

MRS FAQs

(MRS Frequently Asked Questions)

In the January issue of *MRS Bulletin*, I presented a list of the four most common Materials Research Society (MRS) FAQs. This month, I continue with the list of the next most common.

8 How do I get on an MRS Committee?

It is a constant truth in this busy world that MRS is always looking for volunteers. In the 2002 governance restructuring, Committee Chairs became directly responsible for populating their committees. Therefore, the procedure is as follows:

- Go to the MRS Web site at www.mrs.org.
- Click on the panel for "Society Information."
- Follow the right-hand side links to committees
- Look at the list of current committees and committee chairs.
- Decide on one for which you would like to volunteer, then call the chair. You will probably have a short conversation on what the committee is currently doing, what the probable time commitment is, and where your interests and availability lie with respect to those activities.

Much more often than not, the committee will need people, and in a matter of minutes, you will be in!

7 Why does MRS force its symposium organizers to raise money? No other society does this, and this practice deters good people from volunteering to organize a symposium. It also makes MRS seem mercenary.

We encourage people to raise money for their symposium because it allows MRS to capture exceptional invited speakers that might not come otherwise. This in turn enriches the whole meeting. Internally, the funds raised for symposia are a pass-through, and MRS does not profit from them. Of course, writing those three-page proposals (or making those phone calls) is definitely an expense of personal time and effort, so each symposium organizer must judge if the additional result will ultimately be worth the additional effort. For symposium organizers who decide that fundraising is not for them, an MRS symposium can be run exactly like those at other societies' meetings: Each symposium automatically has full audio-visual (A/V) support, proceedings publication, a meeting room, advertisement, and shockingly expensive refreshments (did you know that coffee was one of the single biggest meeting expenses?), all without any fundraising whatsoever. In fact, organizers for



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each symposium are given upfront an account of \$1000 provided by MRS, and that may just be enough to pull in that Nobel Prize recipient without any additional fundraising effort.

6 Why have there been no female MRS presidents?

Ouch! I won't pass that question on to Julia Phillips (1995) or Kathy Taylor (1987), both of whom were marvelous presidents in their time. Julia was the one with the jam-packed Day Planner and a mind like a steel trap—10 years later she could remember who was the symposium organizer who did not show up to chair his Tuesday session in Symposium P in 1987. She has led numerous national committees since then and serves as director of the Physical & Chemical Sciences Center at Sandia National Laboratories. Kathy was the one who brought a results-oriented industrial mindset to MRS in its formative years. After many years at GM, she finally retired as its Materials and Processes Lab Director at the GM R&D Center. And, for the record, about 30% of MRS's officers have been female, which is slightly in excess of the female representation in MRS's membership. I attribute this significant representation to MRS's electoral procedure, which always secures two viable candidates for each ballot position, often with intentionally diverse backgrounds (male/female, academe/industry, research field 1/research field 2, U.S./non-U.S.). In so doing, MRS broadens the pool by a factor of two compared to most other professional societies. I am proud of our governance

structure, not only in terms of its diversity, but also in terms of its rigorously enforced turnover, which constantly brings new blood and new ideas into the society.

Where we do fall behind is in MRS's awards to female scientists. An active effort to recruit nominations from the distaff half has improved our recent statistics, but the truth is, it is dismally difficult to get nomination packages for female scientists. The peers who would nominate them are generally also in the midst of their careers, and the last thing they need is yet another package of paperwork to fill out, on top of a 25-hour day. If you know of a deserving candidate and have a few hours to spare, please nominate her. You can obtain nomination packages for all of the MRS awards online or by contacting MRS headquarters. Nomination packages are valid for several years, so your efforts will live on well past the year you undertook them.

5 Why do you invite U.S. government officials to talk at MRS meetings and not non-U.S. government officials? Why does the Public Affairs Committee concern itself only with U.S. policy?

MRS considers itself a U.S.-based organization with international membership. Its headquarters and activities are almost all in the United States, with the exception of the occasional co-sponsored conference held outside the States. There are Materials Research Societies in other countries, but they are *not* subsidiaries or extensions of the MRS in the United States. Our relationship with these other societies is not legal or financial; it is purely collegial. Thus, given our lack of physical facilities or staff outside the United States, it is highly unlikely that we could take on in-depth lobbying for European, Asian, or African programs. However, to the extent we can find ways to help our international members while they are here in the United States, we would like to do so. Starting with the 2002 MRS Fall Meeting, we began to see presentations on international collaborative programs at the meetings, and last Fall, *MRS Bulletin* extended its Washington news coverage to include news on science policy from around the world. In the future, we may also facilitate educational discussions of non-U.S. science policy issues within our committee structure.

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