

Paper 196-2012

SAS® User Groups - Why? - How?

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about how to effectively establish and/or support a SAS User Groups at any level (i.e., Regional, Special Interest, Local, or Internal). SAS software is the mainstay of many successful organizations. However, leveraging the success of any SAS software installation is completely dependent upon its user base.

Too often, organizations adopt, knowingly or not, the idea that if they buy a SAS software solution, their employees will use it effectively. Establishing and supporting SAS User Groups is proven to generate positive returns. Resulting interactions amongst SAS Users fosters healthy collaborative relationships that enhance their performance.

In this paper, I will cite experiences and specific examples of SAS User Group 1) ROI, 2) support, and 3) establishment.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about how to effectively establish and/or support a SAS User Group at any level (i.e., Regional, Special Interest, Local, or In-House). SAS software is the mainstay of many successful organizations. However, leveraging the success of any SAS software installation is completely dependent upon its user base.

Too often organizations adopt, knowingly or not, the idea that if they buy a SAS software solution, their employees will use it effectively. This assumption or lack of thoughtfulness can result in a significant loss in expected Return on Investment (ROI), along with employee frustration. Conversely, establishing and supporting SAS User Groups is proven to generate positive returns. Resulting interactions amongst SAS Users fosters healthy collaborative relationships that enhance their performance.

To ensure an effective installation of SAS solutions and resulting ROI, software users must have a “grass roots” buy-in and/or ownership of how the software will benefit them and their organization. SAS Institute has a clear understanding of this business integration model. They have been supporting the User Group model since SAS was founded. Dr. Goodnight has always been open to feedback and is a huge advocate of knowledge sharing. As further demonstration of this commitment, SAS recently created a new organizational division focused on Customer Loyalty and Satisfaction.

Why am I telling this story? Well, my experience spans several years in working with and participating in SAS User Groups. I also have a “GEEK” passion to help others with solving unique challenges in the practical application of SAS syntax and solutions. To that end, I have played roles in the establishment and/or volunteer support of PBSUG, SDSUG, NEBSUG, MWSUG, IFSUG, and SAS Global Forum. Indirectly (or directly), I have also provided input and feedback within the context of many other SAS User collaboration connections, such as sascommunity.org, SAS-L, Linked-In Groups, and SAS Blog sites, just to name a few.

In this paper I will cite experiences and specific examples of SAS User Group 1) ROI, 2) establishment, and 3) support.

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WHY? = ROI

The real impact must be demonstrated and communicated effectively. There are many ways to do this to the "C-Level" in order to acquire and/or maintain ongoing support from any corporate entity. Many executives understand the need for continuing education and the collaboration of "Like-Minded" professionals in order to stay up on current technology advances. The biggest investment any organization has is in its people, not the technology.

Below is an example of a recent email that was sent to the VP of MIS at PREMIER Bankcard to reinforce corporate support for my User Group activities in 2012.

--- Begin Quote --

Good Morning Dave,

I thought it would be a good idea to provide you with a current list of the organizations I volunteer for and the positions/roles I'm currently holding. Just for the record, my time spent on these volunteer items is done primarily outside of work and/or over my lunch hour. There are times when I need to perform some communications during the day via email or phone, but I make up time as necessary by coming in early, staying late, or working from home.

Sioux Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, Ambassador Committee
Center of Hope Board of Directors, Treasurer
SDSUG Steering Committee, Chairman
MWSUG Board of Directors, Secretary
IFSUG Steering Committee, Chairman & Interim Treasurer

I've also attached my conference calendar for next year (only 4 this time). All of these conferences will have no registration fee due to my volunteer roles on the leadership Boards and/or Committees. Most expenses will be reimbursed as well. Therefore, the cost to PREMIER will primarily be my time out of the office on Business Travel, which stands to be fairly minimal in 2012 compared to 2011.

As always, thank you for supporting my involvement in these groups. I believe that there is a significant "value add" to PREMIER and its reputation in the community, as well as, the analytics profession. It also is a great inexpensive educational and development opportunity for me personally. I get to stay up on the latest "GEEK" stuff...(-;

An example of "Value Add" at MWSUG 2011...I was able to resolve a configuration problem with PREMIER's upgrade to SAS v9.2 by visiting with Rick Langston and Chevel Parker of SAS R&D. They provided me the solution whereby our programs were bombing. They saved us potentially a week or more of "Down-Time".

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Appreciatively,
Rex

--- End Quote --

The key to maintaining corporate support is continued demonstration of ROI (Value Add) as noted in the last paragraph. The management team must see evidence of success with the investment they are making in the support of SAS User Group participation. Of course, in my circumstance, the VP of MIS is a wonderful advocate of my involvement in SAS User Groups. I regularly share the successes with him, my peers, and the internal users at every opportunity.

Therefore, it is important to communicate results regularly and effectively. Always share what is learned at User Group events through the In-House SAS User Group within the organization. If you do not have an In-House SAS Users Group established, the remainder of this paper should help remedy this gap.

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ESTABLISHMENT

Organizational Considerations (In-House, Local, Regional, Special Interest):

There is good information published about the establishment of the various levels of SAS Users Groups. SAS has done a wonderful job of making this process relatively easy. Visiting <http://support.sas.com/usergroups/> is the first step in understanding more about the process from SAS Institute's perspective. However, since it is a volunteer task, there will be the issue of support and participation. Any group is only as good as its participants. SAS User Group Support also has a "Best Practices" document that can help at http://support.sas.com/usergroups/docs/best_practices.pdf.

An Internal (aka, In-House) SAS Users Group is the simplest to set up and does not require the level of organizational documentation that needs to be established for Local, Regional, and Special Interest Groups. It is possible for an In-House SAS Users Group to be created by simply establishing a repeating calendar event and publishing a pertinent Agenda to cover SAS Solution related content. Once that has been done, the group can be registered with SAS User Group (UG) Support through their website.

After successful registration, the In-House Group will qualify for specific SAS UG Support benefits that will help the In-House UG thrive as long as participation remains consistent. At PREMIER Bankcard PBSUG was established in 2006. The group meets monthly and uses an intranet site to manage regular meeting attendance, agenda content, document sharing, a list of support personnel, and SAS Software user classifications.

For the establishment of a UG at the Local, Regional, or Special Interest level there is a need for a more formal approach. This is primarily due to the potential size and diversity of corporate entities and/or industries that will be participating. There is a need to make sure all participants are comfortable with the collaboration and knowledge sharing to the extent that corporate intellectual property is not compromised unknowingly. Participating corporations also want to be reasonably certain that their staff will not be actively recruited while attending UG events.

To illustrate by example the areas to consider when forming a UG at the Local, Regional, or Special Interest level, I am going to use the recently formed Insurance and Finance SAS User Group (IFSUG). This group was conceived at SAS Global Forum in Las Vegas the spring of 2011 during a SAS Sponsored Panel Discussion. There was a significant amount of interest shown as around 60 individuals showed up to discuss the possibility of establishing a SAS Special Interest UG for the Insurance and Finance industry.

The following material covers the development of IFSUG from concept to their Inaugural Conference.

Insurance and Finance SAS User Group (IFSUG) Organizational Example:

IFSUG By-Laws:

Insurance and Finance SAS User Group By-Laws

Article 1: IFSUG and Steering Committee Formation:

Section 1.01 - The guidelines for establishing a special interest SAS users group is the basis for the formation of the Insurance and Finance SAS User Group (IFSUG) and will be referenced as appropriate.

http://support.sas.com/usergroups/docs/forming_local_usersgroup.pdf

Section 1.02 IFSUG has adopted a clear "Objective" statement to avoid scope creep as follows:

(a) This is a volunteer group whose primary purpose is to provide a forum for the exchange of information and promotion of new ideas concerning SAS and related products and to assist participants in developing SAS skills.

Section 1.03 There will be no election of officers. The current organizational arrangement of a Chair and Co-Chair will be supported by a steering committee made up of at least 3 Peer IFSUG participants.

(a) The Chair will represent the organizational role requirements of President.
(b) The Co-Chair will represent the organizational role requirements of Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer

Section 1.04 The Chair and Co-Chair will serve an indefinite term and will be appointed by majority vote of the Steering Committee members at a regularly scheduled Steering Committee meeting.

Section 1.05 Decisions made on behalf of IFSUG by the Steering Committee and/or the Chair and/or Co-Chair will be documented in the Steering Committee Meeting Notes and will serve as

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official functioning guidelines for the group.

Section 1.06 Decisions made by the Chair and/or Co-Chair on behalf of IFSUG will be communicated via email to the IFSUG Steering Committee within a reasonable time frame, but no later than five business days prior to the next regularly scheduled Steering Committee meeting.

Section 1.07 Competitive recruiting will not be sponsored at IFSUG meetings. However, students and/or unemployed individuals would be allowed, and encouraged, to advance their careers through personal networking.

Article II. IFSUG Funding Options:

Section 2.01 IFSUG Annual Events will be funded through a registration fee model based solely on the cost of organizing the event.

Section 2.02 Corporate sponsorship and/or Member Dues will not be utilized as a funding vehicle at this time. However, these funding options may be instituted at any time at the discretion of the Steering Committee and/or the Chair and/or Co-Chair.

Section 2.03 - Outside consulting services may be asked to assist with the following items at IFSUG Annual Events:

- (a) Newsletter
- (b) Registration (including fee handling)
- (c) SAS Training
- (d) Materials Preparation

Article III. IFSUG communications and User contact:

Section 3.01 An IFSUG Website is not necessary at this time due to the associated cost and maintenance. However, this method of communication may be instituted at any time at the discretion of the Steering Committee and/or the Chair and/or Co-Chair.

Section 3.02 - All direct communications will be handled through email. The Chair will oversee the maintenance of the IFSUG Master Email List by a volunteer communication coordinator.

Section 3.03 - The establishment of a "List Service" may be embraced at some point in time to assist with, and facilitate, IFSUG participant programming needs and questions.

Article IV. IFSUG Meeting Instances:

Section 4.01 Steering Committee Meetings

- (a) The steering committee will meet on the third Wednesday of the month via teleconference
 - i. Biweekly during group formation*
 - ii. Monthly thereafter*

- (b) A quorum of at least three (3) individuals is required for decision making purposes

Section 4.02 Annual IFSUG Meeting Events

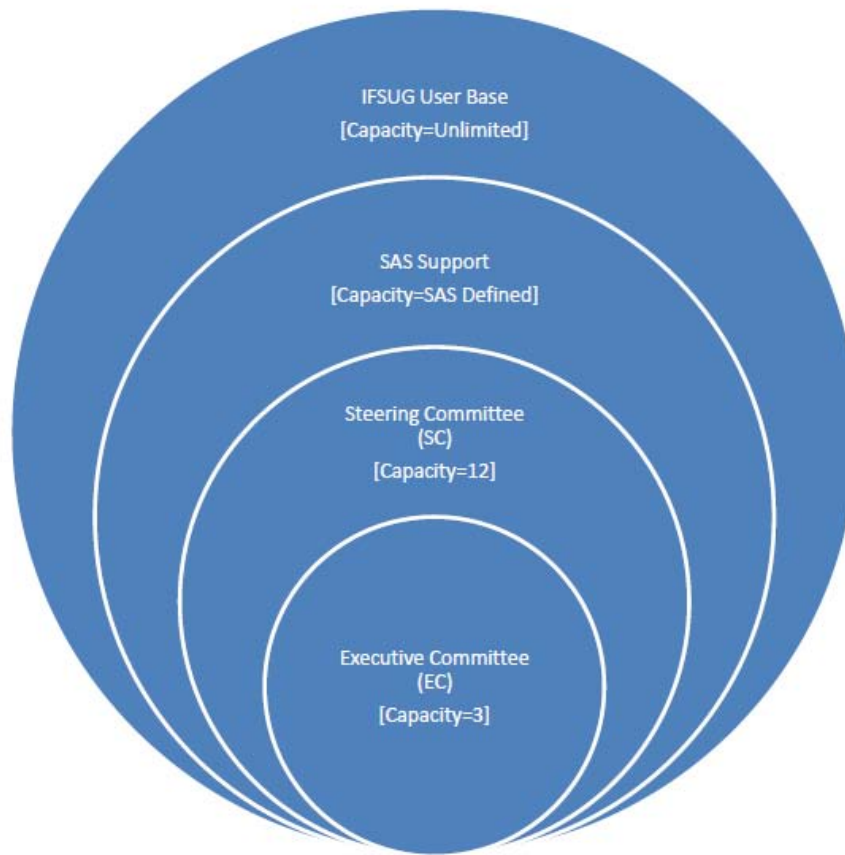
- (a) To be held once per year
- (b) Location to be determined by the Steering Committee or Planning Sub-Committee

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IFSUG Organization/Support Chart:

IFSUG Organizational Support

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SUPPORT

SAS Support:

In the case of IFSUG, SAS went above and beyond to provide proper support to ensure a solid foundation was formed. A liaison was assigned from the newly formed Customer Loyalty Team and the Marketing Team to provide ready access to SAS resources including, but not limited to: Communications Templates, Logo Development, Email Marketing, Volunteer Coordination, Conference Facility Support, etc. SAS has also instituted a User Group Mentor program, of which I am a participant. In this role, an experienced User Group leader helps new groups go through the process of organizing into an functioning group at any level.

Corporate Support:

To be a success, those who expressed an interest in a leadership role associated with IFSUG's establishment and future structural development made proper commitments and solicited approvals from their companies' executive leadership. In fact, the IFSUG Executive Committee (EC) submitted formal documents of authorization per their respective corporate guidelines.

Individual SAS User Volunteerism & Commitment:

The following chart was used to illustrate (tongue-in-cheek) how serious the leadership group was about taking on a leadership role and actually making a contribution to the success of IFSUG. After this was published there were some who made a personal assessment and stepped away. This group is not planning to be an "arm-chair" quarterback set of leaders. ALL are expected to make a reasonable concerted effort to give of their time and talents to help the IFSUG SAS User base, by checking all ego's at the door and getting their hands dirty.

The IFSUG Mission is often cited and the ultimate goal is to help other SAS Users get better at what they do.

IFSUG Organizational Support**IFSUG Leadership Role Qualification (Where Do You Fit?):**

```
*Executive Committee (EC) = Organizer, Volunteer, Leader, Decision-Maker, Mentor, Voting Member;
*Steering Committee (SC) = Volunteer, Leader, Decision-Supporter, Mentor, Voting Member;
*To qualify for the EC/SC, you must personally decide if you are "SC12";
```

```
Data LeadershipActivity;
  Length Member $4. Activity $3.;
  Infile Datalines dsd;
  Input
    Member $
    Activity $
    ;
  Datalines;
EC1,YES
EC2,YES
EC3,YES
SC1,YES
SC2,YES
SC3,YES
SC4,YES
SC5,YES
SC6,YES
SC7,YES
SC8,YES
SC9,YES
SC10,YES
SC11,YES
SC12,NO
;
run;

Data
  EC_SC_Members_Active
  EC_SC_Members_Removed
  ;
  Set LeadershipActivity;
  If Activity='NO'
    Then Output EC_SC_Members_Removed;
    Else Output EC_SC_Members_Active;

Run;
```

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SUCCESS TIMELINE OF IFSUG

Apr 27, 2011 - the first IFSUG Steering Committee (SC) Meeting was held.

Apr 28, 2011 – The <http://www.sascommunity.org/wiki/IFSUG> web presence was established.

Apr 28, 2011 - The Constant Contact database was established.


Apr 29, 2011 – IFSUG Bylaws were drafted for SC review.

Jun 08, 2011 – IFSUG Bylaws were approved (see above).

Jun 22, 2011 – IFSUG Social Media outlets were established on LinkedIn and Twitter.

Jun 29, 2011 – SAS sends the first email blast to 8,122 registered SAS Users in the Insurance & Finance vertical.

If you have images disabled or have trouble viewing this page, please click [here](#).



Insurance and Finance SAS® Users Group

► [Join our mailing list](#) to receive communication.

At SAS Global Forum, we met to discuss this special interest group, which allows you to connect and share ideas with your industry peers.

Your participation is key to having an active and engaged group. When you register for the mailing list, you will receive regular updates. To ensure that you receive emails, please add ifsuginfo@gmail.com to your safe senders list (Outlook).

About IFSUG

This group was formed by SAS users to address the ever-changing business needs of the insurance and financial service industry. IFSUG provides an opportunity to network with your peers, boost your skills and learn about some of the latest SAS tools and technologies.

Check out our page on sasCommunity.org to learn more about this group.

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST

► [Forward to a friend.](#)
Feel free to send this email to colleagues who would be interested in joining.

Questions?
Email us at ifsuginfo@gmail.com.

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Want to get more out of your relationship with SAS? [Create a SAS profile](#). Don't miss important updates from SAS! Please add sas.com as a domain in your [safe sender](#) list.

About this e-mail

If you do not wish to receive future e-mails, please go to <http://www.sas.com/emailpreferences/optout.html>. To contact SAS via postal mail: SAS, SAS Campus Drive, Cary NC 27513 USA. ATTN: Legal Division/Privacy Manager.

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Jun 29, 2011 – After only 1 day 250 registered in the IFSUG Constant Contact database.

Jul 01, 2011 – IFSUG Constant Contact database tops 300+.

Jul 20, 2011 – SC Meeting initiated IFSUG Inaugural Conference planning.

Jul 20, 2011 – Engaged SAS Blogger support for supplemental publishing of IFSUG promotion.

Aug 05, 2011 – Finalized the approval of the IFSUG Logo design with no changes to the original.



Aug 07, 2011 – Established IFSUG Gmail and Google Docs accounts to managed shared planning documents.

Aug 13, 2011 – IFSUG's first official electronic newsletter was published and distributed.

Aug 31, 2011 – IFSUG's Inaugural conference planning is in full swing with specific conference leadership in place.

Mar 04, 2012 – Mar 06, 2012 – IFSUG held its Inaugural conference at the SAS Executive Briefing Center (EBC).

Mar 07, 2012 – The event was a success with Dr. Goodnight, David Macdonald, & Keith Collins delivering Keynotes.

Mar 12, 2012 – Great positive feedback!

Post Conference Feedback Survey Comments:

**The users at this conference were different from the SGF - these people are more talkative and more willing to share ideas. I really appreciated that the most.*

**Very enjoyable and useful. It is always refreshing to meet new people in my industry with similar issues to solve and hear how they approach a problem.*

**The new SAS C building is fabulous. If it were me, I would just fix the IFSUG location there forever. A middle of the road geographically, and the facilities in C are just right for the size of the meeting.*

**Closer to my daily work than the very broad SGF*

**Great and applicable content with good discussions.*

**The facility itself was incredible. Can we have all IFSUG meetings there?*

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CONCLUSION

IFSUG is achieving huge success with over 80 in attendance at its first meeting and over 480 are now registered in their Constant Contact database. Planning has already started on the next IFSUG conference venue. Most importantly, the IFSUG affiliated SAS Users have expressed sincere appreciation for this special interest group and look forward to its future impact on the SAS User Community.

In order to effectively establish and support a SAS Users Group at any level, there is a critical need for committed leadership and corporate sponsorship of a solid volunteer base of SAS Users. The result will be successful demonstration of SAS Software Solutions and corresponding ROI contributing to the participating company's "bottom Line" income.

Therefore, get involved in your In-House, Local, Regional, Special Interest, and Global SAS User Communities.

Contact Information

Your comments and questions are valued and encouraged. Contact the author at:

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