

Outline for Strategic Plan Development

The LTER Network Office (NET) will undertake the development of a strategic plan incorporating recommendations of the NET Site Review Report, the 20-year Review of the LTER Program, the National Science Foundation, and independent reviews of International LTER and Education activities being conducted by the National Science Foundation. The strategic planning process, which will be carried out in close consultation with the LTER Executive Committee/Coordinating Committee, will focus on the NET's mission, its role in relation to other organizations, and the most effective management structure (both internal to NET and overall). A strategic plan focused on management of the NET will include: a) a mission statement, management organization chart, and defined scope of external relations; b) mechanisms of personnel evaluation; c) reporting structures and mechanisms of accountability; d) relations to NSF, UNM and the LTER leadership; e) processes for program evaluation, priority setting, and priority implementation; f) defined role in LTER-wide initiatives; g) defined role in LTER-related research; h) assessment of the most effective structures and activities for independent advisory groups. In addition, the strategic plan will contain sub-plans and budgets for the further development of synthesis activities and the LTER Network Information System as part of the LTER Decade of Synthesis.

Approach

Incorporating as it does recommendations from various sources, parallel strategic planning by the LTER Network, and independent evaluations of some activities, the development of the Network Office Strategic Plan (NOSP) will be a complex undertaking and will require professional consultation throughout the process. Therefore, the first step towards preparation of the NOSP will be to identify and contract an appropriate consulting firm. In order to meet the deadline for completion of the NOSP, this initial step must be carried out as promptly as possible. Mechanisms for identifying and funding consulting support are discussed below.

Once selected, the consultant will assist NET in developing a comprehensive timeline for development of the NOSP. We anticipate that the various steps in this timeline will include 1) assessment of priorities, capabilities, and key ecological research challenges; 2) identification of opportunities for collaboration and partnering; 3) development of an implementation plan, including NET organization, governance, and evaluation; and 4) review and approval. Each step will involve close consultation with the LTER Executive and Coordinating Committees as well as input from LTER Standing Committees, the National Advisory Board, and members of the national scientific community.

Assessment – We will conduct a three-day workshop involving NET staff and 12 scientists involved in long-term research (8 LTER, 4 non-LTER). This workshop will examine the scope of past and current LTER scientific activities and will, most importantly, identify key ecological challenges that may best be addressed through the LTER Network. Participants in this meeting will be drawn in part from the LTER Committee on Scientific Initiatives and the National Advisory Board. The starting point

for this discussion will draw on a series of recent reports (PCAST 1998, NCSE 2000, NSF 2000, NRC 2001, Thompson et al. 2001, AC-ERE 2002, LTER 2000-2010) and initiatives (e.g., ESA's "Assessment of Priorities, Opportunities, and Needs for Ecology in the First Decade of the 21st Century") that attempt to define key ecological questions. By evaluating these and other reports in the context of LTER priorities and capabilities, we will define a series of potential LTER activities for broader discussion by the entire LTER Network. The results of this exercise (a published report), including input from Network scientists and students, will provide the foundation for the development of the NOSP and will also inform the LTER Network strategic plan.

Identification of opportunities - We propose to host a two day workshop that includes representatives of the LTER Strategic Planning Committee (representing strategic planning efforts at the network level), the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis, the Santa Fe Institute, the Sustainable Biosphere Initiative of the Ecological Society of America, and other relevant entities to identify opportunities for collaboration and partnering, to fully leverage LTER with other scientific enterprises. We anticipate that this effort will draw upon experts in the analysis of complex systems and the use of cross-disciplinary approaches from outside the LTER Network.

Implementation - We propose to organize one or more two- to three-day workshops that will focus on developing an implementation plan. In particular, optimal network organization and governance structure, funding levels, and assessment plans will be developed in light of the scientific initiatives and collaborations proposed in the prior two workshops. This workshop will include key representatives from the LTER Strategic Planning Committee and the Network Office, as well as a small group of management consultants. The management consultants will be chosen for their expertise in the evolution of organizations, learning institutions, scientific governance structures, and evaluation and assessment procedures.

Review and approval - Results of each of the three strategic planning workshops will be presented to the LTER community at meetings already scheduled for 2003-2004: the Coordinating Committee meeting at Kellogg Biological Station (May 2003), the All Scientists Meeting (September 2003), and the Executive Committee/National Advisory Board meeting (February 2004). Thus, the LTER community and the National Advisory Board will play key roles in assessing progress and outcomes of the strategic plan. Final approval of the NOSP will be at the Executive/Coordinating Committee meeting scheduled for April 2004 in Santa Barbara.

We anticipate that the entire planning process will be completed within 18 months. Most of the working group meetings will comprise 8-12 individuals that represent the full breadth of LTER—i.e., discipline, geography, gender and ethnicity, and old and new sites. Two individuals (Gosz and Waide) will be present at every meeting to insure continuity in the planning process. Although the working group meetings will be limited in size to optimize participant productivity, working documents will be openly accessible and we will routinely solicit input from the LTER Network and other stakeholders throughout the planning process.

Schedule

Development of a final schedule will require the participation of the consultant, who is yet to be identified. However, discussions with several consulting firms suggest that the strategic planning process will require a preliminary period of evaluation followed by a series of meetings focused on specific tasks. The attached schedule describes a tentative timeline for such meetings during 2003-04. In this schedule, we have endeavored to maintain costs low by scheduling meetings in Albuquerque or in coordination with other scheduled LTER gatherings.

Budget

The principal cost for development of the NOSP will be the requirement for independent consulting and facilitation. Two draft plans have been solicited from consulting firms and are attached to this document. These plans represent preliminary estimates and not firm quotations; such quotations will have to be obtained following established University of New Mexico (UNM) or NSF purchasing procedures. Note that while the two estimates are similar in total cost, they differ widely in effort and hourly charges. A competitive bidding process will be necessary to determine the most cost-effective proposal.

The following costs will be incurred during the strategic planning process:

1. Travel for consultants (6 trips @\$1000) = \$6,000
2. Consulting contract (\$80,000)

Travel costs for LTER and non-LTER participants in meetings will be covered from existing Network Office funds.

A proposed budget would be:

NSF share	\$58,333 + 50% IDC = \$86,000
UNM cost share	\$28,667
Total available to contractor	\$86,000

Preparation of the supplement proposal will proceed as soon as NSF approves the dollar amount to be requested.