

LONG TERM ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH
NETWORK COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE (NCO)



Call for Working Group Proposals

In this packet, you will find all the information needed to submit a proposal to the NCO.

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LTER Network Communications Office

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Overview and Deadlines

The LTER Network Communications Office (NCO) was initiated in 2015 to foster enhanced communication, collaboration, synthesis, training, and engagement across the [LTER network](#). To promote analysis and synthesis of LTER data, the NCO requests proposals for Synthesis Working Groups, with research to begin before October 2016. Funding is available for 2-4 projects of up to 2 years in duration. Proposals must include the analysis and synthesis of LTER data from more than one site. The Project Selection Committee is most interested in proposals anticipated to return high impact results in the five core LTER thematic areas¹, but proposals in other areas will also be considered. Principal investigators are strongly encouraged to contact the NCO (proposals@lternet.edu) to briefly discuss ideas before submitting proposals.

The NCO is operated out of the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis ([NCEAS](#)) at UC Santa Barbara. The Center provides excellent meeting facilities, comprehensive in-house computing capabilities, and consultation and training for visiting scientists on computation, informatics, and in-person and virtual collaboration techniques.

Proposal Deadlines

Proposals for Working Groups should be submitted by end of day Wednesday, **March 23, 2016**. Decisions will be announced in early May.

Who Should Apply

Proposals may be submitted by individuals of any nationality who hold a position in an academic institution, free-standing research institution, scientific society, governmental or policy agency, non-governmental organization, or a consortium of such institutions. Working Group members should include one or more LTER researchers who are familiar with the LTER sites and data that will be used in the analysis. For synthesis research that will require a large effort to integrate multiple LTER datasets, Principal Investigators are strongly encouraged to consult with and potentially include the information manager(s) from one or more LTER site who are deeply familiar with those data. Please refer to the description of [Synthesis Working Groups](#) for additional guidance regarding Working Group size and composition.

¹ Primary production, population studies, organic matter dynamics, mineral cycling, disturbance patterns and processes

Funding

The NCO base annual budget for synthesis Working Groups is \$111,000. NCO Working Groups are expected to meet at NCEAS in Santa Barbara, CA where the NCO can provide significant logistical and technical support. Funding is intended to offset meeting travel, lodging and per diem expenses. One or more meetings at other venues would be possible if well justified. The NCO encourages and provides technical and logistical support for the use of virtual meetings as well as in-person meetings to reduce project costs and carbon footprint.

Working Group budget requests should not exceed US\$55,000 per year or US\$110,000 for a 2-year period, unless the proposers can bring additional funds from non-NCO sources. This level of funding is generally adequate to support a Working Group of 12 individuals meeting three times per year for 5 days per meeting in Santa Barbara. Working Group costs may vary depending on group size, number of international participants, number of in-person vs. virtual meetings, and meeting duration. Proposals for smaller Working Groups of shorter duration are also invited. Proposals may involve activities with partial support from other institutions or agencies, and co-funding is welcomed.

Please [download](#) and use this template to estimate your Working Group budget.

What We Will Not Fund

- The NCO will not fund projects if the activity should be funded by another entity.
- The NCO will not fund the collection of new data or field research.
- The NCO will not fund proposals requesting overhead or funds to be spent by the investigator at the investigator's home institution.

Data Expectations

We expect NCO Working Groups to emphasize use of existing LTER data. *Analysis and synthesis of LTER data from more than one site is required.* In addition to multi-site LTER data, non-LTER data may also be included in the research.

The NCO, the LTER Network Information Management Office (NIMO) and NCEAS have a strong commitment to developing means to locate, access, analyze and make data broadly available, and to imbuing scientists and other users with a sense of sharing information. To this end we require that Working Groups agree, prior to initiating their activities at the Center, to comply with the [LTER Network Data Access Policy, Data Access Requirements, and General Data Use Agreement](#) and the NCO/NCEAS [Data and Information Policy](#) in using LTER data, and making derived data (data resulting from analyses from which the original data cannot be reconstituted) publicly available.

Reporting

We ask PIs on approved projects to provide an initial summary of research objectives, anticipated work and desired outcomes. NCO support should be cited in publications, and copies of articles accepted for publication should be sent to the NCO Communications Officer. Questionnaires requesting updates on NCO products are sent periodically to participants. The products resulting from NCO research activities are very important to measuring the success of NCO Synthesis Working Groups.

Guidelines for Proposals

ILTER Synthesis Working Group proposals are relatively short (fewer than 2000 words, excluding cover sheet, citations, references, figures, tables, and CVs) and yet need to include enough information in an effective form to allow for an accurate evaluation. Please follow the [formatting and submission instructions](#) provided below.

Include the following information in your proposal, where applicable:

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| COVER SHEET |
| Date of Submission |
| Descriptive Title |
| Short Title – Two or three words for use as a project name (25 characters max). |
| Working Group Leaders' Name(s) and complete contact information |
| Project Summary – A brief scientific abstract of your project. (200 words maximum) |
| Proposed Start and End Dates – Proposed start and end date of your project (month, year). |
| Proposed Data Release Date – Date you expect to submit data set(s) to the NCO (month, year). |
| Is this a resubmission? – Yes/No (If yes, provide date(s)). |
| BODY OF PROPOSAL |
| Problem Statement – Clear and concise statement of what is to be done, why it is important, and how it will be accomplished. |
| Data Sources – Brief summary of key data and data sources. |
| Proposed Activities – Brief description of methods and why they are appropriate. |
| Names of Participants (maximum of 20) |
| Indicate whether participants are confirmed. |
| Identify a technical liaison in the Working Group for NCO/NCEAS computing staff – This participant should have considerable analytical expertise. |
| Identify one participant who will be responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the ILTER Network Data Access Policy, Data Access Requirements, and General Data Use Agreement and the NCO/NCEAS Data and Information Policy are met. |

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| Timetable of activities |
| Anticipated results and benefits – Include description of data and software products and proposed public release date. |
| Is this proposal (or a closely aligned proposal) under consideration elsewhere? If so, please briefly describe the circumstances. |
| Literature Cited |
| Curriculum Vitae for each Working Group Leader – Two (2) page maximum, NSF-style biosketch. |

Formatting and Submission Instructions

Proposals will be accepted in digital format only, as a Microsoft Word or PDF file. Proposals should be submitted as single, complete documents, formatted to standard letter size (8.5" W by 11" L) with graphics embedded directly in the document. Information to be included in the cover sheet and body of the proposal is provided in the table above. Please address each question in the order it is presented. The body of the proposal should be less than 2000 words and follow the cover sheet. Do not send compressed collections of files, such as .ZIP files.

To submit your proposal, e-mail the final proposal document to proposals@lternet.edu. All those who submit proposals will receive an email confirming receipt within 24 hours of submission. If you do not receive a confirmation email, please call (805) 893-2500 with the first PI's name and proposal title and someone will follow up with you shortly. Please contact proposals@lternet.edu if you have difficulty submitting your proposal, or if you have extenuating circumstances that would prevent you from uploading a digital version of your proposal by the deadline.

For answers to questions not addressed on this Call for Proposals site, please email proposals@lternet.edu or call (805) 893-2500.

Proposal Review Process

Proposals are evaluated for their scientific merit, contribution to LTER Network science, novel approaches, and rationale for involving the NCO and NCEAS. The proposal review panel will include both LTER scientists and non-LTER scientists. Panelists are given a list of proposals under consideration and submit a list of those they prefer to review. Review assignments are made considering these preferences. Reviewers recuse themselves from proposal review when there might be a conflict of interest. At the request of the panel, the NCO may obtain additional reviews from other individuals with expertise of special relevance to the proposed research.

A context statement and reviews written by panel members (but not the actual scores given by reviewers) will be returned to the PI(s) without revealing the names of the reviewers. While reviews are provided to applicants, they may not reflect the full breadth of discussions that take place at the panel meeting. The final decision on which proposals to fund will be made by the NCO Director in consultation with the Chair of the LTER Executive Board. Based upon panel discussions the NCO may request some modifications to the proposal (e.g., adjustments to Working Group size or composition, inclusion of additional data resources) before funding is awarded.

Proposals received after the deadline will be returned without review. Proposals that are clearly inappropriate for NCO funding (e.g., those that do not involve analysis of multi-site LTER data, requests

overhead, funds to be spent at the investigator's home institution, or funds intended to fund new data collection, etc.) will also be returned without review.

Proposal Tips

To help you develop successful proposals, here are a few rules of thumb to guide your proposal preparation:

- Proposals are evaluated primarily on the significance and novelty of the idea(s) under consideration and should be question-driven (i.e., not purely descriptive).
- Provide a clear rationale for why this should be, or can only be, done at NCO/NCEAS.
- Be clear and concise. Give brief examples of major points you are making or approaches you are using. "Trust me" proposals are not effective.
- Include a **diverse** array of participants who are committed to the project. Pay attention to gender balance and include individuals from underrepresented institutions and groups. For each participant, specify the expertise brought to the project and whether he/she has agreed to participate.
- Indicate where the data used in your project will come from and its availability.

Synthesis Working Groups

Based on twenty years of experience at NCEAS, we have identified a few characteristics of Synthesis Working Groups that contribute to their success:

- Groups of 8 -16 scientists (20 maximum) work at the Center for 3-7 days, concentrating on specific issues that require in depth analysis of data and synthesis of ideas. Each Working Group typically meets 2-3 times a year. It has been the experience at the Center that Working Groups of 15 or fewer individuals meeting for at least 5 days are the most productive.
- Working Group proposals must designate at least one Working Group member as the liaison with the NCO/NCEAS technical staff to address any concerns related to data management and computing.
- It is expected that all Working Groups will involve a diverse group of participants, including gender diversity, diversity in career stages, and members of underrepresented communities.
- The NCO is interested in increasing opportunities for early-career scientist and graduate student participation in LTER synthesis activities.

- Funding occurs through an [NSF](#) grant to [UC Santa Barbara](#), which reimburses actual expenses (i.e., the Center does not award grants to other institutions). Applicants are encouraged to consider additional funding sources to leverage NCO resources.

- An analysis of NCEAS Working Group productivity was published in:
Hampton, S.E., and J.N. Parker. 2011. [Collaboration and productivity in scientific synthesis](#) (PDF).
BioScience 61: 900-910.

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