

ARCTIC COUNCIL SAO MEETING  
16-18 MARCH, REYKJAVIK ICELAND  
MEETING CODE: SAOIS203\_2021\_RVK-VIRTUAL1

DOCUMENT TITLE  
SDWG Covid-19 in the Arctic Briefing Note

AGENDA ITEM NUMBER  
9

SUBMITTED BY  
SDWG

DOCUMENT FILENAME  
SAOIS203\_2021\_ RVK-Virtual1\_9\_SDWG-Briefing-Document-COVID-19-Arctic

NUMBER OF PAGES, NOT INCLUDING THIS COVER SHEET  
7





## **SDWG COVID-19 in the Arctic: Briefing Note for SAOs**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The SDWG and its Expert Groups are continuing to invest significant time and energy into work related to COVID-19 in the Arctic both by considering the impacts of COVID-19 in our existing projects and activities and planning new projects that position the Arctic Council to play a leadership role in pandemic-related work in the Arctic moving forward. An overview of these efforts is provided below.

### **Decision Sought From SAOs**

At the SAO plenary meeting in November 2020, SDWG was assigned responsibility for leading the Arctic Council's response to COVID-19. The primary purpose of this briefing document is to **confirm the level and type of support that SAOs are requesting from the SDWG.**

The briefing document introduces three options for consideration by SAOs, including:

- **OPTION 1:** SDWG incorporate COVID-19 into its existing work and initiate new pandemic-related projects, as appropriate;
- **OPTION 2:** Tracking and communicating Arctic Council activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic; or,
- **Option 3:** Establishing the Arctic Council as a leader & partner in responding to COVID-19 in the Arctic

Each option outlines specific activities and deliverables that can be provided by the SDWG and **identifies the resources and authorities required by the SDWG to deliver on these commitments.**



## OVERVIEW

COVID-19 and the actions taken to respond to it have unique impacts on, and implications for, the Arctic. The pandemic has also exposed distinct strengths and vulnerabilities of Arctic communities. Understanding, learning from and sharing the experiences of Arctic communities during the pandemic and the period following, and taking action to support and work with Arctic peoples during this period is critical for the short-, medium- and long-term resilience of the Arctic. The Arctic Council is well-positioned to contribute to this effort and potentially play a leadership role in this work.

The SDWG and its expert groups have committed significant time and energy over the last 10 months to engaging experts and knowledge holders to inform our understanding of the unique impacts and implications of COVID-19 in the Arctic and providing advice on how the Arctic Council can contribute moving forward. This has culminated in:

1. [The COVID-19 in the Arctic: Briefing Document for Senior Arctic Officials](#) (June 2020); and
2. [SDWG's Advice and Analysis on Arctic Council COVID-19 Work](#).

In addition, the SDWG is:

1. Continuing to identify opportunities to consider and **integrate work related to COVID-19 in the Arctic into its existing projects**, including:
  - 1.1. Incorporating activities related to COVID-19 into projects, such as **One Arctic, One Health**;
  - 1.2. Adapting and modifying activities to advance existing projects, like **Local2Global**, despite continued restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; and
  - 1.3. Ensuring that new projects factor the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic into project planning, such as the **Solid Waste Management in Remote Arctic Communities** project.
2. Considering and developing **3 new projects** that would directly contribute to understanding and responding to COVID-19 in the Arctic. These include:
  - 2.1. **Biosecurity in the Arctic**: a project proposal that was tabled by the Russian Federation and Finland for endorsement by the SDWG on 28 January 2021. This project is intended to be a cross-cutting effort of SDWG, AMAP and CAFF and is currently being reviewed by all 3 Working Groups.
  - 2.2. **COVID-19 Public Health Outcomes in Arctic Communities: A Multi-Site Case Study Analysis**: a potential project introduced by Canada that has been well-received by SDWG members. Canada is now seeking co-leads for the project and preparing a full project proposal for endorsement by the SDWG.
  - 2.3. **COVID-19 in the Arctic Assessment Report**: A potential project that was recommended by SDWG's Expert Groups (AHHEG and SECEG) and has been well-received by SDWG members. Iceland and Canada have offered funding support to develop a full project proposal. The Russian Federation has indicated that they are prepared to lead this



project and are seeking indications of interest from Arctic states, Permanent Participants and Arctic Council Observers to co-lead or participate in this project.

## **DIRECTION SOUGHT FROM SAOs**

Consistent with the recommendations provided in the [SDWG's Advice and Analysis on Arctic Council COVID-19 Work](#) and the guidance received from SAOs at their November 2020 plenary meeting, the SDWG is prepared to undertake responsibility for coordinating the Arctic Council's response to COVID-19. However, the SDWG proposed to assume this role on the understanding that this work receives adequate authorities and resources.

As a result, the SDWG is seeking further guidance from SAOs regarding what is expected of the SDWG. To facilitate this discussion, this briefing document articulates three options that represent different levels of activity and support by the SDWG. For each option, we also outline the new authorities and resources that the SDWG would need to successfully undertake activities and produce deliverables.

Any of these options can also be modified or refined based on feedback received from SAOs and the interests and priorities of the Arctic Council.

All options also assume that these responsibilities would be assumed for the 2021-2023 work period at which point the nature and scope of this work would be reviewed and decisions made about any further commitments that may be required.

### **OPTION ONE: SDWG incorporate COVID-19 into existing work and initiate new pandemic-related projects, as appropriate**

Option One would see the SDWG focus on continuing to identify opportunities to consider and integrate COVID-19 into its existing projects and incorporate new projects directly related to pandemics in the Arctic in its 2021-2023 work plan, as appropriate. In this option, the SDWG would not coordinate, track or report on COVID-19-related work outside the SDWG.

#### **Activities**

Activities would include:

- **Develop a monitoring and reporting framework to track SDWG activities** related to COVID-19 in the Arctic in consultation with SDWG Expert Groups (AHHEG & SECEG). The [COVID-19 in the Arctic: Briefing Document for SAOs](#) (2020) would be used as an initial guide for structuring this framework.
- **Solicit information about SDWG activities related to COVID-19** from project leads, AHHEG and SECEG, as appropriate, every 6 months.
- **Collect and organize the information** received into a standardized form aligned with the monitoring and reporting framework.



- **Prepare interim SDWG COVID-19 activity reports** for SAO regularly scheduled plenary meetings (every 6 months).
- **Prepare a final SDWG COVID-19 activity report** to be presented to SAOs at the conclusion of the Russian Chairmanship.
- Following each SAO meeting, **make interim and final COVID-19 activity reports available publicly** through the Arctic Council archives and provide to partners, media and the general public, upon request.

### **Key Deliverables**

Key deliverables for this option would include:

- A framework to monitor and report SDWG activities related to COVID-19;
- 3 SDWG COVID-19 interim activity reports; and
- 1 SDWG COVID-19 final activity report.

In order to provide the level of support, SDWG would require the following:

### **Authorities Required**

No new authorities.

### **Resources Required**

- **No new funds from Arctic States.**
- A commitment from SDWG Heads of Delegation, SDWG Expert Groups (AHHEG and SECEG) and the SDWG secretariat to invest the time and resources necessary to prepare, review and deliver the COVID-19-related reports outlined above.

### **OPTION TWO: Tracking and communicating Arctic Council activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic**

Option Two would see the SDWG provide light coordination and administrative support through the SDWG secretariat.

### **Activities**

Activities would include:

- **Develop a monitoring and reporting framework to track Arctic Council activities** related to COVID-19 in the Arctic in consultation with SDWG Expert Groups, other Arctic Council subsidiary bodies and the Arctic Council Secretariat. The [COVID-19 in the Arctic: Briefing Document for SAOs](#) (2020) would be used as an initial guide for structuring this framework.
- **Solicit information about activities related to COVID-19** from the leads of relevant SDWG projects, Arctic Council subsidiary bodies, and others within the Arctic Council, as appropriate, every 6 months.



- **Collect and organize the information** received into a standardized form aligned with the monitoring and reporting framework.
- **Prepare interim COVID-19 activity reports** for SAO regularly scheduled plenary meetings (every 6 months).
- **Prepare a final COVID-19 activity report** to be presented to SAOs at the conclusion of the Russian Chairmanship. This report would primarily provide information and would include limited analysis. It would also provide options for how this work could proceed during the Norwegian Chairmanship for consideration by SAOs.
- Following each SAO meeting, **make interim and final COVID-19 activity reports available publicly** through the Arctic Council archives and provide to partners, media and the general public, upon request.

### **Key Deliverables**

Key deliverables for this option would include:

- A framework to monitor and report Arctic Council activities related to COVID-19;
- 3 Arctic Council COVID-19 interim activity reports; and
- 1 Arctic Council COVID-19 final activity report.

In order to provide the level of support, SDWG would require the following:

### **Authorities Required**

A mandate from SAOs to:

- Prepare a monitoring and reporting framework to track the Arctic Council activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic.
- Solicit information every 6 months from Arctic Council subsidiary bodies, and others within the Arctic Council about their activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic, as appropriate.
  - Arctic Council subsidiary bodies and others within the Council would contribute this information on a voluntary basis, as the SDWG does not have the authority to compel such submissions or reporting.

### **Resources Required**

- **New funds from Arctic States in the range of \$15,000 to \$20,000 CDN/year** to hire a part-time intern or student to track Arctic Council COVID-19 activities and collect and organize information.
- A commitment from SDWG Heads of Delegation, SDWG Expert Groups (AHHEG and SECEG) and the SDWG secretariat to invest the time and resources necessary to prepare, review and deliver the COVID-19-related reports outlined above.

### **OPTION THREE: Establishing the Arctic Council as a leader & partner in responding to COVID-19 in the Arctic**



Option Three would see the SDWG provide enhanced analytical and strategic support and play an active role in engaging and working with partners outside the Arctic Council to understand short-, medium- and longer-term priorities, map work being done in the Arctic related to COVID-19, identify critical gaps and communicate how the Arctic Council is contributing to responding to COVID-19 in the Arctic.

Under the leadership of SDWG Heads of Delegation, the SDWG secretariat and the SDWG Expert Groups, AHHEG and SECEG, would work together to support this work.

### Activities

- **Develop a monitoring and reporting framework to track the Arctic Council activities** related to COVID-19 in the Arctic in consultation with key officials within the Arctic Council (as per Option TWO) and considering the advice of a broader community of experts and knowledge holders engaged in work related to COVID-19 in the Arctic. Information about COVID-19 related activities would be solicited from within Arctic Council every 6 months.
- **Establish a framework to map and gather information on initiatives and activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic that taking place outside the Arctic Council.** This would be continuously monitored, as appropriate, over the course of the project.
- **Collect, organize and analyze the information** received from sources inside and outside the Arctic Council to assess potential overlaps, gaps, opportunities for partnership, etc.
- **Prepare interim COVID-19 assessment reports** for SAO regularly scheduled plenary meetings (every 6 months).
- **Prepare a final COVID-19 assessment report** to be presented to SAOs at the conclusion of the Russian Chairmanship. This report would provide information and also offer enhanced analysis and assessment state of work related to COVID-19 in the Arctic. It would also provide options for how this work could proceed during the Norwegian Chairmanship for consideration by SAOs.
- **Create an online tool to share the information** collected about initiatives and activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic taking place inside and outside the Arctic Council. This tool would be available publicly through the Arctic Council website.
- **Prepare and action a knowledge mobilization strategy** to communicate, build awareness, and engage with relevant experts and knowledge holders, partners and stakeholders and the public about the unique circumstances surrounding COVID-19 in the Arctic and the actions being taken at the circumpolar-level to understand and respond to the pandemic.

NOTE: Work to establish a framework to map initiatives and activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic and efforts to gather information about these activities has already been initiated by the SDWG secretariat with funds provided by Canada.

### Key Deliverables

Key deliverables for this option would include:



- A framework to monitor and report Arctic Council activities related to COVID-19;
- A framework to map initiatives and activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic outside the Arctic Council;
- 3 Arctic Council COVID-19 interim assessment reports;
- 1 Arctic Council COVID-19 final assessment report;
- An online tool share information about COVID-19 in the Arctic; and
- A knowledge mobilization strategy to support the Arctic Council work related to COVID-19 in the Arctic.

In order to provide the level of support, SDWG would require the following:

### **Authorities Required**

A mandate from SAOs to:

- Prepare a monitoring and reporting framework to track the Arctic Council activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic.
- Solicit information every 6 months from Arctic Council subsidiary bodies, and others as appropriate, about their activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic.
  - As with Option Two, Arctic Council subsidiary bodies and others within the Council would contribute this information on a voluntary basis, as the SDWG does not have the authority to compel such submissions or reporting.
- Engage with institutions outside the Arctic Council to seek advice and collect information about their activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic.

### **Resources Required**

- **New funds from Arctic states in the range of \$45-55,000 CDN/year** to hire an intern or early career professional to collect, organize and analyze information about initiatives and activities related to COVID-19 in the Arctic from inside and outside the Arctic Council.
- An elevated commitment from SDWG Heads of Delegation, SDWG Expert Groups (AHHEG and SECEG) and the SDWG secretariat to invest the time and resources necessary to prepare, review and deliver the COVID-19-related deliverables outlined above.
- Support from the Arctic Council Secretariat to create an online tool to share information about COVID-19 related initiatives and activities and to launch this tool on the Arctic Council website.
- Support from the Arctic Council Secretariat to prepare and action a knowledge mobilization strategy.