

User Services & Outreach

The User Services & Outreach (USO) group promotes awareness of the national user facility, leading to its increased usage and impact to science, and facilitates and documents this usage for the W.R. Wiley Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory (EMSL) and its sponsors.

User Services

The USO group provides support services to facilitate and promote the effective use of EMSL resources by staff and users. USO oversees those systems that enable users to submit proposals for research and to have a productive user experience. The USO group also provides appropriate reports as needed to PNNL, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), and federal and state regulators to document the success of EMSL as a national user facility. Activities include:

- Coordinating production of the EMSL annual and monthly reports
- Providing training for the EMSL User System (EUS)
- Providing access control for the facility
- Distributing proximity cards, computer passwords, and IDs to staff and users
- Scheduling conference rooms for seminars, meetings, etc.

In 2003, USO worked with contacts from each of the major research facilities in EMSL to create the 2002 User Report and the EMSL monthly reports, both of which document research and development within the facility, and to distribute the reports to EMSL management, staff, sponsors, and clients.

The EUS, a proposal lifecycle software tool, was developed as part of the EMSL user operations model. Since its release in October 2002, USO has provided training for the EUS, thereby ensuring consistency of use across the various groups in EMSL. The EUS, shown in Figure 1, tracks the lifecycle of a proposal—from submittal, through review and acceptance, to closure. At various stages in this cycle and at completion, proposal authors are asked for updates of the progress of the research and copies of any publications resulting from the work.

Reporting of these publications to the DOE's Office of Scientific and Technical Information is mandated by the DOE, and the USO group worked with EMSL groups to develop procedures for meeting these requirements and ensuring compliance.

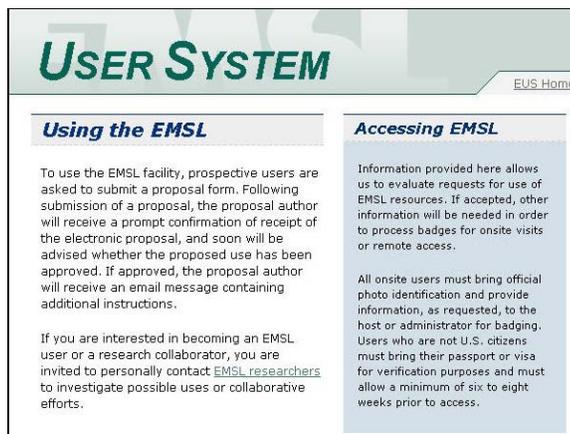


Figure 1. The EMSL User System (EUS) enables staff to easily and effectively process nearly 800 research proposals each year.

Part of the responsibility of USO includes providing access control and other support services for EMSL. The Front Desk staff members are often the first contacts that users, visitors, and new hires make when entering the facility. These staff members greet visitors, provide information, review requests for access, and process badges and proximity cards. Additional services include distributing various keys to the facility, ID numbers, and computer passwords for new accounts. EMSL has one of the two auditoriums on the PNNL campus as well as a number of conference rooms, and USO staff members are the primary points-of-contact for scheduling these rooms and assist at events in this facility. A USO staff member also works with EMSL management to coordinate office space (Figure 2) assignments for staff and visitors.



Figure 2. User Services & Outreach promotes the awareness, reputation, and use of EMSL.

Outreach

The USO plans, develops, and coordinates implementation of EMSL's communication strategy to promote the awareness, reputation, and use of EMSL as a national user facility. The USO group is one of the primary points of contact for PNNL and external media requests for general information, background material, and interviews with staff. Outreach activities, which are undertaken to increase local, regional, and national awareness of the capabilities and accomplishments at EMSL, include:

- Creating print media, such as brochures, newsletters, posters, fliers, photos
- Developing and maintaining electronic media and websites
- Organizing the EMSL User Meeting and workshops
- Giving tours of EMSL
- Promoting the facility through local and offsite events.

A variety of collateral material was created in 2003, including brochures for the Instrument Development Laboratory, Accelerator Facility, and the M.T. Thomas Postdoctoral Award. Posters providing overviews of the various facilities and capabilities, including high-performance computing, were designed and produced.

The EMSL website (<http://www.emsl.pnl.gov>) was completely redesigned and released in 2003. To provide the most relevant information to potential users, staff carried out usability testing and determined that the topics our website visitors most wanted to see included 1) people and contacts, 2) discussions of research, and 3) descriptions of instruments. In particular, potential users wanted to know that the staff, research, and capabilities at EMSL are state-of-the-art and accessible. The new website focuses primarily on these topics.

The next EMSL User Meeting will be held in June 2004; however, planning for this event, which has the theme “Bridging Technologies in Structural Biology,” has already begun. About 100 scientists are expected to attend. Topics include high-throughput structural biology (nuclear magnetic resonance and x-ray crystallography), user research, cryo-electron microscopy, and small-angle neutron scattering.

EMSL is one of the main destination points for visitors to PNNL. Each year, nationally elected and appointed government officials, such as cabinet members and members of the Senate and House of Representatives; local and regional elected officials; senior Battelle and PNNL management; and a broad spectrum of members of the national and international scientific community visit or attend meetings in the facility. As part of EMSL outreach activities, tours of the facility are given on a regular basis. Staff members from the USO group organize, assign, and guide most of these tours. More than 150 tours of EMSL (for nearly 1000 people) were given in 2003. Also in 2003, monthly tours were initiated to introduce PNNL staff members to the facility. This outreach serves to highlight EMSL capabilities to the full range of PNNL staff members, including scientists, support staff, communications and public relations individuals, and legal staff. Since its inception in April 2003, more than 90 staff members have taken part in these monthly tours.

Frequent requests from the PNNL public relations organization and external media organizations are handled on a case-by-case basis. For example, in 2003, USO assisted in the creation of the nomination package for the Computerworld Honors Program. EMSL was ultimately one of only a few finalists for this award and was recognized as a leader in information technology for advancements achieved by the development of the EMSL high-performance computing capability. The USO group also responded to requests from other PNNL groups such as Integrated Planning, University Relations, Strategic Planning, and Communications, as well as research teams, communications organizations from Battelle, and industrial media contacts at Intel and Hewlett-Packard.

Various other outreach activities were carried out in 2003. The USO group, along with the staff members from the PNNL University Relations and Fellowship Program, developed and conducted seminars to introduce current postdoctoral researchers to the resources at EMSL and guidelines for how to access these capabilities. Also in 2003, EMSL participated in an internship fair in Washington D.C., for Department of Homeland Security Scholars and Fellows. More than 100 students with interests ranging from psychology to chemistry and robotics attended. The USO group provided information packets and a poster describing EMSL, and as a result of this effort, 20 students who may wish to carry out their internships at EMSL and/or PNNL have been identified.

Future Directions

The year 2003 was a time of change for EMSL, with a restructuring of the facility’s organization and a renewed focus on the user operations model. The USO group supported these changes by creating products and collateral materials for the new organization. We also continued to provide services that enable efficient access to the facility and to document the research being carried out in the facility.

Awareness-building of EMSL capabilities, the expertise of its staff, and its research activities will continue. Using the information products being created (e.g., brochures, fliers, etc.), the USO group will expand strategies implemented in 2002. Examples of future activities include:

- Outreach to regional institutions to increase advocacy for the facility
- Attendance at national meetings
- Planning of the FY 2004 EMSL User Meeting
- Ensuring consistent use of the EUS
- Reporting of research accomplishments and products to sponsors.

Regional outreach will take the form of marketing to selected institutions, such as Washington State University, University of Washington, University of Oregon, Oregon State University, and Oregon Health & Science University. This outreach could include visits to the sites, presentations at seminars, distribution of fliers, and advertising in institutional newsletters and magazines. New brochures are being developed that will highlight the research and capabilities within each of the six major EMSL research facilities.

Training for the EUS will continue as new staff members join the facility and as current staff members need to be updated on new developments in the system. As part of the proposal lifecycle-management process, members of the USO group will participate in an internal evaluation designed to select proposals within the EUS and to track the actions and progression of the proposal from submission to completion. This activity is essential to ensuring that EMSL staff members understand and carry out their responsibilities in tracking and coordinating proposals and that appropriate reporting is accomplished.

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