

INFORMIX LOCAL USERS GROUP RESOURCE GUIDE

International Informix Users Group

December 2002

Introduction

The International Informix Users Group (IIUG) is an independent organization that provides thousands of people just like you with opportunities to network with each other, share knowledge, and become advocates for the IBM Informix product portfolio. IIUG is the most influential user group representing the users and partners of Informix database products.

IIUG works closely with IBM Data Management to encourage and support Local User Groups (LUGs). Together, IIUG and IBM provide the tools and programs to help LUGs grow strong and vital. As a LUG leader, you'll be part of a collective voice that influences Informix product enhancements and product strategy. Through this forum, Informix knowledge is disseminated and IBM obtains feedback from Informix users about what they want and need from the products that they work with every day.

IIUG members enjoy a number of benefits including software repositories, discounts, and early and free access to IBM software products. Informix fans can network with others with similar interests without regard for geographies and time zones.

"IIUG provided virtually all of the tools that we needed to organize meetings: member mailing lists, a Web page, liaisons, some of the highest level experts in our field for presentations, and LOTS of great advice! A good steering committee truly makes organizing and executing a user group much less work. The regular assistance by IIUG Board members and the steering committee makes the task lighter.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of leading a local user group has been the opportunity to meet many of the most amazing and brightest people in the IBM Informix world. Every group is different—go with it! Do what works for your user community."

Kathy Zunino
President, Informix Users Group Northern California
<http://www.iiug.org/iugnc/>

About this Guide

Are you thinking about starting a new Informix Local User Group (LUG)? Or are you a seasoned user group leader who is looking for fresh ideas for your group? Regardless of where you are in the process, this resource guide provides everything you need to know to get a new user group started, sustain its growth, and keep it fresh and alive.

This guide was written to demystify the process of starting and growing a LUG. It includes an introduction to the International Informix Users Group (IIUG) team who are there to support you, a checklist of organizational tasks, meeting agenda suggestions, instructions for creating your LUG Web site, and much more. The suggestions in this guide are good starting points. You are free to tailor your LUG to meet your members' unique needs and preferences.

As your user group begins to thrive and grow and your members' needs and interests change, you'll want to find new and better ways to conduct meetings and improve your services. This guide offers ideas and advice from other user group leaders that can help spark creativity for revitalizing your user group.

This document is divided into the following sections:

International Informix Users Group

Explains the purpose and organizational structure of the International Informix Users Group.

Getting Started

Provides answers to many of your questions regarding starting a new user group.

Organizing a New User Group

Offers step-by-step guidance for organizing a user group that is tailored specifically for your members.

Planning User Group Meetings

Includes suggestions for scheduling and planning meetings—from creating the agenda and publicizing your meeting to recruiting new members.

Growing and Maintaining a User Group

Presents available resources for enhancing the benefits, service, and programs of your user group.

Staying in Touch with Your Members

Showcases IIUG resources for communicating with your user group and creating your group's Web site.

International Informix Users Group

The International Informix Users Group (IIUG) is an independent organization that facilitates communications between IBM and its worldwide Informix user community. IIUG members are Informix end users, developers, administrators, analysts, and executives from a variety of organizations representing a wide range of industries in more than 120 countries around the world. Key programs include local user groups and special interest groups, which IIUG promotes and assists from launch through growth.

IIUG History

IIUG was established at the 1995 Informix Worldwide User Conference. Formally recognized by Informix, IIUG provided an efficient forum for two-way exchange of information between Informix and its user community. It has experienced significant growth since being acquired by IBM Data Management division. Today, IIUG membership exceeds 16,000 in more than 120 countries.

IIUG Charter: Purpose

- To promote the growth of local, regional and special interest Informix user groups worldwide.
- To provide a communication channel to disseminate news and other information efficiently to the Informix user community.
- To give Informix users a collective voice to articulate issues they find important.
- To influence and advise Informix.
- To foster the professional development of individual Informix users.
- To coordinate the collection and distribution of user-contributed resources.
- To provide an organization for Informix users without access to a local user group.
- To allow local user group members to participate in a global organization.

Member Services

IIUG provides its members with a wide array of services such as:

- Online free membership
- Networking opportunities
- Technical information and training
- Newsletters and alerts
- IIUG and LUG Web sites
- Online surveys
- Software downloads

Informix User Group Leadership Council

The Informix User Group Leadership Council (IUGLC) is comprised of the IIUG Board of Directors and representatives from each LUG, SIG, and regional group. The IUGLC facilitates communications between group leaders worldwide. IUGLC representatives disseminate information from IIUG directly to leaders to enable them to make it available to LUG members.

Worldwide User Group Program

The Worldwide Informix User Group Program, located in Menlo Park, CA, is responsible for programs that meet the needs of Informix user groups around the world. Supported by IBM Data Management, it provides a communication channel between the International Informix Users Group (IIUG), Local User Groups (LUGs), and IBM Data Management.

Individual Members

Individuals may join IIUG, a Local User Group, or both. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in Informix Software.

Local User Groups

Informix Local User Groups (LUGs) are independent organizations that are managed by volunteers, with a single purpose—to help their members learn more about Informix software. Informix user groups serve members in a regional or local area and range from small, informal groups that meet at a restaurant or in a company conference room to large, formal groups with hundreds of members who sponsor conferences. LUGs provide a forum for members to facilitate networking and information sharing about Informix technology and to provide feedback to IBM Data Management.

Special Interest Groups

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) provide a forum for IIUG members with a specific area of interest to communicate with others who share their interest. SIGs are recognized entities of IIUG and have the same opportunity to influence Informix product direction that LUGs have. Examples of SIG email discussion groups are:

- Euro-ug@iiug.org is a forum for European-based user groups to discuss issues specific to using Informix products in Europe.
- IDS@iiug.org is a discussion list for those interested in all aspects of the Informix Dynamic Server (IDS) engine.
- linux-informix@iiug.org is an email discussion list that focuses on the use of Informix Software on Linux.

Getting Started

You have questions...we have answers! If you are considering starting a new Informix user group, you probably wonder what is involved, who will be there to support you, and where to begin. This section will probably answer most of your questions but if you wish additional information, email ug@iiug.org.

Why do people join local Informix user groups?

Simply put, people join Informix user groups to become part of a larger community of Informix users, to exchange experiences and knowledge with other people who share their interest in using Informix technology more efficiently, to gain access to Informix software product information and to network with other Informix users.

Obtaining and sharing knowledge about Informix products is one of the main reasons why people join a user group. Through the IIUG Web site, members can join newsgroups and email discussion forums and visit the extensive online software repository. User groups provide members with an opportunity to exchange technical tips and techniques, but most LUGs do not conduct formal training or provide technical support. However, if enough members are interested in a specific product or technology, the group can coordinate in depth technical meetings.

"IIUG has allowed me to be a part of a group of people who strongly believe in and support the best performing database products on the market today. Being an AZIUG board member enables me to learn and share ideas with IIUG leaders and those at IBM who work very hard to improve and maintain the Informix database engines that we depend upon every day."

Deborah DeCorrevont
Arizona IIUG Board member

Should you start a new local user group?

If there is a LUG in your area that meets your needs, you might want to consider joining and participating in an existing group rather than reinventing the wheel. With dozens of LUGs throughout the world, a group could be located in your community. You can visit the IIUG Web site at <http://www.iiug.org/community/lug.html> to see if there is a LUG in your area. LUG leaders are happy to have you attend their meetings and to share their experiences with you. If you can't find a LUG that meets your needs, you can recruit a few other Informix fans and start your own group. For more information, email IIUG at ug@iiug.org.

Neil Truby from the UK IUG describes how one user group recently revived a previously dissolved user group and launched a revitalized group:

"When I started working with Informix products in 1994, there was an active Informix user group in the UK called INFUSE. Slowly it died, apparently pulled down by squabbles over group financing. A similar fate befell a briefly revived user group in late 1999.

In the summer of 2002, the International Informix User Group (IIUG) resolved to try once again to get a group going in the UK and asked for the help of UK-based IIUG members. Accordingly, in July 2002, a group of eight interested persons attended a kick-off meeting at IBM's Warwick offices. Also present were IBM representatives from Marketing, Sales, and Data Management and two IIUG Board members.

We decided to kick off the newly christened UK IUG group with a nationwide technical meeting scheduled for the end of October 2002. The strategy of the UK IUG from the

beginning was to start off as a free-to-join organisation with initially free-to-attend events, thus avoiding the mistakes of the past. Thus, this first event was organised at an IBM office in the Midlands, with IBM picking up the bill for catering and other meeting costs.

It is now two weeks after the first event. It was a huge success with nearly 120 attendees from all over the country—at a time when the calendar is full of competing IBM Data Management activities. It just goes to show that there is still an enormous appetite for Informix events, particularly those where real users are given a chance to meet and question IBM execs about the products' future.

After getting off to such a strong start, the UK IUG needs to plan its next move carefully and consolidate the interest. One of the most involved (and passionate!) sessions at the first meeting was the Informix product roadmap presentation by former Informix UK Managing Director, Barbara Stanley. Perhaps the UK IUG might try to organise more regional, debates on this subject. On the other hand, a number of third-party vendors have expressed an interest in presenting to Informix users, so here is another avenue to explore.

The UK IUG has to recognise that it is representing users of products with a limited independent shelf life, some of whom are not too happy about that fact! The challenge ahead is to engage with IBM constructively whilst continuing to be vocal and independent in articulating the groups' fears and concerns."

Neil Truby
UK IUG Steering Committee Member
<http://www.iiug.org/ukiug/>

Who will help me to get started?

IIUG and the Worldwide Informix User Group Program are available to help you get off to a good start and help your user group grow. In fact, a team that consists of two IBM Data Management representatives and two IIUG Board volunteers help new LUGs get off to a good start.

IIUG Program Manager

IBM employee

- Works with the local IBM Data Management sales liaison to help LUGs to schedule IBM speakers.
- Collaborates with IBM product management to create presentations and road shows for LUG meetings.
- Coordinates IIUG activities and communications between LUGs and local IBM Data Management offices.
- Works with IBM Marketing to promote LUG meetings.

IBM Sales Liaison

IBM employee

Provides promotional, logistical, and content assistance to each LUG. At least one IBM sales liaison is assigned to each LUG.

IIUG LUG Nut

IIUG volunteer

- Advises and mentors LUG leaders
- Hosts LUGs' Web site on the IIUG site
- Creates email aliases and membership lists
- Promotes meetings to local IIUG members through email blasts
- Helps identify speakers for meetings
- Shares best practices for managing a user group

IIUG Board Liaison

IIUG volunteer

- Acts as an ambassador to a particular local user group
- Advises and mentors to LUG leaders
- Assists in promoting LUG meetings and activities to the IIUG community
- Provides access to IIUG resources

Where should I start?

Taking the time to plan your strategy for organizing a LUG will save you time and headaches in the long run. The following list of organizational tasks will give you a sense of some of the tasks involved in starting a new LUG and the order in which they can be done. Most are common sense, obvious tasks. Review the following list, decide which tasks will be helpful to you and your LUG, and ignore the rest.

- Contact IIUG to have an IIUG Board Liaison assigned to your group
- Recruit a steering committee
- Plan a steering committee meeting
- Prepare an agenda for the organizational meeting
- Create an interest survey
- Publicize your organizational meeting
- Hold organizational meeting
- Survey attendees for their interests and needs
- Recruit volunteers
- Evaluate surveys to determine the focus of the group
- Choose interim leaders
- Draft a mission statement
- Draft Charter and Bylaws, if appropriate
- Hold meeting to approve steering committee recommendations, Charter and Bylaws, if appropriate, and elect officers
- Locate regular meeting place
- Determine regular meeting date and time
- Plan two or three programs
- Publicize your meetings
- Recruit members
- Contact IIUG to request recognition assistance
- Evaluate progress

Case study: Washington D.C. Area Informix User Group

The Washington D.C. Area Informix User Group started in 1990 by two people. After helping to organize one-day conferences for Informix users, Lester Knutsen persuaded a few other people to help with newsletter mailings and organizing events. Today, the Washington D.C. Area Informix User Group offers a training day in odd calendar years and a full-day conference in even years, with quarterly meetings throughout the year.

Nick Nobbe, Washington D.C. Area Informix User Group, offers the following words of wisdom:

- Keep it simple.
- Deliver on your promises.
- Don't overextend yourselves.
- The core group -- the board of directors -- is the driving force behind the user group.
- Do what you can with the people that you have.

Democracy might be sacrificed for efficiency and pragmatism, but the board should act quickly and with consideration for all of its members.

Nick Nobbe
Washington D.C. Area Informix User Group

Organizing a New User Group

In this section, prospective LUG leaders will find helpful tips and tricks that have been time tested by successful Informix LUGs worldwide. Feel free to take them or leave them, depending upon what works best for your group.

Visiting user group meetings

Visiting another user group is a great way to get started. You'll have the opportunity to observe how meetings are run, hear how information is presented, and note the size and mix of the group. Leaders are eager to share their experience and tips for getting started.

Recruiting a steering committee

When starting any new organization, it is much easier to share the work with a group of people than it is to try to do it alone. A core group of three to five people can be the nucleus of a steering committee that will help you plan and structure the new LUG. The steering committee will be a valuable source of ideas, contacts, and specialized expertise.

Writing a mission statement

A mission statement is not only a practical statement of what you plan to achieve, but it also conveys the spirit and priorities of the steering committee and helps keep your group focused when planning new activities.

Why are you starting an Informix user group? What will attract potential members to your meetings? What do you hope to accomplish? Some user groups address topics of general interest while others focus on specific technologies or applications and plan presentations that address their members' areas of interest.

Mission statements should be short and to the point. To help you get started, here are a few examples of mission statements from other Informix LUGs:

- To share information, learn about new products, provide technical input, discuss problems and share solutions, and network with other Informix users.
- To serve as a focal point for presenting feedback from the user group to IBM Informix Data Management.
- To train members in the use of Informix products and related technologies and to keep members informed

Identifying potential members

Potential members are co-workers, people who are interested in Informix products and live in your area, those who have a common interest in a specific application or technology, or want to network with other Informix users. User groups range in size from five members who have quarterly breakfast meetings and informal gatherings to large user groups with more than 500 members that organize mini conferences.

With your steering committee, decide who your user group members will be. Will your group include a specific segment such as users from a particular organization, application designers, or IT staff? Or will your membership consist of a mix of co-workers? Do you want to extend membership recruitment to your community, region, or state?

In addition to identifying potential members, it is helpful to decide how many members you want to have. The size of your user group will affect your meeting location and the number of volunteers that will be required to manage your LUG. It will also be a factor in choosing the type of structure for your group.

Choosing a structure

Decide how formal or informal you want your user group to be. If you plan to grow your membership to a large-sized group and offer a wide range of services, you'll need to have more structure than if you intend to meet on a regular but informal basis.

Formal structure

A formal organization has a governing board—a board of directors or elected officers, or a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and committee chairpersons.

A charter and bylaws define the structure and processes of an organization. They are not required but are recommended if you plan to grow a large group. If you choose to create these documents, they can be drafted by a small ad-hoc committee and presented to the steering committee for approval.

User groups cannot incorporate as nonprofit organizations in the U.S. However, they may incorporate as for-profit organizations with a not-for-profit objective. This means that they intend to show a profit at the end of the year and therefore, may not be subject to income tax.

Charter

A charter defines the name, purpose, and organizational structure of the user group. It provides guidelines for the directors, membership, elections, meetings, and code of ethics.

Bylaws

Bylaws define the rules and processes for governing the group. They include specific procedures for the election or appointment of officers, membership policies, responsibilities of officers, and meeting parameters. Remember that as your user group grows and changes, bylaws need to be amended so be sure to include a provision for revisions. Structure is important, but so is flexibility.

Informal structure

Most groups operate informally. If you plan to keep your group small, you only need to elect a president, secretary, and treasurer. Informally structured groups can meet at someone's home, in a conference room, or at a restaurant.

Defining Roles and Responsibilities

One of the best ways to ensure that your user group runs smoothly is to decide on roles and responsibilities early in the process. Defined roles and responsibilities allow the workload to be distributed and help avoid misunderstandings and tension that arise when no one knows who has responsibility for a task. In a formally structured organization, this can be accomplished by recruiting a board of directors or electing officers and committee chairpersons.

Board of directors

The board of directors is responsible for ensuring that the user group fulfills its mission and provides leadership, vision, and access to resources and expertise.

One way to establish your board of directors is to invite four to eight potential members to a meeting. You can use the attendees' participation and reactions as a gauge of their interest in the group. After the first meeting, you can ask if anyone is willing to serve a six-month term on the board. You can either assign titles and tasks to those who volunteer, or you can ask volunteers which position they would like. Before the end of the six-month term, you can hold an election and volunteers can either run for the position or gracefully decline.

Elected officers

You can choose to elect officers rather than create a board of directors if you wish.

- The president is responsible for guiding the user group in accordance with the mission statement, leading meetings, providing vision and overall direction, and is the official user group representative to IIUG.
- The vice president acts on behalf of the president if the president is unavailable.
- The secretary manages correspondence and records.
- The treasurer oversees financial resources, recording, and reporting.

Committees

Committees are a good way to share the tasks of running a user group. The following list might give you some ideas about establishing committees that meet the needs of your group. Most LUGs only use a fraction of the committees in this list. You can choose the ones that are appropriate for your LUG.

Committee	Responsibility
Membership	Member recruitment, status, membership communication, and maintaining updated member information in the database
Program	Scheduling and direction of speakers, presentations, and demos
Vendor Relations	Communication with hardware and software vendors
Volunteer Relations	Volunteer recruitment, management, and recognition
Marketing and Public Relations	Publicity, media relations, community relations, and promotion of special events
Newsletter	Editorial, creative development, production, and distribution of newsletters
Web Communication	Managing and maintaining the LUG Web site
Library/Resource Materials	Managing shareware, software, and group resources
Review Software	Obtaining review software and software information
Legal	Obtaining or providing legal advice
Finance	Advising and overseeing financial management
Database	Managing the membership database

Naming your user group

Most user groups' names include Informix and the city or region in which they are located. Some examples of user group names are:

- Informix User Group of the Philippines
- North Africa Informix User Group
- Informix User Group of Northern California
- St. Louis Informix User Group
- Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana Informix User Group

Budgeting for expenses

User group veterans advise LUG leaders to avoid money handling for as long as possible. Some expenses are inevitable, but through creative, resourceful management, you can keep expenses to a minimum. Most groups do not charge a membership fee, although a few groups do, ranging from \$10 to \$50 per person, per year.

If you leverage your resources, you can probably get most of your supplies and services donated. Office supplies, meeting space, refreshments, and publicity can be underwritten by IBM Data Management or by a member's employer. Contact IIUG to find out how your team can help you.

Keeping track of your members

Tracking your members is important. It's a good idea to set up your database before your first meeting so you can gather attendees' contact information at the first meeting. The simplest way to gather contact information and survey interests is for attendees to complete an application or membership profile form at their first meeting. To maximize the value of the database, keep it up to date and include members' interests. Keep the database confidential and centralized with clear accountability.

Tips for keeping track of your members:

- Bring a laptop to your meetings to make instant updates.
- Back up your database early and often. Keep a copy of the database in another location to avoid losing your membership records.
- Assign responsibility for the database to one person with designated backup volunteers who are familiar with the database.
- Configure your database to produce reports, tables, or to track information such as:
 - User group officers
 - Hardware and software vendors' contact information
 - Meeting attendance records
 - Presenter information
 - Newsletter or advertising information

Recruiting and managing volunteers

The importance of volunteers cannot be underestimated. Volunteers are critical to fulfilling your user group's mission. Members volunteer for a variety of reasons, often simply to give back in appreciation for what they have received.

Effectively using volunteers requires good management. Divide and delegate the tasks according to volunteers' skills and strengths. Don't overload volunteers, even if they are willing or they won't want to volunteer for other projects. Finally, remember that volunteers aren't being paid—don't demand perfection.

Tips for recruiting and managing volunteers:

- Make it a point to talk to each user group member on a regular basis. When you get to know them, you'll find members with special skills, knowledge, and those who are interested enough to be committed to the user group. Ask them to volunteer for specific tasks and tell them exactly what is required.

- Let your members know about the activities that your user group has planned and what you need help with. Then ask for help!
- Follow up promptly when a volunteer offers to help. Nothing turns a volunteer off more quickly than to volunteer and then not be used.
- Publicly recognize your volunteers. Find out what motives them and reward them accordingly. When you have volunteers who are especially dedicated and deserving of recognition, contact the Worldwide User Group Program Manager and ask for help in recognizing your volunteer.

Case study: Arizona Informix Users Group

<http://www.iiug.org/aziug/>

When I started attending the Arizona Informix Users Group (AZIUG) about 10 years ago, we were meeting in the basement of a large office building. Someone would bring a package of the grocery-store cookies and a couple of six-packs of generic sodas for refreshments. Rarely were more than ten users in attendance.

Over the years, the AZIUG has had its ups and downs. We eventually moved out of the basement, sometimes even meeting up in the Informix offices. Third-party vendors provided a substantial portion of support for our meetings. Still, the success and effectiveness of the group was inconsistent. About three years ago, the AZIUG was in one of its down cycles. Meetings were not held on a regular schedule and were rather poorly attended. I decided to run for President. Since I was the only candidate (the current President was trying to run a small business), I was unanimously elected. In fact, almost all of the new officers were new, except the past President, who graciously agreed to stay on as one of the VPs.

Since then, the AZIUG has enjoyed a rather long cycle of success. Knowing that this was not due to any one person's efforts, I asked the other officers why we seem to be doing so well. They responded that the group maintained consistency and provided good content for meetings. Early on, we established a regular meeting schedule and we make every effort to stick to that schedule. It's easier for people to plan to attend a meeting if they know about it well in advance.

However, consistent meetings with good content will not happen without people who are committed to the group and its goals -- committed enough to lead the group -- and who cooperate to get things done. If the commitment and cooperation are not there, the burden of running the users group invariably falls on one person, usually the IBM Sales liaison. Good user groups are run by users. We have a great group of people on the AZIUG Board, which has made serving on that Board easy and enjoyable!

In summary, I think that the essential ingredients for a successful local users group are the Four Cs:

1. Commitment
2. Cooperation
3. Content
4. Consistency

Paul Mosser
AZIUG President

Planning Your First Meeting

This section is designed to help you plan your first meeting. You only get one chance to make a first impression. So spend the time to plan a top-notch agenda so attendees will feel that it is worth their time to attend and become involved in the user group. Attendees aren't interested in coming to see a marketing or sales presentation—they're looking for "how to" information that helps them solve a technical problem or better utilize their Informix products. They want to exchange information, improve their skills, and pick up new technology tips.

Scheduling meetings

Most Informix user groups meet quarterly although some meet bimonthly. Your group can meet for two or three hours in the evening or for half-day or full-day meetings. In Europe, for example, it is difficult to schedule an evening meeting because members must travel a distance to attend. They schedule one or two all day meetings several times a year. Poll your members to find out what works best for them. Scheduling meetings too frequently makes it difficult to schedule high-quality programs and can cause interest to wane. Finally, be sure to consider parking, access, and safety for people with disabilities and whether your meeting site is easy to find.

Choose a time and place that's convenient for your target members. For example, if your group has been organized through your company, attendees might appreciate meeting onsite after work.

Planning your agenda

Take the time to survey them to find out what topics interest them the most. Then shift your resourcefulness into high gear. Try to find a presentation or speaker that will appeal to the majority of your attendees. It's a good idea to plan at least two meetings ahead so you can announce your meeting dates, times, locations, and programs so attendees will look forward to coming to future meetings. Remember to provide time for questions and answers and allow plenty of time for people to make new contacts, get to know each other, and exchange experiences and information.

Suggestions for finding good guest speakers:

- Contact the Worldwide Informix User Group Program office for suggestions and referrals.
- Approach hardware and software developers who work with Informix products.
- Ask user group members who have a special expertise to speak at a meeting.
- Invite co-workers who have developed a special application or tool to deliver a presentation.
- Contact the IIUG Board Liaison or LUG Nut for assistance.

Typical meeting agendas include:

Welcome and announcements

The meeting leader welcomes attendees and announces upcoming events or other items of interest. Try to keep announcements short and tell attendees where they can obtain more information. Take this opportunity to recruit volunteers -- the more the better.

Business session

Use this time to deal with administrative, staff, volunteer, or financial issues.

Presentations or guest speakers

Presentations or guest speakers increase the attendance at your meetings. Members who have real-life experience with Informix Software give some of the best presentations. IBM Data Management or vendors of related products, followed by a question and answer session, can be very effective. Be sure to allow plenty of time for discussion after

a presentation for questions. If a demonstration is part of the presentation, allow time for those who want more in-depth information about specific features or functionality.

Question and answer sessions

These sessions can be held at any point in the meeting -- during the business session, after a presentation, or as part of the main program, such as a roundtable discussion. Try to make sure that the meeting doesn't get too bogged down in technical detail or with questions that only interest one or two people. Encourage off line discussion if questioning gets out of hand.

Breakout sessions

Breakout sessions are sometimes used to give small groups time to address specific topics or tasks. Survey members to learn which topics they'd like to discuss in breakout sessions. Each session should have a leader even if the groups are informal. This helps to keep discussions on track, keeps people involved, and provides a single contact to follow up on questions.

Shareware and public domain software

You may want to allow time for sharing software templates, tools, or other software that is available in the public domain at some of your meetings.

Networking

Your members will want to network with each other. You can provide a break or time after the meeting for members to meet new contacts, share technical information, and socialize.

"The most popular meetings include practical tips and techniques. Our last meeting featured a presentation on data warehouse performance benchmarking and how to install Informix on Linux."

Lester Knutsen
Washington D.C. Area Informix User Group

Preparing for successful presentations

Next to choosing a winning topic, planning is the key to having a successful presentation. Here are five planning suggestions:

1. Be considerate of the presenter
Tell the presenter the size of audience that you expect. Be realistic. If the speaker is well known, consider providing publicity for the presentation. For example, you can post an announcement on your IIUG Web site or publish an article about the scheduled presentation in your group newsletter to generate interest.
2. Ask for the presenter's bio ahead of time
Be sure to get the presenter's correct name, title, and background information before your meeting so that you can provide a proper introduction.
3. Prepare your user group for the presentation
Give your members as much advance notice as possible about upcoming speakers so that they can plan to ask questions. Encourage members to bring associates or potential new members to the meeting.
4. Set ground rules
Some user groups set ground rules for presentations so that the presenter can respond to questions in an orderly manner. Presenters can encourage members to ask questions during the presentation or they may prefer that questions be held until afterward. Don't let

members interrupt or distract presenters during the presentation and try to keep the meeting as orderly as possible. Presenters are reluctant to address user groups if they are not treated with respect.

5. Make sure that someone follows up on attendees' questions
Make sure that member's questions are answered and they receive the information they need. If questions cannot be answered during the meeting, someone should record the question and the name of the person who asked the question. This is a good volunteer task. If the presenter provides evaluations, encourage attendees to return them.

Publicizing your events

It's not enough to plan a great meeting or event -- you need to publicize it to attract a large audience. IIUG can help you send email announcements and create a Web page. You can also post flyers and use newsletters to let people know what you are doing.

IIUG resources

IIUG helps you publicize your meetings in a variety of ways:

- IIUG Web site calendar
- Email blast is sent to IIUG members in your region by your LUGNut
 - Email your agenda or announcement to the Worldwide User Group Program Manager at ug@iiug.org.
 - IIUG Insider distribution to LUG leaders to send to their members.
- LUG Web sites
- Email your agenda to a usenet newsgroup called comp.databases.informix (CDI)
- Newsletters
 - You might be able to include a notice about your new user group in your company newsletter. Professional association newsletters are especially good places to promote your user group because their members have similar skills and expertise to LUG members.
 - Some user groups write and distribute their own e-newsletter.
 - Post notices (with permission!) on your company's intranet site or other related business sites.

Recruiting and retaining members

Recruiting members is easier than you might think. Your steering committee is a good place to start! If each member of the steering committee invites his or her co-workers to attend a LUG meeting, you'll be on your way. Encourage attendees to invite other Informix users to attend next time. When you send an email announcement, suggest that members send forward it to others.

The secret to retaining members is to give them what they are looking for. Encourage participation. Plan stimulating meetings with relevant technical presentations. Stay in touch with members between meetings. Remind them of IIUG resources that are available to them. Inform them of IIUG activities and events, such as Webcasts. In short, make them want to go to meetings and communicate with them regularly.

"We've used IIUG mailings to invite potential members to our annual one-day forum. Perhaps the most successful means of generating attendance and increasing membership has been to use IIUG membership list and call people to personally invite them to a meeting. Our forums feature technical sessions that offer attendees practical information that helps them solve their problems."

Lester Knutsen
Washington D.C. Area Informix User Group
<http://www.iiug.org/waiug/>

Growing a Strong and Vital User Group

Now that you've successfully launched your user group, it's time to focus on growing and maintaining your group. This section discusses how to provide the programs, services, and benefits that will help your user group thrive and grow.

Planning meetings that keep members coming back

Ask yourself, "What topics would motivate *me* to attend a meeting? What do *I* want to get out of meetings?" Chances are the topics and information that interests you will interest the majority of your members. Give members a good reason to attend meetings. Members are always interested in new Informix products, development tools, new technologies, and data architectures, so consider these topics when planning your meetings.

Staying in touch with your members' changing needs should be a priority so you can stay abreast of their constantly changing needs to enable you to plan effective programs and services that are critical to your group's long-term success.

Guidelines for planning successful meetings:

1. Stay focused
2. Begin and end your meetings on time. Have an agenda that sets clear expectations for the meeting. Keep the meeting on track and try not to let discussions stray from the agenda. When the discussion gets side tracked, you can suggest that the subject be discussed after the meeting or at a later time.
3. Welcome newcomers
Newcomers are the lifeblood of a group. They are potential members and can be a valuable resource and will help the user group to avoid becoming stagnant. Ask members to greet newcomers and find out what they would like to get out of the user group. Some groups assign mentors to new members to help them integrate and get involved in the group.
4. Encourage participation
Members feel more like part of the group when they are involved. Get people talking to each other. Encourage comments from the audience. Ask people to contribute ideas and suggestions. You might want to draft a survey to gather contact information, interests, skills, and list the tasks that are needed. Members who have experienced a range of product issues and have resolved a variety of problems can share information with the group or could be a good presenter.
5. Balance structured and unstructured time
Create an agenda that structures time for announcements, user group business, speakers, demonstrations, and presentations. Also allow plenty of time for socializing, questions and answers, hands-on demonstrations, and interaction with the speaker and breakout sessions. Each group has different needs—try to find the best balance for your user group. Remember that attention spans can be short, especially after a long workday. Keep the structured portion of the meeting to 45 minutes and not more than an hour. If you sense that attendees are tired or bored, try to cut that portion of the presentation short and move on to the next agenda item.
6. Provide useful presentations and information
Part of the user group's mission is to provide useful information and help members solve specific computing problems. If members leave meetings feeling that they have received

at least one nugget of information that will help them do their job better, you will have succeeded. Keep in mind that attendees have different levels of technical expertise. Continually be on the lookout for topics and presenters for future meetings. If you cannot find enough interesting topics for each meeting, contact the LUGNut at LUGNUT@iiug.org or ug@iiug.org

7. **Communicate with members after each meeting**

Following up with an email containing a summary of what occurred at the meeting and a reminder of the next meeting gives you an opportunity to communicate with your members, which is essential for keeping members interested and eager to attend future meetings.

Special interest groups

Encourage members to find a Special Interest Group (SIG) that interests them. SIGs provide an online forum for IIUG members with specific areas of interest to communicate with others who share similar interests. Through email discussion lists, members can share technical tips and information with their peers and provide feedback to IBM Data Management on specific technologies and products. A list of SIGs can be found on the IIUG Web site at http://www.iiug.org/resources/SIG_forums_list.html

Newsgroups and email discussion forums

Thousands of users participate in email discussion forums every day. Sharing information increases their knowledge of Informix products. You can find a list of these groups at <http://www.iiug.org/resources/newsgroups.html>

Webcasts

IIUG sponsors Webcasts that educate its members about the future and technical details of Informix-related products. You can find information about upcoming and past Webcasts at <http://www.iiug.org/news/webcasts.html>

Software repository

IIUG maintains an extensive online software repository of Informix-related software. This is one of the most popular resources available on the IIUG Web site <http://www.iiug.com/software/index.html>

Discounts

Distributors, magazine publishers, and other computer-related businesses may offer discounts to your LUG members. You can offer a potentially loyal customer base in exchange for money-saving discounts.

In-house alliances

If your LUG is sponsored by your employer, build a strong relationship with internal groups such as the IT department. Your LUG can become a good resource for the IT department, disseminate information, or conduct special training for your organization.

Industry events

Events such as trade shows and seminars provide opportunities to meet and connect with new vendors and expand your pool of LUG meeting presenters. You may even sponsor a booth at an important industry trade show to gain visibility for your group. Contact the Worldwide Informix User Group Program Manager ug@iiug.org to find future trade shows that IBM Data Management is participating in and how you can gain visibility for your LUG.

Staying in Touch with Members

Staying in touch with LUG members between meetings is important to your group's success. This section describes many of the communication tools and services provided by the Worldwide User Group Program and IIUG to help you communicate with your members and keep them up to date on IIUG activities.

IIUG Resources

Communication tools for IIUG leaders and members

- Quarterly email IIUG newsletter for LUG leaders to distribute to their members
- Biweekly email IIUG Insider, which is sent to LUG leaders
- Representation on the Informix User Group Council (IUGLC)
- IIUG membership referral incentive program

IIUG Web Site

The IIUG Web site, <http://www.iiug.org>, contains a gold mine of resources and information for IIUG members.

- Home <http://www.iiug.org>
- Join IIUG <http://www.iiug.org/iiug/join.html>
- Member Area <http://www.iiug.org/members>
- Calendar <http://www.iiug.org/calendar>
- Software <http://www.iiug.org/software/index.html>
- Local User Groups <http://www.iiug.org/community/lug.html>
- Discussion Groups <http://www.iiug.org/resources/newsgroups.html>
- IIUG Insider <http://www.iiug.org/news/insider.html>
- Webcast Corner <http://www.iiug.org/news/webcasts.html>
- President Letters <http://www.iiug.org/news/letters.html>
- Online Resources http://www.iiug.org/resources/online_resources.html

Helpful IBM Sites

- IBM Informix home page <http://www.ibm.com/software/data/informix>
- Informix product family news
Informix Today <http://www-3.ibm.com/software/data/informix/news/3.ibm.com/software/data/informix/informixtoday/>
- IBM Informix support site <http://www.ibm.com/software/data/informix/support>
- Data Management Certification
Program <http://www.ibm.com/software/data/db2/skills/cert.html>
- Informix IBM PartnerWorld
for Developers page <http://www.developer.ibm.com/data/informix/index.html>
- Recent data management product
announcements <http://www.ibm.com/software/data/launch>
- Upcoming IBM US conferences <http://www.ibm.com/services/learning/conf>

Creating a LUG Web Site

LUG Web sites provide access to IIUG and LUG information and announcements and email access for all members. It's easy to create your own Web site. Free server space and resources are provided by IIUG or you can maintain your site through a local provider.

Your Web site can help you to:

- Announce upcoming events
- Provide a forum for sharing information and discussing issues
- Post your LUG's newsletter
- Promote your LUG
- Establish an online library of shareware for download. For many groups, an online library has replaced the traditional disk-based software library. Be sure to check specific software licensing terms before you post software.

How to Create a LUG Web site

IIUG makes free space and resources available for LUGs to create their own Web pages. This service includes space on the IIUG Web server for LUG HTML documents and login IDs for file transfer.

Login IDs

A login ID is established for each user who will be working with the group's Web files. The LUG can store its Web files in the ID's personal Web area. Many user groups use their user group acronym but your LUG can choose an ID that is appropriate and is a legal Unix login ID.

LUG Web directory

Your chapter's HTML files are placed in a directory called `public_html` under your login ID. All subdirectories on the LUG page must be under `public_html`.

For example, suppose your LUG is called the Almost Big Informix User Group. ABIUG wants to create its own page on the IIUG site. You request a login ID. An IIUG Board member will create a login ID called "abiug" on <http://www.iiug.org> and send you a password. You place the ABIUG HTML files in the `public_html` directory in ABIUG's home directory. The URL for your Web site is <http://www.iiug.org/abiug>.

The `abiug/public_html` directory is writable by the Unix ID `abiug`. The developer can update files in that directory from this login by transferring the HTML and Web files by FTP.

Creating Web pages

When you create links in your Web pages, use relative links, or URLs. That is, leave the host name off of the URL specified in your `<A HREF>` tags. This will allow your site to be portable in case you want to move it to another server or to mirror it on different Web servers.

For example, if ABIUG had an HTML file called `events.html` in the directory listing upcoming group events, it is better to use `Current Events` in ABIUG's site, rather than ``

Permissions, directories, and conventions

Most of the common Web conventions apply to the files on your site. HTML files should have `.html` or `.htm` extensions. ASCII test files should have `.txt` extensions and GIF files should have `.gif` extensions.

The public_html directory must have read and write permissions. Upload a copy of your site into this directory and name it index.html. To make your site available to the public, the site must also have public read permission set.

Using the IIUG Web site server

The IIUG Web site is used for supporting IIUG administrative processing and Web services. IIUG members with Guest IDs should limit their use of this site to Web page development. It might be more convenient for you to create your pages on a local system, then upload them to www.iiug.org.

Uploads are handled via FTP by utilizing the login/password for either your personal maintenance account or the account associated with your LUG (abiug, for example).

Ready, Set, Go!

This document describes the many benefits of IIUG membership. Sharing information that helps you better use the Informix products that you work with every day and having the opportunity to influence the direction of the Informix product portfolio are important. But the personal benefits should not be overlooked. Members say that they have made lifelong friendships through their affiliation with IIUG.

Keep this guide handy to use as a resource as your LUG grows and your needs change. If you have any questions that are not covered in this document, you can email the Worldwide Informix User Group Program at ug@iiug.org.

Enjoy your experience!