



Birthing the Cultural Evolution Society

A Road Map for 2016 and Beyond

Prepared by:

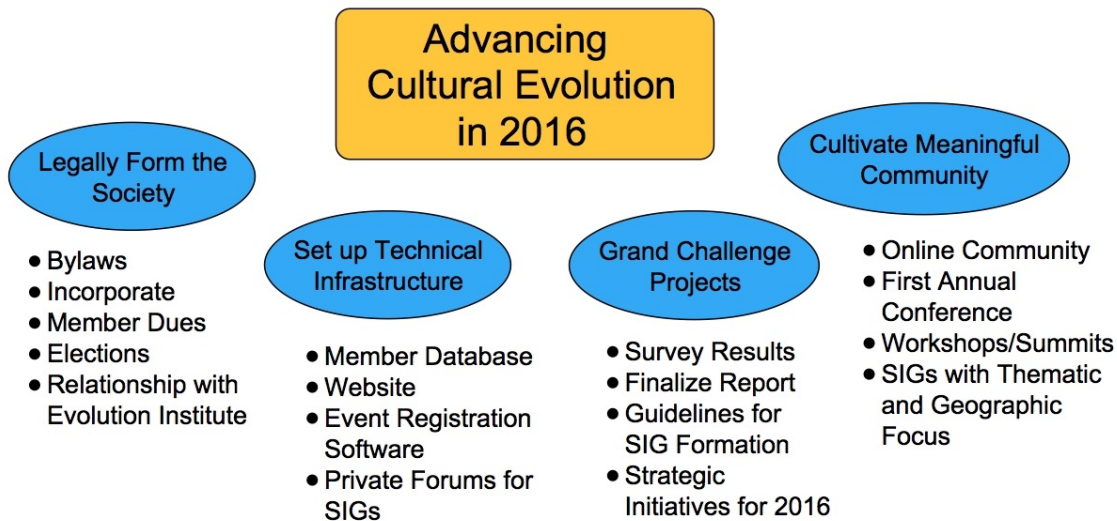
Joe Brewer

Culture Designer

The Evolution Institute

What You Will Find In This Report

The ad hoc steering committee for the Society for the Study of Cultural Evolution met in College Park, Maryland on December 20th through 22nd of 2015.¹ This report is a summary of discussion topics and key decisions made in that highly productive meeting. We explored a number of issues sufficiently well to begin creating a road map for birthing the Society throughout 2016—culminating with the first annual conference, to be held in 2017, with an inaugural leadership team who will officially take office at that time.



Summary of the Meeting—A Narrative Discussion of Key Topics

Naming the Society

At our meeting there were several topics that needed to be covered: one of which was the idea of changing the name of the Society for the Study of Cultural Evolution. Three options were floated around at the meeting: (1) Society for the Study of Cultural Evolution; (2) Society for Cultural Evolution; and (3) Cultural Evolution Society. One of the early decisions will be to adopt a set of bylaws—which will give our founding members an opportunity to suggest additional names and vote on them.

Key Outcomes and Next Steps:

- ◆ **We will tentatively use Cultural Evolution Society as our name.**
- ◆ **In the near future, survey our founding members about their preferences.**

¹ A list of participant bios and the full agenda can be found in the Appendix at the end of this report.

Core Values and Mission

We started out the morning with a review of all that had been accomplished in the last nine months. From a [small workshop in March](#) to a fledgling Society in December with financial supports and a dedicated staff person to manage the birthing process in the next year and a half. We reviewed the [Grand Challenge Survey responses](#) and promptly dove into a lively discussion about the core values and mission for the society.

We brainstormed a list of values and operating principles that, while needing refinement and open debate among the membership, offer a starting point for creating the society:

1. Scientific objectivity;
2. Study of cultural evolution as core emphasis;
3. Interdisciplinarity—knowledge synthesis and the integration of science from different fields;
4. Doing “socially relevant” science with practical and timely applications to the real world;
5. Deep diversity—actively seeking collaboration across a plurality of methodologies, domains of practice, research areas, and cultural systems;
6. Do culture design on ourselves. Apply best practices and key insights from our field to the society itself;
7. Promote evolution and educate students, researchers and the general public about it;
8. Be student and training focused—cultivate skills in the next generation of scholars and practitioners.

Other members of the steering committee wrote their own list of core values. These will be gathered and vetted to create a refined list that will be shared with the founding membership. This list will be brought together with a mission statement and the bylaws for our constitutional documents (see section below on committees for more about this).

Key Outcomes and Next Steps:

- ◆ **David Sloan Wilson will draft a refined list of core values and share with the steering committee by mid January. This list will then be shared with the founding members for discussion and debate.**
- ◆ **Joe Brewer will draft a mission statement from an initial version sent out by Peter Peregrine before the meeting. This will be passed around with the core values for input from the steering committee and then passed on to the general membership for discussion.**
- ◆ **These outputs will be combined with a set of bylaws from the Bylaws Committee and shared with the community in the next few weeks.**

Collaborative Research Projects

Ian MacDonald and David Sloan Wilson discussed the concept of *Special Interest Groups (SIGs)* as it has been developed by the Association for Contextual Behavioral Sciences and gave an example of an early-stage SIG for our society for studying intentional communities. The concept of SIGs was new for some of the workshop participants, perhaps unsurprisingly, because most scientific societies do not include them. One issue raised concerned the relationship between the Grand Challenges that we are identifying through the survey, and SIGS that emerge from bottom-up interests (such as the intentional community SIG). Another concern was how to maintain quality control. There is a strong sentiment that the Society should be scientifically rigorous. This led to a discussion of the relationship between basic and applied science and the potential for a positive rather than a negative tradeoff between them.

There was a lot of confusion about the SIGs—leading to a realization that two different elements were being confused by failing to adequately differentiate them. The Grand Challenges were understood to be guiding principles, presented as “big questions” the field needs to address. At the same time, the idea that research can be self-organized by society members was introduced and presented. Basically this would be a mechanism for interactions whereby members are able to create their own *collaborative research projects*.

We learned that these two concepts had been conflated by thinking of the collaborative research projects as being organized around grand challenges identified by our members. While this is a possibility, there is a broader two-pronged strategy that both asks the big questions (as organizing principles and strategic focus for the Society) and enables members to create their own functioning groups around topics that interest them. One way to think about this is that collaborative research projects are generally lead by principal investigators—and the SIGs may be helpful for bringing these PI’s together and seeding new efforts.

One thing that became clear was that a high-level goal for the society is to become a world-class, highly prestigious scientific body. This will require a set of guidelines for forming SIGs and a vetting process for elevating them to “official” status as part of the functions of the Society. We also discussed the need for a special regulatory function that provides ethical oversight to activities within these groups as they represent our membership in an official capacity.

Key Outcomes and Next Steps:

- ◆ **Peter Peregrine will take the first stab at writing up a set of “Big Questions” following from the Grand Challenges Survey analysis. This will inform the process for members to set a course together and be an input into the writing process for a peer-review article written by the steering committee (see below for more about this).**

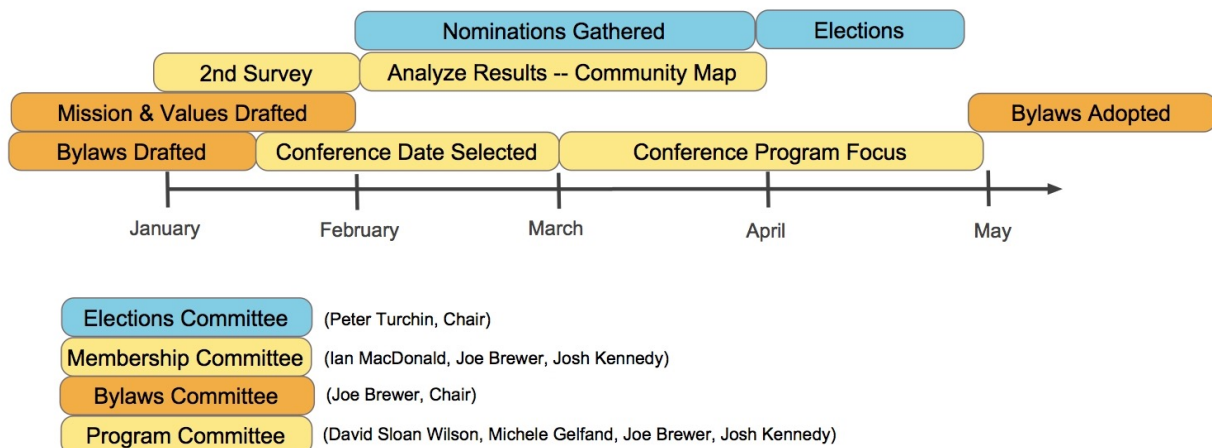
- ◆ **A vetting process and oversight committee will be created for collaborative research projects.**
- ◆ **David Sloan Wilson will write a memo about SIGs explaining how they were used in ACBS.**
- ◆ **Continue exploring this on an ongoing basis—we have a real opportunity to be innovative here.**

Forming Committees and Setting Deadlines

Another important set of decisions was made about forming committees and creating a detailed timeline for 2016. We made it clear that people need to step up and take responsibility for different tasks and have clear deadlines to hold ourselves accountable. As the graph below shows, we agreed to create four committees—one for bylaws and organizational matters, one for nominating the executive team and running elections, one for learning about our membership, and one for beginning to plan program content for the first conference.

Cultural Evolution Society

-- Committees & Tasks --



The Bylaws Committee was already formed by recruiting volunteers from the founding membership in the fall. This group has been actively shaping a set of considerations for how to organize this Society—using other societies as model templates and customizing to suit our unique needs. Peter Turchin offered to chair the Elections Committee with a timeline of gathering nominations in February and March, then holding elections in April so that the leadership team has been selected by the early summer of 2016.

A Program Committee will begin to shape the high-level objectives and initial themes for the first annual conference throughout the spring. And a Membership Committee will continue gathering information from our founding members to construct a rich *community map* of knowledge diversity to complement the Grand Challenge Survey analysis conducted in the fall.

Our purpose in seeding these committees is to offer a well-structured process that makes it easy for members to get involved. We will invite volunteers from the founding membership as we move through the steps of becoming a member-led organization.

Key Outcomes and Next Steps:

- ◆ **Committees have formed and timelines were established.**
- ◆ **Each committee will now initiate its course of action to rapidly create the Society in the next six months.**

How the Society Relates to Evolution Institute

The Evolution Institute is currently an “incubator” for the Society by receiving grant funds from the Templeton Foundation to support its formation in this early stage of development. A number of issues are entangled in this institutional arrangement that will require special care throughout the formation process. We spoke with Jerry Lieberman, co-founder and Secretary/Treasurer at the Evolution Institute, about the importance of ensuring that society activities are restricted to the domain of legal constraints for 501(c)3 nonprofits during this transition period.

Perhaps more exciting were the discussions about how synergies can arise through a coordinated approach that leverages the strengths of the Evolution Institute. Paul Wason joined us from the Templeton Foundation to share his vision for long-term collaboration with the Society. The topic of university overhead costs for managing grants came up as something that limits the scope and reach of cultural evolutionary studies in academic settings. Universities typically charge 40-50% of grant awards for institutional supports—whereas the Evolution Institute has a much lower overhead charge more typical of nonprofit organizations that provide fiscal sponsorship to projects managed through them. This opens up the possibility that the institute may be a valuable *grant processing center* for receiving and managing grants on behalf of society research projects.

While preliminary and early-stage in this conversation, it was already clear that a number of benefits can come through a well-envisioned approach that leverages the institute for Society activities. We are already building a customized member database with grant funds that supports the Society while enhancing the operational capacities of the institute. Another consideration is the suite of communication outlets managed by the Evolution Institute (*This View of Life* magazine, *Social Evolution Forum*, and *Economics* magazine) that can be deployed in service of the Society. This will be a topic for discussion with elected leaders when the society is ready to self-govern.

Key Outcomes and Next Steps:

- ◆ **We will continue actively exploring these issues throughout the next 18 months with the soon-to-be-elected society officials, looking for “win-win” outcomes that serve the field of cultural evolutionary studies.**
- ◆ **David Sloan Wilson will write a memo about this.**
- ◆ **A combination of informal and formal processes will be created in 2016 to assist this effort.**

Writing A “Manifesto Paper” About the Society

It was clear by the summer that we were doing something important here—recruiting more than 1000 founding members in less than a month. At the meeting we discussed how to set the stage for rapid evolution of cultural evolutionary studies as a scientific field by co-authoring a major paper that assesses the state of the field by reporting on the Grand Challenge Survey analysis and Big Questions for Cultural Evolution that have evoked such an enthusiastic early response.

One topic we explored at length was the top-priority response from the survey analysis calling for *knowledge synthesis across the social and biological sciences*. It is clear that a focus for our field will be to actively promote interdisciplinary research and cross-disciplinary integration of knowledge (also known as “transdisciplinarity”). Our founding members come from many different disciplines and are prone to be somewhat isolated in traditional academic departments and research areas. This tells us that we are already strong in interdisciplinary studies as a nascent community.

Serving as a catalyst across established fields stands as an objective we seek to serve by firmly establishing our own field on solid ground. As mentioned in the introduction, our ad hoc steering committee wants to create a world-class scientific society for cultural evolution while simultaneously working to make the world a better place. One key way we can do this is by staking out the territory for big questions and grand challenges that will be the early focus of our new society.

Key Outcomes and Next Steps:

- ◆ **Ian MacDonald and Josh Jackson will write a new survey to gather more information from our founding members—mapping the knowledge diversity of the field by inquiring about disciplines and societies already linked to this community.**
- ◆ **David Sloan Wilson will draft the opening statement for this paper and send around to the steering committee for feedback.**

- ◆ **Once these steps are completed, we will establish a formal process for writing the paper in the spring for publication in a high-profile research journal.**

A Roadmap for 2016 and Beyond

As this report shows, we really were productive at our meeting. The high-level goal I had coming out of our time together was to create a roadmap for the next 18 months—to guide my work as the dedicated staff person funded by the Templeton Foundation grant to guide the formation of the society between now and summer 2017. This is something I am now able to do. Here is the general timeline for what we will do together, recognizing of course that it will evolve as we move forward.

Spring/Summer 2016

- ◆ Write the mission statement and core values.
- ◆ Finalize draft bylaws.
- ◆ Nominate and elect leadership for the society.
- ◆ Build out the member database and create website.
- ◆ Gather more information about our membership.
- ◆ Write a manifesto paper on the big questions and grand challenges for the field.
- ◆ Begin shaping the agenda for our first annual meeting.

Fall/Winter 2016

- ◆ Officially adopt bylaws by elected leadership in consultation with the membership.
- ◆ Establish dates and program themes for first annual conference.
- ◆ Invite elected leaders and ad hoc steering committee to a summit for making the transition to democratic representation for the society.
- ◆ Map out the activities and timeline for the first three years of society objectives.
- ◆ Publish the manifesto paper and use it to launch the first round of collaborative research projects.

Spring/Summer 2017

- ◆ Prepare for first annual conference.
- ◆ Clarify long-term organizational relationship between the Society and the Evolution Institute.
- ◆ Prepare papers on first round of collaborative research projects for conference.
- ◆ Form committees for establishing an official journal for cultural evolution, vetting of research projects, ethics and oversight of society activities, and other functions to be determined along the way.
- ◆ Elected leaders “take the reins” at the conference.

Summer/Fall 2017

- ◆ The society has launched!
- ◆ We've had our first annual conference.
- ◆ Core organizational systems have been built.
- ◆ Prepare for next round of elections.
- ◆ Grow and make impacts on the world.

This roadmap is intentionally broad and written in brief. We have already seeded a number of conversations about ongoing research into the community gathered around the field of cultural evolution. Some among us are keenly interested in curriculum design and online education that will begin in the next few months. Others are talking about creating comprehensive databases for cultural evolutionary studies—the *Seshat World History Databank*² being an early prototype that is already being built. A conversation is underway about how this society should partner with other established societies and research communities.

It is an exciting time indeed! Here's to a productive new year.

Onward,

Joe Brewer
Culture Designer
The Evolution Institute

² <http://seshatdatabank.info/>

Appendix I – Participants

David Sloan Wilson (EvoS, SUNY Binghamton)

David Sloan Wilson is an evolutionary biologist and Distinguished Professor of Biological Sciences and Anthropology at Binghamton University. After earning his Ph.D. from Michigan State University, Wilson took several research positions at Harvard University, the University of Washington, and the University of California, Davis, before eventually joining Binghamton as a full professor. At Binghamton, Wilson started the Evolutionary Studies program, which unifies disciplines under the theory of evolution. In addition to exploring the biological world, Wilson's research deals with public policy, community, and religion. He communicates his work to the general public through his ScienceBlogs site and his trade books, such as *Evolution for Everyone: How Darwin's Theory Can Change the Way We Think About Our Lives*.

Ian MacDonald (EvoS, SUNY Binghamton)

Ian MacDonald is a senior member of the Binghamton Religion and Spirituality Project. His current research centers on the role that religious expression plays in the context of everyday life. Using data from a recent study of quality of life within contemporary intentional communities, he tests claims about the adaptive nature of religious expression for both communities (e.g. increased longevity?) and their members (e.g. healthier?). Additionally, he is engaged in an observational study of local Christian worship, using a specially designed ethogram "app" to systematically record collective behaviors during services.

Joe Brewer (Culture Designer, Sustainability Expert, The Evolution Institute)

Joe Brewer is the founder of Cognitive Policy Works, and is a consultant who aims to develop integrated solutions at the intersection of advocacy, technology, and policy. His research specialties include design for systemic change, the architecture of human interaction, and incubating social innovations that promote the growth of livable and resilient communities. Brewer has formal training in Earth systems, political cognition, and open collaboration processes, and works internationally with social entrepreneurs, civic institutions, and non-profits to solve some of the most challenging problems confronting humanity.

Joshua Jackson (Cross-Cultural Psychology, University of Maryland)

Joshua Conrad Jackson is a predoctoral researcher at the University of Maryland. He received his B.A. with First Class Honors from McGill University in 2013, and held a research position at University of Otago in New Zealand before joining Maryland in 2014. Josh studies the emergence and evolution of cultural norms, religious cognition, and the dynamics of natural social grouping. He is currently working as co-PI on an Otago Research Grant that explores cognitive responses to existential threat. He also serves as co-editor of the science communication group, *Useful Science*.

Peter Peregrine (Archeology, Lawrence University)

Peter Peregrine is a Professor of Anthropology at Lawrence University and a registered professional archaeologist, as well as the creator of the Peter Neal Peregrine Press. He previously received his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D., from Purdue University. His research interests include anthropological theory, the evolution of complex societies, culture contact and change, and the integration of archeology and ethnology. In addition to archaeology, Peregrine has also made a number of contributions to cross-cultural studies. The focus of his work has been on developing archeological correlates for various types of behavior, including warfare, post marital residence, and social stratification.

Peter Richerson (Zoology, Culture and Evolution, UC Davis)

Peter Richerson is the Distinguished Professor Emeritus of the Department of Environmental Science and Policy at the University of California, Davis, past President of the Society for Human Ecology and of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society, and President-Elect of the Evolutionary Anthropology Society. After completing his Bachelor and Ph.D. at UC Davis, he held guest professor positions at the University of California, Berkeley, Duke University, and University of Exeter, before rejoining UC Davis as a faculty member. Richerson's research investigates sociocultural evolution, human ecology, and applied and tropical limnology. In his work on cultural evolution, he uses methods of analysis of evolution developed by evolutionary biologists to study the processes of cultural evolution. His models aim to illuminate the evolutionary properties of human culture and animal social learning, and the properties of gene-culture coevolution. Richerson was recognized as a Guggenheim Fellow in 1984, and was awarded the J.J. Stanley Prize of The School of American Research in 1989 for contributions to the human sciences.

Peter Turchin (Evolutionary Biology, U Conn)

Peter Turchin is a professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at University of Connecticut. Turchin was trained as a theoretical biologist, and earned his Ph.D. in Zoology from Duke University. His current interests, however, lie in the field of Cultural Evolution and Historical Social Dynamics. Turchin is one of the founders of Cliodynamics, the new scientific discipline at the intersection of historical macrosociology, cliometrics, and mathematical modeling of social processes. Using cliodynamics, he has studied multilevel selection, the collapse of complex societies, and the effect of population pressure on warfare. He is also vice-president and one of the founding members of the Evolution Institute.

Paul Wason (Archaeology, John Templeton Foundation)

Paul Wason is responsible for developing new research initiatives investigating the evolution and fundamental nature of life, human life, and mind, especially as they relate to issues of meaning and purpose. Before joining the Foundation, he spent ten years at Bates College as director of foundations and corporations and as a sponsored-research administrator. An anthropologist with a specialty in prehistoric archaeology, Dr. Wason received his Ph.D. in anthropology from the State

University of New York at Stony Brook and is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Bates College, where he earned a B.S. in biology. His research on inequality, social evolution, and archaeological theory has been published as *The Archaeology of Rank* (1994).

Michele J. Gelfand (Cross-Cultural Psychology, University of Maryland)

Michele J. Gelfand is Professor of Psychology and Distinguished University Scholar Teacher at the University of Maryland, College Park. She received her Ph.D. in Social/Organizational Psychology from the University of Illinois. Gelfand's work explores cultural influences on conflict, negotiation, justice, and revenge; workplace diversity and discrimination; and theory and methods in cross-cultural psychology. She is the founding co-editor of the *Advances in Culture and Psychology* series (Oxford). Gelfand is the Past President of the International Association for Conflict Management, and received the Annaliese Research Award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Her work has been published in *Science*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, *Psychological Science*, *Annual Review of Psychology*, *Academy of Management Review*, among others.

Harvey Whitehouse (Social Anthropology and Cognitive Science of Religion, Oxford University)

Harvey Whitehouse is Chair of Social Anthropology and Director of the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology at the University of Oxford. Whitehouse completing his PhD at the University of Cambridge under the supervision of Ernest Gellner, and followed his fieldwork in Papua New Guinea with the theory of “modes of religiosity,” which proposes that the frequency and emotionality of rituals determines the scale and structure of religious organizations. In recent years, Whitehouse’s work has expanded beyond religion to examine the role of rituals of all kinds in binding groups together and motivating inter-group competition, including warfare. This research has become increasingly global in reach with ongoing data collection now established at field sites in Singapore, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Vanuatu, Brazil, the U.S., Spain, Croatia, the U.K., Mauritius, and Libya.

Appendix II – Full Meeting Agenda

Monday, December 21st 2015

9:00 AM -- Welcome and Open Circle

Set the tone for the day and welcome everyone. Go around and do a brief "check in" to see how everyone is feeling and what they would each like to accomplish in the meeting.

9:15 AM -- Tell the Story of Last Nine Months

Recap our journey since the last workshop in March. Review the incredible progress we have made and get everyone on the same page about where things are now with the society.

9:25 AM -- Review the JTF Grant and What We Can Do

Go step-by-step through the planning grant and review budget, timeline, and activities that are funded for the next 18 months. Clarify and address any questions. This will enable us to concretely plan for what we already have resources for, while growing capacity for additional supports and activities along the way.

10:00 AM -- Scope and Mission of the SSCE

Dive into the mission and shared values for what we want this society to be. How much like a traditional science society? How much applied work with practitioners? What about advocacy and informing public policy? Let's build up a shared understanding of what we want the SSCE to be.

11:00 AM -- Grand Challenge Survey

Ian and Joe will present findings from the survey results for discussion. What should we do with this information? There has been talk of publishing a peer-review article -- how shall we proceed? Practically speaking, what should we do next to guide the society in forming Special Interest Groups (SIGs) for strategic initiatives?

12:00 PM -- Lunch Break

12:30 PM -- Organizational Matters

Bylaws and membership dues. Legal formation of the society. Election of executive leadership. All of these things need to happen. Along the way, we will need to thoughtfully navigate the relationship between the Evolution Institute and the SSCE.

1:00 PM -- Skype Chat with Jerry Lieberman

Continuing the discussion of organizational matters, JL will skype in to present on the legal and fiscal matters involved for the Evolution Institute to "incubate" the SSCE. Eventually there will be two executive boards -- how will they interact? Will the SSCE remain part of EI or will it eventually part ways?

2:00 PM -- Forming SIGs (Intellectual Candy)

Perhaps the most exciting way we can hit the ground running in 2016 is by formalizing the process for creating SIGs. One SIG has already started taking shape -- David and Ian's project with intentional communities and ecovillages. Let us explore this as a case study and brainstorm other SIGs we'd like to initiate in the first year of operations. What other materials and infrastructure will be needed for SSCE members to join SIGs or create their own?

3:00 PM -- Birthing A REAL Tribe

Right now we have 1200 people on our email list. How do we meaningfully evolve this latent community into a real tribe? Conferences and workshops? Summits and SIGs? What can we do to create a real sense of community? And what is the appropriate (realistic) timeline for doing so?

4:00 PM -- Putting the Pieces Together

Let us create a timeline and priority list for putting all these pieces together. What are the outstanding questions or issues left to discuss? What is "shovel ready" right now? We begin to formulate a road map (action plan) for the next 18 months as a synthesis of the meeting.

5:00 PM -- Close of Meeting

Conclude and break until dinner. Meet at the hotel at 6:30 for social outing.