

## Commercial Sector Engagement in GEO

*This Document is submitted by the United States to the Executive Committee for discussion.*

### PREAMBLE

To succeed in its second decade, GEO will need to develop effective modes of engagement with the commercial sector. The United States believes that there are proven models by which public-purpose entities such as GEO can engage beneficially with commercial entities while still protecting the organization's values and purposes. In the paragraphs that follow, we present one approach and describe how it might fit into the tiers of GEO activities as described in the Secretariat presentation on the tiered engagement of the commercial sector in GEOSS.

The United States presents this approach and submits our considerations to move the Executive Committee to begin a more focused conversation, after November, including with the representatives of the commercial sector, towards designing a set of principles for engagement with the commercial sector.

## 1 A COMMON FRAMEWORK FOR CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP IN GEO

### 1.1 New Category - Corporate Partners

As set forth in the GEO Strategic Plan, GEO's relationship with the commercial sector is key to extending the benefits of Earth observations across various user communities around the globe and to boosting GEO's financial footing. To pursue a meaningful strategic engagement with the commercial sector, GEO must develop relationships with businesses that share and/or wish to support GEO's mission and vision. To ensure an equitable partnership that respects the integrity of GEO as an intergovernmental body with an expanded relationship with the commercial sector, it is important to clearly define that relationship.

A proven and accepted way to achieve this is to establish a *Corporate Partner* category to allow a commercial entity to support or engage with GEO. *Corporate Partner* will be a category separate from Members, Participating Organizations and Observers. A commercial entity that associates with the GEO mission and vision and wishes to contribute to its success may choose to become a GEO Corporate Partner. The minimum support required from a corporation to secure this status will take the form of a *corporate partner fee*, paid into the GEO Trust Fund for use by GEO at its discretion to perform its core functions in accordance with the adopted strategy. This will ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the company's giving and GEO's work activities.

### *Partnership Benefits*

All successful partnerships are based on mutual benefit, and so a GEO *Corporate Partner* program must deliver mutual benefits to both GEO and its Corporate Partners. GEO can benefit from corporate partnerships in a variety of ways. Corporate partner companies can:

- contribute specialized knowledge and strategic insights regarding user trends and market needs for information and products;
- extend the GEO user community, by leveraging GEOSS resources for their respective clients;
- support the resourcing of GEO's work through the payment of a *corporate member fee* into the Trust Fund;
- promote the GEO brand and increasing awareness about GEO through publishing of the GEO logo on relevant products, event promotional materials, etc.

For Corporate Partners, associating with GEO adds value by:

- advocating for and enabling broad and open access to data and information;
- offering streamlined access to globally-sourced Earth observation data and information;
- enabling networking opportunities among businesses and GEO's Member governments;
- enabling new market opportunities worldwide;
- increasing awareness of the companies' commitment to a worthwhile positive cause, through publishing companies' logos on promotional materials at sponsored events and in publications.

To foster mutual understanding and ties, and to promote the smooth working of its Corporate Partner program, GEO would be wise to convene an annual forum of GEO community and Corporate Partners leaders during the Week of GEO Plenary. During these annual forums, the GEO community would share the latest programmatic developments in GEO, to spur interest among Corporate Partners, and Corporate Partners would provide GEO with current know-how about the latest trends in the geospatial information and applications markets, user needs and emerging opportunities for GEO. Opportunities to hold joint events or co-sponsor events could also be presented by both parties.

This common framework for engaging with the commercial sector can be augmented by a number of specific principles applicable to certain types of engagement scenarios, according to the nature of business, as described in the following section.

## **2 COMMERCIAL SECTOR ENGAGEMENT IN GEOSS**

The following categorization of focused commercial engagement in GEOSS, in the three tiers previously described by the GEO Secretariat, is anticipated to deliver results primarily in two areas – increasing the uptake of GEOSS resources, derived largely from the GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI), and turning data into products, tools and services available to extended communities of downstream users. Each of these areas largely, though not exclusively, will rely on partnerships with commercial value-added providers, including Small and Medium-Size Enterprises (SMEs). The following tiers have been defined:

1. Tier 1 – GEOSS Providers;
2. Tier 2 – The GCI;
3. Tier 3 – GEOSS Applications.

## 2.1 Tier 1 – GEOSS Providers:

This tier is comprised of the multitude of entities that contribute to building the subsystems of GEOSS. The contributions are generally in the form of data that are discoverable and accessible by the GCI.

### *Necessary Considerations:*

Some commercial entities may put more restrictions on their data, but many other commercial sector entities have been willing to share their catalogues, thereby allowing GEOSS users to discover higher-resolution data generally not accessible from government systems. While the commercial sector may, on a case-by-case basis, also be involved in the construction of the data processing and information systems, decisions about commercial participation in this tier are typically the purview of GEO Member nations or Participating Organizations.

## 2.2 Tier 2 – The GCI:

Currently there are three major components of the GCI – the GEOSS Portal, the Discovery and Access Broker (DAB) and a Registry for selected assets. In each instance, these components are funded by GEO Member Nations (Italy and the United States) and, in the case of the Portal, a GEO Participating Organization (PO) (the European Space Agency).

### *Necessary Considerations:*

These components are significant national or PO *in-kind* contributions that GEO is not in a position to replace or substitute through the purchase of commercial services or equipment. Theoretically sustained, long-term corporate commitments to donate such equipment or services might be possible. However, by far the most significant hurdle to overcome in this tier is trust. Would a majority of GEO nations trust a commercial entity to operate the GCI, or would concerns regarding data misuse, rising prices, corporate nationalism rule this out altogether?

## 2.3 Tier 3 – GEOSS Applications:

It is this third tier where there is considerable potential for commercial sector engagement, and in particular from the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). In large part, the commercial sector leads the development of state-of-the-art user applications derived from geospatial data. Given the creativity, innovation and speed-to-market that exists in the commercial sector, with data accessible from the GCI, the commercial sector has the potential to generate a limitless number of applications for mobile devices, thereby reaching thousands of new users everyday, informing everyday decisions – GEO's ultimate vision. These would be products and services *powered by GEOSS*, with the final products crediting GEOSS as a source. Ultimately, the sale of these new products, tools or services will generate the economic return that underpins the rationale for many of the emerging broad, open data policies.

### *Necessary Considerations:*

Success in this realm is predicated on the condition that there will be unrestricted access to the GEOSS resources, through GCI, by the developers and that available content will be rich and robust to deliver data needed for applications development.

Concerns have been expressed that a) not all data-providing GEO Members can realize economic return from the broad and open use of their data by value-adding commercial industry and therefore GEO may need to collect royalties for the use of those data; and b) commercial companies may be required to pay fees for the use of GCI – a public infrastructure - to access data and resources for the development of user applications.

To address these concerns, it must be emphasized that a) the data providers ultimately control access to the data, while the GCI, through the DAB serves as a discovery and access tool only, therefore GEO cannot collect fees for data use; and b) imposing fees for the use of GCI will likely discourage commercial companies from using it altogether, as presently the GCI has neither a reputation of an indispensable tool, nor is it the only means to access the necessary data. GEO's efforts must be to attract the commercial sector and not to put up barriers, which would limit their interest. However, GEO may use the contributions from the collection of Corporate Partner fees to make necessary investments in the development of GEOSS infrastructure, including on the basis of the feedback from the commercial companies who will use GCI, to boost its functionality so it can adequately meet the demand of the developers.