



Operations and Governance Plan

Adopted on November 11, 2021

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GEO Blue Planet is an initiative of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) that focuses on the use of ocean and coastal observations to inform policy and decision-making. This document provides an overview of the governance and operations procedures of GEO Blue Planet and serves as an addendum to the GEO Blue Planet Implementation Plan.

Version 1.0 of the Governance and Operations Plan was adopted by the GEO Blue Planet Executive Committee on November 11, 2021.

Overview of GEO Blue Planet Activities

GEO Blue Planet conducts activities in three Core Action Areas.



Stakeholder Engagement

Outreach materials

Stakeholders who are not experts in Earth observations or ocean science are often interested in what Earth observations are, how they are applied in the ocean and coastal domains and the limitations to their use. To this end, GEO Blue Planet produces informational materials including booklets on ocean and coastal observations, examples of indicators and decision support tools that utilize ocean and coastal observations, infographics, videos and other outreach materials as needed.

Workshops, Symposia and Consultations

Understanding the decisions that stakeholders are required to make and what information is required to support those decisions is a key focus of GEO Blue Planet. GEO Blue Planet works to plan regional and thematic workshops that bring together representatives of government, research institutions, industry and NGOs. This provides an avenue to assess information needs in terms of ocean and coastal observation-based products and service and capacity development. GEO Blue Planet also makes understanding information needs and stakeholder priorities a focus of international GEO Blue Planet symposia. GEO Blue Planet Secretariat, Committee and Working Group members also welcome invitations to participate in UN expert meetings on topics that require input on ocean and coastal observation topics and to provide informal consultations on relevant topics.

White papers on Earth observation applications

In order to understand the state of science, limitations and future directions of ocean and coastal observations for a specific application (e.g., management of tuna fisheries, monitoring of marine litter, etc.) or provision of policy-relevant information, GEO Blue Planet produces white papers on Earth observation applications based on requests from stakeholders. Teams of experts collaborate to produce the publications which are published either by the requesting organization (such as the UN) or in a relevant journal.

These core actions aim at identifying stakeholders' needs and priorities. GEO Blue Planet's portfolio of stakeholder engagement core actions include:

- Outreach materials
- Workshops, symposia and consultations
- White papers on Earth observation applications

Cooperation and Co-design

Building expert networks

Once a stakeholder information requirement is identified, GEO Blue Planet works to bring together an expert network that can advise on the development of indicators or decision-making support tools. This may be met through internal expertise or through linking existing groups/task teams (e.g., SCOR, GESAMP, GOOS, CEOS teams) and/or identifying additional experts with other skills required to meet the stakeholder's needs (such as statisticians, policy experts, etc.).

Developing indicators and decision support tools

Distilled ocean and coastal information in the form of indicators and decision-making support tools are needed for sustainable management of the ocean and coasts. GEO Blue Planet works in an iterative process to co-design and co-develop indicator and decision-making support tools based on stakeholder needs. These include indicators for specific global policies, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction or Paris Climate Agreement.

Co-creating information hubs

Earth observation information alone is often not enough for non-expert users to understand issues and make informed decisions. Often Earth observation processes and resulting outputs must be simplified to ensure its relevance for a larger community. To facilitate cooperation with other communities, GEO Blue Planet supports the development of information hubs (e.g., <https://sargassumhub.org/>) that provide background information on Earth observation-based co-designed indicators and decision-making support tools, information about the topic and other information. The information hubs are co-designed and developed with end users and a variety of partners and are intended to be maintained long term by a partner organization.

These core actions aim to meet stakeholders' needs through cooperation and co-design between scientists, intermediaries and end-users. GEO Blue Planet's portfolio of cooperation and co-design core actions include:

- Building expert networks
- Developing indicators and decision support tools
- Co-creating information hubs

Capacity Development

Training Courses

GEO Blue Planet targets training courses at government and other stakeholder organizations that will be able to implement and maintain the skills learned on a regular and sustained basis. GEO Blue Planet does not arrange training for students or for informational purposes. Training is focused on building long term capacity for an Earth observation provider to deliver a decision support tool to a specified end user on a sustained basis. Training material and learning tools are carefully chosen to provide long-term solutions using resources that can be sustained by the end user.

Information Exchange

Capacity development involves the transfer of information between experts in different regions and fields. GEO Blue Planet works to support information transfer related to ocean and coastal observations. Core actions for information transfer include activities such as ambassador programs and exchanges, best practices documentation and sharing of data, tools and protocols.

Transfer of applications to operational agencies

One of the major challenges in the sustainability of Earth observation applications is maintenance due to the current funding and development structure. In the ocean and coastal observations arena, there are many useful applications that are developed with temporary grant funding that become nonfunctional at the end of the funding cycle. For applications where stakeholders have a clear need for continued use and maintenance of the applications, GEO Blue Planet works with operational agencies that support and operationalize these applications. GEO Blue Planet also works to identify operational agencies or other partners that applications that are developed in collaboration with GEO Blue Planet's working groups.

These core actions aim to develop global capacity to utilize ocean and coastal observation-derived data and information for operational capabilities (such as detecting pollutants, hazards or other issues of concern), develop applications that utilize ocean and coastal observations or to maintain applications on a long-term basis. GEO Blue Planet's portfolio of cooperation and co-design core actions include provision of:

- Training Courses
- Information Exchange
- Transfer of applications to operational agencies



Organizational Structure

The structure of GEO Blue Planet consists of bodies responsible for governing, advising and activity operations.

Governing Bodies

Executive Committee: the main decision-making body for GEO Blue Planet.

Patrons Group: underpin operations by funding the Secretariat and works to identify opportunities to further sustain GEO Blue Planet

Advisory Bodies

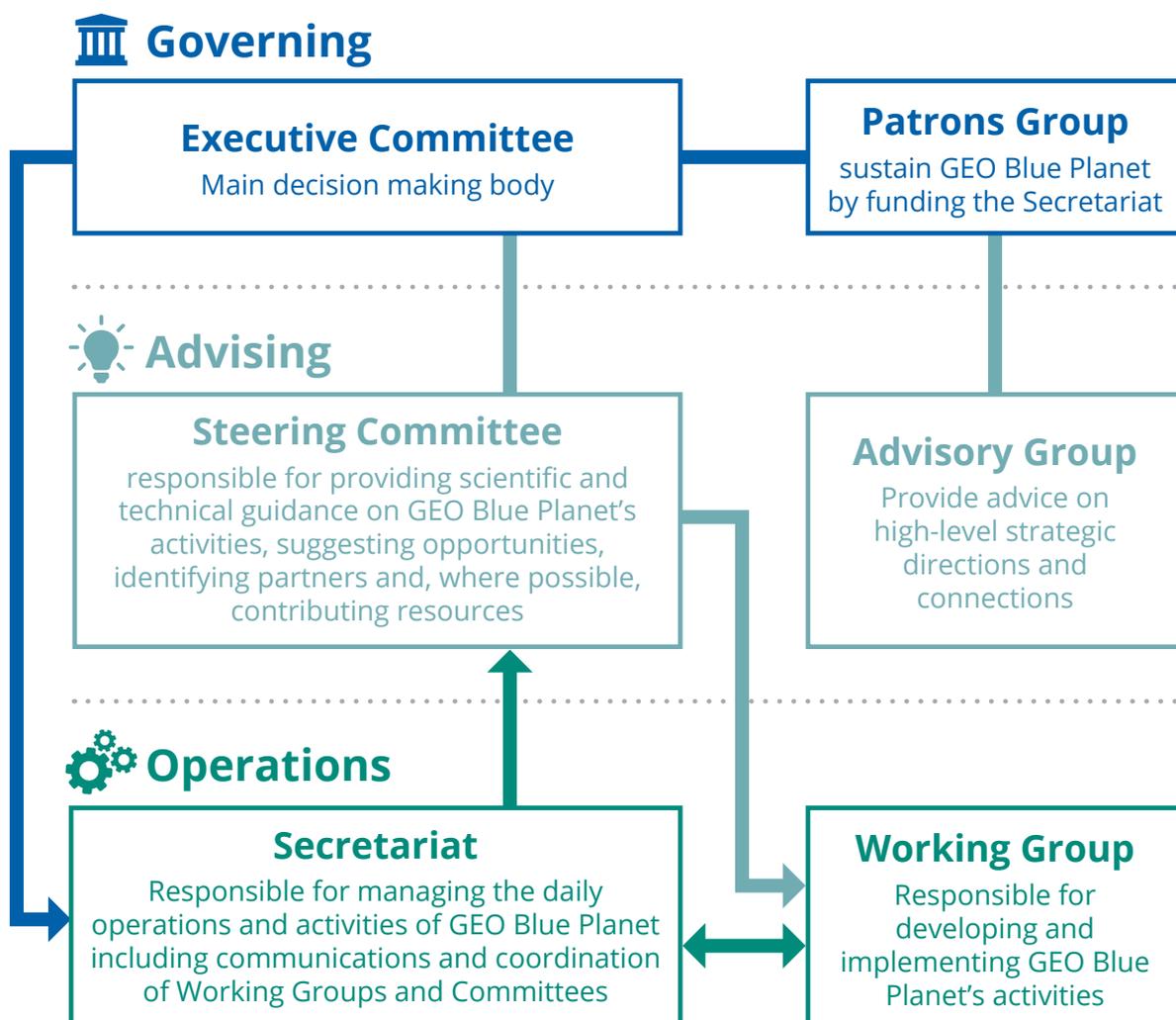
Steering Committee: responsible for providing scientific and technical guidance on GEO Blue Planet's activities, suggesting opportunities, identifying partners and, where possible, contributing resources.

Advisory Group: provide advice on high-level strategic directions and connections.

Operations Bodies

Working Groups: responsible for developing and implementing GEO Blue Planet's activities.

Secretariat: responsible for managing the daily operations and activities of GEO Blue Planet including communications and coordination of Working Groups and Committees.



Roles, and Responsibilities and Composition

This section provides information about the roles, responsibilities composition of GEO Blue Planet's bodies.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is the main decision-making body for GEO Blue Planet. It is also responsible for overseeing the operations and activities of GEO Blue Planet.

Executive Committee duties are:

- To endorse the Implementation Plan and Annual Working Group Plans;
- To review and endorse updates in the Governance and Operations Plan;
- To elect new Steering Committee members following the nominations review from the existing Steering Committee and strategic guidance from the Advisory Group;
- To provide guidance to the Secretariat on day-to-day operations and activities;
- To review progress on activities between Steering Committee meetings; and
- To identify and support additional partnerships and funding opportunities.

The Executive Committee is composed of the three Steering Committee Co-Chairs, the previous co-chairs (only one year – for continuity), members of the Patrons Group, heads of the GEO Blue Planet Secretariat offices and a GEO Secretariat representative. The Executive Committee communicates via regular e-mail correspondence.

Patrons Group

The Patrons Group provides financial support to the Secretariat. The Patrons Group sits in the Executive Committee and convenes the Advisory Group.

The Patrons Group duties are:

- To ensure sustainability of GEO Blue Planet through financing its secretariat;
- To provide guidance and direction consistent with their institutional priorities;
- To convene and seek strategic directions from the Advisory Group; and
- To represent the Advisory Group at Executive Committee meetings.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is responsible for providing scientific and technical guidance on GEO Blue Planet's activities, suggesting opportunities, identifying partners and, where possible, contributing resources.

Steering Committee duties are:

- To promote the aims and objectives of GEO Blue Planet and expand its profile and prominence;
- To review the Implementation Plan and Working Group Plans of GEO Blue Planet;
- To monitor and evaluate institutional effectiveness of GEO Blue Planet against aims and objectives outlined in the Implementation Plan;
- To review proposal for new Working Groups;
- To review progress and provide guidance to Working Groups activities;
- To coordinate the production of deliverables for reporting to the GEO Secretariat;
- To work with the GEO Blue Planet Secretariat and the GEO Secretariat to identify new stakeholders that would contribute to and benefit from GEO Blue Planet; and
- To facilitate, support and coordinate relevant activities.

The Steering Committee will consist of up to 35 members. Steering Committee members will serve a three-year term with the potential for two one-year extensions (not to exceed five-years in total). The term may be shortened if the member is representing an organization and changes positions or if the member is unable to make the required time commitment. The Steering Committee will have three Co-Chairs that will serve terms of three years, with the potential for two one-year extensions (not to exceed 5 years in total). Time served as co-chair will not count towards a member's overall Steering Committee term.

Advisory Group

The Advisory Group is the high-level advisory group convened by the Patrons Group. The Advisory Group will be given updates via physical annual reports and subsequently meet in person for an Advisory Group meeting.

The Advisory Group duties include:

- To advise on alignment of user-requested thematic activities with priorities of international bodies and organizations for policy-relevant and other information;
- To provide connections with organizations/stakeholders that relay end-user needs; and
- To support resource mobilization for supporting the Secretariat and its activities.

The Advisory Group will be composed of high-level members representing global organizations with balance along the Ocean Observation value chain. Advisory Group members will be ex-officio members that are invited to serve based on their position at their home organisation. The member has full rights and obligations of the group they serve and will cease their appointment once they change status within their home organisation.

Secretariat

The GEO Blue Planet Secretariat provides scientific and logistical support for GEO Blue Planet activities. The Secretariat also provides coordination support for activities and develops partnerships. The GEO Blue Planet Secretariat reports to the Executive and Steering Committees. Unlike other GEO Blue Planet bodies, Secretariat members must be funded to support Blue Planet.

The Secretariat is geographically distributed, currently with offices located in Asia, Europe and North America which together support GEO Blue Planet's global activities. These Offices are also requested to support specific engagement in GEO Blue Planet from their regions.

Duties of the Secretariat are:

- To provide overall support and coordination to the GEO Blue Planet network;
- To support cross-cutting and thematic Working Groups to deliver GEO Blue Planet activities as required;
- To support and manage global stakeholder engagement activities;
- To support the Steering Committee in the reviewing of GEO Blue Planet activities;
- To promote GEO Blue Planet in the international arena;
- To interface with and report to the GEO Secretariat on behalf of GEO Blue Planet;
- To support the organisation of GEO Blue Planet Symposia and other relevant events;
- To assist Working Groups to secure funding by circulating relevant grants opportunities and support coordination in the formulation of proposals; and
- To manage the GEO Blue Planet website, social media and other communications.

Working Groups

Working groups are created on a rolling basis based on identified stakeholder needs and availability of resources. Working Groups must answer an identified need of a high-level stakeholder (such as an UN Agency) to develop capacity to utilize ocean or coastal observations to meet end-users' (e.g., member country) needs. End-users are required to be identified to ensure both the co-design and the capacity development for sustained operation and use of the Working Groups' deliverable(s).

Duties of the Working Groups are:

- To develop and implement GEO Blue Planet's Core Actions;
- To report and update the Secretariat and Steering Committee on activities;
- To present on Working Group activities at international meetings; and
- To directly support GEO Blue Planet's stakeholders and end users.

Procedures

This section provides information about the procedures for GEO Blue Planet's governance and activities operations.

General procedures

General Membership

- The initiative does not have a standalone legal status and all participants contribute via in kind or dedicated resources from their home institutions, including GEO Blue Planet's Secretariat. GEO Blue Planet is an open community and all who share the interests of the GEO Blue Planet community are welcome to join. Those interested in join should contact the GEO Blue Planet Secretariat at info@geoblueplanet.org.

Funding for Meeting Attendance

- In person attendance of members at symposia, workshops and events will generally be funded by the members themselves, although opportunities for travel funding will be sought by the Steering Committee, particularly for members from developing countries.

Consensus

- All governing bodies will, as far as possible, operate by consensus. Decisions requiring a vote will be decided by simple majority of the votes cast. The quorum for a valid vote is participation of one half of the voting members of the relevant governing body. Votes may be held at meetings or by appropriate electronic means.

Executive Committee

Executive Committee Meetings

- The Executive Committee will meet virtually every two weeks and communicate via email or Microsoft Teams as needed.
- The agenda for Executive Committee meetings will be set by the GEO Blue Planet Secretariat Director with inputs from the Committee.

Advisory Group Management

Advisory Group members are selected as “ex-officio” members, invited based on the organizations they represent. The Executive Committee will review organizations to be represented on the Advisory Group every three years, corresponding with the three-year GEO Work Programme cycle.

- Advisory Group members will be nominated by the Executive Committee.

Approval of New Working Groups

- Based on recommendations from the Steering Committee, the Executive Committee will decide based on alignment with GEO Blue Planet’s core actions, priorities and available resources
 - > if new working groups that have been proposed should be accepted or not
 - > if new working groups should be created by send it out a call.

Approval of Implementation Plan

- Based on recommendations and feedback from the Steering Committee, the Executive Committee will decide if the Implementation Plan should be accepted. This will be done once every three years according to the GEO Work Programme schedule.

Approval of Operations and Governance Plan

- Based on recommendations and feedback from the Steering Committee, the Executive Committee will decide if Operations and Governance Plan should be accepted or needs to be updated. This will be done on a rolling basis as required.

Patrons Group

Patrons Group Meetings

- The Patrons Group participates in the biweekly Executive Committee meetings. Any stand-alone meetings of the Patrons Group will be scheduled on an ad hoc basis.

Convening the Advisory Group

- Once yearly, the Patrons Group will convene the Advisory Group. The Patrons Group will set the agenda and chair the meeting.
- As needed, the Patrons Group will contact the Advisory Group members for assistance with GEO Blue Planet sustainability issues.

Advisory Group

Advisory Group Meetings

- Once yearly, members will participate in an Advisory Group meeting via videoconference (or in person if possible). The meeting will typically include two two-hour sessions: one to describe success of the last year period and the second to provide space for discussion on topics where advice is needed.
- Members may also be contacted by a member of the Patrons Group to provide guidance on a specific topic.

Steering Committee

Steering Committee meetings

- Steering Committee meetings will be held every other month at two time zones online using Microsoft Teams.
- Steering Committee meetings will start with a topical presentation by a GEO Blue Planet working group, related GEO activity or other relevant activity followed by a discussion.
- Current Working Group Co-Chairs will attend the Steering Committee meetings as observers.
- The bulk of the Steering Committee meetings will be dedicated to reviewing:
 - Reviewing progress of activities
 - New working group proposals
 - Stakeholder priorities and interests

Steering Committee membership

- Calls for new Steering Committee members will be sent out when more than five members rotate off at any given time.
- Selection of new members will be done by the Executive Committee with consideration given to a balance of diversity in terms of geographic location, expertise, career stage and gender.

Steering Committee Co-Chairs

- Steering Committee Co-Chairs will be elected by the Steering Committee with consideration taken for sector, geographical representation (and time zones) and gender balance.
- Elections will occur when a Steering Committee co-chair's term ends or a Steering Committee co-chairs steps down due to status change or other circumstances.
- The Secretariat will ask for self-nominations from the Steering Committee members. An electronic vote will then be circulated to the Steering Committee members.

Working Group Review Teams

- Steering Committee members will be requested to volunteer to participate in Working Group review teams. These teams will be tasked with reviewing progress of working groups annually and making recommendations for next steps for the working groups including recommending if a Working Group should be discontinued.
- Review of each working group will be conducted on an annual basis. Reviews will be submitted to the Executive Committee for a final decision on next steps for the Working Group.

Implementation Plan and Strategy Teams

- Steering Committee members will be periodically asked to volunteer to serve on teams for updating the implementation plan, operations and governance plan and other strategic documents as required by the Secretariat.

Secretariat

Secretariat Meetings

- The Secretariat will have weekly meetings to discuss global, Working Group and Committee activities and operations.
- Daily correspondence will take place via email and Microsoft Teams.

Working Groups

- Each Working Group will be assigned a Secretariat lead. The Secretariat lead will:
 - Schedule the meetings for the working group
 - Ensure the working activities are on track
 - Ensure the Working Group's activities are aligned with GEO Blue Planet's Core Action Areas
 - Provide connections to other GEO Blue Planet Working Groups and activities
 - Connect the Working Group co-chairs with the Steering Committee and GEO Secretariat
 - Connect the Working Group with relevant grant or funding opportunities that are available through GEO

Outreach and Communications

- The Secretariat will maintain the GEO Blue Planet website, social media and other communications
- The Secretariat will lead the organization of GEO Blue Planet symposia and attend international meetings as required
- The Secretariat will work with graphic designers to develop graphics for the website and other outreach materials as needed

GEO Blue Planet Updates

- Prior to each Steering Committee meeting, the GEO Blue Planet Secretariat will provide an update on Secretariat and Working Group updates to internal GEO Blue Planet stakeholders.

Working Groups

Work Group Proposals

- For a new Working Group to be formed, a Working Group proposal must be submitted to the Steering Committee. A Working Group proposal template can be found in Annex A.
- The Executive Committee can also require the formation of a new Working Group based on a demand from the Advisory Group, Steering Committee and/or the Patrons group. A call will be sent out and interested participant will submit a proposal to the Steering Committee.
- Working Groups must answer an identified need of a high-level stakeholder (such as an UN Agency) to develop capacity to utilize ocean or coastal observations to meet end-users' (e.g., member country) needs. End-users are required to be identified to ensure both the co-design and the capacity development for sustained operation and use of the Working Groups' deliverable(s).
- Working Group proposals will first be reviewed by the Steering Committee. Based on comments from the Steering Committee, the Executive Committee will make a final decision on the Working Group proposal (based on alignment with GEO Blue Planet's core actions, priorities and available resources).
- A Working Group should produce a tangible output or outcome (paper, workshop etc) in a timely manner.

Working Group Meetings

- Working Groups will meet as often as necessary as determined by the working group co-chairs based on the on-going core actions.

Working Group Plan

- Approved Working Groups must provide the Steering Committee with Working Group Plans once per year. Working Group Plans should follow the template outlined in Annex B. After a review process by the Steering Committee, Working Group Plans will be sent to the Executive Committee for final approval.

Secretariat Updates

- Once every other month, Working Groups will provide the Secretariat with operations updates to include publications, events and funding opportunities and plans for applications or other core actions.

Annex A: Working Group Proposal Template

Background and Rationale

- Background information about the topic
- What is the challenge and opportunity
- What is the Earth observation focus?

Resources

- Are there any available resources to support the working group?
- Is there a plan to bring in resources such as proposals or networking through partner organizations in the working group?

Objectives

- What are the goals and objectives of the working group
- Core actions that will be undertaken

Working Group Composition

- Expected composition of the working group
- Three co-chairs must be identified for the proposal. One co-chair must be an early career professional.
- A plan for working with the Secretariat to recruit additional working group members should be included.

Anticipated Deliverables

- A draft set of deliverables is required for the working group proposals with an understanding that the deliverables will be updated once the working group is full formed, and the working group plan is fully developed

Timetable

- How long the working group will run. Working groups will have an initial set time period but can be extended if new tasks are identified and new work plans are submitted with additional deliverables.

Annex B: Working Group Plan Template

Background and Rationale

- Background information about the topic
- What is the challenge and opportunity
- What is the Earth observation focus?

Resources

- Available resources to support the working group?
- Plan to bring in resources if resources have not yet been identified (if required to achieve deliverables)

Objectives

- What are the goals and objectives of the working group
- Core actions that will be undertaken

Working Group Composition

- Three working group co-chairs must be identified for the proposal. One co-chair must be an early career professional.
- Secretariat lead
- Additional working group members

Deliverables

- Deliverables that will be completed by the working group for the time period outlined in the working group plan.

Timetable

- Working group time period. Working groups will have an initial set time period but can be extended if new tasks are identified and new work plans are submitted with additional deliverables.



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