

Tips for Proposing and Running a GEM Focus Group

Proposing a Focus Group – Written Proposal

Proposal guidelines are given in the GEM by-laws:

https://gem.epss.ucla.edu/mediawiki/index.php/GEM_Bylaws

General criteria the GEM Steering Committee (SC) may use to evaluate focus group (FG) proposals are available at the above site. On one hand, GEM wants to have active FGs operating under the umbrella of each Research Area, but there is no upper limit to the number within a research area. The GEM SC will consider all proposals received before the submission deadline.

Details about the existing FGs are available on the GEM website:

https://gem.epss.ucla.edu/mediawiki/index.php/GEM_Focus_Groups

FG proposals should be submitted to the GEM Steering Committee Chair and cc'ed to the Vice Chair, which will typically be given out via email through the GEM Messenger 1-2 months before the proposal deadline. Questions should be directed to the SC Chair or to the specific Research Area Coordinator for your topic. The list of RA coordinators is available at

https://gem.epss.ucla.edu/mediawiki/index.php/Organization_and_People. FG proposal deadlines are typically in late-November or early-December, at least a week before the Fall American Geophysical Union meeting.

Proposing a Focus Group – Oral Presentation

The step after the FG proposal is submitted is to give a public description of your proposed FG. There will be a late-afternoon session at the Mini-GEM Workshop at which the FG proposals will be presented and discussed in a forum open to the entire GEM community. If you are proposing a FG, then please plan to give a 5-10 minute presentation in this session - the GEM SC Chair will provide guidance via email about the length of the presentation.

You will want to be ready to answer questions from the community and from the SC. The general criteria list cited above is a good place to go to anticipate what the SC

might ask you. Some questions may simply be clarification but others could be more pointed. Why is this research area needed now? Is your team balanced? What will you really accomplish? How will you interact with other focus groups? How are you distinguished from other focus groups? Some may suggest additional activities. The SC has a meeting immediately afterwards, and will inform the leaders of the selected focus groups within a day of the meeting.

You have a new Focus Group – now what?

Around February, the Meeting Organizer will contact all focus group leaders to determine how many sessions each focus group wants for the summer workshop. This includes any joint sessions. Be judicious with your planning – don't plan more sessions than you need to accomplish your goals. Don't have a joint session just for the sake of doing it – have clear science goals that you hope to accomplish that require the expertise of the other focus group(s).

“Plan” your sessions before the meeting, which should include determining the topics that your focus group wishes to discuss and what goals you hope to achieve. This could involve inviting speakers, but please keep in mind the desire to have sessions run in the GEM workshop style (see the next session). Be creative to encourage discussion and a genuine workshop. It is also helpful to advertise the session topics so that interested people have a better idea of which sessions are of interest to them.

Communicate with your community (by submitting an announcement to the GEM newsletter and/or correspondences directly to your community) to inform them of the activities. Do this sufficiently before the poster deadline so that your community knows what will be happening at the session and whether they should submit a poster. Also, post your announcement on the GEM website (you should have received edit permission when your focus group was selected).

After the meeting, your focus group is required to submit a written summary of the focus group activities to your Research Area Coordinators within about three months of the meeting. This does not need to be a long document. Many people ask people who gave talks or presented slides to write a two-sentence summary of their talk (specifically the main findings of the talk, something like the JGR/GRL “key points”), and the focus group organizers weave that into a summary.

A similar process is carried out before and at the mini-GEM meeting preceding the Fall AGU meeting. No summary is required for mini-GEM activities.

Tips for Running Discussion-Based GEM Focus Groups

- 1) The ideal GEM session is discussion-led in workshop style (although the style of the discussion session and how it's implemented is **entirely up to the FG organizers**), with a goal of making genuine progress on unsolved problems of importance to the GEM community.
- 2) Informality and mutability are key. Audience members are encouraged to give a few slides on a topic being discussed.
- 3) Encourage your members to sign up for posters (before the poster deadline) so that less people feel like they need to give a talk to contribute.
- 4) When people do sign up to give a presentation, remind them about GEM discussion-based style.
- 5) At the beginning of the session, remind the audience about GEM discussion-based style.
- 6) Ask a community member to give a summary ("scene-setting") talk of recent results or significant open questions (it's more effective for this person to not be a focus group leader) as a way to generate discussion.
- 7) Find two or more people that have opposing stances on an open question, and ask them to each give their side. Follow this up with discussion among the audience. Or have a similarly designed panel discussion.
- 8) Identify particular discussion topics for the sessions; don't solicit formal talks on these topics.
- 9) Set aside time during the session to brainstorm on open problems, future directions, approaches to solve these problems, potential for GEM Challenges etc.
- 10) Focus group leaders have the prerogative and responsibility to organize their sessions as they choose to encourage the GEM workshop style. This means that they are not required to let everyone speak that requests a talk. For "accepted" presentations, it is helpful to collect the powerpoint slides before the session begins, partly to save time in switching computers, and partly to check that the talks are not excessively long AGU-style talks.
- 11) Especially when a number of people are asked to speak in a session, the focus group leaders should be mindful of diversity and inclusivity. Try to have proper representation based on career stage, gender, etc.
- 12) Keep in mind that the GEM workshop historically places great emphasis on student and early career involvement: this a meeting where it may be appropriate (and encouraged) to grant talks to those individuals very early in their careers over more senior researchers.
- 13) Techniques used in past sessions to keep the pace moving:

- a. Have thought-provoking questions prepared in advance with one teaser slide each, in case of a lull in the debate.
 - b. Allow plenty of time for walk-on comments and 1-slide presentations that may be germane to the discussion topic at hand. Ask presenters to line up against the wall for a turn at the mic/board.
 - c. Use large-format post-it notes to take notes and make diagrams/lists.
 - d. Be a lively, energetic FG organizer without monopolizing the conversation (hard to do). Try to speak less than others.
 - e. Call out specific people in the room to reply or respond to presentations given or questions posed (if you know they may be able to add something or they have an opposing viewpoint).
 - f. If you want to keep a true discussion format, plan to fill only HALF the session time with pre-approved talks. Keep the other half open entirely. Don't fret that there will be empty silence; the time will be used up quickly with debate and discussion.
 - g. Get creative: have a mascot, a fun theme, or a funny buzzer sound to cut off speakers who go on for too long. Play with acronyms, discuss naming of new terms on the fly, and just generally have fun.
- 14) It is your job as convener to keep presenters in check/on time. If you tell them they have only five minutes, do not let them continue talking for fifteen. This may demoralize other presenters and participants. Tell presenters you will keep them to task, then stand up if they do not conclude punctually. Of course they should follow the guidelines, but ultimately it is your responsibility to ensure the session runs the way you want it to.
- 15) Panels are growing in popularity and have proven a great format to promote discussion. Panels are different than a list of invited speakers (invited speakers give presentations and then there is time for discussion). Panel format poses a limited number of questions to a group of experts (giving them the questions in advance), then goes over one question at a time. Fewer questions is better for promoting in-depth discussion as well as audience participation.