



LTER Network Executive Board

June 28, 2008

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

Dear Bob,

At its 6 May 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 past year, on the LNO's annual report to NSF, and on discussions with you. It is also informed by results from the annual survey administered to LTER lead PIs, Information Managers, and Graduate Student representatives this past April.

The EB is pleased with the overall activities of the LNO this past year. And as evidenced by survey results, progress has been made in all of the areas targeted in last July's evaluation. This is especially the case with respect to communication issues, two of the three areas identified by the EB for attention in last year's evaluation:

- 1) the need for improved LNO-site communication.
Action taken in response: The LNO has increased efforts to communicate with the sites. In particular, the Executive Director has contacted sites that expressed this problem to arrange visits or videoconferences and requested additional feedback on requirements for the document archive. We have included the development of a comprehensive LTER Network communication plan in the LNO renewal proposal to address barriers to communication within the network.
- 2) better opportunities for sites to learn about Network Information System (NIS).
Action taken in response: Additional efforts have been made to bolster NIS information flow. Information about the NIS is provided to information managers through the DataBits newsletter, annual presentations to the IM Committee, presentations to the Network Information System Advisory Committee (NISAC), frequent videoconferences with the IM Executive Committee, and individual interactions. The LNO has contacted directly the respondents who indicated dissatisfaction with information flow to elicit suggestions about how communication can be improved.
- 3) specific help with site needs in the areas of informatics training, especially in ecological

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informatics, EML, and database development.

Action taken in response: The LNO has allocated funds to conduct a training exercise for the LTER IM community, and that community is in the process of identifying appropriate topics. In addition, annual IM training activities have been built into the LNO renewal proposal, as have product-oriented meetings for information managers and targeted site visits by IMs. The LNO continues to provide assistance to sites through site visits and other interactions as needed by sites.

The EB has had a number of opportunities to discuss LNO activities over the past year, especially in light of the LNO renewal proposal. These discussions have been very productive, as was our recent discussion of 2008 survey results. We expect many of the substantive issues that arose in these dialogues to be resolved with implementation of the LNO renewal. Nevertheless, several issues that arose deserve attention in the meantime:

- graduate student involvement - survey results suggested that graduate students feel poorly informed. This is part of the general communication issue that has been identified in prior reviews, and we need to ensure that the communication plan proposed for the renewal period targets and involves grad students in particular. Additionally we need to ensure that the 2009 All Scientist Meeting provides ample opportunities for involving students in network-level activities, and also encourage sites to more regularly update student information on the network personnel database, a perennial challenge to keep current.
- documents on the Network web site - the usability of the document archive could use some attention. Partly this is organizational (a table of contents might help here); partly this is priority-related (minutes of meetings and workgroup products are not as timely as optimal). Additionally, a summary calendar would be useful, as would a network history overview including an event timeline.
- remote sensing on the network information system - the remote sensing archive appears underutilized, which may reflect a lack of need. We will address this at the EB level with an ad hoc group to advise us on the best path forward, including identifying current and future needs for a centralized site-image repository.
- LNO server administration for sites - information about the LNO's willingness to administer database servers for individual sites needs to be more equitably distributed, and if administrative costs are not trivial, a fee structure needs to be considered.
- photo gallery of LTER research - the site image gallery needs updating. The EB chair will put out a call to sites for images, and the LNO will need to follow-up.

Again, as for last year's review, let me reiterate 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 this Office. As we move further into implementation of the Decadal Plan these needs and expectations will continue to grow, and we look forward to helping to keep the LNO vibrant and nimble in the face of changing Network needs.

Sincerely,



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

cc: LTER Executive Board