



AgNIC Governance & By-Laws

I. Name

The name of this organization shall be the Agriculture Network Information Collaborative interchangeable with the abbreviated form of the name: AgNIC. AgNIC, whose Internet address is <http://www.agnic.org>, is a diverse, voluntary global alliance of national and international institutions, including agricultural departments or ministries, research institutes, land-grant and other agricultural colleges and universities, faculties of agriculture and veterinary medicine, national agricultural libraries, and any other agriculture-related public or private organizations, both governmental and non-governmental. In this document, the organization may also be referred to as the alliance. Institutional members of AgNIC are referred to as Partners.

II. Aims and Objectives

AgNIC is customer-focused, providing openly accessible agricultural information over the Internet. Partners take responsibility for identifying information sources specific to agriculture (including basic, applied, and developmental research; extension; and teaching activities in a broad range of agricultural topics including food, natural resources, forestry, and aspects of the physical and social sciences) and supplying the metadata to the AgNIC discovery interface. The alliance is based upon the collaboration and cooperation of independent participants bound together by common interests and goals. Decision-making is achieved by general consensus of partner institutions whenever possible.

III. Membership

Subject to the approval of the AgNIC Executive Board, membership in the AgNIC alliance is open to academic research institutions, not-for-profit organizations, and others with significant, freely accessible, quality electronic information and resources which would be of benefit to agricultural communities and researchers around the world. All Partners commit to specific activities in support of the alliance and its work and are expected to participate in decision-making, policy development, and governance where possible.

a. Benefits of Membership

Partners receive benefits from the collective AgNIC alliance beyond those they can achieve on their own, thus justifying the local costs of participation. Membership allows each partner institution to make optimum use of its limited resources by offering these opportunities:



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- 1) to interact and share information resources with other national and international agricultural institutions and with professionals,
- 2) to participate in a global network,
- 3) to share services and use current technology,
- 4) to provide value-added services to constituencies,
- 5) to collaboratively develop topical areas and services,
- 6) to apply for funding using AgNIC's name, and
- 7) to contribute to policies affecting the direction and goals of AgNIC.

b. Categories of Membership

AgNIC partners may belong to one of four categories of membership based on the level of participation in the alliance.

1) Sustaining Partners:

- a) contribute content – full-text and other links - and metadata to the AgNIC system;
- b) (Library partners) participate in direct reference or referral services for AgNIC customers;
- c) are strongly encouraged to participate in AgNIC through attendance at annual meetings;
- d) may vote on issues raised before the Coordinating Committee;
- e) serve on AgNIC Executive Board, task forces, and Committees/Working Groups; and,
- f) submit an annual report of AgNIC related activities and other information, as requested, to the AgNIC Secretariat.

2) Strategic Partners:

- a) further AgNIC mission through collaborative projects;
- b) establish relationship with AgNIC via Memorandum of Understanding; and,
- c) may serve on AgNIC Committee/Working Groups and may attend meetings of the Coordinating Committee and the Executive Board, without vote.

3) Sponsoring Partners:

- a) provide significant funding in support of the AgNIC mission; examples might include funding for specific initiatives; travel support for partners to attend AgNIC meetings; sponsorship of AgNIC meetings or other activities.
- b) may serve on AgNIC Committees/Working Groups and may attend meetings of the Coordinating Committee and the Executive Board, without vote.

4) Emeritus Partners:

- a) Individuals who provided institutional representation to AgNIC during their professional career,
- b) Wish to remain engaged in support of the mission and goals of AgNIC,



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- c) Submit a letter of interest to the AgNIC Executive Board for inclusion, and
- d) May serve on AgNIC Committees/Working Groups and attend AgNIC Coordinating Committee annual meetings without vote.

At the discretion of the Executive Board, working relationships may be established with other entities for a specific project or goal without the requirement of formal AgNIC membership. Liaisons representing these relationships may attend meetings of the Coordinating Committee and the Executive Board, without vote, at the invitation of the Board.

c. Membership Guidelines and Requirements

- 1) Proposals for membership in AgNIC are submitted to the AgNIC Secretariat.
- 2) AgNIC membership must be approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the Executive Board.
- 3) Partners who fail to meet the expectations of the alliance may be removed from membership upon action of the Executive Board
- 4) Documents relating to the guidelines and requirements of membership are found in the AgNIC Recommended Guidelines and Procedures, including:
 - AgNIC Reference Policies
 - AgNIC Web Page Standards
 - AgNIC Content Selection Policies
 - Metadata Requirements

d. To apply for membership

As a Sustaining Partner in AgNIC, an institution or organization shall submit a letter of proposal to the AgNIC Secretariat at NAL, describing how the partner will contribute toward achieving the mission and vision of AgNIC. A description of the partner's contribution may include:

- 1) the significance of the selected subject area(s) for proposed contribution, including a review of similar or related Web resources;
- 2) a proposed AgNIC website (original content, value-added services, user-friendly interfaces, and reference service), or a collection of metadata records;
- 3) the resources to be committed to the project (travel to the annual meeting and technical support, including hardware, software, telecommunications, personnel, and adherence to specified standards); and,
- 4) (Library partners) how direct reference or referral services will be provided to AgNIC customers.

e. Membership Participation Guidelines for Sustaining Partners

Evidence of contribution to the AgNIC mission and vision will be based on one or more of the



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following:

- 1) An AgNIC Sustaining Partner will select one or more narrow subject areas in which it has particular expertise, resources, and interest to support, or will be a major contributor to another Partner's project. If two or more Partners have strong interests in the same or closely related subject areas, they will be encouraged to coordinate their activities.
 - a. Partners will utilize the World Wide Web (WWW) as the basis of organization and presentation of materials, creating and maintaining AgNIC pages which observe such structural and logical standards as are established by the AgNIC Coordinating Committee, and defined by the AgNIC Web Page Standards (AgNIC Recommended Guidelines and Procedures).
 - b. Partners will adhere to technical standards adopted by the Coordinating Committee, in order to support an open system architecture.
 - c. AgNIC Partner web pages are expected to include quality content that is research-based.
 - d. All internal and external links will be kept current and updated on a regular, annual basis.
 - e. AgNIC Partner web pages will include appropriate legal disclaimers to ensure appropriate use of the information mounted. Each Partner will be responsible for adhering to applicable copyright law in referring, pointing, or linking to materials created by others in constructing its AgNIC website.
- 2) Within vertical subject areas, Sustaining Partners that have library collaboration are encouraged to offer electronic reference service according to the AgNIC Reference Standards (AgNIC Recommended Guidelines and Procedures).
- 3) Sustaining Partners are encouraged to contribute content and metadata information to the central system such the AgNIC Resource database (AgNIC Recommended Guidelines and Procedures), the Calendar, or the News.
- 4) All partners will participate in AgNIC promotion and training activities and will report AgNIC website usage statistics [due each year on October 15 for the period October 1 to September 30], annual activities [due November 1 of each year] and other information as requested by the Secretariat.
- 5) All AgNIC partners are strongly encouraged to display the AgNIC logo prominently on relevant institutional or organizational websites. In cases where the use of the logo is prohibited, a statement of AgNIC membership may be included by using these words: [Name of institution] is a [sustaining, strategic, sponsoring] partner of the AgNIC alliance, a leading collaborative provider of access to quality food, agriculture, and natural resources information and expertise. If unable to continue supporting its subject coverage, an AgNIC Partner will notify the AgNIC Secretariat before suspending access and will work with the Secretariat to seek another Partner to assume responsibility for the subject.

IV. Organization and Administration

The organizers of AgNIC agreed upon a dynamic structure that would operate as a collaborative "alliance", with most organizational work accomplished by Committees/Working Groups and



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task forces. In this context, an alliance is defined as a voluntary organization of equal partners with mutual interests and goals, operating with minimal overhead and bureaucracy. Responsibilities for administrative functions in the AgNIC alliance are distributed among three entities: the Coordinating Committee, the Executive Board, and the Secretariat.

A. AgNIC Coordinating Committee

- Representatives from all Partners of the alliance are organized as the AgNIC Coordinating Committee, which works collaboratively to (a) set policies and operating procedures for the alliance; (b) determine subjects and approve content and structural, logical and technical standards for AgNIC websites; and (c) set an agenda for outreach and dissemination.
- Committees/Working Group Composition and Voting Rights Each Sustaining Partner has one vote on this Committees/Working Group, and it is recommended that at least one primary and one alternate Representative be named, to ensure that
- Representative will attend each meeting of the Committees/Working Group. Partners may also send other participants to meetings, but each Sustaining Partner will have only one vote.
 1. Meetings
 - 1) The Coordinating Committee holds an Annual Meeting in the spring, with the date determined by polling the Partners. To conduct business at the Coordinating Committee Group Meeting a quorum of at least 40% of the sustaining partners shall be required.
 2. Officers
 - 1) The officers of the AgNIC alliance are an Executive Board comprised of six partners elected from and reporting to the Coordinating Committee, each representing one of the AgNIC Sustaining Partner institutions: Chair, Chair-Elect/Vice-Chair, Past Chair, and three Members-at-Large. The Chair of the Executive Board also serves as Chair of the Coordinating Committee.

B. AgNIC Executive Board

The Executive Board serves as the administrative oversight group for the alliance and meets as necessary, but at least once a year.

Each year the AgNIC Coordinating Committee elects a Vice Chair/Chair-Elect and one Member-at-Large; the past year's Vice Chair/Chair-Elect becomes Chair, and the past year's Chair becomes Past Chair. Members-at-Large serve three-year terms. To provide continuity, these terms are staggered so that one Member-at-Large is elected each year.

Each member of the Executive Board has one vote. The Board also includes the AgNIC Coordinator as an ex-officio member who votes only to break a tie. The NAL Liaison to AgNIC is also an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Board.

1. Election Procedures

- 1) Composition of Nominating Committee/Working Group



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- 2) Each year's Nominating Committee/Working Group is comprised of the Past Chair, who may not be nominated for a position for the next year, and the most recently elected Member-at-Large.
- 3) All primary and alternate Representatives from Sustaining Partner institutions are eligible to run for election to the Executive Board. Seated Members-at-Large may run for Chair-Elect. A member can serve no more than two (2) consecutive terms, or six (6) years on the Executive Board. A member may be re-elected after one year of absence from elected office.
- 4) In the event of disability or withdrawal of the Chair, the title and all duties and obligations are assumed by the Past Chair. Should further succession to the office become necessary, the title, duties, and obligations are assumed by the seated Past Chair until elections, where a special election will be held. In the event of disability or withdrawal of other members of the Executive Board, the Chair will appoint an eligible member to fulfill the remainder of the current year of service. Any remainder of the term will be filled by special election held concurrently with the next regularly scheduled election.
- 5) A special election will be held in the case that a seated member of the Executive Board is elected for another position on the Board, such as Member-at-Large being elected as Incoming Chair. The slate would be comprised of the remaining list of members who ran for the office of "Member-at-Large" that year - after first agreeing to be on a special elections ballot. If no one on the current slate agrees to run for the office, then at least two other individuals would be identified for the special election slate for this office. This special election would be held within one week (seven days) of the annual election of officers for the AgNIC Executive Board.

2. Schedule for Nominations and Elections

- 1) The AgNIC Secretariat (i.e., AgNIC Coordinator) confirms the primary and alternate Representatives of all Sustaining Partners, i.e., the members of the AgNIC Coordinating Committee, on or before March 15 each year.
- 2) On or about March 15 each year the AgNIC Secretariat issues a call for nominations for election to the Executive Board.
- 3) The Nominating Committee receives nominations and checks to ensure that candidates are willing to serve if elected. If there are fewer than two nominations for any position, the Nominating Committee contacts eligible Representatives to encourage at least one additional nomination.
- 4) The Nominating Committee presents the slate of candidates to the Executive Board for review by May 1. The Executive Board reviews the slate of candidates and forwards the approved slate to the AgNIC Secretariat so that an election may be conducted by electronic mail on or before May 31.
- 5) At the annual meeting of the Coordinating Committee, the call for nominations is repeated, and a deadline for receipt of nominations set.
- 6) Votes are collected and counted by the Nominating Committee and the AgNIC Secretariat. If there is a tie, there is a run-off election.
- 7) Following the election, the results are announced by either the Chair or the AgNIC Secretariat.



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- 8) Those elected take office on July 1.

3. Responsibilities

The Executive Board is responsible for the following functions:

1. Reviewing new Partner applications, approving or rejecting those applications, and ensuring that new Partners are presented to the Coordinating Committee;
2. Polling partners of the Coordinating Committee as appropriate in regard to policy decisions which must be made between meetings of the Coordinating Committee, and making such decisions on behalf of the Coordinating Committee when necessary;
3. Approving the location of the annual Coordinating Committee meeting and preparing a draft agenda for that meeting;
4. Drafting quality criteria guidelines for participating institutions to follow in their AgNIC-related activities;
5. Performing other responsibilities assigned by the Coordinating Committee, e.g., creating task forces, standing Committees/Working Groups, and consulting bodies as needed, including individuals from other related and pertinent organizations as deemed necessary by the Board;
6. Proposing changes to alliance documents; Proposing dissolution if deemed necessary; and,
7. Communicating all actions and decisions to the AgNIC Coordinating Committee.

4. Duties

A. Duties of the Chair:

- 1) To recommend to the Executive Board measures considered desirable to further the objectives and broaden the effectiveness of AgNIC;
- 2) To call and schedule at least one membership business meeting of the alliance members annually to be held in conjunction with the annual members meeting;
- 3) To set the agenda for the Executive Board meetings and all membership business meetings;
- 4) To preside at all meetings of the Executive Board and Coordinating Committee;
- 5) To announce the election results; and
- 6) To send letters of invitation to the annual meeting, and follow-up letters of appreciation to speakers who have presented at the annual meeting.

B. Duties of the Past Chair:

- 1) To advise the Chair on matters requiring a historical perspective;
- 2) To Chair the Nominations and Elections Committee;



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- 3) To step into the Chair position if the Chair steps down prior to the end of that term; and
- 4) To collect suggestions for revisions to the Governance and By-Laws, and to the Guidelines for review and consideration by the Executive Board, and to serve in other capacities as called upon.

C. Duties of the Vice Chair/Chair-Elect:

- 1) To preside at meetings of the Board and of the membership in the absence of the Chair;
- 2) To assist the Chair with any projects, policy planning or other business affairs which the Chair might designate;
- 3) To serve as the Recorder of Action Items during the Executive Board meetings.

D. Duties of the Member-at-Large:

- 1) Attend AgNIC Executive Board meetings and participate in planning and decision-making to move the network in a positive direction;
- 2) A Member-at-Large may also be appointed to fill a vacancy for the office of Chair-Elect or Past-Chair for a one-year term as created by a vacancy; and
- 3) Members-at-Large are expected to perform other assignments as the Executive Board directs.

E. AgNIC Secretariat

It was agreed by the organizers of the AgNIC Alliance that there was a need for the National Agricultural Library (NAL) to provide administrative coordination of the basic activities and structural components of the Alliance at the national level. To this end, the AgNIC Secretariat is housed at NAL for the purpose of managing the day-to-day operations of the AgNIC Alliance and website. NAL recuses itself from competitive grants pursued by AgNIC partners as appropriate.

Composition

The Secretariat includes the AgNIC Coordinator, a NAL liaison to AgNIC, and program staff for technical, content, and other support, all of whom report to the NAL Associate Director for Information Products Division, Digital Library Branch.

Responsibilities

The AgNIC Secretariat coordinates alliance Partner activities and serves as the central point of information concerning AgNIC Web pages and the AgNIC alliance.

The Secretariat's functions include:

- 1) Coordinating membership activities, including but not limited to:
- 2) maintaining an online registry of subject responsibility that new participants can check to avoid duplication;



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- 3) providing information to potential new Partners; advising Partners on AgNIC related issues; maintaining listservs or discussion groups for communication among AgNIC Partners;
- 4) The Secretariat maintains a draft set of minutes of all official meetings of the Board, which is furnished to the members of the Executive Board within thirty days after each meeting. At the next meeting, these minutes are presented for adoption. The minutes may be amended to make factual corrections concerning debates or votes, but cannot be changed to modify actions previously taken;
- 5) coordinating and supervising technology development and bringing new technology developments to the attention of the Membership; coordinating and participating in meetings of the Coordinating Committee and the Executive Board; administering agreement funds as needed; producing reports from the Coordinating Committee and Executive Board as required; executing actions recommended by the Executive Board and Coordinating Committee; maintaining central AgNIC portal; and g) other duties as requested by the Coordinating Committee or the Executive Board

V. Parliamentary Authority

The rules contained in the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* shall govern the alliance in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with this Governance Document and any special rules of order the alliance may adopt.

VI. Amendments

- a) Proposed amendments to the *AgNIC Governance Document & By-Laws* may be submitted through either the Past Chair, upon being asked to review the document by the Executive Board, or by petition of five Sustaining Partners of the Coordinating Committee
- b) Proposed amendments shall be received by the Executive Board 30 days prior to the time at which they are to be considered. The AgNIC Secretariat will make editorial changes as needed and shall contact the sponsor if substantive changes are necessary for proposed amendments to be in the proper order.
- c) A two-thirds positive vote of the members of the Board shall be required for approval of proposed amendments.
- d) The Board shall consult with the AgNIC Secretariat to make editorial changes as needed and shall contact the sponsor if substantive changes are necessary for proposed amendments to be in proper order. Copies of the final draft shall be distributed to each member of the Executive Board at least thirty days prior to the meeting at which they are to be considered, or prior to



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the final vote by the Coordinating Committee. Copies of the final draft, as approved by the Board, shall be distributed to each member of the Coordinating Committee at least 15 days prior to either, the meeting at which they will be considered, or 15 days from the call for a virtual vote.

- e) Balloting shall be either in person at a Coordinating Committee Meeting or electronically. A two-thirds positive vote of the voting partners of the Coordinating Committee present and voting at the meeting shall be required for adoption of proposed amendments. If by electronic means or by mail then at least 51% of the voting partners must participate to constitute a quorum and the amendments shall need a two-thirds positive vote, of those voting, for passage.
- f) Unless otherwise provided for, amendments shall take effect immediately upon adoption by the Coordinating Committee. Final changes to the documents will be distributed and posted on the AgNIC web site within 15 days of the vote.