



NOAA Libraries Advisory Committee (NLAC) Terms of Reference (March, 2021)

Purpose and Scope

The NOAA Libraries Advisory Committee (NLAC) provides advice and recommendations to the NOAA Research Council concerning the structure and operation of the NOAA Library system. The NLAC addresses both short- and long-term needs of NOAA's libraries. It works towards a vision of a NOAA library system that is sustainable and meets the most critical needs for researchers to continue accomplishing the NOAA mission.

Membership

The NLAC shall be composed of:

- (1) One member from each NOAA Line Office (LO), and OCIO. These individuals should be management-level NOAA employees who are familiar with NOAA's mission, one or more NOAA libraries, and have a background in scientific research or operations. The representative from each NOAA organizational unit shall be nominated by the respective LO or Staff Office, but appointed by the Research Council;
- (2) The Director of the NOAA Central and Regional Libraries; and,
- (3) One other NOAA librarian from outside the NOAA Central Library. This individual is expected to represent perspectives of NOAA library staff beyond his/her own library and to, therefore, consult regularly with other library staff about matters before the NLAC.

The Chair of the NLAC will be appointed by the Chair of the Research Council for a term of two years upon a recommendation from the NLAC. The Chair position may not be held by the same person for more than two consecutive terms. The NLAC Vice Chair and Executive Secretary will be appointed by the NLAC Chair in consultation with Research Council leadership also for two year terms, subject to one renewal.

The Chair will lead the NLAC, conduct meetings, guide tasks, and oversee progress. The Vice Chair will fulfill the Chair's responsibilities when the Chair is unavailable. The Executive Secretary will support the Chair and Vice Chair, coordinate the NLAC, manage meetings, and facilitate tasks.

Roles and Responsibilities

The NLAC will:

- Develop and submit to the Council an implementation plan for accomplishing the long term organization of a sustainable NOAA Library system that provides equitable access to information resources for all employees that need them.
- Assist the Council in coordinating the execution of an approved plan.
- Identify efficiencies in the provision of library services that can be achieved. These efficiencies could include, among other things, budgets, use of space, coordinated purchases and shared services.
- Provide other recommendations and information to the Research Council as requested.

The NLAC is authorized to create sub-committees as needed upon the consent of the Chair of the Research Council. Terms of reference for each sub-committee established will be documented and included on the NLAC section of the Research Council website.

Meetings and Coordination

The NLAC will meet regularly, with the specific meeting frequency driven by the requirements of its current activities and the direction of the Committee Chair. While meetings may be held as frequently as required or desired, it is likely the NLAC will need to meet at least once monthly until a draft implementation plan is provided to the Research Council. Members or their designated representatives are expected to participate and make every reasonable effort to attend scheduled meetings.

Decision Making Process

The NLAC will make decisions through informed consensus. When the NLAC presents decisional items to the Research Council for approval, it will provide a set of options with pros and cons. It also will provide a Committee consensus recommendation when one can be reached; otherwise, it will indicate the different views within the Committee. The Research Council is the final decision-making body for all Committee activities.

Terms of Reference Revision Process

The NLAC will review its terms of reference every two years, or sooner at the request of two of its members or of the Research Council, to ensure continued accuracy and relevance. If changes are warranted, revised terms of reference will be presented to the Research Council for approval before entering into force.

Appendix A: Background

NOAA has numerous library facilities across the country. These libraries are characterized by dramatically different sizes and provide a variety of services. A benefit of the current organizational structure is it has developed over time in a way that serves the specific needs of most NOAA scientists who require library services to be successful in their jobs. This structure has also proved to work well in times of budgetary increases. However, when budgets remain flat or decline, it has become evident the current structure is not geared towards best identifying system-wide efficiencies or coordinating opportunities that might allow an increasingly efficient use of NOAA resources. The current inhomogeneous funding structure also can leave some library locations and services particularly vulnerable to reductions in budgets when those entities that are most directly served by the library system do not have a significant voice in the ultimate library funding levels. As many fixed costs associated with library services continue to increase, the sustainability of the library system itself, and thus the ability of NOAA to carry out its mission, could be at risk without an alternative strategic vision. It is clear scientists and librarians at the local level are in the best position to identify essential library services. Thus a centralized, top-down organizational approach could lead to degradation in important services unless there is significant consultation among the library providers, the library users, and those making the budgetary decisions.

In 2011, the Research Council charged an Ad Hoc Committee on Libraries to perform work in two phases. In the first phase, the Committee assessed the current state of libraries in NOAA with respect to budgeting and funding for library materials. The Committee gave its report to the Council in November 2011.

In the next phase, the Committee surveyed users and librarians to develop a more detailed picture of libraries in NOAA. The survey revealed those NOAA users who responded greatly value their libraries and the wide variety of services they provide. The action plan the Committee developed described total library costs, staffing, and space; it recommended NOAA move forward with a four-part approach to create a more effective library system by providing: (1) a set of core resources available to all NOAA staff; (2) a NOAA Institutional Repository to preserve and provide access to all NOAA digital intellectual output; (3) a strategic communications and education plan; and (4) an improved NOAA library organizational structure. The Committee made its Phase II report to the Research Council in April 2012.

In early 2013, the Management Oversight Group (MOG), with the help of the NOAA Executive Panel Libraries Task Force, arrived at a specific vision for making the NOAA library system

more sustainable, while still meeting the most important needs critical for researchers to continue accomplishing the NOAA mission. The vision consisted of both short- and long-term objectives. First, the Line Offices that had an interest in doing so would move towards regional libraries within a few years. Gradually then, the expectation was that NOAA would move toward having a virtual library with a single facility housing the print collections not yet digitized and archived informational materials NOAA wished to preserve. While the MOG laid out an overall vision of library reorganization, the details of how to reach the goals were left to be determined during the implementation phase.

When NLAC began working on the implementation phase of the virtual library with a single print facility model, it became clear that it was important, if not essential, to have physical

3

holdings co-located with some field offices due to the specificity of those holdings, which was an adjustment to the original vision of the MOG. While NOAA may move towards having a reduced number of physical libraries in the coming years, NLAC considered the all-virtual model to be premature to pursue. Subsequently, NLAC developed a set of principles to guide new discussions that were approved by its members in 2014 and stated: “Consolidation of some library services may be an efficient way to meet NOAA’s needs, but any additional library consolidation or library closure should be reviewed carefully to ensure continuity of library services and preservation of critical NOAA intellectual material.”

Based on its 2014 principles, NLAC produced “Advancing NOAA Library Services” (approved by Research Council, 2016), to provide the Research Council with some initial steps that will improve the likelihood that the NOAA libraries will effectively and efficiently serve the agency in the future. Among the report’s chief recommendations were: conduct regular surveys of library customers and staff; require each library to produce an annual report to provide information on activities, staffing and evolving needs; reduce un-cataloged backlog of library holdings; establish a Committee of Librarians to work with the NLAC to ensure recommendations approved by the NOAA Research Council are implemented, among other goals; develop a strategic plan for the entire library system; identify a set of core resources; develop a plan to provide guidance in the event of a library closure and evaluate funding options for NOAA libraries..

NLAC accomplished several 2016 report goals during the 2017-2018 time period. First, the Committee of Librarians (COL) was established with ToR approved by NLAC and librarians in April, 2017. The COL was envisioned by the 2016 report to provide significant input to the NLAC on development and delivery of goals as well as to improve communication among NOAA libraries. The COL continues regular meetings. Second, NLAC approved an annual report template for the NOAA libraries and sent a letter to library supervisors requesting that the annual report be produced. NLAC began collecting annual reports from the libraries by the end of 2018. Last, NLAC produced a guidance document for NOAA management who are evaluating NOAA libraries for closure. This guidance was approved by the Research Council in July, 2018.

