CODATA[1] – A Strategy to Increase the Membership Circle

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to devise a plan to increase the number of members in CODATA, both national and institutional members. The document portrays the plan through the following sections:

1. Brief definition of CODATA mission and major activities.
2. Why membership growth is important?
3. A "Business Model": What CODATA can offer that might be attractive to potential members?
4. Target populations.
5. Action plan.

Background: CODATA mission and activities

CODATA Strategic Plan 2006-2012 delineates the background and the activities of CODATA: "*Created by ICSU in 1966 as an interdisciplinary body focused on scientific and technical data, CODATA has established itself as an influential voice in national and international policy regarding scientific data management and as a focal point for international, cross-disciplinary collaboration and communication on key data issues. CODATA, through its Task Groups and other focused activities has made significant contributions not only to the improvement of scientific data development, analysis, and visualization in key fields, but also to the overall advancement and application of science internationally.*"[2]

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[1] Committee on Data for Science and Technology, International Council for Science
[2] CODATA Strategic Plan 2006-2012, public review draft, December 2008, p. iii.

The Strategic Plan also states the mission of CODATA[3]: "*The mission of CODATA is to strengthen international science for the benefit of society by promoting improved scientific and technical data management and use.*"[4]

In light of that mission, CODATA focuses its efforts in the following types of activities:

1. Encouraging the sharing of data among various scientific disciplines such as Geophysics, Biodiversity, and many more.
2. Promoting the development and use of open access scientific data.
3. Advancing methods of data storage, data mining and data analysis.
4. Encouraging data standards (e.g., citation standards).
5. Forming and Supporting Task Groups dealing with topics pertaining to CODATA purposes.

It should be emphasized that CODATA is a multidisciplinary organization. It focuses on data rather than on specific science(s). Its target is to enable and facilitate data access and data sharing in all scientific fields, such as Exact Sciences, Life Sciences, Engineering, Social Sciences, Management Sciences and the like.

Why membership growth is so important?

Almost every organization needs to grow in order to avoid stagnation. However, beyond this slogan, there is a number of good reasons for the strive of CODATA to increase its membership circles:

1. **Mutual learning:** Additional members will broaden the variety of disciplines that are covered by CODATA. This will allow more learning opportunities. After all, generically, the treatment of data is not that different among various sciences. Researchers can learn one from each other and adapt storage, data mining and analysis technique that are prevailing in a "foreign" discipline.
2. **Cooperation:** additional members can create more cooperation opportunities among countries or among "neighboring" disciplines.

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[3] Ibid, p. iii.

[4] This mission statement has been approved at the 25th CODATA General Assembly in Beijing in October 2006.pes of

3. **Services:** Additional members can offer more services in terms of technology, open source, open access, methodologies, hosting workshops and conferences and more.

4. **Financial stability:** Additional members provide more membership fees, hence strengthening the financial stability and ability of CODATA.

In sum, in the case of CODATA it can be argued that *quantity is also quality*.

A "Business Model": What CODATA can offer that might be attractive to potential members?

One of the major components of an expansion plan of a business organization is the "business model", namely, what can we offer to our potential "clients" and what is our payoff from having them on board? The second question, CODATA's payoff was discussed in the previous section. Here we list out what CODATA has to offer that might be attractive to potential members:

1. **Experience**: CODATA's current members, individuals as well as the organizations they belong to, possess a unique experience in all areas pertaining to data acquisition, standardization, storage, retrieval, mining and analysis (hereafter – *data sciences*). Moreover, if a certain expertise is not available within CODATA, its members will probably have a fast access to individuals and institutions where the required knowledge exists. Such experience is extremely valuable to the scientific, public and private sector research communities and offers a cost-effective alternative to commercial consultants.

2. **Methodologies**: CODATA's current members, individuals as well as the organizations they belong to, possess an incredible knowledge about methodologies of data analysis, particularly quantitative methods (*comment: since qualitative methods are essential in Social Sciences it is advisable that CODATA strive to attract experts in that field too*).

3. **Task group support**: CODATA supports task groups that bring together international experts to address issues of importance to CODATA's mission. The

resulting expert international consensus may be attractive to an organization or a country that faces similar issues.

4. **Conferences and workshops**: CODATA organizes a biannual conference and sponsors and helps in organizing other conferences and workshops where researchers can benefit for the exchange of knowledge.

5. **Journal**: CODATA publishes a journal that can be an outlet for publications related to "data sciences", hence contribute to the publicity, academic promotion and exposure of individuals and organizations.

6. **International gate to data sciences**: Since CODATA is an international body, it provides a gate to anyone wishing to publish or to develop connections with other individuals or institutions dealing with related issues in data sciences.

7. **Affiliation with ICSU**: CODATA is affiliated with ICSU. Through ICSU it can facilitate relationships with countries and institutions when needed.

In summary, CODATA's value proposition is that it can play the role of an *international consultant* and *international facilitator* in all aspects of data acquisition, standardization, storage, retrieval, mining and analysis (i.e., *data sciences*).

CODATA should properly package, position and present its value proposition to potential members. It is advisable, therefore, to consult with marketing experts and perhaps engage them to develop a marketing strategy and design supporting materials (organizational branding scheme, brochures, exhibit, etc.)

Target populations

CODATA's target populations for member recruiting should be threefold: countries, academic institutions, and international associations.

1. **Countries**: CODATA has very low visibility in a number of regions around the world such as Latin America, Africa, and Central Asia. Even in Europe the "coverage" is not complete. Hence, the expansion of national membership should be a prime target of CODATA. In the past there were cases where countries have

backed off due to problems in paying the membership fees. One problem was the amount of the fee, but another problem was how to identify the governmental organization within a country that will be committed to making the annual payment. This should be discussed with CODATA "fans" within those countries.

2. **Academic institutions**: Academic institutions can find interest in CODATA and opt to become members. For example: schools of engineering, schools of exact sciences, research institutes within universities, national institutes in countries such as bureaus of standards, and the like. So far, CODATA has concentrated on countries and international organizations. It should consider approaching those sectors as well. This, of course will require some thinking about membership fees.

3. **International associations and institutions**: A number of those are already affiliated with CODATA; however there are many that have not been approached yet. CODATA should deliberate on how to attract the enormous number of international bodies and associations that might be interested in data sciences.

In addition to those CODATA should consider approaching data warehouses organizations, libraries, vendors and individuals.

The target populations should be approached in two directions: bottom-up and top-down:

1. The **top-down approach** centers on reaching the leaders and managements of the target bodies (academies of sciences, governmental departments, university presidents, research institute directors, and the like) and convince them that the bodies they are heading will benefit greatly from joining CODATA given the low cost of membership.

2. The **bottom-up approach** concentrates on individuals who might benefit if the organization/country they belong to join CODATA. These individuals should be respectable leaders in the academic or professional community so their words and recommendations have an impact on the decision makers. CODATA should identify such figures through its current members and some "intelligence".

CODATA should strive to activate more than one point of contact in each country. This will increase the chance of success in the beginning and the continuity of the membership thereafter. This might be a delicate issue but it should be explored.

CODATA should also consider different types of membership (e.g., individual membership, institutional membership, not only research institutional membership but also vendor membership). This may engender two benefits for CODATA:

1. Increase membership.
2. Alleviate the problem that governmental bureaucracy is hard to "crack" in terms of convincing it to allocate budget for membership fees.

Action plan

1) Compile an inventory of high-value potential members to target and set a new membership target: It is suggested that the secretariat, in collaboration with members of the Committee would identify three or four countries who have expressed an interest in CODATA membership to test the document against. Suggested countries are: Finland, Belgium, UK (although UK is a member it is trying to identify other data institutions within the CODATA UK network).

2) Review the approaches used by other similar organizations to build membership: it would be useful to talk to other organizations within ICSU. CODATA secretariat could follow up on this.

3) Identify barriers to membership (cost?) and consider options and solutions. Potential avenues that should be explored:
Different types of membership (e.g., individual membership, institutional membership, not only research institutional membership but also vendor membership, libraries, database and data warehouse organizations, pertinent software vendors (e.g., SPSS)).

Differentiation in fees: e.g., developing countries (less), business organizations (more), academic institutions and NGOs (less than countries), individuals (less), libraries, data warehouse organizations.

4) Identify "high profile" CODATA members who can be encouraged to promote CODATA and membership within their communities. Identify scholars who are not involves in CODATA right now but can be recruited to promote CODATA in their countries or associations.

5) Review the existing approach used by CODATA to encourage membership, document it and distribute it for comments among the Committee and the EC members.

6) Investigate options and costs for purchasing professional advice and consulting on how best to market CODATA and build membership.