

A Scientific Ocean Drilling Coordination Office for the US Community FY25 Q2 Operations and Management Report

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1. Introduction

Texas A&M University (TAMU) and Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University (LDEO) collaboratively form the Scientific Ocean Drilling Coordination Office (SODCO) to facilitate US scientific ocean drilling goals. TAMU will assist principal investigators with creating drilling proposals; identifying suitable drilling platforms, coring, and logging tools; working with the scientific community to advance new technologies; and planning and implementing expeditions. LDEO will provide research community support services for successful planning and execution of expeditions, including pre-drilling activities, planning and training workshops, and science communications and outreach.

2. Management and Administration

The SODCO branches at TAMU and LDEO act as a fully integrated team. The SODCO Executive Team comprises the SODCO Director, the Director of Science Operations, and the Director of Science Support:

- SODCO Director (TAMU): provides overall project coordination and supervision of project personnel at TAMU and acts as the interface with other TAMU-provided services (general Information Technology [IT], Publications, Sponsored Research Services [SRS], and Gulf Coast Repository [GCR]).
- Director of Science Operations (TAMU): oversees day-to-day activities of operations, engineering, science, permitting and clearances, and a technical team.
- Director of Science Support (LDEO): manages community science planning, including pre-drilling and training activities; oversees science communications; and supervises the staff at LDEO.

On 17 July 2025, supplemental funding was awarded to add the site survey data-bank function (at Scripps Institution of Oceanography) as requested by NSF, support the maintenance and operation of the downhole logging database (LDEO), and add salary and travel support for the US Co-Chief Scientist on International Ocean Drilling Programme (IODP³) Expedition 502. TAMU issued letters of intent to both institutions, and the awards are expected to be finalized by 31 August 2025.

The Director of Science Support continued filling open positions at LDEO. Progress with hiring is reported below.

In July, the Directors of Science Operations and Science Support attended the summer meeting of the U.S. Advisory Committee for Scientific Ocean Drilling, the final formal meeting of this advisory body to the International Ocean Discovery Program (IODP). They presented plans and progress on the SODCO, including highlights of upcoming SODCO-led activities that will engage the U.S. ocean drilling community.

The Directors at TAMU and LDEO meet weekly to track issues and updates.

The 2025 international Scientific Ocean Drilling Forum meeting will take place in Q3 with the Executive team attending. A US Co-Chair to the Forum was invited and accepted. The second US member of the 2025 Forum planning committee will be the Director of Science Support.

3. Advisory structure

The SODCO advisory structure will include the central SODCO Advisory Board (SAB) and a series of working groups, advisory committees, and panels:

- Science Staffing Subcommittee

- Science Communications Subcommittee
- Science and Workshops Subcommittee
- SODCO Engineering and Technology Advisory Committee (SETAC)
- SODCO Safety and Environment Panel (SSEP)

The Executive team initiated plans to populate the SAB. The SAB Chair was invited and accepted the role. In Q3, a set number of members with recent experience from IODP panels will be invited to serve on the SAB at a reduced term for continuity into the new US Sub-Seafloor Sampling Program (S3P). An open call for applications to complete staffing of the SAB will also be released in Q3. The Executive team completed a draft of the SAB Terms of Reference.

4. Science operations

Analytical instrumentation

Customized seagoing containers will provide critical instrumentation and support for at-sea data collection, while laboratory facilities at the GCR will be available for shore-based description and measurements. Work with TAMU to provide power requirements to the areas where the containers will be stored on campus when not deployed at sea is ongoing. Planning for science container customization and vendor investigations began this quarter with a compiled list of requirements. TAMU will issue a Request to Purchase in Q3.

Operations and Engineering

The Operations and Engineering group consists of a Supervisor, two Operations Engineers, and two Staff Engineers. The final open position, a Staff Engineer, will be hired later this calendar year.

This group continues to explore information on vessels, platforms, tools, and other technology that are available on the market. The entire group attended the Offshore Technology Conference (OTC) in Houston, Texas (5–8 May) to speak with vendors.

Technical Support

The Technical Support group comprises a Supervisor, a Senior Technician, a Chemistry Technician, an Electronics Instrumentation Specialist, and a Mobilization and Logistics Coordinator. The office is in the process of hiring the Senior Technician and the Electronics Instrumentation Specialist. The Chemistry Technician will be hired later this calendar year.

The Supervisor of Technical Support sailed on joint IODP³-NSF Expedition 501, assisting with whole-round measurements and supporting other technical and operational activities. They learned the processes and methods of the European Science Operator (ESO), including laboratory operations. The knowledge gained from observing the operations and speaking with ESO staff has been invaluable to SODCO planning.

The Mobilization and Logistics Specialist will be attending the Expedition 501 end port call in Q3 to observe the demobilization process and to ship the TAMU Ce source back to the GCR.

Science Services

Two Expedition Project Managers make up the Science Services group at TAMU. In Q2, they participated on SODCO website requirements and container design teams.

Information Technology

The TAMU SODCO IT team, consisting of an applications developer and an IT specialist, is determining the networking and power requirements for the containerized laboratories. Modifications to existing in-house software and potentially new computer software will need to be developed to support operations at sea; identification of these needs are in progress.

5. Science Support

Science Support

The Science Officer position description is in the process of development. The position will be posted in Q3, and interviews and hiring will be carried out later this calendar year.

Two SODCO-supported undergraduate interns participated in the 2025 Lamont Summer Intern Program (LSIP) in Q2, working on research projects related to scientific ocean drilling.

Communications

Hiring was completed for the Science Communications Manager position. They will begin working for SODCO in Q3.

The Director of Science Support met with staff from the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in May to discuss their collaboration with SODCO. Several AMNH outreach events for Q3–Q4 were proposed that will incorporate content and speakers from the US scientific ocean drilling community.

6. SODCO website

SODCO held a kick-off meeting with C&G Partners and a web developer in July to review timelines for website and related product development and branding preferences. The SODCO team, working with the vendors, will be gathering organizational and website preferences, developing content, and fine-tuning branding preferences during the next quarter. An initial focus will be on content and functionality for a launch website to provide basic information on SODCO, including key contact information, while the full site is being developed.

7. Financials

Project expenditures are proceeding as expected, with the bulk of the costs attributed to staff salaries. TAMU-Sponsored Research Services staff are coordinating with Columbia University's Financial Operations offices to clarify the subaward invoicing requirements. The new subaward with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) has been initiated and should be finalized in August after UCSD's review. The amendment to LDEO has also been prepared and sent for signature. Additionally, TAMU-SRS purchasing and project staff have met to review the container procurement process, including bid solicitation and related requirements.