

Proposal to create a GEO Associate Category

This document is submitted by Executive Committee to Plenary for decision.

Background

During its 43rd meeting, the Executive Committee identified the need to address the following issues regarding the GEO Participating Organization (PO) application process:

- The ambiguity in the key sentence in the GEO Rules of Procedure that identifies the kinds of organizations that are eligible to be recognized as POs;
- Requests from commercial entities for affiliation with GEO.

To adequately address these points, the Executive Committee established a Subgroup of Executive Committee members and request it to:

- Explore modifications to GEO Participating Organization eligibility criteria;
- Identify options for a new category of affiliated organizations

At its 44th meeting, the Executive Committee further discussed these topics based on the report received from the Subgroup. The following recommendations represent a consensus view of the GEO Executive Committee.

It should be noted that the recommendations in this document are not intended to change any conditions, roles, or privileges of GEO Members.

1 Modifications to Participating Organization Eligibility Criteria

1.1 Rationale for modifying the eligibility criteria

The issue that caused the Executive Committee to re-examine the eligibility criteria for Participating Organizations concerns the ambiguity in the key sentence in the GEO Rules of Procedure that identifies the kinds of organizations that are eligible to be recognized as POs. This sentence is reproduced below:

“GEO welcomes, as Participating Organizations, intergovernmental, international, and regional organizations, development banks, foundations, non-governmental organizations, and not-for-profit associations of commercial entities with a mandate and/or interest in, or be a user of Earth observations, information or services – that is the full spectrum and/or value chain from data collection to use.”

One source of ambiguity is whether the words “international and regional” are intended to apply to the types of organizations that follow in the sentence, namely, “development banks, foundations, non-governmental organizations, and not-for-profit associations of commercial entities”. The inclusion of the word “organization” after regional in the current wording suggests that “international and regional” do not apply to the other categories and thus national or sub-national organizations in these categories would be eligible. A second source of ambiguity concerns the term “regional”, which has been interpreted by some applicants to include a region within a single country.

The wording of this sentence has implications for GEO’s engagement efforts. Because of the ambiguity regarding the international mission or scope in the definition of the POs, Executive Committee had difficulty in deciding whether to accept or reject several recent PO applications submitted to GEO. Clarification to the wording in the Rules of Procedure would ensure that applicants clearly understand the criteria that will be used by Executive Committee to assess their application.

1.2 Executive Committee Recommendation

The Executive Committee recommends that the wording in the Rules of Procedure be revised to be consistent with recent Executive Committee practice. That is, the Rules of Procedure should clearly state that all categories of organizations applying to become POs must have a mission and/or activities that is global or regional (multi-country).

Therefore, the Executive Committee recommends the following revisions to the paragraph in question:

“GEO welcomes as Participating Organizations all organizations with a global or regional (multi-country) mandate and scope of operations that have an active interest in, or are a user of, Earth observations, information or services – that is, the full spectrum and/or value chain from data collection to use. These may include: intergovernmental international, and regional organizations, development banks, foundations, non-governmental organizations, and not-for-profit associations of commercial entities with a mandate and/or interest in, or be a user of Earth observations, information or services – that is the full spectrum and/or value chain from data collection to use.”

2 New Category of Affiliated Organization

2.1 Rationale for a new category of affiliation

In 2018, GEO Secretariat has received applications for PO status from entities in the following categories:

- Non-governmental, not-for-profit organizations that have a national or sub-national mandate or scope; and
- Commercial sector firms.

Neither category is currently eligible for PO status, nor would they be if the proposed revisions to the PO eligibility criteria in section 1 above are accepted.

Nevertheless, several prior GEO decisions have set the expectation for broader engagement by GEO. Namely,

- The Mexico City Declaration of 2015 and the GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025 set a direction towards inclusivity and engagement with a broader set of stakeholders, including the commercial sector;
- The *GEO Stakeholder Engagement Strategy* and Commercial Sector Engagement strategy approved by GEO-XIII Plenary in 2016 further elaborated on this direction.

Guided by these decisions, the Executive Committee considered an option to create a new category of affiliation with GEO.

Potential benefits of expanding the opportunities for organizational affiliation with GEO include:

- Encouraging engagement in GEO, leading to active participation in the GEO Work Programme, by an increasing number and range of organizations, especially those representing end-users;

- Enabling GEO to benefit from receiving first-hand input, information and know-how from organizations with experience as end-users or serving end-users of Earth observation information;
- Complementing GEO's support for national and international policy priorities (e.g. Sustainable Development Goals and disaster risk reduction) with support for economic growth through partnership with the commercial sector; and
- Recognizing the role of non-governmental organizations in GEO, many of which have long been key contributors to the GWP, and enabling their closer connection with GEO Members and other organizations.

Concerns have also been expressed by some GEO Members that the number of POs has been expanding rapidly, especially in the category of non-governmental organizations. Creation of a new category of affiliation is intended to encourage engagement in GEO by a wider range of organizations, while limiting the numbers that would have Participating Organization status.

2.2 Recommendation of the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee recommends that GEO create a new category of affiliation to be called "GEO Associate". This category would be in addition to the existing category of POs.

GEO Associate category would be open to commercial sector firms and national associations of commercial sector firms, as well as non-governmental, not-for-profit, and civil society organizations with a national or sub-national mandate or scope of operations.

GEO Associate organizations will be permitted to:

- Contribute to, and participate in GEO Work Programme activities;
- Contribute to the GEO Trust Fund per the current Rules of Procedure;
- Reference their organizational affiliation with GEO in their own communications;
- Receive invitations to and attend GEO Plenary meetings, GEO Symposia, GEO Data Providers Workshops and other GEO events;
- Make interventions at Plenary on topics that are not presented for Plenary decision.

The key distinction between GEO POs and GEO Associates in terms of their privileges and responsibilities within GEO is that POs would continue to be able to serve on GEO Programme Board, but GEO Associates would not.

With the introduction of the GEO Associate category, the GEO Observer category will be reserved for UN member states only, who may express interest in following GEO activities but without committing to a full Member status.

The proposed substantive changes to the GEO Rules of Procedure to are detailed in Annex 1.

ANNEX 1

PROPOSED REVISIONS

TO THE GEO RULES OF PROCEDURE

2 GEO MEMBERS, OBSERVERS, PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

2.1 Members

Membership in GEO is open to all Member States of the United Nations and to the European Commission.

2.2 Observers

Member States of the United Nations may participate in GEO activities as Observers

2.3 Participating Organizations

GEO welcomes as Participating Organizations all organizations with a global or regional (multi-country) mandate and scope of operations that have an active interest in, or are a user of, Earth observations, information and services – that is the full spectrum and/or value chain from data collection to use. These may include: intergovernmental, organizations, development banks, foundations, non-governmental organizations, and not-for-profit associations of commercial entities

2.4 GEO Associates

GEO welcomes as GEO Associates commercial firms and national associations of commercial firms, as well as non-governmental, not-for-profit and civil society organizations with a national or sub-national mandate or scope of operations in the field of Earth Observations, and having a concrete and sustainable contribution to GEO in some form.

Annex A provides guidance for recognition as GEO Participating Organization and Associates.

Annex A

Guidance for Recognition of

New GEO Participating Organizations and ~~Observers~~ Associates

Entities requesting official recognition as a GEO Participating Organization or ~~Observer and Associates~~ will be considered based on the following guidelines:

~~Membership in the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) is open to all Member States of the United Nations and to the European Commission.~~

1. Participating Organizations

GEO welcomes, as Participating Organizations, ~~intergovernmental, international, and or re~~ all organizations with a global or regional organizations, development banks, foundations, non-governmental organizations, and not-for-profit associations of commercial entities all organizations with a global mandate and/ all organizations with a global interest in, or ~~be a~~ are user of Earth observations, information ~~or~~ and services – that is the full spectrum and/or value chain from data collection to use. ~~Acceptance is subject to approval by Executive Committee.~~

~~1 The difference between Participating Organization and Observer Status is largely based on the level of involvement in GEO. These may include intergovernmental, organizations, development banks, foundations, non-governmental organizations, and not-for-profit associations of commercial entities~~ Participating Organizations may attend Plenaries and are eligible to serve on the Programme Board, and may join any of the Working Groups or Task Forces that coordinate and conduct GEO's work. ~~Observers, on the other hand, may only attend Plenaries to observe and monitor GEO proceedings. Acceptance of Observers is also subject to approval by Executive Committee.~~

2 The Participating Organization applicant must identify their proposed contribution to GEO, including, but not limited to, involvement in the GEO Work Programme, and/or the function performed by the organization that would benefit the broader GEO community. Examples include capacity building, data sharing, programme development, training and education, and communication and outreach. Applicants must endorse the GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025: Implementing GEOSS. Independent recognition of sub-programmes or subgroups of currently recognized Participation Organizations are generally discouraged from seeking independent recognition. Generally, the parent organization is considered sufficient. In ~~selected~~ select instances, and if a compelling argument is presented as to why separate participation is being sought, applications will be considered.

3 Joint programmes (programmes established under the auspices of two or more recognized Participating Organizations) may be designated by the Executive Committee as a separate Participating Organization or ~~Observer~~.

2. GEO Associates

GEO welcomes, as GEO Associates, commercial firms and national associations of commercial sector firms, as well as non-governmental, not for profit, and civil society organizations with a national or sub-national mandate or scope of operations in the field of Earth Observations, and having a concrete and sustainable contribution to GEO in some form. GEO Associates may attend Plenaries.

4 The Executive Committee will consider applications received and reviewed by the Secretariat and make the final decision on the approval of the requests for Participating Organization, and ~~Observer~~GEO Associate status according to the above criteria. The Executive Committee, supported by the Secretariat, may make direct contact with POs to encourage active participation.-

5 The Plenary will recognize Participating Organizations and ~~Observers~~ Associates at its earliest session.

6 Inactive Associates who have not contributed to GEO will be removed from the GEO Associates list and are not allowed to use the term and logo of "GEO" any more.