



DivSeek Charter

This Charter defines the general conditions for the operation of DivSeek and sets forth the governance structure for voluntary cooperation by Partners. This Charter does not create any legally binding obligation between or among Partners.

The DivSeek Assembly approved the first version of this Charter on 9 January 2015 in San Diego (USA). The full list of current partner organizations is provided on the DivSeek website <http://www.divseek.org/partners/>

Background

Meeting the food needs of a growing human population in an era characterized by climate change and increased competition for land and water is a key global challenge. Crop production must rise, and crops must become more resilient to an increasingly unstable climate to produce sufficient nutritious food and other agricultural products in a sustainable manner. Natural variation from genetic resources is the raw material for crop improvement, and thus must be a critical component of any comprehensive strategy to address food security and the sustainability of agricultural production.

Game-changing technologies and advanced data processing and analysis capabilities now enable a more comprehensive approach to genetic resources, using existing but dispersed capacities of genebanks, breeders, researchers, farmers and other stakeholders, to respond to global research priorities. In recent years a number of crop-specific projects have been initiated in this new sphere. In an attempt to link these efforts DivSeek was initiated, as a voluntary association of like-minded partners harnessing genetic resources for food security to create synergies that would benefit most stakeholders and hence accelerate the unlocking of the value of genetic resources for the benefit of sustainable intensification and climate proofing of global agriculture¹.

Mission

The mission of DivSeek is to cross-link, support and add value to individual activities that **harness the power of crop diversity** for food and nutritional security and societal and economic benefits, by enabling breeders and researchers to mobilize genetic variation in order to **accelerate crop improvement**.

¹ The assembly identified possible synergies between DIVSEEK and the programme of work of the Global Information System of the International Treaty of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

Principles

DivSeek aims to bring together a broad array of voluntary partners to **facilitate networking and collaborations** among otherwise disconnected efforts to harness genetic resources for crop improvement and to ensure the continuous relevance of their outputs for the targeted beneficiaries. DivSeek is a **community-driven** and **inclusive** initiative open to all institutions from all relevant sectors. An organization can become a Partner by accepting this Charter in writing.

DivSeek advocates the application of state-of-the-art genomic, phenotyping and bioinformatics technologies to enhance the quality, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of germplasm conservation, provision and utilization for breeding, to **deepen our understanding of crop diversity** and to stimulate public interest in the role of genetic diversity for crop improvement.

DivSeek facilitates the **linking of germplasm with passport, characterization and evaluation data** through formulating and advocating common data and informatics standards and best practices designed to enable interoperability among information systems, to broaden the usability of data and germplasm, and to support open access to germplasm-associated data. DivSeek advocates and promotes the widespread adoption of terms and guidelines for access and use of data and knowledge about plant genetic resources.

DivSeek follows a **modular approach** to information management, which aims to define and maintain a set of core standards for data exchange to enable data integration and interoperability among continuously evolving and potentially diverse platforms and data domains. This approach reduces transaction costs, allows for effective 'rights management' at a level of discretion determined by individual stakeholders, and allows stakeholders to absorb and adapt to new requirements and rapidly changing technologies.

DivSeek contributes to on-going international cooperation for the developing and strengthening of a **global information system**, to facilitate the exchange of information on scientific, technical and environmental matters related to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

DivSeek recognizes the importance of **understanding the needs and capacities** of stakeholders such as genebanks, breeders, researchers and farmers to define priority areas for germplasm characterization and evaluation, and data access. DivSeek identifies and communicates critical needs and facilitating cross-crop learning and capacity development and training to access and apply cutting-edge tools for the analysis and knowledge transfer from genotypic and phenotypic data on plant genetic resources, for impact-oriented and discovery-driven research.

To implement the actions and principles set forth in this Charter, DivSeek may elaborate operational guidelines, including, for example, through **expert consultations** and **working groups**.

Membership

Partners are organizations that support DivSeek's mission by voluntarily associating specific activities with DivSeek and by providing advice and support. Partners individually determine the nature and extent of their participation in DivSeek.

New organizations that wish to join, as Partner should submit a letter of interest to the Coordinator of the Coordination Unit and, upon invitation by the Steering Committee, will be asked to approve this Charter in writing.

Governance

All Partners are invited to nominate one representative and one alternate to participate in meetings of the DivSeek **Assembly**. The Assembly meets at least once a year. The functions of the Assembly are to:

- a) Consider and approve DivSeek's annual work plan and the budget of the Coordination Unit, accompanied by a resource mobilization plan, and the annual progress report, submitted by the Steering Committee;
- b) Provide recommendations on the strategic direction of activities and projects associated with DivSeek;
- c) Elect the Steering Committee members from among Partners, for a term of two years, renewable for one term²; and
- d) Elect a Chairperson of the Assembly, for a term of two years, renewable for one term.

The **Steering Committee** consists of the Chairperson of the Assembly and eight Partner representatives, preferably from different regions, types of organizations and categories of expertise. The Steering Committee convenes at least twice a year. Representational guidelines for the Steering Committee may be defined by the Assembly. The functions of the Steering Committee are to:

- a) Prepare the agenda for the Assembly;
- b) Provide inputs and endorse DivSeek's draft annual work plan and the draft budget of the Coordination Unit, accompanied by a resource mobilization plan, and the annual progress report;
- c) Work with the Coordinator and Coordination Unit to periodically collect information about interactions among Partners and convey such information to the Assembly and to other stakeholders and interested parties
- d) Advise the Assembly on the strategic direction of activities and projects associated with DivSeek;
- e) Undertake any activities that may be assigned to it by the Assembly through DivSeek's operational guidelines

² The first Steering Committee had staggered appointments; half of the members were appointed for one year, half for two years; all will be eligible for a second term of two years.

The Assembly and the Steering Committee shall make every effort to adopt their decisions by consensus, that is, the absence of a formal objection by any of the Partners present at the meeting. A valid quorum for meetings of the Assembly is the presence of the majority of the Partners. Changes to this Charter shall only be possible with the consensus of the Assembly, with at least three quarters of the Partners present. Presence may be in person or through a teleconference connection.

The Assembly and the Steering Committee may establish rules of procedure for their meetings. Such rules of procedures may provide for matters such as: a) notice and record of meetings; b) decision making (e.g., where consensus cannot be reached) and recording of dissent; c) electronic tools and procedures for decision making; d) conflict of interest; e) replacement of Steering Committee members.

A **Coordinator**, selected by the Steering Committee, will lead the **Coordination Unit**. The functions of the Coordinator supported by the Coordination Unit are to:

- a) Develop a draft of DivSeek's annual work plan, the budget of the Coordination Unit, accompanied by a resource mobilization plan, and an annual progress report based on the recommendations of the Assembly and inputs from the Steering Committee;
- b) Prepare the draft agenda, relevant documents and organize the logistical arrangements for the Partner's Assembly and Steering Committee meetings;
- c) Work with the Steering Committee to secure and administer financial and other resources to support the organizational and networking functions of DivSeek in keeping with its work plan, and provide biannual reports and updates about DivSeek finances to the Steering Committee;
- d) Use DivSeek's financial resources, in accordance with its budget, to support the operations and meetings of the Assembly, Steering Committee and Working Groups;
- e) Support the development of operational guidelines to implement the actions and principles set forth in this Charter, and of rules of procedure for the meetings of the Assembly and the Steering Committee;
- f) Provide potential Partners with membership information, and engage in recruitment and capacity building to help ensure the widest range of participation in DivSeek;
- g) Promote linkages for DivSeek to cooperate with other initiatives and programs of relevance to its mission, such as the CGIAR Research Programs, multilateral initiatives promoting access to, and transfer of technology and knowledge;
- h) Assist the Steering Committee in the periodic collecting of information about interactions among Partners, Working Groups and other relevant initiatives;
- i) Coordinate initiatives for awareness raising, capacity development and training;
- j) Undertake any activities that may be assigned to it by the Assembly or by

- the Steering Committee through DivSeek's operational guidelines;
- k) Provide a focal point through which Partners may seek operational funding, support or endorsement of projects to be undertaken under the aegis of DivSeek.

Use of logos and names

Partners may, on a good-faith basis, use DIVSEEK's logo and name for DivSeek's activities. Partners understand that, subject to their agreement, their names and logos may be displayed on DivSeek's web site and documentation.

Withdrawal

Partners wishing to withdraw from DivSeek should provide written notice to the Coordination Unit, preferably two months in advance. Or, if mutually agreed, the dissociating partner may still participate as an observer at the Assembly.

Upon withdrawal, the Partner is to cease associating any of its projects and partnerships being executed as a result of participation in DivSeek with DivSeek's initiative and logo.