How to Plan and Submit an Organized Session at the Global Symposium on Health Systems Research?

Purpose
While planning for the Vancouver Health Systems Research Symposium in 2016, the organizers noticed the low number of proposals for organized sessions originating from Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC). We are determined to grow LMIC submissions for organized sessions as we prepare for Liverpool 2018.

Therefore, in preparation for HSR2018, HSG is strongly encouraging those in LMIC settings to submit abstract for an organized session.

We have pulled together past experiences in this note and hope it will help guide our members as they prepare their submissions. The Theme for the Liverpool symposium is “Advancing Health Systems for All in the SDG Era” and we plan the Fifth Global Symposium to advance conversations and collaborations on new ways of financing health, delivering services, engaging the health workforce, forging new social and political alliances, and understanding how new applications of technologies can promote health for all.

Please stay tuned for the call for abstracts for organized sessions to be announced in September 2017 with a close date in January 2018 (please watch the symposium website for exact dates).

What should you know?
As you prepare an abstract for an organized session, please note following:

- Organized sessions are 90-minute-long events where organizers decide the topic/title, the speakers and moderators, and the format of the session (participatory – round table discussions, debates, fishbowls, games, etc.; or traditional presentations by panel members).
- The issues discussed are expected to be relevant to the symposium theme/sub-theme, and this relevance has to be well reflected in the abstract itself;
- There will be a total of 120-130 parallel sessions (organized, abstract-driven, Thematic Working Group, etc.) in the symposium program and only up to 50% of these sessions are allocated to organized sessions. Thus, submissions for the organized sessions are highly competitive. Based on experience from Cape Town and Vancouver only about 20-25% of submissions are accepted;
- If your session proposal is not selected there are two further options to have your ideas feature in the symposium program. First, you may be able to organize a Satellite Session on the Monday or Tuesday before the main conference starts. These range in length from 2 hours to a full day. However, you will be expected to apply specifically for the Satellite Session. If the topic of the session is relevant to the symposium theme (or sub-theme), your submission will be accepted on a first come
first serve basis. The number of Satellite Sessions is also limited so, please do not delay submission and follow the symposium website for key dates.

- The difference between organized and satellite sessions are following:
  - Organized sessions are selected competitively by a scientific committee, and if chosen, there is no additional charge to organisers for room-rental and audio-visual equipment, beyond the conference fee itself.
  - Satellite Sessions, when aligned with the symposium theme/sub-theme, are selected on a first come first serve basis and organizers will be expected to pay for the room and basic equipment rental. The price depend on the length of the session and the size of the room required i.e. number of participants expected.
  - Both sessions (organized and satellite) are listed and reflected in the symposium program (for details see Vancouver program).
  - Finally, there are also skill-building sessions occurring in parallel to satellite sessions on Monday and Tuesday. Skill-building workshops are for educating participants and developing their capacity. The Scientific Committee considers these submissions and when selected the Health Systems Global fully subsidizes the costs and organizers do not pay for room and equipment rental.
  - For organized sessions that are made up of individual presentations – if the organized session is not accepted, it is possible for the individual presentations to go forward into the individual, abstract-driven competition; the deadline for this is about a month after the organized session competition.

How to plan and deliver a session?

- Please be aware we are prepared to accept submissions in English, French and Spanish languages.
- We strongly recommend considering participation of panelists from different regions and language backgrounds to support cross-regional learning and engagement. Such diverse contributions will give your submission a competitive edge.
- Please start planning early: don’t wait until just before the deadline to contact potential contributors to your session. The call for abstracts will be released in September 2017 (watch the website for exact dates). HSR2018 Symposium theme and sub-themes, available from the symposium website, already provide sufficient details for planning the focus/title of your session;
- Select the title/topic for the session, preferably focusing on your country’s region’s health policy and system priorities (or on cross-regional priorities if you consider going beyond your immediate region); in your abstract, be clear on how it fits with the symposium theme/sub-theme;
- Identify and reach out to potential session speakers-presenters and moderators. Diversity is valued in the symposium: try to mix speakers from different countries/regions, consider gender balance and where possible, engage young researchers. You might want to include health system managers or policymakers as well. A good organised session is usually one that is planned jointly by some form of existing team that spans across countries but had worked on similar issues either jointly or separately under the same initiative so there is a common and established link.
• If you are not sure who to invite, there are several approaches that you can take:
  o In the searchable part of the HSG’s member directory locate researchers, identify their research interests by visiting their public profiles on LinkedIn or researchgate.org (both available from the directory if they have such profiles). Please note the search function in the directory is only available to HSG members;
  o If you are a TWG member, you could post your interest in organizing the session and invite speakers to contact you directly;
• Plan your session in a way to allow sufficient time for Q&A and discussion. Do not overload the session with presentations and leave at least 20 minutes for Q&A and discussions. Think about how to make the session format engaging and vibrant. Be aware that session attendees are there not only to listen but also to engage and ask questions;
• When conceptualizing and designing your session, be aware that attention is paid to the “session details”, which provides the detail helps the scientific committee who will review your session to understand what each speaker in your session has to offer and why the session will stand out from other similar submissions. Focus especially on:
  o Session details—questions people should ask and the lessons they will learn. Specifics of what would be covered in the session—not just generalizations, but bullets that help the assessors understand flow, prioritization, and detail and how what will be presented can be applied
  o Technical expertise of each presenter - each of the speakers is expected to have strong domain expertise—as illustrated in their bio—to support their case to present on the topic (the biographies and vantage point of the proposed speakers is hugely important in the evaluation process).
• Coordinate abstract preparation (drafting and finalization) among session speakers/moderator(s) and after completion submit necessary information through abstract submission system available from the symposium website. Coordination requires time so you need to plan for it in advance.

Frequently Asked Questions
Q1. If I organize a session, who will support travel and participation costs for speakers?

A1. The best and most certain way to plan for your session is to be sure that you have financial support for yourself and invited speakers through their respective institutions or research grants. Health System Global raises scholarship funds from donors to facilitate the participation of LMIC residents and also students in the symposium. Based on scholarship rules in force, HSG aims to support at minimum one speaker from each session in the symposium. When resources permit, HSG may increase this number, but final decisions depend on the available resources.

Q2. Will I receive financial support/discount if my organized session submission is not accepted and if I opt for a satellite session?

A2. HSG does not fund/subsidize cost of satellite sessions. The organizers are expected to cover the session costs themselves.
Q3. What is included in the Satellite Session price?

A3. Prices for the Satellite session depend on the session duration and size of the room required and are published on the symposium website. All prices include following:

- Room signage before the session;
- Availability of the room 15 minutes before the beginning of the session;
- Sound and basic audio-visual equipment;
- Details of the session and speakers listed in the symposium program.
- All additional requirements beyond the listed one are subject to additional charges.

Q4. What should I consider when organizing a satellite session?

A4. A Satellite session duration could be between 2 hours to full day long and scheduled for the opening days of the Symposium;

- Sessions should be organized around a specific theme and must have an expected output, i.e. report, plan of action, roadmap;
- Active learning and participation are expected including in the presentation format. The session agenda should include ample time for discussion and interactive activities;
- There should be at least one and up to two coordinators. They will be responsible for coordinating the session, communicating with speakers, promptly liaising with the Secretariat about changes, and facilitating or co-facilitating the workshop.

Please make sure that you are entering the active email address of the chairs and speakers. All communication is through email using the addresses you provide at the time of application.