Procedure Lifecycle, continued from page 7

the month the procedure was revised. A Revision History describing the revision must be written. The SME must complete the SBMS Approval Form. **Some** major revisions must be reviewed and approved by the SBMS Steering Committee; therefore, the SME must write an I&DP and present it to the committee. These revisions are announced to the staff through an e-mail subscription service and generally require implementation actions.

Consideration is being given to redefining revisions as Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. These changes are being considered because not all major revisions need to be approved by the Steering Committee. The objective is to better define the process to distinguish between those that need the committee's approval and those that do not. Level 1 would be a major revision, Level 3 a minor revision and Level 2 a major revision that does not need to be reviewed and approved by the Steering Committee.

SBMS writers also are carefully making sure that they write clear and informative revision histories of major changes. The revision history is e-mailed to staff to announce changes and is listed on the Updates to SBMS page on the Laboratory's Web site. Staff emphasize the importance of their knowing the details of these changes and the date they are effective. Some would like to see the changes published in a different format (e.g., in a different font or type). Some members of the SBMS Steering Committee would like to see the changes highlighted somehow so that they know where text has been changed.

SUMMARY

The Laboratory will be creating new subject areas for years and revising them forever. A couple here and there may be rescinded as new ones are created. It will become clear that some procedures can be integrated. As a result, two or three procedures will be combined into a single procedure. Integration is part of the lifecycle of a procedure, but it deserves its own topic of discussion.

As more procedures are developed and the Web site grows, it may be necessary to redefine more processes for development and revision. Listening to staff and keeping them involved and interested is essential to a happy lifecycle for all.

Katherine Vivirito is senior writer/editor in the Standards-Based Management System Office at Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, New York. She is a member of the Long Island Chapter of STC.

The mission of the Policies and Procedures special interest group is to assist STC members in developing, implementing, and managing policies and procedures communication through educational and networking opportunities, STC conference sessions and publications, and communication with other STC SIGs and professional organizations in areas of common interest.

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The newsletter of the STC Policies and Procedures Special Interest Group

The Procedure Lifecycle: Creation, Publication, Revision

By Katherine Vivirito

At Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) in Upton, New York, laboratorywide procedures are called subject areas. The Standards-Based Management System (SBMS) Office at BNL develops these subject areas with subject-matter experts (SMEs) and publishes the documents on the organization's Web site called SBMS. The site can be viewed at https://sbms.bnl.gov/. The SBMS office also is responsible for maintaining the procedures while they are on the site.

New subject areas and major revisions go through a formal BNL review and approval process before the SMBS Office publishes them. This process helps to ensure that BNL staff have an opportunity to be involved in developing or revising a subject area. The process works well. Staff are kept informed during development, and the Laboratory can be assured that the published product is accurate, of a high quality and current.

Processes for creating and revising subject areas are being refined. The goal is to keep BNL staff involved in development, and the feedback from these individuals is taken very seriously. What is the fastest, most stress-free process for creating new subject areas? How are SMEs and other staff kept interested and involved in developing new subject areas? What can be done to get them to buy in to the process? How are staff kept informed of revisions that affect their work? How many details do they need? What is the best format for a revision?

I will discuss these processes for creating and revising procedures as I explain the procedure lifecycle at BNL.

CREATING SUBJECT AREAS

Previously a writer in the SBMS Office spent two to three months meeting once a week with a team of experts to create a subject area from scratch. This process was very time-consuming and frustrating for staff. Sometimes staff had difficulty knowing where to begin, and the long development process took time away from their work. SMEs now are encouraged to develop rough drafts of new subject areas before formally meeting with a development team to create the subject area. So far, the process is working smoothly.

Notice of Intent

Two processes are used for creating subject areas: an existing procedure (called a legacy document) is rewritten into a subject area, or a member of the SBMS staff works with a SME to rewrite and edit a draft of a subject area.

Procedure Lifecycle, continued on page 7

In This Issue

Congratulations

Steps & Specs, the Policy and Procedure SIG's quarterly newsletter, earned awards of ***Merit*** and ***Most Iproved*** in the 2001-2002 STC Newsletter Competition for its outstanding newsletter.

Steps & Specs is published quarterly by the Society for Technical Communication's Policies and Procedures Special Interest Group.

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Manager's Report:

Member Feedback . . . Conference Recap & Presentation Proposal . . . Web Site Update

I want to thank the few SIG members who took the time to respond to my call in the last issue of *Steps & Specs* for input on what they want and need from the P&P SIG. I have read each one carefully and appreciate your willingness to share your ideas. I am reprinting them—anonymously—elsewhere in this issue. If anyone would like to add to these members' comments, please do so. E-mail your replies to me at audck@aol.com.

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The P&P-related sessions at the Society's conference in Nashville this past May—two panels and a progression—went well, with turnout good at each one. Thanks to all the speakers and moderators for their efforts in preparing and delivering interesting and engaging presentations. They all helped in giving the P&P SIG a positive presence at the annual conference.

And while it's been only a month or so since the conference, planning for next year's presentations is well under way. I have put together two panels and one progression (possibly two). If you are subscribed to the SIG's discussion list, you should have received my call for presenters. I reiterate that call now. If you have never presented before, the progression is a good place to get your feet wet. The small-group format makes for a less formal presentation format. You're not standing in front of 30 or 50 people. Instead it's more like having a discussion with a group of colleagues. Handouts and flipcharts are often used, but they are not required. Each speaker presents his or her material three times during the 90-minute session. The individual presentations are about 10 minutes long with about another 10 minutes for questions from and discussion among the six to eight people at each table.

Panels are a little more formal. Usually each panelist gives some opening remarks before questions are taken from the audience.

Presentation proposals are due in the Society office by August 1, so there's still time to get involved. Even if you are not sure that you will be able to attend the conference next year in Dallas, please volunteer anyway. Just let me know if your participation is tentative and when you might know for sure if you can attend. On page 3 are the speaker opportunities still available. If you want to volunteer, have questions or would like to discuss a topic idea, e-mail me at audck@aol.com.

****

It's been a long time in coming, but the SIG's revised Web site should be available by late July or early August. A new Webmaster, Janice Haskins, is working on the project. We will be adding content and links to make the site more useful to P&P communicators both within and outside the SIG and STC. Thanks to Janice for her hard work and expertise. If there is something you would like to see on the site, e-mail her with your ideas. Her address can be found in the staff box on page 2 of this newsletter. When the site goes live, let us know what you think about what you see.

Reminder

The deadline for submission for the fall issue of *Steps & Specs* is August 25.

Email submissions to Kathy Craddock at dizsuitsme@aol.com or call 919/966-7904 for more information.

Procedure Lifecycle, continued from page 1

Before the process can begin, the SME presents a Notice of Intent (NOI) to the SBMS Steering Committee for permission to develop a new subject area. The NOI describes the plan for developing the subject area and lists recommended team members who plan to develop it. The committee is made up of scientists and high-level managers and administrators.

After the Steering Committee grants permission, the work begins.

Legacy Documents

Legacy documents are considered Laboratorywide procedures and are kept on site. One of the goals of the SBMS Office is to convert all legacy documents into subject areas within the next three years. However, sections of some are outdated, and these cannot always be easily rewritten in whole or in part as a subject area. Sometimes, though, an SBMS writer can rewrite a legacy document on his or her own and afterward work with the SME to finalize the draft for publication. SBMS writers work on the Laboratory's author-review Web site using Dreamweaver. After a draft is finished, its URL is sent by e-mail to the SME.

The SME reviews the draft and is responsible for making sure that other BNL staff who have a stake in the procedure are involved in reviewing and developing the subject area. The SME works with the team listed on the NOI, and the writer works closely with the SME to complete the subject area.

When the subject area is published, the legacy document is rescinded and the staff is notified of its publication through e-mail.

From Scratch

When there is no procedure to rewrite, the SME is encouraged to create a rough draft of a subject area. The SME consults the writer for help during development of the draft. The SME also seeks input from other BNL staff who have a stake in the procedure. The SME meets with the team listed on the NOI at least three times before submitting a draft to the SBMS Office. An SBMS writer then reviews, edits and rewrites the draft. SBMS writers work on the author-review Web site using Dreamweaver. After the draft is completed, the URL is e-mailed to the SME so the SME can review the draft.

Approval and Publication

The SBMS Office needs two things before it can publish the new subject area:

- An SBMS Approval Form signed by the SME, the team members who developed the subject area and senior management
- A signed Issue & Decision Paper (I&DP)

Regardless of which process is used to create a subject area, when it is completed, the SME must write an I&DP and present it to the SBMS Steering Committee for approval to publish. If the committee approves the I&DP, the subject area can be published. If the I&DP fails, the SME must revise the subject area according to the committee's requirements and present the I&DP again for approval.

The committee forwards the I&DP to the Laboratory director for his approval and signature. The Director's Office then forwards the I&DP to the SBMS Office. Within five working days from the day the director's approval has been received, the subject are is to be published on SBMS.

The SBMS Office sends out a Laboratorywide e-mail to notify staff of the publication of a new subject area. If the subject area replaces a legacy document, then the staff is informed of the legacy document's rescission.

Life Goes On: Revising Subject Area and Legacy Documents

The SBMS Office not only creates new subject areas, but it also revises old ones and existing legacy documents. The process for revising procedures is sometimes similar to the process for creating new ones. There is a formal review and approval process that involves SMEs and other BNL staff.

The SME submits changes to the SBMS Office. The SBMS senior writer works with the SME to determine if the revision is minor or major. Then an SBMS writer revises the files. After the writer revises the files on the author-review Web site, the SME reviews and approves the changes. Minor revisions are published upon immediate approval from the SME. Major revisions need further approval.

MINOR VS. MAJOR REVISIONS

Consideration is being given now to changing the revision process. Currently there are two types of revisions: minor and major.

Minor revisions do not affect the way staff do their work; they include content changes that clarify work processes, change contacts or clarify guidance. They are not reviewed by the SBMS Steering Committee, do not require implementation actions and generally are not announced to the staff. The effective date does not change. The date and revision number on the footer of the revised files are changed to note the month of the revision and the new revision number.

Major revisions, however, significantly affect the way the staff does its work and includes changes to required work processes and required forms. The effective date on the procedure, as well as the date and revision number in the footer of the revised files, must be changed to reflect

Procedure Lifecycle, continued on page 8

Conference Progression Attendees Discuss Who Should Document Organizational Policies and Procedures

By Raymond E. Urgo

During the Policies and Procedures Progression session at the STC Annual Conference in Nashville this past May, I facilitated three rounds of discussion to answer the question: "Who should document organizational policies and procedures?"

I began each round by briefly presenting what I find to be two typical extreme situations that organizations may engage. One extreme is having non-P&P practitioners (i.e., managers, subject experts, end-user employees) be totally responsible for documenting their own procedures. These practitioners typically have no expertise or training in documentation, and they apply their "writing" as a secondary skill set to what they normally would do in their work. The other extreme is having P&P practitioners be totally responsible for procedures documentation development with little participation from others in the organization who will be affected by the procedures. This extreme presumes that these practitioners have expertise, training and a career orientation in P&P documentation or technical communication.

To facilitate the discussion, I asked each round of attendees to identify challenges faced in the two extreme situations as represented by non-P&P practitioners and P&P practitioners regarding P&P documentation. The tables below summarize some of the typical challenges identified by all three rounds of attendees:

I then asked each round of attendees to compare its respective lists of challenges and identify their observations. The attendees reported that in some instances, certain challenges on the lists for non-P&P practitioners and for P&P practitioners were complementary. They also observed that non-P&P practitioners face challenges with writing and documentation, while the P&P practitioners face challenges with relationships and value in their work within the context of the organization they serve.

Near the end of each round, I asked again the question I posed at the outset: "Who should document organizational policies and procedures?" The consensus among each round of attendees was that documentation development should be a joint endeavor between the two parties.

They concluded that non-P&P practitioners should focus on content, while P&P practitioners should be focused on context or process when developing P&P documentation.

Attendees shared how they are or could be better at managing the document development process—including using their personality styles more effectively—to get cooperation and demonstrate value in their work. One round of attendees thought it would be interesting to facilitate this same exercise with a focus group of non-P&P practitioners and then compare results.

In closing each round, I reminded the attendees that additional information on this progression topic is available in an article I authored for the *2002 STC Annual Conference Proceedings.*

Challenges for Non-P&P Practitioners (Managers, Subject-Matter Experts, End-User Employees)

- Where and how to start
- How to organize ideas
- Writing clearly
- Providing effective sentence structure
- Providing proper use of grammar, acronyms and jargon
- Presenting a narrow perspective without considering the impact on changes for other departments and for other P&P documents
- Difficulty in following format and style standards
- Not knowing how to use word processing tools effectively

Challenges for P&P Practitioners (P&P Analysts, P&P Writers, Technical Writers, Documentation Specialists)

- How to deal with no response to draft reviews
- Coordinating disagreements among departments
- Positioning and promoting best use of P&P services
- Not using their personality styles effectively to manage working relationships with others
- Not getting the respect they feel is deserved
- Difficulty explaining the value for their services
- Difficulty making sense of content from drafts or documents prepared by non-P&P practitioners

Raymond E. Urgo is the principal of Los Angeles–based Urgo & Associates, specializing in policies and procedures communication. He is the founder and first manager of STC's Policies and Procedures SIG. He can be reached at rurgo@urgoconsulting.com

SIG Discussion List Lets Members Ask Questions, Share Expertise

By Linda Charles

A lone policies and procedures writer drums her fingers on a desk and stares blankly at the wall, stupefied by the seemingly awesome documentation project that lies ahead. "Why did I choose this profession?" she wails. "And how many others like me are out there?"

How can someone help this struggling writer, you ask? By spreading the word about the Policies and Procedures SIG discussion list, a forum for asking questions, sharing news and information, and fostering a sense of community in the world of policies and procedures communication.

Thus far, 2002 has seen a number of conversations enter the arena, covering subjects such as the following:

- Usefulness of software such as ProcedureWrite and RoboHelp Enterprise
- Development of user surveys
- Standards for writing computer-related procedures
- Implementation of document management systems

Discussion list visitors also were privy to information about the Fourth International Conference of Plain Language Association International and the Policies and Procedures SIG panel presentations at the society's annual conference this past May. And who wasn't pleased to receive the fantastic news that *Steps & Specs* won the Merit and Most Improved award in the annual STC newsletter competition?

In the hustle and bustle of our 9-to-5 lives, it's comforting to know there are others "out there" who have the same concerns and struggles in the quest to achieve quality in policies and procedures communication.

Keep asking questions. Keep sharing knowledge. Keep the discussion alive!

Linda Charles is a writer at Towers Perrin and a member of the Toronto chapter of STC. Charles can be reached at lcharles@interlog.com.

2003 Conference Opportunities

The Policies and Procedures SIG has the following opportunities available for the 2003 STC Annual Conference in Dallas, Texas. To volunteer, please contact Audrey Cielinski Kessler at audck@aol.com or 330/677-8598 by ***July 26****.*

Panel: Time and Cost Estimating for P&P Projects

The Policies and Procedures SIG is submitting a proposal for a panel titled "Time and Cost Estimating for Policy and Procedure Projects." A third panelist is needed. If you have experience in this area please consider sharing your expertise.

Panel: Interviews of Self-Employed P&P Contractors and Consultants

Prospective panelists are needed for a conference presentation featuring self-employed independent P&P contractors/ consultants. The moderator, Raymond E. Urgo, principal of Urgo & Associates and P&P SIG member, is looking for people who want to be considered for participation on the panel. As moderator, Raymond will interview the panelists. The types of questions and topics he is likely to ask will be provided in advance so the participants can prepare themselves. Very little preparation on the panelists' part is required.

2003 Conference Opportunities, continued on page 5

Membership Report

By Candie McKee

Welcome, new SIG members! As we enter the third quarter of this year (and the second month of the Society's fiscal year), the SIG has continued to grow at a steady pace. With 63 new members from within the United States and 10 from countries around the globe, the Policies and Procedures SIG has more than 900 members as of May 2002. International members include seven from Canada, one from Venezuela, one from Australia and one from France.

This steady growth indicates how important policies and procedures are (and always have been) to the world of technical communication and how important SIGs are to the Society's members. Through the SIG newsletter, members can expect to learn or renew their knowledge about the basics of producing usable policies and procedures. It is also in the newsletter where members share their experience with more-involved issues, such as audience analysis.

The SIG also has a Listserv that offers you quick access to answers to questions and comments on issues about writing policies and procedures. Discussions range from lone writers to team writing issues and the basics of working with technology. Not signed up for the Listserv? Worry not. You can subscribe by sending an email to: subscribe-stcppsig-l@lists.stc.org. (Note that the character before the @ is a lowercase letter *l*—not the number one.

Interested in contributing to *Steps & Specs*? Have a great article idea? Want to write an article yourself? Or maybe you would like to submit a member profile of yourself. (If you do, just request the list of questions from SIG Manager Audrey Cielinski Kessler at audck@aol.com or Kathy Craddock at dizsuitsme@aol.com) The SIG would love to hear from you.

Responses to the Spring Manager's Report

Audrey,

Here are a few brief top-of-the head reactions to why I (and probably a number of other people) don't volunteer for SIG activities, aside from the obvious question of time:

1. I'm still trying to figure out what the original purpose of the SIG is. Do I want to be involved in that purpose?

2. I work in biotech. How does the work I do writing Standard Operating Procedures compare to the work other members do?

3. Where does my level of experience fit in relationship to the other SIG members? In short, do I actually have anything worthwhile to contribute, in a newsletter article for instance, or would the my writing and insights actually be "old news" to more experienced members?

4. Would volunteering be a pleasant experience or an exercise in frustration because just a few people are involved and nobody really cares what you do? A positive emphasis on the opportunities to improve your skills while helping the SIG would help.

5. Have any local/ regional meetings of the SIG members in a particular geographic area ever been held? Is there a way to find who else in the same geographic area is a member? Sometimes it seems more real if there are actually names and faces attached to a group.

In addition, I would not describe any Web site work as short term, although each session of work on a site that is "up and running" might be short in duration. A Web site loses its usefulness if it isn't updated on a regular basis. As far as getting one started, (although this isn't one of my skills yet) I have heard estimates of 40 to 50 hours minimum for experienced professionals to put a site together.

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Dear Audrey,

I just read your Manager's Report asking for ideas on why more people don't volunteer. It does seem surprising that with 900 SIG members, only a few are actively involved. I am writing to assure you that you are on the right track, because you are letting people know there is a need.

I am also working to get more people involved in my much smaller group. We find, as you have, that Listserv, Web site and newsletter postings do not produce immediate results. They mainly serve to increase awareness of the need for volunteers. In addition to continually reinforcing the message that we want more volunteers, we find that we have to get personal—take advantage of personal connections, through e-mail, meetings and phone calls—to get results. We have also found that emphasizing the positive is important, as you did when you pointed out "there's so much to gain by volunteering."

We found we lost ground when we made statements like, "It's not as if anyone is being asked to make a long-term or daily commitment." We don't downplay the effort involved. Our message is: "We all contribute time to the best of our ability, and when other pressures make it difficult to meet our specific responsibilities, we are expected to ask other team members to provide back-up." We try to emphasize the team aspect, and that seems to make people more comfortable with the idea of making a commitment.

I have been an STC member for about seven years, but I do not attend meetings locally or nationally. I belong in order to receive the publications and to be aware of issues of overlap between my field (performance improvement and instructional design) and the field of technical communication. In other words, I am part of your appreciative and generally passive audience.

But all you need is active involvement by a small percentage of your 900 members. I encourage you to set a target, such as 15 or 30 volunteers, and then go about recruiting them by clearly defining and prioritizing the tasks. For example, instead of a Webmaster, you could ask for a Web site committee, chaired by the Webmaster, with others contributing in defined ways.

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Dear Audrey,

Good morning! I've just received and read my *Steps and Specs*. Firstly let me tell you that I do appreciate the consistent, dedicated, committed effort that you put into the P&P SIG. I do have a sense of how much time and energy it must take. For my part, I get a great deal out of the SIG—indeed it is the only reason I am a member of the STC.

Educational Opportunity

Introduction to Policies & Procedures Communication
(Web-based course)

University of California,
Los Angeles Extension

Dates: October 10-December 5

Fee: $550

Course No.: 439.19

Reg. No.: Not yet available

Instructor: Raymond E. Urgo
Contact: UCLA Extension
310/825-4192 or
http://www.uclaextension.org

2003 Conference Opportunities, continued from page 3

If you are interested in being considered for this panel, you will need to provide your e-mail address and telephone number and a brief description of the kind of P&P work you do as a self-employed contractor/consultant.

Progression: Topics in P&P Communication

Table hosts/speakers are still needed. The topic of discussion is up to you. It just needs to be related to in some way to P&P. This is a good place to start if you will be a first-time presenter.

Progression (unmoving): Industry-Specific Table Topics

Ever wish you could put your finger on the pulse of P&P development for your industry? Now there is an opportunity to do so in Dallas next May. In the works is a session for P&P authors, editors and managers to talk about what individual companies are doing to address their area's needs.

The session will be a discussion set up for multiple groups in one room, similar to a progression. Unlike the normal progression setting, however, speakers and listeners would sit at one industry-focused table for the entire session

What we need to know from you is the following:

- What industries would you like to see represented?
- Would you be willing to serve as a discussion leader?
- Would you be willing to be a table participant (share information about your company)?
- Would you be willing to share questions or issues facing you with the table participants?

P&P SIG Web Site Undergoing Remodeling Effort

The Web site of the Policies and Procedures SIG is undergoing some remodeling and should be available to the membership by late July or early August.

The site will provide a central location for archived copies of the SIG's newsletter so members can refer to previous issues and to articles in the most recent edition. Also available will be links to other sites and a comment section where members can post their comments about policy and procedure issues and SIG-related topics.

At some point, a chat room will be included so that members can ask questions and exchange knowledge online. The site is intended to benefit all members. Active support and input from the membership is essential to keeping the site fresh and useful.

Send suggestions, comments and ideas for content to Janice Haskins at davejan@ibl.bm.

The site's Webmaster is Janice Haskins, in Bermuda. "I volunteered for the Web site project," Haskins said, "because I believed it would be a fun project and a good way to understand the STC by getting involved with policy and procedure information. I also believed it would be a good exercise in project management."

In her job, she is responsible for departmental procedures and corporate policies. She has worked in a bank for almost 14 years developing these items. Over the past six years, she has been a content developer for the bank's Intranet. During that time she has found that staff read information placed online and that the Intranet has become an interactive service because of greater input from staff about what they want to see online. Comments from staff, said Haskins, indicate that they use the Intranet information daily to do their job.

She volunteered for the site redesign project because, Haskins noted, "I strongly believe that informationwise, the site will benefit the whole membership, myself included, and perhaps give us a sense of unity."

Janice Haskins is a senior member in Bermuda and is not affiliated with a local chapter.

Get Involved

There are lots of ways to be involved in the creation of *Steps & Specs*. One way is to introduce yourself in our Member Profile column.

This is an easy way to contribute to the newsletter and a great way to tell us about yourself, the work you're doing, any special challenges you face, ways you've solved problems and hints, tips and suggestions you have to offer your colleagues.

Interested? Contact Kathy Craddock at dizsuitsme@aol.com or 919/966-7904 for more information.