Win With SAS®, JMP®, and Interest In-House Groups

Charles Edwin Shipp, Shipp Consulting, San Pedro, California
Kirk Paul Lafler, Software Intelligence Corporation, Spring Valley, California

Abstract

Have you considered an in-house group for SAS®, JMP®, or special interests? We discuss how to start and maintain an in-house group. Benefits include leadership opportunity, peer-to-peer interaction, tutorials, collaboration of users and also departments, a focal point for proper requests, and getting to know other users and providers. We present differences in corporate cultures and examples of successful school, company, and government user groups. We then summarize with critical success factors. Expect a lively discussion to follow.

Introduction

With more than 145 SAS-registered in-house user groups in the USA, there is a growing interest in the user group organization for sharing information on SAS software, tips, and useful techniques that users can benefit from. This presentation discusses how anyone who is considering starting an in-house user group can get started, as well as how to maintain a strong and healthy organization through leadership opportunities, peer-to-peer interactions, tutorials, collaboration of users and departments, a focal point for proper requests, and getting to know other users and providers. We present differences in corporate cultures and examples of successful school, company, and government user groups.

Assess

How many of you participate in sasCommunity.org? Read SAS-L on a regular basis? Work for a company, university, or government agency? Have an in-house SAS, JMP, or Interest group? How many are seeing an increase in interest among members? Decreasing? Like a garden, user groups require nurturing and attention.

History

As soon as there were clusters of SAS programmers, they began to talk, compare notes, assist each other, and hold user group meetings. These first in-house user groups had a great pay-off to companies, universities, and government agencies. Soon, SAS User Group International (SUGI) began holding annual meetings. Next were city user group quarterly meetings, and then popular regional user group annual meetings. The authors were the first and third presidents of the Southern California SAS Users Group.

With the popularity and success of these larger groups, some companies reduced their in-house user group activity, up until now. A few kept up their in-house meetings in strength, robustness and value. Will there be a comeback? It represents a competitive edge for forward-looking companies and institutions.

Background

In an environment of lean budgets, working smart is critical. User group activity improves productivity and profit – and in-house activity reduces costs associated with travel and time. The pendulum swings and cycles occur. In-house groups are poised to increase in importance in the current business environment, and beyond.

The effect of decreasing budgets combined with an increasing need for results requires in-house activities to include training, cooperation, and problem solving. Expect the best leading-edge organizations to capitalize on SAS-related skills, leadership abilities, application- and/or task-specific knowledge, and experience . . . for in-house results.

Benefits

As depicted in Figure 1, the specific benefits associated with in-house SAS, JMP and Interest Groups include the following:

- Peer-to-peer interaction and problem solving;
- Leadership development and visualization;
- Tutorials by peers, IT dept, and SAS Institute;
- Department-to-department communication;
- Focal point for proper upgrade requests;
- Provide management visibility of SAS activity;
- Get to know other users and providers.

Figure 1. In-House user group benefits.

Benefits Explained
A detailed explanation of each benefit is presented below.

Peer-to-peer Interaction and problem solving:
The original intent of in-house user groups was to assist each other. Problems are solved. In addition to solving problems, user groups increase the capacity to program and design the best possible SAS systems within an organization.   Where better to solve in-house problems than in-house? For proper programming, SAS Institute and professional consultants can also assist as needed — and they are great in-house meetings presenters.

Leadership Development and Visibility:
Within organizations, the good leadership in a well-run in-house user group will be noticed. It is a win-win situation for personal development, to the benefit of the university, public department, or corporation, and to the growth of the individuals. Skills are on display and contacts are made that further the career of young brilliant entrepreneurs.

Tutorials by peers, IT dept, and/or SAS Institute:
Professional JMP and SAS consultants, SAS Institute speakers, your IT department, and peers within the in-house users group can all participate in presenting valuable programs.

Department to department communication:
What are the departments of interest to you as a SAS or JMP programmer? At Northrop Corporation, we had Corporate and Division leadership, IT classes and helpline support, user department SAS programmers and leadership, IT support from different divisions including database and software installation, scientific programming and business programming, to name a few.

The in-house user group provides a forum of communication and cooperation. We had a major department spring up just to be liaison between engineers and IT. As the founder of the Northrop SAS Users Group, I operated successfully from "Northrop Data Processing, Scientific Programming" and wrote the SAS technical newsletter announcements. It was natural and convenient to pull departments together. This, of course, was *way* before there was a jump to JMP.

Focal point for proper upgrade requests:
There are always timely questions about moving to new SAS upgrades and bringing in new SAS Institute packages, whether it is JMP, Enterprise Miner, Enterprise Guide, or another product. It is good to have discussions in the user group to decide priorities how to proceed. This can also be a 'cultural thing' but usually, going it alone is not the best approach when requesting enterprise-wide software. The in-house users group can also study and focus on the annual SASware Ballot.

Provide management visibility for SAS activity:
The in-house user group can do many good things which raise awareness of management to the benefit of the company and also individuals. As an example, best practices in many areas can be compared and adapted across departments. It is truly a win-win-win situation. The company and departments win, SAS Institute wins, and individual SAS programmers win.

Get to know other users and providers:
Generally speaking, you are probably better than most SAS programmers but there may be one better than you. Both the teachers and students benefit in an in-house user group situation, "The teacher always learns the most." Life is not just about furthering corporate goals. Helping others and the world comes from the best run in-house SAS, JMP, and special interest user groups. You'll also have greater reach and opportunity to interact with SAS Institute by approaching as a group.

Corporate, University, and Government Cultural Differences
How is the Boston Computer Society different in culture from BMUG, the Berkeley Macintosh Users Group? Aside from cultural differences, there are style differences that are critical to appreciate. What type of university, company, or public agency is yours? Does your enterprise appreciate innovation, or do they want you to live within the bounds of your box and cubicle? Is thinking 'outside-the-box' appreciated or punished? In most cases, innovation is applauded if it is approached correctly. This is for you to know and find out — and hopefully, not the hard way. Have a leadership restaurant-meeting for your new in-house group to strategize, dream and plan.

Corporate / Federal-State-Local Government / Universities and Colleges
Generally speaking, these are the three areas but they can be big or small, formal or informal. Each college or university has a unique culture and computing capabilities. What is your culture of computing and statistics? One advantage of an in-house group is to customize to the business vision and mission, same with a government agency. Will you meet weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, or annually?

In one situation at Northrop, we had monthly meetings within major divisions and an annual corporate meeting at the corporate office. People in the corporate office also participated, which was important for our requests and overall visibility. Universities often invite other attendees from the outside, including speakers from other college in-house user groups.

Online communications and information sources
An important part of any in-house effort can be SAS-L and sasCommunity. You can also create your own company discussion area online, such as a special LinkedIn discussion group. Keep technology in mind as you advance your group vision and mission. An excellent article on "shoe-string budget" user group communication is listed in our bibliography.

Beginning Critical Success Factors
A variety of beginning critical success factors should be considered. The following list identifies a few success factors to consider:

- Find a critical-mass of "quality" SAS expertise;
- Determine the type of 'culture' to implement – Experiment as necessary;
- Determine frequency, time and place for meetings;
- Identify one person as the main leader/Chairperson;
- Obtain the support of this person's manager;
- Strive for content, content, content – Keep it valuable!
- Start with what works, even if only discussion;
- Always tune to address the needs of 'new' attendees – Make it FUN!

SAS user groups exist on four continents: North America (United States and Canada), Asia/Pacific, Europe, and South America. As depicted in Figure 2, SAS users benefit from a variety of resources including SAS Global Forum (SGF), regional and cities, virtual communities and websites including sasCommunity, SAS-L, and support.sas.com, and in-house groups.
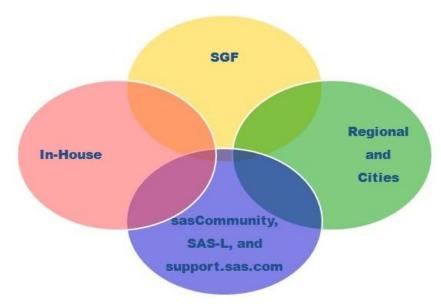
Figure 2. Available SAS user resources.

Success Story: In-House SAS Group

Westat's SAS support infrastructure supplies resources that are aimed at educating staff, strengthening their SAS skills, providing SAS technical support, and keeping the staff on the cutting edge of SAS programming techniques.

- SAS Training;
- SAS Resources Web Pages;
- SAS Outlook Information Forum;
- The Westat SAS Users Group (WesSUG);
- Corporate SAS Macros;
- SAS Conference Participation;
- SAS Technical Support.

"We have found it in our best corporate interests to build a strong SAS support infrastructure", says Mikee "Big Iron" Raithel, BBU author in mainframe power.

Success Story: In-house JMP group

To find the powerhouse corporations leading in JMP user group activity, look at the volunteer 12-member steering committee of the 2009 annual JMP Discovery/Summit: John Hopkins University, MIT, Procter & Gamble, Aera Energy, Sematech, Sandia National Labs, Sanofi-Aventis, Biolex Therapeutics, Cree, and McDonalds-worldwide. In addition to the annual summit, JMP teams in regional SAS offices are starting area JMP user groups. Check JMP.com for details. In-house JMP activities can be discussed when this paper is presented and on the sasCommunity.org "in-house user group" article-page.

Success Story: In-house Interest group

Amgen in Southern California is exemplary in running meetings to the benefit of their special interests in pharmaceutical strategies, data collection, data cleaning, clinical trials, marketing, scientific studies, and all things pharmaceutical.

Success Story: Advances in Bioinformatics and Genomics Special Interest group

The Advances in Bioinformatics and Genomics Symposium and Special Interest group provides scientists, researchers, and data analysts with cutting-edge advances in bioinformatics and genomics research and software development. This group meets annually and is an open access free event to attendees. For information and access to content, visit http://www.sascommunity.org/wiki/Advances_in_Bioinformatics_and_Genomics_Symposium.

SAS Institute support: speakers/support/books/web

Special programs exist at SAS Institute for in-house groups! Visit http://www.sasCommunity.org and enter 'in-house' in the search-box. You are directed to the list at the end of this paper for a list of a dozen in-house groups and support areas that SAS Institute provides in-house and local user groups. SAS Institute provides speakers, books, and other types of support. You can also schedule speakers in advance.

Continuing Critical Success Factors

A number of continuing critical success factors should be considered. The following list identifies a few to consider:

- As your group matures, provide 'basic' information for new members, as well as intermediate and advanced topics for others;
- Continue to involve as many departments as possible within the organization;
- Give management the attention they so richly deserve;
- Add features only to the level you can maintain them;
- Continue to groom new leaders and broaden the base of responsibility;
- Draw from the expertise at SAS Institute;
- Continue to benefit from sasCommunity, SAS-L, and support.sas.com participation.

Summary

History bears out that in-house user groups can bring great success. In-house groups are good for your department/company, you personally, and SAS Institute. It is a win-win-win situation. Leadership tools and guidance are available from SAS Institute. Within your own working arena you will find talent willing to participate. The in-house group provides a forum for interchange and development. Work with other departments for mutual benefit and realizing goals.

Conclusion

In-house SAS, JMP, and interest groups provide the opportunity to capitalize on benefits for competitive advantage. Critical success factors include you. Taking advantage of available tips from SAS Institute can help achieve a more desirable result. Everyone can play a part. This forum will facilitate learning, interchange, and cooperation. Enjoy the Odyssey!

Bibliography, with Internet Links

Gilsen, Bruce and Scott Hoenig (2000), "SAS[®] User Support and the Intranet; web pages, In-House Documentation, and Sample Library", Federal Reserve Board, Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Annual SAS Users Group International (SUGI) Conference; http://www2.sas.com/proceedings/SUGI25/25//po/25p193.pdf.

"How Does SAS Support IUGs?"   http://Support.SAS.com/UserGroups/US.html.

Lafler, Kirk Paul and Charles Edwin Shipp (2007), *"Collaborate with SAS[®] Users Around the World with www.sasCommunity.org,"* Proceedings of the 2007 MidWest Users of SAS Software Annual Conference.

Lafler, Kirk Paul and Charles Edwin Shipp (2007), *"Collaborate with SAS[®] Users Around the World with www.sasCommunity.org,"* Proceedings of the 2007 Western Users of SAS Software Annual Conference.

Lafler, Kirk Paul and Charles Edwin Shipp (2007), *"Consulting – Critical Success Factors," – Awarded "Best Contributed Paper",* Proceedings of the 2007 Western Users of SAS Software Annual Conference.

Lafler, Kirk Paul and Charles Edwin Shipp (2008), *"Collaborate with SAS[®] Users Around the World with www.sasCommunity.org,"* Proceedings of the 2008 Annual SAS Global Forum Conference.

Lafler, Kirk Paul and Charles Edwin Shipp (2009), *"Connect with SAS Users Around the World with LinkedIn[®] and www.sasCommunity.org,"* Proceedings of the 2009 Annual Western Users of SAS Software (WUSS) Conference.

LaBore, John M., "Empowering SAS[®] Users through a Webpage on Your Intranet", Eli Lilly & Co., Indianapolis, IN http://www2.sas.com/proceedings/SUGI22/internet/paper194.pdf.

MacDougall, Mary (2001), "SUG on a Shoestring: Supporting a SAS Users Group with Low-Cost Internet Tools", Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth Annual SAS Users Group International (SUGI) Conference. http://www2.sas.com/proceedings/sugi26/p233-26.pdf.

US Bank In-house User Group, Donalee.Wanna@usbank.com; http://www.sasCommunity.org/wiki/US_Bank_In-House_SAS_User_Group.

Shipp, Charles Edwin and Kirk Paul Lafler (2011), "Win With SAS[®], JMP[®], and Interest In-House Groups," Proceedings of the MidWest SAS Users Group (MWSUG) 2011 Conference.

Shipp, Charles Edwin and Kirk Paul Lafler (2011), "Win With SAS[®], JMP[®], and Interest In-House Groups," Proceedings of the Pacific NorthWest SAS Users Group (PNWSUG) 2011 Conference.

Shipp, Charles Edwin and Kirk Paul Lafler (2011), *"Benefits of sasCommunity.org for JMP Coders,"* Proceedings of the MidWest Users Group (MWSUG) 2011 Conference.

Shipp, Charles Edwin and Kirk Paul Lafler (2011), *"Benefits of sasCommunity.org for JMP Coders,"* Proceedings of the SAS Global Forum (SGF) 2011 Conference.

Shipp, Charles Edwin and Kirk Paul Lafler (2010), "Win With SAS[®], JMP[®], and Interest In-House Groups," Proceedings of the 2010 Annual MidWest SAS Users Group (MWSUG) Conference.

Shipp, Charles Edwin and Kirk Paul Lafler (1995), "Training in a World of Cost-Cutting and Downsizing," Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual SAS Users Group International (SUGI) Conference.

SRA In-house SAS Users Group. http://www.sasCommunity.org/wiki/SRA_Inhouse_SAS_User_Group.

"Supporting SAS® in a Research Organization", Michael Raithel, Westat, MD (presenting at SGF 2010); http://www2.sas.com/proceedings/forum2008/215-2008.pdf

 "What Are In-House SAS® Users Groups?" http://support.SAS.com/UserGroups/NAmerica/in.house.html.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Brian Varney, MWSUG 2011 JMP Section Chair, for accepting our abstract and paper. We'd also like to thank Kelley Weston, Conference Academic Chair and Debbi Scheufler, Conference Operations Chair for their leadership and a great MWSUG 2011 conference.

Trademark Citations

SAS and all other SAS Institute Inc. product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of SAS Institute Inc. in the USA and other countries. ® indicates USA registration. Other brand and product names are trademarks of their respective companies.

About the Authors

Charles Edwin Shipp is a programmer, consultant and author, and has been using the SAS and JMP software since 1980. He is credited in the original JMP manual for his roles in the early days. He has written more than one hundred papers and has been an invited speaker at more than one hundred International, regional, local, and special-interest SAS and JMP conferences and meetings, and is the recipient of 10 "Best" contributed paper awards. Charlie is the co-author of three books including the ever-popular Books by Users (BBU) book, Quick Results with SAS/GRAPH Software. Currently, Charlie is involved as an eBook author, sasCommunity.org Advisory Board member, application developer, consultant for Trivani Foundation International, and consultant in JMP and JMP Genomics.

Kirk Paul Lafler is consultant and founder of Software Intelligence Corporation and has been using SAS since 1979. He is a SAS Certified Professional, provider of IT consulting services, trainer to SAS users around the world, and sasCommunity.org Advisory Board member. As the author of four books including PROC SQL: Beyond the Basics Using SAS, Kirk has written more than four hundred peer-reviewed papers, been an Invited speaker and trainer at more than three hundred SAS International, regional, local, and special-interest user group conferences and meetings, and is the recipient of 17 "Best" contributed paper awards. His popular SAS Tips column, "Kirk's Korner of Quick and Simple Tips", appears regularly in several SAS User Group newsletters and websites, and his fun-filled SASword Puzzles is featured in SAScommunity.org.

Comments and suggestions can be sent to:

Charles Edwin Shipp
E-mail: CharlieShipp@aol.com
~~~
Kirk Paul Lafler
E-mail: KirkLafler@cs.com