

Minutes of IT Committee
May 20, 2004
San Diego, CA

This was the annual face-to-face meeting of the committee. The representatives from the Equipment Sites (Hajjar and Steidl), earthquake engineering users community (Kallivokas and Mo), and some of the computing centers (Kamrath, Jim Casdorf for Clayton) attended. A teleconferencing capability had been provided for other members, but unfortunately the schedule of the Annual Meeting delayed our dialing in for so long that it seems a couple of people had dropped off. Mish attended by phone, as did our guest from HPTi, Chris Powell.

As with last year's meeting, this meeting was open for attendance by members of NEESinc. Approximately 15 visitors attended, including Sangtrae Kim, Division Director for Cyberinfrastructure at NSF.

A separate Powerpoint file contains the slides from the meeting.

1. Updates from ongoing activities

A. Independent Validation & Verification

Chris Powell of HPTi summarized progress to date on the IV&V effort. HPTi staff have identified a number of issues related to documentation problems as well as errors that can occur during the installation processes. They have been providing biweekly status updates to Pancake and Nigbor (recently replaced by the new Executive Director of NEESinc, Cliff Roblee) and are on track to complete their report by May 31, as originally planned. This should provide the SI team with sufficient time to respond to the suggestions prior to the release of version 3.0 on July 31.

Some of the initial findings were described. In general, a key problem is the difficulty of putting together the system in the first place due to the fact that information is scattered across many documents, some of which contradict one another. There was also discussion about what kind of group HPTi was trying to emulate; the answer was some site not part of the current ES (and therefore not immersed in NEES "oral traditions") that wanted to participate in NEESgrid.

SI representatives thanked HPTi for their suggestions and reiterated that all of us want to ensure that the product delivered to NITSC is as hardened as possible.

B. NEESgrid acceptance testing

Lee Liming could not be present, but we discussed his recent information about the timing of unit and workflow tests. They are currently scheduled for the last two weeks in July, just prior to the formal release of NEESgrid 3.0 (the June 30 version will now be just a beta version, delivered to a few selected sites). Other representatives of the SI team, including Bill Spencer, were in the room for this discussion.

The tests will take place at UIUC, with additional participation from remote sites where needed to demonstrate particular functionality. Steidl, Kallivokas, and Mo expressed interest in participating, although clarification is still needed on how the tests will be organized. Pancake requested that they be conducted the beginning of the week of July 19, and that the tests which would support remote observation be clustered so as to facilitate participation. (Hajjar and Pancake have other commitments and probably will not be able to participate at all, but at least 1-2 NITSC representatives

will be at UIUC for in-person observation.)

Volunteers from the research community will be solicited to participate either in person or remotely. A clear calendar of tests will be needed in order to help determine who will be able to participate and how.

2. Results of real-time audience polling

The Powerpoint slides summarize the results of the audience polling conducted earlier this afternoon at the Annual Meeting. We did not have any questions to add to tomorrow's polling.

3. IT priorities for first year of operation

Roblee summarized his initial viewpoint on priorities and strategies for IT. He expressed particular concern that we attempt to represent the broader user communities for NEES -- such as practitioners and the education community -- since the polling and surveys only reflected input from the research community.

The Powerpoint slides summarize the results of the NEESinc User Priorities Survey for this year, including the context of the process. The survey was conducted by NITSC as part of their input-gathering phase. A workshop will also be held to gather additional input from key user constituencies. After the workshop, Kamrath and other NITSC staff will draft recommendations for allocating the first year's IT resources. The draft will be circulated to us for review and comment in mid-June, and then passed to the Executive Director. He will work with the Finance Committee to refine the budget over the summer.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS SHOULD BE PREPARED TO REVIEW THE NITSC DRAFT during the last 2 weeks in June.

4. Defining IT assessment & evaluation processes

There has been some confusion over which group(s) has responsibility or authority to development criteria, procedures, and metrics for evaluating the performance of: centralized IT functions, site-based IT functions, and Headquarters-based IT functions. Members of the committee had expressed concern with the issues being raised by the SOC and DSAC, and possible conflicts with ITC recommendations. Further, since all three committees include members of the groups being evaluated, the issue of conflict-of-interest needed to be addressed.

Pancake had raised the issue at the Board meeting on Wednesday and reported their decision. Each of the three committees will provide input and recommendations on guidelines, evaluation criteria, and processes. These will be directed to the Executive Director during the month of June. The ED will review those suggestions and develop the formal plan for evaluation, in such a way as to prevent both conflict of interest and unnecessarily onerous burdens on the Sites and NITSC. Headquarters staff, not the committees, will have responsibility for actual evaluation.

PANCAKE WILL CUT-AND-PASTE PERTINENT PORTIONS OF THE OTHER COMMITTEES' DOCUMENTS and circulate them to the committee so that we can begin formulating our recommendations.

5. Other items

There was also a question from the floor about the openness of our meetings. To date, face-to-face meetings have been open while telecons have been closed (this generally parallels what the other Committees are doing, although both SOC and DSAC have had at least one closed face-to-face meeting). A key reason is that our meetings over the past year have primarily focused on review of the MOM proposals and budgets and other tasks - including the review of acceptance test documents - that would normally be the responsibility of NEESinc Headquarters. In the absence of any Headquarters staff, the Board had asked us to handle the responsibilities. Once there is IT staff on Board, we anticipate being able to focus on "normal" committee business.

It was suggested that at least partial minutes of past meetings be made available on the website. PANCKAE WILL REVIEW THE MINUTES AND EDIT OUT SENSITIVE CONTENT, then post non-sensitive discussions. This practice will be followed in the future.

6. Next meeting

We will establish the next meeting date by email, as soon as we have the NITSC draft.