

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

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

February 25, 1998

Costel Denson (University of Delaware) 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. Denson noted that today's discussion will be held in a similar format to the discussions of the other draft Laboratory/Center reports held at the January 27-28, 1998 BOSC Executive Committee Meeting. Erica Howard (Cornell University), on behalf of Robert Howarth (Cornell University), indicated that Dr. Howarth has reviewed the report and has no comments. She also mentioned that Dr. Howarth is comfortable granting provisional acceptance of the report. Mitchell Small (Carnegie-Mellon University), chair of the NCERQA *Ad Hoc* Subcommittee, provided an overview of the report and focused on the recommendations section. The comments of the Executive Committee members are provided below.

Based on a suggestion by Shirley Hamilton (EPA), the Designated Federal Official, Dr. Small agreed to replace the term "Program Officer" with "Project Officer" throughout the report.

Research Integration and Communication, Recommendation 4: It is recommended that NCERQA prioritize the target audiences identified in its communication plan and that the procedures and products for communication be developed with input from priority customers, including the pretesting of products. It was agreed to modify the sentence to read, "... including the pretesting of communication instruments and products."

Research Integration and Communication, Recommendation 6: 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 the 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. William Cooper (Michigan State University) suggested that the last sentence be a separate recommendation. A number of Executive Committee members believe that this portion of the recommendation should be included in the summary report, as it provides a recommendation applicable to all of the ORD Laboratories and Centers. Dr. Small responded that the recommendation would be out of context if it were a separate recommendation; however, he agreed that inclusion of the recommendation in the summary report would be appropriate. The Executive Committee agreed to retain the recommendation as is in the NCERQA report, and to include the recommendation in the summary report.

Peer Review and Quality Assurance, Recommendation 2: It is recommended that NCERQA authority for QA extend beyond current requirements that a QA plan be submitted and approved by QAD, to also delineate requirements for implementation by investigators, assessment and feedback by QAD, and followup to ensure that achievements are recognized, deficiencies corrected, and appropriate communications implemented. Rae Zimmerman (New York University) suggested that the language be modified to be more similar to an analogous recommendation in the National Risk Management Research Laboratory (NRMRL) report. It was agreed to modify the recommendation to read, "It is recommended that NCERQA's role in QA leadership extend ..."

Peer Review and Quality Assurance, Recommendation 3: It is recommended that policies for formal peer review be extended beyond current practice for review of proposals, to also include review of interim and final research projects. Timely publication of results in peer-reviewed scientific journals should be targeted for all ORD

research. Results of peer review should become part of the research record, and considered when requests for project continuation/renewal are evaluated. It was agreed to modify the recommendation to read, "... to also include review of research products."

Peer Review and Quality Assurance, Recommendation 5: It is recommended that NCERQA develop formal performance measures to track the effectiveness of their QA and peer review functions. These should include administrative measures, such as compliance with contract specifications and timeliness as well as scientific quality, successful publication, citation, and use of the research by others, and successful application to EPA decisionmaking. It was agreed to modify the recommendation to read, "It is recommended that NCERQA develop approaches and measures to track ...". The Executive Committee also agreed to modify the second sentence to read, "These should include ensuring/tracking that the performance and function of the peer review process is operating as intended." The Committee indicated that Dr. Small may alter the language, provided that the intent of these revisions is captured.

In response to an Executive Committee member's question, Dr. Small indicated that *Appendix D: Social Science Research in ORD and NCERQA* is referenced on page 12 of the report.

It was suggested to add guidance from the BOSC regarding the percentage of project funds that are used for QA. However, the level of funding for QA will vary depending on the nature of the project, and the Executive Committee noted that providing a specific percent value could be problematic. Dr. Small agreed to include language capturing the thoughts of the Executive Committee.

Dr. Denson asked that NCERQA officials provide any comments that they may have to the ORD Administrative Assistant, who will forward them to Dr. Denson. He reminded the NCERQA officials on the conference call that comments should be limited to those of technical accuracy.

Public Comment. Ms. Angie Grune (Duke Power) thanked the Executive Committee for the opportunity to comment on the NCERQA report; she expressed her opinion that the process for intramural and extramural grants/awards should be similar. The Executive Committee agreed to consider her comments.

The Executive Committee granted conditional acceptance to the NCERQA report. Michael Kavanaugh (Malcolm Pirnie, Inc.) was appointed the Chair and William Pierson (Desert Research Institute) was appointed the Vice-Chair of the *ad hoc* committee to review the NCERQA report. They will ensure that the comments of the Executive Committee are reflected in the revised NCERQA report.

Action Items

- Mitchell Small will revise the NCERQA report based on the Executive Committee's comments.
- Michael Kavanaugh and William Pierson will review the revised NCERQA report to ensure that the comments of the Executive Committee are accurately reflected in the revised report.

Participants

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

Marilyn Brown	William Pierson
James Bus	Jerald Schnoor
William Cooper	Mitchell Small
Costel Denson	Rae Zimmerman
Michael Kavanaugh	

Additional Participants:

Ginni Boyd (SCG)
Liz Bryan (EPA)
Shirley Hamilton (Designated Federal Official)
David Kleffman (EPA)
Peter Preuss (EPA)
Mark Searles (SCG)
Nancy Wentworth (EPA)