

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 scientific areas of interest. The Guidelines for the Establishment and Operations of Interest Groups (Guidelines) provide guidance on the goals, governance, and operation of Interest Groups (IGs) and provide a mechanism for proposing new IGs.

The primary objective of SETAC IGs is to provide a venue for members and guests with an interest in a particular scientific topic of close relevance to the society's mission to share knowledge and expertise. SETAC IGs are hubs for collaboration (e.g., through investigation, publications, workshops, scientific sessions), networking, and professional development. They provide vital opportunities for member engagement. It is SETAC's intention that IGs are open to all SETAC members and non-paying guest members at all stages of their careers, who are interested in the subject matter of the IG. This format has allowed IGs to be instrumental in advancing the topics within SETAC.

SETAC supports its IGs through a variety of ways, such as by offering a platform for collaboration (online group, video-conferencing system) and encouraging IG initiatives (e.g., IG organized special events).

These Guidelines were developed for IGs with a global focus and are organized into the following sections:

- Objective of Interest Groups
- Activities and Goals of Interest Groups
- Governance of Interest Groups
- Performance and Operational Expectations of Interest Groups
- Proposal and Formation 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 collaborative work to advance the IG topic under the SETAC umbrella.

To achieve its objectives, it is recommended that an IG develops and implements 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 Groups

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:

- Sustaining the IG through identifying steering committee members annually based on terms called for in the charter;
- Reporting on past and planned activities of the IG publicly and, also, for review of the SETAC World Council annually; and
- Reviewing the IG charter and strategic plan and updating as needed every three years.

It is recommended that IG steering committees detail specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based (SMART) goals that provide a sense of accomplishment for the IG. IGs should, on an annual basis, set a **minimum of one goal** for the upcoming year.

Suggested Interest Group Goals

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

- Organize periodic IG membership-wide webinars to present content about the topic of the IG and conduct IG administrative business openly (e.g., identify IG projects and champions)
- 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., Globe articles, Technical Issue Papers);
- Organize and support events such as focused topic meetings, workshops, symposia;
- Create and maintain a knowledge center for the IG topic within the SETAC Science Corner;
- Organize ad hoc groups to conduct or participate in external outreach and collaborations (technical reviews, issue papers, symposia and trainings, and inter-organizational collaborations) under oversight of the SETAC World Council;
- Organize ad hoc groups to conduct work at the science-policy interface with NGOs or governmental organizations;
- Organize and conduct activities recognizing key events or milestones (e.g., Earth Day, Wetlands Day, and International Year of Chemistry);

Governance of Interest Groups

Within SETAC, governance of IGs falls to the SETAC World Council, with the exception of IGs who are focused on regional issues, which are governed by the relevant GU (not in the scope of these guidelines). The IGs themselves are governed through steering committees. 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 World Council, in consideration of recommendations from the preceding year's IG steering committee.

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](#).

IGs are expected to adhere to all [SETAC policies](#).

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

- IGs should organize themselves 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 for balance consistent with the SETAC value of diversity, equity, and inclusion. They are encouraged to showcase representative balance among the Society's three primary sectors (i.e., from business, government, and academia), though it is understood that in some IGs on very new academic topics, the academic sector may be more largely represented. IGs are encouraged to reflect the Society's balanced and interdisciplinary membership. Diversity of career level and expertise, nationality, and gender of members is encouraged, as well as geographic diversity if applicable.

- 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 Programme (UNEP)], 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 SETAC office. Some external entities may require that SETAC formally applies to establish a relationship, which must be done by SETAC governance 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, though staff time and resources (e.g., videoconferencing facilities) are allocated. IGs could request funding from the SETAC World Council for special projects. Some IGs may choose to conduct fundraising or solicit for donations to achieve certain goals. Any fundraising or solicitations should be conducted through the SETAC offices.

Operations and Performance Expectations of Interest Groups

IGs are expected to collaborate with SETAC staff, who 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, among other issues. However, each IG is run by member volunteers, who have ultimate responsibility for the IG, operating within the boundaries set by the SETAC World Council.

SETAC may disband an IG if the minimum set of operational expectations (below) are not being met. SETAC governance and staff will assess the activities of the IG and determine whether the IG should be re-chartered, disbanded, or given extra support with the goal of improving activity level. The following are a minimum set of operations and performance criteria for IGs.

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 Suggested Interest Group Goals).
- 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 video conference or an email. Email communications to the entire IG membership should be accomplished through “email all members” function on the SETAC group’s webpage under “options.” These methods will ensure 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](#) for instructions. Suggested emailed communications could point to

advances in the field, especially those connected to SETAC (a new paper in SETAC journals, a call for session proposal ideas, session summary, etc.).

- Reporting on the activities of the IG through the SETAC website, newsletters, and through a report to the SETAC World Council that describes IG accomplishments, the steering committee membership, and projected goal(s) for the next period, as requested by the SETAC office.

Proposal for Formation of New Interest Groups

New IGs are established by the SETAC World Council in consultation with other IGs, science committees, and SETAC staff. There should be no significant or overt overlap in scope and activities of IGs without a conscious decision and agreement. 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 SETAC.

A group of SETAC members 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 SETAC office and will be forwarded to the Global Science Committee. SETAC World Council leadership will serve as the final arbitrator following evaluation by the Science Committee. If the proposed IG has a specific geographic focus, the relevant GU governance body has purview over the establishment and maintenance of said GU.

A proposal for a new IG should:

1. Identify a clear need for an IG focused on the topic. State the current state of the scientific topic at SETAC, unmet needs at SETAC, and 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 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. Propose a list of individuals willing to serve as the founding steering committee for the IG and state their qualification on the topic. Provide names, professional affiliations, and demographic information; recognizing that SETAC encourages steering committees to embody SETAC principle of multi-stakeholder engagement and SETAC value of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The IGs are encouraged to showcase representative balance among the Society's three primary sectors (i.e., from business, government, and academia),
4. Identify the immediate objectives of the IGs as well as the IG goals for the first year.
5. 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

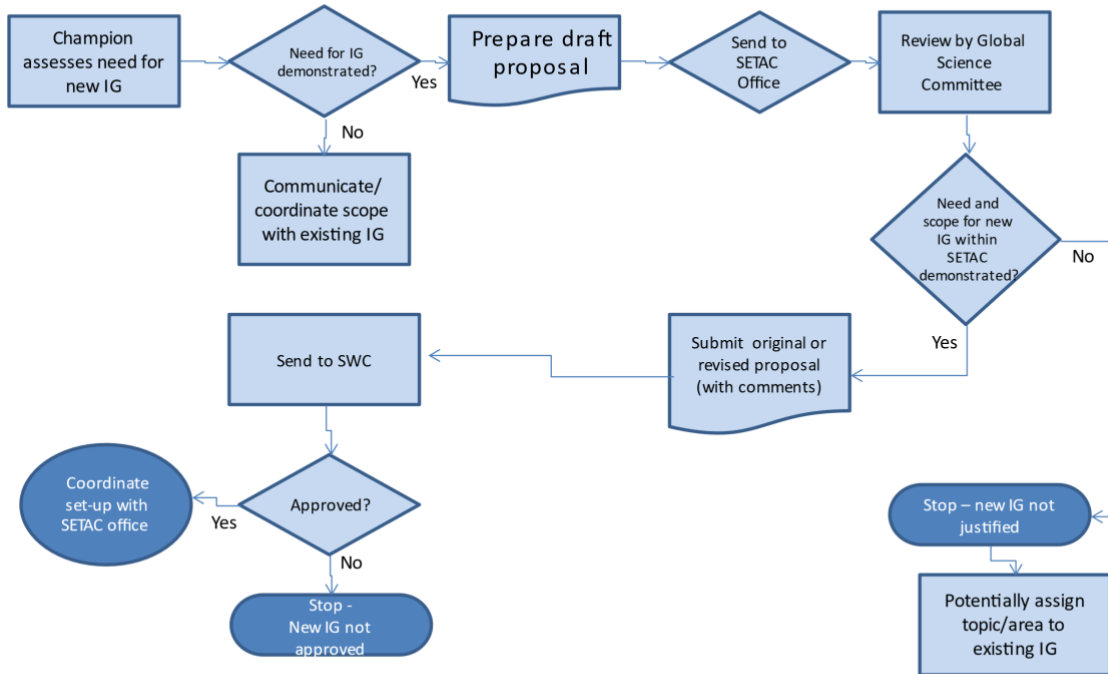


Figure 1. Interest Group Proposal and Formation Flow Chart

Approved by the SETAC World Council on 18 August 2021.