

The Ultimate Guide to Abstract Management

How Leading Associations Manage Calls for Papers by Staying Ahead of the Curve



Introduction

As a Director of Meetings, you're already pulling off the impossible: juggling deadlines, wrangling reviewers, managing spreadsheets, and keeping authors happy while delivering a well-balanced agenda. You might think, "I've got this. Why fix what isn't broken?"

But the world's most successful meeting directors don't ask, "Is this working?" They ask, "Is this the smartest, most strategic way to manage this?"

This guide will show you how:

- Your current system is quietly costing you money
- Untapped strategic value is going to waste
- Your Inability to scale is holding you back
- An optimized system is your strategic asset

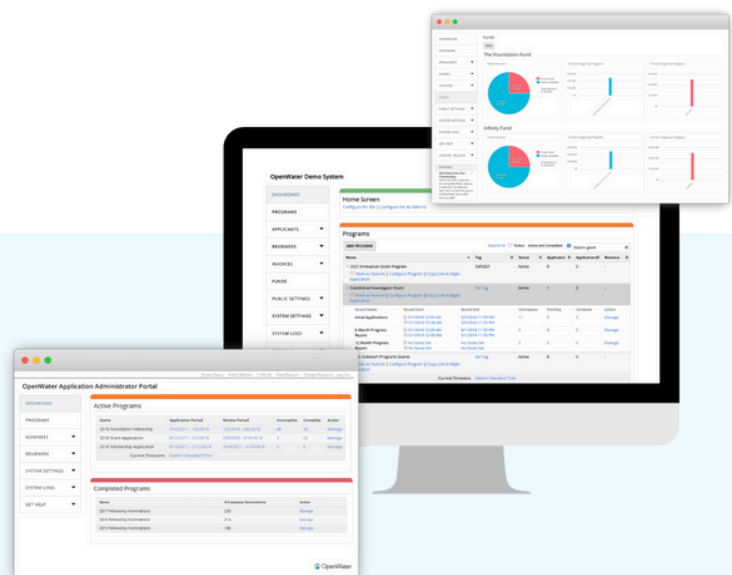


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01 Knowing When it's Time to Replace Your Abstract Management Software

Whether you need to issue a Call-for-Papers/Abstracts/Speakers/Posters, or Sessions, your goal is certain: you need to deliver a conference program that isn't just informative but is essential to your members. For associations and academic institutions, your annual meeting/conference is where attendees expect cutting-edge ideas, credible voices, and the latest research — all expertly curated by you.

Yet the abstract submission and review process has grown more complex every year. With hundreds — or even thousands — of submissions, multiple reviewers, tight timelines, outdated tools and spreadsheets simply can't keep up. What used to be “good enough” now limits your ability to shape a program that sets your organization apart.

Majority of Associations Plan Smart Event Tool Investments

87% of associations plan to increase investment in digital event tools that streamline operations and improve member experiences.

- ASAE Research Foundation, Association Operating Ratio Report



Modern abstract management software isn't just an operational upgrade — it's a strategic advantage that keeps you in control of submissions, peer reviews, scoring, scheduling, and last-minute changes — all in one place. It frees you and your team to focus on program quality, not admin tasks.

Top directors also know what's next: AI is no longer a buzzword; it's already shaping how leading conferences build stronger agendas with less staff time. Choosing the right platform now will ensure you're ready to embrace new technologies as they emerge — not scrambling to catch up later.

- ✓ **Centralize** submissions, reviews, scoring, and scheduling
- ✓ **Automate** manual tasks so you focus on what matters
- ✓ **Enhance** the experience for authors, the review committee, and attendees
- ✓ **Scale** as you grow — from 100 to 5,000+ submissions
- ✓ **Make informed business decisions** based on accurate, real-time data, not just a gut instinct
- ✓ **Future-proof** your program for the twists and turns to come



“ *Our abstract submission has been greatly simplified by using OpenWater. The process used to be very manual and labor intensive.* ”



02 Exploring the Newest Innovations on the Market

When it comes to managing abstracts, your options have evolved and so have your expectations. The most forward-thinking meeting directors look for tools that turn a logistical necessity into a strategic advantage.

Types of Solutions on the Market



Standalone Abstract Management Software

These purpose-built platforms are designed for complex, high-volume submissions. They can support sophisticated, multi-round reviews, website/form/calendar building with no coding, and adapt to the quirks of modern conferences with multiple tracks, stages, and committees.



Event Management Suites

In some organizations, abstracts are folded into an event system that includes registration, speaker logistics, housing, and mobile apps. While convenient, event software rarely goes much beyond entry collection and fails to offer the complex features required for end-to-end abstract management.



AMS Add-Ons

Many membership systems offer basic submission modules. These add-ons typically cannot handle rigorous peer review or detailed agenda planning.



Homegrown Systems

These custom-built forms or databases are often patched together by a tech-savvy staffer. They can get the basic job done — until that person leaves, requirements grow, or technology outpaces your old system.

What Modern Abstract Management Unlocks for You

A modern abstract management solution doesn't just collect submissions — it positions you as an innovator, helping you deliver the kind of stand-out program that keeps your members talking long after the closing session ends. With the right system, you can effortlessly collect abstracts, papers, posters, and more, seamlessly review submissions, organize conference sessions, and manage your speakers from a single, user-friendly platform.

Scalability is Critical

The average academic or scientific conference today receives between **500 and 3,000 abstracts** per event, with some large global meetings topping **10,000 submissions**.

- Council of Engineering and Scientific Society Executives (CESSE)



What to Look For

Your new software should free you to focus on creating a next-level program that proves your conference/annual meeting is the must-attend event for your members and attendees. The best solutions now empower you to:

- ✓ Offer an intuitive, **user-friendly system** your authors, reviewers, and chairs will value
- ✓ **Seamlessly manage hundreds — or thousands — of submissions**
- ✓ Build a professional, branded **conference website, forms, and event Calendars** — with no coding required
- ✓ Conduct **multi-round reviews** and support complex scoring processes
- ✓ **Create sessions, plans, and schedules** using built-in tools
- ✓ Generate polished, automated **emails in just a few clicks** using a wizard
- ✓ **Promote your meeting on social media** and via your mobile engagement app
- ✓ Conduct in-depth **analyses and produce insightful reports**
- ✓ **Track session attendance** and collect session satisfaction ratings
- ✓ **Integrate with the leading member management systems** on the market

03 Why Your Current Process is Quietly Costing You Money

If you're still relying on spreadsheets, basic modules, or a patchwork of legacy tools to manage abstracts, you may be balancing your budget but eroding your organization's long-term financial success.

Small hidden costs can pile up quickly, including:

Staff Time	Hours lost chasing version updates, doing manual data entry, and creating one-off communications
Credibility Risks	Small errors in submissions or reviews can damage trust in your process and your conference's reputation
Delays	Slow turnaround times mean missed opportunities to attract the best speakers and create early buzz
Volunteer Burnout	Frustrated review committee members don't come back; recruiting and onboarding qualified replacements can be time-consuming.
Friction for Authors	A cumbersome process can discourage repeat submissions and referrals from your industry's leaders.

The Cost of "Good Enough"

54% of associations still rely on patchwork or homegrown systems for abstracts, often **leading to duplicated effort, inconsistent data, and credibility risks.**

- Tagoras Learning & Technology Trends Report



You May Be Managing — But Are You Optimizing?

Outdated, rigid or homegrown systems limit your ability to grow, adapt, and innovate. Vendor consolidations often stall updates and increase costs. And if your software can't connect directly with your member management system, you're duplicating effort and data — creating risk and frustration for your organization.

The solution isn't more staff time or bigger spreadsheets. It's modern, adaptable software designed for today's demands with:

- ✓ **Flexible configurations** that support new formats and workflows
- ✓ **Solid integrations** with your member management and mobile engagement app systems
- ✓ **Reliable data governance** to protect your program's integrity
- ✓ **Flexibility and scalability** that can handle thousands of complex submissions without breaking a sweat

The right abstract management solution is an investment that turns hidden costs into visible value year after year.

“Collecting abstracts and sending automatic emails to authors and reviewers takes out the manual process we used before so it's definitely a timesaver.”



04 Identifying the Key Objectives of a New Solution

When you're trusted to deliver a flagship meeting that positions your organization as the definitive source for industry knowledge, you need a best-in-class abstract management solution that can:

1

Provide a Superior Solution That Sets the Bar

At a minimum, your next solution should help you:

- ✓ **Reduce repetitive tasks** and free staff to focus on strategy — not chasing files
- ✓ **Deliver an intuitive, frustration-free experience** for authors, reviewers, and chairs
- ✓ **Support complex submissions**, including posters, panels, and hybrid sessions
- ✓ **Turn data into insight** so you can spot trends, justify decisions, and improve your program year after year
- ✓ **Strengthen your reputation** for running a must-attend event that's highly organized, innovative, and forward-thinking

Today's best solutions don't just gather content; they actively help you grow and evolve with changing demands and new technologies by offering:

Flexibility/ Scalability	Grow from dozens to thousands of submissions without multiplying stress or staff hours — with the flexibility to evolve as your needs change
Configurability	Tailor your processes, scoring rubrics, and roles to fit your unique processes
Effortless Review Management	Automate routing by subject area, flag conflicts, and equip reviewers with dashboards that replace messy spreadsheets
Easy Agenda Building	Convert accepted abstracts into a structured, publishable program with drag-and-drop scheduling, easy session building, and assignment tracking — with no last-minute scramble
Improved Loyalty	Great tools reduce irritation and result in repeat participation

“ The time savings alone is tremendous! Once getting our abstract process up and running, I look forward to learning other ways which we can use the Open Water products. ”



3

Seamlessly Integrate with your Member Management System

You don't have time to reinvent the wheel — and you don't have time to juggle multiple data silos. Your member management system is your single source of truth for member data and your abstract management software should integrate — not compete — with it to:

- ✓ Provide a unified view of your members
- ✓ Ensure data integrity
- ✓ Eliminate manual processes and data entry
- ✓ Reduce duplicate records
- ✓ Strengthen decision making with real-time data

You'll want to ensure the solution offers:

Single Sign-On (SSO)	Empower members to log in once, not juggle passwords
Real-Time Lookup	Pull verified author details from your system as they submit
Co-Author Linking	Allow submitters to add verified co-authors or co-speakers, thereby reducing duplicates and data cleanup later
Data Sync	Push final session data back to your member management system for continuing education tracking, member engagement, and next year's outreach

4

Elevate the Experience for Everyone

Your audience — whether authors, reviewers, or your own staff — expects intuitive tools, not hassles.

**For Authors:**

- Easy-to-use online submission process for all information they need to provide
- User-friendly portal to submit, check deadlines, and upload files
- Instant status updates to eliminate guesswork and duplicate questions

**For Reviewers/Chairs:**

- Personalized dashboards with clear deadlines and scoring process
- Ability to build sessions right in the system
- Mobile-friendly access so they can review anytime, anywhere

**For Administrators:**

- A single hub to track submissions, reviews, communications, and schedules — without clunky spreadsheets
- Reminders and status updates that run without manual intervention
- Drag-and-drop tools to assemble complex multi-track agendas — no IT tickets required
- Abstract book generation
- Automated email communications with authors, reviewers and chairs

05 Vetting Solutions That Actually Deliver

Choosing the right platform requires balancing features, flexibility, and support. But beyond functionality, you're looking for:

- ✓ **Documented success with large, high-stakes meetings/conferences**
- ✓ **Proof of successful integrations**
- ✓ **Exceptional training and support to carry you through**

The Importance of Social Proof

- ✓ Look for case studies from similar organizations
- ✓ Ask for referral clients who manage similar submission volume
- ✓ Request demo recordings tailored to your processes
- ✓ Check independent client review sites, such as G2.com for candid feedback

Volunteer Fatigue is Real

38% of volunteers cite inefficient workflows as their top reason for stepping back. Frustrated reviewers and session chairs are less likely to return if the process is confusing or time consuming

- VolunteerPro Sector Report



10 - Point Checklist

Use this guide when vetting potential vendors:

Checklist		Yes	No
1	Does the system support multiple submission types (abstracts, speakers, posters)?		
2	Can it scale to handle hundreds or thousands of submissions?		
3	Is it easy-to-use for authors, reviewers, and staff?		
4	Will it integrate with your AMS in real time?		
5	Can you create and manage sessions, plans and schedules via a visual interface?		
6	Does the solution support multi-round reviews and complex scoring processes?		
7	Can you build the conference website and email communications with no coding required?		
8	Does the solution offer robust analytics and reporting?		
9	Is onboarding supported with training and documentation?		
10	Does the vendor have demonstrated experience with your organization type and multiple, positive client reviews?		

06 Maximizing Your Return on Investment (ROI)

Abstract management platforms can deliver strong ROI by reducing costs, creating efficiencies, improving the user experience, and generating a superior conference program. Benefits include:



Time Management:

Slash your program management time by eliminating manual processes



Integration Efficiencies:

Avoid redundant data entry, duplicate records, and reporting hassles



High-Quality Submissions:

Improve completeness and accuracy with a simple-to-use system and enhanced author experience



Improved Reviewer Productivity:

Reduce time and fatigue with intuitive dashboards and views

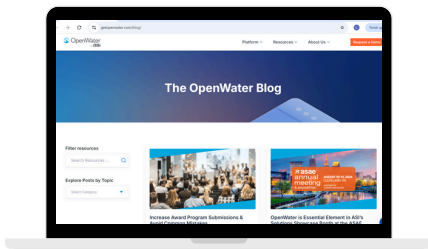


Enhanced communication:

Easily project a professional, consistent brand to all users through email and the conference website

07 Next Steps & Additional Resources

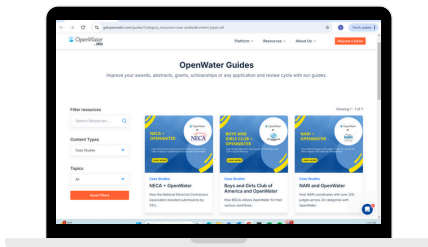
A well-chosen abstract management platform isn't just about processing submissions — it's about enabling your organization to deliver impactful, highly professional, and engaging conferences and meetings. If you are considering an addition to your tech stack, we have several resources you will want to check out:



Educational Blog

Get the latest industry news, hacks, and advice on application and review best practices.

openwater.com/blog



Client Success Stories

Read about how ASAE and other organizations just like yours have optimized their nomination and review processes with OpenWater.

openwater.com/guides



Watch an OpenWater Quick Tour

In just two minutes, learn how OpenWater can streamline and improve your application and review process.

openwater.com/quick-tour

About ASI

Advanced Solutions International (ASI) is a leading global provider of cloud software and services for associations



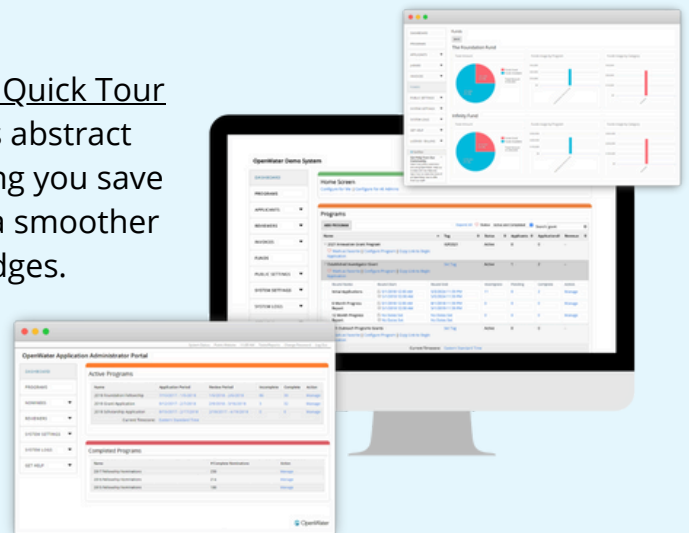
and non-profits. Our innovative suite of constituent engagement solutions helps clients digitally transform their organizations, streamline operations, and grow revenue by leveraging extensive industry expertise and proven best-practice advice. The ASI portfolio includes iMIS® for association and non-profit management, TopClass LMS for learning management, OpenWater for application and review management, and Clowder® for year-round mobile app management. Learn more at www.advsol.com.

OpenWater



OpenWater provides powerful abstract management software for conference and event planners. With OpenWater, you can easily collect proposals, review abstract submissions, organize sessions, and manage speakers within a single, user-friendly platform.

► [Watch a 3-minute OpenWater Quick Tour](#) to see how OpenWater simplifies abstract submissions and reviews—helping you save time, reduce errors, and deliver a smoother experience for applicants and judges. openwater.com/quick-tour



Schedule a personalized demo to discover how you can navigate your abstract program more efficiently, reduce stress on judges and staff, and enhance the member-experience at getopenwater.com/demo.



www.getopenwater.com