Special Technical Communities Governance Handbook

Version 1.0

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I.   INTRODUCTION

Special Technical Communities (STCs) are intended to be financially self-sustaining online communities of computing professionals (including students) who share a common technical, geographic, career, or other interest. STCs may be created around any set of ideas that are relevant to the Society's field of interest. STCs are agile entities that are relatively easy to create and organize, and that can develop new products and services to realize their communities' goals and objectives. STC members may be members of the IEEE, the Computer Society, or nonmembers of either.

a. STC GOVERNANCE

Strategic and operational aspects of STCs will be overseen by an *STC Governance Committee (STC GC).* Each STC will have its own governance

body called the *STC-XXX Committee*. (XXX is the name of any STC.) The STC Governance Committee shall be an annually recurring committee of the EPSC. To minimize operating costs, STC governing bodies should utilize social networking tools approved or endorsed by the Computer Society. Volunteer members of all these governance committees should be members of the Computer Society.

i. STC Governance Committee

The STC GC shall be a committee of EPSC and shall be responsible for all strategic and operational matters related to the vitality of STCs.

The STC GC shall meet weekly to review issues that arise regarding the status and vitality of any STC, applications for new STCs, and all other matters related to the operations of STCs.

The STC GC shall establish and maintain the standards and operating infrastructure necessary to support STCs. The STC GC shall review all applications for new STCs and approve or reject such applications. The STC GC shall conduct thorough reviews to assess the overall vitality of all existing STCs and approve their continuation or termination. A thorough review of every STC shall be done on a regular basis, and the review schedule shall be determined by the STC GC.

The STC GC is responsible for defining and keeping up to date criteria for the creation of new STCs, review of STCs, and termination of STCs. When reviewing the vitality of STCs, the STC GC shall consider including the T & C Board's criteria for assessing the vitality of TCs. (These criteria can be found at www.xxx.xxx.)

The STC GC shall be governed by an executive committee consisting of a Chair, appointed annually by the Computer Society president, a co-Chair appointed by the STC GC chair, the EPSC chair or designee, and an Operations chair and a Webmaster, both appointed by the STC GC chair, each of whom should be a chair or representative from a different STC. The STC GC chair may serve at most two one-year terms. A newly appointed STC GC chair may (at their discretion) retain the existing co-Chair, Operations chair and/or Webmaster. The chair of every STC shall serve as a non-voting member of the STC GC. The chair, co-chair, or designee of each STC may, but are not required to, attend the STC GC weekly meetings.

The chair of the STC GC and the Executive Director of the Computer Society shall determine whether a staff liaison should participate in the management of the STC GC. If so, a staff resource will be appointed by the Executive Director to serve as an ex officio, nonvoting staff representative to the STC GC.

Periodic revisions to this Handbook shall be done by the STC GC, and submitted to the EPSC for approval.

ii. STC Committee

Each STC is managed through its own STC Committee. At a minimum, an STC Committee shall consist of a chair and a vice chair, both of whom must be members of the STC. The chair of the STC GC and the Executive Director of the Computer Society shall determine whether a staff liaison should participate in the management of any particular STC. If so, a staff resource will be appointed by the Executive Director to serve as an ex officio, nonvoting staff representative to the STC Committee. The STC chair and vice chair should appoint additional Committee members, such as a secretary/treasurer and a Webmaster, to assist in establishing and operating the STC. Recommendations on establishing an STC are available in the Quick Reference Card available at
https://stc-gov.ieee.net/stc-quick-reference-card.

Normally, the first STC Committee chair will be the person who initiates and/or leads the establishment of a new STC. In subsequent years the STC Committee shall identify one or more potential candidates to succeed the chair or vice chair. The chair will submit a *Recommendation for Chair Successor form* [a URL will be proved once the form is developed] that identifies one or more candidates to the STC GC for review. The STC GC may at their discretion seek an alternative candidate, or consider terminating the STC at the end of the chair's term. Ideally, if an STC intends to persist for multiple years, the chair and vice-chair should serve no more than two years in their positions before turning over their positions to their approved successors.

In addition to an STC Committee, each STC must have a sustaining body of members who in one way or another benefit from the existence of the STC. At a minimum, an STC should have at least 10 individuals who identify themselves as members. The STC GC may decide that fewer members are acceptable for the initiation and short-term sustainability of an STC.

II. STC VISION, MISSION, PURPOSE, SCOPE, GOALS, AND VALUES

All STCs must have a clearly defined vision, mission, purpose, scope, goals, and values. The application form for creating a new STC will require applicants to address each of these. Detailed definitions of these, and guidance to applicants regarding how to address them, will be clearly defined in the *New STC Application Form.* [a URL to the form will be added once the form is developed.] The following is a brief overview of each:

Vision. STCs must be innovative, elastic or agile online communities, striving to be financially self-sustainable, and self-managed.

Mission. The mission of every STC as long term, social network-based, self-sustaining entities shall be to focus on an innovative concept, usually related to an emerging technology, and work with Computer Society volunteers and staff, to formulate specific, related products and services that will advance the mission of the Computer Society.

Purpose. The purpose of an STC is to serve a computing community that is not served in any other fashion by existing organizations of the Computer Society. The nature of the service can be varied, but at a minimum, every STC must strive to develop and distribute new, financially viable, online products and services for/to their community. STCs must always be concerned about product and service cost recovery in their operations. It is not sufficient for an STC to simply serve as a communication forum for the members of its community.

The purpose defines the goals by which the STC will be evaluated. If an STC is not fulfilling its purpose, then the STC GC shall ask the STC to either revise its purpose, or shall terminate it.

Scope. The scope indicates the field of interest for the STC, e.g., technical, geographic, career, etc. The scope statement indicates the special interest of the STC. All STC scope statements should clearly fall within the Scope and Field of Interest of the Computer Society. The scope of an STC is not required to align with the Strategic Plan of the Computer Society. An STC scope statement must either specify how the STC does align with the Strategic Plan, or explain why it should not.

STC scopes may include aspects that define an STC that are not, strictly speaking, "technical." For example, STCs can be geographically based, such as an STC for software engineers in India. STCs can also be defined for specific groups within the Computer Society, such as for young technology entrepreneurs, or computer technology students studying across IEEE regions.

Goals. The goals must be measurable, and directly related to the purpose and scope. A recommended best practice for the definition of goals might be to follow the "SMART criteria," i.e., be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. (See www.wikipedia.org for more detailed information.) Having SMART goals can help both the STC and the STC GC understand what the STCs objectives are, and when they have been (or are likely to) be met. An STC may revise its goals over time. If an STC wishes to revise its goals, it must seek approval from the STC GC. If an STC wishes to terminate its operation, approval must be sought from the STC GC.

Values. Community-driven, (financially) self-sustainable, elastic, nimble, entrepreneurial, social-networking rich.

a. Fiscal Considerations

STCs are self-sustaining entities. That is, each STC must present a business plan as part of its initiation application. A significant component of an STC's vitality review must be the STCs budget status -- in terms of operating costs, and revenues. While any particular STC may not be, in and of itself, profitable, in its totality, the STC operation must strive for non-deficit budgeting. When considering the budget of the total STC operation, credit to the operation must be granted for revenues that may be generated from Computer Society products and services that are not directly earned by STCs, but which would not be earned in the absence of them.

Any STC may participate in the Computer Society PIF process. PIFs prepared by an STC must be reviewed and approved by the STC GC before submission to the CS Financial and Planning Committees.

b. Revenue Streams

The STC GC will investigate the options available within IEEE and the Computer Society to STCs for generating revenue.

c. Creating New STCs

A new STC can be proposed by anyone.

The *New STC Application* form [the URL will be added once the form is developed] for the creation of new STCs shall require STC applicants to define the STCs purpose, scope, goals, etc., as described above. It should be noted that no proposed STC can be blocked because it has a scope that is identical or even similar to the scope of an existing unit of the Computer Society or even to another STC. While STCs with similar interests will be encouraged by the STC GC to cooperate, the STC GC may permit two groups of people to approach a common topic in different ways. STCs with similar scopes should have distinct names so that they are not confused.

A business plan for the proposed STC must be part of the application. There should be sufficient detail so that the STC GC can determine the degree of difficulty the STC is likely to experience in achieving financial sustainability.

The STC GC shall develop a set of criteria for fairly and consistently evaluating applications to establish new STCs.

d. Annual Review of STCs

All STCs shall be thoroughly reviewed on an annual by the STC GC.

Each STC must complete and submit to the STC GC, the *STC Annual Progress Report* form [the URL will be added once the form is developed]. Each STC will be assigned a due date for the completion of their progress report. The due date for annual reports will be staggered throughout the year to balance the reviewing workload for the STC GC. The STC GC shall review an STC's annual report and inform the STC of their decision (to continue or terminate the STC) within one month of receipt of the report.

In reviewing an STC, the STC GC may decide that the STC;
- is operating well, is progressing towards its goals, and should continue operation. The STC GC shall also offer recommendations or guidance to the STC that will be considered at subsequent reviews;
- is healthy but that has drifted from its purpose and goals and that it should revise those statements in order to continue operation; or
- should be terminated.

Notification of the decisions of the STC GC shall be provided to the president, Executive Director, EPSC chair, and the STC chair within one month of the receipt of the report.

In addition to the annual report, each STC must submit a brief monthly status report using the online form at http://stc.ieee.net/home/monthly-report. The monthly status report should describe their progress towards their goals, their plans for the upcoming months, their current number of members, and any obstacles for which they require assistance. The STC GC shall aggregate the status reports from all STCs and provide this report to the president and the EPSC chair.

Each STC chair is encouraged to send a brief (e.g., one sentence) weekly update as an email to stccoreteam@COMPUTER.ORG if they are not able to attend the weekly STC GC meeting.

e. STCs versus TCs

Technical Committees (TCs) are governed by the Technical and Conferences (T&C) Activities Board. TCs are subject to the rules and policies described in Computer Society governance documents. STCs are emerging entities, evolving through learned policies and practices that are being determined through their activities under the EPSC.

A primary distinguishing characteristic between STCs and TCs is that most of the activity of an STC is online. A secondary characteristic is that STCs are intended to be financially self-sustaining entities.

Normally, an STC shall not be created if its purpose and scope are already addressed by an existing TC. If a proposed STC's purpose and scope appear to overlap with an existing TC, the application should be reviewed at the next EPSC meeting. If a TC wishes or needs to become an STC, it shall comply with the policies set out in this Handbook regarding the creation of new STCs, as well as all of the other processes (e.g., status reports, vitality reviews) that approved STCs are subjected to.

STCs can create and/or sponsor renditions of "traditional" products and services (e.g., publications and conferences) as long as they are online products and services that adhere to existing Computer Society and/or IEEE policies regarding such offerings. Should an STC wish to create a "traditional" or "nontraditional" product or service that overlaps the responsibilities of an existing TC, the STC must seek approval from the STC GC who must gain approval from the T&C Board.

Appendix I – History of STCs

This content of this section of this handbook is provided in order to chronicle the history of STCs as well as the motivation for their creation. Computer Society (CS) handbooks are typically used as 'operating manuals' for CS boards and committees, and usually do not include sections such as this.

Special Technical Communities (STCs) were first conceived in 2009 by the Vice President of the CS Publications Board, who recognized that there are members of the Computer Society and the computing industry whose interests did not align specifically with the topics and titles of the Computer Society's magazines and transactions. In fact, while many of the publications, particularly magazines, included articles and papers with themes that cut across many magazines, often those themes were not focused on any particular Computer Society product or group – i.e., publication or Technical Committee.

In his report to the Board of Governors in November 2009, the VP recommended the creation of revenue generating special interest groups, each of which might focus on a theme that cut across multiple Computer Society publications. These would be offered to both IEEE/CS members and nonmembers alike for a "membership fee," via online social networking constructs that were becoming popular at the time. In return for their membership fees, members of these communities would receive products and services that would be repackaged from existing CS products and services. Fees would be tiered – pay more, get more. CS and IEEE members would pay less than nonmembers, for equivalent products and services. And only CS members would participate in the governance of the special interest groups. While others would/could be members of the groups, governance responsibility would lie in the hands of dues-paying, Computer Society members.

In 2011, a group of interested volunteers, all of whom were eventually elected president of the Computer Society, met to discuss these ideas, and together they evolved the concept of STCs. Discussions ensued about whether or not Technical Committees (TCs) could address the objectives of STCs, but the conclusion was quickly reached that TCs had (and continue to have) a culture that is very resistant to the kinds of changes needed to meet the needs the volunteers felt were required by STCs.

Since then, STCs have been formed in a variety of unstructured ways, without very much attention paid to uniformity of governance considerations necessary to administer STCs in an organized manner. This Handbook is the first attempt to address this need. This handbook is a "stake in the ground"; this is, it is a first attempt to describe the governance and operating procedures of STCs. It is likely that the document will be revised by the governance bodies described in the document, adhering to accepted IEEE and Computer Society policies, procedures, and practices.

It should be noted that the 2010 president of the Computer Society promoted a concept called, "instant communities." An instant community was intended to be a social networking communications tool for like-minded individuals wishing to interact online on a particular topic or subject. Instant communities were meant to be created easily and disbanded readily, depending on the ongoing interests or lack thereof, of the community participants. Instant communities were similar to Yahoo or Google Groups. <u>STCs are not instant communities</u>. They are meant to exist for as long as they are deemed viable, meeting the goals each sets forth when their proposal for creation is accepted by the appropriate governing STC committees.

As a first step in formalizing STCs, the 2011 president appointed the then EIC of Computing Now *to lead the STC effort, and placed the STC structure under the Emerging Products and Services Committee. This was done because EPSC operates as a CS incubator for new ideas and concepts. A characteristic of STCs is their "agility" - that is, their relative unencumbered ability to readily create and develop innovative practices, projects, and services – and their need to be "agile" fits perfectly under the scope of the EPSC. If STCs were to come under the governance of a traditional or existing board, they might lose that agility. Agility is a key characteristic of STCs. It was noted, that TCs are not typically very agile – yet another reason for the creation of STCs.*

In the future, rather than have the STC structure defined in this Handbook be an ad hoc committee of the EPSC, it may make sense to formally incorporate the STC structure as a standing committee of EPSC. At the other extreme, it may be desirable to evolve STCs into their own independent Computer Society board that would be defined in the Computer Society's governance documents. The structure described in this Handbook, with some alterations, could serve as the basis for either circumstance.