



**2008/DIV.02**

## **International Council of Museums Operating Policy**

**SUBJECT:** General Conference Guidelines

**DATE:** June 1, 2008

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this Operating Policy is to ensure an organised and balanced approach to the General Conference that offers a reasonable opportunity for all members of ICOM to participate in an environment of professionalism and collegiality.

**REVIEW:** This Operating Policy (OP) will be reviewed by March 1 of each third year by the Director General and a representative group appointed by the ICOM President, with recommendations for revisions forwarded to the ICOM Director General by May 1.

**POLICY:** Cultural diversity is an essential element of the international museum community, not only with respect of individuals and institutions, but also as a means for promoting a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual life for humanity. ICOM endorses this commitment. Therefore, respect for cultural diversity is indispensable for ICOM and must be manifest in organisational activities. The General Conference as an important event for the international museum community is no exception to this obligation. It is an opportunity for museum professionals from all regions to gather, discuss issues, and to enjoy the unique environment of collegiality and commonality of purpose without social, cultural, or political constraints.

ICOM, as a non-governmental organisation, requires those National Committees accepting the responsibility for hosting the triennial General Conference to honour all contractual obligations, respect the diversity of the ICOM membership, and fulfil in an honest and forthright manner the good stewardship of the organisational commitment to its members without prejudice or exception.

There are practical and respectful, as well as legal, responsibilities associated with hosting the triennial General Conference. The following items are to be considered minimal requirements that may be expanded by the President and Director General depending on location and organisational needs.

### **Human Considerations**

ICOM, as an advocate of human dignity, diversity, and mutual respect cannot be a knowing participant in any form of intolerance. Therefore, respect for the common humanity of the individual and group is a critical obligation for the host country.

- ICOM members shall not be denied access to the host country due to political, cultural, or racial status. (Countries with restrictions that will prevent participation by any ICOM member in good standing must notify the Secretariat before accepting the role of hosting the triennial General Conference.)
- The host country shall make every effort to assist ICOM members to receive entrance visas. Such assistance will be timely in order to allow participants access to convenient travel arrangements.
- The host country shall comply with ICOM's requirement to provide a number of travel grants for qualified individuals. The number of travel grants will be determined in discussion with the Director General.
- As a tool for mutual understanding, language is an interdisciplinary domain and a precondition for exercise of fundamental human rights. Therefore, the host country must provide translation in the three official languages of ICOM (English, French, and Spanish) at all plenary sessions and meetings of the Executive Council and Advisory Committee. Translation to other languages shall be in addition to the three official languages and at the exclusive expense of the host committee.
- The host country shall ensure that at hosted events at which food is served respect is given to the dietary practices of ethnic or religious groups. (The serving of particular foods may exclude members from participating in social activities.)
- The host country shall not conduct meetings, symposia, or conferences at the same time and venue as the ICOM General Conference without the prior written approval of the Director General.
- The host country shall not invite non-ICOM organisations to participate in the ICOM General Conference without prior written approval of the Director General.
- The host country is encouraged to use creative methods for stimulating interest in the events associated with the General Conference, but should avoid conditions and circumstances that promote ideologies, either political or social, that are likely to demean or insult humanity. Such practices are not to be tolerated.

### **Physical Considerations**

The space requirements are critical to a successful General Conference. The Director General, in consultation with the host country representatives, will prepare a detailed plan of space needs.

- Space for plenary sessions must be adequate to accommodate all registered members. It must be appropriately equipped to accommodate audio-visual presentations as well as simultaneous translations.

- Spaces for International Committees, Regional Alliances, and Affinity Organisations meetings must be provided according to the requirements determined by the Director General. These spaces should be close to the main Conference area to accommodate easy movement from one location to another.
- Spaces provided for the General Conference must give equal access for all participants. They must have the necessary means to accommodate persons with special needs. Accommodations will include such items as ramps, elevators (lifts), wheelchair seating spaces, brail or audio signage, appropriately equipped toilets, and the close proximity of refreshments and rest facilities.
- The host country must ensure the availability of clean and safe accommodations in a range of prices and within a reasonable distance of the Conference site. Such accommodations may include hotels, hostels, dormitories, and other similar facilities.

### **Financial Considerations**

The issue of financial resources has ramifications for both the host country and the participants. A balance should be found that as nearly as possible accommodates both without placing an undue burden on either party.

- The host country must be attentive to the cost of participation by members, with special attention to those persons from countries with limited financial means. A discussion of this issue must include the Director General.
- The host country should fix the registration cost at a reasonable level to attract the greatest number of ICOM members, giving thought to the expenses associated with travel to the Conference site and the related costs for accommodations and food.
- The host country assumes financial responsibility for the General Conference as delineated by the negotiated contract. This agreement is legally binding and the obligations and conditions noted in the contract must be fulfilled.
- The host country has financial responsibility for the General Conference and shall not obligate the International Council of Museums or any member of ICOM for financial resolution of associated debts or compensatory obligations.
- The host country will provide at the conclusion of the General Conference a complete accounting of all funds received and expended.

### **General Statement**

The triennial General Conference is an important undertaking for the host country. It is both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to accommodate hundreds of museum professionals eager to see the treasures of museums, enjoy the sights, and interact with friends and peers in an environment of professionalism and intellectual fulfilment. For many individuals it is the one chance they have to confer with peers outside their immediate vicinity. The opportunity for the host country is to present its cultural and natural heritage to a responsive and appreciative audience, establish new friendships, and gain the attention of the world's museum community.

Successful triennial Conferences are hallmarks for ICOM members against which other events are measured.

The leadership of ICOM is very aware of the significance of the triennial General Conference and gives great attention to the selection of the host locations and the preparation for the events. Each venue affords a unique experience for participants that must not be lessened by the actions or attitudes of the host country.

See Attachments A and B for additional information about hosting a General Conference.

## **ICOM GENERAL CONFERENCE PLANNING GUIDELINES**

### **Part A**

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#### **General**

The ICOM Triennial General Conference requires a great deal of planning and preparation. The amount of planning, committee work, fund raising, and promotion depends, in part, on the conference agenda, the complexity of the location (facilities), and the dynamic nature of the program.

#### **Organize**

Communicate between the organizing committee, supporting and sponsoring agencies, and the ICOM Secretariat is essential.

- Communication with the Secretariat is a necessary first step in the planning process.
- Regular planning/reporting meetings with local support groups, cultural agencies and local committees should be organized.
- An email lists should be created for the sharing of information.
- A clearly defined list about who is to do what and when must be established.
- Minutes/notes of the meetings should be kept and used to follow up.

#### **Set a Date (at least 36 months in advance)**

The date for the Triennial General Conference should be proposed based on space availability, special events, hotel rates, weather, and conflicting activities. Following discussion with ICOM representatives (President, Director General, local National Committee President, and International Committee representatives) the dates for the Conference can be determined. In selecting the date, the size and scope of the associated events (International Committee meetings, pre- and post-conference excursions, special activities, and local travel) must be considered. A meeting the size of the General Conference (1500 to 2500 participants) requires special attention to housing, transportation, and food services that might conflict with other local, regional, or national events. It is generally preferable to schedule the General

Conference at a time when tourism is light to avoid overbooked hotels and restaurants and higher prices.

**Considerations for selecting conference dates include:**

- Time to assure finding adequate meeting space.
- Conflicts with other conferences or symposia that the members of ICOM may attend.
- Time of year for work of the ICOM members (museums).
- Conflict with national and religious holidays.

**Budget/Money**

Hosting the ICOM Triennial General Conference is an expense that can be recovered in part of registration, but additional funding is required. The amount of additional expense will depend on a number of factors including the opening and closing receptions, venue, and amenities.

When the conference is over, the host organization should not be left with bills for which it is responsible. Careful planning (projecting costs) and money management can ensure financial solvency. ICOM is not responsible for the financial obligations of the host committee or nation.

An initial part of the discussion with the Director General must be to determine a conference registration fee. The fee can be expected to cover a certain percentage of the Conference costs, but should be reasonable enough that as many people as possible can afford to attend. The host committee must understand that the General Conference cannot be funded by registration and that additional funds will be required. The source of these additional funds will differ from location to location but often include events hosted by museums, support from city or state governmental agencies, private foundations, and corporate entities.

Be sure to include the following costs:

- Publicity
- Printing,
- Mailing,
- Facilities,
- Equipment,
- Staff (other wages),
- Transportation,
- Meals,
- Materials (packets, name tags, etc.)

Attendees should be expected to pay their registration fees in advance. This should provide an accurate estimate of the number of person who will attend. A slightly higher fee can be assessed for late registrations or registrations onsite. Refunds should be allowed, but not after deadlines for food and facilities counts have passed.

The host committee should establish legal status or join with a host institution to provide the best (i.e., most prudent) method for handling registration fees and for paying conference bills. The accounting procedures to be used (for example, what

kind of documentation will be required to get reimbursements from this account) should be established early in the planning process.

The host Committee should not minimize the importance of a detailed accounting of conference funds. Setting correct procedures before receiving registrations fees will make maintaining proper records easier during and after the conference.

### **Program**

A well-planned program is critical to the success of the Conference. Consult with the President and Director General about conference topics of interest, and timeliness. It is important to determine the “message” as it related to the conference theme and what the participants will leave with.

Invited plenary session speakers should have a deadline that allows ample time to recruit replacements should not all affirm their participation. Network with members of host museum community to identify people who might be invited to make presentations and discuss the options with the Director General. Recruiting may be necessary, even when possible candidates are abundant.

Begin organizing the conference schedule as early as possible. Select the speakers and events to be used and verify availability. Create a tentative schedule, matching speakers and events to the facilities. (Remember the Executive Council requires meeting time and space, as does the Advisory Committee. Also International Committees require time for meetings and events. These are critical elements that cannot be excluded or condensed.)

Make certain there is time for attendees to talk with each other, such as at breaks, before and after dinners, at receptions, etc.

Send confirmation letter to each registrant and a formal acceptance note to each speaker. Ask speakers to confirm by sending an abstract of their presentation and submitting a request for any special equipment (AV, computer, etc.)

Identify the local contact for each International Committee and send that name to the Committee chair.

### **Management Tools**

Establish a management system that includes a database for mailings, conference lists, special needs, pre- and post-conference tours, generation of nametags, presenter status, dietary requirements, etc. A second database may be required for recording income and expenses.

### **Advertising**

Promoting the conference begins with confirming the date and location with ICOM. This activity will call to the attention of National and International Committee presidents the merits of the host location and the conference theme and amenities, as well as the date. A conference web site with up-to-date information, on-line registration, and proposal submissions (as appropriate), etc. will reinforce this information.

An announcement of the Conference location must be in *ICOMNews*. Not only is this valuable promotion of the event, but also because it is a time of convening the Triennial General Assembly including the election of ICOM officers and the *Statutes* require it. This announcement both in print and online is available to all ICOM members and a convenient method to promote the conference.

A conference announcement should be prepared with as much detail as possible, including a tentative program. This is important to convince people they should come. Set a registration deadline that accounts for service, facilities, and activities limitations (availability, cost, numbers, etc). A higher fee may be charged for those who register late.

### **Displays/Exhibits/Publications**

Expo displays (exhibits) take work to coordinate and install. The larger the conference, the easier it is to convince vendors to participate. Assign a committee to be in charge of contacting and recruiting vendors.

An Expo (exhibit) hall must be easily accessible and must have adequate space to accommodate vendor booths. There is often a cost associated with such a hall. Some facilities require use of their own personnel to install vendor booths. Be certain to confirm what is included with any rental costs, and what may have an extra charge. Make sure that there is adequate time for attendees to visit the exhibits.

### **Transportation/Travel**

Confirm limo, shuttle, train, or taxi services from the airport. If the housing is not within walking distance to the conference, in case of bad weather, or for handicapped assistance shuttles should be provided.

### **Conference Materials**

For most conferences, the following is a minimum requirement:

- Program,
- Maps,
- Local restaurants,
- Local attractions (museum, heritage sites, monuments, and points of interests),
- Name tag,
- Writing materials (pen and pad).
- Excursion information
- Local transit system schedule, price, and instructions

### **Nametags**

Keep the nametag layout simple: the person's full name and institution in LARGE, readable letters. Do not make people squint to read names on nametags.

The actual nametag (plastic case or hang-around-the-neck, etc.) depends on preference and budget. Stick-on tags must be avoided.

### **Facility**

Meeting rooms must include:

- Advisory Committee meeting room

- Auditorium for plenary sessions,
- A/V and other secure storage area,
- Breakout sessions (International Committees),
- Conference offices (for Host Committee and Secretariat),
- Copy room,
- Space of food functions (breaks),
- Email room/documentation room,
- Executive Council meeting room,
- Expo hall,
- Hospitality area (for speakers and dignitaries),
- Message Board/Information area,
- Office for ICOM President,
- Poster Session space,
- Registration area,
- Room for Voting,
- Secure storage room,
- Speaker preparation area.

### **Equipment and Support**

Ensuring adequate equipment (in good working order), and the appropriate support staff is another critically important part of the conference. It is a demanding and time-consuming responsibility. It is preferable to schedule International Committee and similar sessions in rooms that have basic AV equipment (computers and computer/video projection).

Determination should be made ahead of time about the availability of portable equipment, and whether additional equipment must be rented. When conference presentations are confirmed, request a list of equipment needed.

Once rooms and equipment are assigned, the person in charge should organize support personnel to make certain equipment is in place and working, and to move it as needed. Assign support staff to a specific presenter/room and have them inventory and check the equipment before the conference begins.

A central equipment distribution room is generally preferable, not only for security of equipment, but also so conference presenters know where they can go for help.

### **Computers**

Computers are an important part of conference equipment. Presenters should supply information as to the platform (Mac, PC), operating system, hardware requirements (disk space, RAM, CPU speed), application software, network connections required, etc. When possible, computers should be set up ahead of time, based on presenter needs. Equipment should, when possible, be available to presenters ahead of time so they can check software to make sure programs operate as expected. If unique software is installed, make sure it is clear who is responsible for removing such software after the session.

### **Ceremonies**

Well-planned opening and closing ceremonies are also important to a successful conference. The opening ceremony establishes a sense of commonality of purpose for the conference participants and confirms the theme. The closing ceremony affixes a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction for a meaningful conference. These events should be carefully planned to determine what is needed, and what it will cost. Give careful consideration to local customs, food, entertainment, and services. However, do not ignore the dietary or religious restrictions of participants. Unintentional or thoughtless foods or activities can drastically reduce the overall satisfaction with an otherwise successful conference for offended participants.

### **Pre- and Post-Conference Excursions**

Consider the unique interests of the host location. When feasible, organise group excursions to museums, heritage locations, local sites, heritage centres, etc. Determine whether costs are included in the registration, or if they are to be a separate (and therefore, optional) cost. Determine the number of participants that can be accommodated at each location and whether there is a minimum number needed to make the tour practicable.

Be certain to offer optional activities for accompanying guests that are interesting and informative. Accompanying persons must register and pay an appropriate fee based on activities. It is generally advisable to establish a separate committee to consider activities, guides, transportation, and amenities for accompanying persons. Whatever activities are planned, be certain to include some free time for people to do things on their own.

### **Lodging**

Estimate the number of people to attend the conference based on registration and make lodging arrangements accordingly. Block rooms at local hotels. When making reservations, negotiate other amenities such as complementary or reduced cost rooms, shuttle services (from airports, to conference sessions). Determine how long reservations can be held, cancellation deadlines, etc.

### **Food/Meals**

Provide a list of local restaurants. Include information about which are within walking distance, which is not, and how to get to those that are not.

Strategically scheduled snack breaks (coffee, tea, water and juice) add to the conference. Such activities can be underwritten by museums or businesses. Adequate time for breaks should be allotted, since attendees will want to talk with colleagues and will take the time anyway.

For all group snacks or meals, be sure to allow for special dietary considerations

## Part B

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### ICOM GENERAL CONFERENCE PLANNING CHECKLIST

#### Decisions to be made: Who, What, When, Where, How

- What: ICOM General Conference, Meeting, Event
- When: Select Date/time
- Who: Participants (ICOM members)  
Speaker(s)  
Distinguished Lecturer
- Where: Select Location  
Hotel/Meeting facilities  
Plenary room requirements  
Breakout room requirements  
Agenda/activities/procedures for each  
Materials  
Equipment/Supply requirements  
Evaluations  
Plans for post event data  
Meals
- How: Staffing  
Planning  
Translation  
Event  
Agenda  
Plenary sessions  
Breakouts (rooms for International Committees, Standing Committees, and Regional Alliances  
Meals  
Evening event/Entertainment  
Video/audio recording  
Seating  
Communication/Correspondence  
Advertising  
Recording  
Transportation
- Things to be considered when choosing hotels include:
- Adequate meeting spaces
  - Sleeping room block
  - Internet connection for meeting and sleeping rooms
  - Comfortable food space
  - Copying – inexpensive, 24 hours a day
  - Hotel and A/V contacts

Other items to be considered after hotels are booked:

- Get hotel arrangements in writing especially when changes are made
- Determine the “key phrase” needed for registering rooms at conference
- Know what complimentary rooms will be provided
- Identify who has authorization for approving additional costs
- Be clear on confirmation dates
- Acceptable sleeping rooms and amenities
- Exercise facilities

Thoughts on location:

- Overflow hotel nearby
- Restaurants in walking distance
- Safe neighbourhood
- Easy airport transportation
- Running/walking routes

Thoughts on facilities:

- Prepare facilities diagrams for information and to assign rooms.
- Walk through all Conference facilities in preparation for planning.
- Spacious size meeting rooms
- Sufficient number of meeting rooms
- Traffic flow
- Availability of Internet connection (and wireless)
- Special needs requirements
- Lockable areas
- Adequate restrooms (in location, number, and accessibility)