

The European Business History Congress: Aims, Structure, and Discussion Formats.

EBHA Council, January 2015

The **European Business History Congress** is a forum for business and economic historians, social and cultural historians, historians of technology and scholars of other disciplines whose research explores different aspects of “business history” defined very broadly including the history of business, its products and practices, the relationship of business and society, or history of capitalism in all parts of the globe. The Congress encourages debates on the research field, approaches to research, and academic practices based on theoretical, methodological, and thematic pluralism. The major aim of the Congress is to bring scholars together for a lively debate and to encourage discussion of controversial new views of the subject and methods of “business history”.

This guide addresses:

- Session formats (papers, panels, tracks, and free forums)
- Requirements for paper proposals
- Requirements for panel proposals
- Organizing Sessions/Panels
- Multiple appearances on the program?
- Work of the program committee

Formats for EBHA Sessions

The EBHA welcomes different types of proposals to the annual EBHA congress, either grouped in panels or tracks or as stand-alone papers. We especially encourage panels which can be ninety minutes long or two-hours to accommodate more papers. The EBHA also encourages “workshops” of groups of scholars who want to use the opportunity of the congress to have their regular or specific meeting, e.g. in order to create research frameworks and develop papers or to prepare a book (on details see below). The program committee might also receive and select proposals involving alternative formats (see below). The normal proposal would consist of a paper abstract (see below) or an outline for the panel (track) consisting of an abstract of the general idea behind the panel/track as well as abstracts for each contributing paper and CVs for each proposed participant. In order to give a presentation in a session/panel, participants must have paid the conference fee three months in advance. Full papers must have been uploaded to the conference website two weeks before the start of the congress and circulated to the session participants.

Full papers have at least 12 pages (3,500 words) - 12point font, double spaced -, the maximum is 20 pages (6,000 words) incl. footnotes & reference list; tables & graphs might be added in an appendix.

Each session, panel, and track should aim to foster discussion and debate of new research, new research agendas, the implications of related disciplines for “business history”, and the subjects and methodologies of “business history”. Thus, sufficient time needs to be allocated for discussion within the audience and between the audience and the presenters so that the session turns into substantially more than a brief Q&A part of 10 or 15 min. A minimum discussion time would be 1/3 of the session or track.

Three formats are typical:

1. **Sessions** based on submitted stand-alone papers where the sessions are constructed by the program committee
2. **Panels** of three to five papers suggested by the applicant
3. **Tracks** of more than one panel (up to three panels – one afternoon)

Other formats might be (for example):

- **Workshops** - groups of scholars who want to use the opportunity of the congress to meet (e.g. publication workshop or thematic meeting). The precondition for workshop formats is **openness to new participants**; all material to be discussed must have been published on the conference webpage three weeks before the congress.
- **Debates** e.g. on new research agendas, on the state of the field/select aspects, new approaches in teaching “business history” (maybe roundtable discussions)
- **Discussions** on “business history” in the public arena (films, museums, etc.)

The organizers and the program committee might find additional formats useful. If they are used, they should be managed by the submission platform as well. Example:

- **Poster presentations** for young scholars/research frameworks etc.

Requirements for paper proposals

Paper proposals are to be submitted to an electronic database that helps organizing the work of the program committee. The submission system consists of a template (see the draft below) that specifically asks for

- (1) Author information
 - Affiliation
 - Short CV
 - Authored publications related to the paper proposal
- (2) Abstract of no more than six hundred words
- (3) Additional information important to the program committee
 - Clear statement of the research question (not more than 150 words)
 - Brief information on the theoretical/conceptual framework used
 - Major research areas to which the paper relates
- (4) Joint papers need a responsible applicant who will also present the paper at the conference if the proposal is accepted.

Such a template helps the authors to provide a structured proposal, and it helps the committee building the sessions.

Requirements for panel/track proposals

The criteria for single paper proposals also apply to **panel** (and **track**) proposals. There is, however, a specific template for panel/track proposals.

Panels tend to work better in the Congress because they create a more focused theme and papers that clearly relate to each other. They can be ninety minutes long (usually three papers) or two-hours to accommodate more papers. A successful panel leaves significant time for the audience to raise

questions, to comment and to generally discuss the panel. Good panels have a balance between cohesiveness and analytical breadth.

Tracks combine up to three panels (a whole afternoon) in order to allow for a broader discussion of a specific approach, or large themes important to the field. In a track it is expected that the audience, but also the presenters, will engage in a wider discussion.

Possible convenors of a panel/track are suggested to make an open call for the panel/track. This draws also attention to the Congress and the potentially interesting debates that might take place.

Requirements for workshop proposals

If groups of scholars want to use the congress for workshops or thematic meetings, they

- need to submit a proposal to the programme committee (electronic submission platform) together with an overview of how much time for discussion is needed.

Accepted workshops are scheduled by the organizers of the congress and they may take place on the first conferences day before the official opening.

Workshops are open to all conference participants, and all material to be discussed in a workshop must have been published on the conference webpage three weeks before the congress starts in order to enable preparation for all who want to participate.

Convenors of a workshop are suggested to make an open call for the workshop. This draws also attention to the congress and the potentially interesting debates that might take place.

Requirements for debates/discussions proposals

Convenors of debates or 'discussions' need to submit a proposal to the programme committee (electronic submission platform) together with

- a motivation statement and an argumentation of the aims of the debate/discussion
- a list of participants and a brief abstract explaining how they contribute to the debate/discussion
- a detailed time plan for the debate/discussion (90min./120min.)

A successful discussion integrates the audience and allows for comments and general discussions (not less than 30% of the total time).

Organizing Sessions/Panels

Sessions and panels with a chair and a commentator eat up to much time from discussion.

For a **session**, it is suggested to have only a chair leading the discussion who should not spend too much time presenting the speakers. If a comment is deemed to be necessary for a session the roles of chair and commentator should fall together in one person.

In a **panel** it would be the role of the organizer to give an introduction and to explain how the different papers are related to each other (in some circumstances a commentator might be engaged, e.g. if the organizer is involved in paper presentations or if the panel aims at a special issue and the editor of a journal is invited; these comments should bring out common ideas, perspectives, and points for debate).

The **chair of a session/panel** has the following tasks:

- Organizing the session/panel (this also means that s/he has prepared the papers).
- Efficient time management (each speaker or commentator is to be interrupted when time is over)
- Taking care that the audience gets its full time for comments and discussion
- The chair might take a lead, if the discussion does not start right away,
- (If there is a commentator) after the comment, the audience should immediately get time for questions and comment so that a dialogue between speakers and commentator is avoided. Often, the speakers want to respond to the commentator and then provide lengthy answers. This is to be avoided by putting responses to the commentator to the end of the session.

The **commentator** has the task of **facilitating the discussion** and to a lesser extent of providing feedback to the authors (s/he can do this in detail afterward):

- A comment should not take more than 8min. in total (90min. session/panel). It should explain how the papers relate to one another and collectively address a compelling set of issues pertaining to “business history”. It should open up the debate with some challenging questions.

Multiple appearances on the program

Applicants may make more than one paper or panel proposal, but as long as there are sufficient qualified submissions only one paper, panel or track per applicant will be accepted by the program committee.

Work of the Program Committee

The program committee should not have more than five members. It is appointed by the EBHA council and consists of 2-3 members appointed by the council and 2 member suggested by the local organizers; the chairman of the committee is also appointed by the EBHA council. The chair of the committee will normally be from the host institution. Alternative arrangements are negotiated with partner associations in the case of a joint congress.

Acceptance of a session, panel, track. The applicants receive the program committee’s decision no later than 4 months before the conference. Unfortunately, accepted speakers do not always show up for the congress. For this reason, an application is finally only accepted with the applicant paying the conference fee no later than three months before the conference.

Selection process. The program committee meets within four weeks after the final date for submissions. All members have access to the electronic submission platform and they are expected to have viewed all proposals before the meeting. The chairman might suggest a division of labour, e.g. paper submissions, panels, tracks. S/he has to guarantee that each proposal is evaluated by at least two committee members.

Electronic template:

The template should guide the applicant through the process (like an online submission system of a journal) and should only forward applicants if the requested information is given. The word limits of the boxes must be enforced. The brief instructions should be visible.

1. Personal details of the applicant

Name ..., Academic degree Affiliation Email Webpage
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2. Short CV

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3. Proposals of

paper

session

panel or track

The guides to a specific template. They do not need to be very different, but they will help counting the proposals and organizing them.

In the following the example is only given for single paper submissions.

4. Abstract (max. 800 words)

Effective proposals (1.) identify a central research question and what debates the paper contributes to; (2.) they indicate why that question is important to “business history”; and (3.) briefly describe the key sources/material used and the analytical strategy. (4) They indicate what new findings/interpretations will be provided; and (5.) they lay out the general argumentation of the paper.

Limited to 800 words

5. Statement of the Research Question (max. 150 words)

The statement helps the program committee evaluating the relevance of the paper. Indicate, if you have a purely descriptive approach and for which reasons.

Limited to 150 words

6. Major research areas the paper relates to

Corporate Governance, Finance, Marketing, Retailing, Strategy, The Netherlands in the 20th Century, Innovation

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

7. Theoretical/conceptual framework used

E.g. Cultural History, Econometric, Eclectic, Narrative Analysis, Varieties of Capitalism ...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Then follows confirmation, thanks; expected date of decision etc.

Announcement that final acceptance requires paying the conference fee.

[ceck] I agree to the conditions

[ceck] Herewith I submit