

# Digital-Environment System Coalition (DESC) Governance Framework

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## 1. Preamble

The Digital-Environment System Coalition (DESC) is a coalition of interested individuals and organisations, and this draft governance framework provides a minimal structure through which its purposes can be achieved in a collective, transparent and mutually beneficial manner. It was developed by the Working Group on Governance and Ethics (WGGE) in May and June 2021 to provide a facilitating framework for its implementation and is written in as short and simple a form as possible so as to be readily intelligible and clearly implementable. The framework is expected to evolve over time and will require regular review and updating. It should also be read in association with DESC's Ethical Guidance.

## 2. Name, history and digital presence

2.1 *Name*: the official name of the coalition is the Digital-Environment System Coalition, with the acronym DESC.

2.2 *History*: the idea of DESC was originally conceived within the UNESCO Chair in ICT4D in January 2021 and the first meeting of interested parties was held online on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

2.3 *Digital presence*: DESC's domain name is <http://desc.global> (this currently redirects to <https://ict4d.org.uk/desc/> within the UNESCO Chair in ICT4D's site). Currently social media is managed through the UNESCO Chair in ICT4D's Twitter and Facebook pages; YouthDESC is also building an Instagram and Facebook presence.

## 3. Aim and objectives

3.1 *Aim*: DESC's overarching aim is to be a broadly-based transparent coalition of individuals and organisations undertaking (i) **research** better to understand holistically the relationships between digital technologies and the environment,

and (ii) **practice** to influence policy at all levels from local to global based on the collective understandings generated by the coalition.

3.2 **Objectives:** to deliver this aim, DESC has the following main initial objectives, conceptualised in terms of four main outcomes, to be delivered through six outputs. These will evolve over time.

3.2.1 **Outcomes:**

- Beneficial changes to the understanding by policy makers (at all scales and across all sectors) concerning the interactions between digital technologies and the environment
- Wiser processes and activities implemented by companies, governments and civil society to mitigate the negative impacts of the development and use of digital technologies on the environment
- Improvement in global perceptions and understanding about the environmental impact of the development and use of digital technologies
- Enhanced collaboration between academics, policy makers and practitioners in effecting changes to the ways in which digital technologies are designed and used so that they limit environmental harms

3.2.2 **Outputs:**

- A new holistic framework for conceptualising the digital-environment system
- A digital environment/platform for sharing information about the coalition's activities and findings
- Workshops and conferences to explore aspects of the digital-environment system and to promote the coalition's activities and aims
- High quality research and publications on the digital-environment system
- Production of a report in 2025 on a holistic framework for better understanding the digital-environment system
- Policy recommendations on the digital-environment system

## 4. Membership

4.1 Membership is on an individual basis, and of two kinds: Members and Associate Members. There are no membership fees, and anyone interested in becoming a Member or Associate Member should express their interest to the DESC Secretariat. The Secretariat will maintain an up-to-date list of all Members and Associate Members that will be displayed on the coalition's website.

4.2 **Members** are individuals committed to taking an active role in all aspects of the coalition's work. Amongst other benefits, Members can

- Serve in any formal roles associated with the coalition
- Attend all formal meetings of the coalition
- Contribute to any of DESC's Working Groups (Section 8)
- Participate in the "DESC official" and "DESC discussion" mailing lists (Section 9)

- Participate in any DESC conferences, workshops, or other activities (for some of which payments may be required, as for example in the form of relevant conference fees)
- Have their names and affiliations mentioned on the DESC site

4.3 *Associate Members* are individuals interested in and supportive of the coalition's work but who at present do not feel able to take a proactive role in its activities. They have all of the benefits of Members apart from being able to serve in formal roles associated with the coalition.

4.4 *Potential Conflicts of Interest*. DESC is a coalition within which there are individuals from many different backgrounds and with differing interests. Details of the affiliations of all Members and Associate Members are shared transparently on DESC's website, and any further potential conflicts of interest that may arise should be discussed and documented with the Secretariat.

4.5 All Associate Members are encouraged to become Members when their circumstance permit; Members who no longer feel able to contribute actively to the coalition are welcome to remain as Associate Members.

## 5. Partnerships

5.1 *Partners* are organisations of any kind that are interested in contributing to and supporting DESC's work. To become a partner, representative of interested organisations must complete DESC's partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which serves as an enabling document. Individual staff within an organisation are also able to join DESC as Members or Associate Members.

5.2 All Partners are expected to nominate at least one individual to be a Member of DESC.

5.3 The DESC partnership MoU has no financial implications, and any financial commitments must be subject to additional discussion, agreement and formal documentation.

## 6. Financial arrangements

6.1 There are no fees or payments for membership or partnership.

6.2 Activities undertaken by members and others under the DESC umbrella that involve financial matters will be managed separately and distinctly by those members involved. Typically such activities might include:

- Research Grant applications submitted by a group of members within the coalition.
- Conferences undertaken by groups of members, for which fees are charged and sponsors may contribute financial support.
- Workshops convened by members on specific topics.

6.3 DESC was created with no initial funding, and relies on volunteers and contributions in kind from institutional supporters. Entities wishing to support the costs incurred by the Secretariat are encouraged to do so

## 7. Co-ordination

7.1 The overall *co-ordination* of DESC is provided by the UNESCO Chair in ICT4D, which serves as its Secretariat. Most of DESC's activities are undertaken by its various Working Groups (Section 8)

7.2 The DESC *Steering Group* guides and leads the activities of DESC, taking joint decisions that cannot readily be made by its Working Groups.

- The Steering Group consists of 8-12 Members and Partners, the latter of which should comprise no more than half of its membership.
- Working Group Chairs (or Secretaries) are invited to be members of the Steering Group, and an election will be held should the number wishing to be part of the Steering Group exceed the number of places available.

7.3 *The Secretariat.*

- Coordinates DESC's full meetings and provide support to administrative Working Groups. *Inter alia* this involves polling for selection of dates for meetings, preparation of agendas, and circulation of meeting notes and minutes, as well as posting relevant details on DESC's website.
- Managing and developing DESC's website (<http://desc.global>) which is currently linked to relevant parts of the UNESCO Chair in ICT4D's site (<https://ict4d.org.uk/desc>) until such time as an alternative solution is identified and implemented.
- Maintaining a full and transparent record of DESC's activities
- Supporting activities across the breadth of DESC within the limitations of its capacity and budget.

7.4 Other *Members and Partners* contribute to different aspects of DESC's activities as their means permit. All such contributions are recognised on DESC's website and are publicised and acknowledged wherever relevant in DESC's documentation.

7.5 A summary of *membership of Working Groups and other key roles* is given in Annex 1, which is to be regularly updated whenever any changes occur.

## 8. Working Groups

8.1 DESC has three main types of Working Group: Administrative (AWG), Thematic (TWG) and Youth (YouthDESC). All of these should report at least annually to the full membership through the Secretariat.

8.2 *Administrative Working Groups (AWGs)* are designed to support DESC's administrative functions, and in the first instance include Communications (Internal and External), and Governance and Ethics (Annex 1).

8.3 *Thematic Working Groups* (TWGs) are intended to provide a focus primarily for the research activity within DESC, but can also be on other themes of relevance to members' activities. They can be convened by any groups of members and partners on relevant themes within the overall remit of DESC.

- All Members, Associate Members and Partners of DESC should be invited to participate in any such Working Groups
- The roles of Chair and Secretary of each Working Group are provided from within their membership by whatever means preferred by the Group (generally by election, or informal agreement of participants)
- The creation of a new TWG should be approved by the Steering Group and subsequently recommended by the Secretariat to the full membership of DESC (at a DESC meeting or by e-mail circulation); they need to be confirmed by a simple majority (no quorum required)
- All Thematic Working Groups determine their own activities and modalities of working (Section 11)
- All Thematic Working Groups should report at least annually to the Secretariat and through a short paper presented to all members at one of DESCs full member meetings

8.4 The *Youth Working Group* (YouthDESC) is a subset of members under the age of 35, but focusing mainly on those aged 17-25. Its role is to:

- Encourage and offer opportunities for youth engagement on the inter-relationship between environmental impact, consumers' and businesses' digital activities, and the actions/behaviours of the digital technology sector
- Spread overall DESC messaging and initiatives on a platform, or platforms (social media – pilot activity on Instagram as a starting point) that enables broad engagement to a 'youth' audience, with clear strategic intent for phases of messaging
- Bring together like-minded groups or individuals into a youth coalition that engages with partner organisations (such as YouthIGF) whose members can engage with, and drive/support, for DESC's broader aims

8.5 Other types of Working Group can be created *ad hoc* by recommendation of the Secretariat to the Steering Group if urgent, or to the full membership.

## 9. Communications

### 9.1 Internal Communications.

9.1.1 The Working Group on Internal Communications (WGIC) recommends *broad principles* and practices for efficient internal communications, and is the body responsible for discussion and review of all matters relating to internal communications

9.1.2 The main modality of internal communication is through e-mail, and DESC maintains two mailing lists (currently hosted by the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya). It is hoped that all Members, Associate Members and Partner will consider joining these lists for ease of communication

- DESC-official mailing list <https://mylist.upc.edu/www/info/desc-discussion>
- DESC-discussion mailing list <https://mylist.upc.edu/www/info/desc-official>

9.1.3 *Working Groups* have discretion on the use of their own modalities of communication, preferably following the principles agreed by the WGIC.

9.2 *External Communications.*

9.2.1 The Working Group on External Communications (WGEC) recommends *broad principles* and practices for efficient external communications, and is the body responsible for discussion and review of all matters relating to external communications

## 10. Safeguarding and ethics

10.1 DESC treats ethical issues and safeguarding as matters of the utmost importance, and all Members, Associate Members and Partners are expected to follow the *ethical guidelines* prepared by the WGGE. Concerns about ethical issues should be discussed either with the Secretariat or the WGGE

10.2 Any safeguarding issues that occur during the course of DESC's activities should be reported immediately to the Secretariat who will then normally forward the details to the employing organisation of the person(s) against whom any allegations have been made.

10.3 Digital technologies give rise to specific safeguarding concerns and Members, Associate Members and Partners are recommended to consider this separate [guidance](#).

## 11. Working Modalities

11.1 DESC is a coalition of individuals and organisations that share a common interest in the interface between digital technologies and the environment. Members, Associate Members and Partners nevertheless have strongly differing views, and three principles therefore underlie its working modality:

- Recognition of *alternative perspectives*
- Desire for *consensus-based decision-making* wherever possible
- Respect for *diversity of all sorts*, but especially relating to age, body shape, disability, ethnicity, gender and gender assignment, language, race, religion and sexual orientation.

11.2 DESC is a decentralised coalition, and its main working modality is through largely autonomous Working Groups. A regularly updated list of Working Groups and their members is maintained by the Secretariat, is included in Annex 1 of this document, and is posted on DESC's website.

11.3 *Frequency of Meetings.* There will be 2 or 3 meetings of the full DESC membership each year, and where possible these will be held alongside other DESC conferences or meetings. Working Groups meet on an as necessary basis, and last for as long as there is seen to be a need; any Working Group that does not hold any meetings within any one year will be disbanded, but can be reformed should a future need arise.

- 11.4 *Elections* for all positions are based on a simple majority vote that must be conducted of the relevant constituencies at least a month in advance of the start of tenure of the position. All posts are held for a year, but can be renewed up to three times unless there is a call by the membership of the relevant constituencies for an election. Results of all elections must immediately be reported to the Secretariat who will inform the membership thereof within one week. No election will be held when the number of people standing for election equates to or is less than the number of posts available, but members of the relevant constituencies must be informed within one week.
- 11.5 The activities of each Working Group are reported to the 2-3 regular meetings of the DESC membership held each year (Section 11.3)
- 11.6 All agenda items and papers submitted for formal DESC meetings must be submitted to the Secretariat a month prior to the meeting and will then be circulated to the membership at least two weeks before each meeting.
- 11.7 Should the membership be unable to agree on a matter by consensus any necessary decisions will be made by a simple majority vote.

## **12. Review**

- 12.1 DESC's governance framework is reviewed and revised whenever necessary, and at least on an annual basis.
- 12.2 DESC is intended to operate in the first instance from 2021-2025, and will be reviewed in early-2025 to consider its future.

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## **Annex 1**

### **DESC Secretariat, Steering Group and Working Groups**

#### **1. Secretariat**

UNESCO Chair in ICT4D, through the Chairholder Tim Unwin

#### **2. Steering Group**

tbc

#### **3. Working Groups**

##### *3.1 Administrative (AWG)*

- Communications: Internal (WGIC) and External (WGEC)
  - Leandro Navarro
  - Michael Oghia
  - Tim Unwin
  -
- Governance and Ethics (WGGE)
  - Isabella Wagner
  - Knud Skouby
  - Michael Oghia
  - Tim Unwin

##### *3.2 Thematic (TWG)*

##### *3.3 YouthDESC*

- *Convenor:* Max Hamilton

##### *3.4 Other*