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OTHER BUSINESS

Innovative Collaboration

(Submitted by the Secretariat)

Summary and purpose of document

This document describes a project for an Internet Webboard on Innovative Collaboration.

ACTION PROPOSED

The Management Group is invited to consider and comment on the project.

An Internet Webboard on Innovative Collaboration

Background

1.1 CBS, at its extraordinary session in December 2002, invited the Secretariat to develop a project for an Internet forum to facilitate informal discussions between Members regarding non-technical aspects of international collaboration. Such a forum was recommended in the report of the Rapporteur on Innovative Collaboration, which is available at:

<http://www.wmo.ch/web/www/reports/Innovative-collaboration.html>.

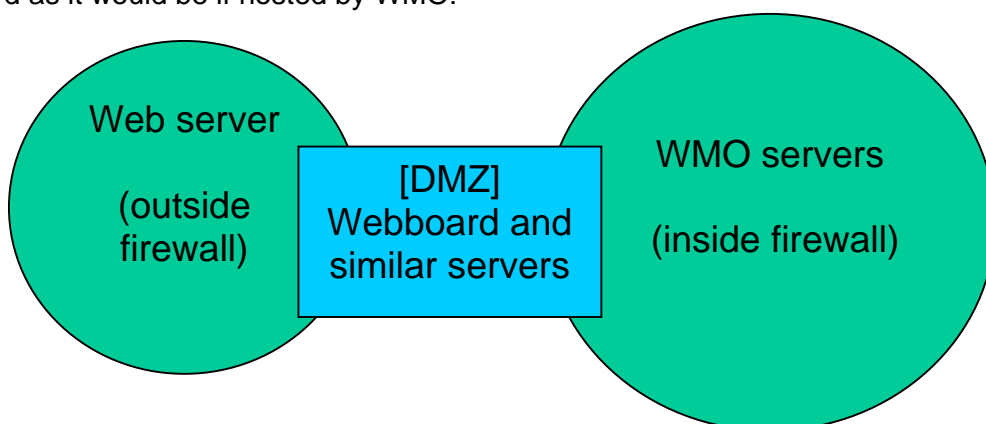
1.2 The proposed forum (hereinafter called the 'Webboard') will give Members a means of exchanging information on non-technical aspects of innovative collaborative ventures, and to provide a mechanism for them to ask for assistance from other Members regarding non-technical aspects of such collaborations. The Webboard will do this by providing a discussion forum at a minimum, but potentially a range of related services, through a common Web interface. These services will allow Members to informally share experiences, ask for help, look at possible solutions, and generally to assist them with possible and future collaborative ventures.

Technical considerations

2.1 It is proposed that for ease of support and maintenance that the Webboard facility be provided by WMO. This would alleviate any particular Member from the responsibility of running the Board. The Information Systems Division of WMO is currently in the process of restructuring the WMO server configuration, and will be providing a server that will be able to host Webboards in the near future. Administrative support to maintain the server would also be provided by the Information Systems Division. The enhancement of WMO's server configuration is expected to be completed during the second half of 2003.

2.2 The Webboard site will need to be hosted on a server that is outside any firewalls so that external users can gain full access. The Webboard server will need full access to the Web server, which is also outside the firewall. In addition the Webboard server will need to be able to be assessable from inside the firewall, from where users inside the firewall will be able to update the Webboard applications.

2.3 The following schematic provides a simplified view of the server configuration of the Webboard as it would be if hosted by WMO:



2.4 The Webboard software and any ancillary software needed to administer the Webboard will be provided by ISY, the WMO Information Technology department. Additionally they will provide the server and all of the associated hardware necessary for the running of the Webboard application.

2.5 Administration and maintenance of the Webboard software and hardware will also be the responsibility of ISY.

Technical Management

3.1 The management of the Webboard would be provided from within World Weather Watch, and would probably become part of the general Internet Web management responsibility. The management required to keep the board operating would be very similar to that required to maintain other World Weather Watch web sites, and is not expected to be a significant additional component.

3.2 Technical management would be involved with ensuring the smooth operation of the board, fixing any technical problems, in association with ISY, and assisting the board moderator in loading and linking new and revised content onto the site.

Services

3.1 The Webboard needs to provide, as a minimum, a fully functional discussion forum. However several enhancements would enable it to be a 'one stop shop' from where several different, but related, services would be available. These enhancements would greatly increase the functionality of the Webboard.

3.2 The following is the list of all features required to implement a fully functional 'one-stop-shop'. However, as suggested above, if a simplified 'bare-bones' discussion forum is considered sufficient, it would be only necessary to implement a) from the following list.

a) A forum for Members to be able to be involved in discussions about non-technical aspects of international collaborations. This could be in the form of a discussion group (or preferably groups), where informal exchange of ideas on collaborations can be posted and viewed. This would give Members who want to find information on international collaborations a way to find other Members who may have the answers; either from experience gained themselves during collaborative ventures or by other means. In addition Members who have gained some experiences from their own cooperative projects will be able to share their experiences with others, with the aim of facilitating future projects

b). A database of innovative collaborative ventures. This database would provide summaries of the experiences gained by Members who have been involved in cooperative arrangements. The database would be subdivided into various subsets, such as administrative, contractual, financial and organisational components. The questionnaires returned by Members as part of the Reporters study could be summarised to provide the initial entries for this database. A questionnaire on the Webboard would allow future ventures to be added to the database.

c) A monthly digest summarising collaborative ventures. The digest would be maintained as a searchable archive for the easy finding of possible solutions. This digest could be expanded to become a searchable long-term archive.

d) A database of names and contact details of 'experts' who would be willing to provide assistance on non-technical aspects of international collaborations.

3.3 How many of these services are provided initially is very dependent on resources, both monetary and of time. A simple discussion forum could be created initially to get the application up and running, with the database and the summaries added at a later date as resources to add them become available.

Administrative and Management requirements

4.1 The Webboard will need to be moderated. The moderator would be involved with the "content" aspects of the site. This will include interacting with the contributions and their contributions, and ensuring that the board is meeting user requirements. The moderator will also need to update the database of collaborative examples as they become available. This database could be as simple as a grouping of Web pages under the required categories, such as

administrative, contractual, financial and organisational components. The moderator would then have to update these pages with the new examples as they are contributed and ensure that the links to the required 'arrangements' categories are maintained. The assistance of the World Weather Watch web support group (technical support) will be required to physically make the changes on the Webboard.

4.2 The moderator would provide a monthly summary of collaborative ventures. This monthly digest would itself form a valuable resource as more and more monthly summaries become available, and eventually it will become a long-term archive of collaborative ventures, including experiences gained and solutions found. This monthly archive will need to be searchable to allow for the easy finding of possible solutions.

4.3 The moderator will be involved with answering questions from board members to assist them in finding the most appropriate resources.

4.4 Depending on how joining the Webboard is set up, the moderator may be responsible for maintaining the membership of the group, which would involve providing login registration to new members of the forum. However automatic registration would be possible, and may be preferable, thus freeing the moderator from this task. However the moderator should maintain a list or database of 'experts' including names, contact details and areas of expertise. This list should be available as one of the Webboard features.

4.5 It is estimated that moderation would require about 10% to 20% of one persons work time. It is suggested that the moderator be from a NMS, and be designated by the CBS Management Group.

4.6 If obtaining an external moderator in proves infeasible or impossible, it may be possible for WMO to obtain the services of a long-term contractor to spend about one day a fortnight providing the moderation support. Alternatively the moderating role could be assumed by the Management Group itself and the workload shared amongst them.

4.7 The management of the Webboard would be provided by the CBS Management. The moderator should provide short annual reports on the operation of the Webboard to the Management Group, including such information as the number of members, the numbers of queries, including the different query categories. The moderator may also suggest changes to the Webboard to provide for new facilities or for enhancements to current features.

Proposed Webboard Structure

5.1 As the Webboard is to provide assistance on non-technical collaborations across the breadth of CBS, it will need to be structured so that all CBS programme areas are represented. There are currently four programme areas within CBS, namely:

- OPAG on Integrated Observing Systems
- OPAG on Information Systems and Services
- OPAG on Data Processing and Forecasting Systems
- OPAG on Public Weather Services

5.2 An obvious structure would be to provide four forums, one for each of these areas. However this does not seem to be the best solution, as some programme areas are more heavily involved with collaborations than other programmes.

5.3 A better structure is to have generic forum which cover the activities of the programme areas. Such a breakdown was presented in the Study on Innovative Collaboration report where four 'challenge' areas were defined. Using these as a guide it is proposed that the Webboard should consist of four forums, which together will cover the activities of the four programme areas. The proposed (but by no means definitive) forums are:

- observing systems
- telecommunications
- data processing & forecasting
- NWP models
- common services
- others

5.4 However it needs to be noted that maintaining four separate forums on the Webboard may prove to be administratively expensive, particularly if there are not a large number of messages posted to the Board. Hence for the initial set-up it may be best to have only one message area, where all queries can be posted. If necessary separate forums could be added at a latter date if they become necessary.

5.5 A schematic presentation of a possible web board structure as given. Note however that the three bottom groups, Post New Messages, Last Months Messages and All Messages, are only available after entering into each forum. They are shown here just to simplify the graphic.



Rules

6.1 Whilst rules should be kept to a minimum so as to facilitate free exchange of information and views, minimal rules such as those suggested below would ensure the smooth operation of the web board.

- a) Membership to the group will be restricted, and members will be required to apply to the moderator for a password for access to the forum.
- b) The web board is to be used for the purpose of the discussion and exchange of ideas relating to non-technical aspects of international collaborations.
- c) Normal rules of courtesy and consideration of others will apply. The moderator will monitor the web board site, ensuring that it is used suitably.
- d) The moderator will report on a regular basis to the approved administrative group or sub-committee, on the status of the membership, usage of the site and any need for change or improvement of the site.