Department of Energy
Office of Science
Washington, DC 20585

Office of the Director

July 23, 2003

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

Dear Dr. Hodgson: Keith

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 Climate Change Research Division (CCRD) 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 CCRD, 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 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 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?

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The panel should assess the processes and operations used for proposal funding actions and program implementation decisions in the CCRD during FY 2003 and provide comments on how they can be improved. It may examine any files of both DOE laboratory projects and university projects funded in FY 2003. 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. 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% 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 CCRD, as well as a deep familiarity with DOE programs.

The COV should take place early this fall 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 November 2003 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 Jerry Elwood, 301-903-3281, or by email at jerry.elwood@science.doe.gov.

Sincerely,

Raymond L. Orbach
Director

cc: Ari Patrinos
Jerry Elwood