



Under Secretary for Science

Washington, DC 20585

January 23, 2008

Dr. Michelle S. Broido
Associate Vice Chancellor for Basic Biomedical Research
and Director, Office of Research, Health Sciences
University of Pittsburgh
Scaife Hall, Suite 401
3550 Terrace Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15261

Dear Dr. Broido:

By this letter, I am charging the Biological and Environmental Research Advisory Committee (BERAC) to assemble a Committee of Visitors (COV) to assess the process used by the Life and Medical Sciences Division (LMSD) in BER to manage the LMSD-supported research programs. The operation of the DOE Joint Genome Institute, a national scientific user facility, will not be included in this review, having undergone a BERAC review in November 2005; the charge for that separate review is forthcoming. The COV panel will be provided with background material on the targeted processes prior to its meeting, including the report from the previous COV review of the Life Sciences Research Division and its response to the COV recommendations and comments. The panel should evaluate the actions taken to respond to the recommendations of the previous COV and the effectiveness of those actions in resolving the identified issues. The Medical Sciences programs were merged with the Life Sciences Research programs in FY 2006 and thus will be undergoing their first COV review.

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 LMSD, 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? Is there evidence of programmatic considerations in making funding decisions? Is such evidence adequately documented?
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, (c) link the research to mission needs of DOE, (d) enable the support of coherent suites of projects that are integrated and collectively of added scientific value to programs, (e) ensure a reasonable and appropriate turnover of funded investigators to enable and foster the support of new projects and scientists by programs, and (f) 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 LMSD during FY 2005-2007, and the panel should provide comments on how they have changed based on the recommendations of the previous Life Sciences Research Division COV and how they can be improved. It may examine any files of both DOE laboratory projects and university projects funded in the period FY 2005-2007. It may also examine any documents related to LMSD program implementation. The panel is asked to review the aforementioned processes used by all LMSD programs and elements.

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 peer-reviewed research programs, either at DOE or other science agencies in the Federal government. 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 LMSD, as well as some familiarity with DOE programs.

The COV should take place in the early summer of 2008 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 the Fall 2008 meeting. Following acceptance of the full BERAC committee, the COV report with findings and recommendations is to be presented to me, as the Under Secretary for Science.

If you have any questions regarding this charge, please contact Sharlene Weatherwax, 301-903-6165, or by email at Sharlene.weatherwax@science.doe.gov.

Sincerely,



Raymond L. Orbach

cc: Sharlene Weatherwax
David Thomassen
Jerry Elwood