



Under Secretary for Science

Washington, DC 20585

December 27, 2006

Dr. Michelle S. Broido
Associate Vice Chancellor for Basic Biomedical Research
and Director, Office of Research, Health Sciences
University of Pittsburgh
Scaife Hall, Suite 401
3550 Terrace Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15261

Dear Dr. Broido:

By this letter, I am charging the Biological and Environmental Research Advisory Committee (BERAC) to assemble a Committee of Visitors (COV) to assess the research program management processes in the Climate Change Research Division (CCRD) in BER. The COV panel will be provided with background material on the processes prior to its first meeting, including the previous COV report and the CCRD response to the COV recommendations and comments.

The panel should provide an assessment of the processes used to solicit, review, and recommend proposal funding actions for FY 2004-2006. It also should assess the processes used to manage ongoing research programs in the CCRD, especially the decision-making processes. I would like the panel to consider and provide evaluation of the following:

1. For both the DOE laboratory projects and university grants, assess the efficacy, fairness, and quality of the processes used to: (a) solicit, review, recommend, and document proposal funding actions, and (b) monitor active projects and programs for progress and outcomes. For example, is the proposal review process rigorous and fair, are funding decisions adequately documented and justified, does the solicitation process for proposals provide sufficient and useful guidance to prospective applicants, and are the progress and outcomes of multi-year projects adequately monitored and evaluated to justify decisions about continued funding?
2. Assess the efficacy and quality of processes used to manage ongoing programs. For example, does the process (a) consider the depth and balance in a research portfolio, (b) solicit and encourage a reasonable amount of exploratory, high-risk research, (c) link the research to mission needs of DOE and its programmatic goals and objectives, (d) enable the support of coherent suites of projects that are integrated and collectively of added scientific value to programs, (e) ensure a reasonable and appropriate turnover of funded investigators to enable and foster the support of new projects and scientists by programs, and (f) result in a portfolio of research elements and programs that have national and international scientific standing?



The panel should assess the processes and operations used for proposal funding actions and program implementation decisions in the CCRD during FY 2004-2006, and the panel should provide comments on how they have changed overall, based on the recommendations of the previous COV Panel. The Panel should also comment on how these processes and operations can continue to be improved. It may examine any files of both DOE laboratory projects and university projects funded in FY 2004-2006. It may also examine any documents related to CCRD program implementation. The panel is asked to review the aforementioned processes used by all CCRD programs and elements.

A primary requirement is that the COV should have significant scientific and administrative expertise across all covered areas, and that this expertise should not rely upon one person alone. A second requirement is that a significant fraction of the committee receives no direct research support from the DOE. A guideline is that approximately 25% of the members, including the Committee Chair, receive no support from DOE. It is also important to have representation on the COV from individuals with experience in managing research programs, either at DOE or other science agencies in the Federal government. There should be an attempt to balance between university scientists and national laboratory scientists. A final overlay should also consider a number of other balance factors, including institution, geographic region, etc. In the end, the COV should constitute an exceptional group of recognized scientists and research program managers, with broad research expertise in the program areas in BER's CCRD. Panel members should also have some familiarity with DOE programs.

The COV should take place early in 2007 at the BER/DOE Germantown location at 19901 Germantown Road, Germantown, Maryland. A presentation on the status and progress of the COV to BERAC is requested at its May 14-15, 2007 meeting. Following acceptance of the full BERAC committee, the COV report with findings and recommendations is to be presented to me, as the Under Secretary for Science.

If you have any questions regarding this charge, please contact Jerry Elwood at 301-903-3281, or by email, jerry.elwood@science.doe.gov.

Sincerely,



Raymond L. Orbach
Under Secretary for Science

cc:

Jerry Elwood
David Thomassen