

Note: *this document is intended to accompany the Final Report of the SAON Initiating Group available from www.arcticobserving.org*

SAON - Arctic Observing Forum: *Draft* Terms of Reference

1. Introduction – Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks (SAON) is a process that was undertaken to further multinational engagement in developing sustained and coordinated pan-Arctic observing and data sharing systems that serve societal needs, particularly as they relate to environmental systems and social, economic and cultural change. A major recommendation coming from the SAON process is the establishment of a formalized Arctic Observing Forum (AOF) to facilitate international collaboration among government agencies, researchers, and northern residents.

These draft Terms of Reference, prepared by the SAON Initiating Group, describe how the AOF will be established, how it will operate, and what it will do.

2. Goals – The SAON-AOF will be established to improve communication and collaboration among operators, funders, and users of observing activities and observational data in the Arctic region. The goals of the SAON-AOF are:

- To facilitate improvements in Arctic observing, and related data and information management services;
- To identify actions that would encourage sustaining Arctic observations and networks, and to seek their implementation by relevant bodies;
- To assist in filling current gaps in Arctic observing and data services;
- To identify better ways for disseminating and applying Arctic observations to various societal needs, including the needs of Arctic Indigenous Peoples.

To achieve these goals, the SAON-AOF shall address issues that transcend individual Arctic observing systems and national capabilities, such as:

- Trans-national funding and infrastructure support;
- Approaches to coordinated data and information management and associated infrastructure;
- Assisting Arctic Indigenous Peoples participation in Arctic observing, including the incorporation of traditional knowledge approaches and the evolution of comprehensive guidelines and ethical principles for conducting research in the Arctic and in Arctic communities;
- Mechanisms for interoperability;
- Tracking Arctic observing capacities;
- Connection to global networks and assessments;
- Bringing to the observing organizations the needs and issues of users, including those of indigenous and local residents;
- Communication of the significance of Arctic observing for addressing societal needs;
- Identifying and helping address near-term problems associated with sustaining existing key observing networks and sites;
- Bringing together advocates and planners for proposed new observation-related initiatives to encourage coordination at the earliest stages;
- Tracking and making prominent the key Arctic issues for which observations are needed;
- Building consensus on which major international observation initiatives to pursue.

3. Membership – Members of the SAON-AOF may be drawn from operating units of regional, national, and multinational governments, Arctic Indigenous Peoples, international science groups, national and regional science consortia or committees, private industry, the user community, and legally established NGOs. The founding members of the SAON-AOF will be drawn from recommendations of the Arctic Council and IASC. Additional membership will be granted to any relevant organization upon request. All SAON-AOF members are expected to provide their own resources for participation in SAON-AOF functions and activities.

It is anticipated that initial costs associated with the creation of the AOF will have limited required cost implications if lead partners, such as AMAP, IASC, WMO and IOC/UNESCO, are able to provide assistance via their secretariats. However, it must be assumed that as the AOF develops some additional resources will eventually be required, but that these would be significantly less than if a new, separate secretariat structure were to be established.

4. Sponsors and sponsoring members – Any individual or organization may sponsor an activity of the SAON-AOF through provision of financial or in-kind support. In addition, SAON-AOF members may agree to serve as sponsors for selected activities.

5. Organization

- SAON-AOF is associated with the Arctic Council structure in a way to be determined by the Arctic Council, in cooperation with other sponsoring members of the AOF;
- The SAON-AOF may elect a small Steering Group to plan activities and guide the support services;
- The SAON-AOF will convene appropriate groups to address its goals;
- The SAON-AOF may identify the need for *ad hoc* or continuing support services and may ask the Arctic Council or any other member or sponsor to donate such services.

6. Tasks – The SAON-AOF will base its work on existing (and planned) observing networks and sites and focus on broad problems affecting several networks or sites. Initial tasks may include:

- A. Identifying existing networks and sites by a standardized questionnaire which should include basic information about each network or site, including standardization of their observations, data policy and management plan, where their data are archived, and accessibility of the data. They should also be asked about high priority problems or issues and how the SAON-AOF could be of assistance. The basic information from this questionnaire will be added on the SAON web site, and the problems identified will be considered as drivers of action by the SAON-AOF.
- B. Convening a stakeholder conference that will:
 - Synthesize, on a pan-arctic scale, observational needs unmet by current observing activities;
 - Evaluate opportunities to facilitate co-ordination among field programs and integration of data streams and data analysis;
 - Facilitate a means by which observational data can be accessed by users to meet their defined needs.
- C. Convening an initial research funding and operational observing agency coordination meeting that will:
 - Consider approaches to coordinated proposal calls and funding recommendations, and shared funding with operational agencies;
 - Consider platform scheduling and sharing.
- D. Convening a meeting with the Indigenous Peoples Secretariat (IPS) and permanent participants of Arctic Council to discuss mechanisms to ensure better integration of traditional and local knowledge into all Arctic observing activities.

7. Scope of Activities – Any subset of AOF members may propose, develop and/or conduct an activity that supports the AOF goals, without the requirement that remaining members of the AOF agree to or participate in the activity. The activity shall be open to additional AOF members joining the activity at any time.

8. Initial Meeting of the SAON-AOF – The initial meeting of the SAON-AOF will be convened by the Chair of AMAP on behalf of the Arctic Council and the President of IASC, with the support of the AMAP and IASC secretariats, as soon as practicable following approval of the SAON-AOF Terms of Reference by the Arctic Council and the IASC. Other members of the SAON-IG will be invited to share sponsoring and organizing the meeting.