

# editor's note



## IF YOU WERE CREATING A TECHNICAL CONFERENCE, HOW WOULD YOU GO ABOUT IT?

You could do it the traditional way (send out a call for papers, evaluate the submissions, select the best papers, and give each presenter 20 minutes to summarize their paper). You could create an “unconference” (where attendees gather, and those present self-select from those present who they want to hear from—essentially a discussion where everyone contributes, rather than simply information flowing down from selected experts). You could have a virtual conference (where everyone is isolated at their own desktops listening to webinars and even visiting a virtual exhibit hall online). You could organize a series of Pecha Kucha sessions, where each presenter is only allowed 20 slides and each slide is shown for only 20 seconds (lots of cool information presented rapid fire). You could use the NASCC model (where a dedicated organizing committee selects topics and then reaches out to the top experts on that topic and invites them to present).

But which way is best?

As you can imagine, there are pros and cons to all of the methods.

A traditional call for papers tends to lean toward more academic presentations—and the 20 minutes allotted to a speaker precludes substantial depth. Unconferences are fascinating but uneven; you tend to learn a lot from your peers but it's hard to really select your topics. Virtual conferences are extremely economical, but you lose the knowledge you normally would gain from an exchange of information, there's a tendency to let your mind wander to whatever else is going on in your office (be it email, an important phone call, or solitaire), and there's no networking benefit. Selecting topics allows for a more in-depth exploration, but there's a tendency to go back to the experts you already know rather than reaching out to new speakers. And Pecha Kucha is fascinating—but only in small doses!

So is it possible to use all of these methods?

We're going to find out on May 12.

AISC, together with ASCE's Structural Engineering Institute, is hosting a mega conference for everyone involved in the design and construction of primarily buildings but also bridges. This huge event combines NASCC: The Steel Conference, The Structures Conference, the Annual Stability Conference (from the Structural Stability Research Council), CASE Spring Risk Management Convocation, NISD Annual Meeting, and the 19th Analysis & Computation Specialty Conference.

Some of the sessions are the result of a call for papers (by my count, even after carefully winnowing the submitted papers, more than 400 abstracts were accepted); some of the sessions are the result of a committee looking for the top experts on carefully selected topics. In some cases, the speakers were chosen first—and then they were given the option of choosing their own topic (check out this year's “essays from experts” and “top pros” sessions). We have roundtables for fabricators and for detailers—essentially an “unconference” where the topics and speakers are self-selected. And we've even set up one Pecha Kucha session!

The only drawback that I can see to this conference is with so many outstanding sessions, with so many people to visit with and meet, and with so many exhibitors to check out, I'm going to be hard-pressed to find time to go with my family to Disneyworld. (Oh, did I mention the conference is in Orlando? My kids have been lobbying their mom to go for more than a year!)

Visit [www.aisc.org/nascc](http://www.aisc.org/nascc) to see a full list of the sessions, to register, and to book a hotel room (did I mention there's a free shuttle to Disneyworld—which is only about five minutes from the hotel?).

Hope to see you in Orlando!

**SCOTT MELNICK**  
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