=: SOFSEM :=

Guidelines for PC Chairs and Organizers of SOFSEM conferences

The normal duties of PC chairs and Organizing Committees (OC) are assumed to be well-known. The guidelines below are merely meant to give an *overview* of the activities involved in the planning and realization of a SOFSEM conference and to highlight a few ingredients that are special to SOFSEM's profile.

Frequent contact between PC chair(s) and OC chair(s) is important for coordinating activities and in all budget-related matters. The Steering Committee chair is available whenever policy decisions are required and at any time for advice in general. Regular online meetings are advised, especially in the early stages.

The preparation of SOFSEM *x+1* normally begins right after SOFSEM *x* with the launch of a first version of the conference *website,* presenting the information that is available: conference dates, location, pc chair(s), organizing team and host institution and, if possible, already some `important dates'. *Early web presence is important for announcing the next SOFSEM.*

1. Program Committee matters

The PC chair(s) and the Steering Committee together determine whether the *list of topics* for contributed papers can remain what it was for the previous SOFSEM or should be *updated* in view of current developments in the field. There should also be agreement on any special focus area(s) which the PC chair(s) want to highlight for the upcoming SOFSEM and which are the basis for invited lectures, tutorials, a special session, or perhaps even a mini-course within the regular program.

1.1 Program Committee

The PC chair(s) select(s) the program committee. The following common SOFSEM practices should be taken into account:

- the committee represents the relevant research areas and chosen topics for the conference.
- all members are well-recognized internationally as top researchers in their respective research areas.
- the committee is reasonably well-balanced geographically, at least across Europe (East versus West, North versus South),
- with due attention for gender diversity,
- and ideally has, for reasons of `historic continuity', at least one member from the Czech and/or Slovak research community in Foundations.

The Program Committee should also reflect SOFSEM's tradition as a conference where young researchers can develop their experience in the leadership of the field. It is thus recommended that

- the committee includes a number of highly qualified young researchers who may not have served on a program committee very often before.

The PC chair(s) and the Steering Committee chair together determine the size of the program committee that is aimed at. PC members are to be encouraged to participate in the conference.

1.2 Invited Speakers

SOFSEM typically has 4-5 invited (plenary) speakers. Invited talks can vary from technically advanced to tutorial. In general, the first part of an invited talk should be accessible to all SOFSEM participants, the second part can be more technical. An invited talk or tutorial could e.g. be followed by a special session with contributed papers on the subject area of the talk.

The actual number of invited talks and whom to invite is to be planned by the PC chair(s), but speakers should only be approached after the plan is approved from a budgetary perspective by the OC chair(s). SOFSEM usually covers the regular stay of invited speakers at the conference and local transportation to/from the conference, but normally cannot cover non-local and international travel costs.

When a speaker is approached for a presentation at SOFSEM, the PC chair(s) should pay attention to the following:

- timeslots for invited talks are normally 75 minutes, with 60 minutes for the talk and 15 minutes for questions and discussion.
- an invited speaker is expected to write a paper covering the subject of the invited talk or an extended abstract of it for the proceedings (full papers can be 12-20 pages, extended abstracts should be at least 4-5 pages),
- and ideally attends the conference for at least one or two days, in order to allow for interactions with as many participants as possible,

in addition to the budgetary aspects. The practical arrangements are to be approved by the OC chair(s).

Invited speakers should be highlighted on the conference website as soon as they agree to speak. Two months (say) before the submission deadline at the latest, invited speakers should be asked to supply:

- the definitive title and a brief abstract of the invited talk, and a picture, for posting on the conference website.

The planning of the invited talks in the program is in the hands of the PC chair(s). Ideally, the first invited talk, usually on Monday, highlights novel developments in a specific area and new results, while the last invited talk, usually on Thursday, could be a *visionary* talk, presenting for instance a new area, approach, or method.

1.3 Call for Papers

The Call for Papers for SOFSEM *x+1* is formulated by the PC chair(s), in a format as defined together with the Organizing Committee. Possibly a same or similar format as last year can be used.

A first version of the Call for Papers should be posted on the conference website as soon as major parts of the text are known, such as: the conference venue for SOFSEM *x+1*, the special focus areas or actions (if any), the invited speakers (insofar as already known), the list of topics,

the program and organizing committees, the important dates for submissions and notifications, and other common ingredients. See also 1.5 (Guidelines for Submissions).

The Call for Papers may include a call for special initiatives like a poster session or an (open) meeting of an international research project, provided the OC chair(s) confirms that these activities be accommodated.

The Call should also mention any awards for which submitted papers may qualify. In the case of the *Best Student Paper Award*, the call specifies when a paper qualifies as `student paper' for SOFSEM. The submission system should allow that student papers can be tagged as such, for the sole purpose of qualifying for the award.

As to *submission deadlines*, SOFSEM (still) follows the classical 2-step protocol: a first deadline for *abstracts* of the planned submissions, followed by a second deadline a week later for the *full version* of the submissions. Submitting a full version without submitting an abstract first may be allowed. The reviewing is traditionally `*single-blind'*.

See also 1.7 (Proceedings) and 3 (Timeline) concerning the *important dates* for SOFSEM.

1.4 Advertising SOFSEM (I)

Wide announcement of SOFSEM *x+1* in the community is important, from the very moment that the key data of the conference are known (dates, venue, PC chair(s), organizers, and deadlines). The PC and OC chairs should make a concerted effort to publicize SOFSEM *x+1* in the regular channels of the theory community, as part of the preparation of the conference.

As a first step, a first version of the *conference website* should be launched as soon after SOFSEM *x* as possible. After this, SOFSEM *x+1* should be included in as many of the relevant computer science *conference listings* on the web as possible. As these listings are frequently consulted by researchers, the conference website should be actively *updated* and *maintained* so it always reflects the latest information about the conference.

As soon as the Call for Papers is finalized, the PC and OC chairs should publicize it as widely as possible, e.g. by the following actions:

- distribute the Call over key mailing lists of the field (like DMANet) and post it in relevant news group and bulletins,
- ask the PC colleagues to bring the Call to the attention of researchers in their networks,
- send the Call to other known research institutions and groups in the field, and
- use a mailing list of participants from past SOFSEMs (available from the SC).

As the submission deadline approaches, it may be considered to distribute a *final call* and post an *alert* on the conference website. In the event of an *extension* of the deadline, this extension should be mentioned on the conference website, applied to update the various listings of the conference, and communicated to all authors who already submitted a manuscript.

1.5 Guidelines for Submissions

The Call for Papers will solicit papers that present original research in SOFSEM's topic areas. Submissions will normally be extended abstracts (or papers), with a page limit set by the PC chair(s) and specified in the Call, usually 12 or 14 pages including or excluding references.

Extended abstracts may be supplemented by a clearly marked *appendix*. An appendix is meant to provide the details and proofs that could not be presented within the page limit in the extended abstract, and should be added to support a complete verification of the results in the paper. In case an appendix is used, the extended abstract must still include at least a sampler of the key ideas and proofs of the results. Submissions that do not do so should not to be considered acceptable. Appendices will be read at the discretion of the PC members.

SOFSEM adheres to the common `dual submission policy' of international conferences. It means that the following rules should be respected:

- *no prior publication,* i.e. no submissions are allowed which are essentially similar to papers that have been previously published or accepted for publication in another peer-reviewed conference with proceedings or a journal, and
- *no simultaneous submission,* i.e. no submissions are allowed which are essentially similar to submissions from the same author(s) which are simultaneously submitted to other peer-reviewed conferences with proceedings or journals and still under consideration.

Submissions that partly overlap with papers that were previously published in a peer-reviewed conference with proceedings or a journal or with simultaneously submitted work must contain a notable set of new original results. (Invited papers can be based on a prior publication, but then only a summary of the paper may be included in the proceedings, to avoid double publication.)

If a submission is found to violate the dual submission policy, it will normally be cancelled from further consideration by the conference. The PC chair(s) determine how to act in these cases. For example, if violation is not clearcut, they may give the author(s) which it concerns the opportunity to rebut before deciding whether to cancel the submission.

The Call for Papers specifies common instructions for the desired format of submissions. The PC and OC chairs may specify additional common guidelines that should be observed in the preparation of submissions. For example, they may require that extended abstracts are thoroughly spell-checked before being submitted, or impose rules and restrictions on the use of advanced AI tools like ChatGPT in the work.

While submissions are under consideration, the authors of submitted papers are free to give talks and colloquia about the ideas in their paper and disseminate draft versions of it. In particular, full draft versions may be posted in an open technical report series or on the *arXiv*, or in similar freely accessible on-line repositories.

1.6 Submission, Evaluation and Selection

The PC and OC chairs choose the conference system they wish to use. (SOFSEM normally uses *Easychair*, but free online conference systems like *EquinOCS* are used as well.) The conference system is ideally opened for submissions at least two-three months before the submission deadline. The Organizing Committee signs for the technical supervision of the conference system `in action'.

The PC chair(s) decide on all matters that arise during the submission process and the evaluation of submissions. The target criteria for the selection process are discussed and agreed upon beforehand with the OC and SC chairs. The PC chair(s) inform the PC of the criteria they like to see observed in the reviewing and of the *confidentiality* of the process.

SOFSEM has no rule that would prohibit PC members (other than the PC chairs) to *co-author* a submitted paper with one or more other researchers. However, the PC chair(s) see to it that every PC member to which this applies declares the submission as a `conflict of interest' in the conference system and is thus excluded from the reviewing and decisioning of the paper.

The PC chair(s) lead the selection of contributed papers by the PC. The PC also decides which of the accepted papers are the winners of the Best Student Paper and Best Paper Awards (if applicable). Authors of accepted papers are informed forthwith of the acceptance of their paper, of the requirements for the revised version of their paper for the proceedings, and of the deadline for submitting it.

If their submission made use of an appendix to stay within the page limit, the author(s) of an accepted paper must post a full (`long') version of their manuscript on the *arXiv* or in a similar freely accessible online repository. As the appendix will *not* be included in the camera-ready copy, every reference to the appendix in the latter should be replaced by a reference to the full version in the online repository. The full version must be posted before the camera-ready copy is submitted for the proceedings. Replacing the full draft paper on the *arXiv* or a similar online repository by revised versions is allowed.

Invited speakers and authors of accepted papers should be informed that the deadline for submitting their final, revised manuscripts for the proceedings is *strict.*

Finally, at least one author per accepted paper must register for the conference and attend SOFSEM *x+1* in person, to present the paper and participate in the conference. If no author of a paper registers in time, the paper will normally not be included in the proceedings. Only in exceptional cases may the PC chair(s) decide otherwise, for example in case of insurmountable visa- or health problems.

1.7 Proceedings

The proceedings traditionally appear in the ARCoSS Subline of the series *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* of Springer. The proceedings are edited by the PC chair(s).

As soon as the contours of SOFSEM *x+1* are clear, the PC chair(s) should inform Springer's LNCS Editorial Office of the dates and plans for the upcoming SOFSEM, to establish contact and obtain the details and deadlines for the production, cost and delivery of the proceedings.

The proceedings are composed of: the editorial front and back matter, and the final manuscripts of the invited and contributed papers accepted for the conference. The *front and back matter* are composed by the PC chair(s) using the conference system and consist (at least) of:

- the p*reface* of the volume, with particulars of this year's conference, of the program (incl. invited speakers) and the participation, and due acknowledgements. (Generally, the preface is 1 to 1.5 pages long.)
- the *list of persons* involved in the organization of the conference, including the chairs, committees, and the reviewers that assisted in the evaluation of submissions.
- the *list of sponsoring organizations and sponsors.*
- the *table of contents*, and
- the *author index.*

As to the *invited and contributed papers*, the PC chair(s) *verify* that all final manuscripts and copyright forms are received within the deadline, that all manuscripts satisfy the required format and page limits, that the titles and author names are as listed in the table of contents and the author index, that all authors have suitably implemented the editorial feedback and/or suggestions of the reviewers in their manuscripts, and that full versions have been posted on the *arXiv* or in a similar freely accessible online repository (if applicable).

In case corrections are needed, the PC chair(s) contact the author(s) involved and request that the necessary modifications and/or changes in their paper are made as quickly as possible, within the production deadline of the proceedings.

The *important dates* for the conference should be determined such that there is sufficient time (2-3 weeks) for this editorial process to take place in between the deadline for final manuscripts and the due date for delivering the complete proceedings to the LNCS Editorial Office. The delivery date of the proceedings manuscript is normally fixed and unmovable.

1.8 Advertising SOFSEM (II)

After all submitting authors have been notified of the decision for their paper, it is common practice to post the *list of accepted papers* on the conference website by way of preliminary announcement.

1.9 Special Issue(s)

The PC chair(s) are encouraged to consider editing a *special issue* of one or more suitable journals, with extended versions of selected papers from the conference that highlight the quality and timeliness of the research presented at SOFSEM *x+1*. The choice of journal(s) for this purpose is to be discussed with the Steering Committee chair.

The papers to be invited for a special issue are normally selected as soon as possible after the acceptances are decided but no later than during or shortly after the conference, to avoid the risk that the papers are submitted elsewhere. Normally the selected papers for the special issue reflect current developments in (some of) SOFSEM's areas of interest.

2. Organizational matters

The Organizing Committee plans and manages all practical aspects of the conference, in close contact with the PC and SC chairs, from the initial reservations and announcements until the local arrangements and actual hosting of the meeting and the final wrap-up. The OC also supports and manages the facilities for the work of the PC.

The Organizing Committee is assumed to be well-acquainted with the details of organizing a conference. It is up to the OC whether to make use of a professional conference service. These guidelines only highlight some aspects that are special to the SOFSEM conferences.

2.1 Web presence

The conference website is the main medium for informing the research community about SOFSEM *x+1* and all details that matter and that make it interesting. The website should be launched right after SOFSEM *x* with the key data for the next conference and be updated

whenever new information becomes available and must be posted. Ideally a fixed contact person of the OC develops and manages the information that is to be posted on the website, in close contact with the PC and OC chairs and possibly further technical support. There is no standard format for the SOFSEM website.

2.2 Program elements

There is more to the preparation of the overall program than the scheduling of the invited and accepted papers into *sessions* and the assignment of session chairs by the PC chair(s). Here are a number of further ingredients that the PC and OC chairs should consider, with the typical SOFSEM traditions for them (variations allowed).

2.2.1 *Opening ceremony*
SOFSEMs customarily start with 15-minute slot for a short welcome by the conference chairs and an official opening of the conference by a delegate of the organizing research institute or other official representative of the local academic or industrial research community.

2.2.2 *Invited talks*
Timeslots for invited talks are normally 75 minutes, with 60 minutes for the talk and 15 minutes for questions and discussion. Timeslots for tutorials can be up to 90 minutes, with a short pause in the middle. Invited talks and tutorals are always plenary.

2.2.3 *Contributed talks*
Timeslots for contributed talks are normally 30 minutes, including time for questions and discussion (and session switching, in the case of parallel sessions). The PC chair(s) may provide special instructions for speakers and session chairs.

2.2.4 *Special sessions*
Special sessions may be devoted to the award-winning papers, a panel on trends and/or open problems, poster presentations, (open) project meetings of research consortia e.g. with industry, exhibitions, and/or other activities which fit SOFSEM's profile. If appropriate, some of these activities could be scheduled in an evening program.

2.2.5 *Breaks*
Coffee/tea breaks are normally 25-30 minutes, to allow for discussions and socializing. Lunch breaks are preferably (at least) 2 hours, to allow for lunch and have ample time for meeting and working together.

Aside from the lectures and talks, various other activities will need to be accommodated in the overall schedule of the conference. This includes at least the following, in every SOFSEM.

2.2.6 *Steering Committee meeting*
This meeting is typically scheduled after lunch on the 2nd day of the conference or in the evening, but could also be held just prior to the conference. The meeting is to be attended in person and/or virtually by the members of the Steering Committee, the PC and OC chairs of the conference, and possibly by others at the invitation of the SC chair. The meeting is normally devoted to a review of the organizational experiences and recommendations of the committees of SOFSEM *x+1*, the preparation of the business meeting (see 2.2.7), and a discussion of long-term matters and perspectives (such as the location of next SOFSEMs and any other relevant matters of planning and policy).

2.2.7 *Business meeting*

This meeting is typically scheduled in the conference program on the 2nd or 3rd day of the conference (preferably after the Steering Commttee meeting), is open to all participants, and is meant to inform and include everyone in the ongoing SOFSEM matters. Major items are the reports of the PC and OC chairs, the presentation(s) and possibly choice of the location of SOFSEM *x+2*, elections, the ceremony for the awarding of the Best Paper and Best Student Paper awards, and `any other business'.The business meeting is typically scheduled in a timeslot of 1 hour, but the program should allow that the meeting could last a bit longer.

2.2.8 *Social activities*

The social activities for participants are important for making new acquaintances and meeting old ones. A welcome gathering should already be scheduled on the evening before the conference begins, if participants can already arrive and register then. SOFSEMs normally have an excursion as part of the program. It is up to the organizers to determine whether and to what extent it can be accommodated within the overall schedule.

2.2.9 *Closing ceremony*

SOFSEM conferences customarily end with a 15-minute slot for a `farewell session' in which the SC or PC chair(s) reflect on the scientific highlights of the conference and its organization, and the challenges that lie ahead. The closing ceremony may also take place in the evening of the last day (if applicable).

2.3 Advertising SOFSEM (III)

The *Call for Participation* should ideally be ready for posting and distribution as soon as the list of accepted papers is known. At the same time, or even earlier, the *registration module* on the conference website should be activated.

The following aspects should be taken into account, as part of the details to be arranged for the meeting:

- a reduced registration rate for young researchers/PhD students
- accompanying persons and their fee for participating in the social program
- the possibility of payments both by bank transfer and credit card(s)

The Call for Participation may be distributed through the same channels as the Call for Papers, but should also be communicated to all authors who submitted a paper.

2.6 Budgeting

The budget requires careful planning, as in all conferences in (theoretical) computer science or (the foundations of) AI. For some of the SOFSEM-specific expenses, the organizers may consider finding a *sponsor* or *sponsoring organization.* This applies in particular to the expenses for the Best Student Paper award and corresponding certificate(s) and, if possible, for the Best Paper award as well.

It may be possible to find sponsors for some of the invited speakers, e.g. in combination with a visit to the sponsoring company. The names of the sponsors and sponsoring organizations may be mentioned on the conference website and in the program.

In order to remain accessible to especially young researchers, SOFSEM must avoid high registration fees. Depending on the budgetary perspectives, SOFSEM has traditionally followed the following practices, in the interest of keeping costs down for all participants:

- all non-local committee meetings are held electronically. This applies to meetings of the conference chairs, but also to the selection meeting(s) of the Program Committee.
- invited speakers are asked to help in defraying the costs of their non-local, especially international travel. See also 1.2 (Invited speakers).

Reduced registration fees may not only apply to young researchers but may also be considered for PC members who participate in the conference, to compensate them for their work.

2.7 Code of Conduct

SOFSEM is committed to providing a safe and welcoming conference environment, where ideas can be expressed and exchanged openly and freely, where the rights and dignity of every person and group are respected, and where principles of diversity and inclusion are embraced throughout. All participants are expected to behave accordingly.

SOFSEM subscribes to ACM's `open conference statement' and to the `anti-discrimination statement' of EATCS. The PC and OC chairs are entitled to take appropriate action in case these rules are violated. If called for, they may remove participants from the conference if these participants behave unacceptably, especially towards other participants. Incidents should be reported to the SC. (SOFSEM has been free of incidents in the past and we trust everyone to do all they can to keep it this way.)

3. Timeline

The following checklist and reference dates are only meant to give an *indication* of how the preparation of the conference may be paced in time. The actual timeline for SOFSEM *x+1* is to be discussed and agreed upon by the OC, PC and SC chairs. The concrete dates should take the desired and necessary flexibilities in the schedule into account.

(January/February)
- Presentation of SOFSEM *x+1* plan(s) at SOFSEM *x*
- First version conference website
- Announce SOFSEM *x+1* on the general SOFSEM website

(March 1)
- Finalize topics

(March 15)
- Have the larger part of the PC
- Have (at least some of) the invited speakers

(April 1)
- SOFSEM *x+1* website ready
- PC is complete
- First Call for Papers
- Contact LNCS Editorial Office

(May 1)
- Title and abstract of invited talks
- Update conference website

(June 15)
- Second Call for Papers
- Open website for submissions
- Reminder of Submission Deadline

(August 1)
- Submission deadline Abstracts
- Submission deadline full versions

(September 10)
- Paper bidding by the PC
- Assigning papers to (sub)reviewers
- Reviews due

(October 15)
- Notification (Acceptance/Rejection)
- Selection of Best papers
- Call for Participation
- Final versions of Invited and accepted papers

(November 10)
- Author Registration Deadline
- Second Call for Participation

(November 15)
- Proceedings deadline
- Early Registration Deadline

(November 30)
- Late Registration Deadline

(January/February)
- SOFSEM *x+1*

Separate deadlines may be included for posters etc.

4. Contact

The Steering Committee is available at all times in case policy decisions are needed or when something is unclear or unspecified, or simply when advice or help is needed in any matter in organizing SOFSEM.

SOFSEM Steering Committee   Revised version (JS/JvL), December 2023