



**Department of Energy**  
Office of Science  
Washington, DC 20585

Office of the Director

November 18, 2004

Dr. Keith O. Hodgson  
Director, Stanford Synchrotron Radiation Laboratory  
Department of Chemistry  
Stanford University  
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Dr. <sup>Keith</sup>Hodgson:

By this letter, I am charging the Biological and Environmental Research Advisory Committee (BERAC) to assemble a Committee of Visitors (COV) to assess some of the research program management processes in the Life Sciences Research Division in BER. The panel should provide an assessment of the processes used to solicit, review, and recommend proposal funding actions. It should also assess the processes used to manage ongoing research programs in the Life Sciences Division, especially the decision-making processes. I would like the panel to consider and provide evaluation of the following two major elements.

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 is 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 some exploratory, high-risk research, (b) link the research to mission needs of DOE, (b) enable the support of coherent suites of projects that are integrated and collectively of added scientific value to programs, (c) ensure a reasonable and appropriate turnover of funded investigators to enable and foster the support of new projects and scientists by programs, and (d) 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 Life Science Division for projects that received funding during FY 2004 or the first part of FY 2005 and provide comments on how they can be improved. It may examine any files of both DOE laboratory projects and university projects that received funding in FY 2004 or FY 2005. It may also examine any documents related to Life Science Division program implementation. The panel is asked to review the aforementioned processes used by all Life Science Division programs and elements. The COV panel will be provided with background material on the processes prior to its first meeting.

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, either at DOE or NSF. There should be an attempt to balance 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 Life Sciences Division, as well as a deep familiarity with DOE programs.

The COV should take place in the spring of 2005 at the BER/DOE Germantown location at 19901 Germantown Road, Germantown, Maryland. I would like a presentation on the status and progress of the COV to BERAC at either the April or November 2005 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 David Thomassen, 301-903-5468, or by email at [david.thomassen@science.doe.gov](mailto:david.thomassen@science.doe.gov).

Sincerely,



Raymond L. Orbach  
Director

cc: Ari Patrinos  
David Thomassen