

Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry Guidelines for the Establishment and Operations of Interest Groups

Introduction

The Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) encourages its members to organize into groups based on research interest within SETAC World Council (SWC) and SETAC Geographic Units (GUs), such as SETAC North America (SNA) and SETAC Europe (SE), among others. These types of groups were previously referred to as advisory groups (AGs) but their name was changed to Interest Groups (IGs) starting in 2017. The Guidelines for the Establishment and Operations of Interest Groups (Guidelines) provide guidance on the goals, governance, and operation of IGs and provide a mechanism for proposing new IGs. Because SETAC GUs vary in governance terminology – Council or Board of Directors – this document will refer to those entities as SETAC governing bodies. The SETAC Science Manager mentioned in the document refers to SETAC staff serving either the SWC or a SETAC GU.

SETAC IGs play an important role in advancing the science within SETAC. They are a hub for research and investigation, networking, and professional development. IGs have been instrumental in nurturing and growing their subject matter by being a repository of expertise in the specified area and by expanding on that expertise through continually identifying and championing the development of innovative approaches as well as mentoring future leaders. IGs also provide vital opportunities for member engagement. Established SETAC IGs have come to be recognized internally within SETAC, as well as outside the society, as the incubators of the IG-specific technical subject matter.

SETAC supports its IG through a variety of ways such as by offering a platform for collaboration, endorsing IG sponsored sessions at Global annual meetings, encouraging IG initiatives (e.g., administering IG awards, IG organized special events such as workshops and symposiums), administrative support with dedicated staff time for IG related issues, among others. It is SETAC's intention that IGs are welcoming to SETAC members at all stages of their careers who are interested in the subject matter of the IG. As such, IGs provide SETAC members opportunities for collaboration on specific topics. Further, IG work should be a professionally fulfilling experience for a SETAC member. These Guidelines are organized into the following sections:

- Objective of Interest Groups
- Activities and Goals of Interest Groups
- Governance of Interest Groups
- Proposal and Formation of Interest Groups
- Performance and Operational Expectations of Interest Groups

Objective of Interest Groups

The primary objective of SETAC IGs is to provide a venue for scientists with an interest in a particular topic to share knowledge and expertise. As such, IGs are a vehicle for conducting special collaborative work to advance the IG topic under the SETAC umbrella.

To achieve its objectives, it is recommended that an IG develop and implement a long-range strategic plan for participating in the advancement of the IG topic. The long-range plan could be as simple as one or two long-term goals articulated with one sentence to a more elaborate plan. It is further recommended that IGs should, on an annual basis, set a minimum of one goal for the upcoming year to be the focus of the IG work.

Activities and Goals of Interest Group

Administrative activities associated with IGs are streamlined in these guidelines to allow the IGs to focus on advancing their topic-related goals. Administrative activities include:

- Identifying steering committee members annually;
- Preparing an annual report for review by the applicable governing body annually; and
- Reviewing the IG charter and strategic plan and updating as needed every three years.

From time to time, IGs may be asked to voluntarily do other administrative work to promote their IG, should they so wish, but that is not a requirement and strictly voluntary. Such activities include: authoring Globe articles prompting the IG and preparing poster flyers to promote the IG at SETAC meetings.

IGs achieve their objectives through implementing their goals. Each IG's work is different and so are their goals. We recommend detailing specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based (SMART) goals that provide a sense of accomplishment when completed and therefore energizes the membership. We recommend that IGs should, on an annual basis, set a **minimum of one goal** for the upcoming year.

Suggested Interest Group Goals

Suggested goals that SETAC IGs can pursue include, but are not limited to the following:

- Sponsor (lend IG name to), propose, organize, or chair sessions at SETAC annual meetings;
- Encourage, produce, and sponsor publications for submittal to SETAC journals (e.g., Focus Articles, Critical Reviews, and Critical Perspectives);
- Encourage, produce, and sponsor other types of communications (e.g., Technical Issue Papers);
- Organize and support Technical Workshops, Pellston Workshops®, SE Special Science Symposia, or SNA Focused Topic Meetings;

SETAC Guidelines
Adopted May 2017

- Conduct or participate in external outreach (technical reviews, issues papers, and inter-organizational collaborations);
- Create and maintain a knowledge center for the IG, which could take the form of a database of information, a bibliography or library of seminal documents, or other data related to the IG's subject area;
- Conduct or participate in external outreach activities and collaborations, e.g., conduct symposia and trainings;
- Organize and conduct activities recognizing key events or milestones, e.g. Earth Day, Wetlands Day, and International Year of Chemistry;
- Create and maintain a student award program for the topic area;
- Create and maintain a mentorship program.

Governance of Interest Groups

Within SETAC, governance of IGs falls to the applicable SETAC governing body. The IGs themselves are governed through steering committees that must be tripartite. The steering committee is responsible for setting the goals of the IG. The chairs of IG steering committees are named yearly by the President of the SETAC governing body, in consideration of recommendations from the preceding year's IG steering committee. As such, the SWC President appoints the chairs of Global IGs in consideration of recommendations from IG steering committees, consistent with the SWC charter.

IGs are organized through a document called a charter. These charter documents may differ in the level of specificity, although charters for proposed new IGs or revisions and updates to previous charter documents should follow the IG Charter Guidelines.

IG are expected to adhere to SETAC policy. For example, dissemination of IG deliberations and research should adhere to the SETAC [Public Outreach Policy](#). Further, any material shared by the IG or posted on the IG group page should adhere to the [SETAC Communities Rules of Conduct](#), [SETAC Logo and Trademark Guidelines](#), [SETAC Social Media Guidelines](#), and [SETAC Privacy Policy](#). Moreover, all IG members should adhere to the [SETAC Code of Ethics](#). These materials are incorporated into this guidance by reference.

Based on observed practices, the following guidelines are offered for the organization of IGs:

- IGs should organize itself to have a steering committee composed of a minimum of three (3) members and a maximum of twelve (12) members with a built-in leadership sustainability model, which should help with setting the overall tone and agenda, ensuring continuity, managing workload, and planning for leadership transitions.
- The IG steering committee should strive to provide representative balance among the Society's sectors (i.e., from business, government, and academia) to reflect the Society's balanced and interdisciplinary

membership. Diversity of career level and expertise, nationality, and gender of members is encouraged. Diversity in geographic representation is recommended for global IGs.

- IGs steering committees should strive to reach decisions on their work based on a consensus, but if consensus cannot be reached, a simple majority can be used.
- IGs can have internal subgroups that are strictly *ad hoc* such as organizing committee subgroups for development of workshop and focus topic meeting development, or other subgroups that are designed to maintain identity and activity as long as desired by the IG such as advisory sub-groups.
- IGs can have externally facing advisory or expert sub-groups (collaborating with external entities), while that is not an objective or requirement of members of an IG. Members of IGs wishing to form advisory or expert subgroups under the umbrella of SETAC to an external entity [e.g., International Organization for Standardization (ISO) or United Nations Environment (UNE)], must conform to SETAC policies and any requirements established by the external entity to which advice is requested. Such advisory or expert subgroups must coordinate with the respective SETAC Science Manager. Some external entities may require that SETAC formally apply to establish a relationship, which must be done by the IG SETAC governing body through the SETAC offices and not established independently by the IG.

Funds and Budget Considerations

SETAC does not allocate funding to IGs in the annual budget. Some IGs may choose to conduct fundraising or solicit for donations to achieve certain goals. Some of these goals include organizing scholarship or awards to advance the IG topic, inviting expert participants, and organizing social events at annual meetings. Any fundraising or solicitations should be conducted with support from the SETAC offices.

Operations and Performance Expectations of Interest Groups

SETAC governing bodies allocate significant resources for the maintenance of IGs, and as such expect a minimum level of activity from those IGs. The following are a minimum set of operations and performance criteria for IGs. Each IG will work with a SETAC Science Manager who will function as a liaison between the IG and applicable SETAC governing bodies. The manager will help the IG conform to these guidelines and minimum expectations. The manager will inform IGs of matters that may relate to them, remind IG steering committees of responsibilities and deadlines, suggest goals for IGs, connect IGs to potential collaborators, assist with administrative matters (e.g., communication tools, elections), among other issues. However, each IG is run by member volunteers who have ultimate responsibility for the IG.

Where IGs are perceived as faltering, the Science Manager will intervene to help revive the IG if there is interest from the membership. The applicable SETAC governing body may disband an IG if the minimum set of operational expectations (below) are not met over the course of one calendar year. Typically, global or GU leadership reviews IG performance at the meeting following the deadline for the IG's annual report. The SETAC

SETAC Guidelines
Adopted May 2017

Science Manager working with an IG will assess the activities of the IG and make a recommendations to the SETAC governing body leadership on whether the IG should be re-chartered, disbanded, or given extra support with the goal of improving activity level.

Operational Expectations

Minimum Level (allows an IG to remain operational)

- Identifying Steering Committee members at the frequency called for in the charter.
- Reviewing and, if necessary, revising and updating the charter, periodically, but not less than every three years.
- Annually identifying a minimum of one goal and identifying a steering committee member who will be responsible for each goal (see Activities and Goals of Interest Group

Administrative activities associated with IGs are streamlined in these guidelines to allow the IGs to focus on advancing their topic-related goals. Administrative activities include:

- Identifying steering committee members annually;
- Preparing an annual report for review by the applicable governing body annually; and
- Reviewing the IG charter and strategic plan and updating as needed every three years.
-).
- Communicating among the Steering Committee, as needed, to report progress on goal(s).
- Communicating with entire IG membership periodically. This could be in the form of a teleconference, a face-to-face meeting coinciding with a GU annual meeting, or an email¹. Suggested emailed communications could point to material being posted on the IG group page on the SETAC website such as: notes from the IG summit, minutes from the IG business meeting at the annual meeting, a yearly IG work plan, and the IG annual report. Emails to the entire IG membership that call for session proposal ideas, advertise IG-proposed sessions, and promote abstract submittals are highly encouraged.
- Preparing an annual report that describe IG accomplishments during the reporting period, the steering committee membership, and projected goal(s) for the next period, as requested by the SETAC office.
- Ensuring that the IG page on the SETAC website is updated with the current steering committee members, the IG's yearly goal(s), and previous year's annual report. Advise the SETAC Office when significant group webpage changes are made. Refer to the [Guidance for Group Administrators](#).

¹ Email communications to the entire IG membership should be accomplished through the IG listserv or the "email all members" function on the SETAC group's webpage under "options." These methods will insure that messages are sent to all SETAC members who have indicated interest in the IG, and they will have the members' most recent contact information. Please refer to [Guidance for Group Users](#) and [Guidance for Listservs](#) for instructions.

SETAC Guidelines
Adopted May 2017

- Reminding IG membership to submit session proposals and abstracts to relevant annual meetings with plenty of advanced notice.
- Interacting with other IGs via participation of the chair or designee (in person or remotely) in the IG Summits at both SNA and SE annual meetings. The chair or designee should communicate any issues of interest that arise to the entire membership of the IG via email.

Proposal for Formation of New Interest Groups

New IGs are established by consensus in collaboration with other IGs, science committees, and SETAC governing bodies. There should be no significant or overt overlap in scope and activities of IGs without a conscious decision and agreement among the IGs to do so (the GU or SWC can serve as arbitrators as needed). The result of a proposal's assessment may be an invitation to one or more of the existing IG chairs to weigh-in on whether there is an unmet need and, if there is one, whether it is best met by expanding the scope of an existing IG(s). If scope expansion rather than new IG formation is recommended, the responsibility of the IG(s) receiving the new topic areas will be to provide the relevant description of charter and operations changes, including how the champions who brought the new topic forward would be engaged in the expanded existing IG(s), to the appropriate governing body.

Any SETAC member can submit a proposal for the formation of a new IG. The process of proposing an IG to getting it approved ranges from 3 to 6 months. Proposals should be submitted to the chair of the Science Committee and a SETAC Science Manager. The GU or SWC leadership will serve as the final arbitrator following evaluation by the Science Committee. A proposal for a new IG should:

1. Identify a clear need for an IG focused on the topic. Explain how the group can help advance the science and increase its use in decision-making.
2. State the purpose and scope of the needs that will be met relevant to SETAC and to the science, including consideration of what other entities (e.g., IGs or *ad-hoc* groups), if any, are actively working on the same or a closely related topic, and whether a joint effort with these other entities is a viable option.
3. Explain why the need is currently unmet at SETAC.
4. State how the IG will add value to the long-term mission of SETAC.
5. Propose a list of individuals willing to serve as the founding steering committee for the IG. Provide names, professional affiliations, affiliation with SETAC (which GU), and gender; recognizing that SETAC encourages sector, geographic, and gender balance in IG steering committees.
6. Identify the immediate objectives of the IGs, as well as the IG goals for the first year.
7. Clarify how the IG will meet the expectations of SETAC governance and members (students and early career professionals, as well as long standing experts) based on the proposed goals.

A flowchart, providing guidance on the new formation and approval process is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Interest Group Proposal and Formation Flow Chart

