

Report of the IVOA Assessment Committee

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The IVOA in the Era of Operations

- A. The IVOA should continue its present activities in updating existing standards and adopting new ones as the need arises. The impetus for these activities will come primarily from the various IVOA member projects as reflected in Working Group (WG) and Interest Group (IG) activities. In addition the IVOA will create new WGs or IGs, or modify existing ones, in response to new or changing conditions. Particular attention will have to be paid to feedback from the data centers in the operations phase of the VO, and the collection and dissemination of this feedback will have to be carefully organized. A major aspect of this activity will be to continuously strive for the timely movement of standards to implementation, and the IVOA will continue to work toward simplifying and expediting this process.
- B. The IVOA should encourage, and perhaps initiate, the development of tools, metrics and other validators for use by members and data centers to measure quality assurance, assist in achieving compliance with IVOA standards, and generally promote interoperability. It is anticipated that most of this activity will take place within the various projects, but the IVOA should form an entity such as an IG or standing committee to act as liaison and to develop new initiatives. Through this activity the IVOA could become a sort of “standards office” for VO activities. It should be stressed that it is not the role of the IVOA to act in any manner as an enforcer of compliance for any standards.
- C. The IVOA should expand its role as a center for the dissemination of information on all matters relating to VO activities. This “information central” activity has several important components.
 1. Data Centers and Key Datasets. There is a need for a central source of information about the structure and activities of data centers around the world, together with information about the key data holdings at various data centers. While in its most primitive form this information could simply be a page of links, the IVOA should encourage national projects and data centers to provide information about their data holdings and services on a periodic basis to be available at a central IVOA site.
 2. Support of New VO Projects. This effort is already underway in the form of a web page that contains links to tutorials, introductory lectures, criteria for IVOA membership, etc. It would also be useful for this site to contain brief descriptions of support for new VO projects that is provided by ongoing projects, such as the various activities supported by the Euro-VO.
 3. Uptake by the Astronomy Community. Currently the IVOA maintains a “VO presence” at international meetings such as the IAU and CODATA. These activities should continue, but in addition the IVOA should pursue other activities that might encourage the uptake of VO among astronomers

worldwide. While such uptake activities (which require funds) will reside largely within the various projects, the IVOA can expand its presence to smaller local meetings whenever possible, and in addition the IVOA can again act as an information clearing house that provides links to uptake activities and resources being carried out by various projects.

4. Coordination with Other Disciplines. In addition to the above, the IVOA should broaden its outlook and establish contacts and liaison with VO-like activities in other disciplines. Although astronomy is the forerunner in these IT related activities, there is a rapidly growing number of other disciplines that are either interested in, or beginning to develop, the tools and standards for data access and interoperability that astronomy has begun. There is an opportunity here for the IVOA to play a leadership role in fostering communication and mutual assistance among all these emerging entities. This role could have significant importance for the IVOA, and the formation of an ad hoc committee of the Exec to develop this activity should be considered. (See also item 6 below.)
5. IVOA Newsletter. This topic has already received some discussion, and a limited version of a newsletter has already been established by the IVOA Chair, who circulates “Highlights of Exec” to the entire IVOA after each Exec meeting. However, the creation of a more general newsletter would also be useful in making the IVOA community aware of news items or developments that they may otherwise miss if they do not read all the email from all the WGs and IGs. The issue is the amount of effort required to create such a newsletter. Once one or more individuals are identified who would be willing to lead this effort, then with suitable editorial oversight an IVOA newsletter would be a positive addition. The possibility of an RSS-feed tool to accomplish this should be explored.
6. In light of the above items, a Liaison subcommittee of the IVOA Exec should be established, consisting of 3 or more members, in order to coordinate all of these activities. This committee should place significant emphasis upon item 4 if a separate committee has not been established for this purpose.