

ADDRESSING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION FROM WITHIN THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON ANTARCTIC RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) created a scoping group in 2020 to begin discussions on how to approach issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in SCAR and the wider Antarctic research community. The key suggestion to SCAR representatives from the scoping group was to establish a SCAR EDI Action Group (AG) to address EDI challenges. The remit of the Action Group is to improve understanding of EDI challenges within the context of SCAR and translate that understanding into activities and actions to improve accessibility and representation within Antarctic research. The AG was approved in 2021 and began operating in May 2021. In this article, we present the AG organisation, goals, completed and planned activities, as well as outlooks.

KEYWORDS

Antarctica, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, Antarctic governance.

INTRODUCTION

The Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) is a thematic organisation of the International Science Council (ISC) created in 1958. SCAR is charged with initiating, developing, and coordinating high-quality international scientific research in the Antarctic region (including the Southern Ocean) and on the role of the Antarctic region in the Earth System. In addition, SCAR provides objective independent scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM), one of the decision-making bodies of the Antarctic Treaty System. In the following graphic it can be seen how SCAR fits into the Antarctic Treaty System and its advisory and observer role in it.

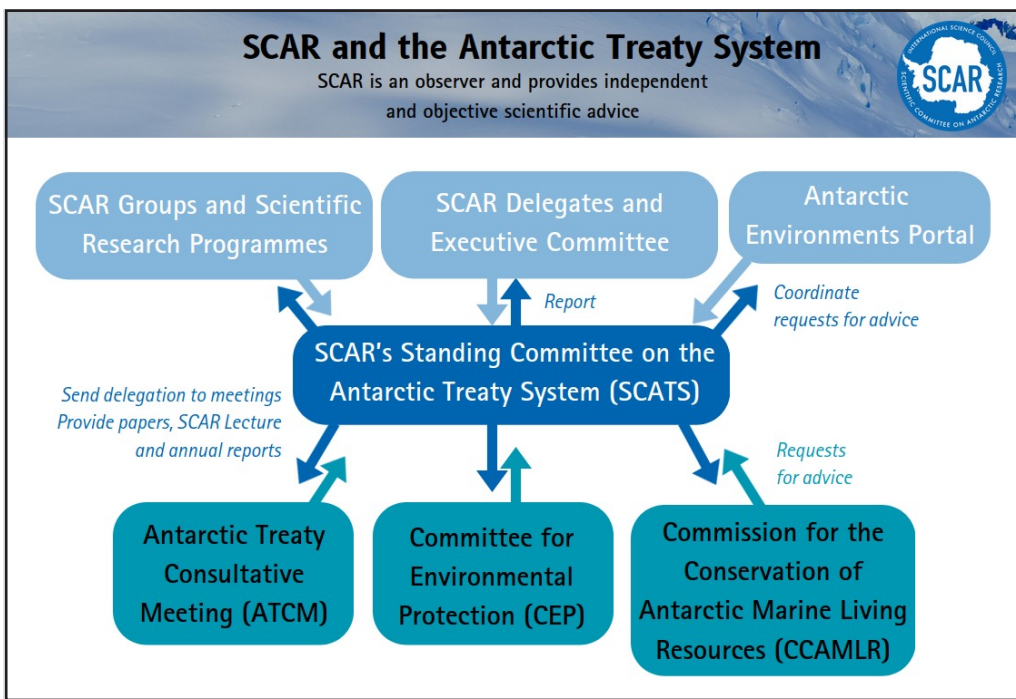


Figure 1. SCAR and the Antarctic Treaty System. Source: SCAR

In recent years, a growing amount of research has shown that having teams with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and talents improves the quality of research (e. g. AlShebli et a., 2018). There is increasing awareness in the Antarctic research community of the need for more inclusive collaborations, which requires recognizing and removing participation barriers that are deeply ingrained in social and cultural norms. It is crucial to recognize the glaring inequalities in the Antarctic research field and to find practical solutions to move towards a more inclusive and equitable community.

To address this goal, SCAR brought together a scoping group in 2020 to determine the best course of action in tackling issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The definition can be found in the SCAR EDI glossary available online at: [Glossary](#). The membership of the scoping group drew on expertise both within SCAR and external to it.

The scoping group's principal recommendation to the SCAR Delegates was to form a SCAR Action Group (AG) on EDI. The formation of the AG was accepted by the SCAR Delegates at their meeting in March 2021, and the SCAR Executive Committee approved the formal AG proposal in May 2021.

As a starting point, the AG is tasked with broadly looking at how EDI issues can be effectively addressed within SCAR and what practical actions are relevant for the organisation. This AG reports through the vice president for capacity building directly to the SCAR Executive Committee and SCAR Delegates meetings.

Early priorities identified by the scoping group included an audit of existing information about EDI within SCAR –e.g. analysing diversity in SCAR leadership positions, as well as in applications to award schemes, and also in attendance at meetings and conferences. Other priorities included building a baseline of relevant SCAR and community data to guide the work of the AG, reviewing other organisations' Codes of Conduct (CoC) on EDI and on how to promote best practices to create a completely new CoC considering the particularities of the Antarctic activities, and providing feedback and guidance on SCAR Capacity Building activities. In addition to this task-based approach, the AG is also developing a long-term strategic vision on EDI within SCAR and the Antarctic community.

SCAR EDI AG ORGANISATION

The SCAR EDI AG membership is currently at 150. Individuals are defined as members of the SCAR community who have expressed an interest in being on the AG mailing list and participating in selected AG activities. The AG is composed of a leadership steering group (LSG), led by a core-leadership group (the authors of this paper) including a Chief Officer, a Deputy Chief Officer, a secretary, as well as an assistant. The LSG meet regularly (at least every other month) and carry out the AG's main activities. Besides the assistant, appointed by the SCAR secretariat, all LSG members are working on a voluntary basis with no financial support.

For the selection of the LSG members the following criteria were applied the best possible, amongst the available volunteer persons:

- representatives of different genders
- representatives of different languages, cultures and races
- representatives from early career stages
- representatives of EDI groups from other scientific organisations

Additionally, it was considered that other minority groups are included.

GOALS AND TASKS

The current goals and tasks of the AG can be found in Table 1. They are based on recommendations to the AG by the initial scoping group, as well as the wider SCAR community, and serve as a framework to guide the AG's work.

Goal	Description	Task
1. Define the role of SCAR EDI AG	Identification of SCAR EDI baseline; definition of gaps and needs; define actions to close these gaps	1.1 Analyse needs 1.2 Review recognition structure 1.3 SCAR EDI AG Statement 1.4 Code of Conduct (SCAR CoC) and reporting tool 1.5 Define and implement specific actions with clear timelines to close identified gaps
2. Outreach of SCAR EDI AG (cross-cutting goal with goal 3 Networking)	Inform SCAR / polar community about: i) SCAR EDI AG actions ii) EDI related events iii) recognition tools	2.1 Prepare reports and newsletters 2.2 Keep website updated 2.3 Organise events at conferences and elsewhere 2.4 Keep SCAR EDI Community informed
3. Networking (cross-cutting goal with goal 2 Outreach)	Stay up to date; benefit from experience of other organisations; share information about SCAR EDI AG	3.1 Networking with other EDI groups 3.2 Foster collaboration with other organisations
4. Tackle linguistic problems	Many barriers occur within the Antarctic research community due to language	4.1 Make (most important) information available in at least all 4 Antarctic Treaty languages (Spanish, English, Russian, and French) 4.2. Translation of SCAR Open Science Conference (OSC) 2024 Code of Conduct (CoC) into Spanish

Table 1. *SCAR Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Group*

FIRST STAGE DELIVERABLES

SCAR EDI AG Statement

The Scientific Committee of Antarctic Research (SCAR) is committed to promoting a culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion. With open minds, we aim to listen, engage in dialogue, and create meaningful change that will enrich our community with a wide range of voices, backgrounds, languages, experiences, and perspectives. The Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Group (EDI AG) is tasked with broadly looking at how EDI issues can be effectively approached within SCAR, and what practical actions are relevant for the organisation. SCAR expects all parts of the organisation and community to actively engage with these issues and, where necessary, consult the Action Group for guidance.

We acknowledge that we must be both reactive and proactive in our efforts to promote EDI, and we will work together to create an environment where all individuals feel valued, supported, and empowered to contribute to scientific research and leadership. We recognize that historic and systemic inequalities have excluded many individuals and communities from participating in scientific research, and as a result in leadership roles within SCAR, and we commit to understand where these inequalities continue to exist and to tackle them, whilst fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect, where every voice is heard, and every contribution is celebrated.

SCAR will continue to work to build a more inclusive and representative community that reflects the diversity of the world we explore. We recognize that we must engage with the SCAR community and our spheres of influence to affect meaningful change. By working together, we can create a more equitable and inclusive future for Antarctic science and beyond.

Code of Conduct

A draft SCAR Code of Conduct (CoC) that also identifies EDI issues has been created and is being reviewed and shared beyond the AG with EDI professionals, along with a community glossary of terms that explains the language used in the policy. It also includes an EDI statement for SCAR (Section 3.1. above) which will be developed through community engagement activities. These documents will be reviewed regularly to keep up with the fast-evolving understanding of international EDI challenges (Nash,2022b). An online tool will be established that allows for the reporting of CoC violations.

Demographic Survey

Another activity led by the AG was the creation of a demographic survey for the SCAR community to be rolled out as part of the SCAR Open Science Conference (OSC) 2022. The AG worked with the SCAR Secretariat and local organisers to develop and implement the survey as part of the registration process. The initial survey was filled out by over 700 participants and covered questions concerning career stage, age, gender, nationality and race/ethnicity, as well as research background and participation level (presenter, co-author, etc.). All questions were voluntary and further responses were gathered in a post-conference poll. The AG will use this information both to gauge diversity and inclusion as it relates to the SCAR OSC, but also to further refine survey methodology for future SCAR meetings, and we are preparing another one for the OSC 2024.

A report about the first outcomes of the survey is under preparation.

Engagement and outreach activities

Engagement and outreach activities help us disseminate the work and vision of the SCAR EDI AG to the wider SCAR community as well as to other polar and non-polar organisations. For example, every year on November 18th, the AG celebrated the third international Polar Pride Day along with many other organisations. In addition, campaigns such as the “Women and Girls in Science Day” proposed by the United Nations have been launched and will be supported by the AG. To further develop its relationship with the Standing Committee for Gender Equality in Science (SCGES), the AG is contributing to webinars to highlight SCAR experiences in dealing with EDI issues. In July 2023, the SCAR EDI AG organised a webinar entitled “Gender equality and beyond in polar sciences”. The webinar was recorded and is now available at the SCGES YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@standingcommitteegenderequ5484>) (see link after the References).

The AG recognises the importance of bringing together different thematic groups and communities who are delivering engagement and outreach activities. To that end, the group has developed an EDI calendar to enhance awareness of EDI-relevant events from other organisations, including online, hybrid, and in-person conferences, and webinars. This calendar is regularly being updated and we welcome contributions from the whole community.

SCAR Open Science Conference Contribution

Several activities related to the SCAR Open Science Conference (OSC) 2020 and 2022 (<https://scar2022.org/>) were undertaken.

At the SCAR OSC 2020 inclusive collaborations were highlighted through a parallel session and a workshop called ‘Inclusive collaborations in Antarctic Research’. Both events were recorded and uploaded to the SCAR YouTube channel (see link at references) after the conference. Since 2020 the videos have had over 300 views and nearly 7000 impressions.

In 2022, for the first time, the SCAR EDI AG was represented on the SCAR OSC’s International Science Organising Committee. The representation of the AG on the committee helped to ensure the involvement of early career researchers in all aspects of the OSC, and to achieve an appropriate balance between gender, age and ethnicity in, for example, invited speakers and session conveners.

During the conference the AG once again ran a parallel session on ‘Inclusive Collaborations in Antarctic research’ while also holding a workshop on intersectional identities in Antarctic research. The sessions were very well attended and brought together speakers from across the spectrum of EDI-related fields of research. Recordings for both sessions are available from the SCAR YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@scar-antarctica/about>).

We aim to continue these interdisciplinary conversations and create space for greater engagement in EDI through the planning of further activities such as workshops and parallel sessions at future OSCs and the upcoming SCAR OSC 2024.

Finally, the AG funded a report to review aspects of EDI over the last three SCAR OSCs. This report is currently in progress.

Networking

Since the beginning, an important ethos of the SCAR EDI AG was to avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’ by finding ways to work collaboratively with others and share our learnings with the wider community (Griffiths, 2021). Therefore, it is not only important to inform and include the wider SCAR community in AG activities, but also to cooperate with EDI groups outside SCAR. To this end, the AG includes representatives from the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS), the Southern Ocean Observing System (SOOS) as well as the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP). Furthermore, members of the SCAR EDI AG are active in other EDI initiatives such as the International Science Council (ISC) Standing Committee for Gender Equality in Science (SCGES) and the SOOS Working Group on EDI.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

Inclusivity should be a core guiding principle in all activities of SCAR. This not only refers to the views and needs of all the diverse individuals interested and involved in polar research, but also to creating space for self-reflection as an organisation and community (Seag, 2020). The SCAR EDI AG commits to working towards supporting accessibility to SCAR and its network’s activities. Special focus should be on both historically and currently marginalised or excluded groups. As this cannot be achieved through the AG alone, a key ambition of the AG is to integrate EDI throughout all SCAR groups and structures.

Only by understanding the obstacles to equitable access will we be able to take action to support the needs of the wider SCAR community (Nash, 2022a). As a global research network, it is crucial to create a space where people can gather to listen to and learn from one another. For this reason, the initial tasks of the AG have focused on the identification and analysis of needs and gaps within the community, while initiating vital and ongoing dialogue on EDI.

Section 3 of this paper outlines our planned activities and longer term aims, including developing reporting mechanisms for violations of the Code of Conduct and standardised demographic surveys. The overwhelming interest and participation in AG events, such as the OSC 2022 sessions, reflect the importance of the AG’s work. Building on the AG’s contributions to the OSC 2024 will include the organisation of round-table discussions for AG members in a safe space where participants may share both positive and negative experiences with the opportunity to retain anonymity. Future actions will also include the development of performance metrics to assess the AG’s progress and improve its efficacy.

Networking and engagement activities will play an important role in enhancing the visibility of the SCAR EDI AG’s activities, and also in broadening the SCAR community’s understanding of diversity and inclusion across all SCAR groups and structures.

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