DDI Alliance Steering Committee Meeting
Tuesday, June 5, 2012
Washington, DC

Minutes

Participants:

Iris Alfredsson, Swedish National Data Service (SND), representing the Council of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA)

George Alter, representing the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) (via Skype)

Bill Block, Cornell University, representing the International Association of Social Science Information Services and Technology (IASSIST)

Sami Borg, Finnish Social Science Data Archive, representing the International Federation of Data Organizations (IFDO)

Peter Granda, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR)

Mari Kleemola, DDI Alliance Expert Committee Vice Chair

Mary Vardigan, ICPSR, DDI Alliance Director

Report on Expert Committee Meeting

The Expert Committee Meeting took place the day before on Monday, June 4, with 32 people in attendance. A summary was provided and the Steering Committee discussed several of the agenda topics.

Draft Charter and Bylaws

The revised Bylaws and Charter were discussed and the committee made some suggestions. First, it was suggested that the new term for the Expert Committee – Board of Experts – be retitled to Scientific and Technical Board. This was seen as a good alternative.

A question was posed regarding how the three new entities envisioned in the revised Bylaws (that is, the Member Representatives who meet annually, the Executive Board elected by the Members, and the Board of Experts) will communicate with each other. It was suggested that the Chair of the Board of Experts also be on the Director's Advisory Board and that more thought be put into how the groups communicate and share information. Right now the only person common to all is the Director.

Conflict of Interest Declarations

These annual declarations were reviewed for the first time since the Conflict of Interest policy was formally adopted by the Alliance. It was suggested that we need a better mechanism for assessing potential conflicts, and George and Mary will talk with UM about this. We need advice on what the declarations should look like and who should review them. Perhaps in the future the Alliance Director could sign off on them with advice from others.

Report on Alternative Training

At the Vancouver meeting in 2011, the Steering Committee discussed the need for alternatives to the existing DDI training opportunities and the need for more trainers. To start to address these topics, a small group got together before the European DDI Users Group meeting at SND in Gothenburg in December with the goal of setting Alliance norms and principles for training. A summary was made available along with the principles that the group agreed to.

Since December a DDI training activity was held in Paris in April with some new trainers participating. This is a good step in the sense that the circle of trainers has expanded. We need to do more in this area to develop an Alliance-sponsored training program.

Tiered Membership Models

The DDI Review Report from Breckenhill Inc. suggested that the DDI Alliance consider a tiered membership model to generate additional revenues. Such a model makes sense given the different types of organizations that currently belong to the Alliance: college and university departments, libraries, and data centers; national data archives; individual data projects; non-profit foundations; research institutes; national statistical institutes; and international organizations.

While this diversity is a healthy and important feature of the organization, it makes it a challenge to develop an equitable tiered system of membership. The participants in the Alliance Expert Committee the previous day discussed two possible models and recommended that the Steering Committee consider a model based on commitment to DDI in which members would self-select into a set of well-described categories.

The group accepted the recommendation of the Expert Committee to pursue the commitment model with additional votes allocated for the tiers paying more money.

It was also suggested that there be a way for smaller projects to join at a lower rate and be able to display the DDI logo. The system should have a sponsor level also.

DDI Alliance Finances

The financial picture was laid out for Steering Committee members. The Alliance will likely end FY2012 with about $20-$25K in expenditures over revenues and will have to dip into reserves. The forecast for FY2013 looks around the same.

The group spent some time discussing ways to enhance revenues beyond the tiered membership. It was recommended that the Alliance actively:

- Encourage members to include funding for DDI development in grant applications. Several grants have been funded recently that could have included some support for the DDI effort.
- Look outside the Alliance for funding opportunities rather than looking just at the members
- Investigate funding opportunities through programs like the NSF cyberinfrastructure awards
- Encourage large funded projects to contribute to the Alliance and set new expectations for this type of contribution

There was a discussion of how big a reserve the Alliance should have. It is important to have a reserve, but the goal should be spending to move the organization forward rather than building up a large reserve.

It was also suggested that the Alliance create and publish a list of developments that DDI needs so that these developments can be written into proposals or can be funded by sponsors. This list could include items such as specific tools for the community, development of an overarching UML model for DDI, formal guidance on mapping DDI to relational database structures and tables, etc. Also, any time the Alliance is asked for a letter of support, we should request some funding.

Marketing

It was pointed out that the Alliance needs a marketing arm that can help get its message out. Currently, some organizations are opting to use DDI Codebook because DDI Lifecycle is seen as too complex. Marketing advice could be useful in packaging and introducing DDI Lifecycle to specific audiences. We need to think proactively about marketing with the next DDI major version so that we can promote the specification to new constituencies. The Alliance also needs to be stimulating tool development even if it does not fund tool development itself.