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# The Arctic Council at COP23

## Bonn, 6 Nov 2017

### Outcomes

**Visibility for the Arctic Council:** The event was well attended, with roughly 75 listeners in the audience despite its time slot on the first day of COP23. It served to build awareness of the Arctic Council as an important voice on environmental issues not just in the region but around the globe. The presence in the audience of climate negotiators from many countries was important to the Council's "professional profile," while the work that we did in advance via arctic-council.org and via social media helped to build awareness of the Council as a key player to a broader audience, including those who could not actually be in Bonn for COP23.

The event also did well online. Our webpage received 1,236 unique viewers, our tweets were retweeted 131 times, our Facebook posts were clicked 356 times, and the YouTube video of the panel had been viewed 406 times as of 4 December 2017.

**Collaboration within the Arctic Council:** Preparations for this event required "all hands on deck" among the planning team (Finnish Chairmanship, ACS, AMAP, CAFF), as well as meaningful support from other States and PPs. AMAP led in identifying speakers and shaping the panel, while the Finnish Chairmanship and the ACS managed the practical organization and communications for the event. CAFF also helped to identify speakers and registered as a co-organizer in the UNFCCC system. ICC and the Saami Council worked to identify a PP panelist to join the panel, and we were glad to have Okalik Egeesiak, International Chair of ICC, as a panelist. Finland and Iceland agreed to help register panelists if necessary. AMAP, CAFF, Sweden, Observers, and many others supported our communications efforts. To the best of our knowledge, all Arctic States made an effort to encourage their COP23 delegates to attend the event, time permitting. This served as a showcase of collaboration within the Arctic Council family.

**Marketing Arctic Council research:** Much of the panel discussion focused on research contained in AMAP's "Snow, Water, Ice and Permafrost in the Arctic" report from 2017, as well as the AACA summary reports. The event itself was an important and rare occasion to present those resources and to digitally deliver them directly into the hands of policymakers.

**Key lessons learned:** Restrictions and processes for each COP may be slightly different, and it is important to adjust planning processes accordingly. For any panel itself, it is critical that the best possible panelists be secured. Ideal panelists (1) are good public speakers, (2) have extensive and appropriate subject-matter expertise, and (3) can provide "fresh" information to the expert audience that will be assembled at any COP. In addition, it is helpful if panelists can be drawn from among those individuals already attending the given COP. Any side-event application should be submitted as early as possible, either by the ACS or by one of the Arctic States. The event must be heavily publicized or marketed through all available channels in advance. It must also be "pushed" to media representatives wherever possible, including at the COP venue itself.

## Statistics

Approximately 75 delegates attended the event in person.

The event's dedicated webpage received 1,236 unique viewers from the time it was published through 22 Nov 2017. This is a large number for an article on the Arctic Council website.

The dedicated shortlink – [bit.ly/cop23-arctic](http://bit.ly/cop23-arctic) – was clicked 661 times through 22 Nov 2017. In addition, the links to other resources (three AACA summaries and the SWIPA summary) were clicked another 195 times in the same time frame.

We sent twelve tweets about COP23 over a period of roughly one month. These were retweeted 131 times in total. (For various technical reasons we have no insight into the total number of clicks.)

We published seven Facebook posts about COP23 over a period of roughly two weeks. Taken all together, these received 7,663 views, 356 clicks, and 176 likes, shares, and comments.

The YouTube video (provided by the UNFCCC, not by the Arctic Council) showing the archived footage of the panel had been viewed 406 times as of 1 December 2017.

Following the event, there were three important articles related to the panel in the press.

- [As COP23 talks start, Inuit org supports call for action, solidarity](#)  
Nunatsiaq News, 6 November 2017
- [Arctic climate change affecting the south](#)  
Canadian Press (widely syndicated), 19 November 2017
- [Global implications of a rapidly changing Arctic](#)  
International Institute for Sustainable Development, 6 November 2017

## Issues encountered

In general, the issues we encountered were a result of the short planning timeline. This was due primarily to the late confirmation of the event date, which came only five weeks prior to the event itself. The first hurdle to be cleared was the application itself. Having never applied for such an event before, the process was somewhat confusing. The second hurdle to be cleared was the identification of panelists. All panelists would either need to be attending already, or they would need to register, find funding, and arrange travel in time to join the event. This meant that about half of the panelists who eventually took part were confirmed only very late in the process.

Specific challenges that we encountered, and that should be considered by future organizers, are below.

- It can be difficult to find speakers and a moderator who can take part. Availability at short notice presents a challenge for many desirable speakers, as does cost.
- Confirmation of the event's acceptance, date, and time can be very slow in coming. This means that all aspects of planning stay in "tentative" phase for a long time, and there is always a chance that the event will not be accepted or that the date assigned by the UNFCCC will be inconvenient. Organizers should consider backup possibilities for that eventuality.
- With the constraints above, it is challenging to secure panelists who have the appropriate expertise, who are good public speakers, and who represent a good balance and diversity of age, gender, and perspective. Nevertheless, this is an important goal.

- High-level political participation is desirable, but difficult to arrange before a specific date and time has been confirmed. Because this is often not confirmed until late in the process, one should not rely on high-level political participation. In addition, organizing the side-event during the high-level segments of the COP meetings increases the risk that conference negotiations or unexpected events will siphon off the potential audience for such an event.
- Participation of high-level individuals requires flexibility from organizers to accommodate last-minute schedule changes.
- Applications may require submission by several different entities for a good chance at selection. Identifying co-applicants and coordinating the joint submission of the application is time-consuming. In some cases, there are restrictions on how many applications or co-applications countries or organizations can do, and therefore one should start contacting the potential organizations well before the side-event registration begins.
- Countries may be reluctant to register too many panelists as part of their own national delegations, using “party overflow” status. Some countries may be entirely unable to do this. Accordingly, this is an important detail to sort out early in the process.
- It’s important to sort out early whether catering is desired, and – if so – who will pay for it.
- The organizers may or may not be able to gain access to the site and the meeting room prior to the event itself. This was especially difficult in 2017 because of the event’s time slot on the first day. The point person from the ACS should be present at the event venue for one full day prior to the event itself in order to take advantage of any opportunity to access the site and check technical facilities.
- There are other opportunities (e.g., small press availabilities) to gain the attention of delegates and media. In 2017, these prospects came up too late in the process for us to take advantage of them. Future organizers should consult early and broadly about such opportunities.

## Summary and recommendations for future organizers

Preparations for the event went well, and certainly as smoothly as could have been expected in light of the short timeline and the uncertainty about the event’s ultimate acceptance or specific date. This was thanks to the efforts made by all those who helped to organize the event.

What we find essential is (1) the early identification of a topic, (2) early confirmation of speakers, (3) confirmation of date and time for the event, and (4) highly visible announcement of the event through many channels.

The work involved in arranging the event seems worthwhile in light of the good attendance at the event itself and the event’s additional resonance online. However, one must recognize that planning is resource-intensive. Had the event itself been poorly attended, the work involved in arranging the event would have seemed, in hindsight, to be too much.

The Conferences typically address one theme (e.g. climate, oceans, biodiversity, chemicals, or something else). Accordingly, the participants are always experts in their field. The side events should be structured to provide information and analysis that will be new to such experts. This should be reflected in both the planning and the marketing of the event.

Specific recommendations for any future organizers are below.

## Preparatory phase

- Consider and discuss whether to have an Arctic State or the Arctic Council Secretariat apply for the side event. The advantage of having an Arctic State apply is earlier certainty as to the allocation and timing of the event, and greater influence on these matters. However, this should be considered case by case because the arrangements are different and the rules and guidance of each Conference should be followed. The advantage of having the Arctic Council Secretariat apply is that it underlines that the side event is an Arctic Council event, which might not be clear if an Arctic State were the lead applicant. The principal impartiality of the Secretariat may also be an advantage.
- Talk early with potential partners within the Arctic Council family, in particular the Nordic Council of Ministers. They may also be hosting an Arctic event, and be willing to share speakers, costs, etc.

## Planning and organization

- Download the UNFCCC's (or other organizers) online resources, and read them early and completely to understand the registration process and to get a good sense of the layout of the event. COPs are huge events, so it is important to know the difference between the different venues. In particular, read the "Side event organizer's handbook" or similar information about technical facilities and practical issues at the venue thoroughly.
- Discuss the preferred format for the event (Presentations? Panel? Something else?) early, and reach agreement. For any panel discussion, find a good and engaging moderator. Consider journalists.
- Plan weekly teleconferences among the key organizers/planning team, whether needed or not.
- It is essential that speakers be confirmed as early in the planning process as possible. Members of the planning team must have good knowledge of potential speakers themselves in order to create a successful event.
- Establish early which country or countries will provide party overflow registrations. Establish the "drop dead" deadline for such registrations by each country. Ensure that you know exactly what information is necessary for each registration.
- Collect biography, photo, travel information, and lodging information from each speaker as soon as possible. Simultaneously, ask whether they are willing to speak to any journalists who may send inquiries. Brief each speaker on the fact that s/he is speaking in his or her personal/professional capacity, and NOT on behalf of the Arctic Council as a whole.

## ACS only

- Establish a single webpage on arctic-council.org that will be the "hub" for all public information about the event. Create an obvious short link to that webpage (in 2017 we used [bit.ly/cop23-arctic](https://bit.ly/cop23-arctic)). Share **ONLY** the clearly-branded short link in all messages and communications efforts both within the planning team and externally. Do not share any longer URLs.
- Prepare a suite of communications resources in an easy-to-share packet. Include images of several different sizes (web, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and polished text (ready to copy-

paste) for several different platforms as well. Share these with the full Arctic Council family, with the request to help market the event if they find it possible to do so.

- The point person from the ACS should be present at the event venue for one full day prior to the event itself in order to take advantage of any opportunity to “scope out” the site.
- Save any speakers’ presentations and speaking notes (if provided). Upload these to the website in order to provide public access, and be sure to link from the event page on arctic-council.org.
- Whenever possible, avoid sending mass emails. Instead, send personalized messages to different delegations and journalists.
- If possible, bring a person to take photos and be responsible for communications work, in addition to the organizational point person.
- Bring Arctic Council name plates to use for speakers.

## Appendix: Planning timeline

- Mid-June 2017: Decision to have a presence at COP23 was made at the SAOX in Helsinki.
- Early July 2017: Planning began, roughly four months before the event. The planning “team” included the Chairmanship, the ACS, and AMAP. We downloaded all available guides for event applicants from the UNFCCC SEORS website, and carefully reviewed the requirements and processes for an event application.
- Early August 2017: At our request, CAFF joined the planning team. We discussed potential speakers and moderators, as well as the theme and structure of the event. We prepared a draft version of the event application.
- 15 Aug 2017: We began to approach potential moderators and prepared a second draft of the event application for comment.
- 18 Aug 2017: We made initial contact with the WMO.
- 22 Aug 2017: We began to approach potential panelists.
- 23 Aug 2017: We prepared a third (final) draft of the event application. We began to approach Ministers (FI, NO) as speakers at the event.
- 25 Aug 2017: We had a coordination teleconference within the planning team.
- 28 Aug 2017: The UNFCCC SEORS system opened for registrations. The ACS submitted the application on 29 August, CAFF on 30 August, and AMAP on 31 August. All were required to submit separate applications.
- 5 Sep 2017: We had a coordination teleconference within the planning team.
- 6 Sep 2017: We merged the three applications in the UNFCCC SEORS system. Recognizing the possibility that our application might be denied, we discussed the possibility of the Nordic Council pavilion as backup space in which to hold the event.
- 8 Sep 2017: This was the UNFCCC’s deadline for event applications. Following this, we could only wait until 25 September to hear whether our event would be accepted or not.
- 25 Sep 2017: We received word from the UNFCCC that our event application had been accepted, but that we had been assigned the date of Monday 6 Nov 2017 (the first day of COP23). Neither Minister (FI, NO) was able to take part on that date.
- 29 Sep 2017: Having received confirmation of the event and its date, we began final confirmation of speakers.
- 4 Oct 2017: ACS prepared draft communications materials and distributed them for comment.
- 11 Oct 2017: We began acquiring speaker registration information. (Panelists who needed to be registered were to be included as “party overflow” either for Finland or for Iceland.)
- 20 Oct 2017: We published the event webpage on Arctic Council website and created a dedicated short link to the event webpage ([bit.ly/cop23-arctic](http://bit.ly/cop23-arctic)).
- 23 Oct 2017: We distributed a packet of ready-to-use communications materials to States, PPs, Working Groups, and Observers, with the request to help market the event via social media and other channels.

- 30 Oct 2017: We held a series of calls with the panelists to discuss their presentations and ensure there would be no overlap. We attempted to update the event's theme and list of panelists in the UNFCCC system, and asked the UNFCCC secretariat for access to the site on Sunday 5 November. We scheduled a pre-meeting for the panelists on the evening before the event at a local venue.
- 31 Oct 2017: We sent a substantial coordinating message to all panelists (and others involved) that provided as much information as possible. We confirmed the final panelist (Okalik Egeesiak, ICC). We sent individual messages to State delegations asking them to encourage their own national delegates to attend the event.
- 1 Nov 2017: We created a one-page printable flyer for use at the event. We uploaded pertinent documents (SWIPA summary, three AACA summaries, one-page flyer) to the UNFCCC system. The Chairmanship ordered catering for the event.
- 2 Nov 2017: We completed registration for the final panelist.
- 3 Nov 2017: We sent personalized messages to known journalists inviting them to watch the live-stream or to take part in event on the ground. The message included contact information for panelists who had expressed willingness to speak to journalists.
- 4 Nov 2017: The order of panelists was changed to accommodate the schedule of the WMO Secretary-General.
- 5 Nov 2017: After arriving in Bonn, ACS checked the location of the venue and registered. Unfortunately, access to the meeting room itself was not possible at this time. We sent messages to the panelists explaining with directions and instructions for registration. We sent requests to some panelists for their PowerPoint presentations. We contacted the Finnish Chairmanship regarding the registration of one panelist who had not received her letter of accreditation from the UNFCCC. We reminded the UNFCCC secretariat to update information about the side event in their systems. In the evening, we held a coordination meeting with the moderator and two panelists.
- 6 Nov 2017: From the hotel, we conducted a test-call with one panelist who was participating via Skype. Once at the venue, we assembled the presentations that we had received from panelists and delivered them to a technician in the meeting room. We signed on to Skype and placed a test call to the ACS from the COP23 venue. We placed Arctic Council table cards and flyers put in place, and collected one "lost" panelist at the venue entrance. The moderator put a SWIPA poster on the door of meeting room. The catering was received on time, and a UNFCCC volunteer agreed to guard the food and drink while the event was in session. During the event itself, the ACS served as microphone-runner during the Q & A session.
- After the event, the ACS uploaded the panelists' slides to the ACS SharePoint, and asked the UNFCCC to ensure upload of the correct video to the UNFCCC Climate Action Studio (YouTube channel). Upon request from one panelist, his slides were sent to a journalist.
- 7 Nov 2017: ACS edited the website to past-tense and added a link to the archived video of the panel.