



# LTER Network Executive Board

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July 1, 2007

Robert B. Waide  
Executive Director,  
LTER Network Office  
University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, NM 87131

Dear Bob,

At its 25 June meeting, the LTER Executive Board (EB) reviewed the performance of the Network Office (LNO) over the past year. This letter summarizes that discussion and suggests changes for the coming year. The review is based on EB member interactions with the LNO over the review period, on the LNO's annual report to NSF, and on discussions with you. It is also informed by the results of a quantitative survey administered to all LTER sites this past spring, a summary of which is attached.

In general, the EB is pleased with the overall activities of the LNO this past year, and in particular is pleased to see progress in the areas identified in prior reviews. This includes the most recent review conducted by NSF on-site in late 2005, which the Executive Committee of that time accepted as its own review for 2006. As you know, we are at a critical juncture with respect to Network synthesis activities with the impending completion of the Network's strategic plan, and it's particularly valuable and gratifying to have a top-performing LNO as we prepare to move into the implementation phase of the plan.

In particular, we commend the LNO for activities designed to address issues identified in the last reviews:

- 1) to develop strategies for meeting synthesis goals across a range of funding scenarios.  
Action taken in response: Increased funds for synthesis activities, such as the EcoTrends project and research working groups, were obtained by redirecting existing funds and by obtaining new funds through supplemental requests.
- 2) to establish a mechanism for better assessing small grant / working group outcomes.  
Action taken in response: The LNO has devoted significant effort to identifying products from research working groups and is constructing a data base with this information that will be part of the upcoming renewal proposal.
- 3) to reduce the lag time for implementation of information management developments.

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G. Philip Robertson (Chair)

Peter M. Groffman  
Morgan Grove  
Donald L. Henshaw  
Sarah E. Hobbie

Sally J. Holbrook  
Charles S. Hopkins  
Sherri L. Johnson  
W. Berry Lyons

Steven C. Pennings  
Dan C. Reed  
Robert B. Waide

Action taken in response: The LNO solicits guidance from the Network Information System Advisory Committee (NISAC) to identify high priority goals. By setting mutually-agreed upon priorities, the LNO can focus on the most important information management developments and reduce implementation time.

- 4) to improve communication between LNO staff and sites.

Action taken in response: Visits by LNO staff to sites continue and the LNO is initiating several new activities: 1) periodic all site videoconferences are being tested as a means to disseminate information; 2) LNO staff frequently engage in real time chat sessions with site personnel; 3) LNO staff have initiated blogs to provide additional information to sites; 4) equipment to record and broadcast webinars will be requested in the renewal proposal; 5) the LNO web site will be revised for easier access; and 6) a new LNO information brochure will be developed.

For the coming year, the EB identifies the following areas for additional attention:

- improved LNO-site communication. Many sites continue to feel poorly informed with respect to LNO activities. In light of on-going and long-standing efforts by the LNO in this area this is a frustrating issue. A strategic plan for communication should be considered as part of the renewal proposal, as we've discussed. In the meantime more outreach communication is needed, which might include improvements to the appearance and functionality of the LNO web site, including a description of LNO services and easier access to archived documents.
- better opportunities for sites to learn about Network Information System (NIS) developments. About a third (9) of the sites profess to know little about recent NIS activities. This is related to the communication bullet, above.
- specific help with site needs in the areas of informatics training, especially in ecological informatics, EML, and database development. Sites also identified needs in the area of cross-site synthesis, but the EB expects much of this to be addressed as part of the suite of activities that will follow release of the strategic plan, and so doesn't believe this is an area of substantive concern at this time.

Again, let me reiterate the fact that the Executive Board endorses the overall direction and activities of the LNO, and much appreciates the leadership that you provide in meeting the high and diverse expectations for the Office. We look forward to working together with you to develop the LNO renewal proposal, now on the near-term horizon.

Sincerely,



G. Philip Robertson  
Chairman, LTER Science Council  
and Executive Board

cc: LTER Executive Board

Summary of the 2007 Site Survey  
June 21, 2007

The survey comprised 59 structured questions divided into eight categories: Administration and Service Activities; Computational and Communication Infrastructure; Information Management and Methods Development; Network Development, Community Outreach and Training; Publications and Public Outreach; Synthesis; International LTER; and Education. Each major category had an open-ended question to solicit additional comments, and there was a final open-ended question designed to address issues that didn't fall within the eight categories. Twenty-two of 26 sites submitted responses, and lead principal investigators were involved in crafting responses for all but two sites.

The performance of the LNO was generally acceptable with the following exceptions. The Request-Tracking System is still not being used routinely by around 40% of sites, suggesting that additional education is necessary. Around a third of the sites felt like they needed more information regarding LNO activities. Additional improvements to the appearance and functionality of the web sites are necessary. Discovery of documents in the electronic archive needs further attention. Nine sites seemed to feel like they were not receiving enough information about the development of the NIS, but at the same time most sites relied primarily on site information managers for information. Sites were nearly unanimous in agreeing that the LNO should continue to facilitate interactions and communication between the LTER Network and scientific and educational societies, government agencies, research centers, NGOs, and policy makers. Two sites were displeased with the assistance provided by the LNO with regard to the development of their brochures. Most sites agreed with the mechanism for providing post-ASM support and would like to see more support for cross-site research. Respondents seemed to want more from the LNO with regard to synthesis.

Regarding site needs, there were strong and repeated indications that support for videoconferencing was an important need. Additional training in informatics should be a high priority for the LNO. Priorities in training included 1) ecological informatics, 2) EML, 3) database development, and 4) sensor networks, in that order. To facilitate cross-site and network-level synthesis, sites need additional support for 1) small group meetings, 2) post-docs, and 3) mini-sabbaticals, in that order.

Specific comments for further action include:

- Provide a table of services on the LNO web page
- Continue assistance to upgrade site IM capabilities
- Provide videoconferencing technology
- Keep meeting and document information up to date on web pages
- Identify and implement trends in new technologies, security, collaboration tools
- Support information management through training and increasing site resources
- Is the cost of sending the LTER exhibit to national meetings justified?
- Improve coordination and communication associated with social science components