

IASC Organisational Review (2016–2025) - Process for Developing the IASC Review Recommendations

The recommendations presented here as a part of the IASC Review process are directly grounded in stakeholder feedback and the data that was collected as part of the Review process.

Data Collection: The review committee gathered qualitative and quantitative data from three primary streams:

- **High-Level Strategic Interviews (n=24):** In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with IASC's internal leadership, Working Group Chairs, and representatives from key external partners. Crucially, this stream also included specific outreach to Indigenous Permanent Participants and Early Career Fellows to ensure diverse perspectives were heard.
- **Internal Stakeholder Survey (n=28):** A confidential survey was distributed to Council members, Working Group members, and Fellows to capture broader sentiment on operational efficacy, strategic alignment, and emerging priorities.
- A longitudinal analysis was performed by cross-referencing findings against the **2016 IASC International Review**. This allowed the identification of persistent structural challenges ("unresolved issues") versus new, emerging risks.

All interview transcripts and survey responses were anonymised and subjected to thematic analysis. To ensure a robust output, the analysis focuses on consensus and also integrated "outlier" perspectives—such as the specific needs of smaller Arctic nations, the environmental ethics of travel raised by Fellows, and the "institutional invisibility" reported by some partners. These distinct viewpoints were critical in shaping specific recommendations (e.g., the "Green Meeting Strategy" and "Targeted Outreach").

Formulation of Recommendations: The recommendations given below were mapping identified challenges to actionable solutions.

- **Strategic Gaps** (e.g., the "Impact Gap" with funders) led to recommendations for new tools like the "Strategic Impact Tracker."
- **Operational Risks** (e.g., Secretariat burnout) led to the call for an immediate "FTE Mapping" exercise.
- **Persistent Issues** from 2016 (e.g., communication failures) were re-evaluated to propose stronger mechanisms, such as term limits and onboarding documentation.

Please note that the Review process has not yet been finalised, and this list gives preliminary findings. The Review Committee will provide a finalised report in Feb 2026, and may change or exclude some recommendations given here, or include new ones as it finalises the process.

Consolidated Recommendations Matrix

The following table synthesises the key recommendations emerging from the 2026 review process. It categorises actions by strategic area and cross-references them with the 2016 review to highlight persistent structural challenges versus new imperatives.

A. Governance & Secretariat Resilience	Status (2016 vs 2026)	Detailed Context & Rationale for Recommendation
Conduct an "FTE Mapping" Exercise	New	Operational Resilience Risk: 2026 data identifies the Secretariat as a potential "single point of failure." Stakeholders have described it as "massively under-resourced" relative to its expanded mandate, which includes participation in complex global initiatives like the IPY, UN Decade of Cryosphere, amongst others. A formal, data-driven audit of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) workload versus current staff capacity is urgently required. This evidence base is critical to justify budget increases to the Council and to de-risk the current model, where the organisation relies heavily on the extraordinary efforts of a few individuals rather than a resilient system. Without this adjustment, the extremely high administrative burden pose a tangible risk of burnout and operational issues further down the line.
Reform Decision-Making (Consensus)	New	Feedback suggests that the "Unanimous Consensus" model renders IASC increasingly slow and reactive, particularly in the current, volatile geopolitical climate. While consensus fosters unity, it can also lead to paralysis during rapid shifts. Establishing a Working Group to explore "Qualified Majority" or "Opt-Out" mechanisms for <i>non-constitutional operational decisions</i> is recommended. This would allow the organisation to respond nimbly to emerging crises.
Implement Council responsibilities and Term Limits	Unresolved Strategic Issue	Engagement Stagnation: The 2016 review explicitly called for "active" representatives to invigorate the organisation. However, 2026 interviews reinforce that this remains an unresolved issue. The persistence of this issue for a full decade suggests that voluntary compliance is difficult unless there are stronger mechanisms for implementing responsibilities, and possible term limits to ensure fresh energy, diverse perspectives, and active national engagement.
Streamline Bureaucracy (Medal Program)	NEW (Specific)	Operational Efficiency: Stakeholders have identified specific administrative processes that yield low value for high effort. The IASC Medal selection process was cited as a prime example of administrative excess that consumes disproportionate time and effort. Identifying, reviewing and simplifying such administrative processes would free up valuable Secretariat and Council bandwidth.
Diversify Secretariat Support	Evolved	Financial Stability: The dependency on a single host country (for 3-5 years each) for Secretariat funding creates an ongoing long-term vulnerability. While the current arrangement is stable, future geopolitical or economic shifts could jeopardise operations. IASC should explore mechanisms to diversify funding sources and create a contingency reserve to ensure long-term stability and resilience.

B. Strategic Impact & Implementation	Status (2016 vs 2026)	Detailed Context & Rationale for Recommendation
Develop a "Strategic Impact Tracker"	NEW	Proving Value with Data: Moving from anecdotal success stories to a robust, data-driven mechanism is essential for the next decade. There is a need to systematically track <i>where</i> and <i>how</i> ICARP and other IASC priorities appear in national and international funding calls (e.g. Horizon Europe). This addresses the identified "Impact Gap" where funders may overlook IASC priorities. Demonstrable Return on Investment (ROI) data will empower national

		representatives to advocate more effectively for continued contribution and participation.
"Crosswalk" Strategic Documents	NEW	Reducing Duplication & Fatigue: The Arctic science landscape is crowded. To avoid duplication of effort for the limited pool of experts who serve on multiple bodies, IASC should formalise a process to "crosswalk" its strategic plans with those of Arctic Council Working Groups and other entities working at a similar level. Identifying overlaps and shared goals systematically will lead to more efficient resource use and clearer, unified messages to the policy community.
Pre-ICARP Audit	NEW	Combatting "Blank Slate" Fatigue: Experts expressed frustration with the tendency to "reinvent the wheel" during every decadal planning cycle. Mandating that future ICARP processes begin with a thorough audit of <i>existing</i> priorities prevents the "blank slate" fatigue and ensures that unfinished business from the previous decade is not lost but built upon.
Establish a "Science-to-Action" Bridge	NEW	There is a notable disconnect between IASC's "pure science" focus and the applied needs of action-oriented bodies working in the Arctic. Creating a formal dialogue structure creates a "bridge" to ensure IASC research feeds directly into practical mitigation and community projects. This enhances the societal relevance of IASC's work and ensures scientific findings translate into tangible benefits for Arctic communities.

C. Community, Inclusion & Indigenous Engagement	Status (2016 vs 2026)	Detailed Context & Rationale for Recommendation
Recruit "Cohorts" of Indigenous Fellows	NEW	Combatting Isolation: Feedback highlights the "loneliness" of being a sole Indigenous voice in a room of western scientists. Moving from individual Fellowships to recruiting "cohorts" provides a critical mass for peer support, psychological safety, and collective empowerment within the IASC structure.
Establish a Participation Funding stream	REPEATED & EVOLVED	Removing Financial Barriers: The 2016 review focused on MOUs and formal agreements; the 2026 findings identify <i>funding</i> as the primary barrier to participation. Indigenous participant/offices often lack the resources to attend non-political scientific meetings. Creating a dedicated travel/time fund (similar to the Arctic Council's Algu Fund) is recommended to move to a practical, equitable engagement.
Targeted Outreach to "Invisible" Partners	NEW	Institutional Relevance: Some Indigenous participants/offices report "minimal interactions" and a lack of knowledge about IASC. It is recommended to launch a specific outreach initiative towards these groups, moving beyond reliance on personal networks (which are fragile) to build robust, enduring institutional relationships.
Create a Shared Indigenous Advisory Committee	NEW	Reducing Administrative Burden: Indigenous organisations are often stretched thin by requests from multiple bodies. Exploring the feasibility of a joint Indigenous Scientific Advisory Committee shared with other bodies that require such advice would significantly reduce the administrative burden on Indigenous partners while ensuring their voice is heard at a high level.
Standardise "Co-Creation"	EVOLVED	Methodological Shift: Moving beyond "consultation" to "co-creation" requires a fundamental shift in how research is conceived. IASC is recommended to formalise a policy that encourages research planning to start <i>with</i> Indigenous communities from the outset (defining the questions), rather than bringing fully formed plans to them for validation.
Asian Engagement Strategy	EVOLVED	Global Shift: The center of gravity in global science is shifting. IASC is recommended to develop a specific strategy to deepen engagement with Asian members, reflecting their growing scientific capacity and ensuring IASC evolves beyond a Euro/North-American centric worldview.

Support for Small Nations	NEW	Capacity Building: Smaller Arctic nations struggle to match the administrative capacity of larger states, risking their exclusion from key decisions. Implementing tiered engagement models or simplified reporting mechanisms would help level the playing field and ensure diverse national participation.
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D. Operational Efficiency & Sustainability	Status (2016 vs 2026)	Detailed Context & Rationale for Recommendation
Commission a "Shared Services" Feasibility Study	NEW	Radical Efficiency: The proliferation of Arctic organisations creates redundancy. IASC, with other interested organisations, is recommended to commission a study on the potential for "Shared Back-Office Services" (IT, Web, basic admin), as this could significantly reduce overheads and administrative burdens.
Develop a "Green Meeting Strategy"	NEW	Environmental Ethics: Addressing concerns regarding the high carbon footprint of Arctic science travel is critical for credibility. It is recommended to study the feasibility of concrete, measurable strategies like rotating regional hubs or carbon budgeting to align its operations with its climate science message.
Create "Onboarding Packs" for new member reps	UNRESOLVED STRATEGIC ISSUE	The failure of national representatives to communicate IASC activities back to their home nations was identified in 2016 and remains a major issue in 2026. Formal onboarding materials are recommended to clarify the expectation that representatives act as IASC network nodes and to reduce the long learning curve for new members and representatives.
Refine ASSW Business Meetings	EVOLVED	Productivity: Feedback suggests that ASSW business meetings often devolve into passive reporting sessions. Reviewing the structure to ensure they are productive workspaces for decision-making and active collaboration would enhance the value of the annual summit.

E. Scientific Priorities & Global Role	Status (2016 vs 2026)	Detailed Context & Rationale for Recommendation
"Terrestrial Flagship" planning and implementation	NEW	Balancing Priorities: The success of MOSAiC has highlighted a disparity between marine and terrestrial research coordination. Planning and implementing a "Terrestrial Flagship" (e.g., a pan-Arctic terrestrial monitoring program) would address critical data gaps identified by Working Group chairs and rebalance the scientific portfolio.
Data Harmonisation for IPY	REPEATED & URGENT	Legacy Planning: The upcoming IPY will generate an unprecedented volume of data. Prioritising the creation of a data harmonisation framework <i>now</i> is essential to ensure this data is interoperable, accessible, and usable for global policy, preventing the creation of "data graveyards."
Codify "Science Diplomacy" Lessons	NEW	Global Leadership: IASC's successful navigation of the recent geopolitical crises offers valuable lessons for the world. Publishing a "Best Practices" guide or convening a dialogue on maintaining scientific cooperation during geopolitical crises would position IASC as a global thought leader in science diplomacy.
Maintain Social Science Integration	EVOLVED	Breaking Silos: The integration of social sciences remains a work in progress. Committing to continuing the "Arctic Congress" joint meeting format is a proven mechanism to ensure Social and Natural sciences remain structurally integrated, preventing the re-emergence of disciplinary fragmentation.

F. Fellowship Program Specifics	Status (2016 vs 2026)	Detailed Context & Rationale for Recommendation
Establish an Alumni Network	NEW	Retaining Talent: Engagement with Fellows currently drops off significantly once their term ends. Creating a formal mechanism to keep past fellows engaged allows IASC to leverage their experience and maintain a vibrant, growing network of "IASC ambassadors".
Cohort Building	NEW	Cross-Pollination: Fellows report feeling "siloed" within their specific Working Groups. Implementing mandatory cross-Working Group bonding activities at the start of the fellowship would foster interdisciplinary connections and a stronger sense of cohort identity.

G. IASC Medal Program Assessment and Recommendations	Status (2016 vs 2026)	Detailed Context & Rationale for Recommendation
Re-found the Medal's Purpose	NEW	Criteria Modernization: Redefine the selection criteria to explicitly include "transformative impact" and "exceptional mentorship." This shift allows for the recognition of mid-career scientists who are actively shaping the field, rather than limiting the award to lifetime achievement. Introducing distinct categories (e.g., Scientific Leadership, Indigenous Partnership) broadens representation.
Establish a Proactive "Canvassing" Committee	NEW	Diversifying Nominees: Create a diverse committee specifically tasked with actively soliciting nominations from underrepresented groups, regions, and disciplines. This proactive approach aims to counter the bias inherent in passive nomination systems where only well-connected individuals are put forward.
Redesign the Nomination Process	NEW	Reducing Barriers: Overhaul the system by implementing a low-barrier, two-stage process. An initial simple online form would be followed by a shortlist, with compiling the full application packages only done for shortlisted individuals. This reduces the administrative burden on nominators and Secretariat staff.
Maximize Visibility & Strategic Impact	NEW	Elevating Profile: Reinstate and elevate the Medal Lecture as a premier, high-visibility event at ASSW to inspire the community. Develop a professional communications strategy (e.g., video profiles) to make the award "newsworthy" and amplify its reach beyond the immediate Arctic circle.