

Blue Ribbon Panel Meeting Summary May 20, 2004

Participants

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Meeting Purpose

This meeting of the OPS-convened R&D Blue Ribbon Panel was held for several purposes, including:

- Update the panel on the R&D Program activities since June 10, 2003;
- Illustrate a new program structure and evolution;
- Present a set of refined performance measures to evaluate R&D outcomes; and,
- Obtain feedback and basic consensus on the reasonableness and validity of R&D performance measures.

R&D Program To-Date

In 2003, a Five Year R&D Program Plan was jointly developed with DOT's Office of Pipeline Safety, DOE's National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL), and the DOC's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). DOI's Minerals Management Service (MMS) was consulted during development of the program plan. This plan is presently in Department Level and OMB Examiner Surnaming.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DOT/RSPA/OPS, DOE/NETL and DOC/NIST was signed on January 20th, 2004 and is available at:
<http://primis.rspa.dot.gov/rd/mou.pdf>

OPS said there have been many audits and that the Inspector General report is due out any day. OPS is also pleased with the strong industry participation reflected in the level of project co-funding.

Response to the recently released BAA #4 has been very competitive and the quality of proposed projects has increased with each BAA. The 148 white papers submitted in response to BAA #4 were reviewed on Tuesday, May 18th and winnowed down to about 40. The evaluators agreed that web-based evaluation of the white papers followed by discussion via teleconference was a very productive way to handle the initial evaluation. During the next evaluation cycle the committee will meet to discuss proposals as a group. Consistent with OPS' objectives, the proposed projects have been competitive, collaborative, and co-funded.

OPS has developed a web site to track information through the life of the projects from pre-award to closeout. The pre-award system is now in place and the white papers have been submitted and initially reviewed on-line.

OPS spoke of the increasing importance of OMB PART for applied R&D programs. OPS has attended several training sessions, reviewed various Federal R&D programs, learned about strategic plans, performance plans, and logic models, and has participated in combined OPS PART evaluation.

In the past, four budget codes have been used to categorize R&D projects. OPS is now considering improved ways to communicate the R&D program focus and the relationship between that focus and the budget categories without inappropriately constraining the R&D program. One approach would be to fund R&D projects related to program goals and then to use a logic model to display the relationship between these goals and the budget categories. The focusing workshop was a good way to identify useful activities and to verify the appropriateness of the program focus.

Benefit assessment is often difficult. How do you measure the effectiveness of R&D in preventing infrequently occurring events? Evaluating R&D effectiveness is complicated by the fact that R&D is but one of many programs carried out by OPS to attain the same set of goals. Attributing measured improvements to one or the other of these activities is very problematic.

Performance Measures

OPS indicated it will be important to recognize best practices, collect data and performance report on how the program has done and then roll it back into the strategic plan. Performance measures ultimately show the aim toward optimum efficiency.

The Performance Measures were reviewed in the following six performance categories:

- Relevance of the R&D Program to National Priorities and the Mission of the Office of Pipeline Safety;
- Quality and Impact of R&D Program;
- Program Management Activities;
- Coordination and Collaboration with Other Agencies, Industry, and Other Stakeholders'
- Communication of R&D Program Activities, Results, and Impacts; and,
- Technology Transfer and Application of Results.

Significant comments from the Panel on performance measurement included:

- DOE experience supports focusing on the desired outcomes. There is a need for both short-term and longer-term outcomes. The difficulty is in “connecting the dots” between the completed R&D and the improved outcomes.
- DOE has been unsuccessful in creating one performance measurement and tracking system that satisfies the needs of all oversight needs (GAO, OMB, GPRA).
- API indicated that all performance measurement should begin with the top-level outputs desired from all industry and regulatory programs, then seek to link the R&D focus areas to these outputs. An example of this linking might be correlating the focus of R&D projects with the threats they are intended to address. Characterizing the impact of each of the numerous activities designed to improve safety is very difficult.
- The AOPL representative expressed the thought that OPS should make it clear that there is no “corporate welfare” involved in the R&D effort. Funding originates with the industry and the benefits accrue to both the public and the industry.

Wrap Up

Comments/Suggestions:

- The most significant challenge in the PART evaluation is determining how R&D activities completed within a given year affect five and ten year goals? Progress is difficult to measure, especially when numerous OPS activities all contribute to attainment of the same set of goals. OMB wants lots of detail.
- MMS indicated that the OPS R&D program structure would be a good guide for MMS.
- More OPS people need to be involved in standards committees to better promote the contribution of OPS R&D accomplishments to developing standards.
- OPS should strive to measure the extent to which its programs are proactive in seeking solutions to potential future safety and integrity issues rather than reactive.
- It was noted that OMB gives points for measures associated with enhancing security. (Integrity, reliability, and security).
- Continuous input into program focus and existing gaps is necessary. This is an evolutionary process started within OPS in 2001.
- The topic of technology transfer was recommended as an important topic for discussion in a future Blue Ribbon Panel meeting.
- There will be a DOE demonstration this summer at Rocky Mountain on leak detection. This test will be open to industry attendees, and participants on the Blue Ribbon Panel were all invited to attend.

Actions:

- OPS will summarize the meeting and provide the summary and feedback to all participants.
- OPS will send a draft of the strategic plan to this group for comment by mid-Summer.
- OPS will form a steering committee for the government/industry R&D Forum.
- OPS will back-populate the R&D Management Information System (MIS) to include all projects starting with BAA #1.
- OPS will collect data on how many white papers were submitted in earlier BAA's.
- OPS will look for ways to track patent applications, papers published, and standards incorporating R&D results. It was noted that more standards and regulations are not necessarily a worthy goal.
- OPS will incorporate feedback from this panel into the Performance Plan.
- Commercialization will be a topic for the next forum.

Adjourn