



Department of Energy
Office of Science
Washington, DC 20585

Office of the Director

Dr. Bruce Hungate
Regents' Professor, Biological Sciences
Northern Arizona University
SLF Building 17, Room 300A
600 South Knoles Drive
Flagstaff, AZ 86011

Dear Dr. Hungate:

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 Science Division (BSSD) within the Office of Biological and Environmental Research 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 FY2017 – FY2019. 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 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 Department of Energy (DOE) national laboratory projects and university grants, assess the efficacy and quality of the processes used by BSSD programs during FY2017 – FY2019 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 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;



research; quality of the overall technical management of the program; relationships between award decisions, alignment with 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; 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. In response, BSSD may suggest a sample of program actions, including new, renewal, and supplemental applications and proposals, awards and declinations. In addition, COV members may 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 will not participate as a COV member for that program. Some, but not all, members of a COV may be selected from a previous COV. At 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. The COV should effectively constitute an exceptional group of internationally recognized researchers with broad research expertise in the program areas within BSSD, as well as deep familiarity with DOE programs. Additional guidance on COV reviews within the Office of Science can be found at <https://science.osti.gov/sc-2/committees-of-visitors/> and attachments therein.

The COV should take place in summer 2020 in a location in or near Germantown, Maryland. A discussion of the COV report by BERAC should be held no later than the fall 2020 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 Todd Anderson, (301) 903-5469 or by email, Todd.Anderson@science.doe.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Fall', with a large, stylized initial 'C'.

Chris Fall
Director
Office of Science

cc. Sharlene Weatherwax