

Proposal for Strengthening the DDE Secretariat

Departmental Structure, Position Settings, and Budget

1. Background and Rationale

1.1 Mandate

During the 18th Executive Committee (EC) Meeting held in Beijing on 4–5 April 2026, the EC adopted a decision directing the Secretariat to identify needs for its own strengthening, consult with EC/SC/GC as needed, and prepare a proposal – including positions, levels, and budget – for EC review. This document responds to that mandate.

1.2 Current Organizational Reality

The DDE Secretariat currently operates under the leadership of the EC Chair / Secretariat Director, with three functional administrative areas:

Functional Area	Current Scope	Current Capacity
Science Operations	International project lifecycle management (including Seed Grant Fund, R&D project and the coming DDE-ISI project); contract negotiation and tracking; milestone and deliverable monitoring; project progress report collection and review; project budget execution monitoring; DDE-ISI call preparation; Document handling.	1 staff member
International Relationships	GC/SC/EC member liaison; international conference coordination and preparation; partnership development and maintenance; cooperation agreement management; delegation and visit logistics; annual report drafting; document handling.	1 staff member
Administrative Support	Document handling; website content updates; reimbursement processing; general office administration.	1 staff member

1.3 Why Strengthening Is Needed Now

- Factor 1: DDE-ISI Launch and Portfolio Growth.** The current portfolio comprises 15 international projects across 8 countries. Once DDE-ISI opens, the portfolio is projected to reach 30–40+ active projects within 12–18 months. Given the greater diversity in project tiers and the increased complexity of management mechanisms, the workloads for project management, financial tracking, and reporting could multiply several times over compared to current levels.
- Factor 2: Single-Point-of-Failure Risk.** Each functional area currently relies on a single individual. This creates operational fragility: institutional knowledge is concentrated, continuity is vulnerable, and depth of expertise in any single domain is necessarily limited.

- **Factor 3: Increasing Compliance Complexity.** As the portfolio expands, compliance requirements multiply. Several areas – notably dedicated financial management and IP/policy expertise – are not covered by any current Secretariat function.

1.4 Guiding Principles

- **Departmental approach:** This proposal defines functional departments and the positions each requires, without assigning individuals to leadership roles. Personnel appointments are a separate EC decision.
- **Strengthen existing + create new:** Three existing functional areas receive support/reallocation; two new departments are created where no current function exists.
- **Phased implementation:** Recruitment proceeds in two phases tied to DDE-ISI milestones.
- **Functional consolidation:** Reimbursement fully transferred to Finance Dept; website content management moves to IP, Policy & Communications Dept to align with strategic expertise.

2. Current Capacity Assessment

2.1 Current Workload Snapshot

Dimension	Current Scale
Active projects	15 (15 international projects, across 8 countries)
International cooperation partners	20+ (strategic and operational levels)
Active contract negotiations	Depends on projects
Annual governance meetings (EC/SC/GC)	4–6
Annual events and international meetings	4–6
Regulatory documents in development	3 (funding rules, IP & data regulations, org structure plan)

2.2 Gap Analysis by Functional Area

Functional Area	Current Gap	Impact
Science Operations	No dedicated project lifecycle officer; project tracking is fragmented across call management and monitoring functions.	Overdue reports; delayed risk identification; no systematic research output curation or project archiving capacity.
International Relationships	No dedicated partnership management support.	Reactive engagement; missed partnership opportunities.
Administrative Support	Single person, no backup; lack of focus on core admin.	Workflow bottlenecks; institutional misalignment with the Suzhou Center prevents effective communication and translation of requirements.

Finance & Budget (not staffed)	No dedicated finance professional; admin currently handles reimbursements alongside core duties.	No systematic budget reporting; ad-hoc audit prep; compliance risks.
IP, Policy & Comms (not staffed)	IP policy, publications, annual reports, official DDE messaging, and the drafting/updating of formal materials – all unaddressed.	IP policy overdue; reports delayed; website not strategic.

3. Proposed Departmental Structure

3.1 Overview

Departments to be strengthened (existing):

1. Science Operations Department
2. International Relationships Department
3. Administrative Support Department

Departments to be established (new):

1. Finance & Budget Department
 2. IP, Policy & Communications Department
- External resource: Legal Advisor (retainer basis)

3.2 Functional Reallocation

- **Finance Consolidation:** All reimbursement, payments, and disbursements transferred from Administrative Support to the new Finance & Budget Department to ensure compliance and operational efficiency.
- **Communications Integration:** Website content management moves from Administrative Support to the new IP, Policy & Communications Department.

3.3 Department-to-Module Mapping

Department	DDE Operational Module Coverage
Science Operations	International Project Management; Research Output Curation & Archiving
International Relationships	Cooperation & Exchange Management; RCEs & WTGs management
Administrative Support	Cross-cutting (governance meetings, archiving, office admin)
Finance & Budget	Budget Management & Reimbursements
IP, Policy & Communications	Cross-cutting (IP policy, annual report, website, publications)

4. Department Profiles and Position Settings

4.1 Science Operations Department (Existing – Strengthen)

Mission: Manage the full lifecycle of DDE-funded international projects and curate

resulting research outputs.**Current positions: 1 | Total proposed positions: 3**

#	Position	Status	Level	Key Responsibilities
1	Science Operations Coordinator	Existing	Mid-senior	Overall departmental coordination and supervision; strategic planning for DDE-funded project portfolio; contract negotiation support; EC/SC meeting report preparation on projects and outcomes; oversee Project Lifecycle Officer and Research Outputs & Archives Officer.
2	Project Lifecycle Officer	NEW	Mid-level	Manage the full project lifecycle from call to closure: DDE-ISI call preparation, announcement, application processing, and form checks; contract lifecycle support; milestone and deliverable tracking; progress report collection and review; budget execution monitoring; primary applicant contact.
3	Research Outputs & Archives Officer	NEW	Mid-level	Track, collect, and curate research outputs from DDE-funded projects (publications, datasets, software, technical reports); maintain project archives (contracts, reports, deliverables, correspondence); manage and update DDE research management policies and procedures; maintain output databases and repositories.

Required Qualifications - Project Lifecycle Officer: Bachelor's/Master's in project management, earth sciences, or related field; 3+ years project coordination experience in international research settings; familiarity with grant and fellowship program management; strong organizational and tracking skills; bilingual (Chinese/English).

Required Qualifications - Research Outputs & Archives Officer: Bachelor's/Master's in information management, library science, earth sciences, or related field; 2+ years experience in research output curation or academic archiving; familiarity with research data management and open science practices; strong database and cataloging skills; bilingual (Chinese/English).

Estimated annual human resource cost: ~1,131,000 RMB (3 positions)

4.2 International Relationships Department (Existing – Strengthen)

Mission: Manage DDE relationships with governance bodies, international organizations, and cooperation partners.

Current positions: 1 | Total proposed positions: 2

#	Position	Status	Level	Key Responsibilities
1	International Relationships Coordinator	Existing	Mid-senior	Overall coordination; GC/SC/EC communications; strategic partnership development; cooperation proposals; RCEs and WTGs coordination.
2	Partnership Officer	NEW	Mid-level	Maintain partner database; coordinate conference participation (EGU, AGU, IGC, etc.); manage delegation logistics; support MoU drafting.

Required Qualifications - Partnership Officer: Bachelor's/Master's in international relations, public administration, or related field; 3+ years partnership/coordination experience; cross-cultural communication skills; familiarity with international scientific organizations; bilingual (Chinese/English).

Estimated annual human resource cost: ~708,500 RMB (2 positions)

4.3 Administrative Support Department (Existing – Strengthened via Reallocation)

Mission: Provide comprehensive administrative support – document archiving, meeting logistics, internal procedure management, and general office operations. (Reimbursement responsibilities removed).

Current positions: 1 | **Total proposed positions:** 1

#	Position	Status	Level	Key Responsibilities
1	Administrative Officer	Existing	Mid-level	Meeting logistics; institutional document archiving and version control; regulatory submissions; internal procedure development; ensuring accurate information flow between Secretariat, governance bodies, and implementation partners; maintaining and communicating internal administrative policies; general office administration.

Reallocation Note: By transferring reimbursement duties to the Finance Dept and website content to the IP, Policy & Communications Dept, the existing Administrative Officer can fully focus on core administrative duties (governance meetings, archiving, office administration) without requiring an additional assistant. The department is strengthened through this functional reallocation rather than through additional headcount.

Estimated annual human resource cost: ~221,000 RMB (1 position)

4.4 Finance & Budget Department (NEW – Establish)

Mission: Provide dedicated financial management – annual budget planning, execution tracking, compliance, audit preparation, and all reimbursement/disbursement processing.

Current positions: 0 | **Total proposed positions:** 2

#	Position	Status	Level	Key Responsibilities
1	Finance & Budget Manager	NEW	Senior	Annual budget proposals; execution tracking; compliance with public institution regulations; reporting to funders (e.g., MOST); quarterly reports; audit preparation; liaison with Suzhou Center finance.
2	Accounting Specialist	NEW	Mid-level	Process all reimbursements, payments, and disbursements; maintain financial records; support multi-currency cross-border payments; monthly financial summaries.

Required Qualifications – Finance & Budget Manager: Bachelor's/Master's in finance; 5+ years in a Chinese public institution/research institute; CPA preferred; familiar with international project finance; bilingual.

Required Qualifications - Accounting Specialist: Bachelor's in accounting or finance; 3+ years bookkeeping experience in a Chinese public institution; familiar with public institution financial regulations and reimbursement procedures; accounting certification (e.g., Junior Accountant) preferred; bilingual (Chinese/English).

Estimated annual human resource cost: ~741,000 RMB (2 positions)

Note on reporting responsibilities: Reporting responsibilities are differentiated: the Finance & Budget Manager produces quarterly budget execution reports (financial tracking); the

Communications & Publications Officer produces quarterly programmatic/activity reports (project progress, outcomes, milestones). This separation ensures financial discipline and narrative reporting are each managed by the appropriate specialist.

4.5 IP, Policy & Communications Department (NEW – Establish)

Mission: Develop and manage DDE’s intellectual property framework; produce official communications and publications; promote DDE’s research outputs and maintain the DDE public image.

Current positions: 0 | **Total proposed positions:** 2

#	Position	Status	Level	Key Responsibilities
1	IP & Policy Officer	NEW	Mid-level	Develop and maintain IP and data-sharing policy (18th EC action item); establish IP rules for DDE Platform contributions; support substantive policy development (research management, data governance, open science); advise on IP aspects of contracts. (Policy drafts reviewed by Legal Advisor before finalization.)
2	Communications & Publications Officer	NEW	Mid-level	Lead production of monthly, quarterly, and annual reports; design, manage, and update the website (www.ddeworld.org); maintain a public-facing output showcase and publication highlights on the DDE website; compile project outputs and achievements for reports and outreach materials; develop conference and UNESCO-IDSSD materials; update official DDE messaging; design promotional presentations, videos, and social media content.

Required Qualifications - IP & Policy Officer: Bachelor's/Master's in law (IP focus), science policy, or related field; 3+ years IP/policy experience; familiarity with research data sharing frameworks and open science policies; bilingual (Chinese/English).

Required Qualifications - Communications & Publications Officer: Bachelor's/Master's in communications, journalism, science communication, or related field; 3+ years editorial/digital content experience; web management skills (CMS, basic HTML); bilingual (Chinese/English).

Estimated annual human resource cost: ~676,000 RMB (2 positions)

4.6 External: Legal Advisor (Retainer)

Scope: Review and advise on international project contracts; review IP and data-sharing policy drafts prepared by the IP & Policy Officer; support dispute resolution.

Estimated annual cost: ~100,000 RMB (retainer, ~10 hours/month)

5. Budget Summary

5.1 Human Resource Cost by Department (Full Steady State)

Department	Positions	Annual Cost (RMB)
Science Operations	3 (1 existing + 2 new)	1,131,000
International Relationships	2 (1 existing + 1 new)	708,500

Administrative Support	1 (existing, optimized)	221,000
Finance & Budget (NEW)	2 (both new)	741,000
IP, Policy & Communications (NEW)	2 (both new)	676,000
Personnel subtotal	10 (3 existing + 7 new)	3,477,500
Legal advisor retainer	—	100,000
Training & professional development	—	60,000
Office equipment & software	—	80,000
Grand total (annual, steady state)		3,717,500

5.2 Phased Implementation

Phase	Positions	Period	Est. Annualized Cost (RMB)
Phase 1	Finance & Budget Dept (2) + Science Ops (2 new: Project Lifecycle Officer + Research Outputs & Archives Officer) + IP/Policy & Comms (1 new: IP & Policy Officer) + Legal retainer	Q3 2026 (~6 mo)	~2,050,000
Phase 2	Intl. Rel. (1 new: Partnership Officer) + IP/Policy & Comms (1 new: Communications & Publications Officer)	Q1 2027 (~6 mo)	~780,000

6. Strategic Analysis

6.1 Why Departments, Not Just Positions

Institutional durability: Departments persist beyond individual tenure. If a staff member departs, the department function and position structure remain.

Avoiding premature personnel decisions: Defines capability needs, not individuals. EC makes appointment decisions separately.

Scalability: As DDE-ISI matures, departments can grow by adding positions without reorganizing the overall structure.

6.2 ISI as a Workload Multiplier

Dimension	Pre-ISI (current)	Post-ISI (projected)
Active projects	15 (international)	30–40+
Annual progress reports	~12	~25–35
Contract negotiations/year	3–5	8–15
Budget transactions/year	~30	~60–80
Governance meetings/year	4–6	6–8

6.3 Additional Recommendations

- **Functional consolidation:** Removing reimbursement duties from Administration and assigning them strictly to Finance prevents duplicated effort and reduces compliance risks.
- **Legal advisory retainer (~100K/year):** More cost-effective than a full-time legal position at this stage.
- **Professional development and AI empowerment: Annual training and AI using budget ~60K RMB for all staff.**

7. Implementation Timeline

Milestone	Target Date	Action
EC review and approval	August 2026	Submit proposal for EC discussion
Phase 1 recruitment opens	Sep 2026	Post Finance & Budget Manager, Accounting Specialist, Project Lifecycle Officer, Research Outputs & Archives Officer, IP & Policy Officer; engage legal advisor
Phase 1 staff onboarded	Sep–Oct 2026	New staff begin; knowledge transfer begins
Phase 2 recruitment opens	November 2026	Post remaining 2 positions: Partnership Officer, Communications & Publications Officer
Phase 2 staff onboarded	Jan–Feb 2027	Phase 2 staff support partnership development and communications for DDE-ISI rollout; Project Lifecycle Officer (onboarded in Phase 1) manages the first DDE-ISI call lifecycle
First performance review	Q3 2027	Evaluate all positions; adjust as needed

8. Expected Outcomes

Systematic project management: Full project lifecycle managed proactively from call to closure; all milestones tracked and deliverables verified; no overdue reports.

Financial discipline & efficiency: Quarterly budget execution reports; full audit compliance; centralized multi-currency processing.

Proactive international engagement: Consistent GC/SC/EC communication; strategic partnership development.

Strong IP and communications: IP policy finalized; annual reports on schedule; website managed strategically.

Administrative robustness: Systematic archiving; standardized procedures without financial bottlenecking.

Operational resilience: No single-point-of-failure; documented workflows; distributed institutional memory.

9. Conclusion

This proposal defines a departmental structure with 7 new positions across 5 departments (3

strengthened, 2 newly established), plus an external legal retainer, at a steady-state annual cost of ~3.72M RMB. By consolidating overlapping administrative and financial duties, the structure is highly cost-effective while providing the capacity needed for DDE-ISI. The EC is requested to review, provide feedback, and approve the proposal so that recruitment can begin in Q3 2026.