

GLOBAL SOIL MUSEUM NETWORK MANDATE & STRUCTURE

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Background

Soils play a key role in sustaining ecosystems and life on the planet. They perform a range of functions, from filtering water to interacting with the atmospheric greenhouse gases to preserving information on natural and anthropic history. There are many terms to describe the importance of well-functioning soil: soil quality, soil health and the concept of soil security. Soil security is an overarching concept of soil motivated by sustainable development, it is concerned with the maintenance and improvement of the global soil resources to produce food, fibre and fresh water, contribute to energy and climate sustainability, and to maintain the biodiversity and the overall protection of ecosystems. Soil security is used in the same sense that it is used widely for food security and water security.

Soil museums and exhibits are important facilitators to help people understand that soil cannot be viewed merely as a means to agricultural production, it must be valued as reservoir that provides many important things to society. The vitality of our communities, economies and cultures is tied to the soil.

Soil may not feature in the average school curriculum, so having a source of education on soils outside of schools is an important contribution and may be the primary opportunity for a child or adult to learn about the importance of soil.

Soil museums, education centres and soil sample collections are invaluable resources for accessing soil information and communicating the beauty and importance of the belowground part of natural and agricultural systems. The scope of institutions providing soil education would be greatly enhanced by connecting and sharing with one another.

Purpose of network

A global network of soil museums aims to support groups for whom a primary goal is: to promote soil knowledge, educate about soil diversity and functions, and explain soil's interface with human activity. This network strengthens connections between entities for whom soil education is a primary goal and cultivates the possibility for cooperation.

Objectives of network

- Increase the networking opportunities and connections between soil collections, museums and education centres worldwide through:
 - In-person network meetings
 - Online workshops and symposia for professional development
 - Tools for ongoing communication between network members such as social media groups and/or a newsletter
 - A website featuring network members

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- Exchange best practices, tools and methods and new ideas around topics of shared professional interest such as collection management, exhibit design and education program development
- Coordinate activities between these entities including:
 - Organize joint awareness campaigns, exhibitions and education programs
 - Develop and implement joint research programs and projects
 - Mutual replenishment of soil collections, for example through loan and exchange exhibits with other museums in the network
 - Joint publishing of scientific papers on the results of mutual studies
 - Global resource creation such as shared access to soil images, descriptions and data.
 - Collaborate on funding opportunities in support of research and development of mutual interest

Benefits for members

- Featured on the network's website: soilsexposed.org
- Invited to annual Global Soil Museum Network meeting
- Access to collaborative opportunities with other members such as joint education programs
- Opportunity to collaborate on funding proposals
- Opportunity to form or join a committee to carry out special work of interest, for example initiating a collection loan program
- Opportunity to join the network's management board

How to join the network

- 1) Prospective member fills in the membership interest form on soilsexposed.org
- 2) A member of the board verifies the legitimacy (an established museum, exhibition or other appropriate education-focused entity) and relevance (soil focused) of each prospective member
- 3) Once verified, a member of the board sends the cooperative agreement to be signed and returned by the new member.
- 4) After the signed agreement is received, the new member will be added to the network website and will gain access to membership benefits.

Membership commitment

- Sign cooperation agreement and designate one or more people who are the members the signing organisation
- Commit to participating in a specific way, by:
 - Joining the management board,
 - Joining or leading a committee, and/or
 - Providing a service from your organization such as communication support, education program development, or something else (open to suggestions from members).

Current members

The network is composed of:

- Dokuchaev Central Soil Museum, Russia
- Emirates Soil Museum, United Arab Emirates
- MIdA Soil Museum, Italy
- Museu de Solos do Rio Grande do Sul, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- World Soil Museum, ISRIC – World Soil Information, The Netherlands
- Institut Cartografic i Geologic de Catalunya, Spain
- Center for Soil Mapping, Geo-Instituut, Katholic University , Heverlee Monolith Collection of KU Leuven, Belgium
- Soil Education Centre-Soil Museum, University of Agriculture, Poland

Operational description

Management board

The management of the network is carried out by a board comprised of up to 10 members who agree to a term on the board.

The board is elected through a voting system by members of the network. The board is supported by a secretariat that functions as the network's document archive, prepares meetings, manages incoming emails to the network and maintains the website. One network member on the board must commit to providing this secretariate support during their term.

A board member has a term of four years. Half of the board is elected every two years, so that there are staggered terms.

Organizing structure

Members are connected to the network via a cooperation agreement, signed by each organisation. This cooperation agreement provides the basis for working together and could be expanded upon in future by establishing a more intensive organizational structure such as an association or foundation.

Financial management

The network will select a treasurer (organization member) on a four-year basis through a voting system. The treasurer reports on the status of the finances and spending to a review committee and all members annually.

Meetings

The network will hold at least one annual network meeting where activities and proposals are presented and discussed and participating institutions will join activities on a voluntary basis. Special effort will be made to collectively celebrate World Soil Day (December 5). Further meetings may be called when common issues need to be addressed.

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At the annual network meeting, decisions that will affect all members will be made through group voting, a quorum (1/3 of network members) is needed.

The management board and other committees which will be formed as needed will meet more regularly, according to their own decision but not less than quarterly.

Website

The network cooperates through a common website operated by ISRIC – World Soil Information - The Netherlands, soilsexposed.org. This is a provisional URL, the group may consider to change this to soilmuseums.org for example in future.