

# LOPSA LOCALS CHAPTER GUIDE

---

## Introduction

Thank you for your interest in starting a LOPSA Local chapter!

Our organization thrives because of people like you. The international association known as LOPSA consists of hundreds of individuals, and there is no better way to carry out our goal of improving the profession of system administration than by providing a community of people who are interested in the same thing. On behalf of the Board of Directors and the membership of LOPSA, I thank you for helping us to build this community.

In this document, you will find a guide to starting and running a chapter, written and contributed to by the people who have done exactly this before. The information contained herein will help you get your feet on the ground, find like-minded people, band together with them, and get meetings running in your area. Before you know it, you'll be in the midst of a new local community of system administrators!

LOPSA is a volunteer organization run by IT administrators, and just like with system administration, as we learn, we improve things, and this chapter guide is no different. As you learn how to build and run your own chapter, you may have suggestions for changes or additions to this booklet. We want to hear them.

During your journey, if you have suggestions, comments, or questions, please email them to [locals@lopsa.org](mailto:locals@lopsa.org) and we'll work hard to give you the resources that you need to be successful in starting your chapter. LOPSA is dedicated to making the Locals program a success, and that means making sure that you're successful.

## What is LOPSA?

LOPSA is the League of Professional System Administrators. We began as a Special Interest Group (SIG) of USENIX, the Advanced Computing Systems Association. Near the end of 2007, we formally separated into our own independent organization, although we still enjoy an excellent working relationship with USENIX.

LOPSA is dedicated to the furtherance of all aspects of system administration as a profession, and all of our programs are dedicated to this cause. Our efforts are designed to encourage system administrators to improve themselves and to increase their professionalism, and we strive to advocate for administrators every chance we get.

We are registered with the United States Internal Revenue Service as a 501c(3) non-profit organization. Your membership fees go toward supporting the various projects and partnerships that LOPSA maintains. Activities such as the Locals program and the Mentorship project materially improve the state of system administration for everyone, not just members of LOPSA. By being a part of our organization, you're actively helping us do this, and we thank you for it.

As mentioned above, LOPSA is run and organized by a volunteer army of IT administrators from around the world. At last count, we had members in 43 countries from around the world. We are actively recruiting new members across the globe, and we're working to start local chapters in many other countries, as well.

## The LOPSA Locals Program

Although our modern digital lifestyle allows us to have a virtual presence anywhere in the world, people are still very attracted to the idea of taking part in a community in their area. Having a local resource or support network is invaluable to being a better administrator.

To help facilitate building a real network of system administrators, LOPSA has developed the "Locals" program that encourages and promotes the formation of local LOPSA chapters. These chapters hold regular meetings and become involved in their community, often working with local businesses and charitable causes.

This local presence allows LOPSA to have an outreach program that provides supportive resources to administrators, and at the same time increase the number of LOPSA members who get something out of their membership.

## Kinds of LOPSA Local chapters

There are three types of LOPSA chapters – regular, student, and affiliate. Each carries our mission of professionalism into the community, but there are differences in the structure and composition of the groups.

- **Regular Chapter**

A regular chapter is a local presence, and is an officially sanctioned part of LOPSA. Regular chapters carry on the goals and programs of LOPSA on a local level. Because Regular Chapters are a part of LOPSA, they are bound by the Regular Chapter Rules. Its paid members are LOPSA members, and its elected officers are covered by LOPSA's insurance. A Regular Chapter must have at least six paid members, although a new chapter will be granted provisional status for its first year with three paid members.

- **Student Chapter**

A student chapter is a local presence at an educational institution and part of LOPSA. Student Chapters carry on the goals and programs of LOPSA at a local level with an emphasis on education. Because Student Chapters are part of LOPSA, they are bound by the Student Chapter Rules. Its paid members are LOPSA Student members, and its elected officers and Student Chapter Advisor(s) are covered by LOPSA's insurance. In addition, Student Chapters must follow the institution's rules for student organizations. A Chapter must have at least six paid members and one paid standard member as a Student Chapter Advisor. Provisional status can be granted with three paid student members (plus the Advisor) for the first year.

- **Affiliate Chapter**

LOPSA affiliates are independent local groups that share similar goals with the LOPSA organization and in some way serve the system administration community and our members in their area. Affiliate chapters are NOT part of LOPSA and will receive support from LOPSA primarily to assist them in providing services to our members and the community.

You should have the type of chapter you want to start in mind, but when in doubt, we encourage you to start a regular chapter. Obtaining three paid LOPSA members is easier than it sounds. If you don't know any other local members, contact [locals@lopsa.org](mailto:locals@lopsa.org) and we will work to get you in touch with other LOPSA members in your area.

## Starting a Chapter

Deciding to start a new LOPSA chapter isn't something that should be taken lightly, but it isn't as daunting as it might seem. A lot of system administrators feel like they couldn't possibly lead a group of other admins, but this isn't something to worry about. Instead of looking at yourself as a leader of admins, try to see your goal as being a coordinator or organizer, because really, a LOPSA chapter organizer's job is to...well...organize.

The most important part of being a chapter organizer is finding speakers, finding attendees, and finding a place to meet. These kinds of organizational activities are well within your skillset, and if you have problems with anything, we're here to help.

## Evaluating a potential city

Chances are good that you're interested in starting a chapter in the town that you live in. There probably won't be a problem with that. After all, the most important aspect of getting a chapter going isn't how many potential administrators there are to attend meetings, but how many potential organizers there are who want to put in the work to make the chapter a reality.

Generally speaking, we've found that it isn't necessarily the biggest cities that have active LOPSA chapters, but the ones with organizers who are devoted to making the chapter work, and who have a significant population within a half hour drive of the meeting location.

If you live in or near a population center where 100,000 people live within a half hour of travel distance, then you definitely have the makings of a potential LOPSA chapter. Is there a college or university with a well-established IT program? That might be the basis of a great student chapter!

It's important to be creative and see the potential in the world around you. Figuring out how to make a chapter a reality is just the first step on a journey that long, but very rewarding.

## Weighing the time requirements

Of the requirements listed above, the dedicated organizer is the hardest one to find. There are major cities in North America that would be natural fits for LOPSA chapters, but at this time, many don't have one, only because no one has stepped forward to offer to do the work.

The reason for this may be that people perceive the amount of time required as being much higher than it really is.

It's completely possible to have regularly scheduled meetings by planning for an hour a week (and less, if you have other people helping you). Everyone *can* organize a LOPSA chapter, so if this is something you want to do, then you shouldn't be afraid of the time commitment, because it's not as bad as you think.

### Obtaining co-organizers

As mentioned before, even the modest time requirements go down when the load is spread across several people. Getting volunteers to work on a small part of the process is usually easier than convincing someone to do the whole thing themselves.

When discussing the chapter with potential attendees, always have a list of small responsibilities that you can offer to interested people – a lot of people will take you up on the offer to help in some small way that will make your life easier. Always remember to mention these people when you're given credit for the success of the chapter.

### Finding potential members

System administrators have a wide range of interests; there's no one place to go where you can contact all of your potential attendees. That being said, the best way to spread knowledge of your new chapter is by word of mouth, but to do that, you need an initial group of people to do the talking. That's where LOPSA can help.

Contact [locals@lopsa.org](mailto:locals@lopsa.org) and express your interest in starting a chapter. You'll receive a contact on the LOPSA Board of Directors who will help shepherd you through the process. One of the steps is setting up a mailing list on the LOPSA server that will give your potential members a forum to talk and discuss.

The best initial source of potential members is the lopsa-discuss list. This non-technical mailing list has the most highest subscription count of all LOPSA lists, and almost certainly has people in your area subscribed. Submitting a message to this list is easy and will reach a lot folks who will be interested in helping your chapter get off the ground.

Other sources can be found throughout the Internet wherever administrators congregate. One of the popular system administrator hangouts is on Reddit, at [/r/sysadmin](https://www.reddit.com/r/sysadmin). This forum has thousands of system administrators visit it daily, and announcing the formation of a new LOPSA chapter in a certain city will definitely see a lot of eyes.

Social media is a powerful tool that can be used to spread word of new events. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and so on. Posting with the hashtag #sysadmin gathers a lot of interest, and asking someone very occasionally to retweet in order to help spread a message isn't usually looked down upon, so long as the message is on target and for the right reasons. Also watch for geographic-specific groups to join and take part in.

I've found that in some communities, Craigslist is an excellent source of potential members. There is usually an "events calendar" specific to the area that you want to meet in, so make sure to check this out.

Interestingly, the communities that spring up around meeting announcement sites can yield a vast supply of potential attendees. MeetUp has millions of users, and whenever a new event is scheduled, people in the area interested in those topics receive a notice. Don't forget to take advantage of this.

Also check to see what local forums are devoted to the city where you want to start your chapter – technical-types hang out on these as well, and your post will probably not be treated as noise.

There have been multiple chapters started by system administrators that came together to celebrate "System Administrator Appreciation Day", which falls on the last Friday in July. These celebrations took place in a local pub or restaurant, and attendees had the option of signing up for notification on the soon-to-be forming LOPSA chapter. The attendees at the parties were found using the above methods.

Lastly, there's good old legwork. Lots of community coffee shops, libraries, and grocery stores have bulletin boards and will allow you to post a flyer. Put "sysadmin" in big letters at the top to catch the eye of anyone who would recognize that word. Make sure the flyer contains the URL to your webpage (and maybe add a QR code which points there).

As you probably know, the crowd on Internet forums is not necessarily polite, so make sure to lurk and get a feel for how the inhabitants respond. Follow the posting rules, and be polite and professional, because as an organizer, you are representing LOPSA with your post.

Using these techniques will help get you on your way, but don't forget that the best method to spread knowledge of your chapter is word of mouth, so encourage

everyone who comes to meetings and joins the mailing list to tell their friends and coworkers.

### Structure of Your Chapter

LOPSA Locals chapter guidelines mention that elected Chapter Officers, but it dictates no enforced structure. There is an included Sample Chapter By-Laws included in this package and on the [lopsa.org](http://lopsa.org) website, but it is only a suggestion. Chapter by-laws are only necessary if the chapter maintains assets over a value of \$500; there's no need to enforce unnecessary structure.

Eventually, it may be necessary or advantageous to elect officers and hold meetings in a more regimented way. When that time comes, the sample By-Laws can serve as the foundation for your chapter, or you may write your own, so long as they comply with the government's requirement for nonprofit status.

### Getting a meeting place

Meetings have to be held somewhere, but the difference between a good meeting place and a bad one can be dramatic, and can materially affect the number of people who come.

Good meeting places generally have a few qualities:

- **Ease of commuting**  
No one wants to drive to a place that's hard to get to. Likewise, in big cities, if your meeting spot has no mass transit nearby, that's going to make it hard for people to get to and from the meeting.
- **Available Seating**  
Most of the LOPSA meetings I've been to have somewhere between one and two dozen people. For an average office, that's actually fairly hard to find extra seating for, even in a large conference room.
- **Internet Access**  
System Administrators like (and in many cases need) access to the Internet. This is less of a problem now with the widely available cellular APs, but decent wireless access is always appreciated.
- **Presentation facilities**  
Many speakers at meetings want to show slideshows or demonstrate technology. Rather than having a dozen people huddled around a laptop, it's far better to have a projector and screen (even if you have to bring it yourself, if that's an option)
- **Proximity to restaurants**

Most of the meetings I've been to have an "after party" of sorts, where attendees with free time will grab a bite to eat and a drink. It helps if this is relatively close to the meeting spot, but it certainly isn't a make or break condition.

None of these are really necessary, but they are nice to have. I've attended a lot of meetings where the only condition met was "Available Seating", and plenty of people still showed up. In the end, it's all about finding a location and then actually having the meeting.

So when taking the above into consideration, what types of facilities should we look at, and what should we avoid?

Here are some good possibilities:

- Libraries
- Offices of members
- Community centers
- Sponsor's facilities
- Classroom

All of these solutions have something in common: they're free, they usually have decent parking, and they're used to having groups of people come in and meet.

When using the facilities of a sponsor or a member's office, make sure to pre-arrange any security information that's needed. In some cases, building security must be notified of all guests attending the meeting, so a registration service like EventBrite or MeetUp should be used so you can give the list to the guards.

There are some bad solutions, though:

- Hotel
- Convention center
- Member's house
- Server room

Hotels and convention centers usually charge excessive rates for meeting spaces. Having a meeting in a member's house means inviting a dozen or more strangers over, plus very few people have the kind of room to house a professional meeting.



Meeting in a server room is a bad idea because it's cold, loud, and you're surrounded by expensive servers that aren't yours.

There is no rule that says a LOPSA Local chapter has to meet in the same place all the time, although most do. Finding a new spot every month is tiresome and means extra work for the organizer. I've found that sticking to the same spot, but having occasional "field trips" is a good way to keep people returning while staying interesting.

There's no general rule about where you can and can't meet, but remember that while you're meeting, you are representing LOPSA and your profession, so use your judgment and common sense about what is and isn't an appropriate place.

### **Speakers and Meeting Topics**

Good meetings require good topics.

Not every topic needs to be amazing, and you don't need a famous speaker to have a great meeting. Good topics and good speakers go a long way toward making a monthly meeting into an event that draws a crowd.

The two main ways to plan the topic for a meeting are to either determine the topic, then try to find a speaker who can present an hour and a half or two hours on that topic, or to have schedule a good speaker and set the meeting topic to whatever they can or want to talk about.

There's nothing inherently wrong with either, though they both have difficulties. If you set a meeting topic but can't find a speaker, then there are issues. Likewise if you have a speaker who is otherwise amazing, but doesn't have anything relevant to discuss.

Another option is that of a roundtable discussion. If there are current events happening that people want to discuss, a topical roundtable might be just what the doctor ordered. As a bonus, you can record the audio and publish it as a group podcast.

If you find yourself stuck for speakers, contact [locals@lopsa.org](mailto:locals@lopsa.org) and we will do what we can to find an appropriate speaker in your area. We can't guarantee anything, of course, but we'll work with you to make something happen.

### **Obtaining Sponsors**

There is absolutely no need to get sponsors for your LOPSA chapter – many chapters have run and survived for years without them, but having sponsors does make a few things easier.

First, it's really nice to offer refreshments at meetings. Paying for these yourself and/or passing the basket works, but you don't want to make a habit of it. Having a sponsor take care of refreshments relieves you of the financial burden, and costs you only whatever you negotiate – in many cases, a brief mention at the beginning of the chapter meeting, or maybe a sign next to the pizza boxes.

The best potential sponsors for a LOPSA chapter are those companies that provide services that are of interest to system administrators. In some cases, local co-location facilities or electronics stores may be interested, but you don't get a lot of interest locally, don't forget that there are a lot of potential businesses on the Internet, as well.

If you solicit a local establishment for sponsorship, make sure to wear business casual dress, and ask to speak to the manager on duty. Introduce yourself and explain your purpose while handing the manager a glossy pamphlet, such as the one included in the Local Chapter Startup Kit. Make sure to politely answer any questions that they have, and if you find yourself unable to, offer to refer them to the member of the Board of Directors who is shepherding your chapter's startup. Respect any signs prohibiting solicitation (and call instead).

When reaching out to an online company, direct your inquiries to the marketing department (most companies list their marketing department contact information on their webpage somewhere). Again, introduce yourself as a representative of the <your city> chapter of LOPSA, the professional association for system administrators. Explain that you are seeking sponsors for refreshments during meetings (or whatever it is that you are seeking sponsorship for).

Presumably, the company will offer to either pay for the refreshments directly, reimburse you for the refreshments, or offer to cut the chapter a check for a certain amount. While all of those will work, the last one requires a bit more work from you, as you need to have a bank account to deposit the check into.

A local chapter is permitted to have a checking account and to keep money in it for the furthering of its goals, but if the amount reaches \$500, then the chapter does need by-laws, as explained above.

## Running a Chapter

Now that your chapter has members, a structure, a meeting place, speakers, and possibly a sponsor or two, we need to get down to the business of operating it and keeping people returning. Running the meeting doesn't need to be a big production (in fact, most people generally prefer simple over elaborate), but it does need to be interesting.

## The format of your meetings

Most Local LOPSA meetings begin at around 6pm and run through 9pm. Depending on your locale, the starting time of the meeting may need to shift later. Particularly in metropolitan areas, a starting time of 6:30 or 7pm isn't unheard of. Here's a typical meeting schedule:

5:30pm	Organizers & refreshments arrive
6:00pm	Informal mingling and meet & greet w/ speaker
6:30pm	Meeting opens with greeting and chapter business
6:45pm	Speaker is introduced
7:45pm	Questions
8:00pm	Organizer thanks speaker, informal mingling / clean up
8:30pm	Everyone goes home or adjourns to a local hangout

Included with this guide should be a checklist that can be printed out to assist the organizer to remember what happens when. It is also useful for the chapter secretary when recording minutes.

## Your First Meeting

The first meeting of a chapter is a little different. The most important difference is that almost no one at the meeting will be familiar with LOPSA. This is their introduction to our organization, so it behooves the organizer to talk a bit about the organization and its goals. If you need advice, the best person to speak to would be the Board of Directors member assigned to help your chapter begin.

When it comes to finding a topic and speaker for the first meeting, it helps to start very strong. Look for someone who is well-known in the community and can talk about something general enough that it will attract administrators across the board, but still be interesting.

## Retaining members

The easiest way to retain members is to get people involved. It's a simple psychological strategy – get someone to invest enough time in something and they mentally assign it a higher value than they would otherwise. For this reason, all of your chapter members should at least be approached personally to see if they want to contribute to some aspect of running the chapter, whether it's finding new sponsors, speakers, or whatever.

The other way to retain members is harder, but just as rewarding, and that's to continually provide a quality experience for people attending your meetings. This means constantly improving the meeting. Don't be content with a decent meeting – improve it until it's "good", then shoot for great. Use the help that your fellow chapter members offer, even if it's just good advice.

Don't worry about failing **if** you try new things.  
Worry about failing **to** try new things.