Meeting called to order at 1:00PM EDT by Chair Scott Collins; Members attending: Dan Childers, John Blair, Emery Boose, John Moore, Evelyn Gaiser, Bob Waide, Mark Ohman, Mary Spivey, Gus Shaver, Steve Hamilton, Karen McGlathery, Emily Stanley
Also attending: Saran Twombly, Matt Kane

1. Approval of minutes of January 2013 EB Meeting
The minutes were approved unanimously

2. The role of LTER site visits and use of site visit reports
In the future NSF site visits to LTER sites will be to determine if the research program is on track based on the research that was proposed. Sites should prepare their presentations around this goal. In addition, it will be possible to get some general feedback on future research initiatives, management issues, etc. However, the main purpose of the site visit will be to determine if the research program reflects what was proposed. This evaluation also fully recognizes the need to adjust on the fly, so any such changes need to be presented and justified. These reports will not be shared with renewal panels, but they will be considered by Program Directors during renewal evaluations. As adjustments are made to research and personnel, etc., make sure those changes are described in the annual reports to get acknowledgement and approval of those adjustments.

Site visit procedures: All PIs have been notified about basic structure of the site visit. Teams are still being recruited for some sites. All sites were given the opportunity to suggest potential members for their site visit team. All materials sent to the team will be shared with the sites. The format will include pretty much the same basic structure as site visits in the past. The previous document describing IM review criteria will not be used because this document is considered to be out of date relative to NIS development and site responsibilities. Sites are being given guidance regarding what material to provide. Teams will get a copy of the proposal to review prior to the visit. It is important not to overwhelm the team with written documents, so streamline the material provided to the site visit team. There will be a verbal report out at the end of the site visit delivered by the NSF PO. Because of potential budget constraints at NSF (i.e., sequestration), site visit teams may be reduced from 5 to 4 members.

Members of the EB had many questions regarding site visit protocols.

Q: Have expectations changed regarding networking and cross-site synthesis activities? What about network-level activities? Ans: These activities are still important and they are still part of the renewal proposal. However, site based research is the highest priority for evaluation.
Q: How do sites prepare for the Site Visit? Ans: Much like in the past, but the review team will be prepared to determine if you are following through with proposed activities. Sites should not send large amounts of material to site visit teams, but rather provide the information they need to determine progress.

Q: Can we get feedback regarding future opportunities or plans? Ans: Yes.

Q: How do Social Science, Education-Outreach, Communication come into play? Ans: that will depend on the degree to which these activities are emphasized in the renewal proposal. All sites have schoolyard LTER programs that now receive base funding support, so it is expected that progress will be made along these lines. Several sites have a strong social-ecological framework for their research and thus their evaluation will focus on this interaction.

Q: Should we limit our proposed activities to the $980,000 per year or should we include more on the larger, integrated programs that we operate? Ans: It is difficult and undesirable to draw distinct lines between LTER core funding and related research activities supported through other funding sources, especially because additional funding is an expectation of all sites. Moreover, it would be impossible to dissect the LTER support from other infrastructure support at sites, such as HBR, JOR or CWT, where LTER forms a strong partnership with federal scientists.

LNO Version 2.0
To some extent we are entering uncharted territory regarding the re-competition of the LNO. In future EB meetings, and at the upcoming Science Council Meeting, we need to determine if the LTER Network plans to submit a joint proposal, as we did in 1996 establishing the current LNO, or if sites within the Network plan to compete individually to host the LNO. If the Network wishes to submit a joint proposal, we need to determine what institution or institutions will be involved and how, and who would serve as PI on the proposal. This decision will clearly affect process. NSF is undertaking a broad information gathering process through workshops. This effort is being chaired by Diane McKnight and Tim Kratz. In addition, the internal recommendations develop via the Robertson-Emery committee have been shared with NSF and with McKnight and Kratz. Of significant concern is the timeline for the re-competition. NSF Program Directors are considering all options, including the option to not have an LNO. The current LNO funding will end in May 2015. Finally, a satisfactory process has been identified between NSF and UNM to deal with potential carryover funds in the main LNO award that result from the accelerated spend-out of the planned 6-year ARRA award that now must be expended by September 2013 after only four years.

Data accessibility
The degree of data accessibility remains a philosophical challenge within the LTER Network. Nearly everyone agrees that LTER data should be made widely and freely
available, but there is disagreement among NISAC members, Site PIs, and EB members on how the data portal within the NIS should be structured. Some want users to go through a page in which they provide their name, email address and intended use of the data. Others want no such barriers, even though the requested information is not that cumbersome. In many cases of web crawlers, they will simply by-pass LTER data if such a form is required. The advantages of the form are obvious. Users are identified, they can be presented with a statement regarding the ethical use of LTER data, and if they choose, they can be informed about future updates and corrections to data sets they may be interested in using. The disadvantages include the perception that the data are not freely available, and many people do not want to volunteer their contact information for concerns about spam, etc. Moreover, such a form does not guarantee that a user will supply accurate information regarding name, email address and intended use. For example one could enter Barack Obama, POTUS@whitehouse.gov and “formulation of science policy” just to get to the data. As a solution, the NIS is quite flexible and each site will be able to designate the criteria for access to their data sets through the central NIS Portal. Some sites can opt for completely unfettered access to their data. Other sites may want to put up information or login forms. Such forms will affect data access through portals such as DataOne, however. In addition, sites can place whatever forms they want on their own websites as this will be another means to access site data. Some members of the EB expressed concern that sites with log-in pages may need to justify their use and value to NSF Program Officers, renewal panels and site visit teams.

The role of the NAB, or do we need something else?
According to the LTER By-Laws, the LTER National Advisory Board (NAB) consists of no more than 15 members representing diverse areas of expertise to provide independent review and advice to the LTER Network, the Office, and appropriate funding agencies. Concern has been expressed by some members of the EB that the current NAB is somewhat disengaged from these duties. What could we do to make the National Advisory Board more engaged? Some have suggested that we alter the purpose of the current board, eliminate the NAB as it is currently structured, and develop the NAB on a more ad hoc advisory basis similar to a Committee of Visitors, which evaluates NSF Programs once every three years. This evaluation would be commissioned by the LTER Network on behalf of the Network and would provide a more frequent synthetic overview of the LTER Network than we now get from the decadal reviews conducted by NSF. Or maybe we need to retain the status quo but give the NAB more challenging duties? Some are concern that bringing in a group that is not all that familiar with the LTER Network “cold turkey” could be a challenge from their standpoint to come up to speed and from the standpoint of the advice they might offer the Network. Yet, that novice perspective might be very enlightening, as well. If we were to change to a more CoV format, it might be possible for some members of the NAB to become familiar with the network via SC and EB meetings as part of the overview process.
Content of PO comments in award letters
In 2012, some sites up for renewal received Program Officer evaluations as part of their award documents. Although this is a new to the LTER program, this may become an increasingly common feature of NSF awards, and PO comments are likely to appear in all award materials in the future. These come from the review analysis written by the Program Director as part of the internal award justification paperwork. The evaluation represents the synthesis comments by the PO in support of their recommendation. These comments will not be shared with site visit teams or review panels. This is primarily a mechanism to communicate between the PO and the PIs, and the comments are meant to be helpful. Any questions regarding the content of these review analyses should be directed to the cognizant Program Director.

4. Other business

Outreach
Concern was expressed that LTER is still perceived to be insular by some individuals. Can we enhance communication both inside and outside the network? Perhaps add more information about LTER partnerships in the LTER Annual Report. We need to try to reach a broader research community, partly to let them know that our sites are available, our data are available, and that we are open to collaboration. Perhaps we can use NIS training workshops at national meetings as a conduit for broader outreach.

International opportunities
A variety of funding programs is available to establish or facilitate international collaborations and research. Program emphases vary in scope. Some require initial contact and submission through core programs, and the core programs work with OISE staff regarding review and funding. For example the “Global Venture Fund in which proposals go to an existing program and some co-funding may be possible from this general account. Another program to consider is CNIC - Catalyzing New International Collaborations NSF 12-573. This program provides travel money for a PI and student to set up something new with an international partner. Must make sure that the disciplinary program is willing to accept a full proposal after the initial interaction supported by CNIC. CNIC can be done via a supplement to an existing award or as a stand-alone proposal. Supplements are preferred. Other acronyms to consider are IRES (International Research Experience for Students) and SAVI www.nsf.gov/SAVI. PIRE remains a viable option for more network-level activities. Pan-American Studies Institute (PASI) supports regional activities.

Final Session with Saran, Matt and Dave Garrison

- LTER EB might be asked to submit a prioritized list of uses for supplement funds that could be available if there is an end-of-year windfall.
Proposal submission deadline and start dates: Part of the challenge is that award recommendations cannot be made until the first day of the fiscal year (1 Oct). We continue to experience delays in funding for a variety of reasons. This year staff in the NSF Division of Grants and Agreements (DGA) required more paperwork and justification for line items than in the past. This delayed funding for some sites. Now that we know about these issues the next cohort of sites to be funded can prepare justification prior to award recommendations to eliminate delays.