

12th IASI World Congress

Program Chair

After-Action Report

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This report is intended to accomplish two tasks: one, to review the activities of the Program Committee for the 2005 Congress; and two, to serve as a learning tool for the next Congress Program Committee. The opinions expressed here are mine and do not necessarily reflect those of the Program Committee. I urge other Committee members to submit their thoughts to the entire ExCo so that all opinions may be heard and considered.

OVERVIEW

Congress Program

During the first meeting of the PC, a brainstorming session was held to identify potential themes of interest to the IASI community. The PC Chair served as moderator of this session. After discussion of several topics and after combining several similar topics, the PC decided on 5 themes (listed below). The PC believed that the 5 themes provided enough variety to interest long-time IASI members, as well as potential new members. With the Congress site being Beijing, host of the 2008 Olympic Games, it seemed important to tie in the Olympic Games to the overall theme and to encourage participants to consider the impact of the Games on sports information.

What Worked: The variety of themes allowed for the easy placement of almost all papers submitted to the PC. All the themes allowed for the incorporation of Olympic related papers.

ISSUES: In spite of the variety of themes, there were several worthy papers submitted which did not fit any of the themes as stated. The PC should consider creating at least one “generic” theme to allow for those interesting papers not otherwise categorized.

Committee Selection

The Congress Program Committee (PC) was self-selected. Individual members of the Executive Committee were asked to consider serving as PC members. The above individuals all volunteered to assist with the program development of the Congress. The first meeting of the PC was an open discussion devoted to identifying and defining the session themes of the Congress. Next, individuals were asked to volunteer to be a session chair. Once the chairs were identified, remaining Committee members volunteered to assist the Session Chairs with their responsibilities.

What Worked: The number of PC members allowed for a great number of ideas related to Congress.

ISSUES: The number of PC members made communication and execution cumbersome and slow. The PC should consider a leaner, more responsive structure that encourages input from the Executive Committee as a whole, but leaves final decisions, logistics and implementation to a smaller group.

Committee/Session Chair Responsibilities

Each Session Chair was charged with the following tasks: develop a brief explanatory paragraph about their respective session theme to be published in the Announcements and the Program; identify potential keynote speakers appropriate to the theme; provide an initial contact with the

speaker; review, evaluate, and recommend papers submitted within the theme; be prepared to moderate the Plenary Session for their theme, including introducing the keynote speaker. In all of these activities, the Session Chair should maintain communication with the PC Chair and with other members of the PC.

What Worked: Charging Session Chairs with theme development and keynote speakers provided a large number of possible choices

ISSUES: As above, the number of Session Chairs made communication cumbersome. Some Session Chairs faced difficulties making deadlines due to work and personal commitments. Some Session Chairs waited for the PC Chair to provide them with preparation materials rather than create their own. Input and communication was not as forthcoming as needed at times. Future PC Chair should be prepared to encourage regular communication between the Session Chair and PC members. Also, any individual volunteering to be on the PC must take that commitment seriously and make every effort to communicate and to fulfill their obligations in a timely manner.

Committee Communication

Communication between PC members was accomplished primarily by email, with some phone calls used between members located in proximity to each other. The PC Chair established and hosted a listserv for the Committee, however, it was not extensively used as the PC was a small group. In addition, meetings of the PC were held at subsequent IASI ExCo meetings in Havana and Lisbon.

What Worked: Email communication proved to be a very useful tool.

ISSUES: The PC listserv turned out to be overkill. A simple “group” email address worked as well and was easier to maintain. Communication was almost always initiated by the PC Chair, so the value of open communication promised by a listserv was not an advantage.

Committee Review of Submissions

The Call for Papers produced over 70 submissions. All papers were submitted to the PC Chair, who collated them into batches based on the theme requested by the researcher. Due to a very low number of submissions at the initial deadline, the PC agreed to extend the deadline by two months. This extension provided the hosts with extra time to promote the Call for Papers and the Congress in general. The PC Chair forwarded papers in theme-related batches to the Session Chairs for review and recommendations. A few papers were returned to their creators for clarification.

Since one of the goals of the Congress is to foster the sharing of knowledge between sport information professionals, a generous approach to evaluation was taken. Submissions that were not research level were accepted for a variety of reasons: to encourage lesser developed sport information centers to participate; to provide insight into the daily workings of special information centers; to challenge Congress participants with new and daring ideas.

What Worked: Since almost all papers submitted fit the established themes, the PC believes that the themes were well defined and developed. The overall quality of the papers submitted was high and on-target for the theme.

ISSUES: The number of papers submitted was lower than usual and was quite delayed. The Call for Papers needed to be published sooner and distributed more widely. The Congress Web Site needed to be updated more frequently, promoted more heavily, and used more effectively to entice submissions.

Committee/Host Responsibilities

The division of responsibilities between the PC and the Hosts was not as clear-cut as in previous Congresses. Some of this was deliberate due to the distant locale and communication troubles of the Host. However, a clear division of duties should be defined both in the Host Agreement and in the initial PC meeting.

What Worked

ISSUES: The Guidelines for Hosting a World Congress, recently adopted by the IASI ExCo, will help to better define the specific duties of the two primary groups involved in the Congress. The Congress is successful only with the voluntary efforts of everyone involved, so it is very important that roles be defined and followed, thereby avoiding undue workloads on any individual or organization.

Committee/Host Communications

Communication was difficult between the PC Chair and the Hosts. Technical problems with the systems of both parties made communication slow and repetitive. Staff changes at the Host institution further complicated the communication problems.

What Worked: Email was a problem, but was still better and cheaper than phone or fax.

ISSUES: In retrospect, staff changes proved to be the most frustrating and damaging problem. While there can be no guarantees regarding staff longevity, every effort should be made by the host institution to provide consistent continuity of Congress activities. If staff members change, it is incumbent on the host to brief new staff and to ensure Congress activity continuity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon reflection of the process and implementation of the Congress, I recommend a few changes for consideration of the ExCo:

Program Committee Structure

While the input of a lot of people is necessary for a successful Congress, I think the actual work of developing themes, reviewing papers, contacting keynotes, and interfacing with the Congress hosts could be more effectively done with a much smaller Program Committee. I would encourage the ExCo to consider a PC made of no more than 3 people who can work and communicate effectively and quickly, make timely decisions, and be responsive to last-minute needs.

This PC would need to thoroughly and consistently communicate with the ExCo and IASI membership regarding themes and speakers. The PC could use email and listservs to solicit ideas, opinions, and potential speakers from the entire IASI membership, thereby bringing even more potential input into the process. Instead of the Congress being the concept of a small group of volunteers, it could be the concepts of the entire IASI membership. With the use of email and listserv technology, there is no reason not to involve more IASI members in the development of the Congress.

Program Themes

Five themes have been effectively used by several Congresses. I would recommend that at least one theme be of a generic enough definition to provide a “catch-all” category for those papers worthy of inclusion, but not easily categorized into a single theme. I also would suggest that some leeway be given to the smaller PC – as defined above – to allow for adjustment of themes to reflect new and emerging topics. Four years is a long time in the development of information and information technology. Themes defined in the first year of the quadrennium may need

tweaking by the end to make them relevant. Or, the topics may need adjustment based on the number and type of submissions.

Congress Facilities

The facilities at BSU were excellent within the individual rooms used – each room was equipped with a complete workstation, allowing for all types of electronic presentation. In addition, the assignment of a IT staff person to each room for the duration of the Congress was equally excellent and was invaluable for speakers not as computer literate as others.

Also of great help to the PC Chair was a knowledgeable and capable student who knew the campus and relevant decision-makers.

The one facility lacking was a Congress staff work room. I strongly encourage each host institution to set up a workroom, located as closely as possible to the presentation rooms, equipped with a complete workstation – PC, printer, photocopier, internet access, phone, etc. Too much time was wasted waiting for the computer room to open, looking for a printer, and waiting for photocopies. In addition, the IASI Presidium must be assigned a single student (or staff member) to assist with photocopying and other clerical duties. The Presidium members, in particular the Secretary, wasted a great deal of time waiting for a photocopier to be available, then waiting for the photocopies to be made. A Congress staff work room, staffed with one full time assistant, would be an invaluable time and resource saver.

Congress Promotion

It is the responsibility of the host institution to strongly promote the Congress throughout the sports and information communities. This should be done on both a global and local level. The Congress is moved from one place to another each year in order to introduce IASI to local individuals and to encourage the organization of local/regional associations. The host institution should strongly encourage local participation.

The IASI ExCo must take some responsibility for promotional efforts as well. The ExCo should work with the host institution to identify and contact appropriate local/regional listservs and publications.

Congress Web Site

This was the first year a Congress web site was posted. It is an excellent idea that was not well used. There were several technical problems with the site, some of which were resolved, others not. The issue having the most impact on the Congress was the lack of a dedicated staff member at BSU to regularly update and maintain the site. In addition, having the site maintained by the host meant it was less a IASI related site and more a BSU site.

If one of the primary goals of future years is to attract and keep membership, then IASI needs to do everything possible to makes its “brand” very visible and identifiable. I suggest that future Congress web sites must be a part of the IASI web site – not a separate site and not reached by a link out to a separate site. Instead, the IASI web site should post on the main page information about the Congress and then have attached pages related to the Congress, with a link to the host institution for local information. With current technology, the host institution can designate a specific person to maintain the site via a remote connection. This allows the host to have input and take responsibility for the effort, but adds value to the IASI name and site.

I hope this document will provoke the ExCo to discuss ways to improve the next Congress. I look forward to working with the next Congress Program Committee and host institution.