



XXXII SCAR Delegates' Meeting
Portland, USA, 23-25 July 2012

Agenda Item: 10.1
Person Responsible: M. Sparrow

The SCAR Website

Executive Summary

Title: The SCAR Website

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Introduction/ Background: The SCAR web site is the major outlet for the organization to communicate with its members, the general public and scientists interested in SCAR's work. However the current version is out of date and is very much internally focused on SCAR groups. The next generation SCAR website will be designed to appeal to a much wider audience, including the general public, funders, educators, policy makers, and journalists. SCAR has been exploring techniques used for marking-up the content and fostering cross-linkages between the SCAR site and others to improve search engine rankings. The updated SCAR web site will include dynamic features within, or as an adjunct to, the static web pages (e.g. use of drop-down menus and inclusion of multimedia material). The new web site will be a collaborative work-space, allowing the SCAR groups to manage their own space by using a Content management System.

Recommendations/Actions and Justification: EXCOM approved a budget of \$10,000 in 2011 to undertake this work.

Expected Benefits/Outcomes: Improved visibility of SCAR and improved collaborative workspace for SCAR groups.

Budget Implications: No additional funds requested beyond the original \$10,000 approved by EXCOM

The SCAR Website

Background

The SCAR web site is the major outlet for the organization to communicate with its members, the general public and scientists interested in SCAR's work. However the current version is out of date and is very much internally focused on SCAR groups. The next generation SCAR website will be designed to appeal to a much wider audience, including the general public, educators, possible funders, policy makers, and journalists. SCAR is exploring techniques used for marking-up the content and fostering cross-linkages between the SCAR site and others to improve search engine rankings. The updated SCAR web site will include dynamic features within, or as an adjunct to, the static web pages (e.g. use of drop-down menus and inclusion of multimedia material). SCAR is exploring how best to make its web site a collaborative work-space so that all SCAR groups will be given the opportunity to manage their own section of the website.

Progress

An initial questionnaire was sent out to the SCAR groups mailing list in September 2011 to gather input as to what the SCAR groups themselves required from a new website. Many of the SCAR groups responded, with the major items being highlighted being the need to have a workspace that could be managed by the groups themselves in a standard and easy to use format and the need to widen the appeal of the website.

In order to move the project forward an external person was hired to carry out a study of the website, taking into account the feedback already received. Her report is attached as an Appendix.

After circulating this report among the SCAR groups and EXCOM for comment we have started work on producing some draft layouts for the new look of the website. The decision was made to design the website using Joomla and host it externally from Cambridge University to allow the SCAR groups to be able to manage their own web spaces. Over the next few months the new website will be constructed and tested and once fully ready the www.scar.org address reassigned to the new structure.

Appendix: SCAR initial Website Assessment

Summary

The Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) is currently looking to redevelop its existing website www.scar.org. Research conducted has identified two main goals in the website redevelopment.

1. In keeping with the SCAR communications plan, the website is to be used as a platform to raise awareness of SCAR and its activities, attracting a wider range of web users including scientists, policy makers, educators and the general public.

2. To have the new site on a Content Management System (CMS) to enable SCAR groups and programmes to maintain and edit their own pages on the website.

This document is designed to evaluate the existing website and identify the method and design of the redeveloped website. The recommendations suggested are to be reviewed once they have been discussed with the executive committee.

Current Website Assessment

Overview of the website: The current SCAR website is very rich in content. The website contains information on all major activities of the organisation as well as a detailed outline of the structure of the membership and responsibilities within the organisation.

Although it has lots of information it is currently difficult to find specific information due to page organisation and menu navigation. The current website is not accessible to maintain remotely by SCAR groups putting a lot of responsibility of web maintenance on the Secretariat. This also limits the ability of SCAR groups to display material in a way that best represents their activities.

User Analysis: The major audiences of the SCAR website are those involved in the SCAR groups and programmes and other scientists involved in SCAR's work. Generally the following are also target users:

- Policy makers
- Educators
- Students
- Journalists
- Potential funding agencies
- General Public

Website Analytics: The Google analytics were reviewed to get a more detailed picture of visitor information and activities on the website. Below are some of the findings of major areas of the website:

- Most visitors to the website come specifically because they were looking for the SCAR website. This is an important type of web traffic but it is important to note that there isn't a significant share of visitors searching for general information, for e.g. on the Antarctic Treaty, Climate Change, Biodiversity etc.
- There are high levels of web redirection around the site suggesting visitors cannot find what they are looking for.

Style Choice: The font used in SCAR's website is standard and readable but the font size is quite small and leads to larger blocks of text being used to make a page look full. These text blocks make information less accessible to visitors.

It has been commented in the feedback that an increased use of images would be desirable in the new website. This would be useful to break up the text and also start to communicate a brand for the website and SCAR.

It should also be noted that the use of acronyms should be limited on the web home pages of each key theme to gradually introduce these to a first time user.

Structure and Navigation: Looking through the SCAR website there is some very good content and also a lot of educational resources, but the structure of website makes it difficult to find any specific resource. There are two main reasons for this which have been highlighted by several people in the feedback:

- ✦ The themes highlighted by appearing on the main menu are not the key areas that you would like to draw attention to.
- ✦ The navigation of the site is very confusing as the left hand sidebar menu changes on every page and is often accompanied by a list of links almost as a page of contents on the left hand side.

I will cover point one when considering the content of website, but how key themes are highlighted in the menus is worth noting here.

How a user navigates the site is key to engaging new users. The structuring of a website includes putting important information near the top of the site at eye level, grouping related topics and ensuring that all necessary information is available without slowing the visitor with unneeded information.

It is therefore necessary to decide what the important information is for the different target audiences. To ensure that these features are covered in the new website I have produced a user group profile template which you can see in the end notes. Currently I have filled this template in with some sample data to demonstrate how it can be used. This document will highlight the way in which the current content is being used and also what content and functionality is missing. This should provide a point of reference throughout the design process to ensure a robust website for the range of different users.

Layout: There has been a lot of feedback on the home page of the site and how to make it a more dynamic space with a simple layout. SCAR's main home page currently invites you to find out more about the way in which SCAR works and how it is structured. Whilst this is an important part of the website, it is not necessary to focus on this on the homepage. It should only provide enough information for visitors to understand what is being provided, engage them so as to invite them to explore further and provide simple navigation tools to make that easier.

Content: Currently there is a very high content level on the SCAR website. Most of this content is PDFs of reports, publications and meeting notes and also news items. This is very good in that it is obviously a website which is kept up to date and I think a lot of this material should remain. I think the balance of the emphasis of this material needs to change, in order to focus more on SCAR's working themes.

Recommendations

Through this analysis and feedback of the design of SCAR's website, the following recommendations have been put together to help increase the site's usability and appeal to current and target web visitors.

Overall look and presentation: As a website trying to provide information to a range of audiences I recommend the website use a selection of different media to engage these audiences. Included in this could be a news feed, blogs and videos. To achieve a robust website, it needs to be considered how text, graphics, effects and layout are combined. To do this I recommend having one key menu item on the homepage which is designed to navigate each different web user group that has been identified.

Whilst an increase of functionality is recommended, this does not mean filling all available space with animation and graphics. In order to produce a dynamic website, a simple but engaging homepage is necessary. I suggest no more than two short paragraphs introducing SCAR and either an image or video introduction from the President or Executive Director.

It is important to keep any new features such as a news feed up to date, so it is necessary to identify someone to be responsible for each new feature.

Layout Design: A point mentioned in the feedback is that navigation methodology e.g. menus and how articles are linked, should be consistent which is a point that is worth considering for the different SCAR groups' homepage. It may be worth creating a small icon for each SCAR group to put next to information produced by or relating to them for easier navigation (branding of the site).

Identifying Key Issues: Looking through a range of related websites you can see that the most successful ones had an entirely separate menu bar for 'key issues'. This de-clutters the homepage and also gives first time users an easy way to begin navigating through the site.

Once on these pages, there were many links to other relevant ones including the detail of the work done by the organisation towards these issues and relevant resources. This will bring a whole new range of web traffic to the site. This is particularly successful on the World Resources Institute website (<http://www.wri.org/>). You can see my comments on other website layouts in the notes at the end.

Relocating Current Content: The current content is very rich, but enable navigation to these items, I suggest the following categories of items be relocated.

- News Items: as a news feed on the main page and on a separate news page

- featuring blogs as well with a separate page for events.
- Reports and publications: On their own page but with regular links from the rest of the website to appropriate links to certain topics.
- Meeting Minutes: A separate SCAR group log in to access a page with these documents to uncluttered the website in the format of a data library.
- Educational Resources: Currently there are a lot of links to many websites and resources in list format, but I think it would be worth reducing these and categorising them according to usefulness to student or educator. I would also recommend an educator page to show how SCAR issues relate to parts of the curriculum.

Increased updates: In order to increase Google optimisation regular updates to new media are necessary. To enable the accessibility of this, an open source Content Management System (CMS) is recommended. In order to build the capacity of the existing website the following technical specifications for the CMS have been identified:

⤴ **Functionality:**

- Maintain the current domain name.
- High data capacity for archiving pages.
- Automatic back-up and ability to perform manual back-up locally.
- Technical support easily accessible for both the CMS and host server.
- Consistency of style templates in the main internet browsers.

⤴ **User management:**

- Very important that the CMS is user friendly and that additional software or upgrade costs are limited.
- Quick and easy for the site administrators to learn back end website maintenance.
- Front end log-in available for SCAR groups to edit their pages with varying levels of editing permissions.

⤴ **Additional Features:**

- Ability to stream multimedia
- Ability to add in analytics several layers deep and track user usage.
- An event calendar with a searchable database (optional).
- SCAR community forum (optional)
- Low or Ultra-low bandwidth site, or mobile "m.scar" site variation available, specifically for those with no access to fast internet (i.e. in the field)

Open source CMS solutions offer lower upfront, implementation and maintenance costs than commercial CMS systems because of the way the software is developed. By utilising the expertise of developers worldwide, open source vendors deliver a robust product. I have identified two possible CMS solutions which meet SCAR's requirements.

Drupal (<http://drupal.org/>): As an open source CMS written in PHP. Editing and maintaining the website can be done from any computer without additional software. Whilst as a CMS it has a high potential for for more custom features, it is not very accessible for the first time users.

Joomla (<http://www.joomla.org/>): Also an open source CMS, the website can be maintained from any computer without additional software and several users can be

logged in for editing simultaneously. Joomla also offers the following additional benefits:

- Easy to set permissions, easy to change templates and menus for different pages for different sub groups.
- Easy to learn including 1.5 hour webinar for free.
- Manual back up and twice daily back up if go with host cloudaccess.net.
- Very similar to Dreamweaver in some of editing tools for those that already know it.
- Capable of adding database searches, videos, images, blogs, news feeds etc.
- If chosen can sign up for support from emails or phone support including different language help centres.
- Joomla's wide usage has meant that a lot of developers have created a lot of free and open source extensions to build additional functionality to the website.

Considering the ability to learn and use the CMS quickly is a key requirement of the new CMS, Drupal would be slightly harder to implement. Therefore I recommend Joomla is used to construct and maintain the new SCAR website.

Actions Required:

This document provides a summary assessment of the existing website as well as recommending specific uses of layout and content for the new website. From this point there are certain decisions that need to be made in order to proceed (note that the SCAR ED and EO have added some points in *italics* to reflect recent discussions):

- Website content:
 - What are the main themes you wish to highlight?
 - How much scope is there for producing new material?

Note: The main themes need to be discussed – they could reflect the main issues that SCAR covers e.g. Climate Change; Conservation....With a direc link to the relevant SCAR groups.

- SCAR groups and programmes:
 - How many pages will they be allowed?
 - What permission levels will they be allowed e.g. can they change the style and design work?

Note: Each group or Programme should have a template to work with but be able to choose the main photo, number of additional buttons to link to different items etc. That is, the visible structure of each website would be the same, but content would differ for each of the groups or Programmes according to their needs and capabilities.

- Final decision on the CMS
 - Will you pick Joomla?
 - Will you continue with the same web host?

Note: Site will have to be hosted externally because university Firewall system prevents such capabilities. Joomla provides the best balance between stability, expense and ease of use.

- Who will do the web design?
 - How much input do you want into the design?
 - What deadlines do you have for web design completion?

Note: The idea will be to have a draft website running (but not yet live) for SCAR 2012.

End Notes

SCAR Website User Group Profile Template:

This template has been filled in with some sample data to demonstrate how to identify the requirements of the new website.

User Group: SCAR Groups

	Comments	Action Required
Why have they come to the site?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To edit and maintain their pages. - To access reports and meeting notes. -To find out about upcoming events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a front end log in to website on homepage and group pages. - Create searchable database for reports and other archived material. -Maintain current events page.
Are there pages adequate to give them the information they require?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Events page - Publications page 	
Is it easy for them to navigate to those pages?	Links from main homepage	
Why do we want them to come to the site?	Same as above.	
Have we set up a pathway to navigate to those pages?		
Are there pages adequate to give them the information we want to draw them to?		
Is there more than one method or media displaying this information?	Creating searchable databases will enable easier access to information.	As above.

User Group: Non SCAR Scientists

	Comments	Action Required
Why have they come to the site?	-to find out more about SCAR's work - to access publications - to register for an event -to submit an abstract.	- Create searchable database for reports and other archived material. -Maintain current events page. - Link to abstract submission through events page.
Are there pages adequate to give them the information they require?	-About SCAR page including structure of SCAR and links to SCAR group pages.	
Is it easy for them to navigate to those pages?	Needs to be easier to access through menu on homepage	Create navigational pathway from homepage.
Why do we want them to come to the site?	To find out about current research.	Create more consolidated pages on each research area.
Have we set up a pathway to navigate to those pages?		
Are there pages adequate to give them the information we want to draw them to?		
Is there more than one method or media displaying this information?	Currently in the form of Powerpoint and text documents.	Produce video summaries of research topics.

User Group: Policy Makers

	Comments	Action Required
Why have they come to the site?	To find out current information on the Antarctic Treaty and Protocol on Environmental Protection and current	Create news feed on main homepage.
Are there pages adequate to give them the information they require?	Antarctic Treaty Page News Page.	
Is it easy for them to navigate to those pages?	Currently linked from main menu.	
Why do we want them to come to the site?	Current news.	Produce News feed.
Have we set up a pathway to navigate to those pages?		
Are there pages adequate to give them the information we want to draw them to?	Current news page.	
Is there more than one method or media displaying this information?		

User Group: Educators

	Comments	Action Required
Why have they come to the site?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To find resources on Antarctica for geography -to find resources on climate change - to find resources on wildlife - information on Antarctic treaty for politics. - links to other relevant resources and information. - why the poles are important to the rest of the world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create pages which cater for specific educator needs including subject areas and age groups. - possible separate menu option for educators. - educator home page on why Antarctica is important and how it affects the rest of the world.
Are there pages adequate to give them the information they require?	Communication and Education page	Need to break down education pages into more specific categories.
Is it easy for them to navigate to those pages?	Yes, link from main home page.	
Why do we want them to come to the site?	To find resources to help advocate SCAR's work.	
Have we set up a pathway to navigate to those pages?		
Are there pages adequate to give them the information we want to draw them to?		
Is there more than one method or media displaying this information?		

User Group: Students

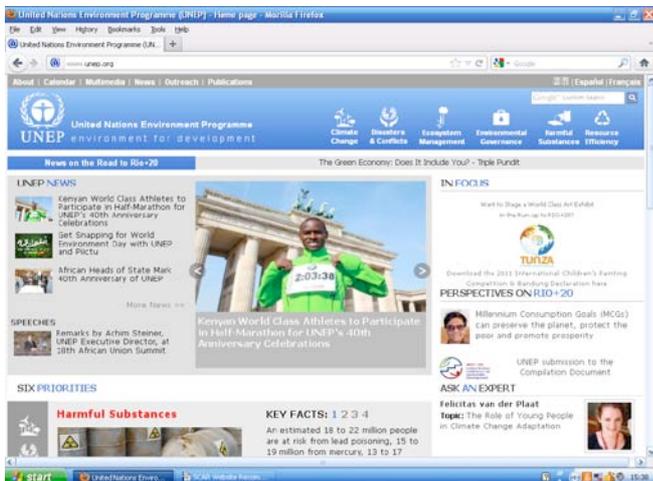
	Comments	Action Required
Why have they come to the site?	University students studying environmental sciences looking for information on research topics - students looking for possible careers -Politics students looking at the way the Antarctic Treaty works	- simple break down of what each group and sub group does in about SCAR to make finding relevant information easier. - Section on the relationship to the Treaty -link to IASC website in job section.
Are there pages adequate to give them the information they require?		
Is it easy for them to navigate to those pages?	No	Use logos for each of the SCAR groups to allow easier navigation.
Why do we want them to come to the site?	- Resources - Current news.	Produce current news feed and blogs.
Have we set up a pathway to navigate to those pages?		
Are there pages adequate to give them the information we want to draw them to?	Too many pages uncategorised.	
Is there more than one method or media displaying this information?	High need for multiple formats of information. Simple summaries to enable navigation.	

User Group: Journalists

	Comments	Action Required
Why have they come to the site?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To find out about a specific event. - To find out background information for a related story. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain events page. - Produce press releases on specific events for communications page. - Have summaries of SCAR's work.
Are there pages adequate to give them the information they require?	No.	Need to separate education and communication information onto separate areas of the website.
Is it easy for them to navigate to those pages?	Yes, link from main page.	
Why do we want them to come to the site?	To publicise the work SCAR does to the general public and other science organisations.	
Have we set up a pathway to navigate to those pages?		
Are there pages adequate to give them the information we want to draw them to?		
Is there more than one method or media displaying this information?		

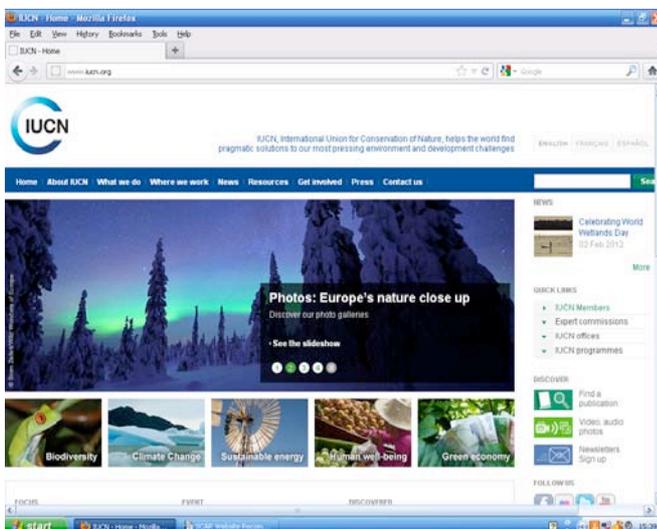
Reviews of related website layouts:

<http://www.unep.org/> :



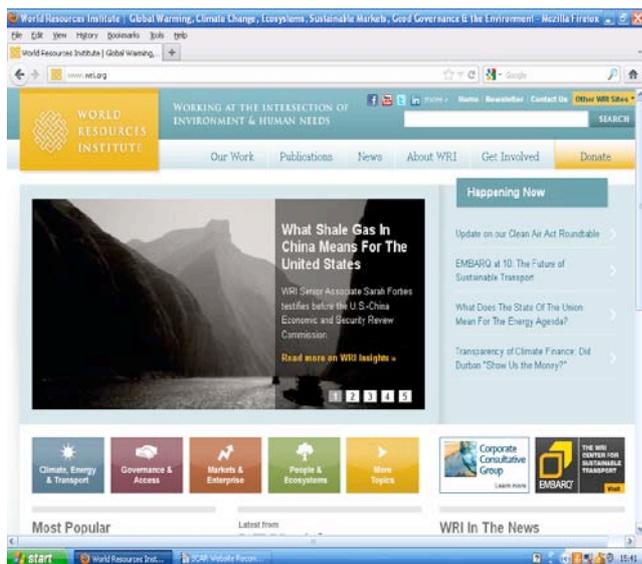
Two menu bars. one of which is smaller and tucked away showing access to standard website pages e.g. news, about etc. and the main one which is used to appeal to the first time user. The main page I would suggest is a little cluttered still, but good use of media.

<http://www.iucn.org/> :



Also has the same technique of two menu tool bars. Addition of entire site map at the bottom of page making all pages accessible. News feed on the side in a column is a classic style and where most users would look for it.

[http://www.wri.org/:](http://www.wri.org/)



Three menu bars. This seems the best mechanism to include all user groups. The main eye catching menu for first time users and general public. The search bar is also more prominent than in the SCAR one which I think is worth considering. So far the best example of combining access to various users with also multi media and still keeping the home page uncluttered.

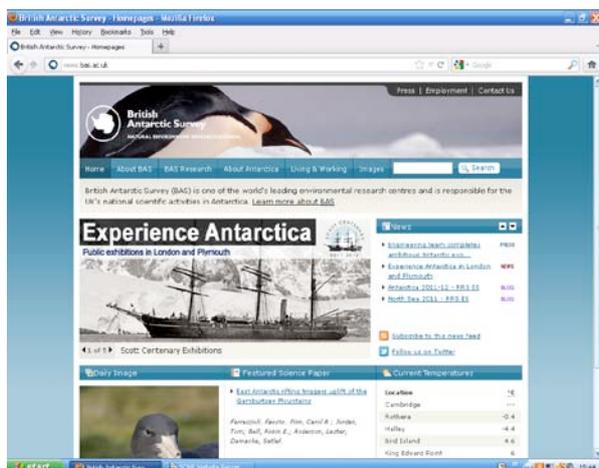
NOTE: This type of design seems the best suited to SCAR needs of both having enough information, but also to keep it simple enough for the general public.

[http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/ :](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/)



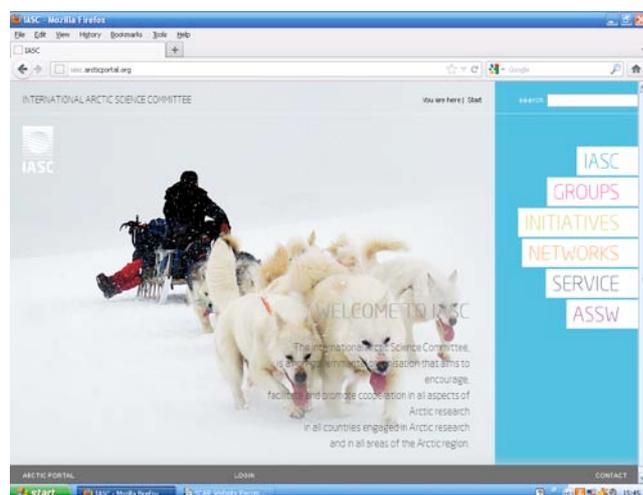
Although two menus are used they are directly next to each other and in very small font creating the 'list' look we want to avoid. The font over all is too small on the page and there is too much information. Also the background almost entirely white is also not appealing.

www.bas.ac.uk:



Not too much information, so harder to translate to the SCAR website. Very standard banner image look. The news feed is squashed into too small a space. But I do like the staff log in menu bar at the bottom as it is tucked away.

http://iasc.arcticportal.org/ :



Layout is dynamic but it is not appealing to a first time user as it makes lots of assumptions of prior knowledge. Text also overlaps images in many browser formats.