

Theme Organizer(s) Responsibilities

The Divisional Activities Committee (DAC) of ACS has sponsored multidisciplinary, cross-divisional programming in specific theme areas at the national meetings for the past few years. The participation in the thematic programming has grown over this time, and the responsibility of choosing the theme and its organizer for a given meeting is now handled by the Multidisciplinary Program Planning Group (MPPG). This is made up of representatives from all ACS divisions and other programming entities (such as COMSCI), and this group has the oversight of the themes. In this document we list the main responsibilities of the theme organizer, to help in identifying candidates, as well as to give those candidates a better idea of what will be expected from them.

The main objectives of sponsoring thematic programming are to enable more focused and more accessible programming on important, high-interest topics; to attract new and inactive members by highlighting areas of great interest; and to facilitate cross-divisional programming to serve all ACS members, not just division members. This can involve not only programming by one or more ACS division, but also symposia done jointly with other societies, when this makes sense. Once the theme topic and the main organizer have been chosen by MPPG, there are several responsibilities for the main organizer in the time before the meeting. These include:

+ *Selection of sub-themes and corresponding organizers* – Generally the themes will be so broad that it will be beneficial to divide it into two to four subdivisions, each of which can be overseen by an organizer. This not only takes some of the work-load from the main organizer, but gives her/him a group to work with to develop ideas and carry out the plans for the theme. MPPG may have some suggestions for the sub-themes, but the main organizer can choose to do this as it makes sense.

+ *Planning of a plenary/showcase/Presidential event* – This is a part of the meeting that puts the focus on the theme, and generally features some well-known speakers that will draw a good deal of attention (high-ranking government officials, Nobel laureates, industrial leaders, *etc.*). The format is open to whatever makes sense – this can be a standard set of talks in a symposium, a panel discussion, or perhaps something even more interactive with the attendees. The ideal might be an event that would set the stage for the rest of the meeting, or at least a large portion of it. In most of the themes that have been run in the past few years, the ACS President has chosen to support this and, more importantly, actively help to organize this. This helps to bring in the kind of participants who will attract a large audience, and it also provides some funding. It also requires another level of coordination, however. This is one area where the committee of overall theme organizer plus the sub-theme organizers can work together to develop a highly attractive program.

+ ***Coordination of divisional programming within the theme*** – Part of the criteria for selecting the theme in the first place is that it be a topic that has interest to a broad range of chemists, so in general many of the technical divisions (as well as other programming units, such as COMSCI) will already have developed symposia in the theme area. One of the benefits of declaring a theme is to help these divisions to coordinate their programming to make the overall thematic programming more accessible to meeting attendees. For instance, they can schedule the divisional symposia so as to not occur at the same time as the plenary event. This would allow all of their members the opportunity to attend the plenary session. The theme organizer can also help divisions avoid scheduling against each other, especially when the symposia are closely related. Even better, given enough lead time, the theme organizer could facilitate joint programming by two or more divisions in a sub-theme area, thus making the programming richer and more attractive. Much of this work can be done in conjunction with ACS staff, who have a wealth of information about the programming and contacts in each division. The staff is also a great resource to assist the organizer in encouraging the divisions to find ways to locate thematic programming in a way that makes it as easy as possible for the members to get to as much of it as they can. In order to help with this programming, DAC has been providing funding of \$30,000 per meeting, which can be used to strengthen these thematic symposia. This theme coordination can be large task, but it will help give substance to the theme focus. As much as possible, the organizer(s) should have an outline of the symposia ready about nine to twelve months previous to the meeting, in order to facilitate useful promotion of it to ACS members and others (see below).

+ ***Organizing special thematic symposia*** – The overall theme organizer and the sub-theme organizers may decide that some topics under the theme are not covered by the divisions, but that they would still be very attractive for the meeting. If so, they can be involved in organizing these, or at least in finding people who can. These will need to be co-sponsored by some division, but the organizers can take the lead. Again, the funding from DAC can be used in this effort.

+ ***Promotion of the theme*** – If all of the elements above can be planned well in advance of the meeting, this information can be used to promote the theme and the overall ACS meeting. One of the aims of choosing a meeting theme is to attract chemists and other scientists and engineers who work on that field but who do not generally attend ACS meetings (whether they are ACS members or not). Such people will need to hear about the theme and get an idea of what to expect at the meeting in the theme area some time (about two years) before the meeting occurs if we expect to attract them. The organizers can use the organs of ACS for promoting the theme (*Chemical & Engineering News*, the website, *etc.*), but other venues will also be useful to get the message to those not in ACS. Again, ACS staff will be invaluable in organizing this and in finding ways to get this done.

Given these responsibilities, there are several key requirements for the theme organizer. She/he should be someone who:

- + knows the field of the theme well, and is a respected member of that community;
- + has organized symposia at ACS in the past and is well acquainted with the ACS system of programming; and
- + has the time, energy, and people skills to coordinate the programming among many divisions and other programming entities (COMSCI, PRES, *etc.*)

This gives a brief listing of what will be expected of a theme organizer. It will also be useful to consult with those who have played this role in the past, and MPPG can put the organizers in contact with these people. Past organizers have found it to be a worthwhile and beneficial exercise, and will be glad to share their experiences.