Terms of Reference

These guidelines are intended to be a quick and easy reference on all matters related to the running, governance and operation of Special Interest Groups (SIGs).

These guidelines are not inflexible but departures from them should be agreed in advance by the STEP Worldwide office, or if significant, by the Board.

1. Creation of a Special Interest Group

Purpose: SIGs exist to support professional development and deepening of networks in focused areas of STEP practice on an international basis.

Groups should be constituted in order to enable members of STEP – wherever based – to achieve the following:

• establish and participate in a programme of activities which further educate and promote technical understanding on the given area of focus
• develop the membership of the group on an international basis (not necessarily restricted to the membership of STEP)
• operate on the basis of financial self-sufficiency

Who can set-up a SIG: Proposals for new SIGs may come from STEP membership or secretariat.

Process: To set up a new SIG, evidence of a need for such a group must be presented to STEP’s Board of Directors in the first instance. A membership survey is one of a number of recommended methods for demonstrating the level of member interest.

Alongside demonstrated levels of interest, it is a requisite that any aspiring group present to the Board a 1-year business plan.

The business plan must:

• detail the purpose, mission statement and vision
• demonstrate how the group will benefit and involve members on an international level
• detail a targeted programme of proposed activities
• provide detail as to how the group will fund itself and evidence to show financial viability, on a break-even or profit basis, together with a budget for year 1
• show how it will continue to grow its membership numbers and membership of STEP at large
• state who will sit on the initial steering committee
In compiling a business plan, the applicable SIG should work with the Special Interest Group Executive at STEP Worldwide. Finalised business plans will be submitted to the Board for consideration and approval.

**Related documents:**
SIG Authority, Reporting and Review - Business Proposals for New SIG Initiatives

### 2. Authority, Reporting and Review

**Authority:** SIGs are answerable to the Board. Establishment and dissolution of SIGs is a decision to be taken by the Board alone. The Board will determine any alternative (or additional) reporting arrangements for each SIG, otherwise SIGs are to report to the Board. Authority for the present document and for any revisions to it rests with the STEP Worldwide office, or if significant, with the Board.

**Provision of Reports and Plans:** The SIG steering committee will (usually commencing the calendar year) make a brief one-page report to the body to which it reports together with the business plan (with budget, where appropriate) for the coming financial year starting 1 April. In compiling such reports and a business plan, the applicable SIG should work with the Special Interest Group Executive at STEP Worldwide. Reports and plans will be submitted via STEP Worldwide office to the appropriate reporting body for approval and subsequently passed to the Board. At the end of each calendar year an annual general meeting of the Special Interest Group shall be held. This shall be open to any STEP member as well as members of the SIG and any interested parties. A summary and review of the year’s activities shall be presented at this meeting.

**Review:** It shall be for the body to which the Special Interest Group reports to determine a programme of review. Reference will be made to delivery against targets and objectives set in the original business plan, although success will not be measured exclusively against these. Subject to the outcome of the annual review guidelines may be introduced to steer the group. Review detail and outcomes will be reported to the Board.

**Related documents:**
- SIG Authority, Reporting and Review - Provision of Annual Business Plans
- SIG Authority, Reporting and Review - Provision of Reports

### 3. Steering Committee

**Composition:**
- The steering committee shall normally consist of between 6-12 members, who must be members of STEP.
- Other individuals may be invited by committee officers to part of a committee meeting, or a committee meeting in its entirety, in a non-voting capacity as an observer or advisor for a particular activity.
- Of the committee members, two or three positions will be those of core officers: a chairman and either one or two deputy chairmen.
- It is recommended that further officer roles be considered for the positions of Policy Liaison Officer and Events Liaison Officer.
• Not counted within the above 6-12 members, it will be normal to have one STEP Worldwide staff member on the committee as secretary (in a non-voting capacity)
• The steering committee should aspire to comprise a mix of individuals from different jurisdictions to reflect and represent the international membership
• Committee decisions should be taken democratically by consensus.

Duties of Steering Committee Officers:

Chairman: The highest level officer of the SIG’s steering committee. It is the chairman’s duty to preside over meetings of the group and to ensure that it conducts its business in an orderly fashion. Outside committee meetings, the chairman’s duties include acting as head of the applicable SIG, its representative to the outside world and its principal spokesperson.

Deputy Chairman: To assume the duties of chairman in their absence and act as second highest officer and core committee member of the group.

Secretary: To assume administrative duties for the SIG to include, but not exclusively, organisation of committee meetings, taking meeting notes, recording meeting attendance, management of membership records for the group, and event budgetary sign-off. This position will normally be held by a member of STEP Worldwide staff, most likely the SIGs Executive, but if so not with voting rights. Where a secretary is not a member of STEP Worldwide staff, SIG activities and membership data should be shared with STEP Worldwide for the purposes of transparency. Please note: Post of Secretary is not counted towards steering committee head count of 6-12 members.

Policy Liaison Officer (Optional): To be the central point of contact between the SIG and STEP Worldwide Policy Team on any policy-related issues and consultation responses. It is this officer’s duty to coordinate the group’s policy activities and take responsibility for progress to action.

Events Liaison Officer (Optional): To be the central point of contact between the SIG and the STEP Worldwide SIGs Executive on event organisation and programming. It is this officer’s duty to coordinate the group’s event activities and take responsibility for progress and action.

Meeting Frequency and Attendance:
The steering committee must meet a minimum of four times in a calendar year, at locations to be agreed by the committee, and with a quorum of fifty per-cent plus one (to include at least two of the officers) attending in person or by means of communication equipment.

An individual’s absence from three consecutive committee meetings shall lead to a review (led by the chairman) of his or her continuing membership. In the absence of a resolution this review may lead to a recommendation to the Board for that individual's removal.

Committee Membership and Election Process: Requirements:
• To sit on a SIG steering committee one must normally be a STEP member.
Types of membership include: Associate Membership, Student Membership, Honorary Membership, Judicial Membership, Retired Members, Restricted Members, and Affiliates. Friends of STEP with relevant professional experience may also be considered.

The Board’s preference is for committee members to be STEP members; any applications outside of this rule must be submitted to the Board with just reason for final decision. Where non-STEP members are to be considered, the case for them being considered is usually two-fold:

1) Demonstration of relevant professional experience and expertise to enable them to bring unique value to the work of the committee (which no existing STEP Member is able to)

2) Any prospect of them becoming a STEP member

To assume officer roles of Chairperson or Deputy one must be a Full STEP member (and Committee Member for the applicable SIG).

General Election Principles:
Elections to the steering committee for vacancies (including the filling of casual vacancies for the most part) will take place annually to the approximate schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-September</td>
<td>Upcoming election dates and request for candidate submissions announced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid October</td>
<td>Deadline for candidate applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of October</td>
<td>STEP’s Director of Governance and Professional Standards and the Special Interest Groups Executive ensure all submissions are complete and valid. Candidates invited to stand for election notified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid November</td>
<td>Members of the SIG provided with details of candidates running. Online voting available to SIG members for a period of two weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of November</td>
<td>Successful and unsuccessful applicants will be individually informed. The election results will be publicly announced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early December</td>
<td>New committee sworn in at the AGM. New committee member/s invited to attend next forthcoming committee meeting.</td>
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</tbody>
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Code and Regulations:
Where applicable, the process of election to SIG steering committees should be compatible with the spirit of the STEP Election Code.

Process:
Application and nomination

- All members wishing to put themselves forward as candidates for the steering committee will be requested to submit an application for committee membership which will comprise of personal details of career, involvement with STEP and the special interest group field, and reasons for wishing to contribute to the work of the committee, along with the name of a contact who wishes to back the nomination.
• STEP office will check applications to ensure submissions are complete and valid. Notification from the Special Interest Groups Executive will be forthcoming to each applicant following the review process.

Election
• Elections are based on “one member, one vote”. By this it is meant that a SIG Member gets a single opportunity to vote per election; should there be two vacancies, they will get two single votes, and so forth. Candidates in elections may vote for themselves.
• STEP Worldwide employees are not eligible to stand or vote in an election and must at all times maintain neutral between election candidates.
• All candidates are entitled to have a short information sheet (election statement) about themselves (up to 300 words) which will be distributed to voters.
• Electronic balloting will be used to allow for international voting. Reasonable precautions for security will ensure that the vote is only capable of being exercised by the correct individual and only once per individual. The electronic data (ballot papers) will be retained for a minimum of six months after the election result has been announced. They may then be destroyed, but only with the consent of the Board.

Results
• Successful candidates will be the 1-12 candidates (according to the size of the committee) who receive the highest number of valid votes cast.
• The results of all elections will be communicated electronically to candidates and voters within seven days after the last date for voting.

Terms:
Committee Terms of Service:
A committee position (except that of the secretary) may be held for a maximum of three consecutive years, with the possibility of standing for a subsequent term of up to three years (3+3), and with a stand-down period of at least three years. It is to be noted that committee terms of service are by calendar year, not from the date of joining. SIG Committee Members shall normally be sworn in at the SIG’s AGM, with the term of service starting on the 1 January or at the first SIG Steering Committee meeting of the new year (as determined by the SIG Secretary). It is for the STEP Worldwide office to agree a different date.
NB. Candidates for re-election shall be subject to the same process as those standing for the first time.

Inaugural Steering Committee Terms:
The first or original steering committee of a newly formed SIG is known as the ‘Inaugural Steering Committee’ and it’s Committee Members are referred to as the ‘Inaugural’ or ‘Original’ Committee Members of that respective SIG. Inaugural Committee Members are held to a different set of terms regarding their term of service on a SIG committee and election processes as follows:

Rotation schedule
A rotation schedule will be devised with original committee members to ensure that exit of all original steering committee members does not take place all at once to
stagger the group experience levels and knowledge. The process for agreeing this schedule is not prescribed, although picking names out of a “hat” is commonly viewed as fair practice.

This schedule will be agreed by STEP Worldwide office and each of the special interest groups from January 2012 (or the point at which any subsequent groups are created). A suggested schedule for a third of each committee would be:

Three years plus possibility of standing for a subsequent one year (3+1)
Three years plus possibility of standing for a subsequent two years (3+2)
Three years plus possibility of standing for a subsequent three years (3+3)

Re-election process
In the spirit of the rotation schedule, Inaugural SIG Committees are to be automatically rolled over to their second term without the need for election process. General election processes should instead commence towards the close of Inaugural Committee Members’ second terms of service per the rotation schedule (after a year for those on the 3+1 rotation).

Towards the close of an Inaugural Committee’s first term, Committee Members will be contacted by STEP and invited to indicate their desire to stand for a second term. Where Committee Members opt not to sit for a second term and instead wish to stand down, their position is to be offered for application and elections as usual.

Casual Committee Vacancies:
Casual committee vacancies are those committee positions which become vacant outside of the three-year cycle.

The filling of casual vacancies is by election, rather than committee decision. Whilst it is recommended that vacancies are filled to the schedule outlined for general elections, it is taken that the filling of such vacancies need not take place to the schedule outlined, but can rather take place as deemed appropriate by the applicable SIG Steering Committee across the calendar year (although if timelines were to coincide with the general election schedule, then the process should fall as part of this). Unless otherwise requested by the Board, a SIG Steering Committee holds the decision as to whether a casual vacancy is filled or left open, supposing such vacancy would not result in the committee falling under or above its requisite composition of 6-12 committee members.

Joining a committee outside of the usual election schedule (midway through the year by means of a casual vacancy) will result in a committee member’s three-year committee term being calculated as commencing from the January of that same year to fall in line with the general election schedule (to align process and avoid any confusion or complications). This may result in a shortened first term.

It is for the STEP Worldwide office to agree alternative election schedules for casual committee vacancies with the applicable SIG Steering Committee, and the date from which a committee member position by casual vacancy will commence.

Officer Roles: Chairperson and Deputy/ies:
The SIG Steering Committee shall elect a Chairperson and either one or two Deputies. This takes place following a three-year term. All elections shall be conducted in the same spirit as committee elections and in accordance with the STEP Election Code.
In timetables set out by the SIG Secretary (usually following the first committee meeting of the new year and meeting of the newly constituted committee),
Committee Members wishing to put themselves forward for the role are to identify themselves, and an election will follow suit by which Committee Members elect by simple majority vote (a secret ballot with a “one person, one vote” principle whereby the person with the majority vote is elected as Chair, and the person/people with the second and third majority votes as Deputies).

**Ownership of Election Process:**
It shall be for STEP Worldwide office to organise the proper conduct of elections and take full ownership of all election process tasks. These include, but are not limited to:
- Ownership of election communications to include notifications around the vacancies and timetable
- Request and receipt of applications
- Oversight of voting process to include the circulation and receipt of ballot forms (with voting reminders sent where deemed necessary), and publication of results.

N.B The spirit of this electoral code should be applied to any electoral matters not specifically covered by the Code.

**Related documents:**
- **STEP Election Code:** [www.step.org/governance-documents](http://www.step.org/governance-documents)
- **SIG Steering Committee Application and Nomination Form**
- **Membership routes:** [www.step.org/joining/1](http://www.step.org/joining/1)
- **Friends of STEP:** [www.step.org/friends](http://www.step.org/friends)

**4. Membership of the Special Interest Group**

Membership of a SIG is open to both members and non-members of STEP. Presently membership of a SIG is not chargeable however the Board reserves the right to introduce or withdraw annual subscription/membership charges.

Administration for membership records and authorisation of membership normally lies with STEP Worldwide office.

**5. Activity Detail**

**General:**
The steering committee will have responsibility for the launch and subsequent activities of the group.

The officers shall liaise as appropriate with the STEP Worldwide office on matters such as membership, public representation and lobbying, press and media, event programming, marketing, publicity and design.

**Consultation Responses/Public Policy Representation:**
No member of a SIG shall make any representation in STEP’s name without the express consent of the STEP Policy Team and appropriate committee of the Board of Directors.
It is acknowledged that STEP has to meet external timetables, often set by governments, when submitting consultation responses. While as much time as possible will be granted to respondents, it will often be the case that external timetables will prevail and may result in restrictive timeframes. When preparing an agreed response to a consultation, timelines will be set by the STEP Policy Team which must be adhered to. Failure to do so may result in input to future consultation responses being limited. With prior arrangement and where possible, the Policy Team will be flexible with regards to scheduled deadlines providing sufficient response time. Where more than one group is responding to a single consultation, the available response time will be equally assigned to each group.

Groups are requested to submit one single collective response upon the deadline, rather than multiple strands. For best practice advice as to how to gather and compile a single group response, please liaise with the Policy Team by emailing policy@step.org

**Event Organisation:**

It is recommended that an event be given at least six weeks of marketing to maximise attendance rates. Please liaise with the SIGs Executive to discuss suitable timeframes and viable ideas for event planning and execution.

Events should be included in the business plan at the start of the year.

Three tiers of delegate charging for SIG events should exist as standard; SIG Member rate, STEP Member rate and Non-member rate. Fees should be set incrementally, with the SIG Member rate being the least, the Non-member rate the most.

Unless undertaking a role at an event (e.g. speaker, host), members of the SIG Steering Committee will be charged the normal event attendance fee.

**Local / Regional Groups:**

Where members of SIGs wish to establish a more localised/regionalised offering, members must first submit a business case to the international steering committee prior to any activity or representation to determine suitability for overall strategy and fit with SIG business plan and budgetary allowances.

It is the responsibility of the international steering committee to agree the appropriate activity output at local level and successfully communicate and ensure understanding of terms under which these activities operate with those involved.

Where a local group is established to progress local activity it is the responsibility of the international steering committee to ensure that that local group provides regular progress updates and fulfils their reporting duties in line with the annual reporting requirements for the international SIG (section 2). Detail surrounding membership of a localised/regional steering committee or group should be shared with the international steering committee.

The purpose of localised/regionalised groups is to expand the international SIG offering for the membership at large. They should not become niche, exclusive or in any way independent from the main group and steering committee.
6. Funding and Financial Responsibility

The steering committee will have responsibility for financial viability of the SIG’s activities. This must be detailed in the annual business plan. Budgetary sign-off and management of funds lie with the STEP Worldwide office with permitted exceptions.

The overall programme of each SIG’s activities must be operated on a break-even or profit basis. If a loss-making activity takes place (whether or not the loss was foreseen), then the loss must be recouped elsewhere within the SIG’s budget.

Event budgets and charging must be agreed with STEP Worldwide.

Charges for membership of a SIG are subject to review by the Board. The Board reserves the right to introduce or withdraw annual subscription/membership charges. Where there is charging for SIG membership, a STEP Member/Non-member differential rate should exist. The same applies for other chargeable SIG services (such as events, webcasts, and so forth).

7. Contact

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