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Controlled Vocabulary Working Group Terms of Reference

Controlled Vocabulary Working Group - Terms of Reference Version 0.2, March 26, 2011

1. Overview

The LTER Controlled Vocabulary Working Group (VOCAB) is a working group established by the US LTER Information Management Committee (IMC).
2. Vision and Purpose

Our vision is that scientists seeking data should be able to efficiently and reliably locate LTER datasets through searching, browsing or following links from non-LTER systems. The purpose of the Controlled Vocabulary Working Group is to help increase the efficiency and reliability of data sharing by promoting the use of controlled vocabularies that provide consistent representations of data across all LTER sites.

3. Membership
Membership is voluntary in the working group is open to all LTER Information Managers and interested LTER researchers. Ex-officio members from organizations outside LTER (e.g., NCEAS, NBII) may also participate.

4. Chair and/or Co-chairs
One or two people (hereafter called "VOCAB-Chair") preside over meetings of the Controlled Vocabulary Working Group, and generally oversee and supervise the activities of the working group. The VOCAB-Chair is designated by the LTER Information Management Committee Executive Committee (IM-Exec).

5. Meetings and Communication In-person meetings of the working group will be held as needed as part of the IMC annual meeting. Working group representatives designated by IM-Exec and special participants from outside the LTER Network may be invited to attend; their costs may be supported by the LNO if the budget permits. Additional meetings by teleconference are organized by the VOCAB-Chair and are held throughout the year to keep VOCAB members up-to-date on current issues and projects and to coordinate activities by working group members. The VOCAB working group will prepare an annual report on their activities to IM-Exec in time for the annual IMC meeting.
6. Activities

Activities of the Controlled Vocabulary Working Group include, but are not restricted to:
• Formulating and updating controlled vocabulary lexical resources, such as keyword lists, taxonomies, thesauri and ontologies (see Appendix 9.2);
• Aiding in the development of systems to integrate those resources into LTER software systems;
• Provide information on "Best Practices" to the LTER Information Management and researcher communities;
• Interacting with similar working groups or other entities in outside organizations;

• Producing articles for publication in Databits and professional journals that support the objectives of the working group;
• Preparing reports to IM-Exec and IMC.

To obtain the authority and resources needed to support these activities, the VOCAB working group will prepare and submit to IM-Exec for further action: request for comments (RFC), requests for support (RFS), or requests for endorsement (RFE). Additionally, the working group may prepare proposals for product-oriented working groups, training workshops, or other activities that will be submitted to the LTER Network Office (LNO), following procedures established by IM-Exec and the LNO. Interactions with the LTER Executive Board and Science Council will be mediated by IM-Exec.

7. Voting
Formal votes by VOCAB are expected to be rare, with the working group operating primarily by consensus (as defined as semi-formal in the IMC Terms of Reference). However, in the event that a formal vote is required, a quorum of 2/3 of the membership of VOCAB is needed, with a simple majority vote carrying the question.

8. Amendments Terms of Reference may be amended by the IM-Exec. A current copy of the terms-of-reference should be archived in the LTER Network document archive.
9.0 Appendix –

9.1 Types of Communication

Examples of types of communication used within the LTER VOCAB Working Group:
• Roster of Membership: A list of participants, their roles, typically maintained as an electronic mailing list group by the LNO
• Terms of Reference: description of a group's governance generated by the group
• Annual Report: A summary of the year's actions, plans, and products developed
• Meeting Notes: a record of participants and discussions at an event
• Agenda: A schedule of items to be covered at a given event
• Oral Reports: Informal verbal reports
• Survey: a collection of information made by asking a series of questions
• White Paper: a review that provides an overview of a particular topic or theme
• Best Practice: a document that provides guidelines for IMC-accepted practices for a particular task or activity
• Request for Comment (RFC): an informal response to a design or plan in its preliminary stages
• Request for Support (RFS): semi-formal support for developing an idea, i.e. project abstract
• Request for Endorsement (RFE): a formal request for support where development has network-wide scope and/or the commitment of personnel time, funds, or other network resources.

9.2 Management of Controlled Vocabulary

The Controlled Vocabulary Working Group is charged with managing the content of the controlled vocabulary. To accomplish this charge the working group may
• Do research to identify terms that should be added based on use in site-specific vocabularies, use in datasets and other sources of information.
• Establish a process to generate, receive and evaluate proposed changes, and make changes to the content and structure of the controlled vocabulary
• From time-to-time, issue new versions of the controlled vocabulary, and a submit a request for endorsement to IMEXEC to have it adopted as the official version
• Make immediate changes in the current official version to correct gross errors

A sample process and criteria for adding new terms might be:
• LTER sites and individual researchers should be able to propose adding new preferred terms to the controlled vocabulary. A proposal for adding terms should include justification, including

information on related terms used at other LTER sites, how the term is used in existing datasets and where the term might be placed into the controlled vocabulary.
• Proposals would be evaluated by the Controlled Vocabulary Working Group according to the following criteria:
o The proposed terms should provide clear utility for searching and browsing, and not introduce ambiguity
o The proposed terms should be suitable for inclusion (e.g., not locations or specific taxonomic identifiers)
o Proposed terms should not be redundant with existing term(s) already in the vocabulary
o Terms and their proposed places in taxonomys or thesauri should conform in form with NISO Z39.19 2005 and successor documents (e.g., sections 6.5.1, 8.3)
• Additionally, sites can propose also non-preferred terms to be linked to existing preferred terms. Here criteria are less stringent:
o The proposed terms should be suitable for inclusion (e.g., not locations or specific taxonomic identifiers)
o The proposed terms must be sufficiently close synonyms to the preferred term to which they will be linked
o
A sample process for removing or altering terms might be: Sites or individuals can also propose, with justification, altering or removing a term from the controlled vocabulary. Removals or alterations of terms are expected to be rare, but criteria to be applied by the working group might be:
• Terms will never be altered, but can be deprecated to non-preferred status
• Terms can only be removed if they are not currently in use by datasets or if they are demonstrably ambiguous, thus hindering rather than augmenting search efforts

Please contact us with questions, comments, or for technical assistance regarding this web site.

Source URL: http://im.lternet.edu/VocabTOR