LEAD PI MEETING
May 20, 2011; Jekyll Island, Georgia

STEVE HAMILTON’S REVIEW OF RECENT RENEWAL PROPOSAL REVIEWS

Common issues

- Lack of conceptual model that links research activities
- Response to mid-term review poor
- Poor integration among research areas and team members, there is trade off of breadth and depth
- Some proposals lacked new and exciting ideas
- Use of ISSE model was variably praised or criticized, depending how well it fits the site
- Include “greatest hits” in results of prior research
- Need to emphasize research that is uniquely possible in long-term program

Areas not treated well enough

- Microbial ecology
- Food web theory
- Human dynamics
- To cover these areas a site may need to recruit somebody

Other problems

- Management issues
- Leadership transition was questioned in some cases
- Lack of external advisory committee mentioned
- Regarding publication productivity; judgment seemed subjective on part of the panel

Positives

- Education and outreach drew praise
- IM drew praise

[ Mentioned later: nowhere in any of the reviews were the LTER core research areas mentioned. ]

LEADERSHIP

Diane McKnight, MCM

- Site has a team meeting every March, for review and planning
- EC meets once per month, or every two weeks
- PI in the field (at McMurdo Dry Valleys) responsible for what happens at that time
- Diane is 4th Lead PI
- There is a transition prior to renewal, and the new PU is whoever is willing and available,
- The grant also shifts, to the institution of the new PI
- The site had an advisory board at beginning, but does not have one now

Dan Reed, SBC

- Site members are not distributed, unlike McMurdo, nearly all from UCSB
- PI is selected by consensus, his research is central to site effort, was willing,
• There are 4 Co-PIs, but there is reluctance to sign on front page; it is thought this may hurt for other grants
• There is an active group of associates, who function like Co-PIs,
• Site is governed by consensus,
• There was an Executive Committee, but it was not used now there is a committee-of-the-whole whole,
• Reviewers suggested reviving an EC
• There is no advisory board: have used SC(?)

Anne Giblin, PIE
• Executive Committee includes half of Co-PIs
• EC conference calls every 4 to 6 weeks
• EC makes all decisions about money, science, field station
• Have not advisory board, have one now
• Bring in people for annual meeting

Phil Robertson, KBS
• All PI at a single institution, many on site
• 7 Co-PIs, all on proposal for university, but not for NSF, spreads credit
• The 7 Co-PIs make up the Executive Committee
• EC meets every 6 to 8 weeks, sometimes less frequently,
• Turnover of Co-PIs in the 22 years, due to retirement, or due to need for new kinds of expertise
• Issue about appointing a new Lead PI; no willing person as yet; alternatives are recruit new senior level person or get current Co-PI to do it, possibly reduce tasks for PI by providing two support positions; this last option selected
• No advisory board for most of the time, initial value of advisory board was falling off with time.

Discussion on leadership
Gus Shaver, ARC
• ARC interacts strongly with other projects
• Anybody on site is LTER
• Partner projects spun off
• This is an issue for grant proposals hard to see what is being proposed on the basis of prime grant, make this clear, what is LTER and what is not,
• Leveraged proposals, how to include these, use web page URLs; now not allowed, proposal should still have to stand alone; do include links, such as IM

Meryl, GCE
• Site has formal by-laws, vote as to who will be PI, at year 5 in the grant cycle,
• Also vote in new EC

Nancy Huntly, NSF
• Have a plan that makes sense
• Can’t have untenured person
• No expectation for names
• Have a framework for change, a mentoring plan

Scott Collins, SEV
• Have a team with possible replacements
Nick Brokaw, LUQ
- Are there sites with two Lead PIs?
- Yes for these sites: HBR, roles divided however it seems to work, according to PI preferences; CAP, PIs for internal and external affairs, respectively; BES, PI for on-site management, PI for other jobs

COMMUNICATION
David Foster, HFR
- HFR has small cohort, great continuity, works with other institutions
- Build on core people: 35 full time at Harvard Forest, many associates
- Weekly communication: weekly lab groups, weekly seminar
- Adding associated faculty: gets one months of summer salary, fit in a broad, rounded group, make appointments at institution
- No advisory committee
- Have Bullard Fellows
- Annual meeting before summer, one day presentation, one for PI for strategy, all give snippets when do proposals switch into synthesis mode, PIs give overviews, invite other scientists who work there and may want to join, attracts new talent
- Summer brings all together, strong undergraduate research in pods, increase exchange and interaction
- Web based system for proposing new work or continuing work, mechanism of communication
- Annual meeting includes other programs
- Annual report
- Monthly highlights
- New communications position, outreach and inreach
- EC meets quarterly

Russ &amp; MCR
- A remote site, personnel dispersed among 8 institutions
- Have some meetings when all together on site
- Two-day meeting every year, includes series on research and synthesis, posters, break outs, site updates, working groups for proposals
- In academic year many standing weekly, monthly, quarterly meetings, teleconferences
- Post a lot of on-line data for everybody to look at
- Annual graduate symposium, joint with SCE
- seminar courses At UCSB with focus on synthesis planning, analysis
- LTER research seminar series
- Have Executive Committee of PIs, and advisory group
- Extensive intranet, list serve

Barbara Bond, AND
- We are at Oregon State Univ., but distributed across 6 different colleges at OSU
• Need for communication with the institution, deans, etc., has worked well
• Share all NSF stuff with group, be clear in the message header
• Executive Committee, signatories and site manager, meets once per month
• People rotate on EC, part of leadership training,
• Decisions made there with lots of input
• Research management committees, e.g., climate, meet on regular basis
• Research groups organized around research themes, research component areas, teams in place for a long time
• Stay in communication with younger PIs, enticed with REU for example
• Monthly meetings 1 hour science, one hour business,
• Annual PI meeting on budget, all give a report on what they are doing, and we allocate budget
• Annual symposium 1 or 2 days, public comes, many posters
• Annual field day, HJA day, internal and external 120 people

Meryl &

• 15 Co-PIs, most from UGA
• Two leaders, Meryl and Steve Pennings
• Executive Committee is PI and Co-PI, data manager, other three elected at the annual meeting
• The EC has a handle on everything; others do not
• Annual meeting 2 days, organized by GCE; start with conceptual framework and questions, give a synthetic talk about those questions; poster session, one minute for each; business meeting
• Have Advisory Board, some from other LTERs, for six year term, may have better view than do some other people; they do a really good job, really invested,
• At Sapelo people congregate and communicate, weekly pot-luck dinner organized by grad students
• Grad student seminar

Discussion on communication
• External advisory committees, what makes them work?
• Local feedback helps at BES
• Multisite work provides feedback
• FCE has advisors, 2 from allied sites
• Regional All Scientists Meetings may be a good idea

PROPOSALS
Dave Tilman, CDR
• Get your mind into the mind of the reviewer, to forestall getting the same negative response again
• Conceptual framework: hard to do this for all the people in the team, hard to articulate this for all
• How to see the big picture?
• We were not productive enough at probation time, we followed up with many papers
Roger Ruess &\&, BNZ
- Have a strong theoretical foundation, great ideas linked carefully to research plan
- Important to demonstrate long-term stuff is there
- Be prepared to put some research on standby
- Allow plenty of time to put the proposal together
- Learn from failures
- Proposals can sink under their weight, make it all clear with diagrams of how it all fits together

Evelyn Gaiser, FCE
- Plan way ahead, more than one cycle ahead, start at mid-term review
- Has an ASM all about the feedback that we got,
- January meeting was all about proposal planning, solicit two-page documents from each of working groups for the proposals, to include: question, past, future
- Consider new collaborators
- Talk with administrators

Henry Gholz, NSF
- Main scientific issue: the conceptual plan or model
- What are the critical core experiments, how does this feed back to new stuff in proposal?
- Synthesize where you have been early, special issue of journal may precede renewal
- Show cohesiveness long and short, sometimes an opportunity to do a synthesis that reaches a new audience, new goal for synthesis,
- Get panelists excited, show exciting results
- Engage Program officers at NSF
- Data increases, things get diffuse due to this, and thus need for solid IM
- On leadership there is no one model
- Leader must be articulate, and have institutional recognition and support
- Important role of site visits and synthesis books for points of departure or reaffirmation site visitors look out for good science that does not support project as a whole
- Site visitors also look for long-term stuff that is not integrated

Nick Brokaw, LUQ
- We ask for a summary of work in current cycle from each researcher, to help with proposal and with results from prior research
- New work should follow from results from prior research
- Connect past with future, put in a table to map this: past present future
- Conceptual framework is key, new work should follow that also
- We have a small writing team
- But we get buy-in from everybody
- We assign tasks to different people, such as mundane tasks like assembling CVs
- We look for the Luquillo LTER niche, what Luquillo alone can do
- We make sure to “press all buttons” on the RFP
• The proposal after probation was more work than the earlier renewal

Discussion of proposals
• Morgan Grove: at our BES annual meeting everybody had to show how they fit into ISSE model; we beat everybody over the head with this
• Look at the SIP for areas where you can conform to it
• Likewise for the Decadal Plan
• Emphasize some aspects of the decadal plan, maybe not ISSE for all
• Likewise for the 30 yr review
• Matt Kane: 30 yr report is not a mandate from NSF to you
• Nancy Huntly: emphasize things that you do that that integrate; your unique stuff is your core, long-term stuff that is unique for the network; that’s why LTER has “protected” status
• How to pull together the pieces, how to do this: use a tiered approach to get to draft, then go to one voice, but still get all people together on it
• Have big meeting of everybody, so all are heard; have several meetings, and proposal gradually come into focus
• Have simple conceptual model, box model, cartoon, how to present conceptual model, at NTL had a series of frameworks, detailed to broad,
• Diane McKnight: we used a sequential team approach, gradual focus, PI visited groups in turn
• Get a great graphics person
• What is the importance of five core areas? It is still a requirement that it be included in some fashion; show in a paragraph how we address those areas, or in a table, some indicators

SITE REVIEWS
Charlie Driscoll, HBR
• Stage of the review: planning, execution, post review,
• 6 months prior start planning the program, talks, field trips
• Have practice and tweak things,
• Three themes: management, governance, FS interaction,
• For the PI overview talk, spice up with sexy observations and important questions, engage reviewers with specific issue, mix up science with education and outreach
• Try to build in as much flexibility,
• Do your homework on reviewer interests
• Students important, all ages give talks,
• Have a diverse program, but cannot cover everything,
• Look at review as an opportunity,
• Afterwards we discuss comments, try to respond to all for NSF, critical issues to follow up on
• Review provides fodder for workshops
• Put review results in results of prior support in renewal proposal

Deb Peters, JRN
• Spend a lot of time on the briefing document,
• Hammer in the conceptual framework,
• We want information from the committee, but the reviews are too detailed
• We need guidance from NSF on what priorities are for response to review comments

Dan Childers, CAP
• We had field trip first (at FCE); that worked well; gave committee idea of our difficult logistics
• Inject students as much as possible, let students know how they fit in to the scheme
• Emphasize what question you are connected to
• Address review of the last proposal
• Inviting administrators, be careful about this

Mark Ohman & &
• Don’t assume knowledge about some things at your site
• Have a crisp way to present the scheme
• Make sure to present landmark achievements, transformative stuff, take home message, signature accomplishments
• Provide 4 or 5 papers that tell the story, a single synthetic paper is a good idea

Discussion of site reviews
• Matt Kane: pick and choose the comments to respond to, defend your choices
• Nancy Huntly: review document should be about 6 pages, keep it at high level; we used guidelines for renewals to let committee know what will be covered; offer yourself as a reviewer; do reply to the review, OK to do it later, when you see things more clearly; there may be a disconnect between mid-term review and renewal, one good, one bad; maybe flip the process, have renewal on site, written mid-term review
• No double jeopardy, team should evaluate what you did as a function of what you did, not reevaluate your conceptual framework,
• Show that all buy into the program,
• Integrate things well, show the framework, or something somewhat modified,
• Where do your people fit in, where are they in the framework.
• Present a charge to the team, treat them as advisors, we want advice, group is there to help you, get feedback,
• Get recommendations from the review team for your administration
• Flexibility is important, team will change things
• Enforce time limits on talks and so on
• No sunglasses; they inhibit connection, communication
• Do research on the members of the review team
• Have a buddy system: your people assigned to individual review team members
• One-minute poster summaries, as at GCE are a good idea

Follow up
The group favors having another Lead PI meeting following the next SC meeting. The format for this Lead PI meeting was good. For the next meeting we will develop topics by consensus.
Budget issues should be a topic for next time. It is suggested that the next Lead PI meeting be divided into a session with NSF representatives and a session without them.

Nick Brokaw
June 16, 2011