

March 18, 2005

Dear Fellow LTER Investigator:

We are pleased to announce that a process has been developed to propose synthesis modules for the LTER Network Information System (NIS). The attached file contains some background information on what modules are and the process required to get them added to the NIS. We encourage you to seriously think about developing a module whenever you contemplate a synthesis project. It is another mechanism to present synthesis at the network level, one that should greatly speed our path along the road to synthesis!

Network Information System Advisory Committee (NISAC)

Request for New Network Information System Modules

Developed by NIS Advisory Committee

A process for adding modules to the LTER Network Information System was formally approved by the LTER Coordinating Committee (CC) in the fall 2004 meeting. This note provides guidelines on how to propose such a module. We encourage you to offer proposals for new NIS modules.

What is a module? All kinds of information may be included in NIS modules: 1) Documents, 2) Presentations, 3) Finite-term (completed) datasets, 4) Open-end datasets, and 5) any other information that documents accomplishments and participation, improves, or in any way helps achieve the LTER network goals of synthesis.

Why have modules? In part they help document the progress in synthesis as well as the resources and people devoted to this important activity. They form basic building blocks of future synthesis by providing key background information and summaries, and by being corporate resources they increase efficiency.

Who can propose modules? Everyone with a stake in the success of the LTER network can propose modules. But we are particularly encouraging **individuals** that may see a need to develop a module or have existing information of value to the network, **science theme groups** that may have developed or are proposing to develop a synthesis product such as a database, presentation, or other form of information, and **ad hoc synthesis working groups**.

How are modules funded? There are various sources to fund module development and to maintain them. Some limited funds may be available from the Network Office, particularly for science theme related modules. Some funds may be available as part of the ongoing LTER Planning effort, particularly for key databases required to assess the state of LTER science. Supplemental funds from NSF may be available to build critical modules. And hopefully NIS module development will be part of any funding request that involves network synthesis!

What needs to be done? The process is simple, but it does have several critical steps:

1. Determine if the process applies. If network resources are involved and a network product is to be created, then the process is to be followed. Otherwise individuals and groups have no obligation to seek network approval, and conversely the network has no obligation to support the module.
2. A short written proposal should be developed that describes the following items: 1) the purpose of the module and the potential benefits, 2) the nature of the information and metadata that will be developed, 3) the who, where, and how of the information creation, 4) the types of maintenance required, 5) the feasibility of the module being successfully being completed, 6) the anticipated personnel and site level impacts if existing funding does not cover all costs of the project, and 7) the specific funding required in the short-term and rough estimates of long-term costs.
3. The completed proposal should be sent to the LTER Executive Committee (EC) either in response to specific requests for proposals (e.g., those related to science themes) or on an ad hoc basis.

Who determines if a module is included in the NIS? The LTER EC will make a recommendation to the LTER CC as to whether the proposal should be accepted, how it should be funded, or whatever actions are needed to implement the proposal. The LTER CC will vote on acceptance of the proposed module, and by doing so agrees to provide the network-wide, LNO, site, and other resources required to complete the project.

Table 1. Criteria to evaluate and base decisions on NIS modules._

- Potential for generating new scientific insight on long-term processes
- Cost of development and maintenance to LTER
- Fraction of LTER sites contributing information
- Broader impacts beyond LTER (e.g., enhance education, affect public policy)