

A Scientific Ocean Drilling Coordination Office for the US Community FY25 Q3 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. A subaward has been completed to Scripps Institution of Oceanography to provide a Site Survey Data Bank (SSDB) for proposal acoustic and related data.

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 Services (LDEO): manages community science planning, including pre-drilling and training activities; oversees science communications; and supervises the staff at LDEO.

Awards for the site survey data-bank and the Expedition 502 Co-Chief funding were finalized this quarter.

Hiring efforts for SODCO continued with the progress reported below. The Directors at TAMU and LDEO meet weekly to track issues and updates. In addition, the directors meet with the Chair of the SODCO Advisory Board (SAB) on a biweekly basis (see below).

The Director and Director of Science Operations attended the International Research Ship Operators (IRSO) meeting in Bergen, Norway, in September. They presented a poster highlighting the new SODCO office and discussed vessel and mobile laboratory issues with other attendees.

The 2025 international Scientific Drilling Forum meeting took place in October in Sicily, Italy, with the Executive team attending. The US Co-Chair to the Forum ran the meeting with the other three Co-Chairs. The Chair of the SAB was also in attendance. The Forum was successful in bringing together several entities to share their ongoing activities and begin planning for future expeditions and collaborations.

3. Advisory structure

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

- SAB Science Staffing Subcommittee
- SAB Science Communications Subcommittee

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

The Executive team met with the SAB Chair every ~2 weeks to discuss SODCO updates, upcoming issues, and staffing the SAB. The application period for the SAB ended at the beginning of October, and applications were reviewed by the Executive team and SAB Chair. Invitations to join the SAB will be issued imminently with the first in-person meeting targeted for February–March 2026.

4. Science operations

Operations and Engineering

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

This group continues to explore information on vessels, platforms, tools, and other technology that are available on the market. Two employees will attend the International WorkBoat Show in Q4 to learn more about available vessels.

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 Senior Technician and the Electronics Instrumentation Specialist will begin work at TAMU at the beginning of Q4. The Chemistry Technician position was posted in Q3 with an application deadline of 1 November.

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. TAMU issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the containerized laboratories and office spaces. Vendor responses are due on 11 November. 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, and construction has begun.

Science Support

Two Expedition Project Managers make up the Science Support group at TAMU. In Q3, 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 Services

Science Services

The Science Officer position description is in review internally. The position will be posted in Q4, and interviews and hiring will be carried out following submission of applications.

The LDEO SODCO team met internally and with international colleagues to plan for the 2025 AGU Fall Meeting. A collaborative booth is planned for the exhibit hall at the meeting, with representation from SODCO, the International Ocean Drilling Programme (IODP³), the Japan Agency for Marine–Earth Science and Technology, the European Consortium for Ocean Research Drilling, and the International Continental Scientific Drilling Program. SODCO is also planning a community Town Hall event for the meeting that will include presentations on recent activities by the U.S. and international programs.

Communications

SODCO communication staff, along with U.S. Science Support Program staff, attended the GSA fall meeting in San Antonio, TX (October 19–22). They staffed a Scientific Ocean Drilling Booth in the exhibit hall and supported a special session dedicated to impact crater research.

In October, SODCO provided feedback to C&G Partners on a range of communications products that are in development, including templates for presentations, newsletters, and email campaigns. C&G Partners delivered logo files in RGB and CYMK color spaces and a PowerPoint template document to SODCO in Q3. Additional products are scheduled to be finalized in Q4.

SODCO is discussing the process of transitioning communications tasks from USSSP to SODCO, which will likely take place in Q4.

6. SODCO website

In October, SODCO held a meeting with C&G Partners, at which a mockup launch website was presented. SODCO will initially launch a concise one-page website, which is projected to go live at <https://sodco.org> on Friday 7 November 2025. Development work is continuing on the full website.

7. Site Survey Data Bank

After receiving the subaward, the SSDB team initiated work on setting up the data bank to receive proposal data. A new programmer/developer was hired and onboarded for the project. New software was purchased and installed on the new SSDB server. A work plan was developed to decouple SSDB from the IODP Proposal Database.

8. Financials

Project expenditures are proceeding as expected, with the costs now spread over salaries, subaward invoices, and other direct costs.

All subawards and amendments have been finalized, and Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) reporting is complete. LDEO's subaward procedures have been reviewed and are in the process of being approved by TAMU-Sponsored Research Services (SRS). TAMU-SRS staff clarified the subaward invoicing requirements with both subawardees, and invoices are being received and processed on a regular basis.

TAMU-SRS purchasing and project staff worked together to develop the RFP for mobile laboratory and office space container procurement. The RFP was released on September 26, and final proposals are due on November 11. After the initial review of the proposals, project staff will reach out to the proposers for clarification and additional information before making a final determination on the vendor.