Exit Report – Co-Chairs for Oe3C

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| Name | Sara Kafashan |
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| Task/Role | Chair |

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| Describe your role/task: |

My main roles included setting up an organizing committee, overseeing the work from the subcommittees to ensure milestones were met in a timely fashion, and planning ahead for the smooth running of the conference. Below is a general guideline for hitting milestones, and after that follows some random bits of advice that you may want to consider for your conference.

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| General timeline | Milestones |
| September | Form committee and assign key roles. (We had a group of 8-10 members. Ideally, you want either a smaller group of highly committed members (~8) or a larger group of less committed members (~12). Anymore than 15 members will likely lead to confusion and diffusion of responsibility.   * Pick dates for the conference, but keep in mind other conferences that people might want to attend. Best to keep OE3C just before the larger conferences, so that attendees can do practice presentations at OE3C. * Brainstorm potential plenary speakers. Securing plenaries is an important and time-consuming task. Be sure to choose plenaries that represent diverse demographics (i.e., tenured vs untenured, gender, study topic, location). There is also a tradeoff between quality (well-known speakers) and quantity (number of speakers). We decided on 4 local plenaries, instead of 3 global/out-of-province plenaries because this worked better for us. |
| October | Get a detailed quote from your conference venue and draft a detailed budget that you can provide to potential sponsors. Most sponsors will not even consider funding you without a detail listing of what you are expected to spend.  Make a short list of plenary speakers you would like to invite and send out a formal invite once you have the conference dates set. Typically there are 3-4 speakers. |
| November | Start sending out fundraising letters. If you can’t get them out before early December, than you are probably better off sending them in January since everyone will be too busy with end of term and holiday plans (this is what happened with us; it worked out but was much more stressful). Sponsorship is likely most successful when the chair(s) are the ones running this, it is probably the most important task and sponsors will want to deal directly with the people in charge.  \*If you have personal contacts that you can see about sponsorship, make use of them. Whether it is for advice about how to go about it at your institution or people that are in a place to receive your request. |
| December-January | In addition to fundraising and finding product sponsors, you want to get your website up and running and prepare for registration.  You can also start trying to plan the conference program (when plenary talks will be, poster session, banquet if you have one).  We sent ads for our conference in early January, in February (when we opened registration) and in April (when our registration was about to close). |
| February | You should try to have registration open mid-late February. You will need to set the registration fee so hopefully fundraising money is starting to show up.  Registration is typically $60-$80 for students, a bit higher for post-doc and professors. This may be when you have to make key budget decisions. For example, we were originally going to have a banquet dinner but we decided to cancel it since our fundraising wasn’t as successful as we had hoped. |
| March | Keep an eye on registration and advertise the conference to as many colleagues as you know!  Start to think about tasks people would like to do approaching the conference. We had 2 groups, one in charge of conference scheduling and another in charge of printing programs and getting registration packages together. |
| April | Once registration closes you can begin doing the conference program (see ours as a guide, we based ours off previous years).  Triple check that everyone who signed up for a talk is in the program! We had 2 abstracts slip by us, but fortunately we had room in the program to accommodate them.  Start thinking about small things: open ceremonies presentation, if you are going to do student awards, renting or borrowing poster boards, etc.  Meet with your conference services group to give them any info they’ll need (# of people, # of vegetarian options, parking, wireless internet, and various other logistics). Go through everything with them in person and then follow it up with an e-mail that has everything listed out.  Have all arrangements for plenary speakers made (hotel bookings, tell them if you are going to take them to dinner or have anything planned for them outside the conference, travel arrangements, etc.) |
| May | Get ready for last minute details.  Assign roles for the days of the conference (sessions chairs, someone to be at the registration desk, etc.).  Make up signs telling people where to go.  Enjoy the ride; be prepared for a few unexpected things to happen. Plan something for the committee at the end; you’ll have earned it. |

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| Other comments | List any other useful information that the previous questions may not have answered. |

* Designate a primary budget point person; in our case we made it one of the co-chairs. They were the person to regularly update the budget as plans changed, sponsorship funds came in, as bills were paid. It should be made clear that only this person (or only the co-chairs) can alter this document so that nothing happens without going noticed. The budget should be checked regularly and double-checked by another person for errors in formulas, expenses, etc. Save previous budgets, we saved versions monthly, so that you have a reference point to look back at if needed.
* Try to talk to a faculty member or other grad students who’ve fundraised money for events at the University for advice. For example, the office of the President at Western will typically match the funds you raise from your home department/faculties. Therefore, it was in our best interest to raise as much money from those sources first and then approach the Office the President so that we could maximize our donation.
* Use Dropbox or some other file sharing service to keep the primary committee members connected to all of the important documents (while backing everything up automatically). The convenience this provided for our committee cannot be understated. Everyone was able to access any of the conference documents they needed for a given task rather than chasing people around.
* Have regular meetings throughout the year. There are going to be times when you need to have a meeting every week or every other week, and others when they can be once a month. We don’t recommend letting it go longer than a month between meetings, just so you can keep everyone on the same page throughout the year. Some of these short update meetings may be 15 – 20 minutes long and others may be 1 – 2 hours in length.
* Make use of sub-committees who can work in smaller groups to accomplish important tasks (e.g. setting the program won’t go well with the entire committee working on it).
* We tried to make the opening ceremonies a bit of fun, so we asked people some questions on their registration form. I then took their answers and tried to find funny relationships (e.g., which school said they drank the most coffee, etc.). It doesn’t take that long to do, we got a lot of compliments about it and it gave the conference a welcoming atmosphere. We used the presentation platform Prezi to make these presentations. It’s not too hard to use and for something that is suppose to be fun it’s a neat tool.
* We decided to have student awards, which I think made everyone ‘try’ a little bit harder. Even if you don’t have $ to give (we did $50 for each award), you can still make up a certificate and it’s something that people can put on their CV. We also gave ‘runner up prizes’ since we had many great talks/posters. These winners got some of our leftover product donations we had to give away (t-shirts, mugs, etc.).
* In the past, the attendance at the end of the day can really go down especially if there’s no ‘final event’ to keep everyone at the end. Try to put something important at the end of the conference; we had a plenary talk and then immediately did student awards to try and get everyone to stick around. Our final turnout was probably about 60 people, when the year before it was maybe 30.
* Keep in mind people’s travel distances and days of the week. It may not be possible with your dates, but we decided to host our conference Thursday night and finish Saturday afternoon. This gave everyone most of Thursday to travel and Saturday night (or Sunday) to travel and rest before going back to work on Monday. One year the conference was Saturday-Sunday on Mother’s day weekend, so a lot of people left after lunch on the Sunday, which made poor attendance in the afternoon talk sessions
* Finally, for the next eight months this conference is in your hands. Leave your mark on it and do it your way. This information we provided is just about how we did it, that doesn’t mean it’s the way it has to be done. Have fun!