

General Chair Duties for ACM SIGMETRICS Conference

Preamble

Being General Chair for an ACM SIGMETRICS conference requires about an 18-month time commitment, with the **bulk of the work done in a 6-month period (January–June) leading up to the conference**. This "busy period" spans a myriad of conference-related activities, including technical program, publicity, tutorials, workshops, hotel, food and beverage, audio-visual, program scheduling, banquet, budgetary matters, and more. Being a conference chair is a big responsibility, but a well-respected role, and a valued service to your research community. Often the role is filled with two co-chairs, to ease the workload.

Many others have done this role before you. Feel free to seek them out for advice. There is much wisdom and experience to glean from prior General Chairs, as well as your SIGMETRICS Executive Committee. Just ask!

Duties and Expectations

The following list shows **roughly an 18-month timeline** of activities, in approximately chronological order. The assumption is that you are General Chair for a June conference in Year N, and that you are appointed in January of Year N-1. For more details, see the official ACM conference guide online at: http://www.acm.org/sigs/volunteer_resources/conference_manual.

Choose a suitable geographic location for the conference. Your SIG Executive may provide advice on this, following a preferred scheduling pattern (e.g., East Coast, West Coast, or overseas). Or you may recommend a location to them. Something in your geographic proximity is preferable, but not a strict requirement. Think about travel logistics, time of year, tourism appeal, meeting facilities, and costs. Important considerations are proximity to major universities, hotels, and research institutions. Some secondary considerations might include where recent conferences have been held (so that people who had to travel far in previous conferences get a bit of a break), and how difficult it is to get the appropriate travel documents (or travel funding approval for attendees to get there), especially if you want to have it outside

North America. If it is a joint-conference with IFIP Performance (every 3 years), get their input on location as well. For an FCRC-affiliated event (every 4 years), the site selection is done by ACM, so you can ignore all the venue selection and hotel contract issues.

Determine suitable dates for the conference. The SIGMETRICS conference is typically in May or June, and often follows a 5-day Monday-Friday format, with 2.5-3 main conference days, and 1 or 2 days for tutorials and workshops either before or after the main conference (or both). Make sure to avoid major holidays, such as Memorial Day in the US, Victoria Day in Canada, or Golden Day in Japan. If possible, try to avoid overlapping with other conferences that attendees might also want to attend (e.g., USENIX, IWQoS). If you are at a university location, try to avoid convocation or large high school graduation events. If at a hotel, be wary of summer wedding events, which often take place on weekends in June. Having more than one set of possible dates gives ACM greater flexibility when negotiating with prospective hotels.

Fill out the Preliminary Authorization Form (PAF) on the ACM Web site. This official paperwork starts the ACM conference planning process. You will likely be in touch with Maritza Nichols at this point.

Select the Program Chair(s) for your conference. These are the most important people, since they are in charge of the technical program for the conference. Consult with the SIGMETRICS Executive Committee for a list of suggested names. Often co-chairs are a good idea. If so, try to find the right mix of expertise to make things work, considering area expertise, geography, academia/industry, gender, and experience, as appropriate. Try to have your Program Chair(s) lined up by March of Year N-1.

Build the rest of your **organizing committee** for the conference. Get people with the right skills, people that you know, and people that you trust to do their job capably, and on time. Getting the right team in place is the most important thing you can do to simplify your own role! In addition to the Program Chair(s), you may want a **Finance Chair** (conference budgeting and expense tracking), **Publicity Chair** (email and Web advertising of conference), **Tutorials Chair** (solicit tutorial proposals and select, collect, and produce tutorial handouts), **Workshops Chair** (solicit workshop proposals and select, collect, and produce workshop handouts), **Registration Chair** (on-line registration and on-site logistics), **Proceedings Chair** (get camera-ready papers from authors into format needed for ACM proceedings production), **Local Arrangements Chair** (on-site logistics, AV, student volunteers), and a **Conference Webmaster** (Web site presence). Recent years have added a **Student Activities Chair** to coordinate student travel awards, doctoral symposium, student dinner, and other activities.

Set up a conference bank account, either with ACM, or with your institution. Determine who has signing authority, charging privileges, etc. An account under your direct purview is best, but ACM accounts work too. The default currency for conference finances is the US dollar. Avoid unstable currencies, or excessive currency conversions.

Think about **possible venues** (i.e., hotels, meeting venues, universities) in your candidate location. Do NOT negotiate contracts with any, but feel free to contact some of them, see their facilities, sample their food, take public transit, etc. Know what is out there, and what the experience is going to be like for a conference attendee. Landing a conference contract is a big thing to a hotel, so they will gladly show you around, but please do not sign anything and do not make any promise about prices or attendance.

Contact the appropriate ACM staff member (currently Ashley Cozzi) to initiate the hotel selection process. ACM is a large organization, and they can negotiate very good deals with certain hotel chains. The process is called a **Request for Proposals (RFP)**. ACM will note the city and dates you want for your event, and then solicit bids from hotels. This takes several weeks. When the RFP process completes, ACM will give you a list of their recommended hotel(s). You have the right to approve or veto their recommendation(s), based on your knowledge of SIGMETRICS and the location. Choose a hotel that meets with your expectations for a SIGMETRICS conference. Saving \$10 per night is not the most important thing, if location or facilities or other considerations can make for a better conference experience overall.

Once you and ACM agree on a suitable hotel, **let ACM staffers negotiate the contract**. They have done it many times before, and know what they are doing. Hotel contracts can be a huge financial exposure for the SIG, so you want professional ACM lawyers negotiating the room rate, room block size (usually expressed in room-nights), reservation deadline, attrition penalties, meeting room allocation, event schedule, AV requirements, food and beverage commitments, etc. Your job is to review the offered contract and make sure you get the dates, meeting rooms, and prices that you want, in accord with your conference budget. Be aware of taxes and gratuities, which cost 15–25% at most places. Contract negotiations take about a month. It is nice to have this process complete about a year before your conference, so that the venue can be part of your publicity and Web site presence.

Prepare a conference budget. Look at samples from previous years. Modify as suitable for your location and venue. A typical SIGMETRICS conference has a budget of about \$80K US. If it is a joint conference with IFIP Performance (every 3 years), the SIGMETRICS portion of the budget will be half of this, since the two organizations share the financial risks and rewards. If it is an ACM FCRC year, the budget will also look different, since ACM handles most of the revenues and expenses centrally, and only part of the funds cross the SIG ledger. Seeing one or two examples from prior years will help you get started. Your current SIG Chair and SIG Treasurer can offer assistance, if needed.

Fill out the **Technical Meeting Request Form (TMRF)** on the ACM Web site. This is the most important document in the ACM process. It identifies key personnel, provides conference dates and venue, and has the first detailed conference budget, including proposed registration fees.

Set up a **"Master Account"** at the hotel to handle all of the conference billing: meeting rooms, AV, food and beverage, etc. Clearly indicate who has signing authority to charge to the account.

Line up sponsors. SIGMETRICS usually has good luck with IBM, HP, Microsoft, and other organizations. If the conference is in the US, you can also pursue an NSF grant for student travel support. Get some funds into your conference bank account well in advance of the conference, so that you can meet ongoing expenses and growing commitments.

In consultation with PC chairs, **determine suitable submission and review cycle for papers.** Work backwards from the proceedings production schedule to ensure there are no surprises along the way. Encourage them to draft CFP to publicize the conference. Think about making posters to distribute as well, if you wish.

Attend the **SIGMETRICS** conference in Year N-1, bringing along 1-3 PowerPoint slides promoting your conference dates and location. Beg for a 5-minute slot to present to the SIGMETRICS conference audience, perhaps just before or just after lunch. Ask your Program Chairs to present as well, and distribute initial CFP. You could even create a brochure or poster promoting the conference and hand these out at the current SIGMETRICS conference.

Create a Web site for the conference. Our current practice is to host these on the ACM server, so that they are all in the same place, and permanently archived for the SIG. Your Webmaster will need an ACM account to do so. This takes about a week to obtain.

Arrange a **banquet** for the conference, which may or may not be at the conference hotel. Think of costs and transportation logistics.

Ensure that Tutorials Chair and Workshops Chair are doing their jobs, soliciting and evaluating proposals, setting timelines, collecting materials, scheduling sessions, etc.

In consultation with the Program Chairs, set a **target number of papers to accept** (e.g., 30-32), and possibly posters as well. Ask PC or EC for **keynote speaker** suggestions, if you need ideas.

Provide financial support for PC meeting. Collect receipts from Program Chairs and reimburse as appropriate as a conference expense.

Coordinate conference program with Program Chair(s), giving adequate consideration to sessions, breaks, posters, banquet, keynotes, etc. Get tentative program onto conference Web site well in advance of the conference (3 months) so that publicity, travel, registration, etc., can proceed unimpeded.

Get Proceedings Chair to coordinate with ACM for **proceedings production**. This involves distributing formatting instructions and copyright forms to authors, collecting camera-ready papers, sending to ACM's publisher, approving galley proofs of proceedings, and making sure that they are delivered to the conference venue on time. Options include printed proceedings, CD-ROM, or both. Papers will also end up in the ACM Digital Library.

Draft a one-page **"Message from the General Chair(s)"** to include in the conference proceedings.

About a month before the conference, **finalize the menu selections** for food and beverage events, and estimate head counts. SIGMETRICS traditionally provides lunch every day, as well as morning and afternoon coffee breaks each day, and one evening banquet during the event. If funds permit, you can consider a welcome reception as well, or even a poster wine and cheese event, or even a simple continental breakfast each morning for attendees. You decide, since only you know the budget details at your site.

Finalize conference schedule with PC Chair(s), including keynote speaker(s). In some years, a SIGMETRICS Achievement Award winner is also honoured at the conference, including an invited talk. Check with your SIG Chair to see if there is one in Year N.

Finalize registration fees for conference and get them on the Web site 2–3 months before the conference. You can follow the general fee structure from prior years, adjusting as needed for your local situation. You can use ACM's RegOnline service if you wish, or find another solution (e.g., university site, PayPal, etc). Have a stated early registration deadline about a month prior to the conference, as well as a clearly defined cancellation policy. SIGMETRICS historically keeps the number of complimentary (free) registrations very low (at most 5). You decide how to allocate these (e.g., self, Program Chairs, keynote speakers, VIPs).

Monitor registrations for the conference. A typical SIGMETRICS conference gets 140–170 people. Be aware of the break-even point for your budget. Have backup plans in case of low attendance (e.g., cancel banquet if there is no financial penalty for this).

Regularly **monitor financial transactions** and commitments on the conference bank account. Keep track of actual expenses as they come in, as you will need these later for your final conference report.

Remind Program Chairs to select award papers, if any. Get title and authorship information regarding award papers to ACM at least one month before the conference, so that plaques can be ordered and charged to the SIGMETRICS conference account.

Invite keynote speakers, **VIP guests**, sponsor reps, etc. Allocate any comps (freebies) from the hotel (e.g., free rooms, upgrades, etc.) to VIPs, keynote speakers, or key members of your organizing committee.

Guarantee **head counts for food and beverage events** about a week in advance. Note that you pay based on the guaranteed number or the actual number of people served, whichever is higher. So be careful with your estimates. Running out of food is bad, but paying for empty seats is also bad. As a performance evaluation person, make sure to get your lower bound as tight as possible!

Attend SIGMETRICS conference in Year N. Give **opening remarks** about the conference, including many thank-you's as appropriate.

Enjoy the conference (if you can). Maybe not this year, but definitely next year, when somebody else is doing it!

Meet with SIGMETRICS Executive Committee to report on your experiences while they are still fresh. Also make sure to share your ideas and advice with next year's General Chair, who is likely in attendance.

Monitor invoices from hotel, ACM, etc after the conference. **Pay bills** as promptly as you can to avoid financial penalties. The norm is 30–60 days for many of these transactions.

Produce **post-conference report** (technical and financial) for SIG EC and ACM.

Once all conference commitments have cleared, arrange to close the conference bank account and transfer remaining balance (if any) to ACM Headquarters, for allocation between SIGMETRICS and ACM. **Conference closeout** usually occurs 4–6 months after the event.

Suggest updates and improvements to the information in this document.