SUPPORTING HYBRID MEETINGS: GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

INTRODUCTION

The London Mathematical Society's Research Grants Committee recognises that, over the past few years, the format of mathematical events (e.g. conferences, research workshops, seminars) has evolved with some activities taking place online, in-person or in a hybrid format. The Research Grants Committee supports the mathematical community and, in particular, mathematical events through several grant schemes. The Committee has produced this guidance for applicants to, and grant holders of, those LMS grant schemes to provide further support to the organisers of, and participants at, hybrid mathematical events. Applicants will be asked how they will manage participation of all attendees, especially the meaningful engagement of remote participants, and grant holders will be asked to report on their experiences. Information from both applications and reports will help the Society ensure that it continues to fund inclusive and sustainable events.

The Committee is grateful for the input to this guidance from the experienced staff at the INI and the ICMS.

CONTENTS

RUNNING A HYBRID EVENT; GUIDANCE FOR BEST PRACTICE

Managing hybrid events will require different skill sets, resources and thinking from managing either online only or in-person only events. It is advisable to "re-think" rather than "replicate" the model for managing hybrid events from the models for running online only or in-person only events.

RESOURCES FOR THE EVENT

Running a hybrid event will entail using resources to provide and maintain the online environment for remote participants. These resources, both digital and administrative, will in addition to the resources used to provide the venue for in-person attendance.

MEETING PLATFORM

Organisers are advised to research the different types of platforms, which are available to support online and hybrid meetings, to determine which platform may best suit the needs, resources and budget of their event.

MATHEMATICAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ONLINE MEETING PLATFORM

Organisers should also consider the likely engagement from their mathematical community in using a particular platform; the success (or otherwise) of using a particular platform will rest on the willingness of the community to "buy-in" to them and on the "buy-in" by the leaders of any particular community. Below are some ideas to help encourage engagement with online attendees.

ORGANISERS' PRESENCE ON THE PLATFORM

Success can be self-perpetuating i.e. if organisers are present on these platforms, this will encourage attendees to use these platforms.

SPEAKERS' PRESENCE ON THE PLATFORM

One successful way to encourage engagement with this platform is to advertise when a speaker will be present on the platform at a particular time. Another way is that the speaker could stay on for participants to "drop-in" and chat (though be aware of the possibility that one participant could dominate the conversation and be prepared to bring in others).

POSTER SESSION

A poster session would also give participants a reason to use the platform.

TYPES OF MEETING PLATFORMS

A list of possible platforms, including some insight into their use, is given below but please note that the Society is not actively encouraging nor actively discouraging organisers from using any of these platforms.

ZOOM

The chat function in Zoom was a useful way for participants to interact.

SOCOCO

Sococo provides a platform, which can be linked to Zoom meeting rooms, which gives spaces in which online participants can interact either in larger communal areas or in smaller rooms. Preparation of the platform ahead of the event will be key and the successful use of the Sococo platform for the BMC-BAMC 2021 was due to the investment in training ahead of the event.

GATHERTOWN

GatherTown provides a platform, which can be linked to Zoom meeting rooms, which gives spaces in which online participants can interact either in larger communal areas or in smaller rooms. Online participants can move their avatar around the platform to drift in and out of conversations as they could do in-person. One successful way to encourage engagement with this platform is to advertise when a speaker will be present on the platform at a particular time. A poster session would also give participants a reason to use the platform. Preparation of the platform ahead of the event will be key.

SLACK

Slack provides the option to create channels in which participants can discuss different topics and share files in one place. Slack was used to support the engagement of remote participants at the LMS Undergraduate Summer School 2021.

MS TEAMS

MS Teams allows the online audience to scroll back through the speaker's slides, during an event, without disturbing the meeting, which is not possible in person.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Organisers are advised to note that hybrid meetings are different from in-person meetings. A key difference is that, while there will be work ahead of both types of events, there will also be lots of work to do during a hybrid event. There will need to be an investment in time to set up the platform in the way that the organisers wish it to be used. Although the platforms provide templates, they will still need to be set up to meet the needs of the event. It is also advisable that there is an administrator or one of the event organisers on-hand during the event to deal with technical queries and support the online participants.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The use of platforms to support remote participants will incur may incur a licence cost, which may be on a per participant basis (e.g. Sococo, GatherTown) or on a per organisation basis (e.g. Zoom). Organisers should check the cost of using online platforms and factor in these costs to their event budget. Organisers should also recognise that the time to manage and maintain the platforms before, during and after the event may need to be financed, especially if employing administrative staff.

THE EVENT PROGRAMME

An advantage of running a hybrid event is that participants from across the globe in different time zones can attend the event remotely.

TIME ZONES

Organisers are encouraged think about whether the event will be aimed at a global audience and, if so, organisers should be mindful of the time zone differences. For example, one option could be to split the event in two sessions; one early morning session and one session in the late afternoon, to accommodate participants in time zones, which are ahead and behind the UK time zone, without the need for UK/European participants to attend for the whole time.

BREAKS

Organisers should be aware that the nature of breaks for online participants, for whom these were breaks away from the screen, are different to the nature of breaks for participants attending in person, for whom the breaks gave them time to interact with each other. For example, one option to facilitate informal research chats between the two cohorts could be a "Zoom bar" with cameras set up by blackboards so that a group at the venue could chat in person and interact with people on Zoom while sharing ideas via the blackboard. The INI uses these "Zoom bars" to facilitate informal research chats.

STRUCTURE

Organisers should note that a hybrid meeting will need a different structure to an in-person meeting. For example, there could be a large discussion session after a speaker's session with an expectation that participants attend this session. Another suggestion could be to hold a hybrid meeting in two parts; an online event when everyone meets to discuss ideas and problems, which would be followed by the in-person event.

The London Mathematical Society currently offers financial support for hybrid meetings under the following grant schemes:
- Conference (Scheme 1) Grants
- Joint Research Group (Scheme 3) Grants
- Research Workshop (Scheme 6) Grants

Applicants to these schemes who are planning to run hybrid events can include costs towards facilitating the organisation of the hybrid meeting in their application. These costs can include contributions towards caring costs for participants attending remotely and items that can facilitate digital participation, where a reasonable case can be made. Please outline these costs either on the application form or in the proposal, as appropriate.

Please note that the maximum values of the awards for each grant scheme remains the same i.e. there is no additional funding to support hybrid meetings on top of the normal maximum grant award. Please see the webpages for each grant scheme for details of the maximum grant award for that scheme.