

ICSU and the International Polar Year 2007–2008

The International Polar Year (IPY) 2007–2008, sponsored by the [International Council for Science](#) (ICSU)¹ and the [World Meteorological Organization](#) (WMO)², was an unprecedented two-year programme of international science, education, and outreach that brought together the ideas, energy, and resources of many thousands of participants from 60+ countries in an interdisciplinary framework. IPY 2007–2008 provides a shining example of ICSU's role in planning and implementing international science programmes.

What is ICSU and what does it do?

ICSU is a non-governmental organization that works on international science cooperation, universality of science, and the science-to-policy interface. ICSU acts on behalf of its global membership³, to plan and coordinate international, interdisciplinary initiatives. IPY 2007–2008 was one such initiative.

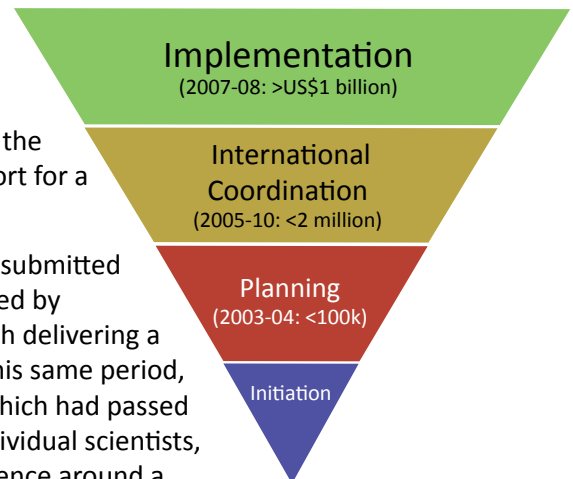
Initiating IPY 2007–2008

Conversations about IPY began in many countries in the late 1990s. The motivation was the upcoming 50th anniversary of the International Geophysical Year 1957–58, which also was sponsored by ICSU and WMO. Some of these discussions were held within ICSU-affiliated bodies such as the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) and the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), others were held within ICSU Member bodies (e.g. US National Academies' Polar Research Board and the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics). At the governmental level, some nations began soliciting support for a polar year within WMO.

As momentum built, the US and European polar boards submitted a joint proposal to ICSU in February 2003. ICSU responded by establishing an IPY Planning Group that was charged with delivering a comprehensive programme plan within a year. During this same period, the Planning Group and ICSU negotiated with WMO—which had passed a formal resolution supporting an IPY—and engaged individual scientists, science institutions and nations. The result was convergence around a common vision for IPY 2007–2008. The key criteria for the new programme were that it should be truly international, well balanced with respect to both polar regions, multidisciplinary, and include a strong education and outreach component.

Implementing IPY 2007–2008

With the work of the ICSU Planning Group successfully completed and captured in the [IPY framework report](#)⁴, ICSU and WMO appointed and funded an IPY Joint Committee to oversee implementation. A venue was identified for an International Programme Office⁵ and a Director was appointed. This structure provided the necessary focus and 'glue' to harness the ideas and energy of the polar research and education community. More than 200 international projects operated within this framework over the two-year IPY period, with total funding of more than US\$1 billion.



ICSU's role in the legacy of IPY 2007–2008

ICSU will continue its strong engagement with the polar research community, particularly in the context of a new [visioning initiative](#) to define and address grand challenges in global sustainability research⁶. This engagement will be built on the lessons of IPY⁷, on the shoulders of the polar organizations invigorated by IPY (many of which are affiliated with ICSU), and in collaboration with partners, including WMO.

For its part, ICSU will regularly assess progress and opportunities for enhancing international and interdisciplinary research in the polar regions⁸. In addition, ICSU will continue to strengthen the key pillars that support polar science, including:

- Data management (e.g. ICSU's new [World Data System](#)⁹ and the ICSU-supported [Polar Information Commons](#)¹⁰)
- Universality of science (e.g. a [position statement](#)⁴)
- Observing systems (e.g. co-sponsorship of the global observing systems, endorsement of the Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks initiative)
- International coordination of funding (e.g. the Belmont Forum¹¹)

In addition to sponsoring the Oslo 2010 and St. Petersburg 2008 IPY conferences, ICSU will be a key sponsor of the 2012 *From Knowledge to Action* conference in Montreal that will advance polar science for policy.

For their part, polar researchers and their organizations should test and push ICSU on these many fronts—engaging in ongoing strategic initiatives and raising ideas, opportunities, and challenges with ICSU's strategic planning and decision-making organs¹²—so that polar science continues to lead the way on international, interdisciplinary science cooperation at this critical juncture in the evolution of the Earth system.

Acknowledgement to the IPY community

IPY 2007–2008 was founded on the efforts of many thousands of individuals and the logistical and resource support of many nations and organizations. ICSU wholeheartedly thanks all IPY participants for creating, supporting, and implementing this unique programme. For their leadership roles in IPY, we particularly thank the individuals and organizations that advocated for IPY and now will reinforce the legacy, members of the ICSU Planning Group and the Joint Committee and its subcommittees, national IPY committees and secretariats, IPY project coordinators, staff of the International Programme Office, and our partners at WMO. The IPY 'story' was built by all these actors.



¹ www.icsu.org

² www.wmo.int

³ ICSU members include 121 national scientific bodies (mostly national academies of science) covering 141 countries, 30 International Scientific Unions and 21 International Scientific Associates.

⁴ Available in the resource centre of the ICSU website: www.icsu.org

⁵ Hosted by the British Antarctic Survey with financial support from the UK Natural Environment Research Council, Canada, China, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, USA.

⁶ www.icsu-visioning.org

⁷ As captured in several key documents, including reports from: the Joint Committee and subcommittees for data, and education and outreach; the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS); and the International Programme Office. See also the *Polar Science and Global Climate* resource book.

⁸ For example, ICSU has awarded grants to ICSU Members and bodies for: an Ice Sheet Modeling Summer School; the Polar Information Commons; lessons learned from IPY education and outreach; and the MicroPerm conference on permafrost microbiology

⁹ www.icsu-wds.org

¹⁰ www.polarcommons.org

¹¹ ICSU is a member of the Belmont Forum that serves as the governance body for the International Group of Funding Agencies for Global Change Research

¹² For example, the Committee on Scientific Planning and Review, and the Executive Board.

Photos - Front: K. Steffen, CIRES/University of Colorado at Boulder. Back L-R: (1) S. Murray, (2) P. West & (6) K. Vanderlinde, US National Science Foundation; (3) S. Spielke & (4) C. d'Udekem d'Acoz, Alfred Wegener Institute; (5) M. Knowles, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute