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**Lake Superior Living Labs Network (LSLLN)**

**Transition Phase - Living Terms of Reference**

**Updated Sept 10, 2024**

**Note: This document is not final. It will be edited during (or following) the Strategic Planning Meeting in Fall 2024. The current purpose of the TOR is to inform potential Advisory Group members of the anticipated responsibilities in that role. If there is something in this document that you think should be discussed, please flag it for future discussion!**

This document outlines the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the LSLLN Coordinator, LSLLN Core Organizers, LSLLN Advisory Group, and LSLLN Members during the LSLLN Transition Phase (anticipated 2024-2025). This document represents an ongoing dialogue between members of the LSLLN about our roles and responsibilities. It is intended to grow and change with the network. Changes will be approved by the LSLLN Core Organizers. For questions or suggestions contact [superiorlivinglabs@gmail.com](mailto:superiorlivinglabs@gmail.com).

*In our work with the LSLLN, we acknowledge the original custodians of this land of the Lake Superior watershed and pay respect to the Elders—past, present, and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture, and the hopes of Indigenous peoples.* *We recognize that we are living and working on the traditional land of the Anishinabek people—signatory to the Robinson Superior and Robinson Huron Treaties of 1850 and signatories to the 1836, 1842, and 1854 Treaties in present-day United States. We also acknowledge the political representatives of Indigenous Nations in northern Ontario: the Anishinabek Nation, Grand Council Treaty #3, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and independent First Nations.*

1. **Background**

The Lake Superior Living Labs Network (LSLLN) evolved from relationships between members who worked at multiple postsecondary institutions, First Nations and tribal organizations, non-profit organizations, municipal government, and businesses across the Lake Superior watershed in 2018. At that time, the network was coordinated by academic steering committee members, and structurally organized into three “hubs” by geographic location: Thunder Bay, Ontario (Lakehead University), Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario (Algoma University), and Duluth, Minnesota (University of Minnesota Duluth and Lake Superior College). In 2019, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada Partnership Development Grant was secured to support the first five years of developing an official network. In late 2020, members from the Great Lakes Research Center at Michigan Technological University joined the LSLLN and Houghton, Michigan became the fourth hub.

At the outset, the LSLLN’s goals were to work with a range of partners to increase the impact of sustainability related teaching, research, and action with a focus on issues at the nexus of water and land, water, food, climate, energy, and community well-being. While there have been previous and ongoing attempts to develop meaningful relationships across the Lake Superior watershed, LSLLN leadership recognized that partnerships are complicated by geographic and disciplinary silos along with political and cultural borders (e.g. municipal, provincial/state, federal, First Nations, and tribal). In response to these challenges, the LSLLN created a platform to connect people within and across hubs in ways that allowed them to develop new partnerships and collaborative initiatives across the Lake Superior watershed. Ultimately, the LSLLN tried to have a stronger impact on issues of social and ecological justice and sustainability regionally, nationally and internationally within the Lake Superior watershed.

The LSLLN has spent the last five years building the relational and networking infrastructure necessary to enhance cross-boundary collaboration within hubs and within the Lake Superior watershed by mobilizing regional members to support and strengthen existing projects and establish new sustainability related initiatives. These included 1) exploring and supporting existing efforts in all hubs; 2) sharing successes and challenges through a monthly newsletter, extensive website, virtual connection events, and numerous webinars; 3) and developing new joint initiatives such as the Climate Action Field School and Lake Superior Watershed Summits.

While much was accomplished over the past five years – both in relationship building and project outcomes (see website for abundant media), LSLLN leadership was consistently seeking feedback on ways to improve connection, process, and outcomes. All Steering Committee members contributed their observations during meetings, and the LSLLN Coordinator also conducted PhD research on the LSLLN, collecting data about member’s experiences and how the LSLLN could improve in the future.

In spring of 2024, the SSHRC funding came to an end and the LSLLN Steering Committee used the collected data to agree to a Transitional Phase Leadership Structure. This Terms of Reference is meant to describe that Transitional Leadership Structure, including the various roles and responsibilities of different parties.

1. **Transitional Phase LSLLN Goals and Objectives**

**Over Summer 2024, the CO decided that the LSLLN should pursue nonprofit status in Canada and the United States to best support its goals and objectives.  This will still be discussed at the Strategic Planning meetings in Fall 2024, but this is the anticipated direction of the network**

**Goal 1.** Clarify the LSLLN’s identity of “who we are”, values, goals, mission, and vision.

**Goal 2.** Confirm and pursue the best organizational structure to accomplish the LSLLN’s mission and vision (e.g., becoming a nonprofit organization).

**Goal 3.** Secure funding to support the next three to five years of the LSLLN’s operations, including a paid Coordinator/Executive Director and in-person gatherings.

**Goal 4.** To be determined – will flow out of Goal #1 above (likely in line with the Historical Objectives).

**2.1 Historical LSLLN Goals and Objectives**

***Goal I:***To enhance capacity for regenerative social-ecological systems at the local and regional scales in the Lake Superior watershed.

***Goal II:*** To expand the living labs approach from the local to the regional scale in the Lake Superior watershed.

**Objectives**

* **Support** and strengthen existing sustainability-related teaching, research and action initiatives
  + Develop case study profiles to highlight examples
  + Identify and evaluate tools and processes that respond to sustainability related challenges
  + Analyze existing initiatives, identify common concerns and opportunities for greater impact
* **Connect** the hubs through workshops and Sustainability Summits
* **Strengthen** existing and new partnerships between academic and community-based organizations
* **Establish** new collaborative projects
* **Establish** a governance structure to ensure equitable and meaningful long-term partnerships and plan for long-term sustainability of the LSLLN
* **Experiment** with tools and processes for learning and working together

1. **Historical LSLLN Guiding Values (*As with this entire document,* *to be reviewed and edited in Fall 2024 at Strategic Planning Meeting)***

All members agree to uphold the Guiding Values of this TOR:

1. *Transdisciplinarity* – The LSLLN members will make attempts to go beyond their own disciplinary and sectoral training and experiences to integrate new and emerging perspectives on issues of social and ecological justice and sustainability in the Lake Superior watershed.
2. *Accountability* – Each member is responsible for decisions and accountable for their actions. We willacknowledge and address any behavior that is counter to the LSLLN guiding values.
3. *Equity* and *Justice* – The LSLLN is committed to equity and justice for all. Each of us is responsible for working to make this a reality in the LSLLN.
4. *Integrative Thinking* – The social, economic and environmental costs and benefits must be an integral part of all decision-making processes.
5. *Flexibility* – Plans and activities must be adaptable and able to respond to external pressures and changing social values of communities throughout the Lake Superior Watershed.
6. *Coordinated and Collaborative Efforts* – Coordinated and collaborative efforts are needed among all Steering Committee members which includes the sharing of responsibility for Steering Committee tasks. Collaborators are responsible for updating the LSLLN on their progress by completing questionnaires and interviews, and case study profiles.
7. *Transparency in Decision-Making* – Decisions will be made in a transparent fashion, built on values of openness, honesty, and consensus.
8. *Indigenous Rights and Title* – We recognize the rights and title of Indigenous Nations across Canada and the United States. These rights and title, will be acknowledged and reconciled as part of our ongoing work.

**3.1 Member Responsibilities to the Guiding Values**

Members will be respectful of one another even on matters where they have differing opinions. Discussion and debate is welcomed and encouraged when undertaken in good faith that it focuses on information, ideas, and potential solutions/opportunities and not the people who might carry those ideas. It is the responsibility of the LSLLN Lead and Hub Leads to ensure the committee environment is respectful, and to recognize and stop any behavior that is counter to the LSLLN Guiding Values.

All members of the LSLLN will:

* support open discussion and debate, and encourage fellow members to voice their insights and opinions in a respectful manner;
* provide feedback on knowledge products produced by the LSLLN;
* uphold the guiding values in the Terms of Reference.

1. **Roles and Responsibilities**

The governance structure of the LSLLN is outlined below, including the roles and responsibilities of: LSLLN Coordinator, LSLLN Core Organizers (CO), LSLLN Advisory Group (AG), and LSLLN Members during the LSLLN Transition Phase (anticipated 2024-2025).

**4.1 Transitional Phase Leadership**

This TOR proposes that these roles are in place for one year (July 2024 to June/July 2025).

* There is an understanding that if people need to step out, they can.  Or if they'd like to continue for another year, that is also possible.
* It is anticipated, and welcomed, that folks may want to move from CO to AG, or from AG to CO. If this happens, they can approach the Coordinator with this idea to co-create a pathway forward.
* It remains possible that following the Strategic Planning meetings in the Fall that the Coordinator role could change (or governance overall). If that happens, this TOR will be updated and shared with the network.
* For Fall 2024, Rachel Portinga is the Coordinator.
* Due to funding resources for graduate students, it is expected that Courtney Vaughan will be the Coordinator and part of the Core Organizers in Winter 2024.
* To support a smooth Coordinator transition, Courtney will attend Core Organizer meetings in the Fall, and Rachel will attend Core Organizer meetings in the Winter.

**Note: Many of the folks listed below work at one (or more) places, while also being involved in numerous organizations / grassroots organizing. These affiliations are not all listed here at this moment. We look forward to learning more about everyone’s interests at our Introductory Meeting this September.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Affiliation(s)** | **Location** |
| **Core Organizers** |  |  |
| Rachel Portinga (Coordinator) | Lakehead University | Thunder Bay  Duluth |
| Nairne Cameron | Algoma University | SSM |
| Erika Vye | Michigan Technological University, Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative | Houghton |
| **Advisory Group (Confirmed)** |  |  |
| Lindsay Galway | Lakehead University | Thunder Bay |
| Tone Lanzillo | World Climate School | Duluth |
| Charles Levkoe | Lakehead University | Thunder Bay |
| Erin Moir | EcoSuperior | Thunder Bay |
| Andrew Slade | Minnesota Environmental Partnership | Ely |
| Courtney Vaughan | Lakehead University, Metis Nation of Ontario | SSM  Thunder Bay |
| Michael Lynn Wellman | Citizens for Superior, Protect the Porkies, NMU Center for Native American Studies, Lake Superior Traditional Ways Gathering | Marquette |
| Nicole Westlund Stewart | Lakehead University | Thunder Bay |
| Laura Wyper | Algoma University | SSM |

**4.2 LSLLN Coordinator Responsibilities**

The LSLLN Coordinator is both a leader and participant in the network. Their role is to lead the LSLLN through the transitional phase by offering long-term vision and guidance, coordinating the necessary meetings and actions to keep the LSLLN’s goals on track, and completing administrative tasks. They are also deeply committed to the social-ecological wellbeing of the Lake Superior watershed and all who live within it.

The LSLLN Coordinator is responsible for:

* Organizing and leading monthly 90 minute Core Organizer meetings
* Organizing and co-leading bi-monthly 90 minute Advisory Group meetings
* Organizing and co-leading Strategic Planning meetings for the LSLLN (anticipated 4-8 hours in Fall 2024).
* Maintaining a record of meeting minutes (although minutes may be taken by another person at the meeting)
* Creating LSLLN Communications including: website updates, monthly newsletters, email correspondence, annual reports, and Instagram posts
* Communicating with, and welcoming in, new members
* Maintaining the LSLLN Directory and mailing it to participants a few times a year
* Contributing to finding, applying for, and “project managing” applications for funding opportunities that would support the long-term maintenance of the LSLLN
  + It is anticipated that funding applications will be completed by smaller groups of people, pulling from the CO, AG, and possibly broader membership, where relevant.
* Attending conferences and meetings on behalf of the LSLLN
* Supporting LSLLN-led or associated projects and events (e.g. webinars, summits)
* Engaging in reflexivity about the governance structures of the LSLLN and making changes as necessary to benefit the LSLLN.

**Anticipated Time Commitment**

The Coordinator is expected to spend an average of 5-10 hours / **week** on LSLLN tasks. Based on past experiences, this will ebb and flow throughout the year. Currently this position is being supported financially through Graduate Assistantships at Algoma University and Lakehead University. This funding is not guaranteed past April 2025.

**4.3 LSLLN Core Organizer Responsibilities**

The Core Organizers will spearhead ideas and directions for the LSLLN and are the decision-making entity for the LSLLN during the Transition Phase. This group aims to include three to four people. When appropriate, they will seek out input from the Advisory Group to inform their decision-making. Additionally, Advisory Group members can approach any Core Organizer with ideas to bring forward for discussion.

The LSLLN Core Organizers are responsible for:

* Attending monthly 90 minute Core Organizer meetings
* Attending monthly 90 minute Advisory Group meetings
* Completes the Prep and Post Work for the Strategic Planning meetings (in collaboration with the Coordinator)
* Attending Strategic Planning meetings (anticipated 4-8 hours in Fall 2024).
* Contributing to recording meeting minutes (where appropriate)
* Sharing relevant event and LSLLN-related details with the LSLLN Coordinator for website and newsletters
* When connecting new people to the LSLLN, introduce them to the Coordinator who can bring them through a welcoming process
* Contributing to finding and applying for funding opportunities that would support the long-term maintenance of the LSLLN
  + It is anticipated that funding applications will be completed by smaller groups of people, pulling from the CO, AG, and possibly broader membership, where relevant.
* Attending conferences and meetings on behalf of the LSLLN, where time allows
* Supporting LSLLN-led or associated projects and events (e.g. webinars, summits)
* Engaging in reflexivity about the governance structures of the LSLLN and making changes as necessary to benefit the LSLLN.

**Anticipated Time Commitment**

It is anticipated that the Core Organizers will spend 5-6 hours / **month** on LSLLN tasks (3 hours in Core Organizers and Advisory Group meetings plus 2-3 hours looking or applying for funding).

The one exception will be (likely) October when the monthly Advisory Group meeting will be replaced with 4-8 hours of strategic planning meetings across the month.

**4.4 LSLLN Advisory Group Responsibilities**

The Advisory Group will aim to be larger group (8-12) of people who represent diverse sectors, disciplines, locations, and ages across the Lake Superior watershed. The members of this group will be asked to use their knowledge of Lake Superior, the region, networks, people, and beings in the watershed to contribute openly to meetings that inform issues of importance related to the LSLLN’s future (e.g. identity, values, status, governance, funding, projects). The Core Organizers will bring issues to the Advisory Group for feedback, *and* Advisory Group members are encouraged to bring forward additional ideas to Core Organizers.

The LSLLN Advisory Group members are responsible for:

* Attending monthly 90 minute Advisory Group meetings. It is possible a meeting or two would be shorter, or even cancelled, but we ask for members to reserve this time on their calendars.
* Attending Strategic Planning meetings (anticipated 4-8 hours in Fall 2024).
* Sharing relevant event and LSLLN-related details with the LSLLN Coordinator for website and newsletters
* Contributing to finding, and applying for, funding opportunities that would support the long-term maintenance of the LSLLN
  + It is anticipated that funding applications will be completed by smaller groups of people, pulling from the CO, AG, and possibly broader membership, where relevant.
* When connecting new people to the LSLLN, introduce them to the Coordinator who can bring them through a welcoming process
* When easy, possibly attending conferences and meetings on behalf of the LSLLN, if the Core Organizers are unavailable
* Supporting LSLLN-led or associated projects and events (e.g. webinars, summits) by sharing posters and attending, when possible.
* Engaging in reflexivity about the governance structures of the LSLLN and sharing ideas about changes as necessary to benefit the LSLLN.

**Anticipated Time Commitment**

It is anticipated that the Advisory Group members will spend 3-4 hours / **month** on LSLLN activities (90 min in monthly meeting plus 1-3 hours looking or applying for funding).

The one exception will be (likely) October when the monthly meeting will be replaced with 4-8 hours of strategic planning meetings across the month.

**4.5 LSLLN Member Responsibilities**

LSLLN Members are tricky to define – and this section will need to be reviewed and edited in the future. Historically, there was a list of people who signed on to the initial SSHRC grant, and others who would be invited to attend Hub Meetings. These folks (ranging from 30-60 people) were asked to contribute to LSLLN events by presenting at, or attending, the Climate Action Field School, webinars, and/or summits. Once the LSLLN developed a newsletter, the number of people on the newsletter email list expanded to 200+ by 2024. Furthermore, over summer 2024, we created an LSLLN Directory, with slightly over 30 people, but due to the need to opt-in, it is missing a number of folks who have indicated interest in remaining engaged. This provides us with three different “lists” of people, none of which are explicitly a “member list”. The LSLLN has previously not asked for any financial contributions to be considered a “member”.

At this time, the LSLLN Advisory Group and Core Organizers need to discuss what it means to be a “member”, “collaborator”, or “participant” in the LSLLN.

For the time being, we will proceed with the LSLLN Newsletter list being the widest-reaching communication method for inviting folks to attend our events. Recognizing that those who are in the Directory may likely have a higher interest and investment in the LSLLN.

When the time comes to apply for grants, the Core Organizers and Advisory Group can decide if they would like to reach out to people directly to ask for their support as appropriate.

**4.6 Succession and Transition**

Participation in the LSLLN is completely voluntary and anyone is free to resign at any point in time. If Core organizers or Advisory Group members are unable to continue and wish to resign, they should provide notice to the Coordinator as soon as possible (e.g. by email or at a regularly scheduled meeting). Resigning members are strongly encouraged to identify another representative from their institute/organization or geographic location to fill the vacancy. If a resigning member is unable to identify a suitable replacement, the Advisory Group and Core Organizers will work to identify a person to fill the vacancy.

**4.7 Historical Quorum and Decision-Making**

All decisions of the LSLLN Steering Committee and Hubs will be made by consensus to ensure all members are in agreement/acceptance with a proposal, strategy, or work plan. If there is full agreement or lack of expressed disagreement, then consensus has been reached. If consensus cannot be reached, the matter will need to be discussed further, or possibly postponed and revisited by the LSLLN Steering Committee and/or Hub meeting at a later date.

**4.8 Meeting Minutes**

All minutes will be shared with the Core Organizers and Advisory groups through a Google Drive folder unless otherwise indicated and noted.

**4.9 Reporting Structure**

The Coordinator, in collaboration with the Core Organizers, will develop an annual summary report to be shared with the network and the public via the LSLLN website. The primary point of contact will be the Coordinator at the LSLLN email address [superiorlivinglabs@gmail.com](mailto:superiorlivinglabs@gmail.com).

1. **Authorship and Presentations**

If members of LSLLN plan to write an article about the LSLLN (i.e. where the network is the object of study), they should send an email to the Coordinator that includes a few sentences describing the purpose of the publication and an invitation for others to participate. The Coordinator will then send this email to all LSLLN members via the newsletter email list. If members are interested in participating in the authorship, they are responsible for contacting the lead author to have a discussion. Authors will be those who contribute meaningfully to the conceptual development and/or writing. This is meant to promote transparency and accountability among the LSLLN membership.

1. **Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

All LSLLN members will seek to declare any conflict of interest with the Core Organizers. Conflict of Interest means a conflict between a member’s duties and responsibilities with regard to the LSLLN activities and a members private, professional, business or public interests. There may be a real, perceived or potential conflict of interest when the member: has a direct or indirect financial interest in a funding opportunity or application being reviewed.