

Highlights of revised SFA Guidance January 2013

Managing BER Scientific Focus Area (SFA) Programs At the DOE National Laboratories

- BER-Funded National Laboratory Programs:
 - Specific SFA definitions have been removed. Topics for SFA research should align with the general goals for BER-funded research in bioenergy and genomic science, radiological science and climate and environmental science. They can focus on research within a BER subprogram, across subprograms within a Division or across Divisions.
- Oversight of BER National Laboratory Programs, BER SFA Leadership and Management:
 - New concept - SFAs that cross BER subprograms or Divisions will also have a single Lead Program Manager, identified jointly by the BER Division Directors, who will speak for BER on issues regarding SFA scientific directions, budget, priorities, management or personnel even though funds are provided by both BER Divisions.
- Non-SFA Projects at National Laboratories
 - BER will continue to fund a limited number of time-limited, non-SFA or boutique projects at National Laboratories. Many of these projects are collaborations led by academic partners through successful response and merit review to an FOA. In these cases, the projects will continue to receive funding for the duration of the financial assistance award to the lead institution, or according to the budgeted work plan for that project.
 - Most of the remaining projects are not large or broad enough to be funded as individual SFAs but are important to overall scientific progress of research funded in SFAs. To ensure that these boutique projects continue to address the broad needs of BER and the research funded in related SFAs, the management and review of these projects by BER should be coordinated with an existing SFA. Future reviews of these boutique projects should be done together with the review of a specific SFA (or SFAs if multiple SFAs are reviewed at the same time). Similarly, research conducted in these boutique projects should be managed and coordinated with the research being conducted in an SFA (or SFAs). This includes management by BER Program Managers and by Laboratory SFA Managers.

Appendix A: Scientific Focus Area (SFA) Science Plan Guidelines

- Science Plan
 - Since defined SFA topics are no longer part of this SFA document, the Science Plan should identify the specific BER subprogram(s) that is being addressed.

- Science Plan Format, Management and Team Integration
 - The Plan should describe the process used to allocate resources and personnel within the SFA, how changes are made, how the evolutionary path for the SFA is determined and who has the authority and responsibility to make these decisions. This reflects the intended dynamic nature of SFAs and the reality that distributions of budget and personnel may change over time as the science progresses.

Appendix B: Annual SFA Management and Performance Reporting Criteria

- Staffing and budget summary, Funding allocation by SFA element.
 - Focus on SFA deliverables / milestones. These will change from year to year and are intended to be cross-cutting to address the broad goals of the SFA rather than being specifically linked to individual BER subprograms and BER Program Managers. The intent is to ensure that the SFA remains focused on the broad scientific goals of the SFA and not on individual BER Program Manager-specific “goals.”

Appendix C: Triennial Scientific and Program Management Review of BER SFAs

- Management and Performance Documentation
 - Is there a well-defined process and structure to allocate resources and personnel within the SFA, to make structural changes, to evolve the SFA over time and is it clear who has the authority and responsibility to make these decisions? A key element of SFAs is coordinated, central management, something that distinguishes an SFA from a collection of individual PI-led projects. This review element enables reviewers and BER Program Managers to evaluate the effectiveness of SFA leadership and overall coordination of resources, including budget and personnel.

Appendix D: Evolution of the BER SFA Portfolio – new Appendix

A significant challenge for BER, BER Program Managers and Laboratory SFA Managers is to ensure that the overall balance and distribution of SFA research and funds makes the most sense scientifically and addresses ongoing and evolving BER strategic goals.

To ensure that BER’s SFA portfolio best meets BER’s strategic goals and to facilitate the need for SFA evolution, the following options exist.

1. BER or Laboratory SFA Managers propose a realignment or restructuring of existing SFAs that could include some combination of the following:
 - a. Due to scientific progress, the scope of future SFA research is significantly narrowed or expanded.

- b. New partnerships/collaborations are established between existing SFAs to better address future research challenges.
 - c. To meet new scientific challenges, new research partners are added to an existing SFA. This could include a reassignment (by the Laboratory SFA Manager) of funded investigators at one laboratory or across several laboratories. This reassignment could also include the establishment of an SFA at a partner laboratory that previously did not have an SFA or the identification of new SFA research partners from multiple institutions that previously were not part of the existing SFA.
 - d. Funds could be supplemented or redistributed among partnering SFAs to best meet future research challenges.
2. BER initiates a new programmatic area and determines the goals are best achieved through the SFA mechanism.
- a. Supplement to existing SFA
 - b. Call for white papers for new SFA
 - c. Guidance to all SFAs to transition research and redirect within existing funds to address new programmatic need
3. BER terminates a programmatic area or conducts a significant scientific restructuring of the goals
- a. Guidance to all SFAs to submit reviewable proposal for reconfigured programmatic area
 - b. Guidance to all SFAs to submit a transition plan to complete the work within an accelerated timeframe