Earth
System
Governance

A global alliance to mobilize research
on global environmental change and governance
across local and global scales

Guidebook for Taskforces and Working Groups

March 2022

1. Introduction

This document has been produced for anyone involved in the Earth System Governance (ESG) project who is convening or participating in an ESG taskforce or working group, or is thinking of doing so. The document is designed to assist in setting up and successfully running a research group. Taskforces and Working Groups are one of the most dynamic elements of the ESG Project. They provide a flexible way to organize our work; allowing researchers to interact, incubate new ideas, develop activities and publications, engage substantively with key issues of governance of the environment and sustainability confronting contemporary societies. They also play a central role in maintaining the vibrancy and relevance of the ESG network.

1.1 What are Taskforces and Working Groups?

Through these groups, the Earth System Governance Project seeks to push the frontiers of research in specific areas of the Science and Implementation Plan. Taskforces are open for all and often interact with other research communities, organizing events, webinars, and publications, and facilitating research all over the world. You do not need to be a research fellow of the Earth System Governance Project to join one of these groups, although we encourage you to apply to become a research fellow if you are eligible.

1.2 What is the difference between a Taskforce and a Working Group?

Taskforces are formal groups that mobilize scholars to collaboratively engage with key issues of governance of the environment and sustainability, within a well-defined research area and in alignment with the Earth System Governance research agenda. Taskforces are community-driven, commonly led by senior Research Fellows or Lead Faculty. Participation is open to any scholar who wishes to become engaged.

Working groups are flexible research collaborations with more narrow or specific focus areas and commonly with limited time horizons. These groups either bring together a sub-community within a Taskforce or else are self-standing and mobilize scholars to study an unexplored area of earth system governance research.

Earth System Governance

2. Setting up and launch

- A small group of conveners prepared to take an active leadership role. This means intellectual leadership – defining the scope of interest and priorities for attention, but also practical leadership – being willing to invest time and effort to coordinate the group.

- Launch! Make sure to create outreach to attract a diverse group of interested participants. When initiating a taskforce or working group, work with the ESG International Project Office (ipo@earthsystemgovernance.org) to ensure that you have a web presence, recognition from the rest of the network, visual imagery, and calls for participation.

- Define early on one or more focused projects and outputs on which the group can focus. If multiple activities are undertaken someone should oversee each one, ideally with a team of 2 or 3 supporting them.

3. Potential activities

Activities of a taskforce or working group can include, but need not be limited to:

- Webinars
  - Record and share videos on the ESG Youtube channel
- Policy Briefs
  - Avail of communication assistance for formatting final document from the ESG International Project Office
- A state-of-the-art summary for a book chapter or journal article
- Working on an ESG edited book or a journal special issue with the ESG Journal
  - ESG Book Series possible with Cambridge Elements and MIT Press
- Panel sessions at the Annual Conference on Earth System Governance
- Organising workshops
- Developing model curricula for teaching

4. Embedding and Support

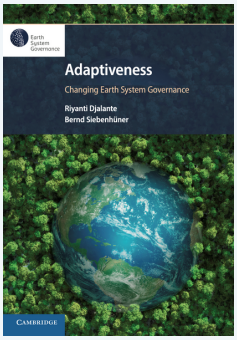
The Earth System Governance Project is uniquely positioned to provide access to a shared research agenda, outlets for publications, an annual conference, and support from an international project office.

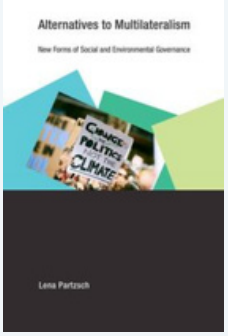
4.1 The Annual Conference on Earth System Governance

To present at an annual conference, you can participate in the call for papers which takes place every year around December until February. Options for participation include:

- Papers
- Full Panels
- Innovative Session
- Taskforce and Meeting Day

4.2 Publish with an Earth System Governance Flagship Publication

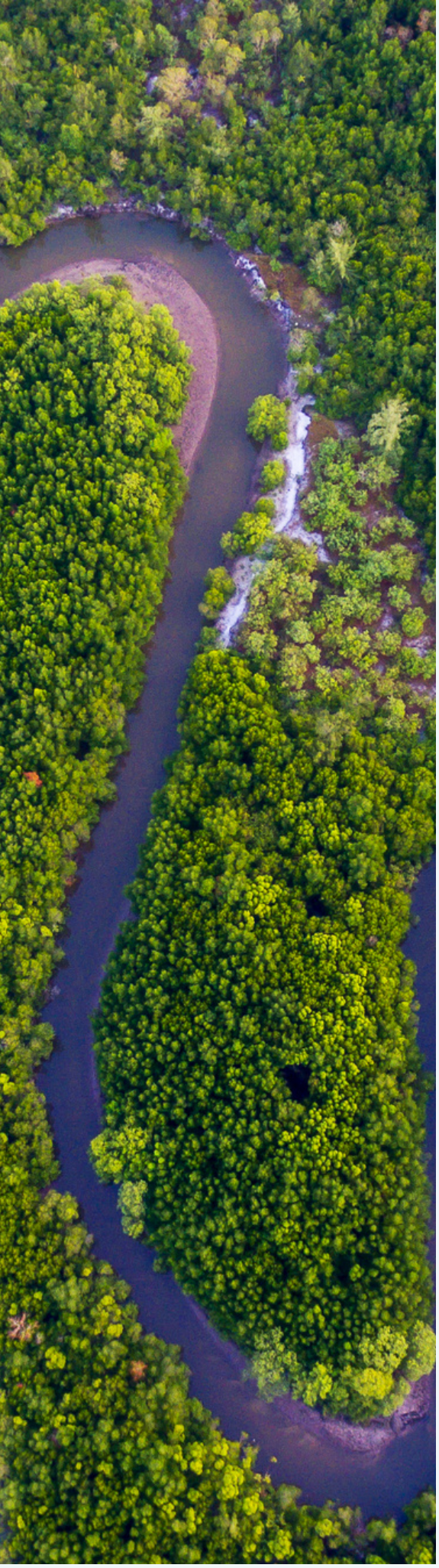




To Publish in the ESG Journal visit this link. It is also possible for Taskforces to apply to edit a special issue in order to build knowledge in a cohesive space

ESG has publications with MIT Press, Cambridge Elements and Cambridge University Press Series to provide concise, authoritative studies of the governance of complex socio-ecological systems, written by world-leading scholars.

Earth System Governance



4.3 The International Project Office

Scholars can work with the international Project Office to launch help launch their taskforce and share information with the wider network.
We can assist in sharing information via the ESG website, newsletters, network updates, and social media channels.

Work with the IPO to host a webinar as part of the ESG Speaker Series. This webinar series provides promotion, event set up and tech support for a taskforce-led theme and content.

If you are interested in sharing updates with the network, you can email any of the following information to us at ipo@earthsystemgovernance.org :

- Publications (articles, books, etc.)
- Upcoming Events (Conferences/Webinars)
- Other activities (trainings & workshops)
- If communicating via Twitter, always tag us via @ESG_Project and we can re-tweet.

Gustav Thungren
Managing Director
g.o.thungren@uu.nl

Lisa Bettoni
Network Coordination
l.bettoni@uu.nl

Jane Butler
Science and Communications
j.a.butler@uu.nl

Earth System Governance

5. Benefits and expectations

The ESG Project will support by:

- Providing a fixed meeting space during the Taskforce and Meeting Day at the annual ESG Conference
- Providing a landing page and admin account on the ESG website. This page will display a description, the group co-conveners, an area for news and to present recent publications or updates. Each taskforce will be provided an admin profile to edit the website.
- Activities highlighted on the ESG website, social media platforms, and newsletter
- Networking, engagement and sharing of best practices with other ESG Taskforces and Working Groups

The conveners are also responsible for:

- Sharing updates with the Scientific Steering Committee and International Project Office. Once a year, conveners of taskforces or working groups will be asked to fill out a 1-2 page report.
- Each June, a 90 minute coordination workshop will be held among taskforce and working group conveners and the SSC taskforce portfolio members* to discuss progress of taskforces. At this meeting taskforce and working group conveners are invited to provide a verbal report on their group since the last such meeting.
- Whenever a taskforce or working group holds a public activity (meeting, webinar, panel, publication) they are recommended to provide a brief description to the IPO so that they can share this with the network via web content.

*Taskforce Portfolio as of March 2022 consists of Aarti Gupta, DG Webster and Jonathan Pickering

Earth System Governance

6. Taskforces and Working Groups who are no longer active

For several reasons, the taskforce or working group may no longer be active in conducting activities and convening members. From experience, we have found it necessary to create a sunset mechanism for groups who are no longer active. This can apply for instance if agreed activities are finished, if conveners are no longer available, or the community of research naturally comes to a close. We ask conveners to also reach out to other members of the taskforce if this occurs to see if new conveners are interested in taking up the bat, or earlier career researchers might have the initiative to launch another activity.

If the Taskforce or Working Group will not continue activities, please contact the International Project Office so that they can update the online profile of the taskforce/working groups and safely archive information on the website.
The International Project Office will assume that your taskforce is active and promote it to new members via the website as long as you have not communicated the status of the group.

After an initial three years, the mandate to run a taskforce or working group with the project will expire automatically. If a taskforce remains active with a defined agenda and enthusiastic participants, conveners should apply for two year renewals with the taskforce portfolio of the Scientific Steering Committee.

Best Practise 1

Using the ESG Journal to publish a special issue: Earth System Law Taskforce

This taskforce published a special issue with the ESG Journal in January 2022.
We asked the conveners for advice on how such a project works.

Co-convener:
Catherine Blanchard

Co-convener:
Louis Kotzé

Co-convener:
Rakhyun Kim

"The Special Issue has largely been a bottom-up process. The Task Force convenors helped to get the ball rolling, but the process was mostly successful because we were lucky to work alongside dedicated contributors who submitted pieces of high quality... and on time! Such a commitment is not something we can impose or create - it emerged because the contributors believed in the value of our common project. We were especially happy to be able to draw on the expertise of the larger Earth System Governance network and to approach several members of the network to ask for contributions.

Another reason why the Special Issue project has been a success has to do with the concept itself - "earth system law". This concept has been effective in drawing people in, especially those who share our vision and the belief in the power of the concept. Perhaps it is the inclusive scope of earth system law research, or the normativity of earth system law, or the interdisciplinary character of our work that people like. What is certain, however, is that people enthusiastically responded to the call to explore earth system law and what it can do to envisage new perspectives, for research and for discussions more broadly.

The Special Issue was also a reflection on what the Task Force is about: a unique space for lawyers and law enthusiasts in the ESG Network, a sort of home for the law in a network that is predominantly non-law, a forum where we can interact with each other and with other disciplines. In many ways, we believe that the Task Force, and, by extension, the Special Issue and ESG journal, offer a useful outlet for lawyers who want to explore publication avenues other than in legal journals and broaden their network."

Earth
System
Governance

Best Practise 2

Building an online community: Anticipatory Governance Taskforce

Building a dynamic slack community recruits and benefits a group of future thinkers who increasingly meet mostly online. We asked the convener about his experience of doing so.

Co-convener: Joost Vervoort

"The slack community was set up because I had too much coffee."

"The Anticipatory Governance Slack community was inspired by very positive expriences in inclusive, supportive communities around games and other media. Originally it started as just a place to connect folks from all areas of work around anticipatory governance. Over time we realised that the best use of this kind of community would be for relatively early career researchers and practitioners to build their networks with each other, because senior researchers would often be over-committed already and have less of a need for connecting to new people. This focus on early career people really helped the community. Then, when the pandemic hit, there was a real need to have alternatives for the normal ways of community building.

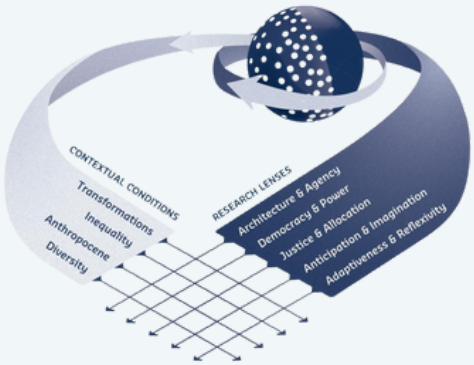
As the community convener, I had the same problem as many other relatively senior folks - I had large networks but not enough time to actively manage a lively community. A community manager position was created to help with this - and different people filling in this role have mobilized small groups of the most active people to organize events together, like writing groups, talks and a small conference. Access to more senior folks is provided through the format of talks and specific events.

Nowadays the community hosts about 600 people, around 50 of which are really active, with most other people coming in and out very occasionally. But this model works well. There are hosting costs associated with Slack, which is a consideration - we spend about 1000 euros a year on the community; which allows for 100 active users. Discord is a free alternative to Slack but Slack has benefits in terms of its clear organization, archiving possibilities and more."

Best Practise 3

Using the Earth System Governance Research Framework: Working Group on Carbon Removal

This working group was set up in January 2022, and the first working group as part of the taskforce on Climate Governance. The conveners used the ESG Science Plan as a starting point to identify overlaps between the research interests of the conveners and the aims of the ESG project as a whole. The Science Plan's research lenses were also a valuable framework for mapping and anticipating novel issues in global governance, such as carbon removal.



The Earth System Governance Research Framework

Co-convener:
Miranda Boettcher

Co-convener:
Sean Low

"As coordinators, we used the lenses to filter and structure a wide range of thematic concerns, and identify sets of guiding questions for discussion with the emerging Working Group. The Science Plan's lenses generated lines of inquiry broad enough to attract a diverse range of members, yet focused enough to facilitate structured discussion around key governance dimensions. These efforts will make it easier for us to engage across other ESG Working Groups and Taskforces – i.e. on Ocean Governance, or on Anticipation – as they allow us to connect to those working on similar dimensions in relation to a different topic."

Earth System Governance

Earth
System
Governance

A global alliance to mobilize research
on global environmental change and governance
across local and global scales

Wishing your Taskforce or Working Group success!