

From the Program Co-chair

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The LASA program committee receives more applications for panels, workshops, and papers than can be accepted. For Lima 2017 the acceptance rate was about 85 percent. What follows are some tips on how to create a strong application, one that will not only have improved chances of acceptance but will also make for a better LASA event and experience. The tips are geared for panels but should also help those proposing workshops or individual papers. They are by no means rules but, instead, suggestions by someone who has had panels accepted and turned down.

Diversity

The best panels feature diverse panelists. Men and women should be present. Furthermore, you should strive to include a number of institutions and, if possible, countries. It makes little sense to limit the participants to a group of colleagues who already work or collaborate together. This format leads to stale conversations or specialized assumptions and references that will not likely spark participation from the audience. Multilingualism is fine.

Most panels emerge from two or three people who have discovered each other's work or research interests. How do you find others working on similar topics from different countries, institutions, and even disciplines? One solution is to write to people in the field and ask them about graduate students researching on the topic, or for names of those who have published on it in another language. Most people will respond, and many will have excellent suggestions. Do not feel bad about approaching people you do not know. Most of us enjoy e-mails such as "I saw your interesting book review," or "Professor X thought you might know someone for my panel."

Coherence

The program committee wants to make sure that the papers work well together and that the topic has broad interest. Ensure that the different papers match the general summary of the panel. If you have an outlier, a paper that touches on slightly different topics or takes a distinctive approach, build this into the summary. Make sure that the general summary fits the nature of the papers—too often the overview and the papers diverge.

One way to approach coherence is to ask yourself and your co-organizers whether you can see the audience making links or contrasts between the different papers.

Interest

Interest is subjective and can be viewed in many different ways. But evaluators will judge whether the papers seem like an interesting mix. Do the cases or topics work well together and, in general, is the topic interesting and relevant? LASA panels range from the erudite or highly academic to contemporary, pressing issues. Nonetheless, even if you are presenting something of great, immediate concern, are you doing so from a new perspective? And if you are reporting on very specialized information, are you striving to engage people beyond the panel participants?

One way to think of this is to ask whether the panel would be a valuable special issue of a journal. Do the presentations work well together and dialogue about an important issue? This is, of course, a lofty and perhaps unrealistic goal, but it helps address a major criterion for the evaluators: Will people be interested?

Track chairs and others in LASA often hear complaints that major figures were turned down. It should be remembered that everyone has to fill out all the sections of the application and meet the deadlines. There are no exceptions for "towering figures" (who often are not that well known outside a specific country or discipline).

These are suggestions. Panels vary greatly, and flexibility in putting them together is important. Nonetheless, attention to diversity, coherence, and interest should help most applications. ■