



BASIC ENERGY SCIENCES -- Serving the Present, Shaping the Future

Basic Energy Sciences Update

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Issues from Division of Materials Sciences and Engineering COV

Documentation

One of the conclusions of the first BES COV (chemistry programs) was that there was a need for standardization of the documentation of decisions, processes, reviews, etc. We were pleased to observe that the implementation of this recommendation was well along the road to completion. ... Our specific recommendations for enhancements to the documentation are:

- A timeline/document page should be developed that would be affixed to the inside cover of every project folder. This page could contain a check off list with all critical milestones in the proposal process, with space to enter dates and comments.
- The use of mail peer reviews is an integral part of the decision making process for BES. This COV believes that the review process would be improved if a reviewer “report form” were developed to help ensure that the reviewer provides as much appropriate information as possible.

Information Management

The Office of Science information management system is ineffective in many ways.

The following specific information would be useful to future COVs:

- Reliable statistics on longevity of projects for all the programs
- Reliable statistics on diversity of PI's and researchers funded by the programs
- A complete listing of proposals received by each program during the 3 year period of evaluation, including information on outcome (fund/not fund), reviewers used, previous funding history of the PI, etc.
- Data on length of time from submission to funding decision
- Reviewer database

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The Proposal Review Process

It would be very valuable if verbatim copies of the text of the reviews were transmitted to the PI's in all cases in such a manner as to keep confidential the identity of the reviewer.

Conflict of Interest

- A set of “conflict of interest” guidelines should be included with each review solicitation.
- PI's should be asked to supply a list of mentors, former students and postdoctoral associates (last 5 years), and collaborators (last 5 years) as part of the proposal submission.

Project Monitoring

We would recommend that consideration be given to a more widespread use of “contractor's” meetings. Contractor's meetings provide a number of benefits in addition to allowing the program manager to remain up to date on project progress.

Program Quality

While it might require “difficult” decisions, some consideration should be given to increasing the grant size of funded projects, even at the expense of not funding some projects at the decision margin.

The COV Process

We strongly recommend that the COV process for BES be continued on a regular basis.