

Is my meeting a SIG or a Satellite Meeting?

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ISMB is a broad meeting that covers the main currents in computational biology. A tradition has evolved of smaller, more focused, co-located meetings taking place before, during, and after the main meeting.

The two primary kinds of co-located meetings are Special Interest Group (SIG) meetings and Satellite Meetings (SM). This note highlights the primary characteristics of these meetings, to help potential organizers answer the question “Is my meeting a SIG or an SM?”. This note provides a comparison; details of each kind of meeting are described elsewhere.

SIGs and SMs co-locate with ISMB to benefit from the many delegates to the main meeting. The main meeting likewise benefits from participation by those who are primarily interested in the smaller meetings or who see the smaller meetings as an extension of the main meeting.

The primary difference between a SIG and an SM is the extent to which their organizers are responsible for the meeting’s finances and logistics. This is crucial; ISCB’s relationship with these meetings must be handled in a responsible way that does not endanger the financial stability of the main meeting (ISMB) or the sponsoring society (ISCB).

SIGs and SMs also differ in terms of logistics. SIGs share a common schedule and other logistical arrangements. Each SM, however, chooses its own format, and may have logistical or financial needs that do not fit conveniently into the SIG structure.

Organizers’ responsibilities

SIG organizers focus almost entirely on the meeting’s scientific content; ISMB manages the finances and logistics. ISMB takes the financial risk of holding the meeting, and meeting organizers must work within the financial and logistical structure defined by ISMB. The daily schedule is the same for all SIGs so that delegates can easily circulate between meetings.

SM organizers, on the other hand, take full responsibility and risk for the meeting’s finances and logistics. They sign the contracts for services such as rooms and food. This allows them the flexibility to tailor the meeting’s structure, to organize special sessions and meals, to subsidize the expenses of invited speakers, and to make other arrangements that are beyond the scope of SIGs.

Fees paid to ISMB

SIG budgets include a per-delegate fee for registration services and a per-delegate fee for logistics management. The ISCB Conferences Director prepares budgets for the SIGs, which include these fees along with the direct costs of holding the meetings.

SMs pay two fees. One is a per-delegate fee for registration services. SM organizers have two choices regarding the second fee. One option is a per-delegate fee for logistics management by ISMB. The other option is for the SM organizers to handle the logistics themselves or hire somebody other than ISMB to handle them; in this case, the SM does not pay a logistics management fee, and instead pays a per-delegate affiliation fee for being affiliated with ISMB.

Summary

The following table summarizes the main differences between SIGs and SMs. Please consult the ISCB Conferences Director or the Chair of the ISMB SIG & SM committee if you have questions about whether to apply for your meeting to be a SIG or an SM.

Aspect of meeting	SIG	SM
Responsibility for finances & logistics	ISMB	SM organizers
Daily schedule	Same for all SIGs	Customized per SM
Location	Same venue as ISMB	Same or different venue
Meeting days	Two days prior to main meeting	Two days before main meeting or several days (possibly more than two) after main meeting. ISMB's logistical support may be partially or completely unavailable for SMs that are three days or longer.
Length	One or two days	One or two days
Shared delegates	Delegates may circulate between all SIGs meeting on the same day	Delegates may attend only the SM for which they have registered
Registration services	Provided by ISMB	Provided by ISMB
Fee for registration	Per-delegate fee	Per-delegate fee
Logistics management	Provided by ISMB	Provided by ISMB or handled separately, per organizers' choice
Logistics / affiliation fee	Per-delegate logistics fee	Per-delegate fee if logistics handled by ISMB. Alternatively, per-delegate affiliation fee.