

How to Organize a SIAM Minisymposium

By [Tamara Kolda](#)

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Organizing a SIAM minisymposium can seem like an intimidating endeavor, but it's an opportunity to bring together researchers in your field. Moreover, you get to pick the speakers and the topic. It also helps for you to become better known within your field. I focus here on SIAM meetings, but the procedure is nearly the same for other meetings.

Step 1. Come up with a title and short description (6-8 weeks ahead)

The idea of a minisymposium is to bring together four talks on a common theme. Based on my very unscientific survey, I conclude that 99% of people do not read the minisymposium abstracts, so it's nice to have a descriptive title that will attract the right audience. For those few who proceed to read the abstract, in 100 words or less you can flesh out the idea with a few more details. You'll want to get your idea together about 6-8 weeks ahead on the minisymposium submission deadline (which is usually six months before the conference).

Step 2. Develop a list of speakers (5-7 weeks ahead)

You typically need four 25-minute talks (but check the submissions page for your conference for details!). Generally one of those talks is given by you, especially if you're junior. The other three talks should be selected within your theme. Ideally, you should choose people whom you judge to be good speakers and are somewhat diverse. In particular, it's preferred (and sometimes even required) to have speakers from different institutions. Ideally, the speakers should also not be recent co-authors so that there is a variety of viewpoints on the topic of the minisymposium. You should also have some back-ups ideas for speakers since not everyone you invite may be available. In fact, SIAM limits speakers to one talk per conference, so you'll want to get your invitation out early to ensure your speakers isn't "scooped" by someone else.

Step 3. Invite the speakers (4-6 weeks ahead)

A good invitation letter contains vital information such as the title of your minisymposium as well as the conference name, location, date and URL. It should specify the length of the talk (25 minutes). If you don't know the person well, it's nice to say who you are and provide a pointer to your web page. It's important that the letter be personally addressed (i.e., don't send one letter to all potential speakers) and includes some reason for the invitation.

Sample invite letter:

Subject: Minisymposium invitation for SIAM CSE13

Dear Prof. Jane Smith,

I'm organizing a minisymposium entitled "Analysis of Network Models" for the SIAM Conference on Computational Science & Engineering. The conference will be held February

25-March 1, 2013 at the Westin Boston Waterfront in Boston, MA. The web page is <http://www.siam.org/meetings/cse13/>.

I'm writing in the hope that you would be willing to give a 25-minute talk as part of my minisymposium. The minisymposium comprises four talks on the theme mentioned above. We haven't met before, but I've been following your work on network analysis using matrix models with great interest. I'm a researcher at Sandia National Laboratories, and I think you know my colleague Frank Jones. My web page is <http://www.sandia.gov/~tgkolda/>. The deadline for initial submissions (speaker names and tentative titles) is Monday, August 13th. Final titles and abstracts are due September 10th, and there is a chance for revisions about 2 months before the meeting.

Participants are expected to pay their own travel and registration costs, though discounts and grants are available for students.

Can you please let me know if you are interested? I'd appreciate a response as soon as possible in order to complete the speaker lineup by the deadline.

Sincerely,

Tamara G. Kolda



Minisymposium at the 2010 SIAM Annual Meeting.

Step 4. Submit the minisymposium proposal

Once you've collected your speakers and their preliminary titles, go ahead and submit the minisymposium on the SIAM conference website. If you don't have all the titles, you can use "TBD-[Speaker Last Name]" as a placeholder. You'll want to remind the speakers to submit their abstracts in advance of that deadline. You can check online to see if they have been filled in. Once those are complete, your work is nearly done. You'll be notified of acceptance in a month or so, and then your last duty is to run the session at the conference.

Step 5. Running the minisymposium at the conference

If possible, track down all your speakers in advance of the session and introduce yourself if you haven't already met. Arrive at the room at least 15 minutes in advance of the session. Check that the projector is working. As the organizer, it's your duty to introduce each speaker and keep each talk on schedule. Even if a talk ends early, you'll want to wait until the scheduled time to start the next talk. Of course, you definitely don't want to let any talk run over its allotted time. For your own talk, you can have a friend act as time keeper.

That's all there is to it! Best of luck!

Extra Credit

A few extras for those who want to go above and beyond...

- The [official SIAM instructions](#) contain further details that are specific to SIAM. SIAM recommends that the first talk be introductory to “set the stage” for the rest of the session. In my experience, that it rarely necessary so long as all the talks are clearly presented. But it’s something to keep in mind, especially for topics that are a bit more unusual in the context of the meeting. Don’t assume that everyone in the audience is an expert in the field.
- You may also consider organizing a no-host lunch or dinner for the speakers.
- David Gleich has prepared a LaTeX template for [cards you can hand out to advertise your session](#).
- You might think that more is better – why have a one-part minisymposium when it can be 2,3,4,5,6 or more parts? Keep in mind that a 2-part minisymposium lasts an entire day, and a 6-part lasts 3 days! This is tough for SIAM to schedule in order to minimize conflicts with minisymposia that have similar themes and tough for the speakers (who like to attend all talks in the minisymposium in which they have spoken). If you have too many speakers to invite, narrow it those few that you really want to hear speak!

Anything I missed? Let me know in the comments.