

MidWest SAS User Group, Inc. - FAQ

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Abstract

This paper discusses MWSUG activities. The main purposes are to (1) disseminate information to users in the area, (2) develop interest and volunteers, and (3) obtain feedback from users. Some of the topics for discussion are: MWSUG board membership, MWSUG conference selection, and conference planning. MWSUG is an incorporated entity with a 10-person board of directors. Several board members will be on the panel to answer questions from the audience. The Board is in the process of formalizing some guidelines for the topics listed above.

Keywords: MWSUG, site selection, co-chair, Board of Directors

Introduction

The timeliness of the information contained in this document varies with the content area. Most of the information on site selection, board membership, and conference co-chair selection are still working guidelines. Any member in the MidWest region should feel free to contribute suggestions and comments to any board member as we try to shape the future and organization of MWSUG, Inc.

Our Mission Statement

The mission of the MidWest SAS Users Group is to provide users with many opportunities and enhanced resources for SAS products, as well as to facilitate communications to and from SAS Institute, Inc., and users of SAS in the MidWest region.

History of MWSUG

Once upon a time, sometime around SUGI 14, a small group of SAS users gathered to discuss the formation of the second regional SAS users group which was to represent SAS users in the Midwestern area. After careful planning, a letter of introduction was sent to other SAS user groups within a vast 12 state area asking for support for this regional idea. Support came rolling in and the MidWest SAS Users Group was born.

The SUGI Executive Board chartered the MidWest SAS Users Group (MWSUG) in December of 1989 as the second regional SAS users group. MWSUG represents and serves local, in-house, and special interest groups in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

The major activity of MWSUG is to hold an annual conference.

Conferences

1990	Minneapolis, MN
1991	Chicago, IL
1992	Kansas City, MO
1993	Indianapolis, IN
1994	Omaha, NE
1995	Cleveland, OH
1996	Minneapolis, MN
1997	Chicago, IL
1998	St. Louis, MO
1999	Columbus, OH

Incorporation

On January 26, 1995, MidWest SAS Users Group was formally organized under the Minnesota Nonprofit

Corporation Act. MWSUG was the first regional to incorporate. The decision to incorporate was made largely due to tax and liability considerations.

SAS Institute, SUGI and MWSUG

SUGI is the international organization of SAS Users. MWSUG is the MidWest regional SAS Users group. SUGI issues the regional charters, including MWSUG. SUGI appoints a liaison to each regional. For MWSUG, this individual is a ex-officio member of the Board of Directors.

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While SUGI and SAS Institute are distinct and separate entities, many of the administrative details associated with the SUGI Conference are handled directly by SAS Institute. Volunteers of the MWSUG organization handle all the details of the MWSUG conference. This is the same with other regional and special interest groups.

SAS Institute is very instrumental in the success of the MWSUG Conference. SAS Institute supplies several speakers, a demonstration area with support staff, announcement and registration packet mailings, and publication of the conference proceedings. The conference committee handles all hotel choice, costs, speakers, organization, proceedings editing, registration, audiovisual, and conference conduct.

MWSUG is financially liable for all aspects of the conference. It is with this

consideration that MWSUG chose to incorporate.

Conference Site Selection

Currently, the major activity of MWSUG is to hold an annual conference. Site selection has been based on several factors: local user group support, hotel facilities and hotel costs. The conference location has tried to alternate between cities on opposite sides of the region to allow all users to attend a conference in a driveable distance every other or third year.

As the organization continues to develop, we are examining a site selection policy. There has been more interest shown the last two years than ever before. In the early conference years, there was rarely more than one city submitting a proposal for a given year. With more cities wanting to host a conference, we are establishing site selection criteria.

Some ideas / discussion points under consideration are:

- Rotate the conference through four major areas - Chicago, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Ohio. The conference itself would not have to be held exactly in these cities every four years. For example, St. Louis may be substituted for Kansas City, and Cleveland, Columbus, or Cincinnati might be chosen for Ohio.
- Separate the co-chair selection from the site selection, similar to SUGI. This would allow us to seek out competitive bids between hotels and cities and arrive at the best situation for conference attendees.
- Ensure local user group support in whatever city chosen.

- Avoid the appearance that user groups themselves are competing - rather have hotels competing.
- Conferences should be somewhat profitable. However, as we make decisions about future sites, it may be possible to hold a smaller conference in a smaller locale to be accessible to users that may not otherwise attend.
- Up until this time, conference co-chairs in conjunction with the Board of Directors have done site selection and hotel negotiation. Usually this is the area where board members and co-chairs have little expertise. We tried a site selection company this year to seek a hotel contract for the 1998 conference. This company does not cost us anything and makes its money from a "finders fee" paid by the hotel. We will evaluate their performance in getting better hotel deals, freeing up co-chair time to concentrate on the program, and allowing the conference to be more cost effective. More details on how well it works to come.

User groups wishing to be considered for future selection should contact one of the Directors.

Selection of Conference Co-Chairs

Conference co-chairs have usually been chosen by the locale submitting the site proposal. Usually there have been two co-chairs that split duties along administrative and program lines. It is nice to have one co-chair in the hosting city to handle administrative duties and act as a hotel liaison.

As we decide on a site selection policy, the selection on conference co-chairs

may change. The Board of Directors will approve conference co-chairs.

The workload, as a voluntary position, is tremendous. It will put a strain on your work, your family, and your spare time. As a past co-chair, I can tell you that Allan (the other co-chair) and I met at the YMCA while his children were swimming, at the Euclid mall which was a central location, at my office, and a half a dozen other odd locales. We were on the phone constantly to each other and to other conference committee members, SAS Institute, the hotel, and speakers and volunteers. Even his children could identify my voice when I called.

While it helps to have a good conference committee, there is still a lot of work that starts almost a year prior to the conference and continues for at least a month post conference. Even if the Board of Directors removes the headaches of hotel negotiation, there is still lots of work. On the plus side, there are the rewards of hosting a successful conference, meeting many new people, learning a lot about SAS, and seeing the inside of hosting a conference.

Some of the activities conference co-chairs are currently responsible for are establishing and maintaining a budget, soliciting presentations, editing and collating the conference proceedings, the entire registration process, special events, coordination of outside training activities, audiovisual equipment, opening and closing sessions, and preparing a final conference report for the Board.

Potential conference co-chairs should consider volunteering in different

capacities at MWSUG Conferences and SUGI. Volunteers are always needed for Section chairs and session coordinators (program side) and registration and facilities (administrative side). If I haven't scared you off, and you are still interested in volunteering or learning more about conference chair responsibilities, contact any board member.

Election of Board Members

There are 10 board members. The Board of Directors elects board members for a 5-year term. Each year, two board member terms expire and two board members are elected.

Candidates for the board should submit their name for consideration to a current board member. Currently there are no guidelines for board membership. Following are some points for consideration in deriving guidelines:

- Should attend the annual MWSUG conference.
- Should be active in the MWSUG organization as a conference co-chair, conference committee member, conference speaker, and/or conference volunteer. Participation in SUGI activities and local activities will also be considered.
- Should be willing to serve to serve a complete 5-year term.
- Regional representation and make-up of the entire board. That is, it is desirable to have members representing the various areas of the Midwest region. Whether this representation should be based on geographic boundaries or actual user per capita is unclear.
- By bylaws, board membership cannot exceed 10 years.

Some questions the board may ask of candidates are:

- Why are you qualified?
- Why do you want to be on the MWSUG board?
- What would MWSUG gain by your membership?

Volunteers:

Volunteers are our most valuable resource.

- To all the people who contribute papers or posters: There would not be conferences without you.
- To the session coordinators, registration and information desk attendants, proof readers, gophers, phone solicitors, Web and e-mail coordinators, vendors and trainers: Conferences like this cannot succeed without much appreciated volunteer efforts.
- To the arrangements/local committees: You make the facility and locale arrangements flow so smoothly.
- To the Section Chairs who track down papers, biographies, keywords, AV equipment needs: They keep the program moving smoothly.

Volunteers come in all sorts of packages and time commitments. Some participate at the conference and others in the planning of the conference. Some are fully committed to the conference and others share an afternoon volunteering time. There is always room for more volunteers. Let us know what your constraints and interests are, and we will gladly work you into the process.

Consider giving a paper at a future conference. The best papers are sometimes the experiences of the SAS user. You don't have to be an expert. Many of the attendees are new SAS users and can use any of your experience.

Conferences succeed because of volunteers!

Other topics:

Other issues that have been brought up for discussion at various times include:

- a regional newsletter to keep users in touch with what MWSUG is doing.
- a speakers bureau to provide national / regional speakers to local users groups at minimal cost to the users group.
- training programs or other miniature conferences

MWSUG Communications

Web Page: MWSUG does have a Web site. It is located at <http://www.biostat.wustl.edu/mwsug> that can also be reached through the SAS Institute Web site. Eric Losby voluntarily maintains this service with space donated by the Department of Biostatistics, Washington University. We hope to enhance this method of communication in the upcoming years.

MWSUG-L: This is a listserver for electronic mail where you can post messages to other SAS users in the MidWest area. You must subscribe before posting a message but anyone can subscribe. Conference updates and other information of interest to all MWSUG members will be posted here. To subscribe just send an e-mail message to LISTSERV@CMSUVM.B.CMSU.EDU. The subject line can be blank but the message must contain the following with your name:

SUBSCRIBE MWSUG-L *John Doe*

You should receive a confirmation back. The confirmation will include instructions on how to send postings to the listserver. Nancy Hill voluntarily maintains this service.

Conclusion

The Board of Directors is always interested in what MWSUG can do to better serve the users in this region. The only formal method we have on collecting this information is on the conference evaluation forms. However, we would always welcome comments and suggestions from anyone at anytime.

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