

**Superfund Research Program's Response to the
SRP External Advisory Panel Report
August 27, 2010**

The Superfund Research Program (SRP) appreciates the thoughtful comments provided by the SRP External Advisory Panel (EAP).

The EAP identified many salient points about the SRP, which will provide NIEHS staff with detailed and constructive direction in shaping plans for the SRP and will also serve as a guide in the years to come.

We find the recommendations presented in the executive summary to be in-line with our philosophy of the SRP. Below we identify some preliminary ideas that we will implement in response to the Panel's recommendations. Following our responses -- at the end of the document -- we have identified a few points that the Panel may care to affirm or comment on.

EAP Recommendations (per the executive summary):

- 1) Conduct a high-level strategic planning exercise to identify and promote research on emerging scientific issues critical for site assessment and remediation;

Response: We agree that a strategic plan will be an invaluable tool for setting the future directions of the SRP. We anticipate that over the course of the next year we will develop a strategic plan that we will present to the September 2010 council.

- 2) Increase level of program integration and promote interactions among grantees; this includes interactions between R01 grantees and between R01 grantees and P42 multi-project grantees.

Response: We agree that increased interactions among the grantees will strengthen the science of the Program. We will consider approaches and possible ways to stimulate collaborative research efforts. Our support of this recommendation is demonstrated by the recent use of American Recovery and Resource Act funds to support research and research translation that enhanced collaborations among grantees.

- 3) Increase emphasis on translation of research towards remediation activities.

Response: We agree that research translation is critical to achieving the SRP's goals. We will continue to emphasize research translation in all areas of science that the Program supports, but will closely evaluate new mechanisms for translating research specific to remediation. We also recognize that research translation can take many forms and is dependent on the target groups being reached. In particular the SRP is identifying new approaches to conduct research translation with our federal partners, EPA and ATSDR.

- 4) Promote effective and sensitive community outreach, especially as it pertains to communities affected by Superfund sites; this includes recognition of and sensitivity towards specific cultural identities and characteristics (i.e., the Indian Nation, its language and beliefs; challenges discussing sickness and death with translation of science; using different approaches for different communities; non-English speaking stakeholders)

Response: We agree that promoting effective and sensitive community outreach must be a priority for the SRP and for this to be effective, it must be culturally sensitive. We will assemble a forum of experts to review current practices and recommend alternative approaches.

- 5) Ensure critical review of continuously-funded, multi-project grants;
- 6) Develop and/or improve tools for assessing progress and achievements at the level of the individual grantee or multi-project grants, and for the SBRP as a whole;
- 7) Develop metrics to assess the impact of SBRP research on the efficacy of site-remediation, decision making, and public policy. These metrics should be used to guide the future of research mechanisms and topics funded by the Program.

Response to 5, 6 and 7: We agree that the continuous and ongoing review, assessment and evaluation of the SRP are critical in order to ensure that the Program is meeting its mandates and to demonstrate accountability. As an NIH extramural program we are committed to utilizing the NIH peer review process in the competitive funding of grant applications, which provides us guidance in selecting only fundamentally sound science for funding. Also, using the NIH required annual review of progress, we are confident that each grant is effectively working towards its stated aims. In addition to this, we agree, that as managers of the SRP, we must look at the Program as a whole and capture “big picture” advances and capitalize on these, such that our society receives the full benefit of the research. To do this we must proactively seek mechanisms and opportunities that will allow the scientific community to comment on approaches, strategies and outcomes of the Program. One mechanism to achieve this may be through establishing expert panels, which assess progress, advise us on metrics, recommend next steps and identify opportunities for research translation. We will also consult with the Division of Extramural Research and Training Program Analysis Branch to brainstorm other approaches for ensuring that the SRP is appropriately advancing the state of the science through its research programs.

In addition, we acknowledge that to effectively accomplish many of these goals, we need to enhance our partnerships particularly with other federal agencies. To fully achieve the Program’s goals it will be important that our sister agencies are engaged in many of these processes. We recognize that without a commitment from them, our success will be marginalized and, therefore, we must identify improved mechanisms for garnering their support.

We would like to take this opportunity to confirm a few of the assumptions that we made based on our review and interpretation of the EAP report.

1. The EAP strongly endorses the continuation of the multi, interdisciplinary research approach of the multi-project grants;

2. The EAP strongly endorses the continuation of the basic, mechanistic studies that have been a strong area of past support, particularly in the areas of biomedical studies;
3. The EAP considers the past SRP emphasis in the areas of health sciences to be appropriate to the Program's mandates and that these areas should continue to be emphasized;
4. The EPA strongly endorses the continuation of Community Outreach as a component of the multi-project grants and that it finds it acceptable that Community Outreach remain a "highly recommended" component of the Program rather than a "required" component of the program; and
5. We acknowledge the Panel's underlying message throughout the report regarding the need to ensure the translation of the research emanating from the Program and we will utilize the necessary resources and mechanisms to accomplish this task.