

## **Executive Committee Review of the Network Office 2 March 2005**

The LTER Executive Committee (EC) met in Washington, D.C., and prepared this review on the basis of EC member visits to the LNO, on discussions with Executive Director Bob Waide, and on materials received from the LTER Network Office (LNO), including: 1) its annual report to the NSF; 2) the LTER site survey of LNO activities; 3) the LNO Strategic Plan, and; 4) documentation of specific responsibilities of LNO staff. We append a summary of the LNO site survey (#2, above) to this report. The completion of the LNO Strategic Plan represents an important milestone in clarifying the role of LNO to the LTER Network. Furthermore, we are pleased with the degree to which the LNO has become involved in, and contributed to, cutting-edge efforts to develop information technologies that benefit the LTER Network.

The following issues were raised in the 2004 EC review of the LNO and were addressed by the LNO as noted:

- The structure of the NSF annual report does not allow assessment of the amount of effort expended by LNO personnel on specific tasks that are priorities for the LNO.
  - Action taken: The information on responsibilities of personnel was presented at the Fall 2004 CC meeting, was discussed at EC site visits to the LNO office, and was included in the LNO 2004 Annual Report.
- Previous breakdowns of time allocation have not been useful, again because they are not keyed to priorities.
  - Action taken: Specific time allocation of LNO personnel cannot easily be discerned, but responsibilities and tasks, by staff member, were defined. Task Request Tracking software has also been implemented at the LNO to efficiently allocate staff time.
- Actual LNO priorities are not explicitly presented or discussed relative to activities.
  - Action taken: A matrix of priorities relative to LNO tasks and obligations was developed, communicated at the Fall 2004 CC meeting, and included in the 2004 LNO Annual Report.
- Contact of the EC with LNO personnel is mostly limited to the Executive Director.
  - Action taken: Since the 2004 EC Review, 4 of 7 EC members visited the LNO office [at separate times]. These visits were productive and informative.

In the 2004 Review, the EC recommended the following changes to future reviews:

1. The LNO should develop its priorities in consultation with the EC and CC before proposals are submitted to NSF for the Cooperative Agreement.
  - Action taken: The LNO continues to work with the EC and CC on a mechanism for this interaction.
2. The LNO should develop an explicit list of its priorities, and clearly indicate how the work of its personnel has addressed them, whether in its annual report to the NSF or separately in preparation for this annual review by the EC.

- Action taken: The LNO has implemented a review process of LNO priorities as per the LTER Bylaws and has included a list of these priorities in its 2004 Annual Report.
3. The LNO should work to improve its communication of accomplishments and activities to the sites and the Coordinating Committee (CC).
    - Action taken: The LNO has developed a formal communications plan to improve its communication with the CC. This plan (detailed in the 2004 Annual Report) includes an annual oral report to the CC, site visits by LNO personnel, and an improved format for the Network Newsletter. The EC visits to the LNO office were particularly helpful, and the EC recommends regular interactions of this kind to the degree possible.
  4. The Information Manager member of the EC should conduct a “site visit” of the LNO prior to the annual review by the EC, in order to gather information from the LNO on its activities.
    - Action taken: Four of 7 EC members visited the LNO office, including the IM EC member, in December 2004.

The EC identifies and targets the following items for attention by the LNO during 2005:

1. Procedures for document archiving, searching, and retrieval need to be improved.
2. LNO assistance to sites, upon request, with website development should be encouraged.
3. LNO should continue to assist sites with EML implementation, to the degree possible given budget constraints.
4. As the role of LNO continues to evolve (e.g. during the planning process), LNO should routinely clarify the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both staff and senior management.
5. LNO should continue to be creative and flexible with the kinds of synthesis activities that can be funded through LNO (e.g. cross-site working group activities).
6. The LNO Director should investigate alternative funding mechanisms for support of the 2006 All Scientists Meeting, in the event that NSF supplemental support is inadequate.

The EC concludes by pointing out several success stories, particularly relative to IM activities. The new hires at LNO have been well focused on activities important to the LTER Network. Priorities of the LNO IM staff are aligning better with LTER Network IM priorities, particularly relative to NISAC recommendations. LNO reporting on follow-up of priority tasks has also improved. The LNO is playing an important and valuable supporting role in the LTER Network Planning Process as well. Finally, the EC appreciates the time and attention that the LNO Director and staff put into this annual review process.