

SEOSAW Steering Committee

Terms of Reference

Purpose and objectives of the Steering Committee

SEOSAW's main purpose is to facilitate collaborative research on African woodlands by building a network of people, plots and ideas. SEOSAW is guided by its steering committee, which oversees the scope of SEOSAW's activities. It is the job of the steering committee to work with the full partnership to:

1. Set collective goals for SEOSAW in terms of the research agenda, outreach, and training.
2. Grow and maintain the network by fostering connections with new researchers and other networks in the region.
3. Encourage the set-up of permanent plots and support long-term plans for remeasurement.
4. Develop, promote, and manage the implementation of standardized methods for plot design and measurement, tailored to the socio-ecology of African woodlands.
5. Facilitate the use of SEOSAW data in analyses.
6. Plan and organize networking events and training workshops to connect African researchers and build capacity.
7. Organize and fund regular meetings with the full SEOSAW network.
8. Work to fund a project manager position to enable the SEOSAW activities.

In addition, there is a particular need for SC members to:

- a. Contribute their time to the leadership of SEOSAW activities.
- b. Obtain funds to support SEOSAW fieldwork, events, or management.
- c. Develop SEOSAW activities and build networks in countries where they conduct research.

Committee membership

The steering committee should consist of 10 to 15 members and two co-chairs, all active in collecting or using SEOSAW data or conducting training and outreach.

The committee should have:

- A good geographical balance, so SEOSAW is led by people active throughout the study region
- A good balance of gender and race, and be welcoming and inclusive
- Relevant scientific expertise in the multiple domains of SEOSAW science
- An open process for people to nominate themselves or be nominated to serve as members.
- Include a student representative

The minimum recommended term for steering committee members is 2-4 years.

Co-Chairs

The co-chairs will circulate off more frequently – every 2 years – so there is an opportunity for new co-chairs to come on. A term as co-Chair is renewable once at the discretion of the steering committee. The steering committee should elect a Chair and co-Chair, ideally not at the same time.

There will be always two co-Chairs of the steering committee. At least one of these co-Chairs must be someone from a SEOSAW country. Co-Chairs will normally serve as committee members prior to acting as co-Chairs. Only one co-chair can be elected at a time, so that there will always be a veteran co-Chair. Normally, co-chairs will remain as steering committee members for 2 years after they stop being chairs.

Recruitment

Once a year the steering committee will assess the membership and terms of the existing members and initiate an open call for new members of the steering committee and actively seek nominations. The steering committee will assess applications and decide who will step down and which new members we will recruit.

If the committee has less than 8 members and 2 co-Chairs, the SC should initiate a recruitment process for new committee members outside of the usual annual recruitment cycle.

Responsibilities

Members

At the beginning of their terms, members should discuss their goals for their term and how they plan to contribute to SEOSAW. Members are responsible for creating a common agenda and allocate responsibilities. Once a year, the committee will reassess this agenda and revise goals for the coming year.

SC members are also responsible for overseeing and approving data requests and supporting other SEOSAW activities.

Co-Chairs

It is the responsibility of co-chairs to make sure the steering committee is working towards SEOSAW's broader goals. Ideally, co-chairs will individually check-in with SC members once a year.

Co-chairs are also responsible for creating a financial plan for SEOSAW to ensure there is some funding available for SEOSAW's activities. This means finding and applying for grants in coordination with staff members that will keep SEOSAW running.

Reporting and monitoring

Once a year, each steering committee member must give a brief update on their work and how it is contributing to the goals they set for their term as a committee member. These updates will take place during a steering committee meeting and should not last more than a few minutes. Steering committee members are encouraged to give updates as frequently as they like and are not limited to once a year.

To remain in good standing, members should normally attend at least 50% of SC meetings each year or actively contribute to SEOSAW projects. If they do not, the chairs will discuss the situation with them and may suggest the step down from the steering committee.

Decision-making

Decision making will take place during steering committee meetings or through email if the decision must be made urgently. Time will be given for members to express any opinions or concerns.

Items requiring a collective decision will ideally be placed on the agenda at least a week prior to the meeting, and relevant documents shared if applicable, to allow time for people to think about the decision. Steering committee members who cannot attend the meeting where the decision will be discussed should express their opinions via email.

More than half of SC members must be in the meeting or have commented by email for a formal decision to be made. SEOSAW staff are considered voting members of the steering committee, but staff must recuse themselves from decisions regarding their roles, funding, or contracts.

All SC members must recuse themselves from votes which pose a conflict of interest for them.

Meeting arrangements

Steering committee meetings will be held monthly or bi-monthly as necessary. The decision of whether to have a meeting in one month or two will be decided at the end of the preceding meeting.

Within a week following a meeting, a calendar invite and email will be sent out with a date and time for the next meeting. This meeting may be moved to accommodate people's schedules up to a week before the meeting. A reminder email will be sent a week before the meeting and a day before the meeting.

Each meeting will be ~ 1 hour. An agenda will be shared in the initial email setting the meeting. This draft agenda will be crafted with input from the co-chairs and staff members. Steering committee members may add items to the agenda using the google drive document which holds the agendas and notes.

Meetings will commence with 5-10 minutes of open floor for members to share updates. From there, the meeting will progress through the agenda items with urgent items taking precedence. Any items not discussed in the meeting will be moved to the agenda of the next meeting.

Notes will be taken throughout the meeting by a staff member. SC members may fill in any missed details after the meeting in the shared google document. A summary of the meeting will be sent with the notes to the SC shortly following the meeting.