What makes a good CECAM application?

Here we want to tackle the question what constitutes a good application to CECAM for a workshop. How can you maximize your chances of success?

1. The organising team

Mix things up; a diverse (gender, scientific origin, age) team of organisers sharing a common research interest or willing to explore topics at the intersection of their competences is a formidable asset for a workshop. Experience shows that a diverse organizing team is more attentive to the development of an inclusive, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral event resulting in a more complete and balanced list of attendees and fostering exciting discussions. Typical organisers teams for CECAM events can include up to four people. Take this opportunity to mentor younger researchers as organisers or include senior organisers to foster dissemination of your event. Balance gender in your team; reach out to colleagues based in different countries and scientific circles and ensure that all organisers are motivated and share the workload.

2. The subject matter

Be bold; the workshop should normally be on a hot subject in the field of computational science. We want to visit new areas of computational modelling, both in terms of applications and methods. The Director working with the Scientific Advisory Committee will indicate what we think some of these new opportunities are, when we issue the call for proposals each year. Equally, we want to encourage new thinking from the community and we would welcome applications in areas beyond CECAMs present remit. If you wanted advice about whether a particular area is sensible for a CECAM workshop, the Director and the Node Directors would be happy to discuss this with you before you submit your application.

We also understand that it is important to revisit rapidly developing areas of computational science but we would like to give these fields an opportunity to develop by staging repeat meetings with a gap of two or three years. It may be that you want a meeting every year when a field is advancing very rapidly but you would need to make that case strongly and explicitly in the proposal.

Some workshops will gain from taking an interdisciplinary approach. After all, advances in a particular field often occur at the boundaries with other disciplines. In these cases, the subject matter should be broad enough to encourage a number of workers from different communities or with different perspectives to gain from and participate in the workshop. Please highlight these interdisciplinary
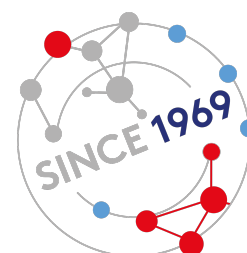
aspects when you write the proposal.

3. The description of the workshop

A short and lucid description of the state of the art in the proposed field of the workshop is a good start. This should be supported by a few key and accessible references. This is important because it allows the applicants to demonstrate their meeting will build on and go beyond the current boundaries of the subject.

A clear description of the ideas and topics to be discussed and tackled during the course of the workshop is at the heart of the proposal. Broad and general statements such as, "we will consider recent developments in the field of membrane-bound proteins or "we will review the calculation of optical properties using extensions of DFT" are not really helpful. Please try to identify real and critical problems that you intend to tackle and avoid generalities. Your programme may be clearest as a series of short bullet points outlining these problems and the corresponding opportunities. In writing the proposal, this is the section that requires the most work and the clearest thinking.

The description of the proposal should also contain a draft timetable. How many lectures do you want to have and why? How will you organise the important time outside the lectures? How will you stimulate lively discussion? Will you be actually trying to solve some of your problems in the course of the workshop? It is a law of nature that PowerPoint expands to fill all the available time. You will need to demonstrate a clear plan that distinguishes your workshop from a mini-conference. CECAM definitely wants to fund workshops.

It would be useful to include a few sentences on any scientific, societal or economic impacts that you believe might result from the workshop. If you think about this before the meeting, it will certainly help you to invite the right stakeholders and to write a good final report.

There is no need to stick rigidly to the 3-day format for a workshop. You can certainly run a longer event and we would be happy to consider suggestions for an alternative format. If you are considering a really alternative format, then call the Director or Node Directors and discuss the format before you submit the application. We can advise on the practicality.

CECAM remains convinced of the value of interactions and informal opportunities for discussion and networking over a coffee in face-to-face meetings. However, we also see the opportunities offered by remote participation in terms of environmental benefits and opportunities to engage for researchers who do not have the possibility to travel. We are therefore open to consider hybrid and on-line events in our flagship program and we are working to provide state-of-the-art tools for this type of meetings.
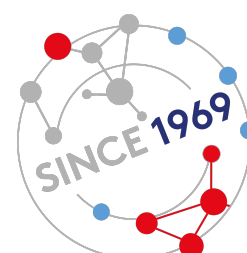
Do not hesitate to contact us if you wish to propose or explore possible formats incorporating or adopting remote participation.

4. A list of perspective attendees

You need to spend some time, while preparing the application, to contact the important potential participants and to get a real commitment from them to attend the meeting. This will mean having a clear view of the dates and location when you ask. It is good to have a mixture of experts and apprentices at the event. We think it is important that the experts understand that you are running a workshop and that, even though they may not be called upon to make a formal presentation, they will all play an important role in the discussion and the posing and solving of problems.

One thing that often stands out in a hastily or ill-prepared application is the situation in which key thinkers or opinion formers are absent from the invitation list. You really do need to identify the key players in the field, beyond your own scientific or national circle, and invite some of the best. A short but well-thought-out list is of more powerful than a long list of individuals who have not been contacted. It is very important to indicate in the application the size of the event that you are planning to run and why you have fixed on that number.

As you prepare this list, pay attention to gender and diversity. Scientific considerations are naturally the most important when preparing a list of attendees, but CECAM strives at inclusiveness in its activities: making the effort to identify relevant participants of different gender and geographical origin is rewarded by a diverse input in the presentations and discussions that greatly benefits scientific exchange.

5. Housekeeping

Please pay attention to all fields in the proposal form and make an effort to provide the required information. This will enable referees and SAC to evaluate your proposal on equal footings with the other applications. In particular, consider carefully the requirement to include an indication of any previous, recent events (especially CECAM) and other important conferences and workshop on a similar theme that will occur in the same year.

Please be clear in application about where you intend to run the event. It is important for us to know if the event will be organized by CECAM HQ (Lausanne, Zurich or Lugano) or by one of the 18 other CECAM nodes (see the CECAM web site). If the event is to be run in a node, it is essential that you contact the node director before submitting the application so that they can advise you on the suitability of the venue and the levels of support available.
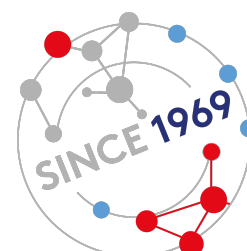
CECAM normally provides a grant of around Euro 12k towards a workshop. This is used to support the accommodation and some of the travel costs of participants. It is important to provide an accurate costing of your event in the application. If you need more or less than the standard amount then please state this clearly. If you are seeking sponsorship for the event from outside CECAM then be clear about how much you expect from other sources and how certain you are of obtaining this. If you give this sponsorship money to CECAM to manage on your behalf, then it will need to be administered and distributed according to the guidelines laid down by CECAM.

Most CECAM workshops are prepared with great care and enthusiasm and the acceptance rate is high (88% in 2020). Good luck with your next application and we look forward to receiving some exciting new proposals in the course of 2021.