

## Evaluation of PCST 2018: summary report

There were 265 respondents to the evaluation survey, and a high (55%) percentage of all those who registered for the conference (223 respondents). Table 1 provides a comparison for survey response rates by participants over the last five PCST conferences.

PCST Conference	Registered participants	Survey respondents	% Response rate
PCST 2010	530	220	44
PCST 2012	670	294	44
PCST 2014	507	159	31
PCST 2016	318	163	51
PCST 2018	408	265	55

*Table 1: Survey responses rates for past five PCST conferences*

84% of the total PCST 2018 survey respondents attended the conference; a large majority of the non-attenders cited finance, including the level of conference fees, as their reason not to attend.

Table 2 compares information on participants' participation in previous PCST conferences. Over half of respondents (56%) were attending their first PCST conference, which was lower than for recent conferences, e.g. 67% in 2014. For the 2018 conference 24% of respondents to the survey had attended two or more previous PCST conferences. These attendance patterns compare to patterns from previous PCST conferences, except Istanbul, where a significantly lower number of participants registered.

PCST conference participation	PCST 2010 (%)	PCST 2012 (%)	PCST 2014 (%)	PCST 2016 (%)	PCST 2018 (%)
Never before	67	67	67	52	56
Once	13	12	12	16.5	19.9
Twice	14	7	8	11.5	6
Three times or more	6	14	13	20	18.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 2: A comparison of participants' participation in previous PCST conferences*

Table 3 compares ways in which participants have heard about PCST conferences coming up. One quarter of respondents (n=216) heard about the conference at a previous PCST conference, but over half (55%) cited colleagues as their source of information, confirming the importance of previous participants and PCST members as ambassadors for these conferences. In previous post-conference surveys, colleagues also were reported as the principal source of information, e.g. by 52% of respondents in 2014 and nearly 50% in 2016.

PCST conference advertising	PCST 2010 (%)	PCST 2012 (%)	PCST 2014 (%)	PCST 2016 (%)	PCST 2018 (%)
At earlier PCST conferences	18	17.5	16	29	23.6
Colleagues	31	47.9	52	49.5	54.6
Web	32	21.3	19	10	6.95
Social media	NA	NA	NA	3	2.3
Email	13	7.3	NA	6	6.95
Other	6	5.9	NA	2.5	5.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 3: A comparison of ways in which participants first heard about PCST conferences*

Over half of respondents (56%) answered ‘maybe’ to a question on whether they would attend PCST 2020, with one third saying ‘yes’, again similar proportions to those for previous post-conference surveys, e.g. one-third ‘yes’ in 2016 (Istanbul) in relation to the 2018 conference in Dunedin; 58% ‘maybe’ in 2014 (Salvador, Brazil), in reference to the 2016 conference in Istanbul. These findings, provided in Table 4, indicate that PCST conferences have a partly regional character as well as global character.

Participation in PCST 2020 in Dunedin	PCST 2010 (%)	PCST 2012 (%)	PCST 2014 (%)	PCST 2016 (%)	PCST 2018 (%)
Yes	51	22	36	31	33.2
No	6	15	6	13	9.7
Maybe	43	63	58	56	56.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 4: A comparison of PCST participants’ stated intentions of attending a subsequent PCST conference*

On several survey questions multiple-choice answers were offered, so direct comparisons of proportions answering a certain way are not always possible with findings from previous surveys. For example, there were 556 responses (from 265 respondents) to the question on their connections with science communication, thus the following numbers total more than 100%:

- professional practice 52.5%
- research 48%
- teaching 41.5%
- student, scientist doing science communication and ‘other’ less than 15% each

It is notable that respondents' most frequently cited connection to science communication is professional practice.

Table 5 presents the main motives respondents gave for attending PCST 2018. 'Presenting in a parallel session' was rated most important in 44% of responses, 17 percentage points ahead of 'networking with others active in science communication'. These two motives were also the top two in the rankings of the second-most important motive, albeit in reverse order. 'Listening to presentations and discussions' was the third most highly ranked motive. In the 2014 and 2016 post-conference surveys, presenting a paper and networking were also the two most strongly represented motives for attending.

Main motive for coming to PCST	PCST 2010 (%)	PCST 2012 (%)	PCST 2014 (%)	PCST 2016 (%)	PCST 2018 (%)
Present a paper	41	34.5	32	45.5	NA
Network with others	33	19.5	30	28	27.4
Participate in an organised panel	NA	14.5	19	8	NA
Listen to presentations and discussions	16	19.5	NA	8.5	20.7
Present a poster	NA	7.5	NA	4.5	NA
Join in discussions outside the formal sessions	NA	1	NA	0	2
Other	6	3.5	NA	5.5	NA
Present in a parallel session (e.g. paper, roundtable discussion, workshop, visual talk, performance) Present in a parallel session (e.g. paper, roundtable discussion, workshop, visual talk, performance)	NA	NA	NA	NA	44.4
Participate in a plenary session	NA	NA	NA	NA	9.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>??</b>

*Table 5: A comparison of PCST participants' main motives for attending PCST conferences*

Individual papers (46%) and roundtable discussions (47%) were by a wide margin the most cited formats for participation, though it is possible that 'present or participate actively', as referred in the question, was understood to mean different things by different respondents. A

higher percentage responded that they participated actively in workshops and plenary sessions than those who presented in those formats; the percentages from survey responses and the conference programme more closely correspond in the case of individual papers and Ideas in Progress.

Table 6 provides a summary of participants' satisfaction ratings for various aspects of the PCST 2018 conference. PCST 2018 responses (n = 216):

Item	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Does to apply/did not attend
<b>Registration and payment</b>	39.81% 86	38.43% 83	12.96% 28	4.63% 10	1.85% 4	2.31% 5
<b>Information from the administration</b>	32.24% 69	47.66% 102	12.62% 27	6.54% 14	0.47% 1	0.47% 1
<b>Venue of conference</b>	45.58% 98	46.51% 100	6.05% 13	1.86% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
<b>Content of plenary sessions</b>	28.84% 62	45.12% 97	19.07% 41	5.12% 11	0.93% 2	0.93% 2
<b>Content of parallel sessions</b>	19.44% 42	47.22% 102	23.15% 50	8.33% 18	1.39% 3	0.46% 1
<b>Content of visual posters/video displayed</b>	13.02% 28	39.07% 84	25.12% 54	4.65% 10	1.86% 4	16.28% 35
<b>Content of performances</b>	12.21% 26	28.64% 61	17.84% 38	1.88% 4	0.47% 1	39.97% 83
<b>Organisation of plenary sessions</b>	22.43% 48	50.93% 109	19.16% 41	4.67% 10	0.93% 2	1.87% 4
<b>Organisation of parallel sessions</b>	16.28% 35	44.65% 96	21.86% 47	13.49% 29	3.26% 7	0.47% 1
<b>Number of parallel sessions</b>	13.08% 28	30.37% 65	19.63% 42	24.77% 53	12.15% 26	0.00% 0
<b>Organisation of performances</b>	7.98% 17	21.60% 46	21.60% 46	4.69% 10	0.94% 2	43.19% 92
<b>Organisation of visual tours of posters/video</b>	7.94% 17	27.10% 58	18.69% 40	5.61% 12	3.74% 8	36.92% 79
<b>Welcome reception</b>	32.41% 70	35.19% 76	14.81% 32	1.39% 3	0.46% 1	15.74% 34
<b>Gala dinner</b>	21.03% 45	24.30% 52	8.41% 18	2.34% 5	1.40% 3	42.52% 91

*Table 6: Participants' satisfaction ratings for various aspects of the PCST 2018 conference.*

The highest levels of satisfaction were recorded for the following, in descending order (with combined percentage of very satisfied and satisfied):

- Venue 92%
- Registration and payment 78%
- Content of plenary sessions 74%
- Organisation of plenary sessions 73%
- Information from administration 70%

The highest levels of dissatisfaction (with combined dissatisfied and very dissatisfied) were for:

- Number of parallel sessions 37% (44% were satisfied or very satisfied)
- Organisation of parallel sessions 17% (61% were satisfied or very satisfied)

These are recurring issues that PCST conference organisers struggle to address; issues with the number, organisation and variable quality of parallel sessions have been cited in previous post-conference surveys as sources of dissatisfaction.

Of the respondents who submitted a proposal, 62% referred to the model provided for guidance on the conference content management system. Of those who made a presentation and said they planned to write it up, 30% said they would submit a contribution to the PCST conference archive and 65% indicated that they aimed to have it published elsewhere. A quarter of respondents did not submit a proposal and could represent those citing networking as the main motive for attending (over 27% of survey participants).

When asked to provide feedback on the 'best thing' about the conference in an open question, the recurring topics included:

- opportunities to network and discuss with a diversity of people in science communication (71 participants)
- quality of the plenary sessions and keynote talks (37 participants)
- quality of discussions (ideas and current thinking) (28 participants)
- variety/diversity of formats, including mix of research and practice and countries represented in sessions (28 participants)
- venue (including its ease of use), food and coffee (19 participants);
- quality of presentations (with some mention of individual sessions) (13 participants)
- friendly, collegial atmosphere (12 participants)

Among the suggestions of things that could be done better, the main recurring topics were to:

- reduce the number of parallel sessions (50 participants) by curating or vetting the abstracts for quality over quantity (7 participants); limiting the number of times a presenter can speak (6 participants); and grouping sessions into streams e.g. media; museums and science centres for better program navigation (6 participants)
- provide a better balance of innovative practical sessions (e.g. new media workshops) vs traditional academic talks (11 participants)
- keep all parallel sessions together in the same venue for ease of movement (10 participants)
- publish the program earlier (10 participants)
- keep plenary talks focused on communication rather than science (10 participants)
- organise and promote visual talks, tours and speakers corners better so they are attractive to attend (8 participants) e.g. easy to find and with no food at the same time
- include greater diversity/representation from the global south (7 participants) e.g. through a fellowship program for low income countries and students (4 participants)
- make more time for discussion (7 participants)

- limit repeat appearances by ‘old guard’ / ‘core group’ (6 participants);
- call for professional moderators (6 participants) and give more guidance to speakers to ensure better presentation e.g. less reliance on Powerpoint (3 participants)
- remove or improve plenary panel discussions (5 participants) e.g. provide better briefing to panel members on expectations
- reduce the number of speakers per session (4 participants)
- include abstracts in the conference app (4 participants)
- facilitate more networking (4 participants) e.g. add more information to conference badge including affiliation and three self-nominated topics/conversation starters; hold welcome reception earlier
- include IT support in each room (4 participants)
- ensure Gala dinner is easy to attend i.e. cost and location (3 participants)

Of the 95 responses to the final question on ‘any other comments’, many offered thanks and congratulations (59 participants) but some critical points were raised, including some already raised in previous responses:

- lack of cultural diversity (7 participants)
- outdated forms of presentation (6 participants)
- ‘inner circle’ too evident (5 participants)
- too expensive (3 participants)

Certain features of the conference were both strongly approved and strongly criticised e.g. feedback on the plenary sessions and the conference atmosphere (collegiate and welcoming vs “old guard/core group” focus). In the responses to this survey, there was a focus on the need for greater inclusion, diversity and innovation within PCST conferences. This will be important for future conference hosts to consider.

The commentary on the PCST2014 evaluation survey had noted:

The satisfaction ratings need to be read alongside the answers to the open questions. Despite the 80+% aggregate Very satisfied / Satisfied ratings for many aspects of the conference, respondents put considerable energy into expressing dissatisfaction or disappointment with certain aspects and/or offering suggestions for improvement.

It will be important for the hosts and organisers of future conferences to take the quantitative and qualitative, the positive and negative, feedback from this PCST 2018 evaluation into account.