Options for US CODATA Organizational Structure in BRDI

This discussion paper provides the pros and cons of two main organizational structures for the U.S National Committee for CODATA (US CODATA) and a proposed way forward. The international CODATA is a non-governmental and interdisciplinary Committee on Data for Science and Technology, affiliated with the International Council for Science (ICSU). Created in 1966, its mission is to **"**strengthen international science for the benefit of society by promoting improved scientific and technical data management and use." CODATA is located in Paris and has national members, affiliated organizations, and organizes its work in task groups. Additional information about CODATA is available at www.codata.org.

ICSU is also a non-governmental scientific organization in Paris. Founded in 1931, its mission is to: "strengthen international science for the benefit of society." ICSU has 120 country members and 31 discipline unions, as well as 17 interdisciplinary committees including CODATA. More details about ICSU can be found on its website at www.icsu.org.

Most of the 22 national members in CODATA are located within or are funded by the national science academies or science ministries in their respective countries. In the United States, the US CODATA is located within the National Academy of Sciences (not the other two Academies or the NRC) and since 2008 has been represented by the Board on Research Data and Information (BRDI). Previously, the US CODATA was an independent committee under the auspices of the Board on International Scientific Organizations, and under other arrangements before that. Most of the other U.S. national committees to ICSU, whether to other interdisciplinary committees or to the discipline unions, also reside in the National Academy of Sciences, either at BISO or at other discipline Boards (e.g., the Boards on the science of oceans, atmosphere, polar regions, geography, or space).

The remainder of this discussion paper examines the pros and cons of two organizational structures for the US CODATA, both of which it has used, and a suggestion for a preferred option to be discussed by the BRDI members.

Option 1: US CODATA represented by BRDI

With the formation of BRDI in 2008, the US CODATA has been represented by BRDI, which is the adhering member of the international CODATA. Six of the twelve CODATA Task Groups have US co-chairs, who are also ex officio members of BRDI, as are Sara Graves, the CODATA Secretary General, and Bonnie Carroll, a CODATA Executive Committee member. Laura Bartolo is the U.S. National Delegate to CODATA and a member of BRDI. All of the Board members are also automatically members of the US CODATA, so the committee meetings are the same as the meetings of the full Board. Some of the work is done between meetings by an informal "executive committee" consisting of the elected officials to CODATA from the US (currently Sara Graves and Bonnie Carroll) and Laura Bartolo.

Pros: the positive aspects of this arrangement are that the merging of the US CODATA with BRDI is a simpler arrangement, less costly (with no separate committee meeting and management overhead), and at a higher (Board) level of visibility within the Academy establishment. The merged CODATA also provides most of the international focus for the Board and provides an additional mechanism and pool of members with an international research data interest for the Board. Finally, this arrangement is responsive to a previous request and discussions with the main sponsor of BRDI/US CODATA, the National Science Foundation.

Cons: Not all Board members understand the international CODATA very well or want to be active in the international work, especially the business issues, which are not a core interest of BRDI. A separate committee would focus more clearly and with greater attention to the issues and activities of international CODATA.

Option 2: US CODATA as an independent committee of BRDI

As noted above, the US CODATA was a separately constituted committee under BISO before the formation of BRDI. It had a separate committee existence with its own membership for many years, even before the formation of BISO in 2001. However, since the formation of BRDI, the Board provides a logical home for the US CODATA, even on a separately constituted basis, so a return of an independent US CODATA to BISO or to any other organizational home with the NAS is not proposed.

Pros: A separately constituted US CODATA under BRDI (with the committee chair also being a member of BRDI) would have a number of benefits, including more autonomy and time for international data and CODATA issues, and a more tailored membership. It also would allow BRDI to be more focused on national US topics, which are more of a concern to the Boards' sponsors than international issues.

Cons: A separate US CODATA committee under BRDI would entail a significantly higher budget and overhead of staff time and committee travel. It would take most of the international issues out of BRDI and place them in an artificially segregated group, making coordination more difficult. It also would signify a lower priority on international data issues. Finally, a separation of the US CODATA from the Board would run counter to the trends to consolidate such activities, as promoted by the federal sponsors of such entities.

Recommendation: The US CODATA "executive committee" recommends that BRDI maintain the current organizational structure under Option 1, but take several steps to make the Board's international work more efficient or effective. Specifically, BRDI can:
- Make the membership in both BRDI and the US CODATA more explicit at the outset;
- Minimize the CODATA business aspects at the BRDI meetings, carrying those out in-between Board meetings by the informal "executive committee", focusing instead on international issues and activities at the BRDI meetings;
- Involve the other ex officio CODATA TG co-chairs to a greater extent, especially between the BRDI/US CODATA meetings.