

Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG) Plan for Governance

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Terms of reference

Since its inception, there has been considerable interest in the work of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG). Interest in the Group's activities is reflected, in part, by the size of the membership, which is larger than many other City Groups. There is also a pressing need for the information produced by the WG. Organizations external to the WG have already inquired about the completion date for development of an internationally comparable general measure of disability in order to plan their own activities. Thus, the WG needs to be effective in accomplishing specified objectives and producing tangible and useable end products in a timely manner. In accordance with United Nations guidelines, city groups determine their own individual mechanism of work.¹ It is timely for the WG to formalize such a working plan to govern its' structure and operation due to the size of the group, the need for the outcomes of the group's work, the external pressure to perform the work quickly, and the nature of the work. Therefore, a plan for the governance of the WG is proposed in this paper.

The main purpose of the WG is the promotion and co-ordination of international co-operation in the area of health statistics by focusing on disability measures suitable for censuses and national surveys which will provide basic necessary information on disability throughout the world. More specifically, the WG aims to guide the development of a small set(s) of general disability measures, suitable for use in censuses, sample-based national surveys, or other statistical formats, for the primary purpose of informing policy on equalization of opportunities. The second priority of the Washington Group is to recommend one or more extended sets of survey items to measure disability, or principles for their design, to be used as components of population surveys or as supplements to specialty surveys. These extended sets of survey items are intended to be related to the general measure(s). All disability measures recommended by the group, general or extended, will be accompanied by descriptions of their technical properties, and methodological guidance will be given on their implementation and their applicability to all sections of the population. The WG will disseminate work products globally through the world-wide web.

I. Membership

A. Composition

1. "City groups" are informal groups of experts primarily from national statistical authorities who meet to address selected problems in statistical methods.¹ Thus, the WG membership is comprised of representatives of national statistical authorities of nation-states belonging to the United Nations.
2. Members are selected by their national statistical authority.
3. Membership in the WG is voluntary.

¹ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/citygroup/index.htm>

4. Representation of each nation-state can include one or more individuals from the national statistical authority of that nation-state or a designated representative. If there is more than one representative per country, one of the representatives should be named as the primary representative.
5. When making decisions on issues, the WG will strive for consensus among participants. In the event that consensus is not possible and balloting is necessary for decision-making, each member state will have one vote.
6. Well-recognized international organizations who have a formal relationship with national statistical authorities (WG member countries) and with expertise in disability statistics may be adjunct members of the WG. Adjunct members may include UN affiliates, disability organizations, other statistical agencies (such as OECD), organizations that represent national statistical agencies (such as Eurostat), or other groups with international expertise in disability statistics. Adjunct members are invited to participate in all activities of the WG, such as setting meeting agendas, participating in meeting discussions, and involvement in workgroup activities. However, they will not vote during decision-making processes.
7. There will be representation of persons with disabilities in the WG. International organizations representing persons with disabilities will be invited to participate. Active participation of these members on committees and workgroups will be encouraged.

B. Responsibilities

1. Members must contribute substantively to the work of the WG through workgroup participation, individual or group contribution of position papers or activity reports, formal commentary, or participation in other specific, product-oriented work identified by the WG.
2. Attendance at annual meetings is encouraged.
3. Consistent with the UN guidelines, each representative is expected to fund his or her participation in the group. From time to time, limited funding may be available for a small number of members to attend the annual meeting. It is the member's responsibility to notify the secretariat of the need for funding well in advance of the annual meeting.
4. The primary representative of each nation-state is responsible for submitting a 2-page "country report" on the activities in their country directly related to the work of the WG. The report is to be submitted to the secretariat in advance of each annual meeting. Primary representatives will be notified of the annual submission deadline for country reports by the secretariat.
5. Requests for technical support will be received by the secretariat and distributed to the WG membership. Members are responsible for deciding if they are able to provide such technical support. If so, they will contact the requesting country directly and inform the secretariat.

II. Operating principles

A. Content of annual meetings

1. The content of annual meetings will be organized around topical position papers and activity reports prepared by small working groups. Papers will include

a list of discrete “next steps”, with a plan and timeline for accomplishing those steps.

2. It is anticipated that major work topics will emanate from the work that is presented at annual meetings. In addition, WG members may suggest work topics that are clearly related to the objectives of the WG and have product-oriented and deliverable outcomes. Major work topics for the following year and future years will be identified at the annual meeting.

3. Workgroups will be designated around work topics.

4. As background material for each annual meeting, each nation-state will submit a 2-page report on activities in their country directly related to the work of the WG. Reports can include country experiences on the development of disability statistics, comments on position papers, progress reports, etc. Time will be allotted at each annual meeting for discussion of these reports in order to facilitate planning of WG activities in relationship to country activities and to offer guidance to countries as needed on “next steps”.

5. Secretariat and steering committee members will be selected.

B. Communication

1. The primary means of communication with full membership will be through the WG website. The website will contain meeting dates, locations, agendas, programs, and proceedings (including presented papers, workgroup and country reports, a list of participating countries/organizations, and the final meeting report). Reports to the UNSD will also be posted on the website.

2. The membership list will be updated through annual email correspondence with WG members to determine who would like to continue to be contacted / involved.

3. The primary representative of each nation-state is responsible for maintaining communications with other parties in their country with expressed interest in the work of the WG. This provides a vehicle for a larger group of experts to have input into the work of the WG.

4. The workgroup leaders will be responsible for communication among the work group members and with the secretariat.

C. Conduct and schedule of meetings

1. The WG will meet annually, sufficiently in advance of the deadline for the report to the annual UN Statistical Commission meeting in March (report deadline is the preceding November). In the future, there will be an option to hold meetings biennially (every other year) if it is agreed that such a meeting schedule facilitates the work of the Group and maximizes the participation of the membership at meetings.

2. Annual meetings will be conducted over 2-3 days depending on the amount and depth of material to be addressed.

3. Before each annual meeting, volunteers will be solicited by the secretariat to be potential meeting hosts for the following two annual meetings.

4. Annual meetings will be chaired by a representative of the host country.

D. Meeting reports

1. Following each annual meeting (assuming early Fall meetings), a detailed final report of the proceedings of the meeting will be prepared by the meeting host

in conjunction with the secretariat. If possible, this report will serve as the report to the UN Statistical Commission for their March meeting (report due in mid-November). If this is not possible, an abbreviated (roughly 3-page) report will be prepared by the secretariat for submission to the UN Statistical Commission.

2. In the event that WG work progresses quickly between November and the UN Statistical Commission meeting in March, an additional room document detailing updates to the November report may be prepared by the secretariat (February submission).

3. Reports will be submitted by the secretariat to the steering committee for approval. Following approval by the steering committee, the secretariat will distribute reports to the WG membership.

III. Organizational structure

A. Executive secretariat and steering committee

1. Composition

a) The secretariat and steering committee positions are voluntary.

b) For the immediate future, the secretariat will be a standing position in order to facilitate the continuity and consistency of communication within the WG and between the WG and external parties. It is desirable that the secretariat be institutionally based so that the work of the secretariat is an institutional commitment rather than an individual commitment. This position can become a rotating position in the future if it better serves the needs of the WG at a later time.

c) Volunteers for the secretariat position were accepted at the 3rd WG meeting (February 19-20, 2004). The National Center for Health Statistics (USA) was selected as secretariat by the WG membership at that time.

d) The steering committee will be comprised of seven representatives of member nations. The committee will include planning committee chairs (hosts) from the last 3 major meetings, the upcoming meeting host (ex officio member), and representatives from each major geographical region of the world.

e) Steering committee members will be selected at the annual WG meeting by the full membership.

f) Steering committee members will serve 3-year terms with the option to complete a second term if the WG membership is in agreement.

g) In the interest of stability of the WG and continuity of the work, a rotating body (steering committee) will be established whereby no more than three participants of the group are replaced yearly. The first committee selected will have terms varying from 1-3 years that will be assigned randomly upon selection.

h) The steering committee will select the chair of the committee.

2. Responsibilities of executive secretariat:

a) The executive secretariat serves as the central contact for timely communications with the full WG membership and addresses external inquiries. As such, the secretariat will maintain and regularly update the membership list.

- b) The secretariat will maintain the WG website and will provide annual updates to the United Nations for the City Group website that they maintain.
 - c) The secretariat will draft annual and interim reports to the UN statistical commission for approval by the steering committee. The secretariat will assist the meeting host with preparation of the final meeting report, to be approved by the steering committee.
 - d) Prior to each annual meeting, the secretariat will solicit volunteers to host the annual meetings for the next two years.
 - e) The secretariat will be the point-of-contact for the workgroups and will provide a semi-annual report of their progress to the steering committee.
 - f) The secretariat will maintain a list of opportunities for funding for members to attend annual meetings. The secretariat will also maintain a list of members requesting funding for each annual meeting.
 - g) The secretariat will inform primary representatives of nation-states of the annual deadline for submission of country reports.
 - h) The secretariat will accept requests for technical support and will inform the WG membership of these requests.
 - i) The secretariat will be responsible for monitoring compliance of the WG with governance plan on an ongoing basis and will inform the steering committee of any issues regarding compliance.
3. Responsibilities of steering committee:
- a) The steering committee will select the annual meeting hosts, sites, and dates, and will establish the planning committee for each annual meeting of the WG. Every attempt will be made to rotate the site and host of annual meetings between all major geographic regions of the world. Every attempt will be made to identify meeting hosts 2 years in advance, such that the hosts for the subsequent 2 meetings will be announced at each annual meeting.
 - b) The steering committee will approve interim and annual reports to the UN.
 - c) The steering committee will determine deadlines for annual country reports.
 - d) The steering committee will develop a long-range work plan and timeline for implementation of the work plan to facilitate WG activities.
 - e) The steering committee will act in an advisory capacity to workgroups to coordinate work between groups and provide recommendations about timeframe for completion of work, the form and content of work products, etc.
 - f) The chair of the steering committee will present the WG report at the annual United Nations Statistical Commission meeting in March. If they will not be attending the meeting, they will be responsible for designating another representative from the steering committee to present the report.
 - g) The steering committee, with assistance from the secretariat, will prepare a written review of the overall progress of the WG every 3 years which will be presented at the annual meeting and posted on the website.

h) Countries or organizations that provide funding for meeting attendance to WG members can select the recipients of the funds with input from the steering committee and information provided by the secretariat.

B. Workgroups

1. Composition

- a) Membership on the workgroups is voluntary.
- b) Workgroups will be self-selected based on interest and expertise in the topical work of the group.
- c) Each workgroup will designate a leader who will be the primary contact for the workgroups members and the secretariat.
- d) Persons external to the WG with recognized expertise in one of the work group topics can be invited on an ad hoc basis to participate in the workgroup by the group leader.

2. Formation and disbanding

- a) Workgroups will be formed each time that a major work topic is identified and agreed upon at annual meetings.
- b) It is anticipated that 3-4 workgroups will exist at any point in time, reflecting the expectation that major work topics will be focused and possess discrete end points associated with tangible products.
- c) When the specific task of the workgroup is completed, the group will disband and have the opportunity to participate in new topical areas.

3. Responsibilities

- a) Workgroups will be responsible for preparing and presenting position papers and activity reports at annual meetings on previously agreed upon topics.
- b) Workgroup leaders will solicit comments on position papers and activity reports from the full WG membership via the secretariat.
- c) The workgroup leaders will provide a brief, semi-annual report of progress to the secretariat.

C. Meeting host and planning committee

1. Composition

- a) The planning committee will be selected by the steering committee and will include the meeting host and leaders from the workgroups that will be participating in the meeting. When possible, the composition of the planning committee will represent all major geographic regions of the world.

2. Responsibilities of the meeting host

- a) The host will secure the meeting facilities.
- b) The host will send invitations to the meeting. Since WG members may need a formal invitation in order to obtain approval from their institution to travel, invitations should be sent well in advance of the meeting date (approximately 2 months). The secretariat will assist the host in preparing the letter of invitation. The secretariat will provide the host with the list of invitees and their current contact information.
- c) The host will identify a meeting hotel or local hotels to assist the WG membership to make travel arrangements.

- d) The host will provide a map of the local area, a list of local restaurants and attractions, and a list of transportation options to meeting participants.
 - e) The host will collect, copy, and distribute materials for presentation and discussion at the meeting (i.e. position papers, background papers, agenda, meeting schedule, etc.)
 - f) The host will moderate (chair) the meeting, provide introductory and summary statements, and will lead balloting according to standard rules of order for decision making.
 - g) The host will draft the final report of the meeting in conjunction with the secretariat.
3. Joint responsibilities
- a) The planning committee and host will plan the meeting agenda and schedule, and assist in identifying potential commentators for scheduled presentations.
 - b) The planning committee and host will identify rapporteurs for the meeting.