Report on GEO Programme Board subgroup 5
(Cross read of Initiatives in GEO Work programme 2016)

This document summarises a cross read of candidate GEO initiatives (page 64 through to 126) in GEO 2016 transitional work programme[1]. The text of the initiatives were benchmarked against criteria derived from the Strategic Plan Reference Document relating to scope, resources and users. The cross read was undertaken by a sub group of volunteers drawn from members of the GEO Programme Board as input to the second meeting of the GEO Work Programme Board. The purpose is to gain insight into the extent to which the 2016 work programme contains the information necessary for the Programme Board to fulfil its duties. Maybe worth mentioning that those candidate initiatives who will "pass" the criteria test will be recommended by PB to be confirmed/approved as Initiatives (i.e. no longer "candidates") by the Plenary.

A smiley scoring was used as a simple process to discover whether the content in the 2016 Work Programme answered key questions that the sub group members felt that the Programme Board would need in order to evaluate initiatives. The degree to which the topic was answered gave rise to more smileys. The frownie symbol was only used to denote that the person reading did not find information answering the question.

Does the content in the WP answer the question	What is the quality of the answer?	Smiley score
Yes	Good	🙂🙂🙂
Yes	OK	🙂🙂
Yes	Patchy	🙂
No	Nothing there	☹️

Criteria for cross read (chosen by sub-group to be answered 'Yes' or 'No'):

- Flagship status: policy mandate?
- Flagship status: Near-op or pre-op service or products?
- Flagship status: user groups (steer flagship)?
- User need or application identified & user reps engaged?
- Sufficient resourcing identified and committed?
- Total resource estimate 2016 (Number)
- Objectives (relevance to Geo strategic objectives identified)?
- Outputs clear?
- PoC / lead clear with contact info?
- Contributing orgs & countries listed?
- Strongly linked – overlapping with other GEO activity or initiative?

In undertaking this analysis, the transitional WP 2016 is being assessed on the extent to which it is already in line with ambitions set out in the GEO strategic plan agreed in Mexico November 2015

[1] GEO Work programme 2016:
http://www.earthobservations.org/documents/work_programme/geo_2016_work_programme.pdf

and on criteria only made explicit at a more detailed level in March of 2016. So there is an element of judging the content of the WP2016 by standards not fully in place when it was first drafted. The smiley analysis does not look at the coherence, priority, gaps, needs, usefulness, etc of the proposed initiatives themselves. Through the application of the criteria listed above, the cross read resulted in four kinds of information:

i. estimation of the extent to which content written in the transitional work programme 2016 contained a response to criteria for determining initiative or flagship status.

ii. notes by the readers on the content presented, (Ex. comprehensiveness, user involvement and alignment with strategic plan)

iii. extraction of examples of what might be considered best practice for others to emulate

iv. estimation of the resources committed by members and participating organisations to the GEO work programme.

The cross read was undertaken by a temporary sub-group members of the GEO Programme Board[2] with different professional and cultural backgrounds, which has no doubt influenced the smiley scoring as well as the overall approach to this task.

Synthesis

Taking an average of the answers across the initiatives, only 5 candidate initiatives have an average smiley score of "OK" (). The rest score fewer smilies.

The average across all questions and for all initiatives results in a score of "Patchy" ().

However, members of the sub-group are aware that some initiatives have good answers to the questions, but it was not presented in the transitional work programme 2016 (Ex on responding to policy need, resourcing or user engagement) .

Definition of Initiatives

Many initiatives state that they are taking an integrated approach across a domain, but this tendency can result in very general statements, some kind of umbrella structure and a lack of credibility making it hard to nail down what the initiative will actually do, for whom, and why. Obviously an Initiative does not need to be quite as defined and specific as a flagship, but it would be nice if it were more specific than "explore and prototype a range of applications and services over the next decade in the vague area of <x>".

Some initiatives seem to contain statements that suggest that the Initiative maps better to a Community of Practice undertaking Community Activities. Sometimes Initiatives are written as a (future) plan to gather contributors, financial support, and other resources or very exploratory activities. This can be interpreted as 'land grabs' for a particular 'space' in GEO with the initiative being proposed for the visibility. It would be useful to consider that community activities secure some benefits to counter balance this tendency to focus on Initiatives. In addition, the Programme Board needs to take this into account and use in particular criteria on users enagagement, resourcing and policy relevance with some discipline. In addition

User engagement

Many statements alluding to users, that users "will be engaged". It would be nice to see a bit more than that. Even if user requirements are not clear or the initiative has identified a problem with the engagement process (refining and validating them and tactics can be in scope) a good

[2] GEO Programme Board 2016: http://www.earthobservations.org/geo_pb.phpv

understanding of who users are, and an indication they have at least been connected with is not a "nice to have" for an initiative.

Policy relevance

Naming a policy instrument such as the sustainable development goals or a convention is a start. In our information society where there are both gaps and digital divides, GEO initiatives and flagships should be responding to an issue that some people need addressed. The policy- science interface is not an easy context to navigate to determine specifically which challenge can be addressed through GEO and who the users are, but more effort needs to be put in to this iterative process to understand specifically for example which aspect of achieving a sustainable development goal will be helped. Furthermore, some initiatives have a very explicit policy mandate attached to specific activities which is known, but is not clearly stated in the work programme (ex. i.a. GEOGLAM and GEOBON)

Resources.

The average scoring on resources across all initiatives is patchy at best, but the modal average is no information provided. The subgroup is aware that many initiatives are resourced, but have not presented information in 2016 transitional work programme. The other tendency is to include what seems to be the whole organisations budget as the GEO contribution. In the GEO resourcing discussion, there are many different interests within the GEO community. Based on GEO strategic plan, GEO rules of procedure and feedback from Excom and this review the subgroup taking the whole of GEO perspective feels that initiatives should improve resourcing information for the 2017 – 2019 work programme taking into account the following notes:

Understanding and communicating the GEO resourcing model is one of the biggest challenges, in particular as it varies between different regions

➢ The key resource of GEO is the community, so peoples engagement and commitment to contributing to securing a shared result is the most valuable. However making ambitious statements not backed but realistic resource commitment to achieve the result undermines credibility at all scales and makes managing dependencies difficult (ref). In addition the programme Board and funding agencies cannot discern gaps and needs.

➢ The Programme Board has a role to play in communicating gaps in resourcing, but cannot do this if there is no information provided. The GEO programme Board is likely to focus initially on aspects where there is a need for additional or complimentary resourcing, as well as highlighting important deficiencies to GEO governance and caucuses.

➢ The GEO community pools resources: the most successfully organised initiatives contain a variety of sources and types for their resourcing. Even where there is a sinlge source of financing listed, this is often in reality co-financing.

➢ Connecting resources which are allocated to a project output to a GEO activity provides transparency, strengthens visibility, can improve results and use of the results for the funding agency, the project, and Geo community.

➢ Resourcing can be expressed in monetary value or Person months or full time equivalents (prefereably using just one in an initiatve) or even for specific items, such as a funding an event (For the purpose of the Work programme we suggest to work with 5000 dollars or Euro as a minimum value and multiples thereof).

➢ Initiative should aim to summarise resources connected to activities or outputs as well as to the sources of the funding in a table format.

Governance and people.

Sometimes no information, sometimes very long lists of people with no clarity on what they are contributing or receiving. Sometimes no lead or point of contact. The extent of involvement of GEO members and participating organisations is very difficult to ascertain, and needs to be improved so that representatives in GEO governance structures can keep oversight of where (and why) they are involved in GEO. Some initiatives have dedicated contacts in GEO secretariat. This support should be made clearer.

The sub-group has decided not to circulate the overall smiley table widely as this scoring will overlap with the submission of proposals for 2017 – 2019 Work Programme, and it may therefore lead to confusion about this analysis and the evaluation process. Some examples are planned to be shown in the Programme Board meeting and the messages (this document) resulting from this task will be shared more widely in the context of the WPS