

**Report to Senior Arctic Officials on
AC Communications and Outreach Guidelines**
AC Communications and Outreach Contact Group - October 2010

In the 2009 Tromsø Declaration, Ministers, “Decide[d] to develop guidelines for engagement in outreach activities and an Arctic Council communication and outreach plan based on common priorities.” These are two separate but related tasks. This report sets out options for such guidelines. The elements of a Strategic Communications Plan are included in a separate report being presented concurrently to SAOs.

Methodology

In this report, the contact group has incorporated feedback from:

- the questionnaires distributed in January 2010,
- feedback received during the April 2010 SAO meeting, and
- feedback received in discussions with various actors.

Where there is a clear consensus on an issue expressed by members of the contact group or during the April SAO meeting, the contact group has developed recommendations on how to proceed. Where there is less consensus, the contact group has proposed options for consideration by SAOs.

All options and guidelines have been summarized in the document “Draft Arctic Council Communications and Outreach Guidelines” (tabled separately). The contact group aims to have the Draft Guidelines approved by SAOs at their October 2010 meeting.

It is necessary to first consider how to incorporate the Guidelines into the core documents that make up the institutional structure of the Council. The contact group recommends that there be a review by SAOs of the Communications and Outreach Guidelines every five years. This review would consider the strengths and weaknesses of the Communications and Outreach Guidelines, including the roles and responsibilities, and suggest appropriate changes if necessary.

Recommendation 1. Add a new document to the Founding Documents that specifically deals with questions of outreach and communications – “Guidelines on Arctic Council Communications and Outreach.” The Guidelines shall be subject to periodic review by SAOs every five years.

Guidelines concerning Roles and Responsibilities

The interim report of the contact group highlighted that there is no clear division of responsibilities in the area of outreach and communications amongst Arctic Council actors. The interim report identified several actors who play a variety of roles and responsibilities in AC communications and outreach. The key finding was that such roles and responsibilities are unclear and have evolved on an ad hoc basis over time, and more clarity was required.

Role of the Chair¹

The interim report pointed out the absence of clear roles and responsibilities of the Chair regarding communications and outreach. As a result a practice has evolved whereby the Chair will speak on behalf of the Arctic Council when providing factual information and agreed positions. He/she will revert to his/her role as Chair representing the State holding the Chairmanship of the AC in the absence of agreed positions. Attempts to obtain a common position have proved time-consuming and unsatisfactory. This limits the voice of the AC with respect to many media enquiries and inhibits a greater role for the AC.

¹ The SAO Chair.

The Chair is the 'face' of the Council and thus has an important, visible role in Arctic Council communications and outreach. The media in particular want to confer with a specific individual. The Chair has two main roles in Arctic Council communications and outreach and a more secondary one. The two main roles are:

1. Overseeing Media Relations: A reactive role in responding to requests for comment, interviews etc from the media.
2. Outreach: A proactive role in disseminating information and appearing publicly at conferences, seminars, meetings of international organizations in order to increase the profile of the Arctic Council.

The more secondary role is to oversee and manage communications and outreach activities undertaken by the AC Secretariat (see below). A suggestion was made by a contact group participant that the AC Secretariat report to the SAOs rather than to the Chair. The reporting relationship of the Secretariat is not a communications issue, and this is outside the scope of the contact group.

The contact group considered three options regarding the role of the Chair in communications and outreach.

Option 1: Greater Role for Chair - the Guidelines shall state that the Chair shall speak on behalf of the Arctic Council and use his/her judgment in terms of responding to questions. This would leave the Chair with a high degree of discretion in terms of responding to requests to speak publicly to the media or at events.

Advantages

- This option would provide the Chair with flexibility and allow for quick responses to requests for comment on Arctic Council matters.
- The Chair would become a much more visible symbol of the Arctic Council.

Disadvantages

- In the January questionnaires, many contact group members commented that the Chair should confine his/her public statements to agreed messaging from SAOs or factual information. They indicated resistance to the Chair commenting on more sensitive 'political' topics on behalf of the Arctic Council without approval of SAOs.
- Controversial positions taken by a Chair commenting in public on behalf of the AC could prove divisive and undermine consensus within the Arctic Council.

Option 2: Clearer Role for Chair and Pre-Approved Lines - the Guidelines would set out the three roles and responsibilities of the Chair: media relations, outreach and managing AC Secretariat communications and outreach. The Chair would speak on behalf of the Arctic Council confining his/her comments to factual information and agreed positions. The AC Secretariat shall prepare Q&As and talking points on the most common questions from external audiences. This will involve a significant initial investment of time by all AC actors to contribute to and review these materials, which could then be more easily updated on a regular basis. All lines and Q&As shall be approved inter-sessionally by SAOs. – **Recommended**

Advantages

- The Chair should then be able to undertake more media relations and outreach opportunities and speak on a wider variety of topics.
- The Arctic Council position should be more effectively communicated while ensuring there is consensus on the public position

Disadvantages

- This option will add to the work of SAOs
- There will likely still be many questions from journalists which the Chair will not be able to answer.

Option 3: Status quo - the Guidelines would formalize the present practice of the Chair commenting in his/her personal capacity on more big-picture 'political' questions and confining his remarks as Arctic Council Chair to facts or agreed positions.

Advantages

- This is present practice and would require no change

Disadvantages

- The Chair and others have expressed dissatisfaction with how this works in practice.
- The Arctic Council is suffering somewhat from a lack of visibility; therefore, it is fair to conclude this approach has not been effective in increasing the AC's profile.

Recommendation 2. The contact group recommend that SAOs approve Option 2 concerning the role of the Chair.

Role of AC Secretariat

The interim report set out the present roles of the AC Secretariat in terms of communications and outreach. There was consensus amongst the contact group and at the April 2010 SAO meeting that the AC Secretariat's role in outreach and communications should continue: responding to routine enquiries, providing factual information on the Arctic Council, preparing electronic and written materials, undertaking outreach to visiting delegations (with approval of Chair) and maintaining and updating the Arctic Council website. There is a role for the AC Secretariat to collaborate with Working Groups to increase synergies and linkages between Working Group and Arctic Council web products. This could be done in a number of ways and should be part of an overarching Arctic Council Strategic Communications Plan. The AC Secretariat could also prepare a printed brochure and an e-newsletter in English and Russian for use with external audiences.

Recommendation 3. The AC Secretariat shall update and maintain the AC website.

Recommendation 4. The AC Secretariat shall implement elements of the Strategic Communications Plan, and report regularly on its implementation to SAOs.

Recommendation 5. At least one member of the AC Secretariat (whether it be permanent or the present system) shall be dedicated full-time to communications and outreach.

Recommendation 6. If Recommendation 2. above concerning the role of the Chair is approved, the AC Secretariat shall prepare a list of common Arctic-related questions from external audiences and draft responses to those questions (a Q&A) as well as talking points on major Arctic-related topics. The AC Secretariat shall regularly update these Q&As and talking points and submit to SAOs for approval inter-sessionally.

Recommendation 7. The AC Secretariat shall collaborate with Working Groups to improve synergies and linkages among communications and outreach activities of AC actors.

Role of Working Groups

There was a strong consensus within the contact group and amongst Working Groups that the Working Groups themselves are best-placed to talk about their own initiatives and activities. The 2009 SAO Report to Ministers in Tromsø requested that all Working Groups include a communication and information dissemination strategy in their project proposals. A key conclusion of the contact group and agreed by SAOs in April was the need for greater linkages between Working Group communications and outreach efforts and those of the Arctic Council more generally. Both Working Groups and the other actors of the Arctic Council have roles to play in ensuring greater coordination.

Recommendation 8. Working Groups shall be responsible for undertaking communications and outreach regarding their own activities and initiatives.

Recommendation 9. Each Working Group shall implement the request of SAOs in the 2009 Tromsø SAO Report to Ministers by developing communications and outreach plans. These shall be aligned with the Strategic Communications Plan, and shall be considered and reviewed on a regular basis. These plans are considered by SAOs as part of their review of project proposals and work plans, and shall be shared with the AC Secretariat.

Recommendation 10. Each Working Group shall inform the AC Secretariat of significant communications and outreach developments or upcoming events in advance, in order for these developments/events to be promoted to the fullest.

Role of Members

Contact group participants felt strongly that it is the responsibility of Members to communicate on an ongoing basis to audiences within their constituencies as they are aware of the interests of their local stakeholders and can target the information appropriately. There is currently no way of determining what Members are doing in terms of outreach and communications to inform their communities (especially Northerners) of the work of the Arctic Council.

Implementing the Guidelines and Recommendations of the Contact Group will add to the volume of products to be developed by all AC actors, and that require approval by SAOs - increasing an already heavy workload. Members will need to consider how to review communications products sent to them for consideration and approval in a timely manner. Members should also contribute resources (either human or financial) and devote attention to the development and review of the Strategic Communications Plan.

Recommendation 11. The Guidelines shall explicitly recognize the role of Members in informing their relevant constituencies and stakeholders of the work of the Arctic Council.

Option: Members could be asked to inform the rest of the Arctic Council (perhaps via a short written intercessional report, oral presentation, etc) about their domestic Arctic Council-related information and outreach efforts.

Recommendation 12. Members shall consider communications products (such as Q&As) sent to them for approval in a timely manner.

Option: A group of representatives nominated by Members could be formed to process and approve draft Q&As, talking points or other outreach and communications products on behalf of SAOs. These representatives would work on a virtual basis through the inter-sessional period.

Guidelines concerning the use of the AC Logo

The Interim Report outlined two main challenges associated with the AC logo:

1. **The logo as a branding tool:** The branding potential of the logo has not been sufficiently utilized, including by some Working Groups and on their websites. This is in part due to conflicting instructions governing the use of the logo. At the same time, the logo appears on products created and maintained by bodies other than Working Groups (such as SAON, the Arctic Portal, IPY) and it is not clear if these products have been endorsed or approved by SAOs.
2. **The logo as a symbol of approval:** The implications of the presence of the logo have not been defined leading to concerns about implied endorsement of and/or compromise of the integrity of scientific findings. This is most prevalent with respect to Working Group assessments and reports.

1. The logo as a branding tool

The Interim Report outlined how the inconsistent application of the AC logo has meant that opportunities to communicate on the capacity and the positions of the AC have been lost. It

noted that in the past, different AC logos have been used (though this seems to be not the case recently). **The AC should take advantage of the branding power of a single AC logo by using it consistently and as often as possible.**

Websites will be discussed in greater detail elsewhere in the document. However, it should be noted that the Interim Report highlighted that the link between Working Groups and the AC was not always apparent on Working Group websites. The AC logo should be displayed prominently on all Working Group home pages in addition to Working Group logos.

Recommendation 13. The official Arctic Council logo (with or without the words “Arctic Council”) is acknowledged to be the following image:



Recommendation 14. The AC logo shall be displayed prominently on all documents, publications or websites intended for public use that are produced by the AC Chairmanship, the AC Secretariat or Working Groups. This is in addition to the logo of the Working Group(s) where relevant.

The AC logo shall only be applied to initiatives or products linked to AC Ministers or SAOs (eg. supported, approved, endorsed, welcomed, tasked, requested, etc.) Should a Member or a Working Group find the AC logo on material where this link is not clear, the individual should flag the use to the SAOs for their review and decision.

Some contact group participants suggested that to increase the branding power of the logo, individual Working Group logos be eliminated in favour of having the name of the Working Group next to the Arctic Council logo. This proposal did not receive broad support from other contact group participants.

2. The logo as a symbol of approval

Comparative Analysis of the Practices of other Organizations

The Communications and Outreach contact group undertook an informal comparative analysis of the publication and approval processes associated with the logos of the IPCC, UNEP, the OECD and the CEC.² There are some valuable lessons that the contact group has drawn on in our preparation of options and recommendations below. However, there are some unique characteristics of the Arctic Council that make some of the methods of other organizations difficult to translate to an AC context.

In recent years, AC Working Groups have more frequently included policy recommendations in their assessments. This trend is likely to continue. The mandate and the practices of other organizations are in most cases limited to providing policy-relevant scientific findings and information. The majority of the documents published by the other organizations studied do not include policy recommendations. There is more potential for diverging views on policy recommendations than on scientific findings or conclusions, so the AC may need to develop its own approaches.

² IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

CEC: North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation

The other organizations that we studied, particularly those with permanent secretariats and significant communications and publishing capacity, will produce numerous publications every year with the intention that states take the findings into account in a general manner in their national and international policy-making. The AC has a different dynamic. Working Groups produce fewer but larger scale assessments, and SAOs and Ministers respond to each assessment through reports and declarations. This dynamic means that the formality and scrutiny of the publication and approval process is higher in the AC than in the organizations that we studied.

The AC is also a consensus-based forum that seeks to demonstrate that the Arctic is a region of cooperation. Other organizations, including UNEP, have used a reservation system in which individual states can express their disagreement with particular findings or recommendations, while approving or endorsing the report as a whole.³ This system runs against the principle of consensus, and could highlight minor differences of opinion rather than furthering the AC message of cooperation, and is likely not appropriate for the AC. It is also more formal than the collegial, consensus-based culture of the AC.

Acknowledging the differences between the AC and other organizations, the contact group offers the following analysis, recommendations and options.

Working Group Assessments and Reports

The Interim Report noted that there is a dilemma concerning the implications of the presence of the AC logo. On one hand, some Members are concerned that the logo implies their endorsement of the findings. On the other hand, some Working Groups do not want the content of their peer-reviewed scientific findings to be modified. It has come up most often in association with the assessments and reports produced by Working Groups, particularly those that contain policy recommendations. The informal manner in which the AC logo has been used as a means of document control in the past has been imperfect and contentious. It has also come at a communications cost, as was outlined in the Interim Report.

In the cases of the IPCC, UNEP, and the OECD, the logo is used only as a promotional tool. **It is not used to indicate the endorsement or approval of member states for content of material on which the logo appears.** This appears to be an issue unique to the AC.

Recommendation 15. The AC communications and outreach guidelines should state that the presence of the AC logo on public materials does not imply the approval of the content of the materials by AC Members.

This approach is appropriate for the AC, as it should ensure that the logo is used to the fullest to promote the AC while responding to the concerns of Members and of Working Groups. If Members disagree with any elements of a report which bears the AC logo, they can point to the AC communications and outreach guidelines to explain that the logo is a branding tool and does not imply approval. Working Groups could promote the AC by putting the AC logo on their publications without worrying that its presence may slow down the publication or lead to modifications in the content of the report. By implementing Recommendation 15, the use of the AC logo will be separated from the issue of the role of SAOs in the publication process for Working Group reports.

In addition to Recommendation 15, further measures are necessary to address the concerns associated with policy recommendations in WG assessments and reports, including separating out policy recommendations and using disclaimers.

As noted above, there is more potential for disagreement over policy recommendations than over scientific findings. When Working Groups include policy recommendations in their

³ One example of this practice is available here: www.agassessment.org.

assessments, they often structure the report so that the recommendations are in a separate section or are formatted differently. This practice makes the distinction between scientific findings and policy recommendations clear, and should be formalized.

Recommendation 16. Based on any guidance received from Ministers or SAOs at the outset of a project, Working Groups shall decide whether a document will contain policy recommendations. Working Groups shall structure their publications so that policy recommendations are clearly identifiable by the reader (ie. In a separate section of the document, using different formatting, etc).

The options below concerning the use of disclaimers could further reassure Members and Working Groups about the application of the AC logo.

Disclaimer Text

Other international organizations with an environmental focus frequently use disclaimers at the beginning of their publications to clarify the level of endorsement of the document by the organization's members. (Sample disclaimers used by the AC and other organizations are listed in the grey box.) This approach has been used on an ad-hoc basis by AC Working Groups in the past.

Option 1: Working Group documents containing only scientific findings or conclusions shall not contain a disclaimer, unless Members participating in the preparation and review of the assessment request that one be added. Documents containing policy recommendations shall always contain a disclaimer.

Advantages:

- Working Groups can provide the most accurate scientific findings and best policy advice to decision-makers without the concern that their work will be modified.
- Members will not have to worry that their approval or endorsement of the findings is implied.
- The publication process is not slowed down by discussions between Working Groups and Members to find a compromise on the content of the report.

Disadvantages:

- It will be complex to manage who makes the determination re the disclaimer and when.
- Users of the assessments may not read the disclaimer message and may continue to imply that the content is endorsed/approved by AC Members.

Option 2: All Working Group assessments shall be published with a disclaimer. **Recommended**

Advantages:

- Working Groups will not have to decide whether the disclaimer should be applied.
- It would be very difficult to imply the endorsement by Members of WG assessment findings.
- This option improves consistency.

Disadvantage:

- The more often a disclaimer is used, the less meaningful it becomes.

Sample disclaimers

- *These findings have neither been reviewed nor endorsed by the Arctic Council Member States and, therefore, represent only the views of the WG/experts/ authors that produced them. - PAME*
- *The views presented in this volume represent those of the authors. Some of the papers presented here have benefited from the oversight, input and suggestions gathered from OECD government representatives. However, the papers do not represent the views of the OECD member countries nor of the OECD. - OECD*
- *The opinions expressed in this book are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the individual OECD countries. - OECD*
- *The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of UNEP or contributory organizations, and neither do they imply endorsement. - UNEP*
- *The material herein has undergone expert and government review, but has not been considered by the Panel for possible acceptance or approval. - IPCC*

In either option, the exact text of the disclaimer would be determined by the Working Group, but it must contain a reference to the fact that the contents have not been reviewed nor endorsed by the Arctic Council Member States if this is the case. If the Members have approved the document, this may be included in the disclaimer

Recommendation 17. The contact group recommends that SAOs approve Option 2 concerning disclaimers.

Approval Process

Through the consultations undertaken by the Communications and Outreach contact group, the use of the AC logo as an approval mechanism emerged as an issue. The contact group has focussed on the task of improving AC communications by preparing options and recommendations that seek to increase the use of the logo by separating it from the approval process for AC documents.

However, the issue of the role of Members in the approval process of reports and assessments still remains. Our consultations have revealed that:

- publication approval processes vary across Working Groups;
- Members may want to review reports or assessments before they are published;
- Working Groups want to ensure that findings and recommendations remain intact, and that publication is not delayed or prevented by an onerous review process.

The task of studying and potentially developing standardized approval processes for AC assessments or reports is not simple, and, in our opinion, is outside of the mandate of the Communications and Outreach contact group. Contact group participants indicated their strong interest in receiving guidance from SAOs on the topic of approval processes. This is a broader issue that would be better taken up as part of the wider discussions on the institutional changes of the AC.

Recommendations concerning Russian Language Products

There is an identified need for more outreach and communications materials in the Russian-language. A significant percentage of target audiences are Russian-speakers and the Arctic Council needs to more effectively communicate to this target audience. This was confirmed by the views of some contact group members and during the April SAO meeting. Fundamentally, this is a capacity issue and its resolution is beyond the scope of the outreach and communications contact group. The contact group's recommendation below highlights the importance of increasing Russian-language capacity to Arctic Council outreach and communications methods.

Recommendation 18. The Arctic Council Strategic Communications Plan shall contain methods by which Russian-speaking target audiences can be reached.

Recommendation 19. Where possible, Arctic Council electronic and written materials should be produced in both English and Russian.

Conclusion

At the October SAO meeting, the contact group recommends that SAOs endorse the recommendations and recommended options for AC Communications and Outreach Guidelines.

I would like to thank all the members of the contact group for their participation and work. I'd also like to thank others who contributed thoughts and ideas and provided information.