

Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry Interest Group Charter Guidelines

The Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) encourages its members to organize into topical Interest Groups (IGs). The Guidelines for the Establishment and Operations of Interest Groups (IG Guidelines) provide the details on the operational aspects of IGs as well as the mechanism for proposing new IGs. The IG Guidelines state that all IGs should have an organizing document called a charter. This document - the IG Charter Guidelines - outlines components of an IG charter and important observations regarding these components.

The components below are characteristics of functioning SETAC IGs – best practices for leadership and communication for IGs to consider as they develop or, from time-to-time, revise their charter:

Interest Group Name: The IG name should convey the subject matter of the IG in a few words followed with “Interest Group.” We recognized that an acronym is convenient shorthand and acceptable for use within the group; however, acronym use outside the IG is discouraged.

Composition and operations that reflect and engage the larger membership: These best practices have been shown to make IGs more inviting and the work more rewarding:

- *Tripartite participation* reflects the Society’s membership composition and balances the interests of academia, business, and government. IG members should reflect these professional sectors as well as possible.
- *Inclusion of students:* The IG should actively include students. Student participation is beneficial to the IG, encourages student development and empowerment, provides mutual networking benefits for long-term professional collaborations, and enhances Society membership.
- *Sub-groups:* If the IG’s charge is extensive, sub-groups help focus resources, facilitate completion of tasks, and provide opportunities to engage more members. Some sub-groups could have an advisory function (see guidelines for forming advisory or expert groups).

A leadership structure: The IG should establish a sustainable IG steering committee composed of a minimum of three (3) members and a maximum of twelve (12) members. The leadership structure should set the overall tone and agenda, ensure continuity, manage workload, and plan for leadership transitions.

- A successful IG steering committee model among many established IGs is one comprised of a chair, vice chair, and past chair, with each position serving one year. The model with a chair and co-chair has also worked well. A co-chair structure can facilitate members’ stepping into leadership roles and provide support with new responsibilities. Leaders should identify and mentor those who will replace them when they move on to new challenges. Leadership transition procedures should be clearly described in the charter.
- A defined period of IG service helps prospective members consider their volunteer commitment, respects their other obligations, and offers opportunities for more members to rotate in and out of the work of SETAC. One- to two-year terms in each position are used by some IGs. This provides continuity while giving new people opportunities to serve and those rotating off chances to serve SETAC elsewhere. Note that the one-year, 3-chair models give each member 3 years to serve the IG, which seems ideal. Upper limits are often established to allow room for leadership

development and to avoid burnout. Steering committee terms can be renewed and have no limit as long as volunteers are not identified after solicitation appropriately of the membership as a whole.

- Annually, around September of each year, IG steering committee members should be polled via email by the chair to confirm their interest in remaining on the IG steering committee. When members are removed from the IG steering committee roster, they should be replaced with due consideration of the tripartite IG steering committee membership goals. The IG steering committee should ensure a turnover of approximately one-third of its members per year. Nominations should be sought from the entire IG membership and IG steering committee members should be appointed based on the results of an election if there is competition. The IG charter could state that the existing IG steering committee may retain their roles for additional terms if volunteers are not identified, until new leadership is identified.
- 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.

Established Goals: Working towards established goals (e.g., planning a session or a publication) increase participation and give members more opportunities to participate. Establishing annual goals and identifying schedules, action items and responsible persons keeps the momentum.

This general guidance and the following template should facilitate IG-specific charter development.

Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry

[NAME] Interest Group

Charter

- I. **MISSION AND PURPOSE** – Explicitly lays out the mission of the IG, which is typically to serve as a scientific resource to all stakeholders impacted by the topic. This should provide context on why the IG exists and engender collective responsibility among members for the achievement of IG goals.
- II. **SCOPE** – Articulates the parameters of the IG topic if necessary. For example, the Pharmaceutical IG may decide to limit its scope to human and veterinary pharmaceuticals and explicitly state it does not cover Personal Care Products (PCP).
- III. **BACKGROUND** – Could be used to provide context on why the IG exists and can engender collective responsibility among members for achieving its mission and purpose.
- IV. **GOVERNANCE**
 - **OVERSIGHT** – Identifies the SETAC governing entity that will provide oversight for the IG and, if necessary, will offer guidance to ensure compliance with established policy.
Example: The SETAC World Council has oversight for the IG and, if necessary, will offer guidance to ensure compliance with established policy through the SETAC Science Manager.
 - **DECISION PROCESS** – Identifies the decision-making process.
Example: The IG is a consensus-based group and uses a consensus-based decision-making process.
 - **RULES** – Specifies the SETAC policy that the IG will adhere to.
Example: Any material shared by the IG or posted on the IG group page should adhere to [SETAC Principles and Values](#) and follow all [SETAC Policies](#). Moreover, all IG members should adhere to all [SETAC Policies](#), which are incorporated into this guidance by reference.
- V. **ORGANIZATION**
 - **IG MEMBERSHIP** – Expands on the rule that membership in an IG is open to all interested individuals.
 - **STRUCTURE** – Describes the hierarchy, including existing subgroups, and how they can be formed, if needed.
Example 1: The IG currently includes the following permanent sub-groups: List.
Example 2: The IG currently does not include any ad-hoc or permanent sub-groups groups. If sub-groups are found necessary, they will be formed in conformance with the SETAC IG Guidelines.
 - **STEERING COMMITTEE** – Specifies that steering committee membership should represent tripartite participation among the Society’s business, government, and academic sectors. Recommends diversity in accordance with SETAC values. Advocates inclusion of students. Identifies the type of leadership structure (bi-chair or tri-chair model), the number of steering committee members, the duration of service (number of years), when and how leadership transition is accomplished, when and how steering committee members are nominated and selected. It is highly recommended (and required for Global IGs) that the terms of the IG steering committee are tied to calendar years.
Example:
 - Membership in the IG steering committee is intended to follow the basic SETAC guidelines and achieve balance with representation from academia, business, and government; personal diversity in accordance with SETAC values proportional to the SETAC membership in membership of the IG steering committee is recommended to the extent possible. The steering committee is comprised of no less than six and no more than twelve individuals.

- The IG steering committee is led by a tri-chair model consisting of a chair, vice chair, and a past chair, each serving in their capacity for a 1/3 their term (total of three years of service to the IG).
- The IG steering committee members serve a three-year term. It is highly recommended that the terms of the IG steering committee are tied to calendar years. The IG steering committee membership and leadership terms are staggered to insure a turnover of approximately one-third of its members per year.
- In instances where an IG steering committee member must leave before completing their term, and when there are more than six months remaining in the term, the IG steering committee solicits from all IG membership for individuals from the departing member's sector to fulfill the term. Individuals are identified to the IG steering committee at least two weeks prior to the appointment of the replacement.
- In instances where new IG steering committee members cannot be identified even after exhaustive queries to the whole membership, IG steering committee members may renew for a subsequent term.
- If job changes among IG steering committee members lead to a change in sectors during their term, they are allowed to continue throughout their term. If sector balance is significantly altered (i.e., no representation from one sector), then new IG steering committee members are sought.

VI. RECURRING ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES – Clarifies how the work gets done and notes important linkages to other IGs, committees, staff; cross reference any relevant SOPs as needed. IG steering committee work includes formation of IG steering committee, setting the IG goals and executing goals (e.g., organizing sessions, administering awards, mentoring program), preparing an annual report, responding to requests from governing body.

- **PLANNING** – Outlines the roles and responsibilities of the IG, including reviewing and updating the charter and the long-range strategic plan every three years, as well as the identifying yearly goals for stimulating and participating in the advancement of its topic. Minimum goals should be based on the minimum expectations outlined in the IG Guidelines.

Example: The yearly goal(s) of the IG are set by the IG steering committee during the first meeting of the year (typically January). Champions or project managers for each goal are identified from the IG steering committee membership, and they determine how best to meet the goals. The champions provide a status update on the goals during the recurring IG steering committee meetings.

- **COMMUNICATION** – Identifies the type and frequency of communication to the IG membership.

Example:

- The IG Steering Committee communicates with the whole IG membership at least quarterly.

Communication to the entire membership can include:

- Sharing the IG yearly goal(s) set by the IG steering committee and committee member responsible for each goal;
- Requesting input on IG work, such as organization of sessions at meetings, awards program, mentorship program, etc.;
- Announcing vacancies in IG steering committee;
- Announcing the new IG steering committee; and
- Sharing of IG annual report.

- **COMMITTEE FORMATION** – Outlines the process of identifying a new IG steering committee.

Example:

A new IG steering committee is formed yearly following this process:

- In September of each year, the chair announces the descriptions of the available vacancies in the IG steering committee (type of position and preferred sector, career path [student, early career, expert], and

in accordance with SETAC values) to the entire IG membership at least four (4) months prior to the appointment date (i.e., September announcement for appointment starting January).

- Anyone who fits a vacancy description, has institutional or personal support, has expertise or interest in IG-related issues, and has a commitment to the mission and operating guidelines of the IG can express their interest in being considered for appointment to the IG steering committee.
- Nominations are open for one month (i.e., from 1–30 September). If there is a competition for any seat, a ballot is organized with assistance from the SETAC office. Voting is open for one month (i.e., from 1–31 Oct October).
- The new IG steering committee members are announced within two months of the announcement of vacancies (i.e., November). This provides a two-month overlap with the out-going committee.
- After the committee has been formed, the roster is included in the annual report, and the SETAC office is informed of the new committee.

- **MEETINGS** – Details how the frequency of meetings, identifies who has responsibility for calling meetings, states plans for sharing meeting agendas and minutes for both IG steering committee meeting and membership-at-large meetings.

Example:

- At the beginning of each calendar year, the chair queries the new IG steering committee and identifies a recurring IG steering committee meeting time. A SETAC videoconferencing account can be used.
- The chair prepares a brief agenda and sends it out one week prior to each IG steering committee meeting.
- The vice chair or a designated member of the IG steering committee takes minutes at the IG steering committee meetings, posts them on group page within one week of meeting.

- **ANNUAL REPORT** - Outlines the process of preparing the annual report

Example:

The vice chair writes the annual report with assistance from the IG steering committee. The chair forwards the annual report to the SETAC office.

- **OTHER**

VII. FUNDS – States that any fundraising conducted by the IG should be coordinated through the SETAC via one of the SETAC offices.

VIII. BUDGET – States that where an IG has funds, an annual budget should be prepared and submitted for inclusion in the overall annual budget for SETAC.

IX. GROUND RULES – Sets some ground rules for working within the IG steering committee and the IG at large.

Examples:

1. Maintain respect for people

- Listen fully
- Solve problems together
- Be tolerant of each other’s perspective
- Respect confidentiality
- Be mindful of the complexities presented by conference calls
- Work to be inclusive of the full membership

2. Conduct organized meetings

- Publicize meeting well ahead of time
- Utilize a written agenda (old business, new business, ongoing business)
- Publish agenda a week ahead of meeting

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- Start and end meetings on time
 - Come to meetings prepared, review pre-meeting reading materials
 - Stay focused on the topic
 - Publish minutes as soon as possible following meetings
 - Add action items and person responsible in minutes
3. Operate effectively
- Assign champions or project managers to goals and action items
 - Follow-through on meeting action items