(NP) Response to the Report of the (NSAC) Committee of Visitors Review of (Office of Nuclear Physics Program)

Date of COV: January 7-9, 2013
Date of COV Report: March 20, 2013
Date of Response: May 7, 2013 (Updated October 4, 2013)
Program Point of Contact: Timothy Hallman

Recommendation/Major Finding	COV General Recommendation/Finding	NP Program Response
Recommendation #1	The COV recommended in 2007 and stressed again in 2010 that it was imperative to develop and implement a database to track relevant proposal and grant information. We reiterate the critical need for the rapid implementation of such a database.	The Office of Nuclear Physics (NP) and the Office of Science (SC) agree with the recommendation to deploy software infrastructure for electronic management and tracking of proposals, grant actions, review reports, etc. The Portfolio Analysis and Management System (PAMS) software developed for this purpose is being implemented iteratively, with the project plan envisioning functionality to address this recommendation becoming available within the 2013 calendar year. When this capability is deployed, NP will have the capability to track relevant proposal and grant information.
Recommendation #2	We recommend that NP track the participation of underrepresented groups and make the information available. The COV urges that the necessary authorization be obtained, consistent with Federal requirements, to track diversity and demographic information.	NP agrees that understanding the participation of underrepresented groups in its programs is essential to stewarding diversity in accordance with the DOE business model for optimizing the effectiveness and productivity of the workforce it supports. The Office of Science is working to track volunteered diversity and demographic information. Once PAMS capability is implemented to support tracking of diversity and demographic information volunteered or collated in accordance with Federal requirements, NP will do so, and, as appropriate, will make the information available.

Recommendation #3	We recommend that, after the PAMS system is in operation, its effectiveness to address the relevant issues raised in this report (such as tracking demographics of the workforce, proposal and grant applications, workload of Project Managers, and impact on NP operations) be evaluated. We request that NP report to NSAC yearly on this evaluation.	In line with its continuing effort to maintain effective stakeholder communications NP will communicate with NSAC on a regular basis on progress towards all COV recommendations. NP will also post responses to COV recommendations on the web per the standard Office of Science COV process.
Recommendation #4	The COV recommends an increased focus on timely delivery of reports, and development of a set of written guidelines for Laboratory Review Reports to streamline the process.	NP agrees with the need for timely delivery of review reports, and will explore possible ways to streamline its review process, including written guidelines for Laboratory Review Reports. Effort will be redoubled towards returning all review reports within 4 months consistent with NP policy.
Recommendation #5	The COV recommends the development of a set of guidelines defining roles, responsibilities, authorities and accountability for both the research and facilities Program Managers. Such guidelines across the NP portfolio would help to consolidate best practices throughout.	NP concurs that in addition to the well defined roles, responsibilities, authorities and accountabilities set out in the Performance Plans for NP Program Managers and Support Staff, additional guidelines to articulate interfaces, functional relationships, and process protocols will help to consolidate best practices, and such guidelines will be developed.

Recommendation #6	The NP should work with the community to enhance the peer review process for university grants such that, while continuing to be fair, it is even more discriminating in the evaluation process. The NP could consider the implementation of a quantitative component into the grant evaluation process.	NP partially agrees with this recommendation. The evaluation process and criteria are well documented and must be in accordance with the DOE Office of Science Peer Review System, with criteria according to 10 CFR Part 605.10. However, NP will work in partnership with the nuclear science community to ensure the criteria of the peer review process are recognized and used effectively in carrying out the peer review process. NP will also consider the value added of including program policy factors to the peer review criteria.
Recommendation #7	We recommend that NP advocate for a change in the administration of the ECA program to give greater control to the individual programs over the size and number of ECA awards. The NP should provide direct feedback to the Early Career Award applicants regarding the relative competitiveness of their proposals, relevance to the priorities of the NP program, and potential alternative routes for funding for the declined proposals.	NP agrees that additional input to the Early Career Award applicant, in addition to the already provided reviewer comments, would be useful to the applicant. NP will also offer a discussion with the applicant, if so desired, to discuss the proposed topics in the recommendation. It is standard SC practice to proactively seek feedback on aspects affecting the effectiveness of the SC ECA program, and NP regularly contributes to those discussions based on its experience and perspective.
Recommendation #8	It is essential that the NP complete the filling of the Research Division Director and Medium Energy Program Manager positions.	NP agrees with this recommendation and is proactively, aggressively attempting to fill these vacancies as well as to address additional and emerging staffing challenges which impact effective servicing of the NP portfolio.

Recommendation #9	The COV recommends that NP define the process and timeframes for the major reviews including the 2013 Comparative Review and communicate this to the field as soon as possible. It is important to provide the guidance to the PIs of the groups and to the panel as soon as possible.	This recommendation has been addressed, and all information necessary for the PIs and panel members to carry out and participate in the review has been communicated.
Recommendation #10	The NP should perform further analysis of the workforce data and develop plans as needed to mitigate the impact of potentially constrained budgets on the workforce.	NP continually assesses the resources needed for effective execution of the activities it supports including analysis of workforce impacts. As part of this ongoing effort, NP will continue to work to mitigate the impacts of potentially constrained budgets on essential research and operations staff.
Recommendation #11	We recommend continued engagement with the User Facilities to establish facility performance metrics that more directly measure the scientific productivity of those facilities.	In FY 2013, SC changed its approach to performance measures upon direction from OMB; the new matrices are now more directly linked to scientific productivity and NP utilizes NSAC-approved measures to gauge scientific productivity. NP will need to continue to quote percent utilization which is the ratio of weeks financially supported relative to optimum weeks of running. NP will continue to strive to highlight the scientific and technical achievements of the facilities in the budget narrative.

Recommendation #12	The COV recommends that the coordination and the information exchange of accelerator R&D activities between SC offices be strengthened.	NP agrees with this recommendation and will explore ways to enhance coordination and information exchange of accelerator R&D activities between SC offices beyond the information exchange and informal inter-office coordination meetings which currently take place. NP will continue to focus on short and mid-term accelerator R&D as HEP is the steward for generic (long-term R&D) and has a plan in place on how to coordinate and enhance information exchange of generic R&D within the Office of Science.
Recommendation #13	We recommend a systematic assessment of computational needs across all theoretical and experimental subfields, especially for the smaller-scale projects in the Medium and Low Energy programs to see if further coordinated efforts within NP are needed.	NP continually assesses the resources needed for effective execution of the activities it supports and notes this COV recommendation, that as part of that ongoing activity, a systematic assessment of computational needs, especially for the smaller-scale projects in the Medium and Low Energy programs, may be indicated.
Recommendation #14	The COV endorses the creation of a distinct neutrino, neutron, and fundamental symmetries portfolio within the office.	NP notes the COV's endorsement of its plan to create a distinct neutrino, neutron, and fundamental symmetries portfolio within the Office.