

# The YERAC Organisations' guide

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A living document for the YERAC Organizers developed by RadioNet project

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## 1 YERAC: History and Raison d'être

The Young European Radio Astronomers Conference (YERAC) has been held nearly annually in different radio astronomical centers in Europe since 1968 and has enabled many graduate students and young post-docs doing radio astronomical research to meet and present their current work. For a history of YERAC, see <http://www.yerac.org>. Originally, YERAC served to overcome the still existing boundaries in Europe. It was for many young astronomers the first opportunity to make themselves visible at an international level. For participants from former Soviet Russian republics and developing countries it still serves that purpose. This makes YERAC a unique event to gain fundamental experience and lay the foundations for future research networks.

### 1.1 Reasons to become a YERAC organizer and how to become one

YERAC is cult! Almost every radio astronomer working in the field has been at least to one and can tell you anecdotes. YERAC is a great opportunity to promote your institute. It enables young people in the institute to become familiar with organizing a relatively large meeting, with challenges in selecting suitable candidates, defining an enticing scientific programme, and organizing engaging social events.

There is no one who is responsible for deciding on the next organizer of YERAC. A suitable way to ensure continuation is to ensure that the host Institute of the YERAC contacts another Director, to encourage the organization of the YERAC the following year. This is usually done on the basis of the list of host countries over the previous 10 years or so.

### 1.2 The YERAC format

The YERAC is addressed to Young European Radio Astronomers, as its name suggests. Young, nowadays means early career stage, and comprises mostly doctoral students, in some cases postdocs or master students. Traditionally an age limit was set, currently the selection is made on the basis of the participants actual status.

Radio astronomy is taken in the broadest sense. Astronomers from high-frequency (mm and sub-mm) disciplines are most welcome, and YERAC could even include researchers in mid- and far-infrared. There has always been an important participation of researchers working in theory and in the technical aspects of radio astronomy.

While YERAC, as its name suggests, is a European format, you are flexible to admit participants with a different nationality working at a European institute or Europeans working outside of Europe, or participants from institutions with a strong connection to European initiatives.

If you organize a YERAC aim at 20 to 40 participants. The idea is that each participant is giving an oral talk with plenty of time for discussions, which is needed because YERAC covers the whole breadth of radio astronomy from our atmosphere, the solar system, the galaxy and the universe as a whole; from the development of hardware and software, to theory and modeling.

It is also a tradition that participants must be nominated by institute directors and professors. This is to ensure a broad range of nationalities and topics. Each participant is asked for a reference letter to guarantee their status as PhD student, confirm their research topic, and gauge their level of research experience (especially for master students).

In the ideal case the conference is entirely organized and run by young researchers, though having at least one experienced member on the LOC is recommend. There might be highlight talks by (senior) members of the YERAC host institute, e.g. as keynote talks in the programme, but these should be limited to ensure maximum time for the participants' presentations.

A well-organized YERAC also leaves plenty of time and space for informal interactions, and non-science lectures. Making the evening meals a part of the meeting will help to boost social interactions.

**Traditionally, the affiliated institutes of each participant pay for the travel and the YERAC host finances the accommodation, the meals, and the social the program.** It is acceptable that accommodations are hostel-like, with shared bedrooms, or student residences. Part of the appeal of YERAC is that participants spend a lot of time together. Therefore, it is highly recommended that participants are lodged in the same place and in shared rooms, rather than spread among different hotels. A welcome reception where participants can meet in an informal setting is a great way to break the ice and start the first day of talks with a friendly and welcome atmosphere.

You may offer some extra activities, for example to show them your institute or telescope, or a barbecue. Activities of a purely touristic value or gala dinners are not in the spirit of YERAC.

## 2 Time Plan

**DATE** – YERAC is often organized in late summer in order to interfere neither with classes nor with vacations. In this respect you as the organizer can be flexible. You are encouraged to consider the availability and prices of accommodations. Given the target audience, it is also recommended to verify that no major data processing schools fall in the same period.

The organizers of a YERAC should know that they are willing to organize a YERAC by the first few months of the year the conference is going to take place. As soon as you have decided, and you are capable of organizing a YERAC, you may seek for additional funding (e.g. RadioNet), and proceed to form a LOC and (if necessary) a SOC. These committees can be combined in one, which makes planning more efficient with minimal resources.

**LOCATION** – About six months before the conference starts you should look for suitable conference sites. These could be guesthouses and conference centers owned by unions, churches or educational facilities. Sometimes one can get very good offers from hotels during the low season.

**ACCOMMODATION** – Depending on the location, having accommodation pre-booked for the participants may be needed up to 6 months before the conference to ensure a good rate.

**ANNOUNCEMENT** – Send out the advertisements for the conference latest 4 months before the conference starts. Note that the proper mailing list would be the list of Radio astronomical Infrastructures' directors. The mailing list of the EVN CBD, or of the RadioNet project would be a good reference.

After a two week grace period for the Directors to respond, a wider announcement can be sent to appropriate e-mail exploders, social media, and conference listings. Individual candidates should always be supported by their institute director.

**APPLICATION** – We suggest that the deadline for applications is 2 month before the conference starts, but details may depend on the host Institute. Some participants need ample time to apply for a visa and book their travel. The organizers should plan ~1 week to make their final selection and notify selected candidates at least 6 weeks prior to the meeting. Participants should upload their talk title and abstract 2 weeks prior to the meeting.

**DURATION** – Participants arrive at the venue 1 day before the conference starts. Organizing a welcome reception is highly recommended. YERAC typically lasts 3-4 days with the following day reserved for departure.

Time till event (months)	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Announcement at previous YERAC	x												
Determine SOC, LOC, financial budget			x	x	x								
Ask for funding at various agencies			x	x	x	X	x	x	x				
Identify conference site/ lodging						X	x	x					
Send out advertisements								x	x				
Application deadline											x	x	
Abstract deadline												x	x

### 3 Finances

Home institutes of participants are expected to pay for the travel expenses, and the organizers for the local expenses: overheads, board and lodging of the participants and the invited speakers; coffee breaks, lecture rooms and equipment, excursions, organized transportation to/ from the airport where necessary.

Please try to obtain additional funding first from national funding agencies, from foundations or your institute. Partial support can be requested from e.g. RadioNet (until 2020). Note that RadioNet rules are quite strict regarding financing conference dinners or social events.

If it is absolutely necessary, you can ask for a moderate conference fee. But foresee the possibility for a fee waiver for those participants who cannot afford it.

Some participants may not even be able to afford their travel to YERAC. The LOC could consider providing partial reimbursement for those cases.

Participants should be aware of the expenses the organizers make for their accommodation and subsistence. There should be a clear deadline for cancelling participation, to ensure costs for no-shows are limited.

## 4 Organization details

### 4.1 Organizing committee

Choosing your Local and Scientific organizing committees from among early stage researchers (PhD students, postdocs) is a great way to promote their careers. In practice, a single committee can suffice, especially when resources are limited. These committees should decide on the maximum number of participants admitted and the invited speakers, who may come from among the emerging science leaders at your institute. It is recommended to have at least one organizer with prior experience on the team, and support from secretaries in local logistics is also essential.

### 4.2 Sending out the advertisements

**APPLICATIONS** – The call for applications should be sent out about four months before the conference. Even though admission is via nomination by institute directors and professors, it is a good idea to make young scientist aware of the conference. There is no need for a conference poster, but spread the word by asking existing astronomical newsletter (e.g. RadioNet) . You may send personal invitations to the directors of institutes and departments, and you may announce the conference electronically at <http://www1.cadc-ccda.hia-ihp.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/en/meetings/> and via social media and on the [www.yerac.org](http://www.yerac.org) website (email [yerac@yerac.org](mailto:yerac@yerac.org)).

**PARTICIPANT LIST** – Interested young researchers may register themselves, but insist to receive a nomination from a director or professor. The SOC will decide, about 1-2 months before the conference on the definite list of participants, considering the scientific potential of the candidate based on the nominations, whether he or she has participated in the past in a YERAC. There should be no more than one or two nominees per institute/department. Exceptions are possible for very large institutes.

**DIVERSITY** – Make sure that in all the advertisements you stress the need for a diverse participant list. This implies specifically asking for women or non-gender conforming participants, under-represented minorities from any country, or people with disabilities. Though it will be up to the LOC to decide to what is feasible, depending on location and available budget, it is important that participants feel they can always request special needs.

### 4.3 Managing the conference

Using a conference management system, like the free INDICO (developed at CERN) makes things easy. INDICO lets you manage the registrations, lets participants upload presentations, contact participants, print badges etc., and in case you need to charge a conference fee also track the payments. The system can also be setup to receive feedback from the participants.

The organizing institute can also use their local management system, if that is available.

### 4.4 Website and social media

To ensure that the information of YERAC is easily found and distributed, having a well-designed website can help. This can in some cases be used instead of a conference management system like INDICO. The decision is entirely up to the local organizers.

Make sure that participants can easily find information of (local) airports, public transport, accommodation and the venue. Include this information in e-mails to the participants. If you need to organize local transport between accommodation and venue, make sure that this is clearly advertised with departure times for all dates. Update the information promptly when needed.

Active engagement of people on social media can be extremely helpful in attracting participants and building a strong network during the meeting. Make a Twitter hashtag and advertise this to all participants and stakeholders. You can also make sure that your institute's Facebook page (if available) posts about the conference. The social media involvement ideally starts when the first public announcement is made.

## 4.5 The program

The scientific program will include contributed talks by the participants. Depending on the number of participants you can allocate 15-25 min including discussion. Organization of the programme (by topic or free-form) is up to the organizers. If possible, the sessions should be chaired by early stage researchers. There may be 3-4 invited talks of about 30 minutes by researcher from the host institute highlighting some hot topics in astronomy. You could also think of new formats, e.g. discussion rounds on career development or others.

Excursions should be preferentially on a science related topic (e.g. one of your facilities).

Almost as important as the science talks are possibilities for interactions between the early stage researchers and with researchers from the host institute. Therefore, it is a good idea to foresee ample lunch and coffee breaks.

Additional non-research sessions can be included in the programme. Some suggestions:

- Advise on research funding (grants, grant application)
- Alternative career tracks
- Diversity and creating an open research climate for all
- History of radio astronomy
- Science communications and outreach
- Tour of local or nearby research facilities which are not directly related to radio astronomy
- Organize a pub quiz after dinner