Industrial Relations at VGTC
Best Practices for Attracting Industrial Support

Conferences that have been successful over many years typically have three content stakeholder groups: scientific authors and speakers; visiting participants – and the supporters and exhibitors from industry. This guideline is part of a VGTC offer to help VGTC-sponsored conferences in their efforts to acquire industry support. In all of VGTC's conferences, the Supporter Committee plays an important role for conferences to have that extra budget to pay for additional conference rooms, coffee, food, and social events. In the past, certain conference committees were extremely successful in acquiring industry support, while others had to manage their conference with a more or less tight budget. Without prescribing any particular procedure, this guideline tries to summarize and disseminate the experience from those conferences that acquired above-average support from industry.

> *"The Supporter Committee has an incredibly important role for VIS, although it is pretty much invisible to the average attendee when it works. The funding from supporters is built in to the conference budget from the start, and when it doesn't match what is anticipated, there can be dire consequences. On the other hand, there can be very nice consequences when more comes in than expected! So please know that your work will be valuable, even if you don't get as many thanks as you deserve!"* (David Laidlaw, Brown University)

Most of the points in this document will seem straightforward. Any organization has to make decisions similar to those described below. However, the organization of a scientific conference tends to run into two challenges: sometimes not all the members of the Supporter Committee have industry experience, and there might not be too much overlap between this year's and last year's Supporter Committees.

Therefore, we will cover three areas in this document:

1. Organization
2. Timeline
3. Processes

With organization, we mean the committee members, VGTC staff, and external contacts that play a role in acquiring industry support. Every conference committee has a Supporter Committee, sometimes complemented by an industry relations committee that manages the involvement of successfully acquired supporters and industry partners throughout the conference. It should be clear from the start who is responsible for which task.

An adequate timeline could be the most important aspect that eventually makes the difference between large and small budgets. Starting this process as early as possible cannot be overemphasized – maybe even before a team applies for organizing the conference at a certain venue. Adequate processes for writing a prospectus, contacting potential supporters, and reacting to emails have to go along with the organization and responsibilities in the committee. Nothing is worse than an expression of interest by a potential supporter that nobody had time to reply to. Certain shared documents have proven to be of great value throughout the entire process.

Organization

There are certain vital roles in and around the Supporter Committee to be filled as early as possible. In the conference planning phase, some of these roles might be managed by the General Chair (for example, for the early acquisition of local supporters):

- General Chair

  The General Chair should have a keen eye on the Supporter Committee, since the conference budget (see *IEEE* below) directly depends on the success of this committee. So, filling the positions with the right people is quite important for the economic side of the conference. The General Chair typically gets active with supporter acquisition long before the committees are set up. This is part of convincing the Executive Committee to decide for a certain venue. In many cases, the General Chair handles the communication with these early, high-profile supporters all the way to the sign-up phase, and sometimes acquires such sponsors later during the acquisition phase.

- Supporter Committee Chair (SCC) / aka Sponsorship Chair (at ISMAR)

  An ideal ECC has one single person as the main chair of the Supporter Committee. We often see committees with 3 or even 5 equals, where the more experienced committee members start working before the new members even know exactly what they are supposed to do. This might be exacerbated by only using an email alias for all members, necessitating the coordination of the response to each and every incoming email. Thus, having one single point of contact for the Supporter Committee is highly beneficial for the communication with sponsors, for the organization of the other members of the committee, and the General Chair. The ECC certainly has the highest workload in the committee and should certainly receive the respective credit on the website and in the Thank you slides.

  The ECC should (ideally):

  - be part of the local organization team, and local to the continent and time zone, where the conference takes place
  - have a direct contact to the conference chair for special questions
  - have worked on a Supporter Committee before

- Supporter Committee members

  All committee members should (ideally):

  - have contacts that are potential supporters (and maybe even work for one)
  - understand the interests of supporters at a conference
  - have enough time available to contact and re-contact potential supporters
  - be accessible and have short response cycles close to the conference to solve issues and answer or delegate last-minute questions

Supporter Committee members can be divided into incoming, continuing, and outgoing members.

- Incoming members need help in finding their role in the committee. They usually bring in new contacts and certainly some new ideas, but are also ideal to approach contacts that have not sponsored the conference before.
- Continuing and outgoing members already have experience with the entire process of finding, convincing, and signing supporters. They can directly reuse their contacts to actual supporters from previous years.
- Outgoing members are most experienced with usually a lot of direct contacts. They should make sure that they introduce actual supporters to a continuing member for next year.

- Chairs of Pre-approved Workshops and Symposia

  Pre-approved Workshops and Symposia usually have a shared responsibility to gather support, no matter if they require additional support for keynote speakers or similar. VIS has officially set targets for each pre-approved workshop and symposium to make sure that there is a broader effort to finance the conference and its co-located events.

- Industry Outreach Chairs / Industrial Presentation Chairs (VR) / Industrial Liaison Chairs (ISMAR)

  These chairs make sure that the industry's interests in the conference are taken into account. This might also include companies that are not actual supporters in the current year. However, the main interest of the chairs is to give the supporters a role in the conference, for example through special sessions in which the supporters can give presentations about their company, their research, or other potential connections to the conference.

- The IEEE staff

  Each of the VGTC conferences is supported by permanent staff of IEEE that makes sure the processes that involve IEEE run smoothly and according to the bylaws. These colleagues have a lot of experience that is absolutely necessary to organize and run the VGTC conferences. Usually, the General Chair is in direct contact with the IEEE staff on budgetary issues and many other organizational aspects. Since IEEE takes over most of the financial risk for running the conference (venues have to be booked, contracts have to be signed, etc.) they have to be continuously up-to-date on the status of sponsorships. This is especially important once the supporters sign up as exhibitors, transfer money (to an IEEE account), and need official receipts for their support.

Timeline

Deadline	TODO	Who
- 2 Y	Decision about the conference venue • LOIs by potential supporters for a first budget draft	GC
- 12 M	Select and invite chairs • Supporter committee chair (SCC) • 2-3 additional chairs • Potentially, Industry outreach chairs	GC
- 11 M	Prepare acquisition • Prospectus o Support levels and supporters' benefits per level o Requirements for pre-approved workshops/symposia o Chairs' contact data • Setup jointly accessible list, continuously updated o List of last years' supporters and contacts o Ideally: debriefing with outgoing chairs o Extend contacts (incoming chairs, earlier LOIs) o Sync with pre-approved workshops to ensure an organized contact process	GC+SCC SCC
- 10 M	Contact potential supporters – 1st round • Divide contacts among Exhibits Chairs • Active follow-up to responses	All chairs
- 7 M	Contact potential supporters – 2nd round • Re-contact non-responsive contacts • Ask potential supporters to sign up at the Support Registration Page or through a document	All chairs
- 4 M	Contact potential supporters – 3rd round • Re-contact non-responsive contacts • Ask potential supporters to sign up • Ensure that potential supporters paid the sponsorship and submitted their logo for the website and the printed program	All chairs
- 1½ M	Production deadline for USB and printed program • All supporters have paid • Logos are submitted	PPC SCC SCC
- 1 M	Supporter/Exhibitor information • Complimentary registrations • Exhibition space / equipment • Floor plan • Shipping/delivery instructions	LocalOrg
Final month	Last minute questions • Forward to appropriate chair (local, GC, Industry Outreach, etc.)	All chairs
During conference	Tour of the exhibition • Gather feedback from each supporter during exhibition	SCC All chairs
until 1 month after conference	Debriefing – transition to new chairs • Meeting of outgoing, continuing and incoming chairs • Go through list of supporters	Outgoing/ incoming SCCs

Processes

- Contact potential supporters

  The timeline shows three contact rounds. While the timing of these rounds is not carved in stone, some SCCs have successfully used such sprints as an alternative to a general and unspecific request for support from their Supporter Committee. When following up on each contact, try to get a real, direct answer. After all, even "not interested in this conference" is important for updating the list and saves time next year. Some companies have long and multi-level decision processes and the direct industry contact is probably unaware at times whether his or her colleagues have contacted VIS yet.

- Sign-up

  The sign-up of a supporter on a signed document or via an online form on the conference website is the main goal of the Supporter Chairs. As soon as a supporter is officially signed up, other chairs or units in the conference organization will usually take over to ensure timely payment, the upload of logos, and that the supporters have all the information about their exhibit space or shipping instructions. Nevertheless, it is important to monitor the process and remain accessible to the supporters in case anything goes wrong. The logos are an important point that should be emphasized when communicating the sign-up process to the sponsor. The logo ensures that the sponsor receives the respective credit and we want to avoid missing logos on the website or, even worse, in the official programs and publications.

Conclusion

The goal of this document is to guide and support the Supporter Committees in gathering industry support. Any feedback on this document will be more than welcome to ensure that it remains a living document improving over the years. While the first version stemmed from experience with the VIS Supporter process, VGTC equally supports all conferences and any input that ensures a general applicability is especially welcome.

Please contact the Industry Outreach Chair of VGTC (see http://vgtc.org/executive-committee) in case of any questions, comments, or requests.