

## **IVOA Assessment Analysis - 8 May 2007**

The following is a list of the major themes identified after an analysis of the 43 responses received for the IVOA Assessment. Many of these themes are interrelated, as will be evident from a reading of the analysis. After the description of each theme, some brief comments are included (*in italics*) that indicate possible near term courses of action. Though many respondents included explicit suggestions for certain problems they had identified, no attempt has been made in this preliminary analysis to include all, or even any, of the suggested courses of action on a given question put forward by the respondents. The list is ordered with the most frequently mentioned or urgent issues appearing first.

### **1. Revise and Update the IVOA Web Site**

This theme appeared embedded in responses to several different questions, and it was raised in response to problems seen with internal communication, with the statement of the goals of the IVOA, with the concerns raised about uptake by the astronomy community, and with worries about our interface with the world at large. It is probably the most generally occurring theme, and it arises in the widest variety of responses. *The needed revision to the website will be a mix of simple technical or clerical revisions coupled with more complex and time consuming issues of overall IVOA long term planning and the interface between the IVOA and the astronomy community and the general public. These last two problems will require the use of special expertise, some of which is already available to some of the national projects.*

### **2. The Progress Toward IVOA Goals, Especially Standards, is Too Slow**

This was a very common response to Question 2, and it had a large number of replies that were labeled as "Serious Problem". *The solution will be a mix of technical and managerial changes. It is important to reach a balance between expedience (at the risk of adopting incomplete or inadequately studied designs) and exactitude (at the risk of long delays and designs that become obsolete before they are implemented).*

### **3. Improve the Functioning of the Working Groups and Interest Groups**

This concern arose in responses to several different questions posed about the functioning of the WGs and IGs, both in terms of their progress toward their goals and in terms of communication among the groups. It is also related to another common theme, which is that some WG chairs may have too much influence on how the WG operates. A third issue that was much less frequently raised was that some of the WGs may be too dominated by the project from a single country. *All of these issues need to be addressed under the general topic of WG/IG functionality. The recent appointment of Vice-Chairs may help this to some degree, but a more formal set of operating procedures, such as interim reports to other WG/IGs or to the IVOA as a whole, may well be required. It may be that Exec will have to take a more formal oversight role in this matter, perhaps via a small subcommittee.*

### **4. Better Communication from the Exec to the IVOA is Needed**

This response took several forms, such as more frequent communications, more formal communications, or more regular communications. In general there seems to be some feeling that the operations of the Exec are shrouded in mystery, while others conveyed the suggestion that as far as they could see the operation of the Exec had little effect on the overall functioning of the IVOA. *This problem should be easily solved by some changes in procedure, such as posting the minutes of Exec meetings and telecons, soliciting input from the IVOA or a relevant subset of the IVOA before Exec meetings, etc*

#### 5. The IVOA has Not Engaged the Astronomy Community

This serious issue arose in responses to several different questions, with the overall theme being that the IVOA has not yet made itself relevant to the astronomy community. The question most relevant to this topic (number 11) had the highest number of “Things need serious and immediate attention”. Several respondents suggested that the IVOA was “self referencing” or working in isolation. One respondent noted that he did not know how a “real” astrophysicist could be “brought near” to the IVOA. In addition to concerns about the uptake of IVOA by the astronomy community, some respondents asked for more presence of scientific presentations at IVOA meetings. These respondents were seeking some sense of the “global picture” or an overall motivation for the technical work of the IVOA. *Injection of more science into the IVOA meetings will be conceptually simple to do, though implementation in practice may be complex. Establishing relevance of the IVOA to the astronomy community may be one of the most critical problems facing the IVOA and the individual projects as well. Its solution will be complex, difficult, and possibly expensive.*

#### 6. The Small Project Meetings Need More Focus

This was a fairly common theme, and it seemed to reflect a feeling from the respondents that there is a lack of coherence among the presentations at the Small Project meetings. This may well be a reflection of the history of the small projects themselves, since by and large they have gone their own way and developed what they felt to be of most interest to them. This approach has many virtues, and it is not obvious that a more heavy-handed policy from the IVOA in establishing “order” among the small projects is a good thing.

#### 7. Parallel Sessions at Interop Meetings Continue to be a Problem

Though this is not an earth-shaking issue, it is one that seems to vex many respondents. *Some procedural changes may alleviate this situation, such as longer Interop meetings, or a posting of summaries (both before and after) of the discussions at the various parallel sessions.*

- Dave De Young