

Increasing Conference Participation from Utilities and Regulators

(Includes increased attendance and panel/paper/speaking roles)

IEPEC Board Meeting, May 24, 2018 , Lauren Gage and Rob Kasman

Approximate time: 60 minutes (including deeper-dive on yellow abstracts)

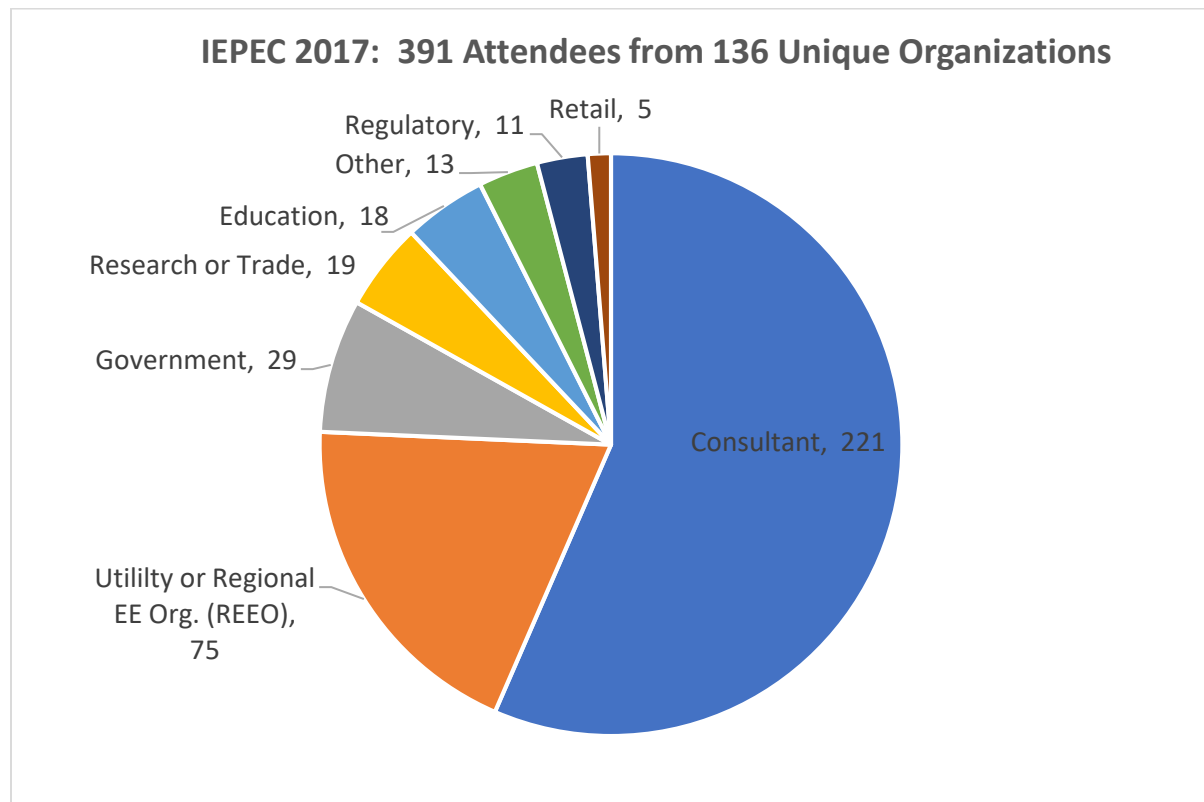
Summary

Premise: Our industry has many types of organizations whose perspectives and input are important and relevant to the evaluation industry. Yet, due to multiple factors, IEPEC conference attendance, papers and presentations are primarily from consultants.

Goal: Encourage an increase in papers, presentations and attendance from non-consulting organizations (e.g., utility staff, regulatory/commission staff) to ensure a broader spectrum of perspectives add value to the IEPEC conference and collective industry wisdom.

Relevant Data

Attendance:



2017 Survey (Ingo's report)

Summary: "Particular weaknesses and low lights for attendees included a lack of diversity in attendees (too many consultants and coastal perspectives; not enough utility representation and mid-country perspectives)..."

Survey Quotes:

"Need better balance - too weighted by consultants"

"The high ratio of consultants to utility staff."

"Far too dominated by northeast and west coast perspectives. There is an entire country with different evaluation needs, approaches, and stories to tell."

"concentration of papers around a few firms-- not very diverse... and many repetitive papers/speakers/moderators."

"Balance of attendees was mostly consultants. I wanted a round table for commission staff."

"Too many consultants."

"Poor utility attendance"

"Lack of participation from most states."

"It would be great to have more presentations from utility staff."

Group Discussion:

Do you agree with this premise and goal? (let's try to hold off on reasons or solutions...)

Key Barriers

Understanding the barriers for utility and regulatory staff to submitting abstracts, writing papers, giving presentations and attending the conference is important to be able to make improvements. We think that some key barriers for utility/regulatory staff include:

- **Barriers to Submitting Abstracts:**
 - **Awareness:** Utility/regulatory staff get many invites to conferences, they may not be aware of this conference and its value.
 - **Lack of Incentives:** Utility/regulatory staff are very busy and external engagements such as conferences are not always prioritized in their workload.
 - **Broad Understanding:** Utility/regulatory staff are focused on internal issues and may be less aware of how their work fits into the broad scope of the evaluation industry.
 - **Mentoring:** Utility/regulatory staff often work in small teams and therefore don't always have the mentoring for developing abstracts and writing papers.

- **Level of Effort:** Often, utility or regulatory staff may not have conducted the underlying research and therefore, their ideas (i.e., policy or thought pieces) may require more effort than research-based abstracts.
- **Barriers to Attending Conference:**
 - **Cost Constraints/Travel Approval:** Utility/regulatory staff often have cost-constraints for travel and conference fees.
 - Lack of an accepted paper to present or other speaking role
 - Others above (e.g., awareness, incentives)

Group Discussion: What do you think? What are other key barriers?

Suggestions/Possible Solutions

We cannot influence all the barriers that utility/regulatory staff experience. Yet, we may be able to help them to overcome some of these barriers. Initial suggestions include:

- **Direct emails to encourage participation.** To help with the barriers of awareness and travel approvals, IEPEC planning committee members could reach out directly to utility/regulatory friends/colleagues to remind them of conference location/time, the abstract deadlines and suggest they request the travel approval early.
- **Other planning team ways to encourage participation.** We could create a slide and other simple materials to promote the conference and key dates. That could be used by PC members in (appropriate presentation venues) and IEPEC avenues (e.g., the Webinar series).
- **Market the training.** Encouraging utility/regulatory staff to attend the (low-cost) training may be a way to increase participation.
- **Create an IEPEC mentor.** To help with the barriers of mentoring and broad understanding, the IEPEC planning committee could make available an “abstract mentor” who is available to talk to utility/regulatory staff to help them brainstorm ideas for abstracts (i.e., understand how what they’re working on is important and relevant to the industry) and review initial abstract drafts to provide suggestions on how to make it stronger.
 - This mentor should not be part of the abstract review process or selection committee. It could possibly be a previous planning committee member.
- **Make abstract request more utility/regulator friendly.**
 - Provide more clear ideas of policy/process papers (i.e., non-research that could be valuable)
 - Remind people that papers can be short.
 - Remind people to suggest quick-take sessions (for lower effort)
 - Encourage teams with multiple perspectives and let them know that presentations can be split between two team members to provide more perspectives.
 - Encourage utility/regulatory staff to suggest, moderate, etc panels
- **Sliding scale of conference costs.** Reduced fees for regulatory (and utility?) staff.
- **Bonus points for yellow abstracts.** (see below for deep dive)

Group Discussion: What do you think? Other suggestions?

Bonus Points for Yellow Abstracts, and Paper Limits, Deep Dive

(Circulated by Rob Kasman email, Mar 2, 2018)

How it works now:

1. Individuals can present 1 paper per conference, and may have one additional “appearance” (moderator, panelist, etc.)
2. There are no limits on the number of papers accepted from any single org.
3. Abstract review is blind (mostly) to focus on the best content, irrespective of company or author.
4. There are informal bonus points to papers from organizations not represented at the conference, all other things being about equal.
5. Bonus points are also given to papers that fit well in a panel that needs an additional paper.
6. In the past we have given a leg-up to international papers, but that may be unnecessary now that there are two international IEPEC events.
7. For the last conference we updated our abstract review process and abstract submission guidelines. The overall feedback on both were very positive.

Additional thoughts/observations:

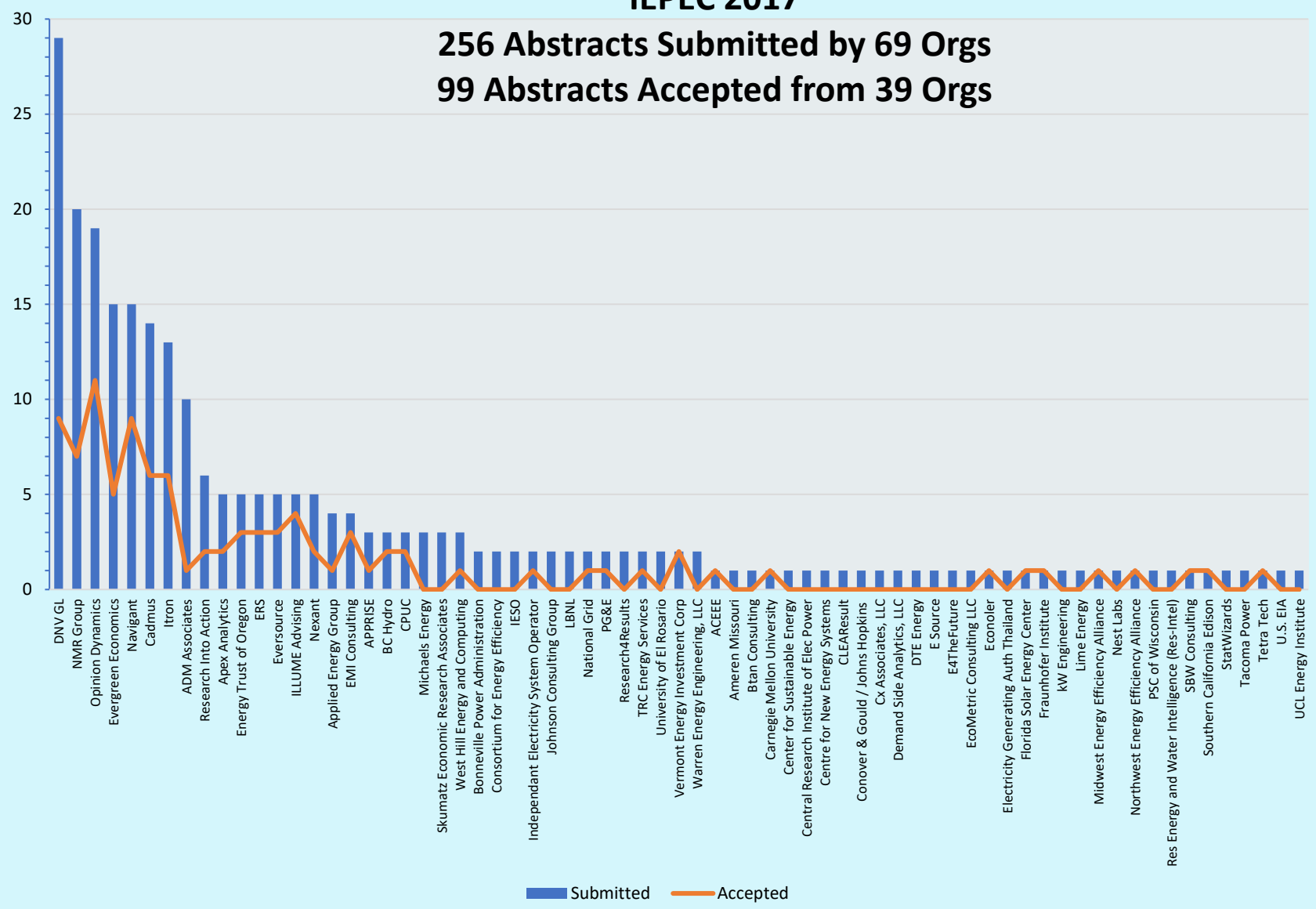
1. With several M&As, there are probably fewer, but larger firms now than in the past. It may only be natural to have most papers from a few big firms, but over half the papers (53/99) in 2017 were from seven firms.
2. I didn’t calculate correlation, but you can see there’s a pretty strong relationship between number of abstracts submitted and accepted. 100% of orgs that submitted four or more abstracts (15) had at least one accepted.
3. Should we consider a distinction between organization type? For example, should Commissions, Labs (e.g. LBNL), and Federal organizations (e.g. EIA, DOE) be given special consideration? Note that in 2017 LBNL submitted two abstracts, and EIA one abstract; none were accepted.
4. Finally, I wonder how much can we really predict the quality of papers and presentations (!) from 250-word abstracts? If we think our predicative power isn’t very high, should we give greater weight to diversity of organizations?

Group Discussion: What do you think? Here are some specific questions that would be helpful to answer:

1. Do we want to set paper limits per organization, even if a sliding scale?
2. How good is our abstract selection process at picking out the best papers?
3. Do we want to formalize bonus points for yellow abstracts from under-represented organizations?
4. If so, by how much? For example, should an abstract with a score of 3.6 from a Commission get accepted over the 9th paper from a consulting firm with a score of 3.8?

IEPEC 2017

256 Abstracts Submitted by 69 Orgs
99 Abstracts Accepted from 39 Orgs



■ Submitted — Accepted