



Note: As far as I know, there is no sexist language in this document. You will therefore find the pronoun "he", and its morphological variants, used here in the traditional way. If you interpret this as reflecting social views that I hold, I hope that you will come to know me or the English language better.

The International Committee on Computational Linguistics (ICCL) exists for the sole purpose of arranging that there should be an International Conference on Computational Linguistics (Coling) every two years, or thereabouts. The members of the ICCL represent only themselves; certainly not the countries or institutions they come from. The committee asks new people to join it from time to time for its own reasons. It has a Chairman and a Vice Chairman whose responsibilities are ill-defined and who serve at its pleasure. The ICCL has no legal status and no bank account. The running of the conferences it sponsors are entirely in the hands of the chairs of the Local arrangements and Program committees, which it appoints. The committees themselves are appointed by their chairs.

The ICCL likes to think that the Coling conferences have a certain characteristic style. They are not quite sure what it consists of, but the following may contribute to it:

- Young people are important. They should be heard and we should try never to exclude them from any part of our activities for financial reasons.
- The social part of the program is not incidental. Excursions, banquets, places to sit and have coffee are all very important.
- We favour lightness of touch, informality, amateurism. We eschew rules of procedure, votes, amateurishness.

Probably because it cares about these intangibles, the committee is nervous about proposals from conference hosts who have not been to one or two Colings themselves, and who are not personally involved in work in the field. It has never accepted a proposal from a professional conference organizer. It can be expected politely to decline a proposal from anyone that seems to expect a profit for himself or anyone else.

The overall plan is that the conferences should take place every two years, preferably in different parts of the world---on different continents if possible.

The committee works like this. It is always on the lookout for people who would be willing and able to serve as hosts for future conferences, hoping at any time to have at least one good candidate in hand for the next one or two conferences. It is when we agree that someone will be the host for a particular conference that we start to refer to that person as the "Chairman of the Local Arrangements Committee" for that conference, on the assumption that the first thing he will want to do is to get others to help. Serving as chairman of the LAC for one of these conferences is difficult. Running any conference is difficult, but these are especially so because there is no parent organization---the ICCL could hardly be said to count---so that the chair of LAC is on his own in all matters except the program of the conference. This is in the hands of the Program Committee whom the ICCL usually appoints at the same time. In particular, the

chairman of the LAC carries the financial burden for everything and, given the committee's concern for keeping the costs for young participants as low as possible, this necessarily entails considerable fund-raising activity.

When a person decides they want to serve as host for a conference, they usually make that fact known by telling a member of the ICCL. When the next Coling comes around, that person is then invited to meet with the committee and make a proposal to them. This is important because the reasons for favouring one part of the world over another changes from one occasion to another and, in any case, the committee obviously wants to get the best offer it can. The things it needs to learn about at that meeting are:

- The site. There needs to be a room large enough to hold everybody---that has meant upwards of 600 people in some years---and three or four smaller rooms capable of holding fifty to a hundred people each for the parallel sessions. The rooms need to be close together.
- There must be a registration area and some kind of office arrangement for the secretariat.
- There must be facilities for meals in the vicinity, and a selection of lodging possibilities should be in reach. There must be cheap lodging for students.
- We need a place for the banquet which should allow for the making of speeches and there should be possibilities for an excursion.
- Finance. It is hard to say what anything will cost four or six years in advance. Nevertheless, the committee is interested in any information tending to indicate what the costs will be and, more particularly, what sources of funds the potential host hopes to be able to tap beyond what participants pay.

It is good for the Program chairman to visit the place where the conference will take place as early as possible because this can affect the kind of program that is assembled. The question of whether there will be invited speakers, and how they will be paid for, is an example of something on which the two chairs must agree. They must also conspire to get the proceedings ready on time and at reasonable cost. The program committee delivers camera-ready copy to the local arrangements committee which is responsible for the actual production of the volumes.

In line with the view that the social part of the conference should not be thought of as incidental, the committee strongly favors the idea that registration fee should cover all the events that compose the conference and, in particular, the banquet and the excursion. If there is a reduced registration for students, this means that others will end up subsidizing opportunities for them to get better acquainted with more established people in the field, and this has generally been thought to be a good thing to subsidize.

The members of the ICCL are accommodated free of charge at Coling meetings, and they do not pay registration or for the banquet or their dinner meeting. This is because the meetings are the only occasions the committee has to get together and the future of the conferences depends on as many members being there as possible. In many cases, travel and other costs associated with the conference are borne by the members personally, and the burden this places on the organizers should be small relative to the total cost.

The principal parts of a Coling conference are:

- An opening session, the program for which should be agreed on by the local chair and the chair of the ICCL
- Four days of five parallel sessions.

- An Excursion
- A Banquet
- The ICCL dinner meeting
- A closing session

Local arrangements responsible for:

- Registration
- Local information for participants
- Email
- Housing in various grades
- Local transport
- Proceedings, bag etc.
- ICCL member housing and the committee dinner meeting
- Entertainment
- Tutorials
- Payment of, and housing for invited speakers.

The chair of the local arrangements committee has absolutely no jurisdiction over the content of the program of the conference. However he is clearly free to arrange other events before and after the conference.

Martin Kay, Chairman.

Last modified: 21 Oct 1997



Please send feedback to: <coling@dcs.shef.ac.uk>