

Frequently Asked Questions about SciColl

What is SciColl?

SciColl is short for “Scientific Collections International” (see www.scicoll.org). It’s an international coordinating mechanism for object-based scientific collections across the full spectrum of disciplines, including but not limited to: anthropology, archaeology, biology, biomedicine, earth and space sciences, and technology.

What do you mean by “object-based collections”? Does it include books and digital data?

Object-based collections are made up of specimens used for research that reside permanently in institutions that make the specimens available to qualified researchers. The collections include the data associated with the specimens which can be in digital form and/or in analog form (e.g., field notes, maps, lab notebooks). As defined by SciColl, object-based collections are not libraries and they do not include databases of observational data (e.g., social surveys, archives of photographs that are not associated with the specimens).

Would these collections include all the specimens in labs being used in research projects?

No. Study material in a researcher’s lab do not become part of a collection until ownership of and responsibility for the long-term care and use of the specimens are transferred to a permanent repository.

Why is an international, interdisciplinary coordinating mechanism needed for collections?

Each discipline has developed its own system of permanent collections and repositories. Like scholarly journals in foreign languages, collections in foreign countries are hard to access because their contents are not well documented and this information is not readily available. The existence of many types of collections aren’t widely known in other disciplines and they may be even harder for researchers in other fields to access. An international, interdisciplinary coordinating mechanism will lower these barriers to access and will facilitate a new generation of interdisciplinary research that relies on collections in different fields.

Isn’t this what GBIF (the Global Biodiversity Information Facility) is already doing?

GBIF is an important organization in the field of biology but it is very different from SciColl. GBIF draws on databases of natural history collections in repositories like museums, herbaria and botanical gardens, and databases of species names, and makes them available through a single web portal. In contrast, SciColl deals with collections from many disciplines, not just biology. Part of SciColl’s mission is to make specimen data more accessible but it does this by helping communities of collections to establish standards and improve interoperability, not by offering a portal for their specimen data.

What is SciColl's mission?

SciColl's mission is to increase the return on investment that countries and institutions make in their scientific collections by:

- *Promoting a new generation of research on major challenges that can only be done through the use of scientific collections that are distributed across countries and disciplines; and*
- *Improving the management, operation, documentation, accessibility and use of collections in all disciplines by developing community standards, documenting and disseminating good practices, and catalyzing international and interdisciplinary collaboration.*

How does SciColl operate?

SciColl convenes scientific conferences and workshop to promote new and far-reaching research programs that rely on collections, and it creates and manages international working groups and networks to improve professional collection practices.

What kind of an organization is SciColl? Who owns and runs it?

SciColl is an independent non-profit organization that is run by its members. SciColl members are government ministries or agencies and research institutions that contain scientific collections. Members make up a General Assembly which elects an Executive Board. The Assembly and Board set priorities that are implemented by the Secretariat Office.

How big is SciColl and how much does it cost?

The basic annual operating budget for SciColl is expected to be approximately €500,000 for a staff of 4-5 people. This basic budget will support staff salaries and a core program of work, meetings, and outreach. SciColl's Secretariat Office will also generate proposals to fund additional work that has been identified as high priority by the Member Organizations.

How is SciColl being supported?

Members join SciColl by signing a Memorandum of Understanding that includes a three-year financial commitment. The annual contributions made by member countries and institutions depend on the Gross Expenditure for R&D (GERD) in that country or the size of the institution, as measured by annual operating budget and staff size. These contributions are presented on the next page.

What benefits will SciColl members get from their financial support and involvement?

SciColl members control the direction taken by SciColl and they set its priorities. SciColl's program of work reflects in a direct way the interests of its members concerning the scientific and societal impact their collections should have. SciColl members become part of a General Assembly that elects an Executive Board that includes representatives of both national and institutional members. The Executive Board develops the proposed direction and priorities of SciColl's program of work and the General Assembly discusses, modifies and approves the program of work.

Annual SciColl Member Contributions

National members:

Category	GERD (latest available figs)	Countries (examples)	Expected contribution (€ p.a.)
1	> \$50 billion	USA, Japan, Germany, China	90 k€
2	\$18-50 billion	Canada, France, Italy, Korea, Russia, UK	40 k€
3	\$7.5-18 billion	Australia, Austria, Israel, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland	20 k€
4 ¹	< \$7.5 billion	Belgium, Finland, Singapore, South Africa, Portugal, Norway, Poland	10 k€

Institutional members:

Category	Operational budget, including staff [US\$]	Collection staff size	Institutions (examples)	Expected Contribution € (p.a.)
Large - 1	>\$5 million	>150	NHM, SI, MNHN, IODP	16,000
Medium - 2	\$1 million - \$5 million	50-150	MfN Berlin, Naturalis, NICL	8,000
Medium-small - 3	\$200k - \$1 million	10-50	INBIO, NMK, University of New Mexico	4,000
Small ¹ - 4	<\$200k	<10	Linnean Society London,	2,000

¹ Countries and institutions in category 4 can form consortia with up to four members for the purpose of sharing the costs of a single SciColl membership. One member of each consortium will be designated by that consortium as its representative to SciColl's Executive Board.