LTER Information Managers Report to the Coordinating Committee

Prepared by IMExec
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Summary of Information Managers Committee (IMC) activities since LTER CC meeting at BNZ / ARC, August 2004.

1. IMExec Meeting. The winter IMExec meeting was held February 15-16, 2005 at the LTER Network Office. Attending members included Barbara Benson NTL, Emery Boose HFR, James Brunt LNO, Don Henshaw AND, Nicole Kaplan SGS, Peter McCartney CAP, Linda Powell FCE, Ken Ramsey JRN, Wade Sheldon GCE, and Jonathan Walsh BES. Invited guests included Randy Butler (National Center for Supercomputing Applications) and John McGee (Information Sciences Institute, University of Southern California). Highlights from this meeting and IMExec conference calls are noted below.

2. EML Best Practices Document. Over the past year a working group has created a document designed to facilitate EML implementation at LTER sites and to maximize interoperability of LTER EML files for synthesis and tool development. After a series of revisions the document is nearly ready for its first official release. The current draft with specific examples and templates can be viewed at http://cvs.lternet.edu under "emlbestpractices" (contact: Wade Sheldon GCE).

3. IM Review Criteria Document. This document was initiated at the IMC meeting last summer in response to a request from Henry Gholz, and has since evolved through many drafts with extensive input from the IMC and NISAC as well as Exec and individual site PIs. The document is intended to serve as a reference for formal reviews of LTER sites as well as for informal self-assessment and planning. The current draft will be presented and discussed at the April CC meeting (contact: Emery Boose HFR).

4. IMC & IM Mentoring Websites. Two new websites, currently under construction, will facilitate communication among IMC members and help train new Information Managers. The new IMC Committee web page (http://committees.lternet.edu) provides a virtual workspace with current information (documents, links, calendars) for the IMC. The IM Mentoring web page (http://devel.lternet.edu) already contains many resources for both new and old information managers (contacts: Nicole Kaplan SGS and Ken Ramsey JRN).

5. LTER Website Design. A working group has studied the diversity of structure and content in websites across the LTER Network and completed a survey of individual sites (see http://intranet.lternet.edu/committees/information_management/) in order to prepare recommendations for sites that are creating new web pages or redesigning old ones. A central question is how to create a sense of network identity given the heterogeneity of site institutional environments. One solution may be to direct users to network portals such as SiteDB or the planned LTER Query Interface (see below). Another may be to

encourage individual sites to use common features such as consistent names and keywords, or links to other sites and intersite projects (contact: Nicole Kaplan SGS).

6. LTER Query Interface. A working group at the IMC meeting last summer initiated design of a query interface for EML-based catalogs such as Metacat. The interface is intended to build on the Network's investment in EML and to support a wide range of search options for LTER datasets. A prototype is currently under development by the LNO (see http://fire.lternet.edu/~servilla/query) (contacts: Peter McCartney CAP & Mark Servilla LNO).

7. Network Planning Activities. Information Managers embedded in the four Network Science Working Groups, as well as the Education and Governance committees, will report anticipated IT needs back to the NISAC Committee, which is charged with developing a cyberinfrastructure strategy for the LTER Network. A proposal to supplement the current 2-year LTER network planning grant will also be submitted to NSF in the near future. If funded, it would support a cyberinfrastructure (CI) working group that would broaden the expertise base for LTER CI planning by including IT professionals from other science and technology centers, large IT development projects, and new observatory initiatives. The CI working group would develop a strategic plan for CI development through CI focus groups and interactions with IM participants in the Network Science Working Groups and NISAC. The strategic plan would be reviewed by NISAC and integrated into the overall LTER planning (contact: Barbara Benson NTL).

8. LTER Grid. The IMExec meeting included an extended discussion of how the LTER Network might someday utilize grid technology to support collaboration and synthesis. Technically a grid is "a set of well-defined services layered on a collection of resources spanning administrative boundaries." Grid services typically include authentication, authorization, resource monitoring, job scheduling, collaboration tools, and access to remote instruments across a network. A plan was developed for a 6-month pilot project that would create a prototype grid linking two LTER sites with the LNO and NCSA. This effort would complement similar efforts in SEEK and NEON (contact: James Brunt LNO).

9. IMC 2005 Meeting. The next annual meeting of the Information Managers Committee is scheduled for August 4-7, 2005 in Montreal, immediately before the ESA / Intecol meeting. IMExec is currently preparing the meeting agenda. For more information on the meeting please see:
http://gce-lter.marsci.uga.edu/lter_im/2005/

10. DataBits. The spring 2005 edition of the LTER Information Managers newsletter, edited by Eda Melendez-Colom LUQ and Jonathan Walsh BES, is available online at:
http://intranet.lternet.edu/archives/documents/Newsletters/DataBits/05spring/