

# DDI Alliance External Review: Summary and Recommendations

## July 8, 2011

### Background

In 2010, at the request of the DDI Alliance members, the DDI Steering Committee initiated a thorough and independent review of DDI governance and IP issues. The Steering Committee contracted with Breckenhill Inc. to provide a review under the following terms of reference:

- Clarify who holds the intellectual property rights to the DDI specification and how the Alliance can best protect its IP (the specification is currently distributed under the Lesser Gnu Public License)
- Consider alternatives to the current Alliance governance structure, including becoming a nonprofit or joining an existing standards organization
- Review the structure of host institutions and associations described in the Bylaws with a view toward opening up the Alliance to others to participate in governance, understanding what it means to be a host institution, and putting in place a system for periodic review and renewal of the governance body
- Review the Bylaws and rewrite to be more specific on the above points
- Provide guidance on having a Constitution that does not change and Bylaws that are easier to change, separating the mechanism for revising the specification from the Bylaws
- Review the membership agreement and suggest content
- Suggest content of a contributor agreement for those contributing products to the Alliance
- Review the current Conflict of Interest form used by the Alliance and provide guidance on how the Alliance should approach this broad area

After interviewing a large group of DDI stakeholders and consulting widely on legal issues, Ned Eustace, consultant for Breckenhill, provided a report to the Steering Committee in May 2011 detailing the findings related to the above questions. The Steering Committee subsequently determined that Breckenhill had met the terms of the contract and had provided useful evidence that the Steering Committee could take forward with its own analysis and recommendations.

This summary document, written by DDI Alliance Chair Chuck Humphrey, Vice Chair Mari Kleemola, and Director Mary Vardigan and subsequently approved for publication by the Alliance Expert and Steering Committees, organizes observations from the Breckenhill report under four main headings, summarizes findings, and pulls out implicit and explicit recommendations in each area.

## External Report Overview

The external review conducted by Breckenhill Inc. found the DDI Alliance to be fundamentally doing very well with good uptake of the standards and a healthy culture of collaboration. It emphasized the fact that the Alliance has accomplished a great deal and that DDI is now being used in over 70 countries around the world.

While this is essentially a “good news” story, there are definitely some important areas to work on and the report suggests several possible ways to improve the Alliance and its operations in order to take it to the next level of effectiveness. Change is needed to accommodate a shifting environment and new stakeholders. The report suggests possible approaches to change in the areas of IP protection, governance, branding, tools, funding, succession planning, conflict of interest, training, communications, marketing, and monitoring. Better communication in general is especially important.

## Recommendations for Improvement

Recommendations from the external review report are grouped below into high-level categories with broad summaries of findings and specific recommendations.

### I. Alliance Culture and Norms

The external review identified the Alliance’s culture and norms as strengths of the organization that are widely embraced by its members. DDI stakeholders believe the collaborative nature of the Alliance is an asset to be protected and valued. What *does* need improvement is communication and a shared vision of where the Alliance wants to go.

The Steering Committee sees two recommendations in this area:

- (1) Create and agree on a Mission and Guiding Principles document
- (2) Review and revise the Strategic Plan:
  - Create tie-in with Mission and Principles
  - Recognize dual development lines (DDI 2.\* and 3.\*)
  - Add performance indicators and milestones to assess the Plan
  - Get buy-in from stakeholders and communicate the Plan broadly
  - Revisit the Plan every year looking at performance

## II. Alliance Governance

Interviews with stakeholders revealed wide satisfaction with the DDI Alliance's affiliation with ICPSR and the University of Michigan. Research into alternative hosting arrangements -- pursuing non-profit status and moving DDI under the umbrella of a standards organization like OASIS -- was undertaken, but the results did not establish perceived benefit to either option. Making the Alliance an independent organization outside of UM/ICPSR would be both a cumbersome and expensive proposition and affords no intrinsic power in protecting the interests of the Alliance. While being part of OASIS would have the benefit of established procedures and processes, there are substantial fees involved and the Alliance would lose its independence and its culture. Accordingly, the suggestion of the external review, with which the Steering Committee concurs, is that the Alliance remain at the University of Michigan with a Memorandum of Understanding spelling out the relationship between the two entities.

Other governance recommendations arising from the external review that are supported by the Steering Committee include instituting a process for changing the Bylaws, developing a succession plan for the DDI Director, and approving the draft Conflict of Interest policy. The review report suggests that a thorough revision of the Bylaws is necessary and provides a draft that might be used as a start of the revision process, with the section on procedures for updating the specification removed. The draft identifies ICPSR as the current single Host Institution and sets up an Executive Committee whose members are elected by the Alliance from among the membership. It also attempts to underscore the relationships among committees as a system of checks and balances to prevent any one committee from taking on too much power. Because the Bylaws are so important to stakeholders, it is recommended that a committee be formed to create a set of Bylaws acceptable to all.

The report also emphasizes the importance of establishing a succession plan for the DDI Director and the fact that it may be healthy for the Director to come from another member organization in the future. The role and responsibilities of this position need to be spelled out. It is also suggested that the organization commission regular forms of monitoring, such as audits and evaluations, to ensure that funds are being employed for the intended purpose and that planned outcomes are achieved.

In addition, the report suggests that the Draft Conflict of Interest policy be approved and annual statements from relevant parties be collected. While there have been no actual conflict of interest allegations made, the *appearance* of conflict of interest or the potential can be just as harmful.

Recommendations in this area:

- (1) Establish a subcommittee, including members from both the Expert Committee and Steering Committee, to work on new Bylaws over the course of the upcoming year with a formal vote to approve a final document at the end of the process. This recommendation recognizes that ICPSR shall remain the Host Institution and that the Steering Committee shall continue to have oversight authority, although it may be renamed and reconfigured.

- (2) Establish a subcommittee to review the process for changing the specification and to create a new document that is separate from the Bylaws
- (3) Establish a succession plan for the DDI Director
- (4) Institute an annual financial audit and institute periodic formal evaluations
- (5) Approve the Conflict of Interest policy and get annual statements from relevant parties

### **III. Alliance Products**

The Steering Committee agrees with the findings of the review report that several major changes are needed in this area. First, related to the above discussion of the University of Michigan as the legal home of the Alliance, the Steering Committee recommends that the Alliance register a Collective mark, which all the members may display, to protect Alliance intellectual property rights. The Collective mark would indicate use of and support for the DDI. The Alliance could decide to let non-members use the mark for a fee, which could generate needed revenue. The University of Michigan has agreed to police the mark and this would be spelled out in the Memorandum of Understanding described above. The use of a Collective mark would address the problem identified in the report that the current GNU license is not appropriate for a standards specification and is not enforceable.

The interviews with stakeholders found a great deal of dissatisfaction with what was perceived to be neglect of the DDI 2.\* development branch. There was widespread agreement to continue to support both DDI-Codebook and DDI-Lifecycle and to finish deploying this new branding strategy broadly across Alliance products.

The lack of tools for DDI was mentioned by nearly everyone during the interviews, but it is not clear whether the Alliance should actively support tools development or not. Either way, a clear policy is needed.

Training was another area requiring attention, according to stakeholder interviews. Training does not appear to meet all stakeholder needs and is too tightly controlled by a small group. Here again, it is not clear whether the Alliance should be responsible for training, but there should be a clear policy.

Related to all of the above, implementing a clear marketing plan was also a finding of the report. Getting statistical software companies interested in DDI was seen as an important goal to pursue. While not inexpensive, such a marketing strategy is likely to pay off in the long run.

Finally, with respect to the specification itself as a product of the Alliance, it was suggested that a thorough evaluation of the existing standards be performed in preparation for DDI 4 to ensure that they meet stakeholder needs.

Recommendations in this area:

- (1) Stop using the GNU license for future Alliance products
- (2) Register a Collective mark for DDI in the U.S. and other countries, policed by the University of Michigan
- (3) Establish a subcommittee to work on (a) preparing the new logo for the Collective mark (a draft is provided as an appendix) and distributing it to members and (b) a possible licensing structure for third parties with an associated fee structure
- (4) Formally adopt DDI-Codebook and DDI-Lifecycle as brands and communicate broadly
- (5) Set policy regarding the position of the Alliance on tools development
- (6) Get statistical software vendors involved
- (7) Set policy regarding the position of the Alliance on training; depending on outcome, define training strategies
- (8) Implement marketing strategy
- (9) Evaluate the standards in preparation for DDI 4

#### **IV. Alliance Membership and Finances**

The Steering Committee recognizes the importance of maintaining the current membership while also recruiting new members to strengthen the organization and the standards and products that we develop and support. The review report raised several points about membership that need consideration. In particular, the report emphasized the importance of enhancing the revenue stream of the Alliance. A few suggestions were made. First, the Alliance might explore the development of new categories of membership. This could include setting up a new mechanism for “sponsoring organizations,” built around a core competency or a declared preference for a specific type of contribution. For example, a sponsor might wish to make progress in fostering a stronger relationship with another standard and might contribute funds dedicated to that purpose. Having multiple Sponsoring Institutions could also inform succession and future Secretariat arrangements by providing a broader set of options to the Alliance for a future Host Institution. Another suggestion was to implement a tiered membership structure with a graduated fee structure, which many international organizations use.

Recommendations in this area:

- (1) Find ways to bring in more money, including getting more institutions to join the Alliance
- (2) Evaluate the feasibility of establishing a set of membership classifications with associated fees
- (3) Evaluate the feasibility of creating a Host/sponsor/partner mechanism, with these sponsors paying the Alliance to move specific projects forward