

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Research and Development**

**BOARD OF SCIENTIFIC COUNSELORS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
CONFERENCE CALL**

January 22, 1998

Mitchell Small (Carnegie-Mellon University) reminded the Executive Committee members that the objective of today's conference call is to discuss the *Review of the National Center for Environmental Research and Quality Assurance (NCERQA)* working document. Dr. Small noted that NCERQA has conceptualized a number of innovative ideas, but has had some difficulty with implementation. One Executive Committee member noted that the working document is organized in a different fashion than those for the other Laboratories/Centers. Costel Denson (University of Delaware) responded that he had discussed the format with Dr. Small, who has agreed to make some modifications to improve consistency. However, Dr. Denson indicated that some variation among the documents is expected. Dr. Denson also noted that he and Ginni Boyd (SCG) are developing a format shell for the documents; adherence to the shell should create a suitable level of uniformity. He added that he has prepared a notice and preface to be included in each of the documents; this should ensure that the front-end of each working document will be consistent. Dr. Small provided a brief synopsis of each conclusion/recommendation, and the comments from the Executive Committee members are provided below.

Recommendation 3: The responsibilities of NCERQA Program Officers have increased significantly since 1995, and some have skills that are mismatched to the needs and expectations for effective management of the administrative and technical aspects necessary for good scientific research. There is particular concern about whether sufficient time and resources are available to provide effective post-award oversight to ensure quality and relevance. Robert Howarth (Cornell University) indicated that the quality and relevance of grants and fellowships is a long-standing issue; he believes that post-award oversight is not the most appropriate path to ensure the quality/relevance of grants and fellowships. He urged the use of the NSF model. Dr. Small responded that a mechanism needs to be implemented so that grants and fellowships adhere more closely to the ORD mission. It was suggested to modify the language to emphasize communication (i.e., active dialogue between the grant/fellowship awardee and the EPA Project Officer), and to minimize references to "oversight." Dr. Small agreed to modify the wording accordingly.

Recommendation 11: It is recommended that NCERQA fund a "Research Integration" project with each RFA. Research Integration projects could be responsible for developing State-of-Science reports, tracking technical progress on individual grants and their relevance to EPA, and establishing connections with other organizations conducting similar research. These projects provide a possible testbed to allow ORD scientists the opportunity to apply competitively for NCERQA grants or contracts. It was suggested that the "Research Integration" project, mentioned in the recommendation, be performed within NCERQA as a pilot program. One Executive Committee member noted that NCERQA may not have the resources to implement such a pilot, but the Executive Committee believes that it is a sound suggestion.

Recommendation 16: It is recommended that QA policies, procedures, and documents undergo regular review to ensure that they are meaningful to those who use them. Particular attention should be given to options that allow for reduced paperwork. Executive Committee members were concerned that quality assurance (QA) reporting requirements could become an undue burden on the awardee. A distinction was drawn between core research and research in direct support of regulations. QA reporting requirements should not interfere with the awardee's ability to perform core research, nor should they require undue resources. An Executive Committee member noted that a project may cost as much as 50 percent more due to QA requirements. Dr. Small indicated that he would take the

Executive Committee's comments under advisement and modify the recommendation as appropriate.

A number of Executive Committee members indicated that they were uncomfortable with the last two paragraphs of the conclusions/recommendations section. These members noted that the paragraphs were outside of the BOSC's charge, and Dr. Small agreed to remove the paragraphs. In response to an Executive Committee member's suggestion, Dr. Small agreed to include a statement regarding NCERQA's role as a reviewer of other Centers and Laboratories.

Ms. Boyd agreed to circulate all of the revised working documents, with the exception of the NCERQA working document, to the Executive Committee via express mail by today, January 22, 1998. Shirley Hamilton (EPA) pointed out that the agenda for the January 27-28, 1998 BOSC Meeting, which was circulated to Executive Committee members, erroneously indicated that the meeting was to be held on February 27-28, 1998, instead of January 27-28. Dr. Denson noted that there will be 75 minutes dedicated to each working document during the BOSC Meeting; the NCERQA working document, however, will not be discussed at the meeting.

Action Items

- Mitchell Small will modify Recommendation 11 per the suggestions of the Executive Committee.
- Mitchell Small will remove the last two paragraphs of the conclusion/recommendations section.
- Executive Committee members will prepare an introduction to the working documents consistent with the notice and preface prepared by Costel Denson.
- Ginni Boyd will circulate all of the revised working documents, except the NCERQA working document, to the Executive Committee via express mail by today, January 22, 1998.

Participants

The following Executive Committee members were present on the conference call:

Marilyn Brown	Jerald Schnoor
Costel Denson	Mitchell Small
Robert Howarth	Rae Zimmerman
Brian Leaderer	

Additional Participants:

Shirley Hamilton (Designated Federal Official)
Ginni Boyd (SCG)
Mark Searles (SCG)