

Call for Letters of Interest to Join Scientific Collections International (SciColl)

Scientific collections are critical components in the infrastructure of countries, institutions, and the international research communities in many fields of science and engineering. Despite their importance to research, collections suffer from a lack of support and coordination across institutions, countries, and research disciplines. Scientific Collections International (SciColl; see www.scicoll.org) is a new organization that was developed under the auspices of the OECD Global Science Forum and will be devoted to addressing these needs. SciColl's Steering Committee plans to form an international, interdisciplinary Executive Board in early 2011 and ***invites government agencies, institutions that own and manage scientific collections, and other scientific organizations to submit Letters of Intent to become SciColl members by 15 January 2011*** (see Annex 1 for sample Letter of Intent).

Governments, museums, universities, research institutes, foundations and other organizations support scientific collections because they are the critical infrastructure of many research fields as well as essential for many areas of government regulation. This support promotes the long-term conservation of these collections and the ability of researchers to physically access specimens in their repositories and to retrieve their related information in digital form. Research in the 21st century is increasingly interdisciplinary, creating a pressing need for interoperability among databases associated with specimens in different types of scientific collections.

SciColl's mission is to increase the return on investments that governments and institutions make in scientific collections. These returns may be direct and intellectual, in the form of more research results that have greater impact within and across fields of science, or they may indirect and socioeconomic, emerging through better policy decisions, economic development, regulation, or law enforcement. Other returns will be financial by increasing the efficiency with which collections are managed. Membership in SciColl provides a way for stakeholders who support and use scientific collections to leverage their investments in collections through international cooperation and interdisciplinary coordination.

SciColl's program of work has two major components: improving the management of collections and expanding their research impact. The first component of SciColl's work program will catalyze new interdisciplinary research programs and projects. SciColl will convene meetings and online discussions of research communities that rely on scientific collections in different disciplines and the funding agencies that support them. The goal will be to identify high-priority research topics that require access to scientific collections and coordination across disciplines. Research funding agencies that are members of SciColl will have first-hand involvement in these discussions while leverage their investment through international partnerships brokered by SciColl.

The second component will be devoted to increasing the interoperability among collections in different disciplines that will be needed for research, and improving the cost-effective management of collections. Scientific collections are not only resources for research, they can also be the subjects of research by the community of collection repositories. SciColl will convene international, interdisciplinary groups for:

- Research and development of data standards and database interoperability that will expose collections and specimens more effectively on the web, thereby increasing access and use;

- Compilation of best practices in collection management, performance-based budgeting, models of administration and governance, and other dimensions of organizational efficiency; and
- Discussions and formation of networks on new types of collections (e.g., frozen tissues and DNA), emerging technologies for digitization and analyses, workforce training, use of collections for education and public engagement, and other issues of interest to SciColl members.

SciColl's History, Governance and Budget

The history of SciColl's development from 2006 to the present is presented in Annex 2. SciColl governance and business plans are presented in its [Terms of Reference](http://www.scicoll.org/sites/default/files/SciColl_TOR.pdf) (http://www.scicoll.org/sites/default/files/SciColl_TOR.pdf). Members will form a General Assembly that is led by an Executive Board. A small Secretariat Office will implement strategies approved by the Board and Assembly.

SciColl's budget of approximately €500,000 per year will be provided by member contributions and will be supplemented by project funding obtained through proposals submitted by the Secretariat. Contributions for national and institutional members are presented below.

National members:

Category	GERD (latest available figs)	Countries (examples)	Expected contribution (€ p.a.)
1	> \$50 billion	USA, Japan, Germany, China	90 k€
2	\$18-50 billion	Canada, France, Italy, Korea, Russia, UK	40 k€
3	\$7.5-18 billion	Australia, Austria, Israel, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland	20 k€
4 ¹	< \$7.5 billion	Belgium, Finland, Singapore, South Africa, Portugal, Norway, Poland	10 k€

Institutional members:

Category	Operational budget, including staff [US\$]	Collection staff size	Institutions (examples)	Expected Contribution € (p.a.)
Large -1	>\$5 million	>150	NHM, SI, MNHN, IODP	16,000
Medium - 2	\$1 million - \$5 million	50-150	MfN Berlin, Naturalis, NICL	8,000
Medium-small - 3	\$200k - \$1 million	10-50	INBIO, NMK, University of New Mexico	4,000
Small ¹ - 4	<\$200k	<10	Linnean Society London,	2,000

¹ Countries and institutions in category 4 can form consortia with up to four members for the purpose of sharing the costs of a single SciColl membership. One member of each consortium will be designated by that consortium as its representative to SciColl's Executive Board.

Annex 1: Sample Letter of Intent to Join SciColl

Please submit Letters of Intent to Stefan.michalowski@oecd.org and SchindelD@si.edu.

TO: OECD Global Science Forum Secretariat
2, rue André Pascal
F-75775 Paris Cedex 16
France

FROM:

DATE:

This document is a statement of our intent to join Scientific Collections International (SciColl) by signing a Memorandum of Cooperation at a later date, and to make an initial three year financial commitment at an agreed upon level. The tentative levels of commitments were made available to me as part of SciColl's Draft Terms of Reference. Our willingness to sign the Memorandum of Cooperation is contingent on the availability of funds and the development of terms that are agreeable to us and other potential SciColl member countries and institutions.

[FROM GOVERNMENTS]

As an official representative of _____ (name of government agency/ministry), I am writing to express my organization's interest in scientific collections and our willingness to serve as the governmental representative on the SciColl Executive Board.

[FROM CONSORTIA OF INSTITUTIONS]

This institutional membership in SciColl will be shared among the institutions listed below. The lead institution with respect to SciColl membership will be _____.

Annex 2: SciColl History and Implementation Timeline

Phase 1. Exploration, February 2006 to October 2008: A proposal by the Netherlands delegation to OECD's Global Science Forum leads to two exploratory workshops in Leiden and Washington. These workshops produced preliminary plans for an international coordinating mechanism for collection. The Global Science Forum approved an 18-month planning period that would produce an implementation plan for the proposed coordinating mechanism.

Phase 2. Organizational planning and community consultation, October 2008 to April 2010: Two steering committee meetings were held and three working groups developed a strategic plan, program of work, governance model, business plan, and outreach campaign for Scientific Collections International (SciColl). An international conference was held in Brussels in February 2010 to gather input from the research communities and stakeholders. The Steering Committee submitted an implementation plan and supporting documents to the Global Science Forum in April 2010 and delegates invited the committee to proceed with implementation.

Phase 3. Membership development, April 2010 to May 2011: The SciColl Steering Committee will solicit expressions of interest in becoming SciColl members from governments and institutions. If there is sufficient interest, representatives of governments and institutions that have expressed interest will form an Interim Executive Board in February 2011 to finalize SciColl's Terms of Reference and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to be signed by SciColl members. Members will be asked to sign the MOU beginning in April 2011 at which time they will make financial commitments for a three-year period. In parallel, applications to host SciColl's Secretariat Office will be received and reviewed by a panel convened by OECD's Global Science Forum.

Phase 4. Organizational launch and implementation, May 2011 to late 2013: Governments and institutions that have signed the MOU and made financial commitments will:

- Elect members of an Executive Board that would make operational decisions,
- Select a host country and institution for the SciColl Secretariat Office,
- Advertise for and select an Executive Secretary,
- Create and adopt Terms of Reference with a detailed governance structure,
- Implement a program of work, and
- Monitor progress against a set of deliverables defined by SciColl members.

Phase 5. Full implementation, beyond late 2013. Based on its achievements, impact, and perceived return on investment, SciColl will attract sufficient members and financial commitments for continued operation through successive renewal periods.