

## Virtual Update Notes August 27 & 28, 2009 - Governance and decision making



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Mon, 08/31/2009 - 1:49pm — sremillard

Discussion centered on the issue of governance, decision making , the role of NISAC, and communication between EB, NISAC, LNO, and IMC.

Participants:

**Thursday (8/27):**Corinna Gries (moderator, CAP), Barbara Benson (NTL), Dave Balsiger (NTL), Theresa Valentine (AND), Nicole Kaplan (SGS), Emery Boose (HFR), Jason Downing (BNZ), Wade Sheldon (GCE), Suzanne Remillard (AND), Karen Baker (PAL, CCE), James Brunt (LNO), Christine Laney (JRN), Mark Servilla (LNO)

**Friday (8/28):**Nicole Kaplan (moderator, SGS), Dan Bahaudin (CDR), Duane Costa (LNO), James Brunt (LNO), Karen baker (PAL, CCE), Wade Sheldon (GCE), Margaret O'Brien (SBC), Mark Servilla (LNO), Sven Bohm (KBS)

**Thursday Notes:**

by Emery Boose

See materials posted on IM website for additional details. The NISAC report to the EB was prepared during the period of LTER reorganization (2006) and describes the committee's purpose and activities at that time.

NISAC was more active during the LTER planning phase. A common perception is that NISAC is less active and less focused now.

What is the flow of communication? Top down or bottom up? What opportunities are there for the IMC to have an influence?

The governance working group has focused on the IMC. How have we governed ourselves over the last two decades? What entities have influenced our decisions (or made them for us)?

How can the IMC work within the LTER organizational structure? How can this structure be depicted graphically?

Where does LNO fit in? Where does NISAC fit in? These are recurring questions.

LNO tends to sit in the middle, with representatives on each committee and direct communications with NSF. At least this is the pattern for communications. It's less clear how decisions are made.

Frequent communications between Phil and NSF and between Bob and NSF. LNO is funded directly through a cooperative agreement with NSF. Phil does not represent LNO directly.

Where does the SC sit? According to LTER bylaws (available online), the SC reserves the right to make decisions. But it has rarely exercised this right. The SC has not been involved in recent EcoTrends discussions.

The SC sets the network science agenda. The SC is unlikely to act on administrative matters unless at a high level or high priority. But the SC does elect the LTER chair.

Does the IMC have issues that should be heard by the SC? Perhaps science related issues? Increasingly IM/IT staff are transitioning from a service role to a decision role.

The ideas for EcoTrends came out of the SC. But directions for implementation came from other sources (LNO, NISAC, IMC).

No clear lines of authority have been established for NISAC or other standing committees. So far the emphasis has been on advisement. This concept may need to be revisited.

The EB seems to expect NISAC to take on responsibility for CI implementation. Mission creep without explicit discussion. Still some confusion over NISAC's role.

Lots of PI involvement in the early days of NISAC. The committee has changed over time with personnel rotations. After initial planning effort, PIs were

less involved. PIs are more involved now, but NISAC is burdened with CI implementation.

The CI implementation plan is large and crosses many boundaries (funding, network organization, lines of communication and decision making). The plan has raised lots of big questions. What should be included in such a plan? A major operation with implications across the network.

Who should be involved in crafting the individual pieces of the CI plan? Web services, etc are complex technical decisions. Many of these are beyond the ability of the EB to deal with directly. Like EML raised to the 3rd or 4th power in terms of impacts.

Lots of issues around NISAC governance structure. The mission of NISAC is clouded by these issues.

We could learn from experience with past modules. How would we like them to have developed? Specific experiences might have more weight with the EB. Perhaps a topic for discussion at ASM.

The evolution of the NIS is also very dependent on the evolution of technology and our understanding of technology.

EcoTrends is a useful example. Christine is assembling a list of milestones for EcoTrends for such a discussion. EcoTrends is a science-led module.

ClimDB and SiteDB are IM-led modules. The Bibliography is an LNO-led module. A diversity of methods has worked well.

Governance may differ for these different methods. Hence they may not work that well together. The NIS is an effort to bring these modules together in a single system. Most agree that the NIS should be a single, unified system, not just a collection of disparate modules.

At the site level, many datasets do not work well together. A single architecture may not work.

Identify the pieces that support integration. Other pieces may not be ready for integration. Build in hooks for later integration. SiteDB is integrative. Other pieces such as ClimDB are not integrated yet.

Need to focus more on the umbrella framework. Is this something for NISAC to do? Or who?

New modules should be conceived in a way that fits into the larger framework. Requires a shift in thinking.

Also think about support services needed. Resolution services to identify datasets, shared keys, etc. This requirement was not articulated in the beginning. To some extent changes in expectations reflect changes in technology.

EcoTrends bypassed ClimDB, etc in its original concept. This led to some frustration among IMs. We need to take advantage of existing synthesis efforts.

Need for a NIS module best practices. Also a need to revisit the approved process for new NIS modules, which was dismissed early in the EcoTrends discussion and since ignored. This might be a good place to put NIS best practices.

Re-factoring vs. re-scoping. What would it take to go back and revise ClimDB? New guidelines could drive re-factoring or re-scoping of existing modules. Also give science groups a heads-up for the coordination that will be required.

The NIS approval document is fairly short. See document on LTER Intranet.

Who will do what? NISAC has drafted a CI implementation plan (March). Some substance, but not complete. NISAC backed off on some complex details (e.g. web services) that might be assigned to a dedicated working group. How to assemble (and pay) the right group of people?

NISAC should set the broader goals, working with IMC and EB. Then assemble (and pay) a new group to work on these tasks.

The NIS approval document puts the burden of broad thinking on the submitter. But some of the requested information might be hard for scientists to provide. Approval rests with the EC (now EB), not with NISAC or IMC.

NISAC was not given authority to make decisions. NISAC is an advisory committee to promote NIS development.

At a minimum, NISAC should be engaged in the process of preparing proposals and advising the EB on decision making.

Unit registry project. What steps should it take through the various committees?

NISAC is not a place to vet nuts and bolts, but rather a place to vet broader impacts, priorities, commitment of LNO resources, etc, and to gain support for moving forward as a network on particular initiatives. NISAC should be a source of unbiased and informed recommendations to the EB.

The IMC meeting at the ASM includes some time for governance discussion.

The cut-off point comes where major resources are involved. IMC can develop prototypes. But a motion for all sites to adopt requires approval at a higher level (EB).

NISAC should be involved earlier in the process, before a request for adoption by all sites. A development group or IMExec could bring a project to NISAC's attention. NISAC could evaluate the potential value for the network and need for resources. Need good lines of communication. But also need to keep extensive reporting and feedback within bounds.

Controlled vocabulary project. Who needs to give its blessing? This might be a low hanging fruit to test procedures for design and vetting.

EML adoption. No prototyping or exploration. Need smaller steps before official adoption, including prototypes, feedback (from IMC, NISAC, etc).

Unlike larger systems that promise an end-to-end solution, the vibrancy of the NIS may stem from its ever changing development.

NIS adoption process: NISAC for broader impacts. IMC/LNO for technical recommendations. NISAC for ramifications. EB for decision.

The revised NIS approval document could help identify who to contact when considering a new module.

### **Friday Notes:**

(Margaret)

Attending:

Dan Bahauddin, Duane Costa, James Brunt, Karen baker, Wade Sheldon, Margaret O'Brien, Mark Servilla, Sven Bohm, Nicole Kaplan (moderator)

short summary of Thursday for Friday people:

very broad, at network level. Also considered communication at upper levels, who need to work together (EB, NISAC, LNO)

Wade: where does NISAC fit? Some confusion. NISAC has always been an advisory board, but not an approval board. Some shift in direction of NISAC since it's inception. Initial focus was to provide guidelines (identify procedures, trajectories). More lately, is more tasked with implementation of CI plan (less advisory?),

Karen: NISAC is nicely positioned to be a communication facilitator. Could use model like the EB – they always goes back to sci council. We could use 4 current projects and examine their trajectories, all need to know how to proceed. [unit registry | pasta | projectDB | contrvocab ]

For each, define design dimensions:

what is interaction with community

what makes it part of a larger landscape (how to become interoperable with other systems)

what is life cycle (right?) karen, please summarize.

Definitions: Mark S suggests that pasta is not a module, but is core. Pasta is capable of delivering the set of “core” services required of NIS.

We have not really established definitions (maybe it is something like this??)

NIS core - deliver services - (pasta)

NIS module - development is often distributed, and then incorporated (ie, unit registry, projectDB, controlled vocab). processes are not currently defined, and might vary. None knows how to plug in to a core NIS.

Very valuable exercise: identify the trajectories of each of these current modules. Possibly, the best features could be used to create guidelines for future databases.

A question that arose yesterday: should the science council be the authority on NIS projects? Need good communication between IM individuals with the ecologists. Right now, we have one rep (Corinna) as does the LNO (Bob Waide). Occasionally, IMs going to ecology meetings (like ESA). James brought up the possibility of a joint IMexec/EB meeting. Should it include NISAC? (or is

nisac supposed to have the role of communication between sci domains and NIS already?)

| Attachment                       | Size      |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| NISAC_report_for_EB_2006.doc [1] | 43.5 KB   |
| GOV_VTC_AUG_2009v1.ppt [2]       | 220.5 KB  |
| 2008Renewal 56.pdf [3]           | 184.51 KB |
| nismodproposal.pdf [4]           | 87.33 KB  |

- Virtual Updates [5]

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**Source URL:** <http://im.lternet.edu/node/478>

**Links:**

- [1] [http://im.lternet.edu/sites/im.lternet.edu/files/NISAC\\_report\\_for\\_EB\\_2006.doc](http://im.lternet.edu/sites/im.lternet.edu/files/NISAC_report_for_EB_2006.doc)
- [2] [http://im.lternet.edu/sites/im.lternet.edu/files/GOV\\_VTC\\_AUG\\_2009v1.ppt](http://im.lternet.edu/sites/im.lternet.edu/files/GOV_VTC_AUG_2009v1.ppt)
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