

IATI Members' Assembly 2023

Monday 13 March (14:00-18:00 CET) and Tuesday 14 March (09:15-17:15)
UN City, Copenhagen & online (Zoom Events Space)

Paper 5 - Definition and Management of IATI Membership

Background

IATI is a voluntary, membership-funded initiative, whose member organisations have chosen to contribute financially to support the initiative as a public good and to publicly demonstrate their respective commitments to transparency. Remaining engaged with our members and the wider community is essential to ensure we continually provide high quality services.

As the initiative has grown, managing the relationship with our members and the wider IATI community has become increasingly important, impacting everything from managing the IATI Trust Fund and determining staffing levels, providing Helpdesk support and technical services, to ensuring the members can participate in different technical and governance processes such as election to the Board, or contributing to key decisions for the initiative through formal working groups.

It is essential particularly at this point of transition to strengthen IATI's internal processes by streamlining the collection of fees and improving membership data. As a membership organisation, timely payment and collection of contributions is essential for its development.

These are just some of the issues to be considered under the banner of Membership Management, to ensure clear membership criteria, definitions and processes, outlining both the rights and obligations of IATI members, community members and Board members.

Board's call to action

The Board proposes to establish a time-bound Membership Working Group (MWG) to develop recommendations on these issues for inclusion in the next update of [IATI's Standard Operating Procedures \(SOPs\)](#). Members are invited to volunteer for this time-limited activity as a contribution to a broader overhaul of IATI's SOPs to be made to incorporate changes that result from decisions on hosting of the initiative.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) Status

IATI's current Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were developed in 2012 and have been updated periodically to reflect decisions taken by members during annual meetings or to implement decisions taken through written procedure. Recent updates to the SOPs dealing with membership management have been issued in 2019 as Revision 5, and in 2020 as Revision 6. Different institutional review processes have made recommendations to address membership questions, but these have not yet been taken forward by the Governing Board while it has focused on other priorities (such as delivery of major technical projects, and establishing a new 'business as usual' operation throughout the Covid-19 pandemic).

The Board wishes to undertake a comprehensive update of the SOPs in 2023 and to engage IATI members throughout the process.

Issues for consideration by the MWG

- *Constituency categorisation*

Members are currently considered to be within different constituencies for the purpose of determining contribution levels, however these categorisations are not always appropriate, and are subject to change. Some constituencies are very broadly defined (e.g. CSO and other organisations) in which 'other organisations' is not defined, and others not included at all (e.g. individuals, and philanthropic organisations). CSOs may be national or regional, from the global south or north, each typology having different circumstances and needs. Is this categorisation appropriate or helpful at all in the network context of IATI today and in the future?

- *Availability of waivers*

SOPs currently offer a pathway for partner country governments to seek a waiver from the requirement to pay annual financial contributions in certain circumstances, but existing criteria and process for applying them are subject to interpretation. Furthermore, no such pathway is available for civil society organisations seeking similar waivers, when their participation in the initiative is similarly important and their ability to find funds for membership in a voluntary organisation perhaps even more challenging. Clarification is needed on the criteria and process for issuing, reviewing and renewing waivers.

- *Governance and membership*

IATI has seldom taken votes and has instead worked through lengthy discussion to achieve consensus among members on different matters. As the initiative continues to expand, votes may be required more frequently on a range of decisions. Member

organisations currently have a single vote if they are ‘in good standing’. This term is not clearly defined and is therefore open to misinterpretation and challenge. Should a grace period apply for members making late payments due to technical reasons, and what status do organisations have when they are in arrears for a certain period? What factors might lead to the revocation of membership, and what process should apply in the case of closure, pause or revocation of membership, by either the member or the initiative? What due diligence factors should be considered following a request to join, and what are the rights and obligations of both member and initiative in this contractual relationship?

- *Financial contributions*

These currently range from US\$1,100 annually for small private sector organisations to US\$85,000 for providers of development cooperation, based on levels set in 2018 and continuously renewed to maintain a steady and reliable income for the initiative at a time of transition and the uncertainty that may bring. This wide variance may not be considered by all stakeholders to be equitable or fair. Issues to consider are the level and scale of contribution (including for private sector organisations with annual turnover exceeding US\$10m - currently not costed at all in the SOP on the basis that no such requests had previously been received); frequency of adjustment; timeframe for collection; and basis for calculation (ability to pay v. budgetary requirement). What lead time do members need to factor financial changes into their own annual budgeting cycles?

Out of Scope

Beyond these questions on policy and process, it is timely for the initiative to consider broader strategic questions, and the Governing Board proposes to table a discussion around the purpose and value of membership, as the basis for encouraging members to maximise their involvement and the benefits for the entire initiative. This will be considered in the context of a mid-term review of the Strategic Plan (slated for 2023/24) and is therefore considered out of scope for this working group.

Next steps

During the Members’ Assembly (Sessions 6 and 7), members are invited to engage in an initial discussion on these issues, considering which of the issues should be prioritised, and whether other issues should be included.

Members interested to join and support this new Working Group are encouraged to express their interest so that they can contribute to the development of Terms of Reference for the group.