

Minutes: Alternet Steering Committee Meeting 2024

26-27 November 2024

INBO - Brussels, Belgium

Room: Room 01.70 - Ferdinand Peeters

Present in-person: Philip Roche (Chair), Jiska van Dijk (Council Chair), Maurice Hoffmann, Mart Külvik, Riikka Paloniemi, Adriana Cliville Morato, Karmen Czett, Tyler Kulfan

Present remotely: Allan Watt (Vice Chair), Marie Vandewalle, Joan Pino, Mark Frenzel, Sibylle Schroer

No present: Ana Lillebø, Juliette Young, Lisa Norton

Minutes: Tyler Kulfan

Day 1 (26 November 2024)

1. Welcome - Philip

Those present were welcomed and the meeting was opened by Chair Philip Roche.

2. Acceptance of agenda; AOB inquiry - Philip

The agenda for the Steering Committee meeting had been distributed prior to the meeting. The agenda was accepted and the meeting commenced.

3. Official acceptance of previous MB meeting minutes - Philip ([doc 1](#), [doc 2](#))

The minutes of the previous MB (now Steering Committee) meeting were distributed. Minor changes and rephrasing of the decision concerning Maurice Hoffmann's retirement from INBO and the MB were suggested. The changing of the names of the various bodies was noted; the MB was renamed as the Alternet Steering Committee to prevent liability for any potential malpractice, and the Executive Committee became the Management Board. A definition of malpractice was provided by Maurice. The business plan and budget of Eklipse is needed for purposes related to Alternet's participation in BioAgora. In the minutes it is stated that the budget was sent by Eklipse, and it is presently requested for it to be resent.

4. Report on the Council meeting (Feb 2024) – expectations and agreements - Jiska ([doc 3](#))

Jiska shared the overview of the Council meeting in February 2024 and highlighted certain issues from the meeting.

In-kind website section; commenter on call texts; european projects working group; and collaborative projects initiatives have had no progress and need to advance prior to the Council

meeting in February 2025. Task force leaders should be appointed when task forces are assembled. Plans for how to advance initiatives will be discussed throughout the course of the present meeting. A list of tasks with associated task leaders is needed.

Collaboration with SER has not proceeded to date. Adriana noted that CREAM could assist in setting up such a collaboration. She also mentioned Louis from CREAM as a person with valuable positioning for initiatives concerning EU projects. Philip suggested reviewing other science societies of interest. The Eclipse network of networks was positioned for this type of scanning and collaboration in the past, and the Biodiversity Knowledge Agora will do so in the future.

Sibylle Schroer has been contacted and it's strongly suggested to the Council that she be added to the SC for the task of monitoring Alternet participation in EU projects. For the EU project task force on scanning potential projects of interest, the goal is somewhat different and would not necessarily fall under Sibylle's leadership; someone should be appointed to lead this initiative on scanning and commenting on draft calls.

Alternet's IPBES plenary stakeholder position is occupied by Juliette Young; it should be considered if this is a position which is still valuable and relevant for Alternet to retain. If so, Juliette can determine whether she would like to retain this position or if it should be filled by someone else.

5. Statutes & recap of decisions of the in-between (Old) Management Board meeting - Maurice ([doc 4](#))

A recap of the need for updated statutes was shared by Maurice, including the change of address. The legal liability of the (old) Management Board was likewise noted, which prompted a broader revision of the statutes. Revised Title 4 (Management) was reviewed. The chairs and vice chairs of the Alternet Council and SC and treasurer comprise the "board of directors." SC members are appointed by the MB, and MB members are nominated by the AC (Council). Renewal prior to the end of the 36 months term is via a proposal on the agenda of the AC meeting. Starting and ending dates of the present MB need to be defined; as such, reinstatement of the current MB should be on the 2025 AC agenda. The statutes will be re-translated into Dutch and it will be ensured that the text is acceptable; they can then be finalized.

An in-between meeting of the Council in January to review/accept changes to the statutes is recommended for January and a doodle will be distributed by Tyler.

It was inquired whether the change of address can be executed presently and all agreed. All contracts will need to be subsequently updated.

Alternet partner institutes are renewed automatically in membership subscription unless they explicitly terminate their membership.

6. Overview of finances - Maurice ([doc 4.1](#))

Maurice shared an overview of the financial state of Alternet and spending in 2024. Membership fees have been received; to date, all but about 4-5 have paid. Individual reminders to non-paying members will be distributed this week.

There is a great amount of remaining funds available from European projects; for this reason, Alternet is hiring a research assistant and will renew its pursuit of administrative and financial support. The support staff would be paid via overheads if viable support can be found. VAT issues were discussed; support on VAT issues from Deloitte is likewise being presently obtained.

Tyler will be employed by Alternet in 2025 as a sole trader, and associated VAT concerns will likewise be addressed by Deloitte. The budget for secretariat will need to be raised somewhat for reimbursement of travel costs (for SC, secretariat, etc.); e.g. the travel costs for Tyler's current participation in the MB are identified under MB meeting costs.

6. Governance and coordination - Management Board

- 6a: Alternet/Eclipse : MoU draft ([doc 5](#) - Jiska)

Jiska introduced an Alternet/Eclipse draft MoU that has been prepared by Alternet management board as part of an Alternet - Eclipse task force (composed of Marie Vandewalle, Uta Jacob, Nils Bunnefeld, Allan Watt, Juliette Young, Philip Roche, Maurice Hoffmann, and Jiska van Dijk). The document developed by Alternet MB was sent 10 days prior to the Steering committee meeting to the Alternet-Eclipse task force and then directly forwarded to all Eclipse members. The different Eclipse governance bodies (KCB, MEG, EMB and SAB) are currently reviewing the document. The goal expressed by Alternet is to complete a consensus document prior to the 2025 Council meeting. Alternet is officially the legal body under which Eclipse can operate. Eclipse's projects' (ECO-Ready, Restoreid) contracts were signed by Jiska.

Jiska inquired what Eclipse hosting means to Alternet and opened for discussion. Sibylle and Carmen noted that a lot is being asked of Eclipse from European projects (esp. BioAgora) and to ensure that we have the support necessary to be up to the task; Allan stated that reconciling the financial issues is the key to a healthy relationship. In-kind work from CREAM on behalf of both Alternet and Eclipse is being done in the form of web hosting. Allan suggested associated costs could be spent from overheads. Allan also inquired if Eclipse BioAgora costs are funded by UFZ exclusively or also Alternet; it is only UFZ that is responsible. A strategy needs to be compiled with UFZ to explicitly allocate coordination work and determine how it will be executed. Allan stated that there needs to be good will between the parties involved. Philip noted that Alternet support requires that some funds are taken from Eclipse project income to be used by Alternet, and emphasized that there is no intention on the part of Alternet to interfere in the operation of Eclipse. Access to such materials as Eclipse budgets and project budgets would be valuable for Alternet; and would in no way suggest interference. Maurice commented that one

issue preventing clarity is that projects of Eklipse were entered via UFZ rather than Alternet. In principle, overheads available from Eklipse projects should be available to Eklipse. Clear and open communication and updating between Alternet, Eklipse, and UFZ is needed for optimal transparency. Mark Frenzel proposed arranging a bilateral meeting with UFZ, Eklipse, and Alternet.

Advancement on the agreement between the two parties is urgently needed, and the more input from both parties the better. Mart noted that this issue keeps coming up and friendly resolution is a priority issue. All are encouraged to review the document and comment.

- 6b: Alternet Collaboration Project: call launch date ([doc 6](#), [doc 7](#))

The Alternet collaborative projects initiative has been developed over the past year, combining the MSR and AHIA activities. Joan has shared a rough template with Tyler that can be adapted for CP proposals. When these materials are prepared and submission protocol is established, the call can then be launched.

Proposals should have names, institutes, names of project members, type of action (scope, goal, intended outputs). Joan shared his draft template with the SC. Philip suggested incorporating elements on the type/scale of project/proposal and elements from 2.1 and 2.2 from doc 6 in the form of tick-boxes. Maurice suggested that the seven criteria mentioned in the draft call be included in the proposal template. He also noted that contracts are established with the participants in successful proposals. Deliverable timelines should be firmly established.

Proposed launch date: 15 December 2024 through 15 February 2025.

- 6c: Alternet Conference

Tyler provided an overview of the state of conference organization. The 2025 conference will be hosted by CESAM in Aveiro, Portugal from 13-16 May. A combined organising and scientific committee has supported the CESAM team in planning the contents and structure of this conference, which is entitled: "Achieving Transformative Change for Biodiversity." A call for sessions was distributed; 30 proposals were received in addition to the seven internally decided sessions. Keynote speakers are being confirmed.

A call for abstracts will be distributed in December.

7. Update on contracts - Management Board

Jiska shared an update on the secondments, contracts, and employment agreements that are currently managed by Alternet. These range from sole traderships to secondments. A sole trader contract agreement was prepared by Jiska and shared this morning with Tyler for Alternet secretariat work.

Interviews will take place later this week for the hiring of a research assistant to work on CO-OP4CBD, BioAgora, and to scan for potential projects. Four candidates are under consideration. A direct employment contract for this future employee is preferred.

- 7a: Alternet positions & 7b. Alternet's EU projects - Jiska

Philip has recommended that Sibylle Schroer joins the Alternet Steering Committee to represent Alternet's involvement in EU projects, overseeing its progress and considering future participation in projects of interest.

The issue of accomplishing Alternet's tasks in BioAgora and establishing the role that Alternet will play in the science service is critical and organization of Alternet's place within the present and future structure is needed. Maurice questioned who is taking up the day-to-day project management of BioAgora on behalf of Alternet. Jiska has been representing both Alternet and NINA in the project, and she expressed that she is happy to continue in this capacity. Person months are available in the Alternet budget to help Oppla in platform development within the context of BioAgora.

- 7c. AHIA "Nitrogen" project status and decision on payment - Philip

Philip gave an overview of the progress of the AHIA project of Carla Washbourne and Nicolas Dendoncker; one publication is produced to date but two more deliverables were agreed upon previously and are yet to be produced (a webpage or blog and policy brief). They are requesting their second payment; Philip recommends approving the payment presently as the two remaining deliverables are acceptable and are to be quickly produced. An invoice to Alternet will be needed for the remaining funds. Jiska suggested that we need to be more strict and efficient in terms of future project timelines.

Nico and Carla will be approached to send their invoice for the remaining funds and a short timeline for producing the remaining outputs will be established, preferably before the 2025 AC meeting.

8. Gender Equality plan - Riikka ([doc 8](#))

Revisions were made in response to the requests of the AC; SC will have until the end of the year to approve the final text and then the original working group will determine the implementation plan. The acceptance of the plan by the AC will be done in early 2025 by remote decision.

9. Need for Data Management Plan; how to proceed? - TBD

The possible need for a data management plan by Alternet was discussed by Jiska. For the projects we are partners in, we are subject to their plans. However, an independent plan for

Alternet itself is desirable. Philip proposed copy-pasting the standard template of Horizon Europe; this will be the next step and then an iterative process can begin. Philip will share a google doc containing the draft contents with Tyler by mid-December. A new task force is needed.

The Eclipse data management plan was questioned; our plans should be compatible, even though there are different specifics—and there should be recognition that they have different data management plans.

10. Alternet priorities (Alternet dialogues) - Jiska ([doc 9](#))

Jiska shared the outcomes of her recently introduced initiative: Alternet dialogues among the AC members. The first dialogue was on horizon scanning and research prioritization. Collaboration was highlighted as a major added value of Alternet.

The next dialogue will be held in early January; the theme will be considered, and Jiska will discuss with Ben Delbaere whether a conversation on the perceived role of institutes in the future science service would be appropriate or premature at this time. The first dialogue was valued and the intent is to have ~four such dialogues per year. It was questioned whether the SC should be included in these dialogues. Full attendance of the AC is not important, as it is not a formal decision-making activity. Themes in the future need to be quite specific to guide the conversation.

A virtual meeting will be held in January concerning changes to the statutes; and an in-person meeting will be held in Barcelona in February 2025.

Added item: CEE Partner Support

Mart raised the issue of engaging, supporting, and integrating Central - Eastern European (CEE) institutes and partners. He suggested that the Council can consider and reflect on the state of the art and concrete actions that could be taken to address this issue. Maurice noted the importance of Alternet's pan-European identity; he expressed that quantifiable metrics concerning involvement of Eastern European institutes should be considered and assessed. Mart noted that meetings used to be routinely held in CEE countries, and that is no longer the case; it is important to promote our CEE partners in the future. A survey can be organized by Mart, Carmen, and Tyler to assess perceived issues and potential solutions.

DINNER - 18:30 AT [BALADI RESTAURANT](#)

MB Meeting 2024 Day 2 (9 January 2024)

11. Activity plans and outputs for the next Council - Feb 2025 - Presented by respective activity representatives; 10 minutes each

- Conference 2025
 - Tyler presented overview (see item 6c)
 - No budget required, thanks to the in-kind contributions of CESAM and income from ticket sales. The generous support of CESAM was recognized and gratitude was expressed.
- Summer School
 - Allan Watt shared a presentation on the 2024 Summer School, which was another successful event and (due to the absence of some speakers and some grant recipient students), operated under its allocated budget.
 - Julia Bethe has expressed the intention of Biodiversa+ to continue their support of the Summer School at the same level and under the same conditions. Maurice and Tyler will coordinate with Biodiversa+ concerning funding in the future. Marie noted that the Biodiversa+ advisory board voted unanimously to continue supporting Alternet's successful summer school. Their funding will likely be exhausted in 2027, but their intention is to continue support until that time.
 - Requested budget: ____
- Collaborative projects
 - Joan presented an overview of the new CP initiative, which combines AHIA and MSR. Preparations are being finalized concerning the release of our first collaborative projects call. The call text and review template are being completed in the upcoming weeks and the intent is to release the call on 15 December with a deadline of 15 February 2025. The first 10k (allocated for 2024) will need to be reallocated for 2025. It was questioned whether a second call will be launched in 2025, requiring a second allocation of €10,000.
 - Requested budget: 10k
- A4Cap (alumni network)
 - Karmen Czett presented an overview of the past year's activities within the A4Cap network:
 - Official recognition as an Alternet network activity - February 2024
 - Annual capacity building assembly in Spa, Belgium - June 2024
 - Networking opportunities, capacity building workshops, research workshops, lectures, skills-sharing sessions, field trips, and fun activities
 - ECR/A4Cap talk at Alternet Day in Helsinki - June 2024
 - Orientation meeting for new alumni - October 2024
 - Logo design drink & draw activity - October 2024
 - Commencement of new research initiative: investigating past 20 years (in recognition of Alternet's anniversary) of biodiversity research, the Alternet Summer School, and the advancement of transdisciplinary educational methods and themes

- Opening of A4Cap to all early-career researchers in Alternet member institutes
- Further establishment of positive relationship with hosts in Spa - now allowed to reserve accommodations 1 year in advance
- Publication of official A4Cap webpage on the Alternet website
- Creation of new GDPR-compliant mailing list/contact form
- Creation of new email address
- Dual presentation of BioAgora ECR network and the A4Cap at the YESS ECR session at ESP in Wageningen - November 2024
- Proposed network activities for 2025 included the following:
 - Biodiversity Research & Transdisciplinary Education session at Alternet 2025 Conference in Aveiro - May 2025
 - Annual Assembly for capacity-building in Spa, Belgium - June 2025
 - Including networking opportunities, capacity building workshops, research workshops, lectures, skills-sharing sessions, field trips, and fun activities
 - Advancement of research project; finalization and publication
 - Further outreach to Alternet-network early career researchers
 - Welcoming of 2025 Summer School alumni
 - (Online) trainings of Biodiversa+ on selected topics
 - Science-policy-society interface workshop facilitated by BioAgora ECRN
- Metrics of participants, demographics, alternet-members were requested
- 5k was allocated by Alternet for 2024, and 5k was deposited to Alternet by Biodiversa+ in support of A4Cap. ~3,600 remains unspent. As activities and participation of ECRs are being scaled up, it is not expected that underspending will occur again in 2024. Per the agreement with Biodiversa+, Biodiversa+ support is contingent upon equal spending by Alternet; and, as such, it is requested that this surplus amount be reallocated to spend in support of A4Cap participation in and contribution to the 2025 Alternet Conference in Aveiro.
- 5k budget for 2025 plus reallocation of rollover surplus amount from 2024 requested

Activities: Upcoming year (2025)

- Biodiversity Research & Transdisciplinary Education session at Alternet 2025 Conference in Aveiro - May 2025
- Annual Assembly for capacity-building in Spa, Belgium - June 2025
 - Including networking opportunities, capacity building workshops, research workshops, lectures, skills-sharing sessions, field trips, and fun activities
- Advancement of research project; finalization and publication
- Further outreach to Alternet-network early career researchers
- Welcoming of 2025 Summer School alumni
- (Online) trainings of Biodiversa+ on selected topics
- Science-policy-society interface workshop facilitated by BioAgora ECRN
 - Metrics of participants, demographics, alternet-members were requested

- 5k budget plus reallocation of rollover amount from 2024 requested (per agreement, Biodiversa+ support is contingent upon equal spending by Alternet)
- Communications
 - Adriana and Tyler provided an overview of the communications activities of 2024 which included the following:
 - 20th anniversary visuals, news story
 - Conference materials
 - Revamping of news page (Updates)
 - Addition of PhD webpage, A4Cap webpage
 - 10 news stories, quarterly/seasonal newsletters, special edition Nature Restoration newsletter
 - Social media activity, shift to more instagram activity

The following communications initiatives were proposed for 2025:

- Internal newsletter (bi-monthly) covering all network activities and opportunities
 - Recover and strengthen social media editorial calendar
 - Return to a closer coordination with Eklipe and projects
 - Interviews at Council meeting for anniversary
 - Conference 2025 graphic design and promotional materials
 - Retiring X account migrating to BlueSky
- 3k budget requested
- Call exchange
 - A task force on finding ways to engage Alternet proactively to comment and consult on upcoming calls and opportunities was recommended. Eeva Primmer proposed this initiative. In January, there is intent to advance this discussion and make concrete proposals. Collaboration with PEER may be valuable. The goal is for Alternet to have an impact on the research agendas of financing bodies and on calls before they are launched. The specific role that Alternet would play in this process needs to be developed and elaborated on. Marie noted that the initial purpose of the Call Exchange is to increase the number of successful joint proposals from Alternet institutes. She noted the transformative potential of increased involvement in projects with major SPI elements. Concerning key messages, she suggested a statement and definition of the types of projects that Alternet wishes to support and be part of.
 - It is suggested to continue the call exchange as is; to compose a key message strategy for Alternet's participation in projects of particular interest; and to define how Alternet can contribute to the proactive development of upcoming calls.
 - Two task forces:
 - Alternet coordinating proactively with funders and serving as a commenter on draft calls in the European community to raise the profile of Alternet among funding bodies and projects, possibly in cooperation with

PEER and biodiversity knowledge agora (BioAgora) - (Mart, Eeva Primmer, Riikka Palomieni, Jiska, and Philip are interested in helping with this initiative).

- Assembling a strategy regarding how projects are approached, communicated, and understood concerning added value to Alternet. Compiling a process for proactively scanning for calls of interest to Alternet - (Mart, Eszter Kelemen, Allan Watt, Marie Vandewalle, Sibylle Schroer, and Jomme Desair are interested in helping with this initiative). Sibylle could lead this initiative. Marie volunteered to help support Sibylle. An overview of our involvement in projects would also be compiled as a part of this.
- Maurice suggested using the conference as an opportunity to impact the research agenda on how to achieve transformative change. A dialogue with Eeva Primmer on behalf of PEER is recommended; Mart and Riikka will reach out to Eeva.
- No budget requested
- Science lectures
 - All council members were contacted about taking initiative to host science lecture series. There was great interest at the Council meeting but there has been no followup interest in organizing, excepting one correspondence with NINA. The activity is to date inactive. The initiative will be relaunched and reminders will be distributed. Contacting AHIA/MSR/A4Cap researchers directly; advertising this opportunity using the new internal newsletter; updating comms contact persons; and contacting partners of joint projects of Alternet are recommended next steps to advance this activity moving forward.
 - No budget requested
- Science-policy interface
 - Outreach methods mentioned above for science lectures are likewise advised for the SPI webinar initiative, which will continue in its status quo form.
 - IGB has a proposal for a SPI seminar: they would like to present the work of the Leibniz Network "Systemic Sustainability"
<https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/en/research/leibniz-labs/systemic-sustainability>
 - No budget requested
- Eklipse
 - Jiska and Marie provided an update on the recent joint meetings of Alternet and Eklipse and the production of a draft agreement; it was noted that there is an urgent need for a consensus version of this agreement. An official statement on behalf of Eklipse on the draft agreement and proposed changes will be shared in the upcoming days once everyone in Eklipse has had the chance to review and comment.

- Marie also shared an update of the general state of the art of Eklipse and the progress of Eklipse activities and projects. A budget of 15-20k is requested. Part of the budget would be for the organization of an in-person Eklipse gathering event, potentially including Alternet representation. An Eklipse Impact event, featuring all past and ongoing requesters reporting back on the impact of Eklipse is likewise planned.
- Eklipse will need more communications and social media personnel working; these could collaborate with Tyler and Adriana on joint/coordinated communications.
- 10-12 requests of Eklipse made from BioAgora are included in the budget of UFZ. Anything related to BioAgora is done by UFZ; Restoreid, Eco-Ready, and independent Eklipse requests go through Alternet. Further discussion will continue in the Alternet-Eklipse task force.
- Technical support for a web update was made by Eklipse to CREAM; it was too much to be done in-kind. Eklipse would like to use project overheads to make these updates now; they would like a budget overview to know what they have available at the present moment to use for such purposes. Calls for request are now open permanently; this will be communicated to the Council.
- Requested budget: 15-20k from Eklipse income
- Alternet 20th Anniversary
 - A potential tie-in event at Aveiro conference was suggested.
 - Budget allocation is recommended (2k presently), and the appointment of a chair.
 - Requested budget: 2k
- MoU Alternet-LTER
 - The proposed MoU between Alternet and LTER is still waiting on a proposal from Mark Frenzel; Tyler will follow up with Mark about this initiative.
 - No budget requested

12. Budget proposal - Philip/Jiska

Maurice provided a summary recap of the proposed budgets associated with each of the 2025 activities of Alternet.

- Conference: no budget
- Summer School: 19k
- Collaborative Activities: 10k, with 2024 10k allocation to be used for call launched in December 2024
- A4Cap: 5k, plus re-allocation of remaining amount from 2024 (3,600) for conference contribution support
- Communications: 3k
- Call exchange: no budget
- SPI: no budget

- Eclipse: request for access to the budget Eclipse brings to Alternet; no request for Alternet budget
- 20th anniversary event: 2k
- Secretariat: 30k
- Secretariat travel costs: presently drawn from activity costs of associated activities (option of separate travel budget was discussed)
- Legal advice and financial support: budget drawn from external projects overheads as needed
- Running secretariat costs:
- Steering Committee meetings budget: 5k
- Council meeting: CREAM covers costs

Preparation for pre-Council meeting work – deadlines, task assignments - Philip / Jiska

A final overview spreadsheet of the proposed budget will be compiled and shared with the SC by email in early December. The group will reconvene to discuss final proposals prior to the meeting on 11-12 February 2025.

Final proposals and budget requests are needed from SC members by 21st of January (3 weeks prior to the AC meeting). Consideration will be given to whether a change to membership fees may be needed.

13. AOB

Marie shared the joint letter of scientists to the European Commission on the need to revive the Green Deal. It has been signed by Alternet members as individuals, but Alternet has the opportunity to sign on as a collective organisation. This is contingent upon the approval of the Council, but there is a desire among the SC to sign on to this initiative. Guy is the contact person; Marie should be included in correspondence. All Alternet partners are encouraged to sign as individuals, as well.

The meeting concluded at 12:45 on 27 February 2024