

The Functioning of ICFP

Version 2024

On behalf of the ICFP Steering Committee

Inspired by the Principles of POPL and the Practices of PLDI

Goal

Our goal is to create a contract between ICFP organizers, ICFP authors, and ICFP participants that defines essential organizational and reviewing policies. We wish to establish clear expectations for authors while allowing plenty of leeway for organizers to innovate. We anticipate that the contract will change over time, but when it does, we'll inform the community and provide a justification for the change.

The remainder of this document is organized topically. Each topic has two subsections: *Prescriptions* and *Suggestions*. *Prescriptions* are firm policies; we expect that the organizers for each incarnation of ICFP will adhere to the policies. In cases where the organizers feel an exception or change is warranted, they must first consult with the SC. *Suggestions* are best (or at least very good) practices that we expect organizers to strongly consider.

Definitions

CFP: Call for papers

COI: Conflict of interest

DBR: Double-blind reviewing

EC: SIGPLAN Executive Committee

OC: ICFP Organizing Committee (for a single instance of the conference)

PC: ICFP Program Committee

SC: ICFP Steering Committee

SIGPLAN: ACM Special Interest Group on Programming Languages

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Topics

Managing Change

This topic addresses the meta-policy of how the SC manages changes in policy.

Communication

Prescriptions

Pending changes to prescriptions and suggestions should be clearly communicated to the community. All changes in prescriptions should be discussed at an open meeting at the conference.

Change log

Prescriptions

For each change to this document, a date and rationale should be added to the change log at the end of the document.

Surveys

Suggestions

Surveys of authors, reviewers, and attendees are a good mechanism for gathering community feedback. Careful alignment of survey questions from year to year and with those from other SIGPLAN conferences may allow meaningful comparisons to be drawn longitudinally and among the conferences.

Conference Organization

SC Composition

Prescriptions

The Steering Committee meets at every ICFP. Its members are determined by the following rules:

- The current SIGPLAN Chair and SIGPLAN Vice-Chair will be ex officio members of the Steering Committee.
- The General and Program Chairs from future and recent conferences will be members of the Steering Committee. A person that accepts the position of General or Program Chair for ICFP(n) becomes a member of the Steering Committee up to and including the ICFP(n+2) meeting.

- Four members of the Steering Committee will be members-at-large, serving four-year terms.
- The ICFP Publicity Chair, serving a three-year term, will be a member of the Steering Committee.
- The ICFP Industrial Relations Chair, serving a two-year term, will be a member of the Steering Committee.
- The ICFP Diversity Chair, serving a two-year term, will be a member of the Steering Committee.

The General Chair of the ICFP(n) conference will be the Steering Committee Chair for the period after the conclusion of the ICFP(n+1) conference until the end of the ICFP(n+2) conference and will chair the SC meeting at the ICFP(n+2) conference. General Chairs and Program Chairs of future instances of ICFP will be full members of the steering committee as soon as they accept their positions.

Members-at-large are appointed by the Steering Committee. The Publicity Chair, Industrial Relations Chair, and Diversity Chair are selected by their predecessors in consultation with the SC.

To preserve continuity, the Publicity Chair, Industrial Relations Chair, and Diversity Chair should appoint a co-chair in the final year of their terms who will become the next Chair. The co-chair can observe and learn during that time with the intention that the co-chair becomes the new chair in the following year(s). A co-chair should be chosen in consultation with the SC.

If an SC member stands down prematurely, then the SC will appoint a replacement. If an SC Chair (or GC who is due to become SC Chair) stands down prematurely then the SC will first seek a replacement from among the remaining SC members.

Suggestions

The [PACMPL Advisory Board rules](#) ask for one representative from the SC. Consider using a member-at-large slot for this position.

Selection of Organizing Committee

Prescriptions

The General Chair for ICFP(n+2) is selected by the SC for ICFP(n), subject to the approval of the EC. The General Chair selects the PC Chair with the approval of the SC and the EC. The General and Program Chairs must come from different institutions. The General and PC chairs select other members of the OC. See also the [SIGPLAN General Chair Guidelines](#) and the [SIGPLAN Program Chair Guidelines](#); those documents contain information about all SIGPLAN conferences, not just ICFP.

Suggestions

The selection of General and PC Chairs should, over time, represent the ICFP community, in terms of its diversity in all dimensions.

To preserve continuity, chairs of co-located events, like the Video and Student Research Competition, chairs should appoint a co-chair in the final year(s) of their terms. The co-chair can observe and learn during that time with the intention that the co-chair becomes the new chair in the following year(s). A co-chair should be chosen in consultation with the General Chair.

The Industrial Relations and Video chairs may stay for multiple terms if this is desired by both the SC and the Chair. The General and PC chairs may at their discretion appoint additional members of the OC, including a Local Chair who can liaise with the conference venue. The General Chair may consider appointing an Accessibility Chair.

Conference Venue

Prescriptions

The conference venue is chosen by the General Chair, in consultation with the SC. The SC strives to identify venues that reflect the diversity of the ICFP community. The conference location alternates between North America and Europe with an occasional stint in another continent (about once every five years).

Suggestions

The conference location should be at least every five years in Asia; if possible, even more frequently. The General Chair should consider appointing an Accessibility Chair; SIGPLAN PAC support may be available to help attendees (e.g., for an accompanying person).

Program Committee Composition

Prescriptions

The PC is selected by the PC chair in consultation with the General Chair and the SC. The composition of the PC is subject to approval by the EC Vice Chair. The PC follows the [Guidelines for the Program Chair of a SIGPLAN Event](#).

Topical, personal, geographical, and institutional diversity is critical to the long term vitality of ICFP. ICFP adheres to the [SIGPLAN Diversity Policy](#). In addition:

- PC members should not serve on the PC more often than once every three years. No one should serve on the PC (whether as a Chair or regular PC member) for more than two years in a row.
- The size of the PC should be such that, given the expected number of submissions, each PC member will review about 5-8, but no more than 10 papers.

Suggestions

- The PC Chair should appoint one or more Associate Chairs whose job is to help manage submissions. The PC Chair and Associate Chairs are not expected to review papers themselves. The PC Chair should divide the submissions between themselves and the Associate Chairs. Each chair is responsible for monitoring the discussion and keeping track of the reviewers assigned to their collection of papers. The PC Chair is in overall charge and should loosely monitor even the papers they have not assigned to themselves.
- The PC Chair of year n+1 should be invited to participate in the process for year n. At the PC Chair of year n+1's and PC Chair of year n's agreement, this participation should be in the form either of a silent observer or as a PC member / Associate Chair. If the former, the PC Chair of year n+1's papers are not held to a higher standard; if the latter, then the PC Chair of year n+1 functions like a PC member / Associate Chair in all other respects, with the possible exception of a lighter load. Either way, the PC Chair of year n+1 is not allowed to see or comment on papers they are conflicted with. The intention of this clause is to give the PC Chair of year n+1 an understanding of how the process works in year n, before they Chair the program committee in n+1.
- The PC Chair should avoid selecting PC members who collaborate regularly with each other or PC members from the same institution in the same area.
- PC Chairs are encouraged to include researchers who have not yet had the opportunity to serve on a PC.
- PC Chairs are encouraged to consider the submission profile of previous years when assessing the coverage and diversity of their committees. Focusing only on the accepted papers from previous years may skew the ICFP profile.
- The PC Chair of year n+1 is encouraged to finalize the PC in time to announce it at the conference of year n.

Timeline

Prescriptions

The deadline for submissions is advertised as a fixed date. It is firm. No extensions are given.

Suggestions

- September, Year n-2: General Chair selection
- March, Year n-1: PC Chair selection
- June, Year n-1: Discuss candidate PC with the SC, then obtain VC approval
- July, Year n-1: Finalize PC
- September, Year n-1: Publish PC and CFP @ ICFP n-1
- March, Year n: Submission deadline
- April, Year n: Author response period
- May, Year n: PC meeting, and author notification
- June, Year n: Camera ready deadline
- August/September, Year n: Proceedings available for download one week before conference

- September, Year n: Conference

Deadlines for submission and author response should be advertised as a fixed date anywhere on earth (AOE).

Conference Dates

Prescriptions

ICFP takes place in either late August or September.

Suggestions

- The PC Chair should consider a paper submission deadline at least one week apart from SPLASH deadlines to accommodate authors wishing to submit to both conferences.
- ICFP notification should be coordinated such that it is at least two weeks prior to the deadlines of the colocated workshops.
- The conference should not overlap major religious (or other) holidays; as avoiding these dates can be complex, consider at least varying the date across the years to help avoid repeatedly falling on the same ones.

Conference Format

Prescriptions

ICFP organizers should strive to encompass all of the following items to ensure continuity.

- Student Research Competition
- ICFP Programming Contest
- JFP Special Issue
- Co-located events coordinated by designated workshop chairs
- Code of conduct as stated in the [SIGPLAN Conference Code of Conduct Policy](#)
- Keynotes
- Artifact Evaluation Committee where authors may submit programs, test sets, proof scripts, and so on after a paper has been accepted
- Programming Languages Mentoring Workshop
- ICFP has traditionally had only one track of talks, but the General Chair should ensure that space is available for multiple tracks
- Presentations of JFP papers at ICFP. This can include all categories of JFP paper, including pearls, tools papers, tutorials, education matters, etc., but not book reviews, PhD abstracts, or papers previously published at ICFP.

Suggestions

- Events for some groups attending ICFP; past events have included a Women@ICFP Lunch and a LGBTQ+ Lunch.
- A FARM Performance Evening
- Virtual conferences generally need more organization for social activities; consider adding a “Social Chair” to organize these.
- Support for virtual participation with a low-cost online-only registration option.

Review Process

Author Anonymity

Prescriptions

ICFP is committed to use of double-blind reviewing (DBR). The primary goal of DBR is to *help PC members review papers with minimal bias*. The process should be such that authors are able to withhold their identity, and reviewers are able to avoid learning their identity:

1. Submissions should not have author names and references to previous work must be in the third person.
2. Authors are not required to “hide” their submissions: they can put them on web pages and give talks about them.
3. Reviewers should notify the PCC if anonymity is an obstacle to sound and objective reviewing of a paper.
4. Author identities should not be revealed before the conclusion of the PC meeting (blind-till-accept).

Given the use of DBR, the PCC must vet any external reviewers suggested by a PC member.

Suggestions

Provision (2) above is intended to prevent DBR from inhibiting normal dissemination of scientific ideas. Authors should not, however, take it as a license to explicitly lobby the PC or likely reviewers on behalf of their work. While we will not attempt to codify or police such behavior, PC chairs may wish to remind authors of their obligation to live up to the spirit as well as the letter of DBR.

Confidentiality

Prescriptions

ICFP follows the SIGPLAN policy on [submission confidentiality](#). Reviewers should not interact with authors about their submitted papers. Any interaction should go through the PC Chair.

Conflicts of Interest

Prescriptions

Authors and PC members must adhere to SIGPLAN's [conflict of interest policy](#). Authors and reviewers must declare their COIs when submitting or bidding for papers. The PC Chair designates a non-conflicted senior PC member to manage the entire reviewing process of papers that have a PC Chair conflict.

Ownership of Reviews

Prescriptions

The PC Chair needs to inform PC members that they are subject to the [SIGPLAN review policy](#) when they are invited.

Expert and External Reviews

ICFP is committed to identifying expert reviewers for every submission, insofar as possible. By "expert", we mean a reviewer who is very well versed and current in related work in the field. Authors gain confidence in the outcome of review decisions when expert reviewers are involved. That said, we believe that well-informed, but non-expert reviews also play a significant role in acceptance decisions: they represent the majority of the future readership of a paper, and involving them mitigates against topical balkanization.

Prescriptions

- The PC Chair should strive to identify at least two (PC or external) expert reviewers for each paper that the PC Chair deems to be competitive, but should reserve the right not to do so in rare cases where a sufficient number of willing external reviewers cannot be identified or where no single expert covering all topics of the paper can be identified. The PC Chair should also strive to identify at least one (PC or external) informed non-expert reviewer.
- The PC Chair should strive to ensure that all reviews are available prior to the author response period, unless (in rare cases) the response itself raises critical new issues that justify an additional review. The PC Chair should forward reviews that only become available after the author response period out of band to the authors for response.
- External reviewers will be encouraged to participate in online discussion of the papers they have been assigned; however, they should not see unrelated online PC discussions.

Suggestions

Several successful formulas for obtaining expert external reviews have been used in past incarnations of ICFP and other excellent conferences in the field:

- The PC Chair may encourage (or even require) PC members to identify candidate external reviewers for each paper they review.
- The PC Chair (sometimes in consultation with the PC) identifies a roster of external reviewers after submissions have closed.
- The PC Chair appoints a "guardian" PC member for each paper, whose job is to identify (in consultation with the chair) external reviewers.

Submission of Supplementary Material

Prescriptions

Authors will be allowed to submit supplementary material (proofs, software, datasets, etc.) at the time of submission. The PC and the assigned reviewers may access this material throughout the reviewing process, but they are not required to consult this material.

Suggestions

- Past instances of ICFP also allowed authors to submit some history of the submitted paper, for instance, reviews from other conferences of previously submitted versions of the paper as well as responses to these reviews. Prior reviews and the responses will be made available only to reviewers that declare that they reviewed the paper before. Fresh reviewers will not be able to access the previous set of reviews. This process establishes some continuity between separate conference submissions and serves to diminish the gap to a journal reviewing process.
- PC Chairs are encouraged to experiment with an artifact evaluation process, where authors may submit programs, proof scripts, data sets, etc for evaluation after the paper has been accepted. This process has no influence on acceptance of a paper.

Evaluation Criteria and Acceptance Ratio

Prescriptions

There will be no numerical limit on the number of accepted papers.

The PACM Steering Committee requires us to collect statistics about the review process; the [precise requirements are here](#).

Suggestions

- The primary job of the PC is not to attempt to assess the long-term "importance" of work, but to vet the papers for exposure to the wider PL community, which will ultimately render judgment on importance.
- The PC should focus its deliberations on whether
 - there is a genuine research contribution,
 - the approach is fundamentally sound,
 - members of the community will benefit from reading the paper, and
 - the paper (and supporting material, if any) contains sufficient information for others to reproduce and build on the results.
- The committee should err on the side of accepting a paper that is controversial, that is, one that, after discussion, still has both a strong advocate and a strong detractor.
- The committee should lean toward accepting papers that explicate their results clearly.

PC Submissions

PC submissions can be problematic to manage, but we believe that on balance, the benefits of allowing PC submissions exceed the costs.

Prescriptions

ICFP will allow PC submissions, but disallow submissions by the General Chair and the PC Chair.

[SIGPLAN policy](#) requires that PC papers be held to a higher standard than other papers except in the case that the conference adopts full double blind reviewing and has a program committee with at least fifty members. As of 2024 all SIGPLAN conferences including ICFP have moved to a model in which PC papers are *not* held to a higher standard, reviewing is full double-blind, and the PC is large.

If reverting to the old model in which PC papers are held to a higher standard, then the ICFP criterion for acceptability of a PC paper is *clear accept*: there is at least one strong advocate and no detractor. Acceptance decisions for PC papers will be announced at the same time as other author decisions are announced; i.e., the PC will not be aware of any PC paper decisions until the PC meeting is complete. Decisions about PC papers should be made after all other decisions have been made so that the committee knows what a "clear accept" standard means and so that PC papers cannot crowd out non-PC papers.

The policy on PC submission must be clearly explained to candidate PC members when their participation on the PC is solicited. It must also be explained in the call for papers.

Suggestions

- For alignment with other SIGPLAN conferences, PC Chairs should prefer the new model in which the PC is large and there is no higher standard for PC papers.

Diversity of Submissions

Prescriptions

In an effort to achieve a balanced, diverse program, each author may be listed as a coauthor on a maximum of four submissions.

Suggestions

- Submissions from underrepresented groups are encouraged.

Author Response

Prescriptions

ICFP will allow authors to respond to reviews. Authors will be allowed to read all reviews and scores. Authors will be strongly encouraged to be brief, but there is no prescribed maximum response length. Authors must be allowed at least three working days to respond. Reviewers are expected to acknowledge the response in the final reviews.

Suggestions

- The PC Chair may choose to state that the PC is not obliged to read or respond to author responses beyond a certain designated length.

PC Management

ICFP traditionally held in-person PC meetings. However, as of 2019 all PC meetings have been either virtual or replaced entirely by online discussion. Given other changes, such as significant increases in the size of the PC, it is no longer viable to hold in-person PC meetings.

Prescriptions

An extensive online discussion period should be held. The online discussion period should be a minimum of one week, but two (or more) is strongly preferred. During the discussion period, the PC will be allowed to see the reviews for all papers for which they have no conflicts and to participate in the discussions of those papers. Online discussion must be actively facilitated by the PC Chair, Associate Chairs, and Discussion Leads.

If there is a PC meeting then it should be held online after the online discussion period.

The PC Chair will strive to ensure, prior to the PC meeting, that every *competitive* paper has

- at least three PC reviews
- at least one, and preferably two expert reviews
- at least one non-expert review

Suggestions

- Nierstrasz's [Identify the Champion](#) (ABCD/XYZ) scoring process is considered a best practice to select papers, and we strongly encourage PC Chairs to use it. However, the chair should feel free to add other reviewing criteria, with the goal of streamlining the discussion process and better calibrating reviewer baselines.
- PC Chairs should consider including a confidence score in addition to an expertise score. Expertise is a measure of how much experience a reviewer has in a particular area. Confidence is a measure of how confident they are in their assessment of the paper. The two are not always correlated.
- PC members should be strongly encouraged to submit reviews as they are completed; this practice makes it easier for the PC Chair to monitor progress and identify problems (e.g., the need for additional reviewers) early. Allowing PC members to change their reviews after they have been submitted increases their willingness to submit reviews as they go.
- The PC Chair should allow all reviewers (PC or external) to see decisions for the papers they have reviewed before decisions are publicly announced.
- PC Chairs should arrange some synchronous online discussion (e.g. in a Zoom meeting) between the reviewers of controversial papers even if a full online PC meeting is not scheduled.
- If an online PC meeting is held:
 - Try to keep the PC meeting short.

- Schedule the PC meeting at a time that is feasible for PC members to attend from their time zones. Holding it over multiple days can help.
- Encourage reviewers to try to reach consensus before the PC meeting. The most important papers to discuss at the PC meeting are the controversial ones.
- The PC Chair may wish to identify major reviewer disagreements prior to the PC meeting and seek second opinions where necessary to help resolve the disagreements.
- Instead of considering the papers in order from highest-ranked to lowest, consider the papers in a quasi-random order (see article by Kathleen Fisher in [SIGPLAN Notices, 46\(4\):17, April 2011](#)).

Decision Rationale

Suggestions

PC Chairs are encouraged to ensure that author-visible decision rationales are made available for all papers. The purpose of the rationale is to provide the authors with a concise, coherent summary of the committee's concluding assessment, something that is frequently not clear from the sum of the individual reviews.

Distinguished Papers

Each year, as part of the process of determining which papers to publish, the ICFP PC also selects distinguished papers that they think provide the best balance of importance, exposition, and novelty. These papers are recognized with ACM SIGPLAN Distinguished Paper Awards, and specially held up to the community as papers not to be missed.

Prescriptions

The PC awards the SIGPLAN Distinguished Paper Award to selected distinguished papers, up to SIGPLAN's limit for such papers (currently 10% of accepted papers).

Suggestions

- Nominations may be solicited from the PC and ERC, and will also include the top 10% of papers. PC/ERC members should not nominate papers by authors they are conflicted with. When deciding on the top 10%, compare normalized scores if possible; that is, each reviewer's score should be normalized by that reviewer's average score before comparing across reviewers.
- PC papers may be nominated.
- A selection committee, composed of a number of members of the PC and ERC, reviews the nominations, and selects distinguished papers among them. The usual conflict-of-interest rules apply to this process.
- The PC Chair should solicit nominations that come with a brief rationale from the PC and then convene a committee to choose the distinguished papers from the PC, ERC, and SC in such a way that no member of the committee has a conflict with any of the papers. The committee looks at the papers, the reviews, and the nomination statements and decides which papers to award.

PC Member Responsibilities

Prescriptions

The main goal of the conference reviewing process is to provide timely high-quality assessments and feedback on submitted papers. Therefore, PC members must commit to reading all of their assigned papers and writing their own reviews. PC members may also suggest additional reviewers, but they must not subcontract reading or review writing duties to others. PC members may share and discuss papers with students and colleagues (subject to the usual confidentiality and COI provisions), and incorporate information from such discussions into their review, but the PC member is solely responsible for writing the review. When a student is involved in reviewing, the PC Chair should be informed so that the student receives appropriate credit.

PC members must commit to being available to participate in the online discussion for a short period each day throughout the online discussion period. PC members must strive to attend the online PC meeting virtually.

PC members should be directed to the [SIGPLAN Republication Policy](#). If a related version of a submission appeared in a workshop, the PC should take into account whether the call for papers for the workshop stated that publication in the workshop was not intended to preclude later publication.

Paper Categories

Prescriptions

ICFP solicits three kinds of papers: regular research papers, functional pearls, and experience reports. Unlike regular papers, pearls and experience reports do not require original research contributions. Pearls are full-length papers, whereas experience reports are shorter. Pearls and experience reports must be clearly marked as such in the title, they must be submitted in their respective category, and they are reviewed with a different focus.

A pearl is an elegant essay about something related to functional programming. While a pearl is not required to report original research, it should be concise, instructive, and entertaining. The quality of exposition and writing is of paramount importance.

An Experience Report should describe the experience of using functional programming in practice, whether in industrial application, tool development, programming education, or any other area. The experience or thesis must be relevant to ICFP, but it need not consist of novel scientific results.

Suggestions

The current situation with experience reports is somewhat unsatisfactory, with low success rates. In an attempt to address this, PC Chairs may lift the size limit, even to full-length. A dedicated subcommittee may be set aside to evaluate experience reports as they need to be judged to a different standard than regular papers and pearls. However, experience reports may be restricted to short presentations.

Experimentation

ICFP encourages General Chairs and PC Chairs to experiment with new approaches to conference management, reviewing, and evaluation of submissions.

Prescriptions

All deviations from prescriptions in this document must be endorsed by the SC and must be clearly described in the call for papers.

Suggestions

Items that might be considered are

- External review committee

Change Log

2024-09-18

Multiple updates reflecting changes in the way in which ICFP is run:

- Associate Chairs to assist the PC Chair
- In-person PC meetings are no longer an option
- Diversity Chair
- Co-chairs to support continuity
- Full double-blind reviewing
- Higher standard for PC papers no longer required if reviews are full double-blind and the PC is sufficiently large
- Commitment to accommodating JFP presentations at ICFP
- Support for virtual participation with a low-cost online-only registration option
- Option for two tracks to better accommodate additional events such as JFP presentations
- Maximum number of submissions per person
- Updated description of what experience reports are

2022-12-24

Revised texts regarding various chairs and co-chairs. Each PC member will review about 5-8, but no more than 10 papers. PC members do not need to commit to attending the PC meeting in-person, but they must strive to attend it in-person (for in-person meetings).

2022-10-25

Clarified that Experience Reports encompass pedagogy papers too, so are not necessarily about a “project”.

2020-01-26

Removed information about PACMPL statistics collection, replaced with a link.

2020-01-22

Removed information that was redundant with SIGPLAN policies, adding links to the policies

2019-08-20

Made AEC and PLMW prescriptions since they have been successful additions to ICFP. Add a suggestion about additional events such as LGBTQ lunch to encourage continuity. Revised prescription on PC meetings to incorporate recent experiments in online PC meetings. Revise discussion of reviewing to make lightweight double-blind a prescription. Add clarification about co-chair roles. Add mention of the Accessibility Chair.

Changed prescription of anonymity from single-blind to lightweight double-blind. The purpose of double-blind reviewing is to help the reviewers come to an initial judgement about the paper without bias, not to make it impossible for them to discover the authors if they were to try. The decision to use a lightweight process is in order that nothing should be done in the name of anonymity that weakens the submission or makes the job of reviewing the paper more difficult (e.g., important background references should not be omitted or anonymized). In addition, authors should feel free to disseminate their ideas or draft versions of their paper as they normally would. For instance, authors may post drafts of their papers on the web or give talks on their research ideas.

2019-07-15

Added a Prescription from PACM Steering Committee that we should collect various detailed statistics about the reviewing process.

2018-09-26

Added the Industrial Relations Chair to the steering committee, to ensure continuity with our industrial relations and keep him/her informed with any ongoing SC discussions.

2018-09-26

Created this change log, to maintain a record about why certain decisions have been made.