



## DivSeek Steering Committee conference call

27 Apr 2015

### Present

- Steering Committee
  - Susan McCouch (Chair)
  - Elizabeth Arnaud
  - Sarah Ayling
  - Andreas Graner
  - Emily Marden
  - David Marshall
  - Ruaraidh Sackville Hamilton
- Joint Facilitation Unit
  - Ruth Bastow
  - Daniele Manzella
  - Peter Wenzl

### Apologies

- Steering Committee
  - Peter Bretting
  - Rajeev Varshney
- Joint Facilitation Unit
  - Wayne Powell

### Meeting minutes

- **Agenda item: Introduction and welcome**
  - Susan welcomes Steering Committee (SC) members and notes their diverse range of expertise. She reminds the SC that DivSeek is still in its early phases and will need continuous support and guidance from the SC members to be successful. This initial gathering of the SC is to help define who we are and where we are going.

- ***Agenda item: Developments since the first Assembly: updates from Joint Facilitation Unit members***
  - *Daniele: International Treaty Secretariat*
    - Circulated among attendees of the January Assembly in San Diego a meeting report, together with the adopted DivSeek Charter and list of organization that attended.
    - Signatories of last year's expression of interest who did not attend the Assembly were also emailed the Charter and asked to endorse it. Responses have been limited, and follow-up on a case-by-case basis is required.
    - Before the Assembly in San Diego, the first Consultation on the Global Information System on Plant Genetic resources for Food and Agriculture (COGIS), in accordance with Article 17 of the International Treaty was held. Amongst others, the topic of permanent unique identifiers (PUID) was discussed. A subsequent task force concluded that Digital Object Identifiers (DOI) was the option preferred by most.
    - One of the multi-country funded projects of the 3<sup>rd</sup> project cycle of the Benefit Sharing Fund, led by the Indonesian Agency of Agriculture Research and Development (IAARD) in close collaboration with IRRI, will use PUID and develop an API to link rice data sets within the Multilateral System.
  - *Peter: on behalf of the CGIAR CO*
    - A paper outlining future options for funding CGIAR genebank operations after the conclusion of the current genebank CRP, has been drafted by the CGIAR Consortium Office, the Crop Trust, and genebank managers from centers. The paper concludes with a chapter covering future developments that references DivSeek.
  - *Peter: Crop Trust*
    - The Crop Trust-coordinated Crop Wild Relative Project will fund the implementation of the Germinate data repository from the James Hutton Institute (JHI) for rice and sunflower data. The platform has previously been used for barley and potato data at JHI. It has also been implemented in CIMMYT's Seeds of Discovery project for maize and wheat data.
    - Peter attended a meeting by a small group representing the global soybean genetic-resource community, organized in Seattle by Scott Jackson. The objective was to develop a joint action plan for a DivSeek-like project in the crop. DivSeek was seen as an option for could act as neutral broker for issues surrounding data and germplasm exchange.
    - Roberto Papa from from Università Politecnica delle Marche in Ancona (Italy) contacted DivSeek regarding a recent ERA-CAPS, NSF funded project that will genotype 10,000 globally sourced

accessions of common bean. Roberto requested to discuss how to associate this project with DivSeek.

- *Ruth*: GPC
  - Ruth updated the SC on a topic not covered in the introduction paper provided for this meeting: an ERA-Net on a Coordinating Action in Plant Sciences (ERA-CAPS) is bringing together funders from across Europe, Canada, New Zealand and the US (NSF). ERA-CAPS has formed a taskforce on data standards in plant molecular sciences, which will produce a report of relevance for DivSeek in coming month(s).
- Additional comments and discussions
  - *David*: a number of relevant projects funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) are working towards commonalities in APIs for breeding related data. There will be common ground between these efforts and DivSeek, e.g., standards for passing information such as molecular markers, trait info and line data.
  - *Susan*: there is a global working group on APIs, which DivSeek might consider interacting with; the SC may wish to discuss this further.
  - *Peter*: recently met with representatives of BMGF and discussed a potential involvement of the Foundation in DivSeek, given their ongoing re-assessment of funding priorities. The BMGF-funded GOBII project deals with high-density molecular data and thus is very relevant to DivSeek. Given previous investments in agricultural data management (IBP, GOBII), further investments in adapting GOBII tools towards a genebank context, are unlikely unless matching funding can be identified from elsewhere first.

- **Agenda item: Governance-related issues**

- *Susan* reminds the SC that the focus of DivSeek is to promote the use of genetic diversity for food and nutritional security and other economical benefits. The SC needs to consider how DivSeek via supporting, cross inking and adding value to current activities can accelerate crop improvement.
- The key principles of DivSeek as clearly outlined in the DivSeek introduction paper distributed in advance to the meeting. DivSeek requires a form of internal governance that enables it to follow these principles and function effectively.
- There are three components of the current governance structure:
  - The Partners' Assembly (PA) is the ultimate decision body of DivSeek;
  - The Steering Committee (SC), which guides the implementation of the DivSeek strategy;

- The Joint Facilitation Unit (JFU) serves both the PA and the SC.
- These 3 different structures need to work in synchrony with each other to ensure DivSeek succeeds. The role of the SC is to advise and guide the implementation of the strategy outlined by the PA, and to work closely with the JFU to achieve this.
- Comments & discussion:
  - *Emily*: unclear ref. (a) the role of the JFU in setting the agenda, (b) where the initiatives come from and (c) how this actually all works from day to day. What is the balance between a member-driven organization and the JFU that deals with the day-to-day issues? Have these roles been determined or is this still something that we are planning to discuss and determine?
  - *Susan*: the SC is only just getting under way, and we can now work towards achieving a balance among the three components of the governance structure.
  - *Daniele*: at the PA, concerns were raised over the role of the JFU. The Charter helps to clarify some of these. The JFU facilitates implementation of a program of work and responds to the instruction from the PA. In between PAs, the JFU responds to the instructions of the SC. The JFU is currently drawing up an operational plan that will be submitted to the SC at the May meeting. This document will clarify how the JFU organizations interact and function together (e.g. lines of communications, responsibilities, etc.). The operational plan will be submitted to the 2016 PA.
  - **Action point**: the JFU to submit a draft operational plan to the SC in advance of the meeting in May. This plan will describe the roles of the four JFU organizations and outline how the JFU can operate in an efficient and effective manner to respond to a rapidly changing external environment.
  - *Elizabeth*: What are the stages/timeline in the development of the program of work (work plan)?
  - *Daniele*: based on the feedback collected from Partner organizations, the “DivSeek – an introduction” document presented in this SC call and the advice received from the SC, the JFU will develop a first draft programme of work for the SC to discuss in May; a revised draft will be submitted to the PA for consideration and approval
  - *Andreas*: What is the intersection between the work plan and financial support for the work plan? Is the first step to define a work plan, get this agreed by the PA and then use this to attract funding or vice versa?
  - *Peter*: The JFU will provide ideas on what the work plan could contain based on the feedback from the PA survey; but it is up to

the SC to determine the contents of the work plan that will be submitted to the PA in 2016. The work plan could be presented to the PA with some suggestions about costs and funding priorities.

- *Susan*: A number of projects that have been discussed to date are already funded. At present DivSeek doesn't have funds to support projects but instead can consider projects that already exist and assess where coordination and interaction across projects (via DivSeek) would be beneficial to leverage information and add value.
  - *Andreas*: A number of organizations/foundations are interested in funding DivSeek e.g. Syngenta Foundation, Pioneer and BLE. How will this be dealt with? Is there a framework in place to allow this happen? How would DivSeek manage such opportunities?
  - *Peter*: DivSeek perhaps could consider the development of a "landing path" for those that wish to align themselves and link up with DivSeek, to be able to receive funds that are targeted toward the strategic goals of DivSeek.
  - *Susan*: DivSeek will need to manage expectations and relationships with the private sector. The SC needs to define how private sector organizations can join as partners and what is the role of the private sector and private sector funds.
  - **Action point**: Interaction with, and role of the private sector to be discussed at SC meeting in May. *Daniele*: The JFU is communicating with private sector partners that attended the PA. The Charter foresees the development of operational guidelines on private sector engagement. The ASU project on institutional and organizational factors for enabling data access exchange and use aims for DivSeek (which the Treaty Secretariat and the Crop Trust have agreed to co-fund) will also provide recommendations regarding private sector engagement, based on an analysis of comparable experiences within and outside the plant sector. Regarding DivSeek's program of work, it would be useful for the SC to discuss whether to share the program of work (or sections thereof) with industry for consultation.
  - *Dave*: There's a spectrum between public and private organizations (e.g. Palm Oil Board in Malaysia) → we need to lay out a framework that caters for a multiplicity of partners along the public to private spectrum
  - **Action point**: Can SC members please provide examples of consortia or similar efforts that have dealt with this public-private continuum?
- **Agenda item: Looking forward: landscaping study**
    - *Ruth*: Plan is to provide a small, preliminary landscaping study for May

meeting → identify potential 'building blocks' for DivSeek

- 3-D space spanned by three types of 'selection' criteria: importance of a crop for agriculture, factors shaping research approaches, regulatory framework (see Figure 4 in the "DivSeek – an introduction" document)
- Similar approach to define criteria for projects in the data-management domain
- Action point: Could SC members provide feedback ref. suggested 'selection' criteria and projects that would cover a diversity of factors displayed?
- Move forward by prioritizing and focusing on efforts that DivSeek (as a currently unfunded initiative) should build upon to offer value to its members

• **Agenda item: Looking forward: draft program of work**

- *Peter*: Suggested approach is to identify relevant ongoing projects through the landscaping study that Ruth has outlined, and intersect them with priority areas identified by DivSeek partners through the survey distributed during the January Assembly
- Priority areas outlined:
  - Data/information management, including data standards and software platforms
  - Community-building and networking (e.g. bringing together crop communities to stimulate data/germplasm sharing)
  - Research approaches and technology platforms used by different groups for different crops
  - Rights management (data sharing, public-private partnerships)
  - Capacity-building: not prioritized in survey, but perhaps worthwhile considering upfront, in the light of the germplasm vs. technology providers schism?

• **Agenda item: Membership: draft letter of interest**

- *Daniele*: Several organizations have contacted us via the DivSeek website
- JFU has drafted a form that includes a number of questions for prospective partner organizations to answer → requests then to be forwarded to SC in order to select relevant organizations
- Comments:
  - *Dave*: Form should include a brief description of what DivSeek is
  - *Ruaraidh*: Use "desired" or "anticipated" instead of "intended" when talking about contributions by prospective DivSeek partners
  - *Andreas*: Ask prospective partners to state their commitment to actively contribute to DivSeek
  - *Daniele*: this commitment would actually be formalized by endorsing the Charter

- Action point: Form to be finalized, based on comments that the SC members are asked to send in writing before the meeting on 28 May.
- ***Agenda item: Preparation for Steering Committee meeting on 28 May***
  - Invitation for dinner on 27 May; travel and hosting arrangements are in course of completion
  - Action point: JFU to provide a draft meeting agenda in advance to the meeting
  - Action point: JFU to provide the following background documents in advance to the meeting, including:
    - A preliminary landscaping study
    - A document with elements for a draft program of work
    - A documents with elements for a draft resource mobilization plan to accompany the draft program of work, and
    - A document outlining an operational plan for the JFU