



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

May 15, 2001

EPA-SAB-RSAC-COM-01-002

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR
SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD

Honorable Christine Todd Whitman
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Subject: Science Advisory Board (SAB) Commentary on National
Program Directors in ORD for Managing Large Crosscutting
Programs

Dear Governor Whitman:

On March 7, 2001, the Research Strategies Advisory Committee (RSAC) of the Science Advisory Board met in Washington, D.C. and completed a consultation on the topic of the National Program Directors (NPDs) in the Office of Research and Development (ORD). The ORD only recently has selected and appointed NPDs to manage large cross-cutting research programs. We listened to the prepared presentations from four National Program Directors and made inquiries about the strengths of this matrix management structure and areas where improvements could be beneficial to the Agency. The four ORD programs covered in our interactions were Particulate Matter Research, Drinking Water Research, Endocrine Disruptors Research, and Global Change Research. We also received the recently completed "Management Review of the Particulate Matter Research Program" by the Board of Scientific Counselors for the Office of Research and Development.

Based on our discussion, the RSAC decided to prepare a commentary to provide our assessment and advice regarding the National Program Directors in ORD. This commentary offers specific recommendations including a strong endorsement for the continuing use of National Program Directors and for strengthening some aspects of this management structure.

Key Findings

- a) RSAC found that the management structure utilizing National Program Directors with a lead executive, while fairly new, is well organized and efficient. It appears to be working well and is offering the type of leadership and coordination functions that are essential to successfully executing crosscutting research programs in ORD.
- b) RSAC noted that there were differences in the functioning of the National Program Directors among different programs. For example, the Particulate Matter Research Program by necessity requires NPD efforts to be mostly

devoted to identifying research needs, to coordinating the research planning, and to monitoring research carried out by contractors and participating research groups. The NPD for Endocrine Disruptors, on the other hand, has to place significantly more emphasis on coordination of national and international efforts. This flexibility and tailoring of NPD activities is a good attribute that ORD should continue to cultivate.

Recommendations

- a) RSAC notes that even though there are a number of research programs in ORD, all of them do not have National Program Directors. RSAC learned that ORD management appoints National Program Directors only for a subset of the programs. RSAC does understand that all programs may not require National Program Directors. However, RSAC recommends that the Agency establish a set of defined criteria and standards to implement a transparent process to decide when a National Program Director is needed and when one is not necessary.
- b) RSAC also noted that the NPDs play a very critical and strategic role in developing and following the ORD Research Strategy. This allows a focus for ORD's efforts and a means to evaluate how responsive the results are to the stated goals of the National Program Director management program. Because the research planning process is quite complex and requires consensus building RSAC recommends that additional staff support be provided for the NPDs and be adequate for their assigned tasks.
- c) RSAC observed that a dedicated budget for the National Program Directors would be very helpful to bolstering the abilities of the NPDs to be more efficient and successful in their positions. Overall, RSAC is very pleased to see the institution of National Program Directors for a subset of ORD Programs. RSAC also encourages ORD to continue with this matrix management structure and fine tune the operations along the lines of our recommendations.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this program. The Research Strategies Advisory Committee would be pleased to expand on any of these comments, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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Dr. William H. Glaze, Chair
EPA Science Advisory Board

/ S /

Dr. Raymond C. Loehr, Chair
Research Strategies Advisory Committee EPA
Science Advisory Board

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