



# WeGetletters

by Michael W Lucas

Dear ed(1),  
I keep hearing about FreeBSD conferences.  
Should I go?

Sincerely  
Random Sysadmin

Dear Random,  
Yes, you should go. Go, now. Get out of here  
and go!

(time passes)

You're still here?

Sigh. Fine. Let's talk about conferences.

You'll find FreeBSD content at all sorts of technical conferences. Even most Linux events have one or two FreeBSD talks. Ohio LinuxFest has so much, they might as well declare an official FreeBSD track. You'll find FreeBSD content at commercial conferences like Usenix and at a whole slew of security conferences.

But really, you want to hit a dedicated BSD event: BSDCan, AsiaBSDCon, or EuroBSDCon. The smaller, less regular conferences like NYCBSDCon, MeetBSD, vBSDCon are all pretty cool as well. If you speak Portuguese there's Brazil's BSDDay.

BSDCan is at the University of Ottawa, Canada, usually in June. AsiaBSDCon is at the University of Tokyo, Japan, in March. EuroBSDCon, in September, moves each year—not only to a different city, but a different country. I guess Europeans are easily bored? All of these conferences have massive amounts of excellent FreeBSD content. You'll also find all sorts of stuff from other BSDs as well. You can binge on FreeBSD. Drown in it. You can even spread FreeBSD on the floor of your hotel room and roll around in it but do have a shower afterwards.

While the talks are overwhelmingly excellent (except when they give that Lucas guy a platform) the part I most appreciate is the hallway track. When you get together all these really smart programmers, sysadmins, users, and hangers-on, it's like spending a weekend inside the Pinball Machine of Knowledge. Show up to a BSD conference with a problem? You can find people who have solved your problem, or some-

thing much like it. Come looking for an interesting problem to spend some time on? There's a whole bunch of people with problems, and some of them you can solve. And these folks keep up on technology. You'll get offered current ideas, along with older ideas that still work really well—much like FreeBSD itself.

Each time I go to a BSD conference, I leave with more ideas than I can fail to deploy in the next year.

Conferences also give you a chance to interact directly with a bunch of FreeBSD developers. You shouldn't barge up to every developer in the place with your pet annoyance, but it's really easy to ask a question over lunch and see what happens. People code FreeBSD either to a specification (for Foundation-sponsored work) or to solve their own problems.

A developer might be able to point you at a solution, suggest a different tool, or give you some pointers on developing your own solution and contributing it back to the community. Don't say you can't become a committer—at one point, every single committer was just as clueless as you.

These conferences are important enough to the FreeBSD community that the FreeBSD Foundation sponsors them. A two-day FreeBSD developer summit precedes each conference. Committers show up from all over the world to discuss FreeBSD improvements, works in progress, and what comes next. Sometimes five minutes with a whiteboard can cut out months of emails. By subscribing to this magazine, you're supporting those meetings.

There's a last reason for going to a BSD conference, though:

They're a whole lot of fun.

The fun is built into the programming.

Food is fun. EuroBSDCon takes advantage of the locale to host spectacular dinners. You haven't lived until you've eaten spectacular food in a Parisian catacomb or on the only sand beach on Malta. Everyone tells me Japan is magnificent, what with the geeky shopping and amazing seafood. And poutine is sufficient reason to visit Canada. All of these conferences are held in places that have a bunch to interest we geeky sorts, from museums to mints. Bring the family.

They can go out and do cool stuff while you nerd out.

If all that doesn't sell you on attending a conference, I can't help you.

Dear ed(1),

Okay, I want to go. But I can't afford it.

Any suggestions?

—Random Sysadmin

RS,  
BSD conferences are decidedly noncommercial. They're designed to be as inexpensive as possible. When you attend BSDCan, you get access to student housing. But maybe you're flat-out broke, can't prevail upon your hypothetical employer to foot the bill, or haven't figured out how to save part of your salary for the things you want. (If it's that last one; fix that.)

There are two ways to get to a conference on the cheap.

The simplest is to present. Unlike many commercial conferences, BSDCan, AsiaBSDCon, and EuroBSDCon pay travel and housing expenses for speakers. As a BSDCan committee member, I know that we've paid airfare for speakers flying in from South Africa and Australia. It's not first class, either the airfare or the accommodations, but you'll only go back to your hotel room to collapse in exhaustion, so who cares? Your presentation doesn't have to be highly technical; conferences want a mix of programming, systems administration, and war stories.

The other method? FreeBSD contributors can approach the FreeBSD Foundation for a travel grant. You'll have to fill out paperwork explaining your need and how your presence will enhance FreeBSD, but it's not unspeakably onerous. I've seen a surprising number of folks attend conferences on the Foundation's dime.

Why would the Foundation fly people in?

Bringing talented folks to a FreeBSD devsummit, letting them meet people and learn about existing issues they could help with, improves the chances that they'll pitch in to help FreeBSD.

Pick a conference on your continent and go!

Dear ed(1),

There's no conference on my continent.

—RS

How did I let the Journal Editorial Board talk me into answering these letters?

FreeBSD is created by volunteers. FreeBSD conferences are the same. If no conference exists on your continent, then create one. You don't need anyone's permission. There's no central arbiter of who may run FreeBSD cons. All you need is space to hold the con, a few folks to help organize it, and Internet-based publicity.

If possible, attend one of the existing conferences so you can see how they run. Watch Dan Langille's video on running a BSD conference. Shamelessly steal his advice.

Conferences like MelbourneBSDCon or BSDNigeria will only help expose more people to FreeBSD.

And that's how our community grows. One continent, one conference, one conversation at a time. ●

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**Send your questions to [letters@freebsdjournal.com](mailto:letters@freebsdjournal.com). Letters will be answered in the order in which they amuse, annoy, or inspire the columnist, and may be edited for his own purposes.**



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