ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

Incorporated in the ACT
ABN 37 660 297 848

Instructions and Suggestions for the Organising Committee for ASA Scientific Meeting

(Latest revision 26 Jan. 2014)

This long set of instructions is intended to give meeting organisers a starting point when planning their meeting. It looks intimidating, but hopefully it is useful. Any amendments or additions are welcome - (ASA Secretary)

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Initial Planning to host a Future ASM

From 2013, the deadline for submission of bids to host the ASM in the following year will be 31 January of the previous year - e.g. bids for the 2015 ASM must be received by 31 January 2014. This gives Council time to adequately consider any competing bids and suggest improvements, allowing an announcement at the AGM in July.

A Proposal for a future ASM should include:

1. Any special reasons for your University to be host.
2. Proposed venue for ASM and HWWS; include any choices if appropriate (institutional or external venues).
3. Proposed dates for the meeting. Preferred dates are the University common week (early in July) or the end of the University vacation period (later in July - 2 weeks later). The preference is to alternate between years, but the choice is up to the proposers.
4. Any proposed program themes.
5. Organisational arrangements (possible use of professional conference organisers, key LOC and SOC members)
6. Preliminary costings (e.g. what registration charge is likely if lunches and coffees are included; are the theatre and poster venue provided free-of-charge; etc).
7. Any lowish-cost accommodation possibilities for students.

8. Dinner location venue possibilities.
9. Location for other ASA events held that week (e.g. Harley Wood Public Lecture, ASA Council Meeting, NCA Meeting, Department Heads Meeting).

Much more detail can be found below.

Registration cost calculation: (provided for use in preparing budgets, **based on data from the 2013 ASM**)

- Total registrations: 270
- 75% early, 25% late registration
- 47% students/retired, 21% non-members
- 2013 Registration Prices:

	Early	Late
member	$415	$465
student/retired	$315	$365
non-member	$465	$515
student/retired non-member	$365	$415
prize speakers	No charge	No charge

2013 Attendee Demographics:

- early: member 86, non-member 15, student/retired member 78, student/retired non-member 25
- late: member 15, non-member 5, student/retired member 10, student/retired non-member 13
- Total Fee Paying 252
- Prize winners, trade/sponsor passes 16
- Guest to dinner 10
- Total 270

Timeline:

These Instructions may be read in conjunction with the Timeline for Organising the ASA Annual Scientific Meeting and Harley Wood School.

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General format

There are perhaps two main ideas behind the ASM:

- The meeting brings together astronomers from across Australia to see what their colleagues in other fields of astronomy are doing and increase dialogue across fields and institutions.
- The meeting provides a forum for students to present their work to a broad professional audience, often for the first time. We should seek to maximise the opportunity for students to present a talk.

The ASM now attracts over 200 people. Of these, around 40-50% are usually students.

The program for a meeting is best judged by looking at recent meetings. Web sites for some recent meeting are still available on-line - see the ASM web page.

The lengths of oral presentations has varied over the years. In 2013 the majority of attendees chose 15 minutes as the shortest reasonable talk duration (with 10 minutes a close second). 5-minute talks were trialled in 2012, but there is little support for such short talks, and anecdotal evidence suggests they offer little value to the program.

In 2008 there were 30 minute invited talks and 20 minute contributed talks. There was some feeling that this too long because it restricted the total number of talks (especially student talks).

So-called "sparkler" sessions, in which poster presenters are given around 1 minute (and no more than 1 slide) help to break up the oral program and give poster presenters an additional chance to publicise their presentation. In 2011 the meeting was increased to 4 1/2 days (Monday to midday Friday) to meet the increased demand for talk spots. There is little enthusiasm for going any longer. Adopting a few parallel sessions during the meeting can significantly ease the pressure for talks slots, but must be planned carefully to work well. It is also essential that the session chairs keep their sessions striclty to time.

Organisation and Committees

- The minimum recommended local organising committee (LOC) should consist of a Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, one person for venue arrangements, one person for travel and accommodation arrangements and one to organise media contacts. It is also strongly recommended that the Chair of the previous LOC should be part of the following LOC. This list of members should be considered a bare minimum, especially if (as is likely) some have substantial other responsibilities. All should be available to help before and during the meeting.
- Recent meetings have successfully used professional conference organisers (PCO) - e.g. ASN Events in 2013 and 2014. A PCO should be seriously considered if the cost is acceptable, especially for smaller organising institutions.
- Local student organisers (1 or 2) should also be appointed for the Harley Wood School. They should clearly liaise with the LOC of the Scientific Meeting, but the organisation is best kept quite separate (see the separate list of organising suggestions). The HWS is usually entirely organised by students.
- The scientific organising committee (SOC) should have one or two members in common with the LOC and should have expertise in as wide a range of fields as possible, but should not be too large.
- The SOC MUST include a representative nominated by the Council and a representative nominated by each ASA Chapter.
- The SOC should be representative of the broad range of the Australian community and care should be taken to ensure an appropriate gender balance.
- Note that LOC and SOC minutes should be minuted.
- It is never too early to begin detailed planning. An outline of the meeting arrangements is normally submitted to Council when submitting the bid plans in January of the year preceding the meeting date, so many of the larger aspects of the meeting should have been decided by then. Detailed plans should be submitted to Council for comment early in the year of the meeting (e.g. at the first council meeting of the year - usually during February). Earlier is better!

Reporting to the ASA Council

Any ASM is clearly an ASA meeting and therefore ultimately the responsibility of the ASA Council. Council delegates the LOC and SOC to make the arrangements and run the meeting.

- The LOC and SOC must report progress to the Council at its regular meetings - usually sometime in November, February and immediately before the ASM itself.

- In return, the council will provide clear, and quantitative advice and instructions to the LOC and SOC.
- A final report, including a financial summary and demographics report, is required at the first Council meeting after the ASM - usually November. These final reports are available from the Council as a guide for subsequent LOC/SOCs.
- As noted at various points throughout these Instructions, Council advice/approval is required on certain decisions.

Choosing the Location

In recent years the ASA meetings have been held at the hosting university. This provides a venue with meeting facilities, a lecture theatre with appropriate projection equipment, areas for posters and internet facilities. However, costs in universities have risen in recent years as they increase charges for facilities.

The contrary view that held sway some years ago suggested that the most successful meetings are held away from major cities - at least away from significant concentrations of astronomical institutions/universities. This discourages attendees from dropping in and out of the meeting. This may increase the costs, but leads to a better environment for the meeting.

LOCs should consider both options and select whichever offers suitable facilities at a reasonable cost, within the overall budgetary constraint and subject to other logistical restrictions.

Bookings and Venue Requirements

The main requirements are the lecture theatres and a nearby area with adequate space for poster papers. Ideally, poster papers must be in the same place (or as close as possible) to the morning/afternoon tea areas, and if split over multiple rooms, should be accessible and clearly signposted. Other venue considerations include

- Lunch should be available quickly and close by, to reduce delays for attendees of lunchtime sessions. In recent years, lunch has been included in the program and funded by sponsorship.
- A suitable venue should be provided for the Harley Wood Public Lecture - relatively large and easily accessible for a public audience.
- One or two small meeting rooms should be provided for the various satellite meetings:
  - ASA Council meeting (usually Sunday after lunch - a private meeting room is required)
  - ASA Council dinner (usually on the Sunday night after the initial Registration session). *The Council dinner is paid for by the ASA and is not a cost for the LOC.*
  - the Australian Astronomical Directors and Heads Committee meeting
  - the National Committee for Astronomy meeting
- Arrange for registration and secretarial areas.
- Accommodation in student colleges and hotels/motels as required.
- Venue for pre-conference reception (Sunday evening when typically up to 2/3 of registrants may attend).
- Venue for conference dinner. The dinner is best held late in the meeting (allowing presentation of student prizes). Consider how to make attendance attractive to students. Overall attendance (including partners) is usually around the number of registrants but will obviously depend on the conference location, dinner venue and cost.
- The ASA has Public Liability insurance to protect the society from any claim for third party bodily injury or property damage due to negligence. We have a basic cover for $5M with CGU Insurance for any activity of the Society anywhere in Australia. We have a certificate of insurance for $5M

public liability that can be produced if requested by a property owner or event organizer that may want the cover confirmed.

Financial arrangements

Local organisers are expected to use existing institutional financial accounts and facilities, or open special accounts if necessary. Beware of universities charging hefty service fees (up to 15%) for any funds that are processed through their accounts.

The financial planning should begin with the budget from the previous meeting, together with any comments from the last LOC. Recent budgets have been approximately $100K (2013) and obviously depend strongly on venue costs.

The ASM is self-funded and the objective must be to cover costs. Any profit from the meeting must be returned to the ASA.

- In consultation with Council, the registration fees established in the bid should be confirmed, including any additional expenses for visits to observatories and sight-seeing.
- Authors presenting papers at the ASM are generally restricted to *financial* ASA members (paid up by 30 June). However authors may present a paper once as a non-member. This generally applies to students, although they should be encouraged to join the society.
- Eligibility for registration classes should be claimed by the member on the registration form, and then checked with the ASA Secretary and Treasurer. Note:
  - Prize speakers (the Bok Prize winner, Charlene Heisler Prize winner, Louise Webster Prize, and the Harley Wood lecturer [all each year], the Ellery lecturer [in odd-numbered years] and the Peter McGregor Prize winner [every 3 years from 2016]) do not pay registration fees - these effective costs must be absorbed into the conference budget. The David Allen Prize [every 3 years from 2009] should also have the dinner paid since that is where the award would ordinarily be presented. In some cases (esp. CHP and LWP) the awardee may be overseas and may not attend.
  - Late registrations typically incur an extra fee of $50 for members/fellows and $20 extra for students/associates/retirees. This extra revenue should not be relied upon, but merely serves as an incentive to get people to register early enough for you to get a good idea of numbers.
  - For the 2008 meeting onwards, members/fellow will be charged $50 less than non-members; student/associate/retired members will be charged $30 less than student/associate/retired non-members.
  - It is customary to charge retired and associate members at the student rate.
  - Non-members may register as a member providing the Secretary receives their membership application prior to the closure date for early ASM registration. Payment of annual membership fees must then be received within 14 days of the closure date.
  - Existing members must have paid their membership for the year (i.e. be financial) to be considered members for the purpose of registration.
- A float may be requested from the Treasurer to cover any initial costs (e.g. deposits) before registrations are received. At the end of the meeting, this float should be returned - i.e. the conferences are self-funded and you shouldn't spend more than you make!!
- Accounts of the Meeting must be kept and reported - i.e. full statements of income and expenditure, not merely a final figure.
- Registration should include the cost of the dinner since it may be regarded as part of the conference program (and will make it easier to justify to departmental accountants).

- Propose the cost of annual dinner for Council approval. Students pay less and overall attendance (including partners) is usually around the number of registrants but will obviously depend on the conference location, dinner venue and cost.
- Prizes for best student talk, poster, sparkler etc. should be coordinated with the ASA Council and sponsors. The Council nominates judges. Note that prize winners must be ASA members. In the recent past publishers have provided gift certificates which are ideal. Prior to that, prizes and certificates were awarded, usually for 1st, 2nd and 3rd in both best student poster and best student talk categories (2007 values were $200/100/50).
- Ensure the budget has an allowance for Merchant fees (up to $450 for ASA and around $120 for HWWS) charged by the bank if relevant.
- Ensure the budget has at least 10% added to expenses (or is conservative on expected receipts from registrations) for contingencies.
- Seek sponsorship support for the meeting and invite sponsors representatives to functions. Commercial sponsorship would be ideal but has only rarely been obtained and takes some effort.
- **Be careful with GST!** Internal university charges may not show GST. Specify that invoices should be made out to the ASA, not your university, and that amounts quoted should include GST.

Web Pages, Registration and Invoicing

The web page serves as the primary public "face" of the meeting. It is important to have a clear, logically arranged, attractive and comprehensive web site for the meeting.

Meeting announcements, including reminders of registration deadlines etc. should be circulated via the ASA email list AND any other institutional distribution lists that are available. The objective must be the widest possible distribution of information about the meetings.

- The web page must have a prominent "corporate image" (ASA and host institution), accessible from the ASA web pages. ASM pages that remain on-line are linked from the ASM Meeting page . Sample information pages and a sample registration page from the ASA2005 meeting are available, along with a gzipped tar archive of all files, including the php registration scripts.
- Web sites for some recent meetings are still available on-line - see the ASM web page.
- Registrations and Abstracts should be submitted electronically. Consider carefully the information required on the Registration form (look at several previous examples) to make sure that all necessary information is requested and stored. In particular, eligibility as a member should be actively claimed on the registration form (e.g. by clicking a check-box). The registration page will undoubtedly have a confirm/submit/register button. Be aware that people may not press it but think they have registered anyway.
- Registration forms MUST have a gender box to tick along with some text explaining that this information is necessary for demographic purposes only.
- Set the Early Registration date. In 2013 this was 19 April. Previous meetings have been as late as the middle or even end of May which was very clearly too late.
- Be aware that some people *will* register very late - within days of the conference.
- For student talk requests, the website should have provision to record the student's year progression of their PhD and whether or not they have given an ASM talk in the past. This will aid the SOC in prioritising students in the latter years of their PhD and those who have not given a talk.
- Set specific deadlines for submission of title and abstracts.
- Carefully specify the format required for abstracts to minimise effort in preparing the Abstract book. In particular, will you accept equations and if so, in what format? Remember that some people never follow instructions!

- Establish a cancellation policy and indicate this clearly on the registration page and/or web site. If registration payment and abstract submission are separate steps (as is usual), some attendees will wait to see if they have been awarded a talk before deciding on attending and paying their registration. The LOC should carefully balance how strictly to enforce cancellation fees against the need to balance the budget.
- Promptly acknowledge receipt of faxed registrations and cheques by email. Receipts are often issued at the Registration desk with the satchel. An Electronic Funds Transfer terminal is extremely useful during registration on the first day for processing late payments.
- Note that payment via Departmental Invoices is slow due to the involvement of University finance departments, but this method of payment may be very convenient, in particular for students. Therefore set the early registration deadline as early as possible since many people will only register at the deadline.

Programme Details

- In consultation with Council, decide on any special themes for the Scientific Sessions.
- Some of the most successful meetings have involved either the opening of a facility or a visit to a facility. Consider any possibilities which may be made to coincide with the conference dates.
- The conference organisers select the invited speakers, however Council should be consulted before invitations are issued.
- Parallel sessions were re-introduced in 2013, and were generally seen as a necessary evil, contrary to the meeting's aim of allowing attendees to hear about local work outside their own fields. There are several additional constraints for planning:
  o Parallel session topics must be carefully chosen to minimise clashes.
  o Invited and/or prize talks should not be scheduled in parallel sessions
  o Parallel session venues must be nearby (ideally, next door) to allow quick transfers by attendees
  o Programs need to be synchronised between the parallel sessions, and session chairs must be more vigilant than usual to maintain coincident breaks between talks

  In 2013 a spill-over area with a feed from the lectures worked well for both delegates and as a child-friendly area.

- The SOC should be aware that some lobbying for suggested speakers may take place in the form of recommendations (via email and/or verbal). While such lobbying is not condoned, it invariably happens. A positive way to view it is that it reflects an individual's passion for the type of astronomy and astrophysics they wish to promote. A negative aspect is that it may lead to bias in assigning talks. In order to mitigate any potential conflicts and bias, any SOC member receiving such lobbying requests should immediately disclose them to the full SOC membership.
- Ensure appropriate representation by gender, preferably by setting clear gender targets and actively seeking to meet them.
- Consider how to handle student talks. This is an important aspect of the ASM since it provides good training for students. Some meetings have been criticised for forcing too many student presentations into the poster sessions. A poll of students in 1998 showed divided opinion over whether preference should be given to early year postgrads (inexperienced) or postgrads nearing completion (reporting their thesis work). It is desirable to maximise the opportunity for students who wish to present an oral presentation to do so.
- Consider how to handle any talks offered by Associate members. Some of these people are not used to presenting at scientific meetings and the SOC should carefully consider any presentation and/or offer to review a presentation to ensure an appropriate standard.

- Provide an opportunity for poster presenters to very briefly descibe their posters. In recent times it has become usual to have two or more 'sparkler sessions' of 20 minutes each gave each poster presenter one minute (stricly enforced). Single powerpoint slides from each presenter are ususally combined into a single file so they could changed quickly. These sessions should be provided relatively early in the program to allow time to look at all the give people plenty of time to look at the posters.
- Avoid isolated times for less popular sessions (e.g. education, cosmic rays) which discourages attendance.
- Avoid scheduling students on the last day (as far as possible) to allow a timely announcement (at the dinner) of student prizes. The dinner benefits from the spectacle of awarding the prizes.
- Invite a high profile person to open the meeting.
- Suggestions for the Harley Wood lecturer should be submitted to council for consideration at the first Council meeting of the year (around February). The Council has responsibility for choosing the speaker. The President should issue the invitation. The LOC should arrange a small gift.
- The Ellery Lecturer should be chosen (only every second year - e.g. 2009, 2011,..) by the Council early in the year (e.g. at first Council meeting around February). The Ellery Lecture is a prestigious award of the society. In some past years the lecture became somewhat lost in the main program of the meeting. Consider ways to emphasise its importance - preferably making it the opening talk of the meeting, when dignatories may be attending. The Ellery Lecturer is awarded a certificate and a cheque, supplied by the Secretary and Treasurer, at the time of the Lecture. Note that the Ellery Lecturer is offered free registration.
- The presentation to the Bok Prize winner (for Honours reports completed in the previous year) and a talk by the recipient may require a time slot. They frequently do attend and should be offered free registration.
- The presentation to the Charlene Heisler Prize winner (for a PhD thesis completed in the previous year) and a talk by the recipient may require a time slot. They are often overseas and do not attend. If they do attend they should be offered free registration.
- The presentation to the Louise Webster Prize winner (for an early career researcher) and a talk by the recipient may require a time slot. They are often overseas and do not attend. If they do attend they should be offered free registration.
- The presentation to the Peter McGregor Prize winner (for instrumentation development`) and a talk by the recipient may require a time slot. They frequently do attend and should be offered free registration.
- For all Prizes, liaise with the Prize and Awards Coordinator, the Treasurer and the Secretaries to determine attendance and ensure cheques, medals are ready in good time.
- The Prizes should have visibility and prestige, so the talks should be scheduled with this in mind, avoiding times unlikely to attract an audience. For example, Fridays should probably be avoided unless the session topic is a good match to the prize talk topic.
- The LOC should be notified by the Prizes and Awards Coordinator as soon as the Bok, Heisler, Webster [all annual] and McGregor [every 3 years] winners are confirmed (typically around the end of May). Delays in this process may be a significant problem in finalising the program. The Coordinator should follow-up with the winners to lock in scheduling their talks and to obtain basic biographical information and a talk abstract for the conference program. It would be good to have biographical information for all the winners, regardless of whether they are able to give a talk or not.
- Invite session chairs well ahead to allow publication of their names in the final program.

Media/Advertising

- Designate one LOC member to establish media contacts and to inform the media of the meeting (see appended note with further suggestions). This has rarely been done well and deserves much more effort.
- Select two or three scientific highlights to be featured in press releases before the meeting. Press releases should be handled by the Council if there is any suggestion of speaking on behalf of the Society.
- Arrange publicity of Harley Wood lecture. This is a *public* lecture and must be advertised widely to attract an audience. Choosing a good speaker, attractive venue (not a hard-to-find university lecture theatre) and advertising effectively can make a huge difference.
- Prepare a small program for the Harley Wood lecture, including the history of the lecture. See the attached example. The Word version is available from the Secretary (John O'Byrne).
- Solicit displays from Corporate members.
- Provide space if necessary for display by sponsors and Corporate members. Invite them to display.

Other Arrangements

- Consider possibilities for child care and announce these early in the information for the meeting.
- Consider possibilities for a guests' program.
- Arrange morning and afternoon tea and coffee. Lunches have usually been provided in recent years, usually subsidised by sponsorship from various organisations. On any days when lunch is not organised, make sure lunches can be obtained in sufficient numbers from nearby facilities.
- Organise local transport if necessary - e.g. accommodation to conference venue, Harley Wood Lecture, opening reception and conference dinner.
- Make arrangements for the Business Meeting and Scientific Sessions - provide portable microphones, tables, timers etc.
- Signpost the venue professionally - hand-written A4 pages stuck to walls are not good enough. Ensure good 'badging' of the event with ASA and host-institution logos.
- Preferably make use of portable microphones mandatory.

  li> The audio/visual system is critical to the success and smooth running of the meeting. People must be allocated to running the a/v system and helping make quick transitions between speakers. Two students full-time is recommended.

- It is highly recommended that speakers are required to pre-load their presentations from USB, CD or DVD to the venue's computer (in which case they should watch out for font incompatibilities etc.). File synchronisation tools such as Dropbox can facilitate uploads. The LOC should ensure that the latest versions of commonly-used presentation software is provided on the venue's computers. If speakers insist on using their own laptops (e.g. due to custom software, extremely large movie files etc.), a system using two projectors allows operation can be confirmed before the session starts. A spare computer and projector are essential in case of equipment problems.
- All sessions were recorded at the 2010 meeting using the Lectopia (Echo-360) system provided in the university lecture theatre used. Although clearly not essential, consider if similar recording can be readily provided in the venue(s).
- Make arrangements for the poster area (at or near the morning/afternoon tea area) - provide poster boards, poster numbers and/or board numbers (essential!), pins, velcro, etc.
- Arrange a photographer for the conference photo. Unfortunately, this has been neglected in recent years.

- Plan to provide electronic mail access for delegates, photocopying and fax facilities. These days, wireless internet access is considered standard. Also make sure that there are places to sit and use laptops with power available.
- Make provision to receive manuscripts at the meeting (usually these are few).
- Prepare the abstracts booklet. Content usually includes venue maps, information on the venue and transport, a list of participants (with institution and email address), plus of course the program and abstracts. Examples of previous books are available from the Secretary (John O'Byrne). Some recent booklets have been relatively unhelpful in providing useful information.
- Note that the front page of the Abstract book should include the logos of the ASA Corporate members - labelled as such. Take any other suitable opportunity on printed or web material to also display logos of the Corporate members.
- Prepare final program (including names of session chairs).
- Prepare conference satchels containing information such as - list of participants, map of venue, transport timetables, restaurant information, list of motels etc. Consider options to the usual conference bags.

- Prepare name tags - with large print! Consider using lanyard tags rather than clip-on tags, since they are less wardrobe-dependent. If so, make sure the tag is printed in both sides!
- Try not to lose your temper with members who refuse to reply or read instructions.
- Try not to lose your temper with LOC members who don't deliver on time!
- Be prepared for last-minute changes to the scientific program!

After the meeting

- Collect a sample of the circulars, programme, book of abstracts and any other printed material and send it to the Secretary (John O'Byrne) for archiving.
- Prepare a detailed statement of accounts and a report on all aspects of the ASM for the next Council meeting. Examples of previous reports are available from the Council. The report MUST include gender statistics (attendees, invited speakers, regular speakers, poster presentations,...). This should be in the written body of the report, but an on-line form must also be completed to facilitate transfer of the demographic data to the ASA's demographic statistics web site.
- The ASM is self-funded and the objective must be to cover costs. Any profit from the meeting must be returned to the ASA.

Publicity for Meetings - prepared some years ago by Helen Sim

Publicity should be considered by the meeting's organising committee from an early stage, as it needs resources: people, money and equipment.

- The first thing to decide is what you are trying to achieve. Is the publicity intended to promote the organisation that's hosting it or is it just to reinforce the message that astronomy is fun and interesting? In fact, is it worth doing publicity at all?

- Think about what photographs you may need to have taken for particular purposes - e.g. a follow-up story for a university newsletter, research report or conference proceedings - who will take them, and how much it will cost?
- Publicity need not be limited to the workaday press release. You might,for instance, have a public talk worked into your program. However, organising and publicising this is a separate event in itself.
- Select a number of possible stories related to your program. These might centre around the papers being presented or around the speakers themselves. In selecting these, consider:
  - is the story easy to explain in simple language?
  - does it have a strong visual element? (This is very important.)
  - does it have 'human interest'?
  - is it Australian?
  - is it a 'first'?
  - does it lead to benefits for people (e.g. through a spinoff)?
  - does it deal with the Big Questions?
  - why should it interest a non-astronomer?
  - what can the story be linked to?
  - what sort of person will want to read this story?
- Having chosen your stories, you can then consider what kind of media they are suitable for: daily press (national? local? tabloid?), specialist magazine, radio (and which programs in particular? SBS ethnic radio?) or TV? Don't forget the wire services (e.g. AAP).
- After choosing stories, contact the relevant speakers, check that they would be happy to be interviewed during the time of the meeting, discuss the story, and get all the necessary material, *especially* pictures and video tape. You will also need their contact details before, during and after the meeting.
- Check out the venue and environs for interesting backgrounds for photographs. At this point you should also know who are going to be the people at the conference who are going to be the contact points for the media. They must be AVAILABLE during the conference.
- At this point (a couple of weeks before the event) you can start sounding out individual journalists to see if they are (1) going to be around at the time of the meeting and (2) if they are interested in it. The most reliable list of journalists available as a regular publication is Margaret Gees' media guide, which is updated three times a year. Better than that, however, is a list compiled by someone who deals with the science media all the time, because even Margaret Gee can get out of date.
- Get the logos of the meeting's sponsors and make up a media release form, into which you can drop your text. The media release form has to include all the obvious stuff: the date of release, the contact names and numbers (don't give just one), and who is sending out the release.
- Write the media releases and have them checked by everybody who needs to check them. Decide if you are going to embargo them or send them out marked "for immediate release". Think about any predictable events scheduled for the week of your meeting that might adversely affect your coverage (e.g. NASA landing on Mars).
- Make up copies of the program, the relevant papers and other background materials, photos and so on, for the journalists.
- If you are at a university, tell your media unit that the meeting is taking place, when and where, and who are the contact people. Also tell your switchboard operators. Tell the people who will staff the meeting office what you are doing and which speakers might need to be contacted. Give everyone all the relevant phone numbers.
- Make sure that there is at least one fixed phone in a QUIET area, close to the meeting area, which can be used for phone interviews. Make sure that it has STD access at least and, if you think a story may be big, IDD for international interviews (they can ring you for the story, but you may have to ring back). Also get a mobile (or two).
- MAKE SURE THAT THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOMEONE TO ANSWER THE CONTACT PHONE NUMBERS YOU HAVE GIVEN TO THE JOURNALISTS.
- Have a reliable fax machine (again, with no STD bar) and photocopier close to hand.

- When calls for interviews come in, it's good to write them down on the kind of message pad that has carbon duplicates: that's the easiest way to keep track of who contacted you and what they wanted.
- NEVER let a newspaper photographer take one of your speakers away, saying, "we'll be back in half an hour". If they must go off the premises, send along a reliable contact person armed with a mobile phone. Otherwise your speaker will disappear for at least two hours, and in that time will miss four other interviews that you have lined up - or another newspaper will turn up to photograph him/her.
- Afterwards, assess how well you went, what worked and what didn't, and write this down for the benefit of the next conference organisers.

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