Interest Group Convener Handbook

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Helpful Links
Link to FAQs page on Interest Groups:
• Link to the Interest Groups page: https://www.geron.org/stay-connected/interest-groups
• GSA Governance Calendar of Events: (Must log in to the GSA website to view this link)

Interest Group Convener Responsibilities
New conveners are advised to review the policies and procedures document for Interest Groups (IG)
(https://www.geron.org/stay-connected/interest-groups) before starting the role.

Convener expectations may differ by Interest Group (IG). What follows is a general list of responsibilities.

1. Communicate With GSA on Behalf of the IG
   a. Michelle Koblenz (mkoblenz@geron.org) is the primary GSA contact person for IGs. Michelle is
      the Meetings and Exhibits Coordinator and will add you to the list of conveners
      automatically when you become a new convener, as indicated in your IG’s annual report.
   b. Communicate with fellow IG conveners in the Convener Community on GSA Connect. This is
      where you will receive IG updates such as room reservation procedures and end of year
      report requests.
   c. Attend the convener group meeting at GSA Annual Scientific Meeting. At this meeting, you
      will receive updates about the IG and have a chance to connect with other conveners,
      members of the IG Committee, and GSA staff.
2. Communicate With Members Using the IG Community on GSA Connect
   a. GSA strongly encourages IGs to utilize the online networking platform, GSA Connect, as the main vehicle of communication. Each IG has its own community on GSA Connect.
   b. GSA members can join any IG by clicking Update Profile on geron.org. From there, a member can select and deselect IGs. This action will add or remove them from the IG’s community on GSA Connect.
   c. Conveners can generate a list of active members at any time by clicking the Members tab within their community.
   d. GSA encourages pertinent discussions and resource sharing in the IG communities. For engagement tips and community questions, email Kelsey Glatfelter at Kglatfelter@geron.org.
   e. To increase the IGs visibility, GSA encourages conveners to share group updates in the Open Forum, which is a community for all GSA members.

3. Coordinate the Interest Group sponsored symposia.
   a. Official IGs are offered an opportunity to sponsor a single symposium that is recognized in the annual GSA Scientific Meeting Program.
   b. See the IG Policies for guidelines on procedures and eligibility for sponsoring a symposium.
   c. Suggestions and a timeline addressing IG-sponsored symposium are provided below.

4. Organize the Annual Business Meeting/Reception
   a. The Meetings and Exhibits Coordinator (meetings@geron.org) is the primary GSA contact person for organizing the business meeting. Communication will be made with the primary convener on record. It is important to update GSA staff with any convener changes.
   b. Prior to the GSA Annual Meeting, the Meetings and Exhibits Coordinator will ask conveners to fill out a space request form (see Month-by-Month Calendar outlined later in this document). Conveners will be able to request a time slot and request times that do not conflict with other IGs as needed. This space will include the standard set and AV for the session room at the GSA Annual Meeting.
   c. The program for IG business meetings is flexible and varies across IGs. The only requirement is that attendees sign in using the system provided by GSA staff.
   d. With the confirmation of meeting space (no sooner than 45 days prior to the meeting, see Month-by-Month Calendar), conveners will receive an e-mail providing contact information for the hotel, in case conveners would like to arrange catering.

5. Submit an Annual Report & Attendance Sheets
   a. This report summarizes activities at the meeting (reception, sponsored symposium, etc.) Conveners are required to use the provided sign-in sheets to summarize the number of attendees, etc.
   b. Annual reports are due on January 15.
Mentoring Best Practice Examples

Below are recommendations developed by the GSA Mentoring Committee to identify best practices to support mentoring within the IG.

A. Before the Annual Scientific Meeting
   a. Welcome the new members of the IG via GSA Connect
   b. Start a discussion thread encouraging new IG members to introduce themselves and share their interests in the meeting. Encourage senior IG members to reply
   c. Post a thread encouraging IG members who are Fellows to attend the Fellows Reception
   d. Post a detailed list of all IG members’ papers and posters, indicating new member

B. At the Annual Scientific Meeting
   a. Find out more about what other IGs are doing at the IG conveners’ meeting
   b. Discuss expanding mentoring practices at the IG conveners’ meeting
   c. Recruit IG conveners for GSA mentoring activities

C. At the IG Meeting
   a. Allow time for introductions of members at the beginning of the meeting, and brief statements of their research interests
   b. If the group is too large for all members to speak, make time for the new members to speak
   c. Ask new members what would be useful to them
   d. Establish a practice of pairing junior and senior co-conveners for the IG
   e. Recruit new members to be co-conveners of the IG
   f. Pair new members with senior members to propose the program for next IG meeting
   g. Establish a rotation in which graduate students organize the IG symposium every 2-3 years
   h. Allow time for informal mentoring
   i. Arrange informal dinners for new members after the IG meeting
   j. Organize a more formal dine-around dinner

D. Between Annual Scientific Meetings
   a. Follow up on conversations that took place at the IG meeting using GSA Connect
   b. Propose including ESPO members in any symposium sponsored by the IG
   c. Remind new members of abstract deadlines and award nominations
   d. Encourage members to consider seeking nomination for Fellow status
   e. Target information of interest to new members on the IG web site via GSA Connect
   f. Offer new members assistance with abstracts and the submission process for the next GSA meeting
Suggestions for Submitting Symposium Abstracts

A. How can I get sessions from my IG on the GSA meeting program?
IGs may work with their members to informally arrange a symposium. This might be done by deciding the topic of the session as an IG, soliciting abstracts from IG members, and encouraging IG members to attend (on GSA Connect or by publicizing the session at the annual meeting).

B. How do you increase the chances that your IG’s symposium will be accepted for the GSA program?
The best way is to have an understanding of the program process and to get your members involved in that process.

   Step 1: Select the right session codes. When you and your members submit abstracts, you will be asked to select relevant session codes. This should be done carefully, because it will determine who reviews your abstract. Abstracts are reviewed by GSA members of the section that receives the abstract, and who are identified as having expertise in the areas identified by the session codes you select.

   Step 2: Encourage your IG members to be reviewers. Selection of reviewers varies by GSA section, but all sections need program reviewers. The more reviewers who have expertise in the areas in your IG, the greater likelihood that your symposium will be reviewed by someone with a similar perspective -- or at least with an understanding of the existence and/or validity of your perspective.

   Although an abstract can only have two session code associated with it, reviewers can select multiple session codes in which they have expertise. It may be helpful for IGs to encourage members to select session codes related to their IG and/or to create a list of relevant session codes to share with their members.

   Step 3: Coordinate submission and review. If you submit a symposium with the session code “epidemiology” but most of your members identified themselves as experts in “mental health,” you are likely to limit your chances of appropriate review. This can be especially important for multidisciplinary IGs, for whom multiple session codes may be relevant both to the symposium you’re submitting and also to your members, who (if you follow step 2!) could also be your reviewers. If your work spans multiple session codes it may help you to coordinate with your IG membership to make sure that they are potential reviewers for the particular set of sections and codes you plan to submit to.

   There is no sure way to guarantee a positive review. The best we can do is to maximize chances for a fair review by readers who know something about the topic of your proposed session, as that topic is contextualized within your IG.
Example of Month-by-Month Calendar of Activities for Conveners
(Developed by Epidemiology of Aging IG conveners to assist in the transition for new conveners.)

January

1. Communications with Members using the GSA Connect
   a. Create a Happy New Year/New Member post.
   b. This post will start a line of communication between you and IG members.
   c. The post will notify members that the Symposium theme for the next GSA meeting will be announced within the next week.
   d. Create a nominate a peer for fellowship post.

2. Symposium Planning
   a. Announce symposium theme via a post.
   b. This post will notify IG members of the symposium theme and will indicate that potential abstract topics are due mid-February. Members should be reminded that this is only a call for topics that fit the theme. Once the topics are received, the co-conveners will decide which topics best fit the symposium theme.
   c. IGs may have enough topics submitted to develop two symposia.

February

1. Symposium Planning/Communications (this is an example)
   a. Post Call for Symposium topics reminder a day or two before the topics are due.
   b. Co-conveners will review topics and decide which ones best fit the theme and if one or two symposia will be submitted.
   c. Send notification email to IG members who were selected to submit full abstracts for the Symposium. Remind them that they have only 150 words.
      i. This email should provide dates regarding when the abstracts are due to the IG co-conveners
      ii. Usually 1st or 2nd week of February to allow time for review prior to the final submission date.
   d. Send decline email to those whose topics were not selected to be part of the Symposium. Best to send personal emails, if possible, encouraging individuals to submit through the general abstract process.
   e. Post reminder encouraging members to be abstract reviewers for GSA.
March

1. Symposium Communications Continued
   a. Review Symposium abstracts and let presenters know if you have any questions/concerns/suggested changes.
   b. Send a request for exemption to peer review if the symposium needs an alternative review process than is usually used for annual meeting symposia.
   c. At the same time, determine who may be a good discussant for the symposium. The name of the discussant is needed for the symposium submission. It is important to identify several potential individuals in case the first choice declines.
   d. Write 250-word Symposium Program Overview.
   e. Upload Symposium Program Overview to GSA online portal.
   f. Send email to presenters informing them that they can upload their individual symposium abstracts.

2. Business Meeting Planning
   a. Link to Meeting Space Request Form will be made available via the Interest Group Convener Community on GSA Connect. The form must be submitted by June 1 to secure complimentary meeting space at the Annual Scientific Meeting.

REMINDER: Abstracts due this month

April/May/June

1. Business Meeting Planning
   a. This time can be used to brainstorm about potential themes for the Business Meeting and potential speakers (if needed). Ideally, this should be a forum for a presentation type or topic that has broad appeal and might not fit well into the regular program.
   b. Submit the Meeting Space Request form by June 1 to secure complimentary meeting space at the Annual Scientific Meeting.

July

1. Communications
   a. Notification regarding acceptance of abstracts/symposia are usually sent mid July.
   b. If the symposium is accepted, forward the acceptance email to all presenters and the discussant.

August

1. Business Meeting Planning
   a. Meeting Space Request are due via online form distributed in July
   b. It is important to send this information as requests are accepted on a first come/first serve basis.
   c. Secure speakers (if needed) for IG Business Meeting.

September

1. Business Meeting Communications
   a. Post notification of IG events at the upcoming meeting.
   b. Post opportunity for involvement - Call for New Conveners – during your last year.
c. Co-conveners should further discuss the format of the Business Meeting and plan a conference call for end of September with the Speakers.
d. Have conference call with Speakers to finalize program for the IG Business Meeting yet leaving room for any additional conference calls, etc.
e. Begin to work with the hotel to arrange for food/drink for the Business Meeting
   i. Typically, the conveners have been able to get institutional sponsorship to cover a cash bar and food. The cost of food has varies based on institutional sponsorship or other available support.
   ii. With the confirmation of meeting space GSA will send an e-mail indicating the hotel contact to request catering.

October
1. Business Meeting Organization
   a. Finalize food/drink order for Business Meeting.

2. Innovative Ways to use the IG Business Meeting
   a. IGs all receive a spot on GSA’s program to hold a business meeting. IGs use these business meetings very differently, depending on the size of the group and interests of its members. Examples of innovative activities at the business meeting include:
      i. Invited presentations from funders on current funding opportunities and priorities
      ii. Sponsored receptions
         1. Panel discussions and/or debates about hot topics
         2. Display of student posters
         3. Invited presentations on practice examples local to the conference venue
   b. The program for the IG meeting is incredibly flexible. In the past, formats have included presentations, panels, and debates, as well as open reception time. Ideally, this should be a forum for a presentation type or topic that has broad appeal and might not fit well into the regular program.

November
Prior to meeting

1. Business Meeting Organization/Communications
   a. Post reminder indicating IG events.
   b. If applicable, get final presentations/slides from Business Meeting speakers.
   c. Prepare final presentation using the PowerPoint template provided by GSA.

2. Symposium Communications
   a. Send email to Symposium presenters reminding them of the date/time of their presentation.
   b. Ask for final presentations to be sent to you several days before the meeting to allow for the discussant to view them prior to the symposium.
   c. Use the PowerPoint template provided by GSA for symposium title slide.
d. GSA does provide laptops in its meeting rooms. You will be required to submit your presentation in advance of the meeting (early November).

**During the meeting**

1. **GSA Representation**  
   a. Attend Conveners meeting. At this meeting, you will receive updates about the IGs and have a chance to bring up any concerns to GSA.

2. **Symposium**  
   a. Attend IG symposium.  
   b. A convener should introduce the symposium speakers & discussant.

3. **Business Meeting**  
   a. Moderate IG Business Meeting.  
   b. Distribute and collect sign-in sheets so you get a count of the attendees.  
   c. Make an announcement of the importance of attendees to sign the sign-in sheets.  
      i. Sign-in forms will be submitted to GSA at the time of the annual report submission.

**Post Meeting**

1. **Symposium Planning**  
   a. The co-conveners should work together to brainstorm about, and eventually decide on, an IG symposium theme. The symposium theme may result from something discussed during the business meeting, may be related to the overall GSA meeting theme, or can just be a theme that will likely be of interest to IG members.

**December**

1. **Gather Information for Annual Report**  
   a. Review report elements at  
   b. Ensure that provided sign-in sheets have been collected and returned to the convener.  
   c. For any changes in conveners, contact Gena Schoen (gschoen@geron.org) for relevant forms and to ensure you are listed as a convener so you will receive any relevant emails.

**January**

1. **Annual Report Due.** GSA will distribute link for the report to current conveners, only one report needs to be submitted per interest group.  
   a. Fill out Annual report by January 15.  
   b. This report summarizes activities at the meeting (reception, sponsored symposium, etc.).