

Advice to organizers of international scientific meetings

The following guidelines are up-dated from those published in the SCFCS handbook (1995-1996). This handbook is currently under revision but copies are available from the ICSU Secretariat on request.

An ICSU international scientific meeting is defined as any international scientific meeting arranged or sponsored by ICSU itself or by Scientific Unions, Committees or Associates of the ICSU family. In all such cases, by definition, scientific meetings must be open to any member of the international scientific community without discrimination, in accordance with ICSU Statute 5.

1. Organizers of such meetings must ensure by all appropriate legal means that the meeting will comply with the ICSU requirement that no bona fide scientist should be excluded. The Standing Committee on Freedom in the Conduct of Science (SCFCS) has drawn up the following check list for the assistance of potential host organizations and individual organizers in the hope that it will minimize the occasions when difficulties arise and maximize the likelihood of any problems being positively resolved:
 - i. Prior to the submission of an invitation, or choice of site for a meeting, the host organization must provide assurances in writing that consultations have taken place with appropriate government authorities and that every effort will be made to facilitate the granting of entry visas to bona fide scientists to attend and fully participate in the scientific meeting in question;
 - ii. The sponsoring body for the meeting should, in addition to receiving assurances from the organizers, seek information from the Secretariat of either ICSU or the SCFCS on the past record regarding delivery of visas by the national authorities of the country in which the meeting is scheduled to take place;
 - iii. Local organizers should make clear to government authorities, and in the information about a meeting, that the right of a participant to attend is based on the assumption that he/she will return to his/her normal place of residence by the date indicated by his/her visa application, and, if appropriate, that such a declaration may be sought by relevant government authorities. Guidelines on any information likely to be sought by visa authorities, and on anticipated normal practice over the length of an intended stay in connexion with a meeting, are available from the SCFCS;
 - iv. Local organizers should provide a first circular of information / invitation to attend a meeting at least 12 months before it is to take place. The circular should provide a clear statement regarding mechanisms and timescales for obtaining an entry visa and this information should be repeated in at least one subsequent circular. Earliest notice should be given to the ICSU secretariat in Paris and to the SCFCS in Zurich of potential participants for whom visa difficulties may arise (see sub-clause (v));
 - v. Prospective attendees should, if required, apply to the appropriate authorities for visas in accordance with those authorities preferred timescales. Visa requests by persons who apply in a country of current residence which is not that of their citizenship, or whose country of residence/citizenship is

- experiencing political difficulties with the host country for the meeting, may need to apply up to 12 months in advance of the meeting;
- vi. Organizers should inform prospective participants that, if they encounter difficulties over visa applications they should report these at once to the event organizer. They should do likewise if they have not been issued with a visa, or a promise of such in writing, one month before the event. To that end, organizers should identify a liaison person by name and contact address for the meeting. Prospective participants should be informed that a delay in reporting may make it impossible to assist them.
 - vii. Organizers who become aware of difficulties in the issuing of visas should report the facts without delay to the ICSU member sponsoring the meeting who should, in turn, inform the SCFCS and the ICSU Secretariat at once.
2. Action on problems will be instigated through ICSU and the SCFCS. It is imperative that information available to them is as full as possible, notably as regards specific actions already taken, at each stage of the check list of steps for organizers to take, and by the potential participant(s). The following particular details are vital as regards visa refusals:
- i. Date of invitation to hold the meeting, its agenda and any statement(s) concerning delivering of visas;
 - ii. date and location and reference number (if any) of visa application and date of first indication that visa might not be available;
 - iii. bona fides of scientist(s) concerned, (preferably with a cv), including full name, address, date of birth and citizenship;
 - iv. nature of refusal and details of action taken, with rejection reference number (if any)
 - v. effect of action(s) at (iv), if any, and indication of authorities involved and statements received from them (including individuals names if available);
 - vi. reactions of local organizations and other local or regional bodies;
 - vii. statement on any prior visit(s) by the scientists concerned.
3. Should ICSU/SCFCS' actions prove ineffective it will be necessary for one or more of the following measures to be taken in defence of the ICSU non discrimination policy:
- i. issuance of a private protest statement at local, national or international level;
 - ii. recommendation to all ICSU family members not to accept invitations to hold meetings in a country in breach of ICSU non-discrimination policy until there is evidence that the situation has been remedied and a change of attitude has been established (normally a minimum of 2 years);
 - iii. withdrawal of ICSU sponsorship of the meeting, thereby probably necessitating its transfer elsewhere or even its cancellation;
 - iv. publicizing the measures taken, the reason for taking them, and the hoped for the result.