

SIGPLAN and NSF:

Finding People; Improving Communication

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Background: The Search for Program Directors

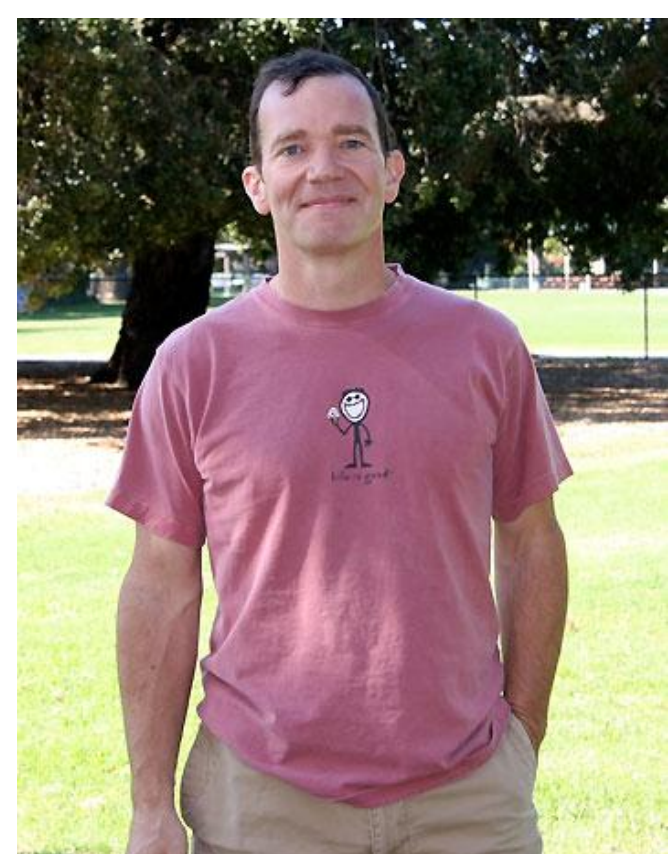
- The National Science Foundation (NSF), a U.S. federal agency, is an essential source of academic research funding and fills a key priority-setting function for the community in the United States
- Program Directors are NSF employees who organize peer-review grant panels, make funding decisions, communicate with (potential) PIs, etc.
 - Usually as a two-year rotation via a temporary leave from home institution
- The best way to ensure a high-quality review process for PL research is to have PL researchers serve as NSF Program Directors
 - *The community should view this role as being important -- like program chairs and journal editors!*
- **Sol Greenspan**, the Program Director and team lead for the Software and Hardware Foundations Program, **approached the SIGPLAN leadership for help finding a PL-focused Program Director**



What SIGPLAN Did: Discuss and Learn

- We took the **longer-term view** that, like some other communities, SIGPLAN should assume an informal responsibility for:
 - Finding potential Program Directors, which can take years of thought and planning for an individual
 - Learning the (remarkably generous) logistics of a two-year rotation and sharing that knowledge
 - Learning what the job entails and why it is rewarding and important
- So, as computer scientists, we created an **electronic discussion list** 😊
 - `pl-nsf-discuss@cs.washington.edu`
 - Initially invited about 30 leaders from the community
 - Publicly announced and open to anyone, but conversation private to current members
- List discussions directly addressed our goals
 - Questions and answers between us and NSF about, “what Program Directors do”
 - Brainstormed list of potential individuals; made suggestions to NSF
 - Discussed barriers and ways to lower them

Near-Term Success



- Awareness of the need and opportunity led to solutions!
- **Bill Pugh** (University of Maryland) served as a part-time consultant in Spring 2011 to organize PL-related panels, etc.
- **John Reppy** (University of Chicago) will begin a rotation starting August 1, 2011
- Please thank Bill and John and ask them about the role of NSF!



Ongoing Steps

- Continue to cultivate interest in the community in taking roles at NSF
- Provide two-way communication between NSF and the SIGPLAN community
- Help John, Sol, and other NSF employees as requested
- Use the discussion list to determine other potential ways to improve interactions between the PL research community and government funding agencies

What You Can Do

- Consider serving as a Program Director or encouraging others
- Join the discussion list (currently zero traffic though)
- Share your ideas on how we can better achieve our goals
- Other? Let us know so we can best represent the community