

## The US LTER Book Series: Criteria, Guidelines and Protocols

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### Introduction, background and intent of this document:

The LTER Book Series was formally initiated in 1998 with the publication of the first site synthesis volume and the LTER Network entering into a non-exclusive agreement with Oxford University Press (OUP) to serve as an outlet for future volumes. Currently there have been 12 volumes published that are generally considered part of the Book Series – nine published by OUP, two by the American Geophysical Union (these pre-date the OUP agreement), and one by Yale University Press.

The original intent of the LTER Book Series was to encourage publication of high quality science volumes emerging from LTER research and to provide a singular outlet (currently Oxford University Press) for these science volumes (site based synthesis, methods and multi-site synthesis) that were a direct product of the LTER Program. Although publication through other presses has always been an option for authors, the advantages of a singular outlet were perceived to include consistency in style and format of the volumes, the marketing advantages of being part of a large and growing series, and access to the collective experiences of previous LTER authors. The advantages to the LTER Network originally envisioned included the ability of the Network to oversee the quality and scope of the books included in the series as well as the series providing a collective identity and enhancing the visibility of the Network.

The LTER Publications Committee (PC) is a network-wide standing committee with membership that includes a committee-elected Chair, two additional appointed representatives from LTER sites, and ex-officio representation from the Network Office. Historically, the PC has provided *ad hoc* advice to the Executive Board (EB) on Network-scale publications policies and activities, with its scope primarily limited to books published as part of the OUP Series.

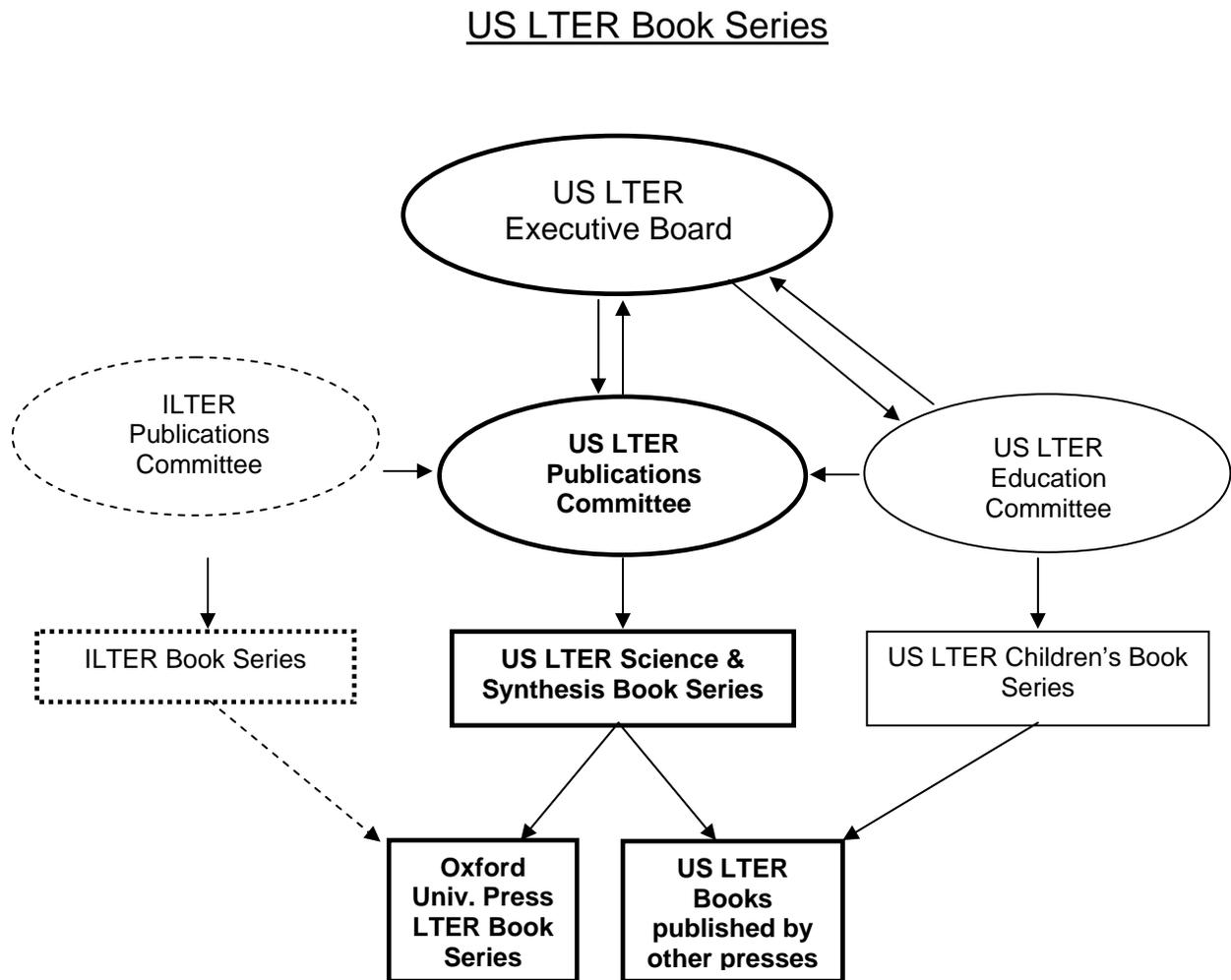
Ten years after publication of the first OUP LTER book, the diversity of potential LTER Science volumes proposed and being written has broadened beyond that originally envisioned. Furthermore, procedures followed by the PC have varied and have been relatively unstructured, and criteria, guidelines and protocols for determining if volumes are appropriate for the US LTER Series have not been formalized.

The LTER EB, under the leadership of Phil Robertson, charged the PC in November 2007 to revisit the goals and intent of an LTER Book Series and provide recommendations to the EB that can serve as the basis for a more formal Network Book Publication Policy. Included in this, the PC was asked to recommend criteria, guidelines and protocols that the PC and EB can use for determining if proposed volumes are appropriate for inclusion in the LTER Book Series.

The intent of this document is to meet this charge and what follows should be viewed as a proposal for the EB to consider – with modification anticipated.

The LTER Book Series defined:

In addition to site and multi-site synthesis, and methods volumes based on research primarily supported by the US NSF LTER program, one International (ILTER) volume has been published as part of the OUP LTER Series and two children’s books have been published by non-OUP presses. To better manage this diverse array of LTER Books, we propose the following structure.



With this structure, there would be three distinct book series within the US LTER Book Series - with two of these directly under the purview of the EB.

The *US LTER Science & Synthesis Series* would include volumes based on site and multi-site syntheses, methods and standards, and other science products supported by the US NSF funded LTER Program. To achieve the originally envisioned benefits of a primary publisher, OUP (or any other press the LTER Network contracts with in the

future) would be the outlet encouraged for these volumes. However, volumes published by other presses would also be included in this series provided they are approved by the EB. Proposed volumes for this series would be vetted initially, and primary oversight would be provided, by the PC. The EB would approve volumes for formal inclusion in the LTER Book Series, acting on recommendations from the PC. More detailed criteria, guidelines and protocols for such approval are provided below.

The *ILTER Book Series* would include volumes based on research conducted primarily at ILTER sites. It is anticipated that these would be vetted and primary oversight would be provided by an ILTER Network committee. Thus, ILTER would oversee its own series with guidelines for publication. However, it is expected that at least some of these books will also be appropriate and meet guidelines for inclusion in the US LTER series. For these books, authors will need to follow the same guidelines as below for the *US LTER Science & Synthesis* series.

The *LTER Children's Book Series* will continue to be published by publishers determined by the authors. These books would be vetted initially and primary oversight would be provided by the LTER Education Committee, with recommendations provided to the PC and the EB for formal inclusion in the LTER Book Series.

**For all three series, official designation for inclusion in the LTER Book Series by the EB would require that these books include the US LTER Logo on their covers. This logo, rather than publication by any particular press, will signify that a volume is part of the US LTER Book Series.**

The remainder of the document pertains only to the *US LTER Science & Synthesis Series* since this is the primary series overseen by the PC.

Guidelines and Criteria for Inclusion in the *US LTER Science & Synthesis (S&S) Series*:

The two primary criteria for determining if a proposed volume is appropriate for the *LTER S&S series* include: 1) Information content - quality and quantity of the science, and 2) the volume's relationship to the US NSF LTER Program. In principle, the latter guideline means that for a book to be appropriate for inclusion, its content would be based primarily on research and resources provided by the LTER Program. Thus, disciplinary volumes by LTER scientists in which the content was not primarily dependent on LTER science, or books largely about non-LTER sites, would not normally be appropriate.

Decisions about information content (criteria 1) should be made via the peer-review process based upon the author(s) providing a standard book prospectus to the publisher and the publisher soliciting anonymous reviews (see suggested protocol below).

The LTER Publications Committee will also review the prospectus and provide a recommendation to the Executive Board regarding the proposed volume's suitability for inclusion in the series (criteria 2). The Executive Board will act upon this recommendation and communicate their decision to the PC. The PC will then contact the proposed publisher and the author(s).

Volumes would have to meet both criteria for inclusion in the *LTER S&S Series*.

Suggested Protocol for Authors Publishing a Volume in the *LTER Science & Synthesis Series*: (Note – this protocol would not pertain to volumes already under contract)

1. The lead author contacts the Chair of Publications Committee (PC) and the publisher with a brief outline/overview of the proposed volume. This will permit a preliminary assessment to be made of the proposed volume's suitability for the series.
2. Assuming encouragement is provided by both parties above, the lead author will prepare a formal prospectus following the structure of previous volumes in the LTER book series. These examples will be made available on-line on the LTER network website.
3. The lead author submits the prospectus to both the book publisher and the PC, with suggested reviewers for the publisher to contact. The publisher should consult with the PC regarding these reviewers and permit additional reviewers to be suggested as appropriate.
4. The publishing house should conduct the peer review of the prospectus. For OUP volumes, a standard set of instructions and questions for reviewers to respond to will be used. These will be available on the LTER website after mutual approval by the PC and the publisher. Modifications to these standard questions may be required for specialized books. In these cases, the PC and publishing house will work with the lead author to develop these questions such that the book is fairly and appropriately reviewed.
5. The publisher will provide reviews to the author(s), negotiate changes to the prospectus and ultimately make a decision on information content, quality and marketability of the volume in a timely manner (not to exceed 2 months). This decision will be communicated to the author(s) and the PC.
6. Based on the reviews and the publisher's decision, the PC will develop a final recommendation regarding the volume's suitability for the LTER S&S Series (using the guidelines and criteria above).
7. The PC will provide the final prospectus, the reviews, the publisher's decision and its recommendation to the EB, where a final decision will be made. The EB will communicate this decision to the PC, who will communicate it to the publisher and the author(s).
8. Pending a positive decision, a contract will be negotiated between the publisher and the author(s). The role of the PC at this point will be advisory to both parties.
9. Author(s) will be responsible for external peer review of the content of their final volume.
10. The publisher will be responsible for the structural quality of the volume, the layout and presentation, and advance and post-production marketing.