SIG Structure Task Force 2.0
Draft Report

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Background

The recent ACM Retreat has spurred discussions on a wide range of topics within the ACM. The nature of the SIGs, how they are structured and administered, and how they might evolve, was one of the major areas of interest. ACM is a membership-based organization, with a significant presence in the academic publishing realm; SIGs constitute a substantial portion of the overall membership, and contribute the lions share of publications to the digital library. While the current model has been successful, it has also been relatively static for many years.

A task force was constituted to examine SIG structure, and propose changes – while some elements of the first proposal were warmly received, others had push-back (primarily from representatives of smaller SIGs). This motivated the formation of a new task force, with greater participation from the smaller SIGs, to carry the process further. In this report, we present a new set of ideas on how to revise the SIG structure in a way that can grow membership, and serve the core mission of the ACM.

Key questions raised in the Retreat were if the current SIG model and structure:
- Provides for continued value to the membership of the SIGs
- Exerts unnecessary pressure on SIGs to conform to one model of success
- Fosters or curtails cross-SIG collaboration
- Fosters or curtails the emergence of new technical communities and activities.
- Fosters or curtails coherence across ACM technical communities

Proposal

The SIG Structure Task Force makes the following proposals:
The SGB EC will oversee and determine viability for each SIG. SIG viability expectations will be based on the focus and mission of the SIG as part of the core mission and values of the ACM. All SIGs will be required to maintain an appropriate fund balance, hold regularly timed elections with a full slate of candidates, have an engaged membership, and demonstrate an effective volunteer development process. All activities that a SIG engages in should be of high quality, reflecting positively on the ACM as a whole. Beyond this, SIG expectations may vary – each SIG will develop a mix of activities that may include highly technical meetings (conferences, symposia and/or workshops), educational programs, awards, and newsletters. SIGs activities should serve the community of computing professionals as well as being an interface to the broader public.

SIG viability decisions will be made by a vote of the SGB EC. As the group most closely involved with the leadership of each SIG, it will be the responsibility of the SGB EC to ensure that SIG activities match with the overall mission of the ACM.

With the approval of the SGB EC, SIGs that are in transition will be allowed to hold elections; this will require a change in current policy. In some instances, difficulty with a SIG may stem from ineffective leadership, rather than a poor focus for the SIG, or a shortage of potential new leaders.

**Revised Viability Review Process**

Under the proposed approach, SIG leaders will provide the SGB EC with documents describing both past and potential future SIG activities. As noted above, SIGs will continue to be required to maintain an appropriate fund balance, hold elections, and have an effective volunteer development process.

SIG leaders will be encouraged to adapt and innovate, finding activities that best meet the needs of their current and future members. The SGB EC may work with the SIG leaders to define objectives that move the SIG in directions that strengthen the ACM as a whole.

**Development of New SIGs**

The SGB EC will consider any new proposal for a SIG, conference, or other activity. The SGB EC will consult the leadership of related SIGs to avoid overlap, and ensure that proposed activities meet the quality standards of the ACM.

Potential groups coming to ACM seeking to charter a SIG, would first be asked to start as a TECH GROUP to gauge interest from the community as well as the commitment from volunteer leaders.

Groups would be chartered by the SGB or an ACM Board. Administrative expenses and activities such as volunteer travel would be covered by the supporting sub-group. TECH GROUPs would offer membership at no fee. Benefits to TECH GROUP members would be distribution lists, electronic newsletters, workshops or conferences (with approval and support from the supporting sub-unit). Each TECH GROUP will have a Chair appointed by the SGB Chair. TECH GROUP Chairs will have the authority to appoint up 2
additional officers. The mission and activities of each group will be stated in their charter and will be reviewed annually by a committee of the SGB EC in consultation with appropriate representation from supporting sub-groups. Inactive TECH GROUPs will be dissolved immediately upon review by the SGB EC committee. Groups with a lifespan of 2+ years may propose securing SIG status or may remain as a TECH GROUP with continued funding from the supporting sub-unit. Revenue from workshops and conferences would remain with the supporting sub-group to offset expenses and potential conference exposure. There would be an annual meeting of Tech Group Chairs to learn about ACM, its practices and activities. All TECH GROUPs would be known as ACM TECH GROUP on XXXX.

Rationale for Proposed Changes

The Task Force proposals address the questions raised in the retreat in the following ways.

Providing continued value of membership/avoiding unnecessary pressure to conform to one model
As ACM has grown, the community of computing professionals has become much more diverse. By allowing the SGB EC and the leadership of a SIG to tailor viability expectations, the SIG can more effectively address the needs of its members. It is unlikely that there is any single set of “rules” that could be developed that would address all SIGs; there is no “one size fits all” solution. Viability decisions will rest with the SGB EC (rather than the full board), as they are most closely involved in setting expectations. SIGs gain the ability to address member needs in creative ways (and would have this creativity recognized and valued in a viability review).

Fostering Cross-SIG Collaboration

Where appropriate, collaboration between SIGs is obviously beneficial. A side-effect of removing SIG viability reviews from the entire SGB board is that it frees up a considerable amount of time during the bi-annual SGB meetings. The SIG chairs will have more time to discuss issues of common interest, and to interact with each other. Greater personal contact between the leaders of various SIGs may help spark new collaborations.

Fostering New Technical Communities and Activities

The proposed TECH GROUPs should allow exploration of new areas; this sort of activity has been taking place in various forms for a number of years. The proposal simply makes the process a bit more formal.

Heavy administration of starting a SIG goes away, new groups can come in and out of ACM easily and groups that choose to can move to SIG status with a record of achievement. The timing gives leadership more than 2 years to determine if they want to take the necessary steps to charter a SIG, and gives the SGB that time to determine if the volunteers proposing the SIG can be counted on to meet their proposed objectives.
Fostering Coherence Across ACM Technical Communities

By having the SGB EC (in consultation with the chairs of each SIG) tailor viability expectations, the SGB EC can encourage growth in key areas, or facilitate collaborations between SIGs where needed.