DDI Alliance Steering Committee
Minutes
May 26, 2009
Tampere, Finland

Present:

- Myron Gutmann, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) (representing ICPSR, a host institution)

- Hans Jørgen Marker, Danish Data Archive (DDA) (chair of and representing the DDI Alliance Expert Committee)

- Ekkehard Mochmann, German Social Science Infrastructure Services (GESIS) (representing the International Federation of Data Organizations [IFDO], a host association)

- Ron Nakao, Stanford University (vice chair of and representing the DDI Alliance Expert Committee)

- Kevin Schürer, United Kingdom Data Archive (UKDA) (representing the Council of European Social Science Data Archives [CESSDA], a host association)

- Mary Vardigan, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) (Alliance Director)

- Melanie Wright, United Kingdom Data Archive (UKDA) (representing the International Association for Social Science Information Service and Technology [IASSIST], a host association)

Report on DDI Alliance Expert Committee Meeting

The meeting began with a report on the Expert Committee meeting, which had occurred the previous day. Twenty-six people were in attendance and good progress was made.

The Steering Committee took up an issue from the previous day related to whether to add new tags to DDI 2 to meet the needs of the International Household Survey Network (IHSN) group, which encompasses several developing countries. DDI 2 is useful for them because it is lightweight and intuitive and there are good tools to create it. IHSN has furthered the adoption and visibility of DDI. The Expert Committee's recommendation for handling this issue was to add the tags requested, move DDI 2 from a DTD as the canonical representation to XML Schema, and add some features that would make it easier to migrate to DDI 3.

The Steering Committee suggested that we first contact IHSN to see if they might be in favor of a special local IHSN extension branded for them. This would be an easy way to meet their needs. However, if that is not acceptable to them, we should continue discussing this until all parties are satisfied. We don't want to add DDI-3 features to DDI 2, however, so we need to be cautious in what we add to the standard. We also don't want to be developing both versions at once in the long run so we need to be clear that our focus is on developing DDI 3. It was also noted that there would have to be a registration mechanism for extensions and that extensions carry IP issues.

Steering Committee Retreat

Because of the number of topics that the Steering Committee needs to cover this year and the limited time available at IASSIST, it was suggested that a special meeting be held in a venue that most people could get to easily. One date proposed was December 7 or 8, 2009, in London, since several members of the committee may be in London for other meetings that will conclude the previous week. The group will decide over email if this date will work for everyone. There should be a formal agenda and discussion papers distributed in advance of the meeting.

DDI Financial Position

The Foundation Tools project no longer has a project manager, so it was suggested that Nathan Adams, ICPSR's new head of software development, serve in this capacity for 2-4 hours a week and that the Alliance pay for this. He will advise the Director and help to coordinate tools development and manage the tools Web site. This suggestion was approved.

There was a discussion of how the Alliance should spend its reserve. One idea is to provide seed money to organizations that want to build DDI tools, such as a DDI 2 to 3 converter. The Alliance should advertise that it is encouraging tools development in this manner and then entertain proposals for projects to which partners would also contribute funds or software developers. We will need to make it clear that the tools we want to support are standards-based open-source tools. The DDI contribution can perhaps be used towards meetings of developers and facilitating collaboration so that we are contributing at the edges. We would not be directly commissioning tools. We need to avoid any conflict of interest, and we probably want to limit the call to members of the Alliance. We need to recognize that there will be IP issues related to tools built in this way so there needs to be a mechanism for handling IP up front.

DDI Evaluation

An assessment of the DDI project on two levels was proposed: the first would be an evaluation of the standard itself and the second would cover structure and governance issues. The evaluation team might include some members of the Steering Committee and some outsiders. The group might interview people to determine what the members and the community are getting from the Alliance and the types of activities it might undertake to speed adoption of DDI. This would reaffirm the mission and the goals of the effort. We should look into how other groups have done this to get ideas on how to conduct the

evaluation. The Digital Libraries Federation (DLF) recently underwent such a process. We might apply for funding for this or possibly hire someone to do it. The evaluation could possibly take place in 2010. This needs to be on the agenda for a full discussion at the retreat in December.

Conflict of Interest

The committee discussed the fact that the proposed conflict of interest form was not well-received by the Expert Committee members, who thought that their institutions would not permit them to submit the conflict of interest statements required. It was decided that the COI requirement would be rolled out first to the Steering Committee members and to others paid by the DDI Alliance, including the consultants and Director. This information will not be published.

Legal Status of the Alliance

Concerns had been raised about the legal status of the Alliance in the context of IP issues – that is, who owns the specification and other products developed by the Alliance since the Alliance is not a legal entity itself. The Director had consulted with a lawyer prior to the meeting and the advice was that gaining legal nonprofit status was not the way to protect intellectual property. The IP belongs to the individuals who have created the specification and other resources and their organizations. It was suggested that the Bylaws document be augmented with more information to this effect and that we investigate the process of becoming an official standard with ISO or OASIS to see what that process affords in terms of protection of IP.

Advisory Committee for the Alliance

A small group of the Steering Committee had met via conference calls a few times in previous months to provide advice to the Director. Rather than formalize such a group, it was agreed that it is within the Director's purview to ask for such consultation as long as the group acts in an advisory role only and is transparent about its discussions. It was recommended that each such conversation be summarized on email for the full Steering Committee.