



Under Secretary for Science

Washington, DC 20585

May 10, 2007

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 process used by the Environmental Remediation Sciences Division (ERSD) in BER to manage the ERSD-supported research program, as well as the operation of the Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory, a national scientific user facility. The COV panel will be provided with background material on the targeted processes prior to its meeting, including the report from the previous COV review of ERSD and the ERSD response to the COV recommendations and comments. The panel should evaluate the actions taken to respond to the recommendations of the previous COV and the effectiveness of those actions in resolving the identified issues.

The panel should provide an assessment of the processes used to solicit, review, and recommend proposal funding actions for FY 2005-2007. It should assess the processes used to manage ongoing research programs in the ERSD, especially the decision-making processes. It also should assess the division's management and oversight of the EMSL. 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? Is there evidence of programmatic considerations in making funding decisions? Is such evidence adequately documented?
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 some exploratory, high-risk research, (c) link



the research to both mission needs of DOE and 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 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 ERSD during FY 2005-2007, and the panel should provide comments on how they have changed based on the recommendations of the previous COV and how they can be improved. It may examine any files of both DOE laboratory projects and university projects funded in the period FY 2005-2007. It also may examine any documents related to ERSD program implementation. The panel is asked to review the aforementioned processes used by all ERSD programs and elements.

A primary requirement is that the COV should have significant 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 percent 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 and research facilities, either at DOE or NSF. There should be an attempt to balance membership between university principal investigators and national laboratory investigators. 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 internationally recognized researchers, with broad research expertise in the program areas in BER's ERSD, as well as a deep familiarity with DOE programs.

The COV should take place late in 2007 at the BER/DOE Germantown location at 19901 Germantown Road, Germantown, Maryland. A discussion of the COV report by BERAC should be held no later than the Spring 2008 BERAC meeting. Following acceptance of the full BERAC committee, the COV report with findings and recommendations is to be presented to me, as the Director of the Office of Science.

If you have any questions regarding this charge, please contact J. Michael Kuperberg, 301-903-4902, or by email at Michael.Kuperberg@science.doe.gov.

Sincerely,



Raymond L. Orbach

cc: Michael Kuperberg
David Thomassen