

Some guidelines for hosting NERA conferences

General considerations

The annual NERA conference is one of the two central ongoing activities of NERA, the other activity is the publication of the journal Nordic Studies in Education which consists of four annual issues. NERA-conferences are hosted by Nordic Universities and organised by local organising committees, as stipulated in signed agreements between NERA and the hosting university.

The general aim of the NERA conferences is to create an inclusive platform for initiating, reporting, discussing and promoting high quality educational research, which acknowledges not only its Nordic context but also wider, transnational – social, cultural and political – contexts. The conferences aim to provide attractive spaces for experienced and outstanding scholars, as well as emerging researchers, and to promote free and open dialogue and critical discussion.

NERA is an autonomous organisation of scholars that engage in critical and constructive discussions of the policy of education and educational research, as well as educational ideas, educational practices and the social and cultural conditions of practice and policies.

NERA acknowledges its background in the Nordic countries. This does not mean that presentations and discussions should be centered around education in the Nordic countries. NERA has not only special obligation to study Nordic developments and traditions but also to enrich the Nordic fields with inputs about new developments in the fields of practice and theories in other parts of the world.

The organising committees of NERA have a high degree of autonomy in their work. However, there are certain restrictions in relation to economy and organisation. Each organising committee is to draw up the general theme of the conference and choose the key note speakers, but before they make final decisions the NERA Board is to be consulted.

In the following, some main issues of the work of the organising committee will be listed, not as narrow prescriptions, but rather as issues that should be given attention at an early stage:

Preparations should start 2 years before the conference

The first preparations should start about 2 years before the conference takes place and during the first year a few - but important – tasks and considerations have to be taken care of:

- To set up a scientific and organizing committee. This committee should consist of 4- 8 members, primarily from the host university. This committee has largely free hands to design the congress

within the general guidelines formulated in the agreement (see template for agreements) and in the Policy Paper of NERA (see homepage). However the committee is expected to be in continuous dialogue with the NERA board.

- To develop an organizational model for the committee. It is recommended to appoint a "project manager", for instance a member of the university administration or a junior teacher or PhD student.
- To make the first agreements with the host university, not only about the economic conditions, but also to ensure sufficient resources of rooms, facilities and support to the organizational work (see the last chapter for details).
- Main principles should be established before the conference date (18-24 months before) in the agreement between NERA and the hosting University. As stated in the template for agreements, costs for participants should be as low as possible. In 2011-2015, the registration fee for "early bird" members has never exceeded 3000 DKK (including lunches but not the conference dinner). The agreement should also stipulate that the conference pays costs for travel and accommodation for the keynote speaker and the board of NERA (+royalties for keynote speakers and conference fee for the board and the presenters in the Board Panel). Furthermore payments to NERA for every participant are stipulated in the agreement template.
- It is important that the nature of the conference and of NERA is reflected in the organisation of the conference. This means not at least an understanding of that the networks organise most of the sessions and that symposia and workshops can be organised, both within the networks or independently. This means that there has to be intensive communication with several people (25 network coordinators and several organisers of symposia) during the last months until the conference – which means extensive and flexible work by organising committee and its "project leader".

Tasks to be settled at least one year before the conference takes place

Some of the first tasks of the organising committee, that should be settled at least one year before the conference:

- To find the right conference bureau to manage registration, travel arrangements, accommodation and other issues, including sub-contracts with service providers and options for excursion trips.
- To formulate a theme of the conference - there should be an ongoing dialogue with the board about the theme during the first of the two years. The overall theme description should be finalised more than a year before the conference and announced at the preceding congress.
- To choose and contact key-note speakers.
- To create a first preliminary budget for discussion with NERA's board during the conference the year before.

- To present the conference at the conference the year before (theme, key-note-speakers etc.) by folders and homepages and a presentation at the closing meeting.
- It is recommended that the project manager and/or coordinator of the organising group follow the practical work of the organisers during the previous conference.
- A first version of the conference website should be made public one year before the conference (published at the conference the year before). No later than 9 month before the conference prices, deadlines and general standards for abstracts, symposia, roundtables etc. should be published on the conference website. This implies a deadline for fixing the prices, deadlines and general standards for abstracts, symposia, roundtables etc. These issues should be drafted with the board during the preceding conference.
- Registration should distinguish between Early Bird (usually those who register before January 15th) and latecomers. Also between members and non members, and the difference between these two groups should always exceed the cost of membership (so that participants are encouraged economically to become members). Furthermore students and retirees should pay a lower fee. The registration form should include the possibility for new members to pay their membership through the conference (see memo from Universitetsforlaget about handling of membership fees).
- An offer should be sent to publishing houses to have stands at the conference.

Some issues to be settled during the last six months before the conference

- About 25-30 rooms are needed for sessions, plus large rooms for key-note speeches. There must be spaces where about 600 participants can have their lunches at the same time, if lunch is included. The organising committee should have a desk at a central place, where also the conference bureau/travelling agency are represented. There should be a rather central space for at least 10 stands of publishing houses.
- The evaluation of abstracts is framed by the deadlines for submission and confirmation of abstracts (for the 2015 conference these deadlines were November 1st and December 15th). Network coordinators should be alerted that their participation is needed during this period, and the organising committee should be ready to assist them.
- When abstracts have been confirmed the coordinators should be asked to line up their paper sessions and the organisers of symposia to set up their program. When that has been done, the organising committee should coordinate these inputs into a comprehensive program. Special attention should be given to “double-booking”, as some participants will deliver more than one abstract and also serve as discussants.

Appendixes

Template for agreement between NERA and hosting university

Policy Paper http://www.nfpf.net/?page_id=72

Memo on handling NERA membership