



# **Program Chair Guide**

**Information for STAC and  
Program Chairs**

## **Planning and Administering AMS STAC & Special Topical Meetings**

This information is intended to help provide you, our program chairpersons, with information on how we plan and organize AMS administered meetings. Even if you have been a meeting program chair in the past, we think you will find this information helpful.

### **What You Will Find Here**

We will describe your role as a meeting program chairperson and the role of the AMS Meetings and Exhibit staff that will support your program. There is some latitude in your role as a program chairperson. Some chairpersons prefer to leave most of the decisions to the staff, while others want a more hands-on approach. We will work with you on this to accommodate your level of interest.

The contractual aspects of your meeting reside with the AMS meeting coordinator assigned to your meeting. They are the sole contact with the hotel or convention center. Only the AMS meeting coordinator can legally bind the Society to a contract.

We will include information on meeting registration fees and what is included. Stand-alone, co-located, and joint meetings will also be covered. We will describe the process of selecting a conference venue and the variety of tasks that must be undertaken by the chair, program committee, and staff to ensure a successful outcome.

There is a lot of material here. We hope you will take the time to read the information. We tried to anticipate what we think most chairs would like to know about when putting on a meeting. Feel free to contact us if you feel that there is something that is not covered.

#### **1. Selection of a Program Chair**

The program chairperson of a meeting is normally selected by the committee's STAC chairperson, in consultation with the STAC members; we recommend that the new Program Chair be selected before the current conference. Alternatively, the next Program Chair could be a member of the current Program Committee and play a large role in the process of selecting the meeting venue.

#### **2. Assignment of a Meetings Coordinator**

At the beginning of the site-selection phase we will assign a Meetings Coordinator to help you work through the myriad of details associated with planning your meeting. Your Meetings Coordinator will usually be someone who is familiar with your meeting history and requirements. Having your meetings coordinator on board from the outset will assure a smooth transition after contracts are negotiated and signed. Attachment A is the historical record of all STAC meetings over the past 30 years.

Your meetings coordinator will work closely with you in finding a suitable venue for your meeting. If the meeting involves another STAC they will handle the business details of the joint STAC meeting while you work on the details of the scientific program. The AMS staff is there to assist with the organizational and social-program aspects of your stand-alone or joint meeting.

### **3. Meeting with Groups Outside of AMS**

We would like to take a moment to discuss joint meetings with groups outside of AMS. Over the past several years we have tried some experiments where AMS met jointly with other groups. These groups were from both science and non-science communities. It was our experience at these meetings that at times the cultural differences were vast enough to create meeting planning and organization problems as well as major economic concerns. If you choose to take this route with your meeting, we find that it works best to determine one group take the lead in the planning process of the logistical details. We also require endorsement by the STAC commissioner and approval by the AMS Meetings Council with input from the meetings staff prior to proceeding with them.

### **4. Selecting a Venue for Your Meeting**

Before proceeding with selection of a site for your next meeting we would like you to understand the benefits of having your meeting clustered with one or more STACs. There is the potential for increased scientific exchange between the disciplines when one or more groups are present. The larger base of attendees gives AMS staff the leverage to negotiate lower sleeping-room rates and food costs. In some situations the hotel will provide extra services at no added cost. There is a need to balance the increased attendance with the space available at the venue. Increasing attendance to the point where we incur meeting room charges or need to go into a convention center may be counterproductive. This is not always the case but at some venues it could happen.

#### *A. Candidate Sites*

The process begins with the program chairperson. Please let the AMS meeting coordinator know where you would like your next meeting to be held. A short list of 3 locations for AMS staff to explore is generally a good start. You may start by looking at Attachment B, a list of recommended venues. These venues have worked well for other STAC conferences and we know that they provide quality services and are cost effective.

If you do not find a venue from this list that is acceptable please contact us about where you would like to meet. When asking us to look for an alternative venue, please keep a few things in mind. A venue that was an enjoyable vacation experience may not be a good meeting venue. The ease or difficulty of getting to the venue will greatly influence the meeting attendance, logistics, and costs. Many venues have seasonal variability factors. So what may have been reasonable rates when you or a colleague visited a site may not apply during the proposed meeting window.

It is important for us to know some qualitative aspects of your desired location. For example, is it your desire to have a remote location to encourage more interactions among the attendees? Are you looking for a venue where there are many things to do after the meeting ends for the day? Are you interested in having a lot of dining options nearby? Do you want to be near specific types of attractions or research institutions? The more criteria you can give us, the better job we can do in selecting candidate sites.

### *B. Time of Year & Pattern*

We need to know the time of year you would like to meet. We will let you know if a venue has seasonal rate constraints that may make it economically impractical to meet at the time you want to hold your meeting. You can give us a specific month or season. Try not to limit it to a specific week. If there are dates that are not good for your group due to ongoing projects, conflicts with other professional meetings, or experiments, please let us know. We also suggest that the STAC/Program Chairperson look into possible conflicts with other meetings that might be happening in your community.

Our normal meeting pattern has a Saturday and Sunday arrival. Meeting days are Monday through Thursday or Friday. We do not recommend meeting over a weekend and having an open block of time during the week.

### *C. Co-Locating Meetings*

We will encourage you to co-locate your meeting with an unrelated STAC meeting, particularly if your constituency or meeting attendance is expected to be small. We are not trying to impose joint conferences on everyone wishing to plan an AMS meeting. However, it is not usually economically feasible for small groups to meet by themselves without increasing registration fees to cover higher per-person costs.

At a co-located meeting you can have a separate banquet or luncheon, poster viewing areas, and meeting rooms. You may have joint social functions, only if both groups desire to do so. We generally encourage joint social functions because there are benefits to the attendees that come about as the result of interactions between the groups.

### *D. Joint Meetings with another STAC*

You may want to meet with another STAC for scientific reasons. The STAC Commissioner may also suggest that you meet jointly with another STAC. You should contact the STAC Chairperson that you are interested in having a joint meeting with to determine their interest. You should try to work out the details of location and time with them prior to having us initiate the site selection process. We will be happy to assist you with the negotiations.

Both chairs are asked to provide information on how the groups may overlap, and to get some feel for the extent to which joint oral and poster sessions and social functions will take place.

### *E. Joint Meetings with a Group Outside of AMS*

As we mentioned earlier we have some major concerns with the effectiveness and business aspects of holding joint meetings with groups outside of AMS. The cultural differences can be somewhat daunting. If your joint meeting receives approval, AMS staff will work closely with you on putting this type of program together. In parallel with discussing the scientific and technical content of the meeting, AMS staff will work out the business arrangements.

### *F. Program Format*

It is very helpful for us to have a preliminary understanding of the program format for your next meeting, particularly if you plan to change from prior history. If you are going to have an extensive poster program requiring more space, or require a breakout room(s) in addition to your general session room, we will need to know this since it will impact space needs. We traditionally turn posters over mid-week, lessening your space needs and the cost of the poster session. We will also need to know your banquet plans for your meeting so space can be planned accordingly.

### *G. Registration Fees and Meeting Budget*

Attachment C presents representative fees for 2015 Specialty meetings. We have also included a description of a standard set of services included in this fee. You have some flexibility on what will be standard for your meeting. For example, you may choose to have more receptions and eliminate the banquet. You may want to go offsite for your function. This may require an addition to the registration fee to cover transportation and/or facility fees. There are some meeting services where there is little or no flexibility to make a change.

Attachment D illustrates a representative meeting budget for a 275 person meeting. When we begin the final hotel selection process we will provide you with information that will allow you to see the impact of different hotel or venue choices on the budget and registration fee. We have also provided some examples of upgrades that other chairs have made to the standard meeting. You can see the impact on the registration fee for making these choices.

### *H. Preparing the Bid Specification/RFP (Request for Proposal)*

The AMS staff will prepare a bid specification that allows a hotel or conference facility to prepare a proposal to host your next meeting. You will be given an opportunity to review the bid specification and add any requirements that you feel are important to your meeting. The end product is a bid specification that is unique to your meeting. Attachment E contains a sample bid specification.

### *I. Evaluating the Proposals*

We evaluate the responses from the various hotels. We eliminate the least attractive proposals and go back to hotels that are in the competitive range. We make up a short list and come back to you with a summary of the responses and a recommendation for a candidate site or two.

On those rare occasions when we are unable to come up with an acceptable proposal we may ask you to provide some new candidate sites. We need to make you aware that there are some contract conditions that will preclude our signing a hotel contract however attractive or desirable the location. The following paragraphs describe those contract conditions that can disqualify a hotel.

#### 1. Attrition

The AMS will not sign a contract that includes an attrition penalty clause. The attrition penalty is a fee AMS would pay the hotel if we failed to pick up a contracted number of sleeping rooms.

## 2. Sleeping Room Rates

AMS is sensitive to sleeping room rates. We require a certain percentage of our rooms at or below the government per diem rate. We also establish an upper bound to the room rates (relative to per diem). The upper bound is 50% above per diem. We consider rates that are no more than 30-35% above per diem to be in the acceptable range. Failure of a hotel to provide rates within these boundaries will eliminate a property from consideration.

## 3. Meeting Room Rental Fees

There is a relationship between the number of sleeping rooms we use and the amount of meeting space a hotel will provide on a complimentary basis. Our registration fees presume that we will not have to pay meeting room rental fees. If you wish to meet at a facility that will require a meeting room rental fee we will ask you to agree to an increase in the registration fee.

## 4. Poster and Exhibit Space Fees

Most facilities will have a charge for poster and exhibit space (if applicable) because this space is held on a 24-hour basis and cannot be used for other purposes while we are on property. We have built into the registration fee a nominal poster space charge. We will contact you if the cost for this space cannot be absorbed by the budget. Exhibit facility costs are paid by the exhibitors and it does not impact the attendee registration fee. Exhibit revenue is used to reduce the overall costs of the meeting or to enhance the level of services provided to the attendee.

## 5. Food & Beverage Guarantees

Finally, some hotels insist on a food and beverage guarantee. If the guarantee appears to be usurious we may eliminate a hotel from further consideration. We try to negotiate a guarantee that closely approximates the anticipated food and beverage expenditures for your meeting. Making changes to food functions after we sign a contract could put the AMS at risk.

Program chairs are discouraged from making direct contact with hotels as we go through the selection and negotiation process. The hotels should only be interacting with the AMS staff that will sign the contract. It may be necessary to make a site visit at this point if we are unfamiliar with the property or it has been a long time since we've used them. The program chair may accompany AMS staff for the site visit at their own expense.

### *1. Use of the Conference Hotel*

The AMS cannot force attendees to book their sleeping room at the conference hotel. However, our program chairpersons and program committees should not actively encourage the participants in their program to go around or outside the hotel block. Rather, we should encourage our attendees to use the hotels that we book for the meeting. If attendees go outside the official hotel block they can create a situation where the Society incurs extra costs. The potential cost to the Society can be substantial. At some point we will have to pass this cost on to the next group of meetings. Further, a history of good sleeping room pick-up at the contracted hotel will greatly help in contract negotiations for desired hotels in years going forward.

## 6. 'Green' Meetings

AMS is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with running the meeting. Although AMS staff has always been sensitive to the environmental impacts of our meetings, the AMS Committee on Environmental Responsibility has developed a series of recommendation for further reducing energy consumption and waste associated with our conferences. Please see Attachment F for the AMS Green Conference Guidelines.

## 5. Meeting Planning Phase

As we mentioned earlier we will assign a Meeting Coordinator for your conference. This staff member will be the only official contact for all of your meeting activities.

Once you are in the planning stage of your meeting please work directly with your Meeting Coordinator. They will coordinate all of your requests for support with an appropriate staff member. If you have questions concerning the audio visual aids, computer, Internet, or facilities they will contact the staff specialist for this information.

If your meeting has an exhibit program please contact your Meetings Coordinator who will work directly with the Exhibits Coordinator or Exhibits Manager for those aspects of your program. Please refer to Section 8 for meeting format rules that apply to all conferences with an exhibit. We can't stress enough the need to work directly with your Meeting Coordinator for all communications related to exhibits.

## 6. Meeting Planning Timeline

### A. Domestic Meetings

In an ideal world you should plan on having 15-18 months to promote and organize your meeting. If you meet every year or 18 months you and your program committee should consider having conference venues identified for the next several meetings. If you have a year or less to plan your meeting and have not finalized your site selection we urge you to proceed with publishing your Call for Papers. It is not necessary to have the specific location identified. You can indicate the region or that it is TBD.

### B. International Meetings

Planning and organizing a meeting at an international venue requires two years or longer. The AMS Executive Committee must approve you holding a meeting at an international location. You start the process by sending a written request to the STAC Commissioner or Board Commissioner. If you are being invited by an organization or institution to co-host your meeting with them please include a copy of the letter of invitation. You will also need to have the Director of Meetings prepare and negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), that describes the roles that each party will play and the financial arrangements. Attachment G provides a sample Memorandum of Understanding. A preliminary budget is required. The program chair and committee are encouraged to participate in this process. In general, meetings at an international venue are more expensive than those meeting in the U.S. If financial sponsorship is needed to make the conference economically viable, a letter of commitment from the sponsor(s) must be included. Sponsorship

may be either a monetary contribution or in-kind services. But in any event the sponsorship must result in an offset of expenses.

## **7. Meeting Tasks & Milestones**

There are a number of tasks that need to be performed by the Program Chairperson, committee, and AMS staff in order to have a successful meeting. Attachment H is a list of these tasks, their milestone dates and a brief description of each.

## **8. Guidelines for Organizing Your Meeting**

In planning for your program you need to be aware that we have established some organizational guidelines. Your Meetings Coordinator will walk through these and other meeting guidelines and answer any questions you may have during the planning of your conference. We will also schedule a meeting at the hotel prior to the start of the conference to review logistics procedures, run a training session on our presentation recording system, and address any concerns you may have. Student helpers will be invited to attend this briefing.

### *A. Oral Presentations*

Oral presentations are scheduled in 15-minute time increments, although program chairs may schedule two or three 15-minute increments for a particular presentation, if they desire. For meetings with parallel sessions this allows attendees to move across sessions and not miss seeing presentations. You may want to start your meeting 8:30 a.m. each day and end by 5:00 or 5:30 p.m. Monday we prefer a 9:00 a.m. start time since we often have a large number of attendees showing up that day for registration.

### *B. Poster Presentations*

Poster presentations may be scheduled at the program chairperson's discretion. We encourage you to schedule them in prime time, either in the morning or afternoon in conjunction with the refreshment break. It would be desirable to extend the length of the break to provide adequate viewing time. If you plan on having a lot of posters, we would urge you to schedule viewings throughout the week. We normally have a mid-week turnover of the posters. Tables are available for poster authors on request. Attachment I provides some guidance on Poster Presentations. Computers, power outlets, and other audio visual aids are not available to support posters.

### *C. Short Courses*

You may want to organize a pre-meeting short course. This is typically a very specialized course or workshop for which an extra fee is charged. Please contact your meeting planner for additional details. The AMS Board on Continuing Professional Development must approve all AMS Short Courses and a copy of the application can be found at <https://www.ametsoc.org/index.cfm/ams/meetings-events/short-courses/>

### *D. Refreshment Breaks*

We typically have two refreshment breaks each day, one in the morning at 10:00 a.m. and one in the afternoon at 3:00 p.m.

### *E. Ice Breaker Reception*



We typically have one icebreaker usually scheduled for Monday evening at 5:30 p.m.

#### *F. Exhibit Program*

If your meeting includes an exhibit program, you need to take into consideration the following guidelines when putting your program together. Exhibit viewing usually begins on Monday evening at 5:30 p.m. in conjunction with the opening icebreaker reception. Exhibit hours can be set for each meeting based on the program schedule. It is best to have at least one hour each day for exclusive exhibit viewing when there are no sessions taking place. We also recommend that you consider having an extended afternoon refreshment break. We recommend including a vendor session in your program. If you include this session please ask your Meeting Coordinator to check with the Exhibits Coordinator to make sure that the author's affiliated organization is an exhibitor. Exhibitors may only give oral presentations. Select only one oral presentation per exhibitor for this session.

#### *G. Luncheon, Banquet, or Special Event*

You have the choice of scheduling a luncheon or banquet during your meeting. There is no requirement for a speaker. We have had some off- site alternatives to a banquet. These have included a dinner cruise, a barbeque, reception at an aquarium or museum, or a baseball game. Some program chairs have opted to schedule additional receptions with posters in lieu of a major food function. You have some flexibility in what you do.

Your options may be limited after the hotel contract is signed. So it is important for the staff to know very early in our planning if you want to have a special event. Please be aware that in nearly all cases special events will require either an increase in the registration fee or a sponsor. The registration fee does not cover, for example, boat rental costs, facility rental or admission charges, or shuttle bus fees. Open bars are generally not an option since many attendees cannot have alcohol included as part of their registration fees. AMS staff will assist you in making these arrangements.

#### *H. Securing Sponsors*

Many times program chairpersons desire to schedule a special event, add additional receptions, or enhance refreshment breaks. This requires either an increase in registration fees or sponsorship of the event. You may also be aware of an organization that wishes to sponsor a function at your meeting and on many occasions it is more advantageous for a program committee member to seek out this sponsorship, due to the relationship with the potential sponsor. If sponsorship is secured, AMS will then be in contact with the sponsor to discuss sponsorship benefits and the signing of the contract. However, if you would like assistance in seeking sponsorship, please let your Meeting Coordinator know and she will be in touch with the AMS Director of Development to assist where possible. It must be understood that sponsorship recruitment is not always successful, and therefore the special function or activity envisioned must be regarded as tentative until financial support is confirmed either through an adjustment of the registration fee, or through a commitment by a sponsor.

### *I. Audio/Visual Support*

The AMS Home Page has a special section on the AMS Upcoming Meetings Page where authors may get helpful hints on preparing oral and poster presentations. Information on standard audio/visual equipment and instructions for ordering optional equipment may also be found.

### *J. Computer Support*

Please note that AMS will supply the following standard equipment for each meeting room: one screen of appropriate size, podium microphone, audience microphone, laptop, speaker timer, and data/video projector. Please contact your Meeting Coordinator if you believe you will need special software requirements.

### *K. Speaker Instructions for Installation and Recording of Presentations*

This material will describe how speakers can get their presentation file(s) to the meeting prior to their arrival.

#### 1. Loading Presentations before the Meeting

Files may be uploaded to the online abstract system in advance of the meeting, normally up until one-week out from the meeting. All files submitted online will be loaded onto the meeting room PCs before the start of the meeting. There is a 200mb size limit for online uploads.

#### 2. Loading Presentations at the Meeting

On site, speakers may upload their presentations on the computers in the meeting room or the Speaker Ready Room if one is being used. The use of personal laptops for presentations, which can cause technical delays and cut into a presenter's time, is discouraged.

Presenters who choose to load their presentations at the meeting will be required to use special installer software running on the Speaker Ready Room or meeting room laptop. These presenters will not be permitted to store their files on the laptop's local drives. Instead, the installer software will automatically create a special directory for those files. Once stored there, presenters will be able to check that their files were copied into the software and that they will run properly .

Speakers who wish to load files at the meeting site need to bring their presentations on one of the following media: USB flash drive, USB hard drive (Pocket Drive), CD-ROM, CD-R, or DVD. Use of rewritable CDs (CD-RW) should be avoided due to compatibility issues. Presenters seeking to edit their presentations on site using a laptop that has a USB port will need to copy their files from their laptop to the AMS PC using a USB storage device.

The AMS PC will have the following software installed: Microsoft PowerPoint XP (2010), Adobe Acrobat 7.x or higher, QuickTime 6.x or higher, Macromedia Flash Player 7.x or higher, and Internet Explorer 6.x or higher. Please note that the AMS PC will not support Microsoft Vista.

## Images, Videos, and Animations in Presentations

Video files should be downloaded and embedded into your presentation. If graphics or video clips are not embedded within a presentation, they will need to be available for downloading as well. Hyperlinks should be avoided. Websites are available to download youtube videos. All images, videos and animations should be checked at the meeting to ensure that they are still functional.

## Video Codecs

Presenters are asked to make sure that codecs used for compressed animation and video files are generic codecs, not video hardware-specific codecs.

## Note on Mac-Produced Presentations

To ensure that Mac-produced presentations remain as close to the original as possible, the following simple guidelines are offered for presentations before they are to be transferred to the AMS on-site computer.

Images should be inserted from within PowerPoint using the "Insert Image" command and not dragged and dropped from other applications.

For Mac-produced presentations that include embedded video, the video will most likely not play automatically on the PC platform. The files will need to be converted to either .mp4 or .wmv format and a link will need to be created within the slide show to an external .mov file. For the latter, the animation will play in a separate QuickTime window, outside of the PowerPoint presentation. It is strongly recommended that presenters test their Mac-produced presentations on a Windows-based system before arriving at the meeting.

## 5. Recording of presentations

In an attempt to expand the audience for presentations and to provide a more complete and permanent record of the authors' remarks, the AMS would like to record the voices of authors and their slides as their presentations are being made in cases where authors are willing to grant the Society permission. To facilitate the recordings, and to make things easier for all attending the meeting, presenters are asked to load their presentation well in advance of the scheduled presentation time. Recorded presentations will be available on the AMS Web site ([www.ametsoc.org](http://www.ametsoc.org)) after the meeting.

To be recorded, speakers must:

- (a) Grant AMS permission to record the presentation at the meeting and to make this recording available on the Web as the Society deems appropriate, and
- (b) Use the PC provided by AMS for your presentation at the meeting.

Speakers can grant permission either when uploading the presentation file or when delivering it to AMS staff in the Speaker Ready Room. Speakers can see an example of a recorded presentation at:

<https://ams.confex.com/ams/33AF12F4BG/videogateway.cgi/id/47446?recordingid=47446>

When presenting, speakers should conform to the following guidelines to ensure an effective presentation and an intelligible recording:

- Face the audience when speaking.
- Use the mouse provided at the podium to point at details on the slides. (A monitor will be positioned in front of the podium so the speaker can see the pointer location while continuing to look at the audience.)
- If the speaker uses the podium microphone, please be sure that they are facing the microphone and remain close to it when they speak.
- If the speaker is asked a question at the end of the talk, unless the questioner uses a floor microphone, please ask the speaker or session chair to repeat the question for the sake of those in the audience and those listening to the recording.

#### *L. Internet Support*

AMS does not provide Internet service in our meeting rooms. If this is a requirement of your meeting please let your Meeting Coordinator know prior to our publishing registration fees. This will require an increase in our fees to support this service. If the hotel offers this as a free service we will make it available for your meeting.

#### *M. Program Chair Funds*

Program Chair funds are normally used to support student travel to the conference. Other acceptably uses of these funds are for student awards or for invited speaker support. If you have an invited speaker, please be aware that all the usual fees (abstract, registration etc.) apply. The 2018 Program Chair Funds are \$1,500. A Program Chair Fund form must be completed and signed by the STAC Commissioner or an AMS representative.

#### *N. Customized Lists*

After the conclusion of the meeting, AMS is able to provide an attendance list upon request. Phone numbers and e-mail addresses are not included. During the planning process, your meeting planner will have access to customized lists (student presenter lists etc.) and can provide those upon request. Your planner can also send targeted e-mails upon request to attendees or presenters to help promote the meeting or send reminders. Please send any text with the subject line to your meeting planner along with a description of who you'd like to target.

#### *O. Session Room Support*

While organizing your program, you will be asked to assign a session chair for each oral presentation. The session chair will be responsible for introducing each speaker in the session, make sure the session runs on time, and possibly ask a question of the presenter in the case where no one in the audience has a question.

AMS will also go out to your student presenters to ask for student assistant. If you have a student in mind, be sure to let your meeting planner know. The number of

student assistants will depend on the number of session rooms running concurrently throughout the meeting. Student assistants are asked to work during Sunday registration hours and for a half day during each day of the conference. Volunteers receive complimentary registration and a \$25/day stipend. They assist with pre-registration and help in the session rooms with presentation uploading and in running the timing equipment.