

Writing a Bid to Chair a Cognitive Science Society Conference

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Last Updated: Kevin Gluck, 15 July 2009

This document offers some advice about writing a bid to chair a future Cognitive Science Society conference. Most of the pieces of advice are short and simple, but we also add some further information to explain each point, and that can get a little more complicated. Some points of detail can vary depending on whether the conference is held in an odd- or even-numbered year, and whether the conference is in Europe or North America or Asia. Such points are marked accordingly. These notes refer to the Cognitive Science Society as ‘CSS’ or ‘the Society’.

It helps if you understand *the context* of your bid. In recent years, CSS has moved to a system which largely separates the questions of (a) *location*, i.e. where the conference is held, from (b) *chairing*, i.e. who chairs the conference. This means that conference chairs do not have to concern themselves with either the local arrangements (location, meeting rooms, accommodation, coffee, etc.) nor with budgetary matters, both of which are the responsibility of the CSS Conference Officer. The conference chairs are therefore free to focus on the substantive *scientific and technical content* of the conference, and to propose a vision of what will be special about the conference, from the perspective of content.

We offer the following guidance on preparing your bid:

1. Please keep the bid document short. We are looking for something about 2 pages long, not much longer.
2. You may find it helpful to understand the purpose of the document, including something of the internal processes of CSS.
 - 2.1 First, do not think of the bid as necessarily part of a *competition*. The Society regards qualified people keen to chair a conference as a valuable resource, so that even if your bid ‘loses’ in the sense that someone else is chosen to chair the conference in a particular year, CSS may well want to continue discussion with you with a view towards chairing a future conference. Or it might be that a particular year’s chairing is agreed with you without any competing bids being requested, received, or considered.
 - 2.2 Your initial discussions are likely to be with the Society’s Chair-Elect (who has the official responsibility, among others, of leading the search process for future conference co-chairs and who will offer the greatest continuity in dealing with your conference over the next few years), or the Society’s Conference Officer (who can give you advice, but is not responsible for the selection of future conference chairs), and/or with the current or previous Society Chair (given that the past chair has specific responsibility for conferences). After informal discussion, it may well be, but is not necessarily the case, that your bid is discussed by the CSS Events Committee. When all those people are happy, a recommendation would be made to the Governing Board (GB) of the Society. Your bid should be written to *assist the GB to vote in favour* of the recommendation.

3. As described above, the system CSS has evolved over the past few years allows chairs to concentrate on the scientific content of the conference. So your proposal will need to address what sort of special stamp you plan to put on the conference, for example:

- what will you look for in choosing invited plenary speakers?
- what special symposia or other events will you include in the programme?
- do you have any ideas for pulling in one or more areas of Cognitive Science that are usually under-represented at the conference?

and so on.

4. We advise you to be cautious about having a public ‘theme’ for the conference, e.g. an explicit focus on Cognitive Development, or Computational Anthropology, or whatever.

In recent years, the CSS Governing Board has been mostly opposed to having themes of this sort. The main reason is that the conference is intended to be inclusive across the whole spectrum of Cognitive Science, and there is concern that explicit mention of one or more areas of Cog Sci may suggest to people working in other areas of Cog Sci that the conference is not the right place for them. It is important that the conference be open, and be seen to be open, to the whole range of Cog Sci and that nobody should get the impression that their corner of Cog Sci is not welcome at the conference.

An alternative that seems to work well is to adopt an “area of emphasis” or a “highlight,” then keep this emphasis/highlight in mind — perhaps Cognitive Economics, or whatever — when you choose invited speakers, and arrange or invite special symposia or other events, but probably *not* to mention the theme on the poster or other publicity for the conference. So it is almost a matter of having a theme, but not telling anyone about it!

5. ***For conferences in Europe***, we have to admit that the separation — between (a) logistics, such as the location, which is the responsibility of the Conference Officer, and (b) the scientific content, which is the responsibility of the chairs — seems to work better in North America than it does in Europe. For the North American meetings, we now choose the location quite separately from the chairs. We have less experience to draw on for the European conferences, but firstly, it makes little sense to insist on that extreme degree of separation. For at least some bids, the prospective chairs are likely to have in mind holding the conference in a particular country rather than just “anywhere in Europe”. It is also worth noting that for the 2009 meeting in Amsterdam, the chairs were active at working with the Conference Officer to suggest possible sites, and also that the Amsterdam conference was mainly university-based, which is something CSS has not done in N America for many years now.

So, ***for conferences in Europe*** especially, in your bid feel free to say that you'd like to see the conference in a particular country (or even in a particular city if that is indeed the case) and add a few suggestions about what you have in mind. But don't focus too much on this. The location will be sorted out once the chairs are decided, in coordination with the Conference Officer.

Likewise, although the conference finances are not your responsibility, if you are aware of any local sources of potential financial support — from a university, or from local government, or from CogSci-related national, regional, or local professional societies or companies, for example — they are a good thing to mentioning.

6. Do say how many chairs you are thinking of, and who they would be. Also, explain briefly how you would divide responsibilities between you. Explaining how you will handle the division of responsibility is important for the credibility of the bid. For example, one of the chairs with software skills will need to become expert at using the PCS conference software and take on responsibility for it.

Until a couple of years ago, there was a feeling in CSS that it was a bad idea to have more than two chairs. (But this may have been based on a particular year when there were three chairs, and tasks seemed somehow to get lost between them.) However, we have been seeing an increase recently, with 3 chairs in 2008, and 4 chairs (nominally, at least) in 2009.

When you list the proposed chairs, do mention something about their past experience at running conferences. (But keep it short, don't include CVs — remember that you're aiming at a total of 2 pages.)

7. Do be aware of the issue of *gender balance* from the very beginning, when thinking about your chairs and invited speakers and invited symposia. It's not a matter of having a minimum 'quota' of women, but Cognitive Science is a field where women are well represented, so it makes sense to bear it in mind when selecting people.

8. Remember that there are one or two plenary speakers where you don't really have a choice. One of them is that year's winner of the Rumelhart prize, and *in odd-numbered years* the other is the winner of the previous year's Heineken prize for Cog Sci.

The Rumelhart winner for your year will be announced at the previous year's conference, so you will know who it is by the time you distribute your Call for Papers. The Heineken prize is a little trickier. We are trying to build up a tradition that the Heineken prize winner is expected to accept our invitation to speak at the following year's conference, though there is no guarantee of this. The previous year's Heineken prize winner may not have accepted your invitation in time for their name to be on early publicity for your conference.

9. Finally, do consider talking with the chairs of recent conferences.

Good luck with your bid!