

2016 Coalition Reform—Webinar and Questionnaire Report

As was its purpose, the April 4-5, 2016 Coalition meeting gave rise to several concrete ideas and suggestions for the future of the Coalition. As many members of the Coalition were unable to attend that meeting, on May 10, 2016, the Secretariat conducted a webinar open to all Coalition members, entitled “AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition: A Vision of the Future.” The webinar was intended to brief attendees on the proposals for action that came out of the April meeting and previous discussions, describe next steps, and identify areas where individuals could be involved and provide input. Approximately 25 Coalition members attended. A recording of the webinar can be viewed at <https://aaas.adobeconnect.com/p82pv1h2xzx/>. This recording, and the webinar PowerPoint, were sent to all members of the Coalition.

The categories of ideas and suggestions made by Coalition members were summarized in the webinar as follows: membership, structure, activities, communications infrastructure, financial resources, goals, and data:

Membership:

In order to support the Coalition’s mission to bridge the scientific, engineering, and health professional communities and the human rights community, the Coalition needs to more effectively engage and involve human rights practitioners. To ensure the long-term significance of the Coalition’s work, the Coalition should also foster the participation of students in its activities. Finally, the Coalition should be a resource for and support the professional development of its members.

Structure:

A Coalition head (e.g., Chair or President) would provide a prominent face and visibility for the work of the Coalition. Comments regarding the need for agility and flexibility inspired the idea of having permanent task forces as well as ad hoc project teams, rather than the current Working Group structure. These ad hoc teams would have a designated lifespan, and would ensure the Coalition can be timely and responsive in its activities. Some of the projects of the current Working Groups would fall under the mandate of these ad hoc teams. This kind of structure would reflect the interests and capabilities of members. Additionally, restructuring the Coalition would remove unreasonable expectations placed on some members, who may, according to current policies and practice, be asked to serve multiple roles in the Coalition.

Activities:

A thematic area of focus for a given period of time would focus the activities of the Coalition around a specific theme, for example climate change. There is a recognized need to define clear tasks and timelines for project implementation, to ensure accountability and timeliness of project work.

Communications Infrastructure:

The definition of tasks and timelines can be aided by the creation of an online project management system that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of team members. Additionally, Trellis should be more effectively used to encourage communication. A Coalition-specific newsletter is also being developed. Externally, member organization communication networks should be more effectively used to raise awareness about the Coalition.

Financial Resources:

The Coalition would be further supported through small-scale requests for financial support for the Coalition from large numbers of constituents (e.g., AAAS members). The Secretariat has begun to explore this option with the AAAS membership office.

Goals:

At the April meeting, it was observed that though the goals of the Coalition are the right ones, their articulation occasionally creates redundancy and are not always clear. The goals should be edited for clarity, inclusivity, and to ensure against duplication.

Data:

The Coalition requires more robust information from its members to establish baseline data and monitor progress. This will be aided through the reinvigoration of the Ad Hoc Benchmarks Committee, supported by member statisticians who volunteered their services at the April meeting.

The webinar also outlined three areas of action. For immediate action, the Secretariat will develop a monthly Coalition newsletter, plan a Trellis training session for the July Coalition meeting, and reinvigorate the Ad Hoc Benchmarks Committee. The second area involves the creation of two task teams made up of Coalition members, one focused on the development of criteria and a selection process for Coalition projects, and the other on increased engagement of students. The third area involves work by the Secretariat, with guidance from the Steering Committee, to develop proposals for presentation to the Council on the incorporation of a 'President,' and amending the Coalition structure to provide for permanent and ad hoc project teams.

At the conclusion of the webinar, attendees were encouraged to answer a brief questionnaire. This questionnaire was also sent to all members of the Coalition. At the time of writing (13 June 2016), 38 individuals have responded. The questionnaire asked respondents to mark their top three priorities for the Coalition in 2016, choose one or more activities to which they would contribute at least two hours of time to before the July meeting, and indicate what information they would like to receive in a monthly Coalition newsletter. It also provided space for other comments or suggestions.

Overall, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that **engagement of human rights organizations** is a top priority. The other top priorities of respondents include (1) development of a communication plan; (2) development of a fellowship-type program to encourage and recognize members' contributions; and (3) the development of an online accountability mechanism for activities.

The top areas in which respondents indicated their interest in participating are (1) developing a strategy for engaging human rights organizations; (2) drafting a plan for engaging students; and (3) determining how to identify and choose thematic areas to guide Coalition activities.

With regard to the Coalition newsletter, respondents indicated interest in receiving updates on human rights-related activities of member organizations, the progress of Coalition projects, and lists of relevant conferences and events, among other suggestions.