

International Mathematical Union



October 14, 2007

IMU AO Circular Letter 6/2007

To: IMU Adhering Organizations
Major Mathematical Societies and Institutions

From: Martin Grötschel, IMU Secretary

IMU stable administrative structure

Dear colleagues,

The 15th IMU General Assembly recommended in Santiago de Compostela (see resolution 11 in the GA report) that the incoming Executive Committee of the IMU

“studies the establishment of stable administrative structure and funding mechanisms, including possible fund raising, for the support of the expanding IMU activities, and reports to the 2010 General Assembly with concrete proposals.”

The IMU Executive Committee would like to find a sustainable location with associated suitable infrastructure at which the IMU secretarial staff could reside for a (long) period of time, and at which the costs of running the IMU operations is either low or covered by some long term grant/subsidy or the like. The purpose of this letter is to solicit from all Adhering Organizations and major mathematical societies and institutions offers or suggestions for the location of such an office.

Since the creation of the (current) IMU in 1951 the legal domicile of IMU moved with the IMU Secretary. This means that the IMU office has resided in Berlin, Princeton, Rio de Janeiro, Helsinki, Paris, Zurich, Rome, and Copenhagen during these 56 years.

Because the IMU activity has considerably increased in recent years, "transition costs" have become a significant factor. Particularly important are knowledge transfer and the many legal problems that go along with moving bank accounts, obtaining non-profit status in a new host country, etc. It would be desirable that there be some place in the world where knowledge about IMU, its activities, and its history were sustained, and that routine activities become really routine and do not have to be learned anew with the change of the IMU officers.

It is apparent to the Executive Committee, that no member country can immediately come up with a solution of IMU's "stability problem", but there may be some countries who see a possibility to establish an infrastructure that serves IMU's needs and who are willing to bear a significant part of the costs for running the IMU office. The IMU EC is

currently reluctant to make a comprehensive list of all aspects that have to be considered, since these may vary with time and location. In the attachment, though, some items are listed that need consideration.

The IMU Executive Committee asks all Adhering Organizations to check out possibilities to host the IMU office starting at some point in time after 2010. Those countries interested in serving IMU in this respect are requested to contact the IMU Secretary for more detailed consultation and information.

There is no decisive deadline for a response, but the IMU EC plans to start discussing proposals from interested Adhering Organizations, mathematical societies or institutions in February 2008, so proposals arriving by the end of January 2008 will be considered in the first round.

Sincerely,

Martin Grötschel
IMU Secretary

Encl.

Attachment to IMU AO Circular Letter 6/2007 of October 14, 2007

The infrastructure details for the IMU office will certainly depend on the country and the institution at which it is located. Some of the issues that need to be considered are as follows:

- An administrative structure that keeps track of all IMU members and handles standard correspondence with the Adhering Organizations, other organizations and individuals who are in contact with IMU. At present, this amounts to work that can be done by an experienced, English speaking staff person (called IMU Administrator) on a half-time position. In the year of an International Congress, the amount of work will increase so that manpower of about a full-time position may be necessary.
- IT infrastructure for the office of the Secretary and the Administrator are necessary as well as printing devices, etc. that are usual for a secretariat.
- Financial transactions amount to more work than might be expected since many transactions to people living in developing countries or countries with poor banking infrastructure have to be handled and lots of searching and book-keeping needs to be done. Moreover, the IMU assets have to be managed. This requires support from staff experienced in this kind of work. Traditionally, such service has been provided by the institution hosting the IMU secretariat either by contributions in kind or work contracts.
- The IMU Web server has to be maintained and developed. Due to the increase of IMU's activities, this work, despite modern IT tools, does amount to a half-time position of a technician who is able to maintain the server, keep it online and run all the backup, updating and protection processes.
- The IMU archive is currently at the University of Helsinki. Since occasionally, often at a point in time of important decision making, the IMU Secretary needs to look up old files (and since someone knowledgeable about IMU matters is necessary to help curate the archive) it might be advisable to keep the IMU archive at a location close to the site of the office and not at some remote place.
- IMU's activities for developing countries are currently managed by the CDE and DCSG, and this work is supported by an administrative assistant (with a half-time position), located at the ICTP in Trieste. There would be advantages in merging this office with the IMU Secretariat.
- The International Commission on Mathematical Instruction (ICMI) is also experiencing a considerable increase in its “daily business”, and it would therefore be helpful if administrative support for the ICMI Secretary General would be provided by the IMU Secretariat.
- A non-negligible aspect is the fact that “back-up support” has to be provided in case the persons normally working for IMU become ill, pregnant, etc. That is why it might be a good idea to “embed” the IMU secretariat into a mathematical institution of a reasonable size (as has been done in the past) so that replacement could be easier to solve.

The costs for such an operation can't be easily estimated in general, since they strongly depend on the location and on the local infrastructure.