

Guide to Forming a US SAS® Users Group

In-House, Local and Special-Interest Groups

In this guide, you'll find practical tips for getting your users group started, getting others involved and getting more from your SAS software investment by participating in users group activities.

Describing the Benefits of Being a Part of the SAS® Users Group Community

When starting a new users group, you may be asked: “So, why should I join this group?” You understand the advantages of a SAS® users group, but your potential members want to understand its value, the time commitment and how will get out of it by participating. Some of the reasons to join include:

- Learn about new SAS products and services.
- Increase your understanding of SAS software and services.
- Make important contacts and exchange ideas with other SAS software users.
- Enhance managerial and leadership skills by serving as a users group officer, coordinating involvement in SAS users group conferences or organizing a new users group.

Different Groups for Different Needs

SAS® users groups create opportunities for SAS users to connect across the nation, while supporting and fostering an environment of growth, development and education among SAS users. Users groups are as diverse as its members. That’s why there are several different types of groups. Use the definitions below to see what type of users group best fits your needs.

In-House SAS® Users Groups

In-house users groups are for users within a single organization. They may consist of users from one site or from many branches of the same organization – both within the US and internationally. While in-house groups may not have the broad perspective of outside expertise, they are able to handle confidential topics and use actual data in discussions. Work with your Users Group Liaison and your Customer Account Executive to ensure you take advantage of all of the resources available to you and your organization.

Local SAS® Users Groups

Local users groups are intended for SAS software users from different organizations within a specific geographic area, for example, a city, county, or part or all of a state. Because of the close proximity of the members, these groups meet throughout the year based on their needs. These groups bring together a broad range of users backgrounds, yet they are generally smaller than regional groups.

Special-Interest SAS® Users Groups

Special-interest users groups serve users within a specific operational area (i.e. Specific SAS software product such as SAS Enterprise Guide, Industry Vertical such as retail or manufacturing, Independent Consultants, or Internet based groups). Some meet frequently, others on an annual basis.

Other SAS® Users Groups

There are regional and international users groups (SAS® Global Forum) that your group can attend/join. However, regional and international users groups are not one of the options you can consider when forming a new users group.

Support for Registered US SAS® Users Groups

SAS offers:

- A team of specialists to assist you. Please e-mail ugsupport@sas.com with any questions.
- A wealth of users group information from its homepage at support.sas.com/usergroups, including links to and contact information about area SAS users groups.
- A virtual networking community – sasCommunity.org. There you will find pertinent information on users groups, products, tips and tricks, etc.
- A link to your group's Web site and contact information from support.sas.com.
- A listing of your upcoming SAS users group meetings on support.sas.com.
- Services for Registered SAS User Groups.

Services for Registered US SAS® Users Groups

Users group support team

SAS provides you access to a team of users group support specialists to assist you with any questions or support requests you may have. To contact, please e-mail ugsupport@sas.com.

Survey

SAS will help you customize an online survey that you can use to gauge interest in a potential new group, or to help you in revitalizing an existing group. For local and special-interest groups, SAS will also assist in building the e-mail distribution list for this survey, and we can help all groups analyze the survey results and determine next steps.

SAS speaker

SAS will pay the expenses for a SAS employee to attend and speak at your users group meeting. This offer is limited to one speaker per year for a half day meeting, two speakers for a full day meeting. We request a three month lead time.

Virtual SAS speaker

SAS is able to provide a SAS employee speaker via WebEx or via taped presentation. Due to resources, limits for this offer apply.

SAS® Press Speakers

SAS experts who have written books for SAS are available to speak at your users group meetings. Certain restrictions apply, and users groups must share in the travel expenses for these speakers. Please request your speaker support at least three months prior to your event to ensure availability of the speaker. This offer is available once per calendar year.

For a list of available SAS Press speakers, please see: support.sas.com/publishing/bbu/speaker.html

When a SAS Press author will be a featured speaker at a users group meeting, the group may choose two free copies of one of the author's SAS Press titles for that meeting (in addition to the four free books offered during the year). Please note that books distributed through SAS Press, but published by another publisher, are not eligible for consideration.

Complimentary books from SAS Publishing

Four complimentary books will be sent to your group upon request. SAS Publishing will provide a list of SAS books to choose from. If you have a SAS speaker presenting who is also a SAS Press Author, you will receive one of the SAS Press Authors books and will get to choose three books from the list provided by SAS Publishing.

SAS Publishing discount

SAS provides a 20% discount on books ordered at a meeting that you designate. All users group members are eligible to participate in this offer. The complimentary book and discount offer is available one time per calendar year.

Complimentary giveaways

SAS will provide a variety of SAS logo items for your users group (total number of giveaways is usually eight to ten). This offer is available once per calendar year. In addition, in-house users groups will also receive one e-lecture from SAS Education.

Use of Registered SAS Users Group Logo

All users groups that register with SAS are provided with a specially designed Registered SAS Users Group logo for use on their Web site, in newsletters and in any other materials designed to promote the users group.

SAS® Global Forum

SAS maintains a users group booth at SAS Global Forum with general information on our users group support program. We also display meeting or membership information in the booth for all registered SAS users groups.

In addition to the support listed above, local and special-interest groups also receive the following:

- **A link to your users group Web site (if applicable) from the SAS Web site**
- **Posting of upcoming meetings on the SAS users group Web site.** If requested, SAS can publish upcoming meetings for your group.
- **E-mail announcement.** If SAS is providing you with a SAS speaker, we will work with you to create an e-mail announcement to promote the meeting. This offer is available once per year.

Getting Started

Decisions Facing the Group

While your users group is in its formative state, several critical decisions must be made. For the most part, these pertain to the group's objectives, structure, leadership, meetings and administrative functions.

Group Objectives

The group's short-term objectives should center on getting organized for the first meeting. For the long term, most successful groups form a steering committee that shares responsibility for ongoing group activities.

Planning your first meeting

If there is enough interest in forming a group, you will want to arrange the first meeting.

- **Set the date.** It's important to allow sufficient time for users to receive and respond to your announcement. If you are forming a local or special-interest group, SAS will help you promote your first meeting with an e-mail invitation. In-house groups generally use internal channels of communication to get the word out about meetings.
- **Determine frequency, length and time of meetings.** Some groups meet quarterly, some monthly, some bimonthly, and so on. While in-house groups can choose a time convenient to users in the organization, local groups often face a greater diversity of time constraints. Regardless of the initial decisions, the issue should be raised again after the new group becomes more settled. SAS currently has no requirements for the number of meetings that your group should hold on an annual basis.
- **Advertise the meeting.** Last but not least, make sure that you advertise the meeting. Aside from an e-mail invitation and posting your meeting on the support.sas.com Web site, you can also put up notices on campus and corporate bulletin boards, both physical and electronic. Consider advertising in local newspapers, public access television stations and computer publications, too. Most newspapers and periodicals that run calendar listings do so at no charge.

Effective Meeting Formats

A traditional presentation format usually involves a rather formal treatment of a topic by a single speaker, followed by a brief discussion period. Depending on the topic and the speaker, this approach can be remarkably effective in covering a specific subject. Overuse of this method may, however, condition the group to become non-participatory, eliminating the most important aspect of the group – shared knowledge through interaction. Vary your presentation formats. Instead of always using the single-speaker, group-discussion format, try alternatives such as panel discussions. Panel discussions can help maximize group participation and broaden exposure to the subject matter.

Rather than try to make a single group be all things to many people, form distinct special-topic subgroups. For instance, one group can concentrate on a particular SAS solution while another group discusses a function such as education, technical support, etc.

If your meeting host can provide the facility and hardware, you may want to schedule workshops instead of regular presentations. Try demonstrating a new software solution. Or choose a particular task – such as report writing – and explore how various software products work together to achieve results. Workshop topics are as boundless as your imagination.

Use outside speakers. Some regional SAS users groups operate a speakers bureau for affiliated local groups. Hardware vendors are sometimes willing to speak to groups about new or existing machines. You may also be able to exchange speakers with another users group nearby. The SAS users group team can arrange for a SAS speaker as well as assist you in arranging SAS Press speakers.

Administrative Functions

Administrative responsibilities for your users group will include record-keeping, mailings, and maintenance of member lists and presentation materials. Some of these functions can rotate, such as mailings and minutes. Responsibility for handling such administrative functions should be delegated as early as possible. Clearly written objectives, meeting minutes, and reports of on-the-job results can serve as evidence to management that your group is a good investment.

Group Structure and Leadership

Should your group have a formal structure – with a charter, dues, bylaws and so on – or an informal one? Many prefer a rigid structure as a matter of course, while others view it as both unnecessary and restrictive. In-house, local and special-interest groups are totally independent from SAS, and they make all their own decisions as to structure and leadership. If your group prefers a formal structure, you may consider drafting group bylaws. SAS strongly encourages, but does not require, that all local and special-interest SAS users groups incorporate. To incorporate, please use the services of a qualified local attorney. SAS cannot assist in helping your group incorporate.

Reaching Potential Members

If you find enough users are in your area to support a users group, you should first contact them to assess their interest in participating. Many people who have started users groups – particularly local groups – have found that surveying the potential membership before formally organizing the group provides an early understanding of the members' backgrounds, interests and expectations. It also helps you prepare for the first meeting and eliminates housekeeping tasks you would otherwise perform during the first meeting.

Survey

A preliminary survey is often used to obtain a profile of the potential members and explore their interests before the first meeting. Use the survey to elicit opinions about:

- Frequency of meetings.
- Organization of the group (structured or informal).
- Time of meetings (during or after business hours).
- Length of meetings.
- Structure of meetings (number and format of presentations, etc.).
- Other pertinent information you'll need includes members':
 - Number of years using SAS.
 - Applications of the software.
 - Operating environments.
 - Willingness to present a topic.
 - Ability to host meetings.
 - Willingness to serve on users group committees or as a users group officer.

If you are forming a local or special-interest group, your users group team can assist you with e-mailing your initial survey to all SAS software installations in the region you have selected.

While the survey is not required, it provides you with information that will help you plan your first meeting and set the direction for the group. You may also get in touch with potential members you know or can reach easily through employee newsletters, e-mail, or other electronic means such as newsgroups or listservs.

Web Site

You can also set up a Web site for your group and use it to announce your group's formation. After that you can post meeting dates and topics, list your group's officers and provide an online form for readers to use to join your group. Local and special-interest users groups that maintain a Web site can request a link from the SAS Users Groups Web page and post meeting information there. It is the users group's responsibility to let SAS know about upcoming meetings by completing a form on the Web page provided for this purpose.

Importance of Newsletters and Meeting Announcements

Newsletters often serve as the glue that binds a group together. They make members feel included even when they are not able to attend meetings. Newsletters also tend to set the tone for the group. They may be formal and include regular columns, technical tips and features, or very simple, depending on the needs and interests of the group.

What to Include in a Newsletter

Announce meetings, summarize the previous meeting, publish technical information, etc. In general, most groups prefer a newsletter that's informative, yet fun to read. An active users group program provides the fundamental material for newsletter articles. You can announce future group meetings, including background information on speakers and their topics. Be sure to include directions to the meeting location and the name, e-mail and phone number of a contact person.

The newsletter can help members stay in touch and up-to-date by summarizing the previous meeting for the benefit of those who could not attend. Use as many names as you can, including people who may be working behind the scenes with little recognition. Include thanks to sponsors who supply meeting space, audiovisual equipment or refreshments.

Ask at every meeting for submissions to the newsletter, and print instructions on how to submit an article. Other possibilities are reports from regional SAS users group conferences or SAS Global Forum. Include a calendar of upcoming events, such as local seminars held by SAS, upcoming training courses and trade shows. Try to develop a

number of regular items for the newsletter. These might include a question-and-answer column, helpful hints or a letter from the group chairperson. Many newsletters also contain a membership form for readers to use in joining the group. Members of your group who are experts in a given area may be flattered to be asked to write a column. Make sure articles are printed with bylines. Consider developing a logo or theme. It will help your newsletter stand out among other mail.

Sending the Newsletter by E-Mail

You should maintain a list of your members' e-mail addresses and ask them to contact you if their e-mail addresses change. Make sure to have your members' permission to communicate by e-mail and provide them with an opportunity to unsubscribe.

Trademark Notices

When referring to SAS solutions and services in your newsletters or other materials generated through your users group, please use the registered trademark symbol (®) with "SAS":

- In the name of the group.
- For any prominent reference to SAS software (such as a headline).
- The first time SAS software is mentioned in the document.
- Guidelines for using SAS trademarks can be found at www.sas.com/news/newsroom/guidelines.html.

How to Register a SAS[®] Users Group

To be recognized and supported by SAS, your local SAS users group must be officially registered. Users groups may register with SAS at any time, and groups may be required to renew their registrations on an annual basis, as determined by SAS.

Registering Your Group with SAS

Registering your group with SAS gives you access to SAS resources and support. Registration information for in-house, local and special-interest groups can be found on our [website](#).

Requesting Support and Services from SAS

SAS has a team of specialists to assist you. Please e-mail ugsupport@sas.com with questions. You may also request our services through the online request support form located on our [website](#).