



WP 10

**EXCOM/COs Meeting 2011**  
**Edinburgh, 16,18,19<sup>th</sup> July 2011**

Agenda Item: 2.3.4  
Person Responsible: M Kennicutt

# **Strategic Considerations for SCAR Standing Scientific Groups**

# Executive Summary (1 page)

**Title:** Strategic Considerations for SCAR Standing Scientific Groups

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**Introduction:** Standing Scientific Groups (SSGs) are SCAR's most direct connection to the intellectual capacity and scientific expertise needed to realize SCAR's mission in Antarctic science and policy advice. The SSGs only convene once every two years. To this end, it is essential that the SSGs be engaged in all aspects of SCAR and that mechanisms be put in place to capitalize on opportunities to consult with and receive advice from the scientific communities that SCAR serves. It is vital that the Delegates receive useful and informative advice and recommendations to assist in setting priorities and allocating resources. The SSGs are the "brain trust" that fuels all that SCAR does as an organization.

**Important Issues or Factors:** Incorporating specific agenda items into the SSG biennial meeting agendas will improve communication between the SSGs and the Delegates and enhance their advisory role. Improving how SSG budgets are developed will allow more timely management of SCAR's limited assets.

**Recommendations/Actions and Justification:** Enhancements in SSGs procedures are proposed for adoption prior to the 2012 biennial meetings:

1. SSG COs will submit draft meeting reports two months in advance of the biennial business meetings.
2. SSG COs will submit draft budget requests two months in advance of the biennial business meetings.
3. SSG biennial meetings will be used to refine and update the meeting report and agree on final budget requests.
4. SSGs will be asked to set aside time to discuss new frontiers and emerging issues during biennial meetings to provide input to the broader "Horizon Scanning" activities being initiated by SCAR.
5. SSGs will be asked to take a more active role in monitoring the progress of and identifying new Scientific Research Programs by adding an agenda item on this issue at their biennial meetings. Specific recommendations as to acceptability, performance, and prioritization of proposed SRPs are to be provided to the Delegates meeting.
6. SSGs are to conduct biennial reviews of all subsidiary groups to assess performance and make recommendations about improvements, continuation, or cessation of groups recognizing that limited resources may entail the end of one activity before another can be approved.

**Expected Benefits:** Enhanced strategic advice and recommendations from the SSGs will improve Delegate decision-making while facilitating optimal allocation of resources. Improved communication of scientific priorities will assure that SCAR anticipates new directions and emerging issues. Under-spending of allocated funds will decrease resulting in more efficient and timely re-allocation of resources.

**Budget Implications:** No new funds are requested.

## Strategic Deliberations by SCAR Standing Scientific Groups

SCAR is, first and foremost, an interdisciplinary, *scientific* organization that strives for excellence in all aspects of its work. As an organization of members, SCAR is dependent on the scientific communities that it serves to provide the knowledge and information necessary to set scientific priorities, advance scientific frontiers, allocate resources, and develop authoritative policy advice. The Standing Scientific Groups (SSGs) are SCAR's most direct connection to the intellectual capacity and scientific expertise needed to realize its mission. As the SSGs only convene once every two years, it is essential that they be engaged in all aspects of SCAR and that mechanisms are in place to capitalize on these limited opportunities to consult with the scientific community. It is vital that the Delegates receive informative advice and recommendations that assist in setting priorities and allocating resources. The SSGs are the "brain trust" that fuels all that SCAR does as an organization.

Recognizing the importance of communication between the SSGs and the Delegates, a variety of operational changes have been instituted in recent years. To improve communication and input, SSG Chief Officer (COs) are *ex officio* members of the Executive Committee. To improve meeting management, SSG COs work from a detailed, annotated agenda provided well in advance of meetings. Early posting of supporting documents is also encouraged. To facilitate communication and optimize the use of limited time together, common cross-SSG elements are presented in plenary to all three SSGs. To give the SSGs some autonomy in allocating funds, block funding is now the practice and allocations within the SSGs are at the discretion of their leadership. To increase synergy amongst the SSGs, cross-linkages workshops of SCAR scientific leadership are held about every 1 ½ years. All SSG reports to the Delegates are summarized in Power point slide presentations to facilitate discussions and improve communication with those whose first language may not be English. While these changes have improved engagement of SSGs in SCAR's activities, more can be done. To this end, enhancements in how the SSGs operate are proposed for adoption prior to the 2012 biennial meetings.

### ***Timeline for Submission of SSG Reports and Budget***

It has been practice for SCAR SSGs to hold "business meeting" in the week prior to the Delegates' meeting. During the restructuring of SCAR, it was recognized that the closeness in time of the SSG meetings to the Delegates' Meeting caused challenges for the SSGs to produce reports and for the Delegates to have time to read the reports. An early suggestion was to separate the business meetings by two or more months from the Delegates' meeting. This proved financially impractical as it resulted in travel to meetings twice and it tended to isolate the SSGs from the Delegates. This approach was therefore abandoned. However, the closeness of the SSG meetings to the Delegates' meetings still presents challenges. In addition to the relatively short time of availability of the report for review by the Delegates, budget requests are also made a day or so before the Delegates meeting making it difficult to develop full financial strategies in time for Delegate approval.

***To improve this process it is recommended that SSG COs be directed to contact the members of their group in advance of the biennial meetings and prepare draft, preliminary reports and budget requests to be submitted to the Secretariat two months in advance of the business meetings.***

SSG COs are to continue the practice of developing annotated agendas and posting supporting papers prior to the meeting. The SSG draft report and budget would be refined during the business meetings. This has several benefits including allowing better use of SSG meeting time to discuss scientific issues and develop future plans. In parallel to this, the SCAR Finance Committee will be convened two months prior to the meeting and will consider draft budget submissions and provide feedback to the SSGs prior to the meetings. This will allow the Finance Committee to integrate all budget requests and develop robust alternative budget scenarios for consideration by the SSGs and Delegates.

Historically, allocated funds have been under-spent by SSGs and their subsidiary groups. Not only are monies not spent on approved activities, other activities are denied funding due to a lack of unallocated funds. This has been addressed to some extent by returning unspent funds to the central SCAR account at the

end of biennium budget periods for re-allocation. It is important that all SCAR funds be fully and properly utilized as requests always will exceed available funds. In regard to budgets, under-spending must be specifically addressed in requests for future funding and large amounts of unspent funds may result in the denial of future funds.

### ***The Role of SSGs in SCAR “Horizon Scanning” Activities***

To sustain a position of leadership, SCAR must maintain a continually evolving vision of frontiers and emerging directions in Antarctic and Southern Ocean science (see IP 9). To this end, SCAR will sponsor a regular assessment of scientific frontiers. The objective will be to assemble the world’s leading experts to scan the horizons for emerging frontiers in Antarctic and Southern Ocean science and identify gaps in knowledge. This gathering will draw on data and information from SCAR conferences, symposia, workshops, meetings and other scientific gatherings; the outcomes of SCAR’s Action, Expert and Program Planning Groups; National Antarctic Program planning and strategic documents; outcomes of SCAR’s Scientific Research Programs; and reports of SCAR’s Cross-linkages Meetings. The assessment will produce a 5- and 10-year vision of future directions and grand challenges in Antarctic science. These assessments will inform SCAR leadership and members as it evaluates its scientific portfolio, concludes programs and approves new directions.

To facilitate the widest possible engagement of the SCAR scientific community in these activities, a series of related activities will be conducted on a regular basis to feed into these one-in-every 4 or 5 year events. As the primary groups of scientists within SCAR, the SSGs should take the opportunity during their biennial meetings to engage their members in discussion about future directions.

***To engage all SCAR scientists in discerning future directions in Antarctic science, it is recommended that SSGs set aside adequate time to discuss new frontiers and emerging issues during biennial meetings to provide input to the broader “Horizon Scanning” activities being initiated by SCAR. These discussions should be recorded and reported.***

As a coordinated framework is developed for SCAR’s “Horizon Scanning” efforts the participation and input from SCAR’s SSGs will be essential. It is expected that “future-directions” discussions and input will also be solicited during thematic symposia that the SSG are deeply involved in organizing and staging (e.g., the biology, earth sciences, and glaciology symposia). The intent is that exploring future directions and emerging frontiers will be an integral part of SCAR’s activities.

### ***Development and Review of SCAR Scientific Research Programs***

A major change, as part of the restructuring of SCAR, was the creation of Scientific Research Programs (SRPs) as SCAR’s marquee, or top-level, scientific activities. It was recognized that in order to ensure that the SRPs conducted the highest quality and timeliest Antarctic science, regular and rigorous review and assessment was critical. To this end, SRPs are subject to two–year internal and four-year external reviews. While once approved, these programs are funded and managed external to the SSGs, the intent was that SSGs oversee and assess the progress of these programs and provide advice to the Delegates about their continuation, revision, or cessation. In the recent past, this SSG role has not always been highlighted.

Even more critical, is that the SSGs are the groups from which new SRPs evolve. The creation of the SRPs also included a plan for the regular renewal of the SCAR research portfolio. SRPs would be approved for finite periods of time, usually not to exceed two 4-year increments (subject to internal and external assessment). Scheduled cessation of programs was intended to keep the SCAR science portfolio timely (addressing the most pressing scientific issues) and to ensure wide participation. This process depends on the innovative ideas for research emerging from the scientific community.

***To more actively engage the SSGs in assessment of existing SRPs and the development of new SRPs, it is recommended that the SSGs add items to their biennial meeting agendas on these issues. These agenda items should lead to specific recommendations as to the acceptability of performance of existing programs, suggestions for improvement of proposed or existing programs, and prioritization of proposed, competing proposals for SRPs to the Delegates.***

All recent Program Planning Groups, the preliminary step to proposing SRPs, have originated from the SSGs. The adding of a specific agenda item in conjunction with the “future directions” agenda item will provide a process for ensuring that this is an integral part of SSG business. It is also important that SSGs conduct regular and rigorous assessment of existing SRPs and provide these assessments to the Delegates who are tasked with deciding about future funding.

### ***Assuring the Renewal of SSG Subsidiary Bodies***

With the creation of the SRPs, significant financial resources and scientific focus shifted from the SSGs (formerly Working Groups) to the SRPs. This realignment of monies makes it all the more important that the SSGs carefully choose the activities they pursue and that these activities (usually expressed as subsidiary groups) be regularly reviewed so that non-productive activities or activities that have accomplished their terms of reference are ended.

***To ensure an orderly transition in SSG science activities and renewal of activities on a regular basis, it is recommended that a biennial SSG meeting agenda item be a review all subsidiary groups. The review is to assess performance and make specific recommendations to the Delegates about continuation, improvement, or cessation of subsidiary groups recognizing that limited resources may entail the end of one activity before another can be approved.***

To more closely link the SSGs with planning for the biennial Open Science Conferences, all subsidiary group Terms of Reference should include the following: “The group will plan, propose, organize, and stage sessions at the biennial SCAR Open Science Conferences to present and highlight the group’s work”. This also supports the goal that the biennial Open Science Conferences showcase SCAR programs, projects and science.

### ***Conclusion***

The creation of SRPs, during the restructuring of SCAR, significantly shifted resources and to a lesser extent scientific focus within SCAR’s organizational structure. However, the SSGs still remain an important resource that provides the much needed interface between SCAR and the diverse scientific communities that it serves. In the recent past, some have questioned the necessity of SSGs, but it remains abundantly clear that if this connection to the “working” scientists did not exist, it would be much more difficult (if not impossible) for SCAR to draw on the wealth of knowledge of expertise represented by the international Antarctic scientific community. The SSGs also provide one of the few venues for scientists from all SCAR nations to come together to develop networks, partnerships and friendships that can change programs and careers. It is therefore in the best interest of SCAR and its member nations to ensure that the SSGs are efficiently and productively operating, that their deliberations are seen as valuable by the Members, and that their advice and knowledge informs decision-making by the Delegates.