**CSS Session 1, Part 1:**

**A First Look at Membership & Participation**

**SIT-27**

**Purpose of the Session:**

Active members shape CEOS: they create progress, develop ideas for new initiatives, and serve as the engine that powers and sustains the many activities of the Working Groups, Virtual Constellations, Secretariat, SIT, and SBAs. In the context of CEOS, people, energy and ideas matter. The challenge for CEOS is to maximize the participation of its members, and that means understanding why members choose to participate – and, just as importantly, why they sometimes choose not to.

**Context and Rationale:**

The 2011 CEOS Self-Study drew attention to the need for a more active CEOS membership and the fact that many formerly-active members and associates are no longer participating. The CSS recommendation of a follow-on study of the issue was adopted, and the follow-on study began in December 2011. In this session, we will present the initial findings of the Membership and Participation Study and invite discussion of the results and recommendations. Some of these results will seem very familiar (e.g. the controlling influence of the availability of travel funds, human capital, and other valuable and tangible resources) and some may be surprising (e.g. the oft-cited advent of GEO may be much less important than was the cessation of a finite but defining issue for associates, such as IGOS). In pursuing this line of inquiry, the Membership and Participation Study points toward the larger issue of defining the core value proposition for CEOS – in other words, what are the tangible benefits of CEOS involvement to its members, especially to those who may not envision either an ability to engage broadly or an immediate return on investment for their engagement?

**Goals and Expected Outcomes:**

To inform the discussion of membership and participation, the preliminary written report of the Membership and Participation Study will be distributed in advance of SIT-27. The end goal of this session is to chart a course forward by beginning the discussion, and collaboratively identifying the specific actions and/or process changes as needed to a) re-engage, empower, and involve/include non-participating members; b) reduce the likelihood of moribund membership in future. These issues of empowering and engaging members are important in their own right, but they also drive toward the CEOS Essential Questions.

***Progress***

The Membership and Participation Study Team was formed in December 2011, consisting of Brent Smith, Vivek Singh, Mark Dowell, Tim Stryker, and Patricia Jacobberger-Jellison. The team met via periodic telecons in January and February 2011 (these will continue after SIT-27). The following objectives, timeline, and approach for conducting the CSS Membership and Participation Study were developed:

*1. Objectives*

The objectives of the Membership and Participation Study (M&P) as called for in the CEOS Self-Study and approved at the 2011 CEOS Plenary are twofold:

* To better understand why some CEOS members and associate members, including important CEOS partner organizations, are not currently participating in CEOS activities;
* To propose concrete steps to encourage, empower and support full engagement in CEOS activities including Working Groups, Virtual Constellations, and other activities, by the widest possible range of CEOS members.

*2. Timeline*

The goal was to have preliminary results ready for distribution prior to SIT-27. This initial report contains the approach, statement of progress and outcomes of study team deliberations and information-gathering efforts. An important component of the M&P study is the collection of direct information from inactive members through a sequence of interviews, which is a process that takes time. In order to balance SIT-27 schedule constraints against the time required to develop thoughtful questions and conduct interviews with inactive members and other sources of input, the work of the M&P Team will continue after SIT-27, and this initial report will be followed by a final report at the conclusion of the interview process.

*3. Approach*

1. Extract relevant findings from the 2011 CEOS Self-Study Report (including Study Team Reports) (complete);
2. Obtain and synthesize input based on collective CEOS experience of M&P Team Members (complete);
3. Coordinate M&P Study with CEO/DCEO/SEO efforts to update the CEOS contact database (ongoing);
4. Assess CEOS membership list to understand distribution of active and inactive members (including associates), and prioritize for subsequent interviews (complete);
5. Review past CEOS meetings minutes, attendance lists, and notes as an independent measure of broad member participation (ongoing);
6. Develop questions and background material for conducting interviews (complete);
7. Re-establish contact with inactive members and conduct interviews (make new contacts where necessary) (ongoing);
8. Interview a selection of active members to better understand their reasons for being active in CEOS (ongoing);
9. Synthesize results and develop recommendations for consideration by CEOS leadership, including follow-up by CEOS leadership, and invitation to next Plenary (preliminary report here; final report to come).

***Initial Themes and Findings***

Preliminary analysis of the CEOS membership list, supported by M&P members’ insights and recollections, reveal a wide range of reasons why members become inactive. These reasons can be divided into four very broad categories:

* Contact management
* Alignment of CEOS with particular members’ agency or organizational goals
* Institutional barriers and impediments
* “Activity with invisibility”

*Contact Management*

On one end of the spectrum, individuals retire and/or move into different agencies or roles, and the connectivity to CEOS is lost when they do so unless there is a known secondary point of contact and/or institutionalization of the membership, including a shared sense of the benefit of CEOS membership within the agency in question.

Given the dynamic nature of membership and participation, especially in a completely voluntary/participatory organization like CEOS, routine contact management will always be a challenge. In the very short term, this challenge can be ameliorated through establishment of both primary- and secondary points of contact wherever possible. In the longer term, CEOS may wish to look at ways to ensure that member organizations will realize benefit from active participation in CEOS, so that CEOS is valued at an institutional level in member organizations.

*Alignment of CEOS with particular members’ agency or organizational goals*

At the other end of the spectrum, examination of the patterns of membership activity showed that seven or eight currently-inactive CEOS members joined CEOS to participate in a very specific activity – IGOS – and when that activity drew to a close, so did their participation in CEOS. Those members are now active in GEO, but they did not remain active in CEOS (this is especially pertinent for UN organizations). Of this latter group, there is a sense through casual conversation that they remain supportive of CEOS even though they no longer participate directly.

As CEOS takes on new activities, it may be expected that similar patterns could recur, and any such “loss” of active members should not necessarily be viewed as a negative; in contrast, it can be construed as beneficial if CEOS is viewed as a group where other organizations can gather at will to accomplish specific goals that are relevant to them. No value judgment is made here as to which is the correct course. However, if CEOS should decide that it is important to re-activate members who participated for a particular goal, purpose, or activity, CEOS will need to be able to articulate and demonstrate to those organizations the value proposition of CEOS, i.e. not just the benefit to CEOS of having these members engage, but the benefit that accrues to a member agency or organization through its participation in current CEOS activities.

In order to better understand this aspect of membership and participation, it is essential that the M&P Study not only reach out to inactive members, but also to include conversations with members who have remained active, especially among smaller agencies and organizations, to understand the value that they place upon CEOS membership. This is the activity alluded to in Step 8 of the “Approach” section above.

*Institutional Barriers and Impediments*

Lack of resources to come to meetings and participate in activities is a known challenge for some members and associates. Travel funds are chronically limited, and smaller organizations also have limited human resources to devote to the business of an organization like CEOS. In the current world budget climate, it is likely that resource constraints will remain a considerable challenge for many if not all CEOS members, as they do for other consultative and professional organizations as well.

CEOS already conducts monthly Secretariat meetings via telecon, and CEOS leverages its in-person major meetings through the inclusion of VC, Working Group and other side meetings. In the short term, CEOS may also wish to develop new ideas and to look at ways to increase the use of other successful mechanisms, including greater use of telecommunications technology, and/or holding side meetings at appropriate international conferences.

*“Activity with Invisibility”*

There is anecdotal evidence that some members / associates are active in working groups and possibly other working-level interactions and activities, but not at the Plenary level, and there is strong anecdotal evidence that such participation tends to be overlooked when CEOS talks about membership and participation. A better assessment on the extent of such participation will be forthcoming when the review of past meeting notes, minutes, and attendance lists is complete (although as a caveat, the existence of those materials is itself incomplete, so a perfectly clean dataset is not possible at this time).

In any case, it is crucial that CEOS recognize and value the contributions of members who participate in only those parts of the organization that are of relevance to them. An immediate step that CEOS could take to ensure that there is no “activity with invisibility” would be to institute a policy going forward of recording who participates in any and all CEOS meetings, including Plenary, SIT, Working Groups, Virtual Constellations, SBAs, and any associated groups, and establishing a central repository for meeting notes and attendance lists so that the information is accessible to CEOS leadership. It would also be valuable to CEOS if members were to take an action to ensure that existing past lists currently held in disparate locations be gathered and placed in that repository. A complete list of annual participation would also help to support the ongoing efforts of the CEO/DCEO/SEO to maintain up to date contact information.