

Message from the 26th USENIX Security Symposium Program Co-Chairs

Welcome to the USENIX Security Symposium in Vancouver! The symposium, now in its 26th year, is a premier venue for security and privacy research, and gathers together researchers from both industry and academia to discuss the latest on improving computer security. The program consists of research papers selected during a peer-review process, invited talks, and professional and social events.

This was the biggest year ever for our peer-review submissions process. Like last year, the symposium had two chairs. We were supported by an excellent program committee (PC) consisting of 77 members. Of those, 35 were remote PC members whereas 42 also attended an in-person PC meeting in Boston that lasted a day and a half. The PC members did an incredible amount of work, and we can't thank them enough for their efforts!

The double-blind review process this year worked as follows: We received 572 submissions—the most ever for the symposium—by the submission deadline of February 16, 2017. Of these, 19 were desk-rejected for various violations of the call for papers. Reviewing proceeded in two rounds. In the first round, every paper was assigned to two reviewers, and 199 papers were marked for rejection after the first round (due to unanimously low scores by two confident reviewers). We allowed a special appeals process in case of reviewer error; none of the appealed papers were revived after inspection of the authors' concerns. The remaining papers passed on to a second round, and received one or more additional reviews.

In an online discussion phase, the committee attempted to accept or reject a large number of papers before the in-person meeting. This was to ensure that there was sufficient time at the meeting to discuss the most contentious papers. We pre-accepted 49 papers during online discussions and discussed about 80 papers during the meeting. Each paper was allowed up to eight minutes of discussion, with few exceptions. The vast majority were easily decided upon within that time. Unlike last year, we did not unblind the authors during the PC meeting and believe the benefits (in terms of discouraging negative or positive bias) outweighed the few situations that arose in which the PC members would have benefited from knowing the authorship. The chairs also decided to keep the PC members somewhat in the dark about the number of papers being accepted over the course of the meeting in the hope that discussions could focus on the merit of individual papers rather than on the need to “fill a program.”

At the meeting, the committee had an extensive discussion about whether more theory-oriented papers are suitably in-scope for the symposium. Over the last few years, the symposium has seen an increasing number of papers that only very tangentially target computer security problems faced in practice, most notably in the context of papers developing or improving cryptographic protocols not yet addressing specific security applications. After extensive discussion, the committee decided that the broader community would be better served by encouraging such papers to seek other venues. This was not a decision taken lightly, and it resulted in a number of very good papers being rejected for reason of fit.

Ultimately, the committee decided to accept 85 papers, a record number for the symposium. Of these, 38 were conditionally accepted and shepherded to ensure that the camera-ready version of the paper reflected reviewer feedback. In the end, this resulted in a 15% acceptance rate, meaning that the conference continues to be exceptionally competitive. We believe the final set of accepted papers represent excellent work, and the authors should be congratulated for their notable achievement!

The conference would not be possible without the help of a huge number of people. The staff at USENIX ensure that everything runs smoothly behind the scenes, and Casey Henderson and Michele Nelson specifically helped us in innumerable ways. The PC, of course, did a tremendous amount of work, with each member reviewing about 20 papers, for a total of over 1600 reviews and over 2200 comments across the entire process. We also thank the external reviewers who were brought in due to their particular expertise to review a smaller number of papers. We would also like to thank for their hard work: the invited talks committee (Michael Bailey, Casey Henderson, David Molnar, and Franziska Roesner); the Test-of-Time award committee (Matt Blaze, Dan Boneh, Kevin Fu, and David Wagner); the poster-session chair Nick Nikiforakis; and the lightning talks chairs Kevin Butler and Deian Stefan. Finally, we thank all of the authors of the 572 submitted papers for participating in the 26th USENIX Security Symposium.

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