

Minutes of the LTER Executive Committee Meeting
Weisman Museum, Minneapolis
May 16, 2006

The meeting was called to order by the EC Chair, John Magnuson, at 12 noon. Over the lunch, introductions were performed and the agenda was approved.

1. Report out from NISAC meeting

Don Henshaw delivered a short report of the activities of the Network Information System Advisory Committee (NISAC) with results from their May15-16 meeting. He focused on the development of an example science scenario that would provide a focus for cyberinfrastructure planning. Collins asked about the fate of the use case scenario that had been developed as part of the Planning Grant. Henshaw indicated that the use case scenario was not discussed by NISAC. The decision was made to call Barbara Benson to raise this issue. Henshaw indicated that NISAC reviewed the draft Cyberinfrastructure plan developed in the planning activity. Grove asked if there was a social scientist involved in the development of the CI plan, and the answer was that there was not. Grove pointed out that NSF/SBE was involved in discussions of management of data from social science disciplines and this might provide a good opportunity for interactions among disciplines. Grove volunteered to help out with the CI plan.

- Henshaw will send a copy of the draft CI plan to Grove for review

Henshaw mentioned progress on the data module for the TRENDS project. There is much to be learned from the TRENDS example on the process of developing data modules. There were also reports from the LNO and a discussion of standard web page interfaces and how these might be used to meet site needs while maintaining an LTER corporate look. Two new members are needed for NISAC; recommendations from NISAC for new members would go to the CC for approval.

2. Revisit LNO review and prepare recommendation for CC

John Magnuson led a discussion of the process for the annual review of the LTER Network Office (LNO). At the last EC meeting in Washington, DC, the EC decided to use the NAB and NSF mid-term reviews as the evaluation of the LNO for this year. Magnuson gave a brief overview of the recommendations from these two reviews. The LNO goes through a large number of annual reviews, which Waide elaborated for the EC. Magnuson asked for suggestions about reducing some of these reviews. Waide discussed the purposes of the different reviews and indicated that it was difficult to single out any review that could be eliminated. There was discussion about the structure of the document prepared by the LNO for the annual review.

Hobbie requested a discussion of the recommendations of the NSF mid-term review. There was a brief discussion of these recommendations, led by Waide.

Hobbie suggested that there was a role for the LTER sites in developing or approving metrics for the performance of the LNO.

Hobbie further suggested that the recommendation for the LNO to be proactive in finding ways to move the planning grant recommendations forward across a range of funding scenarios should also be discussed with the EC. Waide indicated that that issue should form a part of the LNO review in 2007.

Hobbie mentioned the recommendation to find more effective methods of determining the needs of the sites, which he indicated was related to the next agenda item.

3. Ways to improve the site survey

Hobbie led a discussion on the structure of the survey, and suggested that the survey needed to be revised to meet the goals set out by the mid-term review. Waide suggested that one problem with the present survey was that it had too many functions. Collins pointed out that a repeated survey does serve the function of measuring progress. Hobbie suggests that one problem is to get the sites to actually think about and define what they need. He argued strongly that there needs to be an effective mechanism to get the sites to communicate their needs. Grove indicated that there was a need for a long-term data set to track change over time. Waide suggested that the survey might be broken into science, IM, and education sections. Collins reviewed the objectives that led to the movement of the LNO and suggested that the CC has failed to provide consistent input to the LNO. Magnuson summarized this discussion and suggested an ad hoc committee to continue a review of the survey with the goal of dealing with defining site needs and developing an appropriate survey to determine whether needs are being met. Hobbie recommended that the specifics of the duties of the new Network Board include their responsibilities with regard to determining and communicating the needs of sites and their network. Zimmerman suggested a half day workshop of Executive Board focused on the future and based on the results of the planning grant. This workshop would list and prioritize activities that would enable next big science issues for LTER.

- The Executive Board should conduct such a workshop
- This workshop should not address specifics of the survey

The communication plan for the LNO will address the responsibilities of the LNO, the PIs, and the individual scientists in enhancing communication.

4. NEON discussion

In a closed session, Scott Collins led a discussion of recent changes at NSF regarding NEON.

5. Strategy for draft governance plan/bylaws

John Magnuson led a discussion on the strategy for presenting the new bylaws and the implications should they pass. The goal is a vote or a vote in principle with a committee to complete details. Several implementation issues will exist if the new bylaws are approved. The operation of the Science Council is one of these. The election of either a chair or chair-elect will take place in September. Magnuson is willing to either step down in the fall or serve for a year while the chair-elect is trained.

Bob Waide presented a financial analysis of the cost implications of the new bylaws. Childers asked whether the estimates for salary for the chair included fringe benefits and IDC. The answer is no, but there may be mechanisms that will not require fringes or IDC to be paid. The shortfall under the best case scenario is between \$35-50,000. Costs could be reduced if the size of the Executive Board is reduced, or if one of their meetings is via videoconference. A brief discussion of the PolyCom videoconferencing system ensued. Additional savings could be made if the Executive Board and the Science Council met at the same time.

John Magnuson requested a recommendation from the EC as to the action or actions needed to address the financial implications of the new bylaws. Deb Peters suggested adding \$10,000 for discretionary travel for the Chair. Childers suggested that Waide should initiate budget discussions with Henry if the bylaws pass. One approach might be to develop a pie chart with the overhead costs of the network administration to show the actual administrative cost. Suggestions included to start with 4 months salary for the Chair and to note that the status of standing committees is under review.

Magnuson asked the EC what it would take for them as individuals to serve as Chair. Answers included a post-doc (Peters) or 4 months salary (Childers and Hobbie). The consensus was to budget \$60,000 without a specific target for that money. The implication is that 4 months of effort would be expected.

The amounts budgeted for meetings of the Science Council and Network Board were discussed. The value of face-to-face meetings should not be underestimated.

Note-taking of meetings needs to be addressed. Minutes should be circulated and approved, so travel for a note-taker needs to be included. Zimmerman pointed out that communication of the results of the Executive Board would become more important under the new bylaws. Collins suggested that a secretary should be appointed for the Network Board.

A discussion of funds for standing committees ensued. There was some discussion of the possibility of eliminating some committees, but the consensus was that this kind of decision should be taken with deliberation. The decision was

made to reduce the funds for standing committees by half, so that some committees would meet every other year.

The EC authorized Waide to take the agreed upon budget for a discussion with Henry and possibly Penny. In the event that a negative reply is received, the LNO will develop alternative strategies for funding as much of the new governance costs as possible. The request for funds for governance should come from the Network, not from the LNO. Magnuson suggested a letter from the CC as one alternative.

- Develop means of communicating consensus of the Network to NSF.

The election of new EC members was discussed in light of the new bylaws. The decision was to elect two new people and let the transition committee address the mechanism for adding additional members. The composition of the transition committee was discussed. The decision was to charge Magnuson and Waide to develop a list of recommendations for transition for review by the Network Board.

If the new bylaws are not approved, subsequent steps would depend on the number and seriousness of the objections. Minor issues can be dealt with during the meeting; major issues would require additional consideration by the Governance Committee. Zimmerman suggested that the bylaws, if accepted, should be reviewed in a year. Magnuson suggested that such a suggestion would make a good motion from the floor. If time runs out on discussion, there should be a vote on the new bylaws as proposed.

Magnuson led a discussion of the continuing activities of the Governance group regarding ways to incorporate new synthesis research funding into the Network. Magnuson suggested taking the existing recommendations from the Governance Committee and requesting comment from the sites. The Governance Committee could then take the most popular options and flesh them out to a series of more detailed options, which could be presented as advice to NSF. Childers asked how the proposal writing committee fits into this process. Collins presented a vision for way that the Planning Grant will define the participation of sites and hence the ways that funding will be distributed. Collin's vision includes funds coming to a central entity that will issue subcontracts to sites for their parts of the research plan. Discussion about other options ensued. Waide asked if there was an option for proposals that supported large experiments by managing data or analyzing samples, and the answer from Collins was yes. Magnuson commented that the Planning Grant Proposal Committee has pre-empted the charge of the Governance Committee, and suggested that that committee should address specifically the role of the Science Council. Magnuson further suggested that the entity that managed funding should be considered carefully as should the relationship with the LNO and the Science Council. Collins suggested that the Governance Committee spend no further effort on alternate approaches.

Zimmerman pointed out that one of the goals of the Governance Committee in developing alternative strategies was to incorporate non-LTER entities in the management process.

- The Governance Committee should not pursue alternate approaches for implementing the funding mechanisms of the Planning grant.

6. Prepare for Planning Grant discussion; placeholder budgets for CI, Governance, Education, Research

Scott Collins discussed his plan for updating the CC on the Planning Grant progress. He gave a brief history of progress to date, focusing on the past and anticipated future involvement of the sites. He noted that there will be a meeting in July of site representatives to advance integrated projects. There will also be further discussions at the ASM

Scott indicated that Henry requested that the CyberInfrastructure budget be resubmitted with a stronger lineage to the science plan. Apparently Jim Collins never saw the budget that was submitted despite the fact that he requested it.

The EC suggested a few points that should be included in the presentation to the CC.

Magnuson indicated that NTL had approached the request for ideas from Scott by developing a theoretical approach to pulse and press that would apply across sites. Scott indicated that the Conference Committee was already working on this approach. Magnuson expressed concern that the current approach would not catalyze cross site questions. He gave two examples of ideas that NTL scientists had developed in response to Scott's request. Further discussion focused on a possible confusion about the actual role of the ideas being developed by sites in the broader process.

Waide asked if there was need to create a placeholder budget for education. Scott indicated that this was desirable, but perhaps premature.

7. Additional strategic planning topics

NSF has hinted on several occasions that the planning process should include a variety of elements in addition to the science plan. Waide presented a list of possible topics that might be discussed by elements of the LTER Network. He commented that it would be prudent to be prepared to address perceptions that differ between NSF and the planning group. Magnuson suggested that some of the issues on the list needed to be addressed for submission to NSF as part of the strategic plan. There was a discussion about some of the items on the list.

- Scott will review the list to determine which items can be incorporated into the science plan.

Scott suggested that we initiate a discussion of the first two items on the list for a discussion with the CC. Scott will lead the discussion.

8. TRENDS questions and issues

Deb Peters gave a report on progress in the TRENDS project. Twenty-five LTER sites and 25 other sites have responded so far. The plan is to have the book 80% done by the ASM as well as a static web page. DEB gave a supplement to support some of the costs. There was a discussion of the structure of the book and web page. Charlene D'Avanzo has taken on the challenge of adding an educational component to the project. Waide pointed out that the suggestion from NSF to use CUAHSI tools for this project, which may be a forerunner of other requirements for standardization with other emerging networks. Additional resources will be needed to develop the dynamic web page. A question was raised about how much effort would be contributed by the LNO towards the dynamic web page; Waide said he would ask James Brunt. There was a discussion of the need for a graphic artist who might be funded by spreading costs across the participating sites. An additional \$15-20,000 is the estimated cost for the graphic work.

9. Procedure for EC elections

The topic was discussed earlier in the meeting.

10. ASM issues or questions

Waide asked if there were any issues or problems with the plan for the ASM and the material submitted to sites. Waide requested the Conference Committee help to identify specific topics to discuss in working groups at the ASM

11. Topic and dates for 2007 mini-symposium

Magnuson suggested a theme that integrated social and natural sciences. Grove suggested that 5-7 good talks could be developed in this area. Peters suggested using the 5 questions in the Planning Grant as an organizing plan. Collins suggested climate change as a topic. Magnuson suggested biotic responses to climate change. The consensus was to focus on the 5 Planning Grant questions.

- Schedule the meeting for late February or early March.

12. Objectives of September EC and CC meetings

It was decided that there was no need to determine the agenda as yet.

13. Update on the formation of the Long Term Agricultural Research Network

Peters indicated that there will be a meeting in August to discuss next steps for LTAR. Grove indicated that BES has provided a tour for some of the USDA organizing people. Magnuson suggested a letter of encouragement might be sent. There was general agreement that the available information was insufficient to determine a course of action. Waide suggested that LTER should propose questions to be raised at the workshop. There was a discussion of the relationship between LTER and LTAR sites. The decision was to continue to monitor LTAR development.

14. Waide research semester

Waide requested approval to take time outside the LNO to focus on synthesis projects. He proposed a three-month period from December 2006 to February 2007 as the first of four projects spread out over four years. A joint project with Magnuson on the history of LTER would be another possibility.

- The EC approved the request, and determined that CC approval was not required.

15. Funding scenario for the social sciences

There was a brief discussion of the ongoing discussion in Congress about NSF funding for social science.

16. Outgoing C members

John Magnuson offered the two outgoing EC members an opportunity to comment on their experiences and provide final suggestions to the EC.

John Hobbie raised three points:

- Action items of each meeting should be reviewed at the next meeting.
- The Executive Board should consider the value of additional synthetic publications that represent the LTER Network. Such publications would be useful for the next review of the Network. We should use the new Science Council and projects like the TRENDS book to generate products that reflect well on the LTER program. These products, such as the 2003 Bioscience issue, should be featured prominently on the LTER web page.
- There is a serious issue of the definition of "LTER data" that is used by NSF. NSF prefers a very broad definition that requires data even from failed experiments to be posted on the web. Collins agreed that this is a problem, to

the extent that any data mentioned in a renewal proposal elicits the expectation that these data will be posted on a web site. Henshaw reminded the group that the LTER data release policy defines “LTER data” and discusses the kinds of data sets that should be posted. Collins suggested that the reviews of LTER renewal proposals may help us determine if there is a real problem.

Dan Childers reiterated John’s points.

The meeting adjourned for a group photo at roughly 5:30 pm.