



Department of Energy
Office of Science
Washington, DC 20585

August 30, 2010

Office of the Director

Dr. Gary Stacey
Associate Director, National Soybean Biotechnology Center
Department of Microbiology and Molecular Immunology
271E Christopher S. Bond Life Sciences Center
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211

Dear Dr. Stacey:

By this letter I am charging the Biological and Environmental Research Advisory Committee (BERAC) to assemble a Committee of Visitors (COV) to assess the processes used by the Biological Systems Sciences Division (BSSD) within BER to manage BSSD research programs and its user facility, the Joint Genome Institute (JGI).

The COV should provide an assessment of the processes used to solicit, review, recommend and monitor proposals for research submitted to BSSD programs for FY2008 – FY2010. This includes funding at national laboratories and universities and other activities handled by the program during this time period. It should also assess the quality of the resulting scientific portfolio, including its breadth and depth and its national and international standing. Additionally, the COV should also assess the division's management and oversight of the JGI user facility for the same time period. Specifically, I would like the panel to consider and provide an evaluation of the following:

1. For both the DOE national laboratory projects and university grants, assess the efficacy and quality of the processes used by BSSD programs during the past three years to:
 - a) solicit, review, recommend and document application and proposal actions, and
 - b) monitor active awards, projects and programs.
2. Within the boundaries defined by DOE mission and available funding, comment on how the award process has affected:
 - a) the breadth and depth of the portfolio elements and,
 - b) the national and international standing of the portfolio elements.
3. For the DOE Bioenergy Research Centers, assess the division's management and oversight of the science and operations, including progress towards key scientific milestones and deliverables.
4. For the JGI user facility, assess the division's management and oversight of this facility, including facility operations tracking and review, user proposal solicitation, review and recommendation procedures.

For BSSD research programs, topics to be investigated can include but are not limited to: the selection of an adequate number of qualified reviewers who are free from bias and/or conflicts of interest; use of the Office of Science merit review criteria; adequacy of documentation; characteristics of the award portfolio; usefulness of progress reports on previously funded research; quality of the overall technical management of the program; relationships between award decisions, program goals and the DOE mission; significant impacts and advances that have



developed since the previous COV review and are demonstrably linked to DOE investments; and the response of the program to recommendations of the previous COV review.

COV members will be given access to all program documentation completed during the period under review including applications, proposals, review documents and other requests. COV members may also request, at their discretion, a representative sample of the program portfolio be provided. In response, BSSD may suggest a sample of actions, including new, renewal and supplemental applications and proposals, awards and declinations. In addition, COV members may also choose to review files through a random selection process.

A primary requirement is that the COV have significant expertise across all covered areas within BSSD programs and that this expertise not rely upon one person alone. A second requirement is that a significant fraction of the committee receives no direct research support from DOE. A guideline is that approximately 25 percent of the members receive no direct support from DOE. Any person with an action pending (e.g., application or proposals under review, progress report pending approval) in a BSSD program under review cannot participate as a COV member for that program. Some, but not all members of a COV, may be selected from a previous COV. A least one COV member must be a member of BERAC. The committee should be balanced and drawn from a broad field of qualified reviewers from academia, DOE national laboratories, other federal agencies, private sector entities, and other appropriate institutions. The BERAC chair should also consider a number of other balance factors including, institution, geographic region, diversity, etc. In the end, the COV should constitute an exceptional group of internationally recognized researchers with broad research expertise in the program areas within the BSSD as well as deep familiarity with DOE programs. Additional guidance on COV reviews within the Office of Science can be found at http://www.science.doe.gov/SC-2/Committe_of_Visitor.htm and attachments therein.

The COV should take place in the third quarter of FY 2011 (Summer 2011) at the BER/DOE location in Germantown, Maryland. A discussion of the COV report by BERAC should be held no later than the Fall 2011 BERAC meeting. Following acceptance of the full BERAC membership, the COV report with findings and recommendations is to be presented to me, as the Director, Office of Science.

If you have any questions regarding this charge, please contact Sharlene Weatherwax, 301-903-3213 or by email Sharlene.Weatherwax@science.doe.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. F. Brinkman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

W. F. Brinkman
Director, Office of Science

cc. David Thomassen
Anna Palmisano