ICSU-WDS Activity Report

Introduction

The ICSU World Data System (ICSU-WDS) is replacing the Biennial Report that Regular and Network Members were required to provide every two years with an 'Activity Report'. In this document we explain what should be included in the Activity Report, why the WDS Scientific Committee (WDS-SC) is interested in this information, and what we will do with it. We hope that providing this information will make the benefits of submitting an Activity Report, both to your organization and others in the WDS community, clear.

Background

WDS Regular and Network Members undergo Periodic Review by the WDS-SC every three years as part of their continual assessment and to renew their membership, as agreed when joining ICSU-WDS. During this process, Member Organizations are now asked—in addition to updating their WDS application form—to report on their activities since they were last reviewed. Requesting information on activities at the same time as being (re)certified is expected to be simpler for both WDS Member Organizations and the Scientific Committee.

The application form and the Activity Report are two different processes. The application form explicitly covers an organization's (re)accreditation and WDS membership through assessment by two expert reviewers; it examines the organization's current status, and is inherently linked to its trustworthiness and maturity. In contrast, the Activity Report covers a Member's interactions with both the community and ICSU-WDS, and although its content will be examined by the WDS-SC, it will not be formally reviewed. By separating the Report from the application, the WDS-SC can easily see the activities/lessons learned/new initiatives by Member Organizations and can share these with the community.

The Activity Report has two important purposes:

1) First and foremost, the Report helps WDS Member Organizations to publicize their activities. All Reports will be made public, and will thus advertise the work of WDS Members and enable best practices/experiences to be shared within the community. In particular, Members can choose items they would like to highlight in the first section of the Report template.

2) Reports inform the WDS-SC on the activities that Members are undertaking. It is highly valuable to the WDS-SC to take an individual, in-depth look at Member Organizations, and to recognize their achievements and their associations with ICSU-WDS. Each WDS Member can also suggest how their connection with ICSU-WDS can be strengthened, which gives the WDS-SC a better understanding of

how to best serve the community. The Reports thus help to assess the activities and impact of the ICSU-WDS as a whole.

Instructions

- The Report template is split into sections—each with a number of questions—to encourage standardization in the information given by each WDS Member, while enabling them to highlight what they actually do. It consists of five parts: (1) Overview, (2) Activities & Developments, (3) Assessments & Accreditations, (4) Future Targets, and (5) Feedback.

- Responses are expected for all questions, even if your answer is 'Not Applicable' (preferably with a short explanation as to why it is not relevant to your organization).

- Questions are open-ended to allow you to give specific information on your organization rather than following a simple categorization. The Activity Report is trying to capture the richness in the approaches that WDS Members use to solve issues or to take advantage of cutting-edge technologies.

- To help you understand the purpose of each question and the expected level of detail to give in your response, each has a box beneath it with guidance information and exemplars (if appropriate). It is highly recommended that you read the guidance before providing your answer to a question, since this will help minimize the time and effort needed for you to complete the Report.

- Information should be added directly into the Report template where possible. If you would like to reference other reports (e.g., annual reports) or web pages that your organization has created, then please provide a link and also summarize the information, since URLs can often change over time. You can also add supporting tables, graphs, or other documents; please refer to them (using suitable filenames) in the text and append them in a single zip file through the upload box at the end of the Report template.

- Please try to minimize the use of acronyms within your Report. It is a public document, and hence it will be read by a large number of people outside of your organization's field of expertize. If you wish to shorten a term because it will appear a number of times within your Report—and so reduce the length of the text—please write it out in full on the first occasion it is used, followed by the acronym in parenthesis, and then use the acronym from that point forward.

1. Overview

This section is an opportunity for you to highlight your organization's main successes and challenges over the past three years, as well as any major changes that have occurred. It is likely that you will include items here that are talked about in greater depth elsewhere in the Report (or even within your organization's application for WDS membership), and so the section can be thought of as a summary. It is therefore recommended to leave this section until last, after the others have been completed, so that you can decide on what you would like to include and how much detail is necessary.

1.1 What are the key achievements of your organization over the past three years?

Guidance

Please use the space above to list the most significant examples of the following:

- Your organization's accomplishments.
    - How did you achieve them and why were they successful?
- Innovative solutions/practices your organization has put in place.
    - How have they improved your organization's processes?
    - Why do they work well?
    - To what extent are they transferable?

1.2 What are the key changes in your organization over the past three years?

Guidance

Please use the space above to list the most significant changes within your organization in relation to its WDS membership; for example, in connection with the following:

- Organizational structure, funding, and staffing levels
- Technologies and scientific approaches
- Data, products, and services (hereinafter 'data services')
- Standards or best practices
- Anything else that you think might be of interest to the WDS-SC and WDS community (changes to strategy, policies, etc.)

1.3 What are the key challenges your organization has faced over the past three years?

Guidance

Please use the space above to list the most significant examples of the following:

- Specific difficulties your organization has faced and has managed to overcome.
    - How did you solve them? (You may wish to refer to 1.1.)
- Difficulties your organization is still encountering.
    - What can ICSU-WDS do for you towards resolving these challenges?
    - Would you benefit from the advice of other WDS Members?

2. Activities & Developments

This section forms the main part of the Report template, and is where you can give more information on the activities your organizations has been undertaking over the past three years that are particular relevant to its membership within the ICSU World Data System. Although you are welcome to include any information that you think would be of interest to the WDS community, the focus of the activities in the questions is specifically related to your organization's responsibilities as a long-term steward of high-quality scientific data.

2.1 What data, products, and services have been offered by your organization over the previous three years?

Guidance

A criterion in the application form for WDS membership is that an organization has defined the scope of its data services; in contrast, it does not ask your organization to make explicit reference about these data services. This question is therefore an chance to promote the range of data services that your organization makes available to the community. In particular, please mention any expansions to the data services offered over the past three years.

2.2 What ongoing and new scientific and technological developments have there been within your organization over the previous three year?

Guidance

ICSU-WDS is committed to ensuring use of 'state of the art' technologies and scientific approaches for data systems, with the application form for WDS membership explicitly asking Members about the procedures in place to guarantee their scientific and technological relevance.

Your response to this question is an opportunity to share details with the WDS-SC and WDS community of any new innovations that your organization has been implementing. Please also include your experiences with current/previous technology choices: What works well? What 'lessoned learned' can you pass on others?

2.3 What standards or best practices have been employed by your organization over the previous three years?

Guidance

WDS Members are expected to be continually striving to enhance their data management processes. However, it is not always intuitively obvious as to which standards and practices will maximize the benefits to an organization. ICSU-WDS would therefore like to build a knowledge base of guidance to assist WDS Members in mobilizing their capacity. To this end, you are asked here to share details of any highly effective standards and practices that your organization has been using over the past three years (persistent identifiers, metadata standards, preferred formats, etc.). What advantages has your organized gained through their adoption?

2.4 What capacity building/training efforts have been run by your organization over the previous three years?

Guidance

Please list training programmes developed and offered by your organization in any of the various aspects of data and data management.

- Who was the target audience of these courses (e.g., data experts/intermediaries, researchers/end users, general public)?
- How well were they received? Was any part especially successful or unsuccessful?
- Is your organization planning to run these or other courses again in the future? If so, would it be willing to offer its training to other WDS Members or more generally?
- Are there any training needs that are not currently fulfilled by your organization or otherwise that you feel would benefit WDS Member Organizations/data services and that might be supported by the WDS International Programme Office (WDS-IPO) or other WDS Members.

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2.5 What engagement has your organization had with ICSU research programmes (**list available here**) and with WDS (e.g., in Working Groups) over the previous three years?

Guidance

One of the principle aims of WDS is to facilitate scientific research under the ICSU umbrella by supporting trusted scientific data services (WDS Members) in the provision, use, and preservation of datasets, while strengthening their links with the research community. In particular, ICSU-WDS looks to bring its Regular and Network Members together to coordinate their activities and achieve an overall capability beyond that of individual data services and networks. When becoming a WDS Member, an organization makes an agreement with ICSU that they intend to collaborate with and contribute to ICSU-WDS in order to ensure it achieves its aims.

It is therefore very useful for the WDS-SC to not only understand about if your organization is participating within WDS, and within ICSU more generally, but also gain information on its level of active involvement. Please mention in the space above any ICSU/WDS-related research bodies, programmes, projects, panels, task groups, working groups, conference sessions, workshops, meetings, and so forth that anyone within your organization has contributed (or still is contributing) to, as well as who is participating, and their role.

2.6 Which conferences/meetings of importance have been attended by your organization over the previous three years?

Guidance

- 'Importance' here means in terms of your organization's scientific domain/user community, it role as a data service, and/or in connection with its WDS membership.
- Conferences listed—or at least the session attended within the conference—should be associated specifically with data stewardship (e.g., SciDataCon and RDA Plenaries).
- Mention should be made of what was presented at the attended conference.

2.7 What major scientific and practice papers have been produced in connection with your organization over the previous three years?

Guidance

- 'Major' again means in terms of your organization's scientific domain/user community, its role as a data service, and/or in connection with its WDS membership.
- The emphasis here should be on articles concerning data stewardship practices or those where the data holdings of your organization have been used, thus demonstrating their scientific impact. For the latter, it is not expected that the papers listed have been produced by your organization, only that its data were utilized.

3. Assessments & Accreditations

Has your organization obtained, or is it in the process of obtaining, a certification by another standards body? Or is your organization beneath a network/higher authority that provides an in-depth assessment of its scientific or quality/data management expertise? If so, it is very useful for both the WDS-SC and the WDS community to know about this, since it strengthens your trustworthiness and may simplify/expedite your WDS reaccreditation in the future.

3.1 What, if any, formal assessments or accreditations has your organization undergone in the previous three years (other than WDS certification)?

Guidance

An assessment or accreditation should ideally be performed by external body; for example, the nestor Seal or ISO 16363, an ICSU Scientific Union/Association, an umbrella organization (network), or a hosting/funding/parent organization. It may also include the adoption of an internal Quality Management System/Framework with or without official ISO 9001 certification. If your organization has a documented Quality Manual, please mention this and attach it to your Report.

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4. Future Targets

This section gives you the opportunity to provide a forward look and showcase to the WDS-SC and WDS Community any major goals or events that your organization is planning to realize before the next review of its WDS membership.

4.1 What key targets or strategic priorities does your organization have for the upcoming three years?

Guidance

Please use the space above to give details on your organization's most significant future actions/visions. These might build on something already discussed elsewhere within your Report (or WDS application)—for example, how your organization will tackle a problem it is currently faced with, or to continue to enhance a process that it has put in place—or it could be a completely new project that it is undertaking.

5. Feedback

Thank you for completing your WDS Activity Report. This final section allows you to include extra details of importance connected with your organization that were not asked for elsewhere, and to provide the WDS-SC with feedback on your organization's links with ICSU-WDS and on this Report.

5.1 Is there any additional information that you would like to share with the WDS-SC and WDS community?

Guidance

Please add anything in the space above that you would like to mention about your organization, but that was considered unsuitable for any of the other sections.

5.2 Is there anything that ICSU-WDS can do for your organization?

Guidance

The WDS-SC is very keen to ensure that all WDS Members have a strong connectivity with ICSU-WDS; that the prominence of their affiliation with ICSU-WDS is sufficiently recognized by their host institutions, funders, and governments; and that they are supported by ICSU-WDS when needed. Please mention in the box above anything that you feel is missing when it comes to your organization's status as a WDS Member. What can the WDS-SC (WDS-IPO or otherwise) do to help improve linkages with your organization?

5.3 Do you have any suggestions on how this Report template might be improved to facilitate its completion by WDS Members in the future?

Guidance

The format of this Report template is not seen as final. We welcome you to let us know of any comments you have on the reporting process, as well as on the template's relevance to your organization.