



OBIS Nodes engagement strategy

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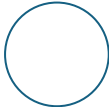




Our vision

We are a community.

The OBIS Nodes are the heart of OBIS, contributing data, expertise, and regional leadership to advance global biodiversity knowledge. As a community, we want to leave no one behind. This proposed strategy aims to strengthen engagement, support new Nodes, and create a more cohesive and interactive community with one goal: collaborating to collect the data we need for the Ocean we want.





The challenges



The OBIS Secretariat is committed to strengthening engagement and ensuring that every Node feels heard, valued, and connected. These four challenges represent areas for improvement, and are the beginning of a journey to reinforce our community.

Challenge 1

How to increase Nodes participation in community activities?

Challenge 2

How to make sure that the Nodes' voices are heard?

Challenge 3

How to increase Node-to-Node exchanges?

Challenge 4

How to boost the sense of community?

Challenge 1

How to increase Nodes participation in community activities?

Possible causes leading to a lack of participation in community activities

Language barrier: Node staff don't feel confident enough to participate in activities due to a perceived lack of proficiency in English

Lack of available resources: some Nodes might not have enough personnel to join community activities

Unclear expectations: Some Nodes might not fully understand what is expected from them in terms of engagement, participation, or contributions beyond data submission

Perceived disconnect from the Secretariat: Some Nodes may feel that their contributions or concerns are not acknowledged, leading to disengagement.

Lack of immediate benefits or incentives: Some Nodes may not see a direct benefit in engaging with the OBIS community beyond their core responsibilities, leading to lower motivation.

Challenges in internal institutional support: Some Nodes may lack institutional backing or formal recognition of their OBIS-related activities, making participation more difficult.

Cultural or regional differences in engagement styles: Some regions may have different norms around participation in international networks, with a preference for localized or bilateral interactions rather than broad community involvement.

Implementable solutions to increase Nodes participation in community activities

Better integrate native languages: encourage native language contributions where possible (Discourse), promote a buddy system where multilingual Nodes can support others in discussions, translate the OBIS website & strategic resources

Alleviate the pressure: Deploy time-efficient ways to contribute (answering a mini-survey instead of attending a full meeting), improve asynchronous engagement opportunities

Make things clear from the start: create a 'What's Expected from an OBIS Node' guide, develop a single-source onboarding package, enable a Nodes mentoring programme

Give back: create a Nodes newsletter, create a monthly "OBIS Pulse" informal survey, better highlight the Nodes & staff on obis.org

Make the Nodes shine: Provide clear pathways for Nodes to showcase their work at conferences, better explain the GBF / BBNJ mechanisms linked to OBIS

Harness the reputation of UNESCO, IOC and OBIS: Provide Nodes with a template letter or presentation to advocate for OBIS activities within their institutions and show the link with UNESCO/IOC, better recognize Node managers & make their contributions more visible

Reinforce regional-level initiatives: Encourage regional Nodes meetings (with an OBIS-Sec attending), encourage regional working groups, offer formal and informal engagement formats

Challenge 2

How to make sure that the Nodes' voices are heard?

Possible causes leading to the Nodes not being heard

Language limitations: Some Nodes may not feel confident expressing concerns in English.

Lack of clear channels for feedback: Nodes may not know where or how to share concerns or ideas effectively.

Hierarchical decision-making perception: Some Nodes may feel that major decisions are made at higher levels without their input.

Passive consultation rather than active dialogue: Nodes may be asked for input but not see how it influences decisions.

Implementable solutions to amplify the Nodes' voices

Better integrate native languages: encourage native language feedback through community translation or a buddy system (a member of the community is designated the entry/exit point)

Channel the channels: Create a clear map of communication channels, specifying the purpose of each and guiding Nodes on where to raise different types of issues. Ensure this information is easily accessible and regularly communicated to all Nodes.

Improve feedback mechanisms: encourage Nodes to take part into strategic discussion, consult the Nodes more and in advance

Show the Nodes' input within OBIS: Ensure that Nodes' contributions and contributors are visibly acknowledged in OBIS reports, documents, articles and newsletters.

Create community relays: Introduce a 'Regional Node Advocates' system, where each region has a representative responsible for ensuring their concerns are heard.

Challenge 3

How to increase Nodes-to-Nodes exchanges?

Possible causes preventing Nodes-to-Nodes exchanges

Lack of awareness of other nodes' work: Nodes may not know who is working on similar topics, challenges, or innovations. Limited visibility of ongoing projects and expertise across the network.

No clear space/structure for informal & peer-to-peer discussions: Most OBIS interactions happen in formal meetings rather than casual settings where Nodes can network. There is no structured platform for Nodes to find and engage with one another easily.

Disparity silos: Nodes may feel they have no/few common points with other Nodes, preventing them from initiating collaboration or even dialogue

Technical & Infrastructure Barriers: Some Nodes might have unstable internet access, limiting participation in virtual networking opportunities.

Implementable solutions to increase Nodes-to-Nodes exchanges

Quarterly 'OBIS Open Desk' Sessions (Casual, Drop-In Style): Nodes can join virtual drop-in meetings made to encourage organic discussions, problem-solving, and project ideas. Split by time zones and led by rotating regional coordinators or OBIS EC members.

OBIS Nodes directory (Who's Who?): Develop a searchable directory of Nodes with areas of expertise, active projects, ongoing collaborations and contact details

OBIS Nodes Mentorship Program: Pair new or less active Nodes with experienced ones to facilitate knowledge transfer. Focus on technical skills, data management best practices, and project development.

Better promote the Discourse group: encourage Nodes to post questions, challenges, and collaboration ideas

Feature Node-to-Node collaborations in OBIS News & Social Media: Regularly showcase successful cross-node projects to inspire further exchanges. Share case studies of how Nodes have benefited from working together.

Challenge 4

How to boost the sense of community?

Possible causes hindering the sense of community among Nodes

Nodes See OBIS as a Database, Not a Community: Some Nodes view OBIS primarily as a technical data repository, rather than a network of people working toward a shared mission.

Lack of shared identity & visibility: Some Nodes feel isolated from the broader OBIS network and may not see how their contributions fit into the bigger picture. OBIS might not have enough community-driven branding or storytelling to highlight the human element of the network.

Low recognition of Nodes' contributions: Some Nodes may feel that their efforts are not acknowledged or celebrated, leading to disengagement.

Implementable solutions to improve the Nodes' sense of community

Shift the Narrative: OBIS is a Global Alliance, not just a database. Reinforce OBIS's Identity as a Community in Communications. Update messaging to emphasize the people and collaborations behind OBIS, not just the data. Share personal stories from Nodes in newsletters, social media, and events. Highlight the mission: "We are a global alliance and a community working together to advance marine biodiversity knowledge."

Pack of community slides & visuals: Create a set of slides and visuals that illustrate the OBIS network as a collaborative global effort, and distribute the material for Nodes to use in their presentations, strengthening the shared identity.

Node Highlight: Every month, highlight one OBIS Node on the website, in the newsletter, and on social media, featuring and amplifying their work, challenges, and aspirations.

Encourage collaborative projects Between Nodes: Actively promote joint research, funding applications, and cross-Node initiatives, and establish a small funding scheme or recognition for collaborative efforts.

Use OBIS Conferences to Highlight Community Engagement and Community Achievement: In the wording used, OBIS should always mention the community and, when possible, name the Nodes particularly involved in some successes.

Proposed action plan





Nodes engagement strategy

Action plan April-June

1

Map and clarify communication channels (Where to raise what issue? How to engage with other Nodes? What to post job announcements?)

Contact the Nodes one by one to identify roadblocks hindering participation and engagement

Update OBIS messaging to highlight the community aspect: "OBIS is a Global Community, not just a database"

Ensure that OBIS messaging at big events consistently acknowledges the community effort and names key contributing Nodes: update the boilerplate text.

2

Begin better acknowledging Node contributions in OBIS reports, newsletters, and social media

Launch the 'What's Expected from an OBIS Node' guide to clarify expectations

Develop a single-source onboarding package for new Nodes

Weekly, low-key Note to Nodes to reduce the distance between Nodes and Sec and create a low-threshold feedback loop

Matchmaking platform to boost Node-to-Node engagement based on survey "what are your biggest roadblocks?"

3

Establish the monthly OBIS Pulse Survey – an informal way to gather feedback from Nodes

Launch 'OBIS Open Desk' drop-in sessions to facilitate casual networking

Start the Node Highlight Series – featuring one Node per month across OBIS platforms

Engage in 1-to-1 interviews with the Nodes that publish the least data to understand and tackle to blockages

4

OBIS Nodes outreach pack: posters, slides, stickers(?) to materially show the belonging to the community

Encourage native language feedback through Discourse and community-led translations

Publish a pack of community slides & visuals to help Nodes present OBIS as a collaborative network

Encourage regional Nodes meetings and ensure an OBIS-Sec representative attends



Nodes engagement strategy

Action plan July–September

5

Strengthen the Nodes Mentorship Matchmaking Programme,

an informal Nodes-to-Nodes initiative where Nodes in need can find the big and small expertise they lack

Develop an OBIS Nodes

Directory: a light, user-friendly searchable database with showing available topical expertise for each Node

6

Launch a 'Regional Node Advocates' system, where representatives relay regional concerns during CG meetings

Develop a template letter/presentation for Nodes to highlight their link with OBIS & IOC/UNESCO and their contributions to their hosting institutions/funders

7

Establish structured Nodes consultation in strategic discussions to ensure their input is considered early enough

Provide time-efficient engagement alternatives (e.g., allowing Nodes to contribute via surveys instead of meetings)

8

Feature successful Node-to-Node collaborations on the OBIS website and in social media



Nodes engagement strategy

Action plan September–December

9

Establish a small cross-Node initiatives funding scheme or incentive program

Encourage joint funding applications and collaborative projects across Nodes

10

Institutionalize OBIS Community Awards to recognize outstanding contributions.

11

Translate key OBIS resources and strategic documents into multiple languages

12

Publish an Annual 'State of the Nodes' Report summarizing their contributions, feedback, and impact on OBIS strategy

Expand regional and global OBIS in-person meetups to reinforce personal connections within the network

But the very first step...

We would need to present the roadmap to the Nodes, gather feedback, implement the feedback and launch the engagement plan.