

Terms of Reference Blue-Skies Thinking Network

BACKGROUND

The Blue-Skies Thinking Network (BSTN) started its work in 2017. It was created by the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Statistics (HLG-MOS). The Network was created to be the ideas factory for statistical modernisation. It reflects the ongoing desire for creativity and agility to identify and evaluate new opportunities for official statistics. This network is an umbrella structure for short-term task teams to investigate and propose new ideas.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the BSTN is to generate and evaluate proposals for HLG-MOS activities and where needed, to do short time-boxed follow-up studies. The network will be an umbrella structure for a core group and short-term task teams to investigate new ideas and opportunities through short evaluation projects supported by the HLG-MOS Executive Board. Any idea that is in line with the HLG-MOS Strategic Framework can be considered. To allow for new innovations, space will also be given to out-of-the-box thinking.

The BSTN core group will itself actively look for topics through a constant environmental scan and evaluate those that were brought to the network. After an initial quick review by the core group, the Executive Board will decide about follow-up activities and next steps, including supporting the launch of short-term projects.

STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP

The BSTN is led by an innovation manager that will be provided by an HLG-MOS member and must have a broad knowledge of current innovation activities in Official Statistics. The manager chairs a core group of experts from various organizations.

The core group must consist of around eight persons from various NSOs with an in-depth as well as broad knowledge of innovation related aspects to facilitate the development of the work. The group must be of sufficient heterogeneity to allow for a variety of expertise and views. Core group members are invited on personal title but endorsed by the Executive Board and HLG-MOS. They should normally be at the mid- and higher-level management in their organization and able to involve technical experts within their organisation. The Executive Board will regularly evaluate the core team and where needed make changes to the membership of the group.

The innovation manager further has a coordination role and will ensure that results are produced on time, dependencies, duplication and gaps between projects and other HLG-MOS

activities are identified, as well as ensuring coordination with other relevant initiatives, such as those of the European Statistical System.

The BSTN can call upon larger group of experts for short time-boxed projects. It will comprise a flexible pool of researchers, who will consider new ideas in brief evaluation projects (maximum 1 to 4 months) and present the results to the Executive Board. Membership of these short-term project teams will be self-selecting. On request, the Executive Board and HLG-MOS may assign experts. After the work is finished, these temporary groups will be discontinued.

UNECE will provide secretariat support to the BSTN.

OPERATING PROCEDURES

When new ideas are submitted to the BSTN, following key questions will be expected to be answered by the core group, usually within a couple of months:

- What is the proposal covering?
- What does it mean for official statistics?
- What has already been done?
- What future work is needed?

The core group, jointly with the Executive Board, can then decide:

- Not to pursue, if there is no strong evidence of enough value-added in what is being proposed.
- Put the work on hold, and re-visit it at a specified future time, when the value proposition may be clearer or resources become available.
- Recommend for further work.

If endorsed, the Executive Board will identify how resources can be assigned to follow-up work and what the time lines and deliverables will be. There are several options for advancing the work such as:

- A group of experts is set-up in an ad-hoc fashion under the BSTN to prepare a report or develop a prototype for a given service.
- Two or more NSOs accept to work jointly on the idea to move the agenda further and report back on progress.
- One of the standing Modernisation Groups is asked to include this work in its program (could include re-prioritizing of work if not enough resources are available).
- A project proposal for consideration by HLG-MOS, is prepared by the core team and if needed, a call for additional experts.

The outcomes of these short-term follow-up projects could be the following:

- Not to continue, if there is no strong business case
- A prototype that is of value but does not need follow-up

- To put the work on hold, and re-visit it at a specified future time, when the business case may be clearer
- A proposal for further work. This could take the form of a project proposal to be considered for the next year, or a smaller scale activity to be carried out under one of the HLG-MOS groups.

Information about the investigations being undertaken by this network is potentially very valuable to the wider community of official statisticians. It offers statistical organizations the chance to quickly sift new opportunities and assess the potential value they might obtain from investing further in a new area. To achieve this value, it will be necessary to actively promote what has been completed, what is being considered and what is in progress.

METHODS OF WORK

The Core group will work mainly by web conferences and wikis. They will be expected to meet virtually on a monthly basis. Physical meetings may be arranged where necessary, usually on the margins of other events. They will ensure effective communication with all stakeholder groups, using all appropriate communication channels.

Small-project teams will meet as much virtually (wiki and web conferences). If necessary, virtual or face-to-face sprint sessions can be organized.

TIMETABLE

The renewed BSTN and core group will be active from February 2019. The Terms of Reference, and the continued existence of the network will be reviewed every year by the HLG-MOS. The Modernisation Trust Fund can provide (limited) resources for travel of manager, secretariat or experts to facilitate and promote the work.

Annex: List of members of the Blue Skies Thinking Network core group (as of 25 March 2019)

- Barteld Braaksma (Statistics Netherlands) *Chair and BSTN innovation manager*
- Marc-Philippe St-Amour and Katryn Stevenson (Statistics Canada)
- Maiki Ilves (Statistics Estonia)
- Sandor Horvath (Statistics Hungary)
- Andrew O’Sullivan (CSO, Ireland)
- Monica Scannapieco (Istat, Italy)
- Juan Muñoz (INEGI, Mexico)
- Anders Holmberg (Statistics Norway)
- Mira Nikic (Statistics Serbia)
- Jean-Marc Museux (Eurostat)
- Taeke Gjaltema (UNECE) *Secretariat*