SRE CON_ AMERICAS

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THE ADVANCED
COMPUTING SYSTEMS
ASSOCIATION

VIRTUAL EVENT • December 7–9, 2020

Rev. 08/06/2020

Sponsored by USENIX, the Advanced Computing Systems Association

Important Dates

- Proposals due: Thursday, August 27, 2020
- Notifications to presenters: Tuesday, September 29, 2020
- Confirmation of acceptances (not content): Friday, October 9, 2020
- Deadline for program materials (descriptions, bios, etc.): Friday, October 16, 2020
- Pre-recorded videos due: Friday, November 13, 2020
  - If edits are needed, you will be notified by Friday, November 27, 2020, and will need to submit your changes within one week from that date (Friday, December 4, 2020).

Overview

For this SREcon, we want to hear how technology companies have embodied resiliency in 2020. We want to look at how SREs adapt in times of uncertainty and how they prepare their teams to do the same. We want to hear stories—stories of the unique situations you never thought you needed to prepare for, how you learned from incidents and surprises, how you scaled, and how SREs influenced their companies during 2020. This includes examining surprising performance challenges, technical coordination adaptability, controlling for the new cognitive load in 2020, and deep debugging efforts within distributed systems.

We're interested in how SREs work along many dimensions, but would like to bring extra attention to facilitation of incident management, new scaling requirements and learnings. Talks might consider such questions as:

- How does your team allow for and encourage learning while continuing to move forward?
- What did you need to make sudden changes to both technically and organizationally?
- What does the new normal look like from an SRE perspective?
- How did you balance the demands of keeping a system running while building for the long term?
- What has your team done to improve your ability to focus on cognitively demanding tasks under new circumstances?

Please join us in creating an excellent program for SREcon20 Americas. Since 2016, participants have come from a wide variety of backgrounds: small startups, tech giants with tens of thousands of employees, finance and enterprise sector companies adopting or expanding SRE in their organizations, and academia. New speakers are encouraged to submit talks; many of our best talks have come from people with new perspectives to share and 2020 most certainly has given us all new experiences and stories we can share and learn from.

We welcome and encourage participation from all individuals, including people that are underrepresented in, or excluded from, technology, including but not limited to: people of all colors, women, LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, students, veterans, and others with unique characteristics. Similarly, we welcome participants from diverse professional roles: QA testers, security teams, DBAs, network administrators, compliance experts, UX designers, government employees, scientists. Regardless of who you are or the job title you hold, if you are a technologist who faces unique challenges and shares our areas of interest, we encourage you to be a part of SREcon20 Americas.

Proposals

We are looking for proposals to fit into a virtual conference. All talks will be pre-recorded videos and scheduled like a normal conference for attendees to watch. During presentations speakers will be able to interact with the audience in real time! More details will follow upon acceptance of your proposal in the submission system.

Due to the nature of a virtual conference we will not have workshops or lightning talks this year and instead will be supporting panels and video-podcasts.

Below are some ideas of what you or your team could submit.

Talks

- 20- or 40-minute talk (with Q&A to follow in dedicated SREcon Slack channel)

Suggested Topics

- Tell us about how you adapted.
  - Were you forced to because there was a pandemic? Or were you well-prepared?
- Tell us about your wild debug stories that took you into the internals of complex systems.
- Tell us about how you accounted for burnout on your team, and how your business recognized it
- Tell us about how you became an expert on a particular tool and how you disseminated that expertise.

- Tell us about how you knew what to work on, given all the reliability problems at hand, and the limited time to focus on all of them.
- Many companies adopted new tools to help cope with the distributed workforce.
  - Which of those are still in play? Which have been discarded and why?
- Tell us about the deep technical or people skills you have developed expertise in as an SRE.
- As SREs, how can we better share our knowledge gained through deep work and level up the rest of our organization?
- How is the pandemic impacting staffing decisions around SRE-type roles? What are the business continuity plans?
- How has your mindset and your organization's mindset toward SRE shifted during the pandemic?
- What are new and unexpected types of incidents you're encountering? How are you learning from and adapting to them?

Panels (New to SREcon!)
- Have you worked at an organization that dealt with unexpected scale during the pandemic (*e.g.*, organizations that focused on food delivery, streaming, medical services, media, COVID-19 work)?
- How did your team adapt to being suddenly distributed?
- Tell us about a strange and surprising incident that occurred during the pandemic. Bring some of your team members onto this panel and tell us the story about what happened and how the team coordinated, reacted to, and solved the problem.

Podcasts (New to SREcon!)
- Do you have a topic you're wanting to be interviewed on? A topic you're wanting to interview someone else on? We'd love to hear it.

Principles Track
With the popularity of the Core Principles track at previous SREcon conferences, we've decided to continue this component at SREcon20 Americas. Talks in this track will focus on providing an in-depth understanding of how the underlying technologies used by many SREs function, and why it's important to know these details when supporting and scaling your infrastructure.

For this track, we're looking for a number of topics, such as:
- **Performance** (*e.g.*, CPU affinity, bottlenecks)
- **Databases** (*e.g.*, how is data stored on disk in MySQL, PostgreSQL, etc.?)
- **Observability** (*e.g.*, monitoring overview, events vs. metrics, whitebox vs. blackbox, visualizations, debugging, etc.)
- **Distributed Systems** (*e.g.*, consistency and consensus, Hadoop, MapReduce, Juniper Notebooks, Containers)
- **Network** (*e.g.*, SD WAN, HTTP routing and load balancing, DNS)

To see the details of what we want to know about your proposal to speak, we encourage you to click through into the talks submission system. This year the SREcon program co-chairs and program committee are here to support you given a virtual conference is new to most. If you are a new presenter or would just like some extra help please reach out. We can provide support via practice sessions, review of your pre-recorded videos, and a helpful guide on how to record your presentation to get the best results possible.

Both presenters and organizers may withdraw or decline proposals for any reason, even after initial acceptance. Speakers must submit their own proposals; third-party submissions, even if authorized, will be rejected.

If you have questions about this Call for Participation, feel free to drop us a message at srecon20americas_chairs@usenix.org.

Background (Overarching Goals of the Global SREcon Conferences)
SREcon is a gathering of engineers who care deeply about site reliability, systems engineering, and working with complex distributed systems at scale. Our purpose is to be inclusive as we bring together ideas representative of our diverse community, whether its members are focusing on a global scale, launching new products and ideas for a small business, or pivoting their approach to unite software and systems engineering. SREcon challenges both those new to the profession as well as those who have been involved in SRE or related endeavors for years. The conference culture is built upon respectful collaboration amongst all participants in the community through critical thought, deep technical insights, continuous improvement, and innovation.

For more information on the themes and programs of past conferences, see the list of past conferences at www.usenix.org/srecon.

Conference Organizers
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