



**OTN Canada Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) Meeting
Tuesday, June 4, 2013 Halifax (11:15 am – 12:15 pm)**

Location: Research Services Boardroom, Henry Hicks Building, Dalhousie

Present:

SAC Members & Assistants: Steve Cooke (*Chair*), Sara Iverson (*OTN Scientific Director*), Katja Fennel, Ian Fleming, Aaron Fisk, Svein Vagle, Scott Hinch, Dale Webber, Chris Barnes, Alison Janidlo (*NSERC*), Fred Whoriskey (*OTN Executive Director*), Kyle McKenzie (*OTN Canada Network Manager*), Nikki Beauchamp (*OTN PR and Communications*), Kes Morton (*OTN Senior Project Manager*), Tracy Rounds (*OTN Administrative Assistant*)

Invitee: Peter Harrison (*OTN Council Chair*)

Regrets: Alain Vezina, Michelle Heupel

Minutes

Steve Cooke welcomed the attendees and introduced observer Dr. Peter Harrison, Chair of OTN Council. Steve and Sara explained that while the SAC would normally begin by reviewing the minutes of the previous meeting(s), there was nothing urgent or essential to deal with in those, and given the pressing need to discuss the peer reviews and issues for Phase II with all present in a one-hour time slot, they proposed to proceed directly to dealing with peer reviews and Phase II budgets. Previous minutes could be dealt with either in a teleconference or at the annual fall meeting. The SAC unanimously accepted this plan.

Accepted Meeting Agenda

- 1) General review of comments from peer reviewers (S. Iverson)
- 2) Budget revisions for Phase II (S. Iverson and S. Cooke)
- 3) Timeline and action items (S. Cooke)
- 4) Adjourn

1) General review of comments from peer reviewers

Sara began by presenting an overview of the reviewers' comments before going into the specifics of the budget issues for Phase II. She explained that as she had alluded to earlier, one reviewer (#2) did not appear to really understand what they were supposed to be doing in their review, and whose comments were brief, not very helpful and in some cases irrelevant. In contrast, comments

from Reviewers #1, 3, and 4 were detailed, constructive and helpful.

Given the short timeframe of receiving the comments (a few days in the middle of preparing for the symposium), Sara had not been able to go through all comments in detail, but suggested some overall things that emerged. E.g.:

One reviewer said they didn't find an overall synthesis but that it was beginning to emerge. It wasn't really a criticism, but something to think about going forward. It was understood that an overall synthesis would be coming at a somewhat later stage and this will be a key priority going into Phase II. Alison reminded the SAC that these synthesis issues, as well as the original conditions stated in the 2009 award, remain in place. An original condition was to avoid 7 years of siloed research. The comments in the reviews suggest there is a portion of the work that would have happened anyway without OTN, but that it is value added to be in OTN.

Reviewers also pointed out that only Theme 5 (the social science component) seems to have had delays that were not convincingly just due to budget constraints. Sara reminded all that David VanderZwaag had just presented the overall efforts towards Theme 5, but that we need to evaluate how best we successfully meet the targets of Theme 5 and relevance of OTN's findings to policy. In certain projects it is already happening, e.g., particularly in the Pacific (but also with cases like that of the American eel in the Atlantic), but we need to make sure to address this across the entire Network. Alison reiterated that there must be value-added to OTN and the NSE work in order to fund social sciences from NSERC sources: there was never any intent for the original NSERC award to fund social sciences, so comments on Theme 5 in the reviews didn't impact the decision by NSERC as to whether Phase II would go ahead, but it needs to be carefully considered going forward. There is value only if it is integrated with natural sciences.

There was also a comment that OTN Canada didn't seem to have a strong communications plan as far as outreach to the public. That has been changing dramatically ever since we hired Nikki to be dedicated to this component, but still, that finding the time to focus on this has been difficult during the 2012 Perfect Storm of reporting and proposal writing. That is going away and we should start to be able to truly focus on our work, its dissemination and outreach.

A number of positive comments from both the reviewers and the SAC were noted. Several reviewers thought the integrations and linkages between themes were extremely good and that we could not be accomplishing what we have without a network; and that networking is increasing. Steve noted that HQP did an excellent job of drawing connections and that we're at a place where the integration simply happens, without having to specifically work at it. Understanding the breadth of what we do is happening at the HQP level. Sara reminded that we have made specific room in the Phase II budget for HQP networking and exchange. Steve also noted that PDFs and RAs have shepherded and written some high level papers that represent high integration and Aaron Fisk mentioned that networking outside of OTN is happening too. Although one reviewer questioned whether there were benefits to Canada's economy, Sara noted that if we are translating our findings into policy, then we are benefiting society. Environmental and social benefits are also of relevance.

Chris Barnes noted that the bigger issue here is: does OTN end in 2016? – in which case, OTN

would spend the money, come to an end, and allocate the budgets accordingly. However, if OTN plans to go forward, how in 2016/2017 will we get NSERC and other agencies to know we have done our job? We would have push the PIs here, to define productivity and measure it in each of these three years, because going forward we are trying to raise money. There may be a need to hold back some budget allocations to to allow things to develop further and develop broad synthesis. Sara and Steve both pointed to OTN's Strategic Plan (developed in 2012) and its strong vision, and the fact that with Council, the ISAC and SAC, OTN plans to push it forward.

Steve asked what the responsibilities are from the reviews. What do we need to do to move forward? Alison clarified that the intent of reviews for NSERC were to decide if Phase II would be funded, the reviews can be used by OTN as constructive criticism makes OTN the best it can be, and with the timing and funds left. Consideration of each specific comment, and higher-level comments, would be very useful (e.g., some projects had more specific comments), and perhaps action taken, but this is the scientific response about work in progress. No negative reviewer comments were serious enough that actually required mandatory action directed by NSERC, but emphasis must be taken on synthesis for Phase III and bringing value added to OTN Canada.

Steve suggested that people in the OTN secretariat could go through the reviews and flag, as well as categorize comments. There are things in there that can be dismissed, and to distill the useful and important comments down into a manageable document. Alison recommended that once that distilled document is produced, that we engage the PIs to respond as well, and subsequently continue this discussion in detail in November, to make sure everything is addressed.

Action Item 1: Distill and categorize peer reviewers' comments into a single cohesive and manageable document containing the items that OTN Canada and its PIs need to carefully address going forward in Phase II. (*OTN Secretariat*).

2) Budget revisions for Phase II

Fred asked about the cash contributions comment that one of the reviewers made. What is expected for a cash contribution to an NSERC award? Are industrial components not allowable? Alison responded that because OTN is built on the normal network framework it is hard to divorce a reviewer's expectations from a normal network framework, such as the need to have significant partner contributions. NSERC's determination in eligibility is narrower than other agencies. The reviewer was possibly referring to the 3:1 cash match, category B for SNG, which was a misunderstanding. OTN is not a normal network, and wasn't applying for category B SNG.

CFI is interested in all of the information in the annual report, and Alison accepts a lot of extra documentation that she doesn't need for NSERC because she doesn't want the OTN Secretariat to prepare documentation twice.

The SAC considered general comments from referees, and discussed budget revisions. When Sara put the proposal together, she asked all the PIs to reduce their budget by a certain amount, but even though people cut, it was still over the amount available. Sara applied a simple formula to take the budget down to the appropriate level. She noted in the proposal that once feedback was received from the reviewers, the final budget allotment would be confirmed. Sara presented the budget to the SAC to determine an allotment to each project that is reasonable.

Sara asked the SAC to remember that PDF funding is only for two years. If it is more than two years, they have to be converted to an RA and are not considered HQP anymore. Some funding, such as \$12K in publications, we can reduce. There is also a possibility of carry-over, which we can allocate.

Alison clarified that PDFs that are three years must be offered up front. Moves are not always accepted for justifications by NSERC for three-year PDF positions, there has to be a significant adjustment for the PDF. If you plan to move a PDF to an RA there are different implications to different institutions. In some institutions, that makes them staff and requires benefits. RAs are allowed, but they must be justified and approved by the SAC. RAs must be kept in a separate category. Student budget money shouldn't be used for other spending.

Alison asked about the status of Theme 5. Martha was going to look into the SSHRC award for \$327K. Sara responded that some of that is funding Tsafrir and Cecilia, but that there is no specific budget in phase II for "Theme 5". Steve Cooke brought up the budget revision, in particular the 11% across the board cut. Yet, some budgets are very lean, and some are rich budgets. The starting points for the 11% cut weren't the same. Undergraduate students cost different amounts by institution, with variation around the country.

Steve noted that, with the reviewer comments, the one thing that jumps out is publication costs that could be centralized. Kes added that position creep could affect a project, where by the seventh year you are paying a person as a full RA with benefits, where we could suggest PIs to go back to training younger people. Steve countered that in the synthesis phase, post-docs are valued for thinking with research maturity. The post-docs and RAs are most active as far as cross-pollination and important for mentoring. It is easier to find free students. OTN could also continue to push the PIs to seek funds from elsewhere.

Scott Hinch asked if there was any indication that we are going to have carry forward after four years. Sara responded that in the budgets she oversees, she has been careful about what is left and saving it. Scott noted that if every project had 20K in carryover that would solve the budget problem. Alison cautioned that some PIs consider leftover money to be their money still. Sara proposed that following the symposium she would come back to the SAC via email with the estimated shortfall and proposed recommendations to ask people to cut down.

3) Timeline and Action Items

The SAC briefly discussed the CFI budget salary constraints for 2015-2016. The Secretariat is going to arrange a meeting between NSERC and CFI. The SAC fall meeting timeline and action items were discussed. Steve pointed out that in terms of synthesizing the reviews, in a month or so, it will take a couple of hours of work just to organize, sort, delete, flag and task individual items. Sara responded that she can get back to PIs about cutting within a month. OTN has until January to get the budgets sorted, but when the SAC meets each year the PIs will get whatever they asked for minus whatever they have left, unless they can justify why they haven't spent it. The dates for the SAC meeting this year are December 4th and 5th.