

**Basic Energy Sciences (BES) Division of Materials Sciences and Engineering (BES/DMS&E)  
Response to the Report of the Basic Energy Sciences Advisory Committee's Committee of Visitors (COV)  
Review of the BES Materials Sciences and Engineering Division**

Dates of COV: March 31–April 2, 2009

Date of COV Report: July 9, 2009

Date of Response: August 17, 2009

Program Points of Contact: Harriet Kung (BES) and Linda Horton (DMS&E)

<b>Recommendation/Major Finding</b>	<b>COV General Recommendation/Finding</b>	<b>BES Response</b>
<b>Major Finding #6</b>	<p><b>Contractors' Meetings</b> There was consensus that Contractors' meetings are a most effective method for the PMs and the PIs to interact. It was valuable for the PMs to directly interact with all of the PIs that are funded, and also allows the PIs to network, and form potential new collaborations (among other benefits). The COV strongly endorses regular contractors meetings, which are deemed to be essential to the health of the programs.</p>	<p>BES agrees that Contractors' Meetings are an important forum for interactions and enhanced collaboration. The Division of Materials Sciences and Engineering (DMS&amp;E) is expanding the use of Contractors' Meetings, with the goal of holding these for all major parts of the portfolio on a regular basis. With the addition of the EFRCs, representatives from these Centers will also be included in appropriate Contractors' Meetings to enhance interactions among all DMS&amp;E-funded researchers in a given area.</p>
<b>Major Finding #7</b>	<p><b>Early Career Scientists</b> There needs to be a balance in the funding opportunities between early-career scientists and more established researchers. The COV thought that generally there is a good balance between established names and early-career scientists. The PMs are to be commended for finding this appropriate balance.</p>	<p>BES agrees that the balance between early career and established researchers is important to the health of the program. The newly established Office of Science Early Career Research Program will provide additional opportunities to support outstanding researchers early in their careers. . The initial response for letters of intent suggests that DMS&amp;E will have a strong group in the inaugural class of early career awards.</p>
<b>Recommendation #1</b>	<p><b>Average Grant Size and New Program Directions</b> The influx of new money is an opportunity to implement ambitious new programs and directions, and to increase the average grant size. Both the money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009 and the FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act 2009 provide a unique opportunity to be bold and steer the Division into new scientific directions and opportunities.</p>	<p>DMS&amp;E has increased the average single investigator award over the last three years. It agrees that the recent initiatives and Recovery Act funding are real opportunities for growth into new research areas. The DMS&amp;E has carefully assessed the portfolio in determining the emphasis areas for the initiatives and is pleased with the balance of the awards among the emphasis areas. We are cognizant of the award size concern and are working to address this in new awards.</p>

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<p><b>Recommendation #2</b></p>	<p><b>Portfolio Analysis and Management System</b>  The highest priority should be given to implement the proposed Portfolio Analysis and Management System (PAMS) information management system. This COV strongly endorses the single recommendation of the 2008 CSGB. The strength of this recommendation can not be overstated. There are a plethora of examples from this COV where a reliable, efficient, usable information management system would greatly aid all involved.</p>	<p>The Office of Science is working towards a common solution that will be implemented broadly. At the request of BESAC, a representative of the Office of the Deputy Director for Science Programs will provide an update on the status of this implementation at the next BESAC Meeting. BES continues to provide input to the Office of Science on the development of an information technology solution.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #3</b></p>	<p><b>Staffing Levels</b>  The staffing level should be reviewed to ensure that it is commensurate with increased workload as a result of increased funding and proposal pressure. An appropriate staffing level is critical to the efficiency and overall operation of the Division.</p>	<p>BES agrees with this recommendation. DMS&amp;E has begun this assessment with staffing planning for FY2010 and is planning to add additional staffing as funding is available and temporary detailees in high pressure areas. Especially noteworthy is the decision to add 2 new BES program managers specifically for the EFRCs.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #4</b></p>	<p><b>Communication</b>  The COV noted several examples where it appeared that the level of communication between DMS&amp;E and the PIs was below what is optimal. This COV therefore recommends that there be an improvement in the communication methods to the research community. One suggested path forward is to drastically improve and keep current the BES website. The website should be the place where a PI can obtain complete information about all aspects of the DMS&amp;E, including proposal submission guidelines and deadlines, new funding announcements and the research areas and directions that fall under the purview of DMS&amp;E.</p>	<p>BES agrees that the BES website is in need of revision and with the importance of communication with the community and PIs. This initiative is in progress and should be launched early in FY2010. DMS&amp;E web content will be updated as part of this process and will be maintained with up-to-date content subsequently.</p>

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<p><b>Recommendations #5 and 6</b></p>	<p><b>Proposal Process and White Papers</b>  The entire proposal submission and award process should be more transparent. The increased use of white papers is encouraged. The COV believes that white papers are an effective means to hone or discourage full proposals as appropriate. However, it is noted that communicating to PIs the advantages of a white paper prior to a full proposal has been a challenge.</p>	<p>BES agrees that the proposal process should be clearly communicated and transparent. We have been using presentations at major professional society meetings to expand our communication on this process. These concerns will also be addressed with the improvements to the website.</p> <p>DMS&amp;E agrees that white papers are effective in assisting PIs in appropriately focusing their proposals. These are used extensively for the national labs. We will continue to expand our use of white papers for the academic community. The DMS&amp;E will establish a database of incoming white papers submitted by laboratory and university PIs to track progress in the review and communication with the PI on the evaluation of the white papers.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #7</b></p>	<p><b>Travel Budgets</b>  The travel budget for PMs should be further increased to allow them to attend national and international meetings and to visit PIs on site. These are critical components for the information gathering that is needed by the PM.</p>	<p>BES agrees with this recommendation and will request additional travel funding to the extent possible within allocated budgets. DMS&amp;E specifically plans to assess the university portfolio and encourage expanded visits to major programs.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #8</b></p>	<p><b>EPSCOR</b>  Following the last COV, a DOE EPSCoR Study Group was convened to make recommendations regarding the program. This COV recommends that the EPSCoR Study Group recommendations should be fully implemented.</p>	<p>BES agrees with this recommendation. As was noted by the COV, significant progress has already been made in improving the processes for the EPSCoR program. In particular, in FY2010, site visits or reverse site visits will be implemented for the Implementation Award Proposals. In addition, site visits or reverse site visits to existing awardees have been initiated in the current fiscal year. The criteria for success/effectiveness of implementation award were included in the most recent Funding Opportunity Announcement.</p>