**Controlled Vocabulary Working Group - Terms of Reference**Version 0.1, Dec. 28, 2010

**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 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, taxonomys, thesauri and ontologies;
* Aiding in the development of systems to integrate those resources into LTER software systems;
* 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. 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 a 2/3 vote of VOCAB and approval by IM-Exec. Revisions approved by the IM-Exec should be archived in the LTER Network document archive.

**9.0 Appendices**

***9.1 Types of Action***

The Working Groups typically make decisions of the following types:

* Formal: votes are taken, e.g. on endorsement or adoption of a community standard
* Semi-formal: consensus, e.g. where a meeting is to be held
* Informal: iterative discussion and agreement or informational; e.g. meeting agenda
* Tacit: tradition, e.g. having an IMC meeting opening mixer
* Compliance: response to mandate, e.g. template developed by the LTER Executive Board

***9.2 Types of Communication***

Examples of types of communication used within the LTER VOCAB Working Group:

* Roster of Membership: A list of participants, their roles, and terms (if applicable)
* 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.