Researcher Led Initiative Fund - Organising an event

The following guidance is based on the experience of RLI award recipients and is intended to provide first-time event/conference organisers with a list of practical issues they might need to consider. It is not an exhaustive list! If you'd like to add anything, please contact us at researcher-development@sussex.ac.uk.

- **Set up a Conference/event committee**- invite other doctoral researchers to work with you. It will be helpful to have doctoral researchers involved who have experience of/interest in event planning, skills in facilitating groups, using social media, managing budgets etc. Set a date and objectives for your first meeting, which you may use to establish which roles people wish to take on. Having a chair and a minute taker for your meetings is a good idea (this could rotate each meeting). It will also be helpful to have some input from academic members of staff who have experienced/organised conferences, and an administrator who knows how to get things done, order catering, use the finance system etc.

- It might be useful to develop a **Gantt chart** to outline your tasks, timeline and roles. You also need to prepare your budget, and may wish to allocate this task to a committee member to lead on. You will need to consider funding streams (department/School/Doctoral School RLI Fund/external grants), and whether you will charge people to attend (and if so, how will this be managed- Eventbrite might be useful). Events should benefit as many researchers as possible and charging may limit the number that attend. If you decide to charge you will need to contact Jamys Edmunds (j.edmunds@sussex.ac.uk) to get a PayPal account set up to collect funds.

  Ensure that you consider all costs, such as catering, travel expenses of speakers, printing of posters/programmes, venue hire costs, poster board hire etc. Stick to your budget- you can't spend what you don't have. You will also need to discuss setting up a budget code for making payments with your School.

- **Defining a theme** – You will want to discuss this within an early meeting, though people may also want to time to think on this outside of the meeting. It's important to draw in the wider Department/School at this stage so that they have some buy in and interest in the conference – ask members of the department for their ideas about themes and speakers. Your theme should address a specific enough field to create a coherent conference, but be broad enough to allow for a range of papers. The task of inviting keynote speakers could be allocated to a committee member, it's important to be clear who is responsible for booking speakers travel and accommodation.

- Check out some possible **dates -** with those people you really need to attend (speakers, members of the department, etc). Make sure that you are not likely to overlap with other conferences that people might be attending.

- Discuss **venues** – consider availability, your needs for break out rooms, refreshments, talks etc. Be clear about how many people you expect to attend (this all goes back to early decisions about a budget). Work with someone within the department who can give you a steer on venues on campus. Once you have a date, a theme, idea of how many you will be

inviting, and how you will cater the event, then book a venue, even if this is provisional. You can book rooms on campus here: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ssro/roombooking

- **Administration-** Decide how you will distribute administrative tasks amongst committee members. You can use systems such as Eventbrite for setting up your event and taking bookings. It might be sensible to set up a dedicated email address for the conference, to avoid your own inbox may become unmanageable.

- **Catering-** Expect catering to take up a large percentage of your budget. Explore SussexFood, but also ask around your department how others have catered their events. Order plenty of tea, coffee and water, though a good guide for food is to book for 75% of those attending to avoid wastage. For larger events, the earlier you order the better, with SussexFood you can usually amend your order to exact number up to 72 hours before the event. Think carefully about organising an evening event, you will be tired at the end of the day, and it might be the last thing you feel like doing! Welcome people at the start of the day with tea and coffee.

- **Call for papers & promotion**- You might consider setting up a blog as your call for papers, Wordpress might be useful for this. Allow time to find relevant mailing lists for external guests, ask colleagues within your department for useful mailing lists, so you can circulate the call as widely as possible. You will need to allow ample opportunity for people to submit papers. Consider how you will use social media for promotion, and other websites/blogs/newsletters/flyers you can use to promote your event. Ensure your advertising includes the details of your sponsors.

  You need to agree a deadline and word count for abstracts early on, and specify the types of formats for sessions (papers, round-tables, workshops, and poster sessions). To encourage concise abstracts, you might also specify what they should include (e.g. title, outline of research, outline of methodology, and summary of findings to be presented). You'll also need to decide when you are going to open registration for the conference, and ensure you ask about dietary needs and accessibility requirements.

- **Reviewing & selecting abstracts**- Have an idea of how many possible slots you have available, and therefore how many abstracts you will accept. It will be useful to have plenty of volunteers for reading the abstracts and volunteers must be clear about the criteria. You might consider having two markers for each abstract, and coming together as a full committee for reviewing marking and to make the final selections. It's important to adopt clear and transparent selection methods, and to consider feedback you will give on abstracts you are rejecting. Once you have selected abstracts, try to communicate your acceptances (first) and then rejections as soon as possible.

- **Conference programme**- Carefully consider start and end times and take into account people's journey to the venue. Consider timing of keynotes, sessions, breaks. Remember that people attend conferences to network and make contacts, so allow plenty of time in breaks. You need to decide whether to have parallel sessions, which will allow you to invite more people to speak, but requires people to choose between papers. Brief Chairs on your

expectations of their role, e.g. introducing speakers, keeping to time, managing questions, closing session.

- **Delegate pack & logistics** - You may need to prepare materials for distribution on the day. A delegate pack might include conference programme, participant list, feedback form, flyers about other events, paper, pen etc. You might also want to organise name badges for displaying alphabetically on the registration table, and might need to organise speaker parking permits. Think about room layouts, getting materials to the venue, meeting speakers, having the appropriate expenses form available for completion by speakers and keeping their receipts, IT support on the day etc.

- **The day itself** – might be stressful and tiring, but highly rewarding to see all your months of preparation pay off! Though be prepared for something to come up that you haven't anticipated. Ensure the registration desk is covered, make sure you familiarise delegates with emergency procedures, fire alarms, toilets etc. You may need to allow time to set up rooms, load presentations and check sound/videos/IT is working, test microphones, internet access, put up signs, ensure speakers have water etc. Allocate someone to look after external speakers, who may need a taxi booked at the end of the event.

- **Evaluation-** You'll need to make a decision as to whether to collect feedback at the event or afterwards. Surveymonkey might be useful for collecting online feedback after the event. Try to keep your evaluation short, and think about what you really want to know.

- **Post conference**- Make sure you send a thank you to all speakers, and you may wish to extend this to all delegates. Consider publishing conference proceedings, disseminating outcomes, and maintaining contact with delegates through social media. It's a good idea to have a final meeting with your conference committee to discuss how it went, what you've learnt, what you'd do differently next time and any future plans. If you have received funding for your event, you may need to work together to write a final report. And finally, congratulate yourselves on a successful event and have a well-earned rest!

Useful websites

Doodle - Doodle is a free and simple to use tool which can help you organise dates for meetings: www.doodle.com

Eventbrite- For promoting your event and taking bookings- https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/

Surveymonkey- For collecting feedback on your event/initiative- https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/

Wordpress- to set up a blog for your event- https://wordpress.com/

Slack- team messaging platform- easier for keeping track of discussions than email- https://slack.com/ - alternatively you could use a Whatsapp group

Adapted from the School of Education and Social Work's (Denise Turner & Jimena Hernandez Fernandez) guidance on the 'Early stages of Preparing for a Doctoral Conference'.