



**Baltimore Educational and Social Society**

**Special Interest Group (SIG) Handbook**

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**November 17, 2002  
Revised July 12, 2007**

## **Introduction**

The Purpose of the SIG Team is to assist Special Interest Groups (SIGs) in obtaining resources to pursue their BESS related area of interest, and to provide interface to the board for the SIGs.

The purpose of a SIG is to allow contributors and interested non-contributors to exchange ideas and information on a specific BDSM related topic.

SIGs promote a higher level of expertise in their area of interest. It is hoped that SIG members will bring that expertise back to BESS to benefit the overall organization.

## **Structure**

For a SIG to be recognized it needs two contributors to act as the SIG Coordinators (primary and alternate) and a statement of scope. The coordinators identify themselves and provide the scope of the SIG in written form to BESS for validation. The statement need not be elaborate. For example:

The Equipment SIG - This group will focus on home made equipment and toys for dungeon use. The coordinator is Jane ([janedoe@mymail.com](mailto:janedoe@mymail.com)), and the alternate is John ([johndoe@mymail.com](mailto:johndoe@mymail.com)).

The SIG will be announced to the membership on both the announcement list and during the next regularly scheduled meeting. The SIG coordinators will assume responsibility for tracking membership of the SIG and providing timely announcements of events to the group and if applicable, to BESS as a whole. All

SIGs operate as semi-independent organizations within BESS. While updates on their activities are desirable, no reporting schedule is mandated.

SIGs maintain an email list to facilitate communication between member and coordinators. The lists are owned by the SIG Team Leader and moderated by the coordinators, and their designated representatives.

SIGs are dissolved upon request of the coordinators or when insufficient interest exists to merit continuation of the SIG.

## **Resources**

BESS provides the following resources to all SIGs.

SIG announcements are posted to the BESS Announcement list and optionally at meetings. Web Space is provided to identify the SIG and provide email points of contact. Services and expertise from the BESS contributors are provided on a voluntary basis. BESS maintains liaison with other organizations and can locate similar SIGs to contact.

Additional services will be added dependent on the SIG focus and resources available to BESS at any given time.

SIG coordinators are encouraged to promote their activities through other scene friendly forums where appropriate.

## **Activities**

SIG coordinators and the contributors in the group determine what the SIG will ultimately do. However most SIGs will follow one or more of the following activities.

SIGs generally host meetings to exchange information with interested contributors. They may also solicit external presenters in their area of interest. If a presentation is of value to BESS overall, a SIG should request the Education team invite the presenter to speak at a regular meeting. In this way, new presenters can be identified for BESS.

Presenters wishing to 'test' their materials can present to SIGs in order to refine the presentations.

SIGs can host presentations to people unfamiliar with their interest. SIGs are encouraged to hold introductory level workshops to introduce new people to safe methods and diverse interests in the scene.

SIGs also have the option to gather simply to practice their area of interest.

SIGs are not to host play parties outside of those directed by the BESS social team. SIG coordinators who invite SIG participants to private play parties are requested to make it clear that these parties are *not* BESS functions.

### **SIG Participation**

SIG coordinators are encouraged to promote SIG participation to include non-contributors. This is done at the discretion of the SIG coordinators and with due consideration to the events planned and topics to be discussed. SIG coordinators may limit participation to BESS contributors only or subsets of contributors based on a published criteria consistent with the SIG's area of interest. For example, a women's SIG can limit participation to female contributors only.

SIG coordinators may similarly choose to limit participation to persons 21 years of age and over. The decision to exclude non-contributors or those under 21 years of age is on a per event basis. Specific non-contributors may be invited as guests of BESS to SIG events with the coordinator's approval.

Non-contributors may not participate in hands-on activities or serve as volunteers in demonstrations.

Coordinators may not exclude individual BESS contributors from SIG events in public venues without prior approval from the board.

Due to increased personal risk, SIG events that occur in private residences are subject to more limited participation at the request of the hosting contributor. The SIG coordinator should use discretion and fairness in excluding individual contributors from events in private residences. Individuals that feel they have been unfairly excluded are urged to consult with the SIG coordinator, SIG Team Leader, or Ombudsman to resolve the issue.

Participation in any SIG event may be limited due to space constraints, with preference given to BESS contributors.

Any announced SIG event that references its affiliation with BESS is an official BESS event. It is bound by the same rules of conduct for safe space as any BESS event. Coordinators are to ensure all participants are aware of the safe space requirements and to enforce them. Non-contributors unwilling to agree to the BESS policies are not permitted at SIG events. Contributors can be removed from BESS for misconduct at a SIG event.

A BESS guest waiver is provided in the appendix of this handbook with the rules of conduct. All participants **MUST** read and sign the waiver prior to participating

in a BDSM activity at a SIG event. This form is accomplished at the first event a participant attends, and kept on file, by the coordinator for future admission to that SIG's events. Participation in a BDSM activity at another BESS SIG requires re-accomplishing the form for the other coordinator's records.

SIG events may occur in private residences. The host is encouraged to brief the coordinators on any additional house rules prior to the event so the group can be informed. The BESS Safe Space Policy will not hold at a SIG event, however the BESS guest waiver MUST be on file prior to any BDSM activity.

All SIG participants must meet the BESS criteria for attending Educational events and be able to produce identification to verify age upon request.

All SIG events are drug free. Consumption of alcoholic beverages is permitted at the discretion of the SIG coordinator for non-play social events held in an establishment where the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages is legal or an event at which the Board of Directors of BESS authorizes the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Events that include BDSM demonstrations or participation of SIG members in BDSM activities, are alcohol free. Alcoholic beverages are strongly discouraged at events open to guests under 21 years old.

## **Funds Handling**

SIG coordinators are tasked with insuring funds are handled in a manner to prevent the appearance or actual misuse of contributor funds.

SIGs act with a large degree of autonomy within BESS. They are not managed directly by BESS with regard to small funds collected and expended during the course of their individual events.

The following guidelines apply:

- SIGs are not to maintain separate funds or accounts from those of BESS
- SIGs may collect from their participants for consumables and refreshments. Monies collected are to be spent for a designated gathering. A total count of the money collected is noted at the start of the event. Receipts are retained during the event. At the end of the event excess funds are noted. Excess funds under \$25 are expected to be managed by the coordinators or their representatives for the next SIG event. The treasurer has the option to request any financial data from the most recent SIG event. But, amounts less than \$25 do not require mandatory reporting by the SIG coordinator or retention of receipts.
- If a SIG has an event that results in an excess of funds totaling \$25 or more, but less than \$100, a courtesy email noting the amounts collected and spent, is sent to the BESS treasurer. The treasurer may audit the

- event and request the receipts. The coordinator or their representative still retains control of the funds. It is expected that those funds will be spent on subsequent SIG events. Coordinators are discouraged from collecting amounts that result in excesses greater than \$25. Receipts are retained for funds in this category until the treasurer declines audit.
- Excess funds collected by a SIG over \$100 will be reported to the BESS treasurer. The report will include amounts collected and spent and receipts for the amounts spent. The treasurer can request the funds for deposit in the BESS account. A receipt is issued to the SIG coordinator for funds in the BESS treasury. The funds can be reallocated to the SIG upon request of the SIG coordinator. Funds in excess of \$100 are strongly discouraged since it puts a burden on the treasurer to track funds outside the scope of BESS's normal business functions.
  - SIGs will consult the BESS treasurer for events that result in more than \$10 per person being collected (for example, an overnight trip requiring bus tickets). The treasurer will advise on handling procedures of those funds on an individual basis.

SIGs acting under direction of the Board, may be allocated funds from BESS for specific tasks. Receipts for the use of those funds are required for the treasurer. Excess funds allocated from the BESS treasury are turned back into BESS upon completion of the task.

SIG coordinators use discretion regarding receipts for the use of trivial funds it collects from its participants. Small purchases do not require elaborate accounting. Maintaining short term accountability is advised by keeping receipts and maintaining notes of funds handled. SIG coordinators act at all times to maintain the trust of the contributors and other SIG participants.

### **Advanced Funds**

The purpose of Advanced Funds, is to prevent SIG staff from using their private funds to finance SIG events that require advanced purchases.

SIG coordinators can request funds be provided to them in advance of an event to facilitate deposits or the purchase of materials required for an event. This is done with the expectation that the SIG will collect sufficient funds to reimburse BESS after the event.

The SIG coordinator provides a written request to the treasurer for the funds and an explanation of the intended use. The SIG Team Leader is also notified of the request. The treasurer approves the amount and provides the funds when satisfied with the request. After the event, the SIG coordinator provides reimbursement to the treasurer. BESS will absorb shortfalls from SIG events up

to the total annual budgeted amount. SIGs are encourage to provide full reimbursement to BESS where possible. Receipts are maintained and provided to the treasurer upon request.

## **Guidelines**

SIGs can be formed to address any subset or focus of the BESS contributors.

The following guidelines apply to all SIGs.

One or both of the coordinators should actively be participants or have some expertise in that area of interest.

SIGs are bound by BESS policies with regard to demonstrations and workshops. This is specifically pertinent to demonstrations that include nudity and/or physical contact.

BESS assumes no liability for activities held in private homes. Contributors hosting SIGs do so at their own risk.

Individual SIG contributors, acting outside of BESS SIG auspices, do so without the approval of BESS and assume full responsible for their own actions.

## **Conclusion**

BESS hopes to assist contributors in pursuing their special interests. To that end SIGs are supported and solicited from the contributors. Please bring any ideas for a SIG to the SIG team's attention for support in getting started.

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GUEST WAIVER (Page 1 of 2)**

1. I agree that my attendance at this meeting or event of the Baltimore Educational and Social Society (hereafter referred to as BESS) shall be solely as a guest of a contributor to the organization and not as a member of the public.
2. I understand that attendance at BESS meetings and events is open only to people over the age of nineteen (19). I certify that I have met the minimum age requirement for the event.
3. I understand that the subject matter concerns the practice of consensual bondage and discipline, sadomasochism, power exchange between willing and consenting adults, homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality, fetishism, and other related sexual or dominance-and-submission activities. The umbrella term for these practices is BDSM.
4. I state and agree that I find none of these subjects or activities offensive or objectionable. I wish to be a guest of BESS for the purpose of learning more about these subjects, including safety issues relating to BDSM and the ethical values of the BDSM community, and to socialize with others who have these subjects as a genuine interest.
5. I recognize that in order to teach the subject matter effectively, some of the programs sponsored by BESS may involve nudity or be sexually explicit. I consent to the explicit nature of such programs and certify that this does not make them offensive or objectionable to me.
6. I agree not to bring or consume any alcoholic beverage or illegal drug at any meeting, program, or gathering sponsored by BESS. The only exception is that I may consume alcoholic beverages at an event held in a bar where the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages is legal and expected or an event at which the Board of Directors of BESS authorizes the consumption of alcoholic beverages.
7. I agree not to bring a camera, video recording device, or audio recording device into any meeting, program, or gathering sponsored by BESS, unless specifically authorized in advance by the Board of Directors. I further agree should any camera, video recording device, or audio recording device be brought into a BESS event by me or someone acting on my behalf, such equipment will be subject to immediate confiscation and all its film, media or recording data will be subject to immediate destruction.

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8. I recognize that BDSM and the related activities described in Paragraph 3 above carry inherent risks. I assume the risk of physical and emotional injury incident to my participation at meetings, programs, and gatherings sponsored by BESS, and I waive any claim of liability that might arise against BESS, or its officers, team leaders, volunteers, or contributors, from my participation at meetings, programs, and gatherings sponsored by BESS or from my use of information or techniques learned at such meetings, programs, and gatherings.

Guest Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Guest's Age is (circle one) 19-20 / Over 21

Guest's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Initial's of person verifying ID's \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_