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I. Introduction

INFORMS's officers have recognized for some time the need for a single document setting forth the Society's policies governing the operations of Fora (formerly known as Technical Fora and Special Interest Groups in ORSA and Colleges in TIMS). Of particular importance are the rules concerning the establishment of disestablishment of Fora, the filing of reports on Fora activities by Sections, and Forum budgeting and dues-setting. This handbook is written in the hopes that Forum officers will be able to perform their jobs effectively with a minimum of Society intrusion if they have this information all in one place. We have also tried to include some practical advice about options available to Fora for serving their members, including which options have proven successful in the past.

The Handbook will need to be updated as Institute policies change and more managerial wisdom is accumulated from past Forum officials and written down. Also, the INFORMS Board and the Subdivisions Council hope the Handbook will serve as a springboard for an ongoing dialogue with Fora on ways to improve Institute services to Fora and Forum performance.

II. Establishing and Maintaining a Forum

Society members wishing to establish a new Forum should submit a petition to the Chapters/Fora Committee signed by at least 25 members of INFORMS. The petition must be accompanied by:
A. an explicit statement about the nature of the proposed activity and its relationship to INFORMS objectives and the subject matter domain of other INFORMS Sections;

B. an acceptable Constitution and By-Laws (the Model Section Constitution included in the Appendix is suggested as a guide for Fora in meeting this obligation, but may be simplified); and

C. a proposed slate of officers to serve until the first election.

The one unique feature of a new Forum will be its Statement of Purpose -- the paragraph or paragraphs identifying what area of operations research activity will be the Forum's concern. The Statement of Purpose should be carefully phrased and should be as explicit as possible so that the Forum's leaders and the Chapters/Fora Committee will be able to judge whether the Forum is achieving its purposes. Also, the Statement of Purpose must be explicit so that the Chapters/Fora Committee can carry out its responsibility to see that the Fora areas do not overlap.

Once these materials are in hand, the Chapters/Fora Committee will act on the petition as expeditiously as possible. If approved, it will be sent on to the Subdivisions Council for review. The Council will provide initial funding for newly approved fora.

INFORMS policy requires that Fora maintain an active program that appeals to a broad membership base. Therefore, to continue in operation, each Technical Forum must satisfy the following criteria:

1. It must hold business meetings and elections as prescribed by its Constitution.

2. It must sustain a paid membership comparable in size to that of other Fora.

3. The Forum must communicate to its members on a regular basis by such means as newsletters, journals authorized by INFORMS, or announcements in OR/MS Today.

4. The Forum must regularly sponsor sessions at INFORMS national meetings and technical meetings in other forums, all addressed to the Forum's areas of interest.

Failure to satisfy these criteria will lead the Chapters/Fora Committee to ask the Forum officers to show cause why the Forum should not be disbanded. If the Committee concludes that reduction in status is warranted, it will so recommend to the INFORMS Subdivisions Council at its next meeting.

III. Forum Finances

Current INFORMS policy is that Fora should strive to be essentially self-supporting. Possible sources of Forum income include membership dues, conference fees, newsletter and journal subscriptions, advertising revenues (e.g., from ads placed in Forum publications by publishers of other journals in the same field), and voluntary contributions. If necessary, INFORMS funds will be provided in support of Institute-required expenses incurred by a Forum (e.g., for elections, correspondence with the Chapters/Fora Committee, etc.). Such subsidies generally will not exceed one dollar per Forum member. In addition, a Forum may at any time request a special allocation of INFORMS funds or accountable advances for use on special projects of clear benefit to the field of operations research and which would be difficult or impossible to finance out of the Forum's budget. Projects eligible for these subsidies include special membership
recruitment drives. Normally such requests will be handled through the regular budget process (see Section VI), but the Committee will have at its discretion some contingency funds for responding to needs of this type that arise during a budget year.

In general, the receipt of Forum income should be handled through the INFORMS Business Office. Disbursement may be managed through the Business Office or managed by the Forum Treasurer through an outside bank account. In the latter case, the treasurer should request dues funds from the Business Office account for the bank account.

Any funds handled outside of the INFORMS Business Office during a year must be reported to the Business Office within one month of the year end. This requirement is necessary to ensure the continuation of INFORMS's non-profit tax status with the Internal Revenue Service.

IV. Forum Reporting and the Budget Cycle

A written activity report to the INFORMS Chapter Relations Coordinator is expected from each Forum shortly after the end of a calendar year. This report should list the Forum's activities in pursuit of its objectives and should be presented in a format that facilitates comparison with the list of activities that was used to justify the budget request for that year. Major deviations from the plan should be noted, particularly those that involved major changes in predicted expenditures. Attendance figures should be provided for sponsored meetings, including Forum-sponsored sessions at INFORMS National Meetings. Where possible, the report should be more than just a list; it should include some narrative that gives the reader a feel for the distinctive features of the Forum's activities. (See the Appendix for some representative Forum reports from prior years.)

Forum budgets for the following calendar year are set by the INFORMS Board at its annual Fall meeting. The INFORMS Board makes its decisions in response to the budget recommendations of the Subdivisions Council, which develops its recommendations by reviewing and consolidating the budget requests of the individual Fora. Each Forum is required to submit an annual budget request that includes the following materials:

A. A brief interim report on Forum activities since the first of the year.

B. A proposed plan of activities for the coming year. This report should provide evidence of the Forum's plans for continued service to its members. It should provide the basis for calculation of the Forum's budget request. Particularly large or expensive activities, such as conferences co-sponsored by other groups or publication of books, should be described in enough detail to provide assurance that the project has been well-planned and will be of benefit. (Of course, a previous history of success with such projects will provide considerable assurance on this point.) See the Appendix for examples of program plans that meet these criteria.

C. A budget request for the coming year. The budget request should be derived from estimated costs of the activities laid out in the proposed plan plus estimated costs of administrative activities required to run the Forum. The expense categories on the following page might be used for organizing such a budget:

Activities Directed to Forum Purposes
1) Publications
   a. Newsletters -- number (of issues) projected for the year, estimated cost per issue
   b. Journal -- number of issues projected for the year, estimated annual costs
   c. Books -- editing and publication costs, costs and income from promotion and distribution of books already published
   d. Special issues of INFORMS journals or other periodicals

2) Meetings
   a. Sponsored sessions at national Society meetings
   b. Sponsored and co-sponsored symposia
   c. Open Forum meetings, Forum Board meetings, planning meetings

3) Quality recognition, e.g., prizes -- conditions, amounts of awards
   a. To professionals
   b. To students

4) Surveys -- target group, purpose of survey, intended use of results, estimated costs

Support Activities

1) Election expenses

2) Administrative expenses -- stationery, bulletins, telephone

3) Board meetings -- printing of agenda and minutes, other expenses

4) Miscellaneous (This item should be small in both absolute and relative size.)

In preparing their budgets, Fora must take note of the following constraints imposed by the Institute.

1) The total value of prizes (cash and non-monetary awards) awarded by Fora may not exceed $250 in any calendar year, except when funds for this purpose are provided by sources outside of INFORMS. This policy was formulated to encourage the awarding of non-monetary prizes, such as medals or books, which tend to be of more lasting significance than cash awards.

2) Forum funds cannot be used to reimburse Forum officers or speakers or attendees at Forum-sponsored sessions for the costs of attending National meetings or INFORMS. The costs of food and beverage held during official Forum meetings may be reimbursed, but only if this expense if made by separate line item in the Forum budget.
D. Requested dues level. Based on its budget and anticipated Forum membership, each Forum must indicate what dues rate it wishes to have the Institute Headquarters charge for membership.

Technical Fora that have acquired and/or expect to acquire revenue from non-dues revenue, such as sponsorships for events, should note past receipts in reports of past activities and projections of such revenues in budget request calculations.

Fora are encouraged to introduce multi-year planning and budgeting into their decision processes and reports. To aid Fora in this pursuit the INFORMS Headquarters allows retained earnings to be carried forward from one year to the next.

V. Membership Arrangements for Non-Members of INFORMS

Fora may offer affiliated memberships to non-members of INFORMS. Such non-INFORMS members will have voting rights in the appropriate Forum, and will receive all Forum mailings, the INFORMS newsletter, and INFORMS National Meeting program bulletins, but may not hold office in the Forum. The dues for such non-INFORMS Forum membership generally shall be greater than the Forum fee charged INFORMS members, but not more than one-half INFORMS dues.

Forum Members who are not members of INFORMS are not eligible to become Forum officers, either elected or appointed, but they may vote in Forum elections.

VI. The Election Cycle

The suggested schedule for Forum elections is as follows:

| At least 6 months before INFORMS Spring Meeting | Forum Chair appoints Nominating Committee of at least 3 members and designates its Chair. |
| 5 months before INFORMS Spring Meeting | Nominating Committee submits to the Forum Secretary at least two nominations for each position to be filled. Nominees for Vice-Chair and Secretary/Treasurer must be members of the Institute. No officer or Board Member, other than the Secretary/Treasurer, who has served a full term may be nominated to succeed himself or herself. The Secretary/Treasurer may be re-nominated to the same office twice following a first term. Secretary reports the Nominating Committee's nominations to all Forum members upon receipt of these nominations. This report is to be made by the most effective and economical medium available to the Institute--mail bulletin, Forum newsletters, or citation in OR/MS Today. |
| 3 months before INFORMS Spring Meeting | Deadline for nominating petitions to reach the Secretary. Each such petition adding a nomination to the ballot must... |
Meeting be signed by at least 6 Forum members.

2 months before INFORMS Spring Meeting Deadline for Secretary to mail ballots to all Forum members. The ballot must list nominees alphabetically, must note that it has done so, and must not indicate which nominees were named by the Nominating Committee and which by petition.

1 month before INFORMS Spring Meeting Deadline for completed ballots to reach Secretary.

2 weeks before INFORMS Spring Meeting A date no later than this must be selected (and pre-announced) for report to Forum Chair of election results. Tellers, who may not be officers or nominees, will have been previously designated by the Chair and will receive the ballots from the Secretary.

Spring meeting of INFORMS Announcement of winners’ names atForum business meeting. Resolution of ties by written ballot or vote of Forum members attending the Forum membership meetings. Winning candidates shall attend the Spring Board meeting as observers and shall assume office following this meeting.

Two special cases need to be mentioned:

1. The first officers of a Forum will be those recommended by the Organizing Committee, which presents the petition for establishment of the Forum. These officers are eligible to succeed themselves in the first election.

2. The first election of a will select a full slate of Board members. Their terms will be based on their respective ranks in the voting -- two highest vote-getters serving normal three-year terms, the two next highest vote-getters serving two-year terms, and the next two highest vote-getters serving one-year terms. This will establish a normal rotation of officers for a six-person Board.

VII. Roles of Forum Officials

A. Roles of Election Forum Officials

1. *Chair.* The Chair is not elected directly but succeeds to his/her post after a year as Vice Chair. The Chair is the chief administrative officer of the Forum. He/she (a) calls and organizes meetings of the Forum, (b) appoints *ad hoc* committees as required, (c) appoints chairs and members of standing committees, (d) manages the affairs of the Forum between meetings, and (e) presides over Forum Board and Business meetings. The Chair is responsible for the development and execution of a Forum program of services.

2. *Vice Chair.* The Vice Chair is the principal assistant administrative officer of the Forum and
acts as chair in the Chair's absence. The Vice Chair shall have such other duties as the Chair or the Board shall assign him/her. Normally, the Vice Chair chairs a planning committee to develop the Forum's future program and required budget for the year when he/she will be Chair.

3. Secretary-Treasurer. Most Fora will combine the offices of Secretary and Treasurer into one post. A separate Treasurer could be justified if the Forum has money-making activities, such as book sales, workshops, or symposia, that carry funds forward from year to year and result in the accumulation of a Forum treasury. In those cases, the Treasurer shall assume only those responsibilities that relate to the control and/or possession of these Forum funds and shall provide annual status reports on them for the Forum's annual financial report to the Chapters/Fora Committee. Program and budget matters outside these areas shall remain with the Secretary.

The Secretary-Treasurer, under the guidance of the Chair, shall conduct correspondence, keep the minutes and record of the Forum, maintain contact with the Society, receive reports of activities from Forum committees, be responsible for the administration and disbursement of Forum funds, and coordinate stages of the election process as detailed in Section VIII. He/she will process the Forum budget for submission to the Society, prepare and distribute reports on the Forum's financial status, and perform other duties usual to the office of an organization secretary-treasurer, including assuring that Forum files and documents are securely stored and transferred to succeeding Forum officers.

Between Forum meetings, the Secretary-Treasurer shall supply information on Forum actions and expenditures to the INFORMS staff person in charge of Fora, normally within two weeks of request. To assure such responsiveness, the Secretary-Treasurer shall remain available for such requests. It is essential that the Secretary-Treasurer be quickly and easily accessible at all times during his/her tenure.

4. All Officers. Any Forum member accepting nomination for elective office in the Forum will be understood to have agreed to perform the duties of that office, if elected, and in particular will have agreed to attend the two regular Forum meetings per year during his/her tenure, except as this attendance is prevented by unusual circumstances.

B. Roles of Appointed Forum Volunteers

Most Forum activities will require the appointment (by the Chair) of officials and/or committees to supervise their progress. Some of the more common positions and committees are as follows:

1) Media Committee
   a. Editor of Forum website, Webmaster
   b. Book projects approved by INFORMS
      i. Editor and production manager for each book
      ii. Head of distribution -- processes orders, stores books, and develops promotion
   c. Editor of journal, journal staff
d. Correspondents to INFORMS publications -- *OR/MS Today, Operations Research, Management Science, Interfaces, etc.*

e. Correspondents to other publications

2) Meetings Committee

a. Liaison with National Meeting Program Committees

b. Appointment of track chair

c. Managers of meeting arrangements

3) Awards Committee -- oversees prizes, contests, etc.

4) Planning Committee

5) Professional Relations Committee -- establishment or reciprocity arrangements with and maintenance of ties to other Societies and to corresponding sub-groups of other Societies.

6) Membership Committee -- membership recruitment, particularly through publicizing Forum activities to reach potential new members. Also encourage membership retention and highlight member benefits.

VIII. Forum Publications

A. *OR/MS Today.* Fora have their own space in the Institute's newsletter. Each Forum will be able to obtain space -- from a half-column to a page -- by making arrangements with the newsletter editor sufficiently well in advance (1-2 months). The same possibilities for content exist here as exist for the Forum newsletter, except that space is more limited. Since *OR/MS Today* goes to all INFORMS members, it can be used to stimulate interest among members of these Societies who do not currently belong, e.g., by providing news of recent or forthcoming Forum activities.

B. *Newsletters/Listservs.* Since the preparation and distribution of quality newsletters is costly and very time-consuming, Fora are encouraged to make maximum use in the Fora column in the joint INFORMS publication, *OR/MS Today,* for routine reports to their members. A separate newsletter may be called for if a Forum regularly has a great deal of significant news to communicate to its members. Examples of appropriate material for a newsletter include:

1) Material

   a. Research and Discussion

      i. Brief articles

      ii. Abstract of books, articles, reports or ongoing research projects

      iii. Synopses of implementation results, political problems encountered and overcome
iv. Book and article reviews
v. Opinion and debate on issues in the field or policy choices facing the Forum
vi. Requests for information from members and responses to such requests.

b. News and Announcements
   i. Notice of coming Forum activities
   ii. Notice of other activities related to the field, such as courses of study, colloquia, requests for proposals
   iii. Surveys of members' characteristics, interests, and opinions
   iv. News of agencies, companies, and institutions whose activities are central to the Forum's area, especially to the conduct of operations research in that area.

Editors will want to avoid use of too much space for materials that members will see elsewhere, such as agenda of the Forum's sponsored sessions at meetings, which will also appear in the bulletins for those meetings. However, repetition of those sessions in limited space may help boost attendance and is definitely worthwhile if the newsletter mailing list includes a substantial number of non-Forum members. Long items -- like full technical articles -- are generally inappropriate for this type of publication, since space is very limited. The OR/MS Today newsletter is an excellent example of the effective use of the newsletter.

IX. Forum Meetings

A. Forum-Sponsored Sessions at National Meetings. It is the responsibility of each Forum to appoint a liaison representative to work with the Program Committee of a forthcoming National Meeting in making the arrangements for Forum-sponsored sessions. To assure that the necessary deadlines can be met, the appointment must be made well in advance of the meeting. Therefore, Fora are asked to appoint and designate their program coordinators in writing to the Program Chair of the meeting at least 1 year prior to the meeting date.

The number of sessions at any meeting may be constrained by the Program Chair of that meeting, but each Forum will be able to have at least one session. The individual chosen as the coordinator of the Forum's program will need to arrange for schedules, locations, agenda, and choices of speakers, although the last function may be handled separately by each session Chair. The coordinator also will be responsible for seeing that the meeting Program Chair is kept informed of any changes in the Forum-sponsored sessions (cancellation of session, change in session chair, etc.).

To assure the best use of Contributed Papers sessions, the chairs of those sessions should arrange with the Chair of the National meeting to receive the abstracts of contributed papers in the Forum's area as soon as possible after the meeting Chair receives them. The session chairs will review them expeditiously, select those they want to include in their sessions, and return the rest for inclusion elsewhere in the meeting program. Additional communications with the authors
prior to the meeting may prove valuable in making these decisions.

B. *Forum-Sponsored Symposia.* One point worth remembering in the planning of symposia is that their principal value often arises from the planned and unplanned interaction of attendees and not as much from the presentations themselves. Thus, over-structuring of time should be avoided, and speakers -- especially "name" speakers, who are often in a hurry -- should be encouraged to stay beyond their presentations to permit such interactions.

C. *Board Meetings.* Forum officers are required to convene Board meetings on a regular basis, including one such meeting at every National meeting as a minimum. At the request of a majority of the Board members, the Secretary-Treasurer shall be required to call a special meeting at a site agreeable to said majority. This meeting shall be held within thirty days of receipt of the request. Board and Forum members will be notified by the Secretary-Treasurer of the date and place of all Board meetings at least two weeks prior to the meeting. At Board meetings, a majority of the Board members shall constitute a quorum. The votes will be broken by the Chair.

Board meetings shall be open to all Forum members, but the Board will have the authority to vote to restrict discussion by non-Board members if this is deemed necessary to complete Forum business.

D. *Membership Meetings.* A Forum membership meeting shall be held at each National Meeting at a publicly announced time and place, to be arranged by the Forum Secretary-Treasurer. The quorum for action at membership meetings shall be 5% of the membership or 15 Forum members, whichever is smaller.

X. *Surveys*

INFORMS Headquarters uses surveymonkey.com to conduct elections, distribute questionnaires, poll members to determine meeting preferences, etc. Headquarters pays a subscription fee to use the service. It has been found to have a greater response rate than email, simply because it is web-based, and so results do not have to be mailed and then collected manually. INFORMS suggests that Fora take advantage of the service. Fora officers should work with the appropriate staff person at INFORMS Headquarters to create election ballots or questionnaires.