SCOR Working Group Proposal
Instructions and Frequently Asked Questions
Updated February 2025

Background and Scope

What is the purpose of SCOR working groups?

SCOR working groups are intended to address narrowly focused scientific issues that are impeding the advancement of contemporary ocean science by convening and building a network of international scientists. These include conceptual and methodological issues identified by oceanographic communities at large. Working groups may stimulate emerging scientific research topics, compile and analyze databases, inter-calibrate existing methods, develop international standards, develop "best practice" manuals for experiments and observations, inter-compare models, make recommendations about ocean instrumentation, or identify priorities for future research.

SCOR is an organization that promotes science that comes from the "bottom up" from the ocean science community and working groups are an important vehicle to bring attention to the important ocean science issues identified by the global community of ocean scientists.

What features make a working group appropriate for SCOR?

Working group topics should represent novel scientific activities that are unlikely to be supported through national sources.

Working groups must have a focus in natural science but can include social science aspects. Proposals can be in any field of ocean science. Interdisciplinarity is encouraged.

The topic should be global in scope. Some past working groups have focused on regional topics but, when they do, the regional topic has global consequences. An example is WG 136 on Climatic Importance of the Greater Agulhas System.

Funding

How much funding do SCOR working groups receive?

SCOR working groups receive $45,000 USD total over their lifetime. This is typically budgeted to cover 3 meetings of approximately $15,000 USD each.

Working groups do not receive their funding as a lump sum. Rather, SCOR pays for individual expenses (e.g., travel reimbursements and other meeting costs). The group will be asked each year to report on their progress in achieving the terms of reference. Funding for continuing their activities will depend on the progress toward meeting their terms of reference and a reasonable path for achievement for the ones that remain. This may include extension beyond 4 years if justified by the pace of progress.

What is SCOR's working group funding meant to be used for?

SCOR's funding is primarily used for working group meetings (e.g., travel, subsistence, and venue expenses), and may also cover open access publications and travel for outreach activities.

Can SCOR's funds be used for research-related expenses such as salary or equipment?

No, SCOR working groups are not meant to conduct research. By facilitating international networking, SCOR aims to add value to outcomes from national activities. Working groups may utilize results of recent or ongoing research activities by their members and the broader scientific community. However, these activities would be supported by other funding sources. The working group is meant to produce products derived from the international networking of the working group, not research results.

Do working groups need to obtain additional funding or other forms of support to match SCOR's funding?

Working groups do not need to obtain any funding beyond SCOR's support. Matching support (e.g., support of individual members' expenses, meeting hosting, support for training activities) will be considered a positive aspect of the proposal. This should be mentioned in the section of the proposal describing the cosponsored activity and not in a separate letter of support.

Proposal Process

Who can submit a proposal for a SCOR working group?

Anyone from any country can submit a working group proposal; proponents do not need to be from countries with national SCOR committees. The proposed chair(s) would typically be those taking the lead on developing the proposal. The proposal template is found on the SCOR website at https://scor-int.org/work/groups/proposals/.

Can proponents receive feedback on their working group proposal prior to submission?

Proponents are encouraged to contact the SCOR Secretariat (secretariat@scor-int.org), a SCOR Executive Committee member (https://scor-int.org/scor/about/officers/), or their national committee if there is one (https://scor-int.org/scor/committees/) early in the proposal development process for feedback about the working group idea, how it might fit with other past and current activities of SCOR and the activities of other organizations, and common mistakes that will make it difficult for national SCOR committees to rank the proposal highly. This feedback may improve the proposal but does not guarantee success.

How are proposals submitted?

Proposals are submitted via email to the SCOR Secretariat (secretariat@scor-int.org). The proposal template is found at https://scor-int.org/work/groups/proposals/.

When is the call for proposals open?

The call for proposals is usually announced in late January or early February with a deadline in April or May, depending on the date of the SCOR annual meeting that year. The deadline will be identified at https://scor-int.org/work/groups/proposals/. Proponents do not need to wait for the announcement to begin developing their working group ideas since the requirements do not substantively change from year to year. However, care should be taken to use the proposal template for the appropriate year and review any revisions to the instructions and frequently asked questions.

How will the proposal be reviewed?

Proposals are posted on the SCOR annual meeting webpage for reviewers to access. SCOR welcomes review comments from national SCOR committees, partner organizations, and anyone in the global ocean science community who wishes to comment. The decision to fund proposals is seen as a specific responsibility of national SCOR committees (who provide co-funding for the working groups). Reviewers provide narrative reviews with scores that are compiled for discussion at the annual meeting. Reviewers rate each proposal as "Must Fund," "May Fund," or "Do Not Fund" based on their overall judgments when assessing the proposal using the following criteria:

- Is the proposal timely?
- Is the topic a priority for ocean science and for SCOR?

- Is a SCOR Working Group a good mechanism to advance this topic?
- Are the terms of reference appropriate?
- Are the membership suggestions appropriate?
- Other comments on the quality and focus of the proposal.

Proposals ranked as "must fund" are those that substantially meet these criteria.

When are funding decisions made?

Funding decisions are made at the SCOR annual meeting, usually held in September or October. Before the annual SCOR meeting, a member of the SCOR Executive Committee is assigned to each proposal, to present the proposal and to summarize comments from national SCOR committees at the meeting. Any present proponent or proposed member of a working group is asked to leave the room before discussion of their proposal. Each proposal is discussed individually and ranked in terms of the desirability for the SCOR funding available that year. In recent years, 1-3 proposals have been funded in any given year.

Proponents will be informed of the decision immediately following the annual meeting. A few weeks later, a summary of the review comments will be provided to both the selected and not selected proposals.

What are common mistakes made in proposals?

Common mistakes that lead to reduced scores for proposals are:
- Submitting a proposal with poor formatting, lack of clarity of language, and not adhering to proposal requirements (e.g., word limits).
- Proposing a topic without describing and making connections to other related projects and organizations.
- Terms of reference that are either too vague or too ambitious for the timeframe and budget of a SCOR working group.
- Submitting a proposal more appropriate for research funding.
- Proposed membership that does not include broad geographic distribution or does not include developing-country scientists.
- A poorly developed capacity building plan.

Proposal Requirements by Section

Title: The proposal title should briefly and clearly describe the focus of the group.

Acronym: The acronym will be the most frequently used identifier for the working group.

Summary/Abstract: The abstract should briefly summarize the justification of the working group, what the group aims to do, and what its products will be.

Scientific Background and Rationale: This section should summarize the state of science related to the working group topic and justify the need for the proposed work. Specifically, it should clarify why the topic is scientifically important and relevant to SCOR as a SCOR working group. It should also identify why the topic is timely or urgent, such as the occurrence of new scientific developments, relevant global events, or the presence of a critical mass of researchers on the topic. The proposal should be written with minimum jargon so it can be understood by nonspecialists.

Terms of Reference (ToRs): The ToRs are the working group's objectives or goals. Each ToR should be self-contained and describe in one sentence an action that will be taken by the group (start with a verb such as "develop," "design," "create," "compile," etc.). If necessary, the one sentence for the ToR can be followed by a more-detailed explanation.

They should be achievable in a 3-4 year period. Working groups proposing ToR at higher risk of success should acknowledge this risk and should still be able to accomplish something in the lifetime of the working group.

Deliverables: These are the tangible products that will result from achieving the ToRs, and should be related in the proposal to the relevant ToR(s). The deliverables should include at least one peer-reviewed paper (preferably open access), but may also include a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal, a dataset compiled by the group and made openly accessible, a conceptual model, a best-practices manual, etc. Meetings, workshops, community building, and proposals for additional activities are not deliverables, although they may result from the working group and may be the means to achieve broader ToRs. SCOR expects products aimed at leading to long-term advancement of the field of study and enhancement of international cooperation beyond the term of SCOR support.

Working Plan: The working plan should describe how the group will achieve its ToRs, such as the sequence and timing of activities, what will be the focus of each working group meeting, what will be accomplished between meetings, etc. This should be presented as a timeline (e.g., as a Gannt chart with the relationship between steps shown) over 3 to 4 years. The working plan should demonstrate how well management of the project has been thought out.

Capacity Building: Each working group should consider how it can build capacity on its topic, both broadly in the scientific community and also with a specific focus on early-career and developing-country scientists. A list of countries considered by SCOR to be eligible for consideration as developing countries can be found at https://scor-int.org/work/capacity/. Past working groups have used a variety of approaches, such as holding a training workshop in conjunction with a working group meeting, involving younger scientists in working group activities, and holding working group meetings in developing countries. Examples of capacity

building activities of SCOR working groups can be found at https://scor-int.org/work/groups/capacity-dev-examples/. Two useful publications that resulted from SCOR activities are the following:

> Morrison. R.J., J. Zhang, E.R. Urban Jr., J. Hall, V. Ittekkot, B. Avril, L. Hu, G.H. Hong, S. Kidwai, C.B. Lange, V. Lobanov, J. Machiwa, M.L. San Diego-McGlone, T. Oguz, F.G. Plumley, T. Yeemin, W. Zhu, and F. Zuo. 2013. Developing human capital for successful implementation of international marine scientific research projects. *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 77:11-22.

> Urban, E.R. Jr., and R. Boscolo. 2013. Using scientific meetings to enhance the development of early career scientists. *Oceanography* 26(2):164–170

Working groups can apply for SCOR's travel grant funding (https://scor-int.org/work/capacity/travel-grants/) to bring early-career, developing-country scientists to trainings or workshops; SCOR's Visiting Scholar program (https://scor-int.org/work/capacity/visiting-scholars/); or the POGO-SCOR Fellowship Programme (https://pogo-ocean.org/capacity-development/pogo-scor-fellowship-programme/). The SCOR Capacity Development Committee will provide advice on capacity building plans for groups that are approved.

Working Group Composition (Membership): SCOR working groups should include 10 Full members and 10 Associate members. The composition of the Full membership should be adequate to achieve the ToR. Full members are prioritized for utilization of the working group's funding for meetings; however, Associate members can utilize funding to attend working group meetings if their support is within budget once all Full members have been offered travel support to a meeting.

Recognizing that the most appropriate or possible composition of the membership will depend on the proposed topic, proposals should still be balanced in terms of geography and gender, including early-career and developing-country scientists across the Full and Associate membership. National committees might propose additional scientists for the working group membership if they identify gaps in the composition. Early-career scientists are those less than 10 years post-degree, not including time off for family leave. A list of countries considered by SCOR to be eligible for consideration as developing countries can be found linked at https://scor-int.org/work/capacity/.

No more than two Full members should be from any specific country without justification in the proposal. There should not be more than one member per institution/organization in the membership.

Chairs/co-chairs should be identified in the membership table. Some working groups may choose to utilize vice chairs depending on the range of expertise needed and structure of the working plan. The leadership team should be composed of Full members only.

Working Group Contributions: Briefly describe how each Full Member will contribute to the working group such that the full range of activities are covered.

Relationship to other international programs and SCOR working groups: This should demonstrate awareness of activities related to the proposed working group and that connections have been made to these activities where possible.

Key References: This should include any references from throughout the proposal. Abbreviated formatting can be used to stay within the word count limit.

Appendix: For each Full Member, five key publications related to the proposal should be listed in order to demonstrate their experience and expertise.