

SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
Program Review – March 25-26, 2009

BACKGROUND:

The ongoing South East Region Research Initiative (SERRI) program was established in the spring of 2006. Projects being evaluated under this program review were funded by an Interagency Agreement (IAA) between The Department of Homeland Security's Science & Technology (S&T) Directorate and the Department of Energy, (DOE) Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL).

The goal of the SERRI Program is to assist local, state, tribal and regional leaders in developing the tools, technologies, systems, and methods required by communities, states, and regions to prepare for, respond to, and recover from the effects of a man-made or natural disaster. A region must not only have the capacity to respond effectively in the short-term, but must also have the ability to sustain coordination and control through the request for targeted ex-region response capabilities and to effectively transition to a joint response when ex-region and Federal response capabilities are brought to bear.

The purpose of the SERRI program is to develop and demonstrate benefits of leveraging Homeland Security-related research and operational and economic development capabilities within a region of the United States. Because of its diverse and representative infrastructure makeup, the south east U.S., and the state of Mississippi were chosen as a primary location for initial implementation of the SERRI Program. The program now has components that extend across most of the south east U.S.

As a principal activity, SERRI will continue to sponsor university research directed toward solutions to important Homeland Security problems of regional and national interest. Commercialization and implementation of innovations based upon SERRI-sponsored research will be pursued to transition research results to useful products and services available to Homeland Security responders and practitioners.

Review - Purpose:

The purpose of this program review is to evaluate and improve projects under the SERRI program through a systematic, cyclical review process. The results are meant to be used as a tool toward continuous improvement for the Principal Investigator (PI) and his or her staff, as well as the local project management team at ORNL. This process helps to ensure the PI is on track and schedule with deliverables, milestones, budget, and an array of other related project criteria. The end goal is to provide the public with state-of-the-art products to help safeguard them from natural or man made disasters.

This was clearly the best coordinated, most productive SERRI review we have conducted. ~ Warren Edwards, Oak Ridge National Laboratory

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The Process:

The SERRI National Program Manager, Michael Matthews, worked closely with the ORNL team to ensure evaluators were cognizant of review requirements and expectations. He provided guidance on the entire end-to-end review process as well as various standardized templates to be used for maximum efficiency, consistency, and standardization. These were all used.

Scoring the Projects:

All evaluators were provided with advance copies of:

- The original funded proposals
- The project abstracts
- The current power point presentation showing current status and progress

These documents enabled them to compare the project's initial deliverables with the current state of progress and direction. Armed with this information and evaluation sheets, they scored each project independently using the five criterion of:

- Execution & Progress;
- Technical Quality;
- Coordination/Collaboration; and
- Transition and Path Forward.

After the review, the program manager collected all of the scoring sheets and comments and scored the projects using standardized categories. The scores are attached to this report for review, recommendation, and action where necessary.

Score	Narrative
1	No progress
2	Poor progress
3	Progress but there are concerns
4	Making satisfactory progress
5	Good progress – no real concerns
6	Excellent progress

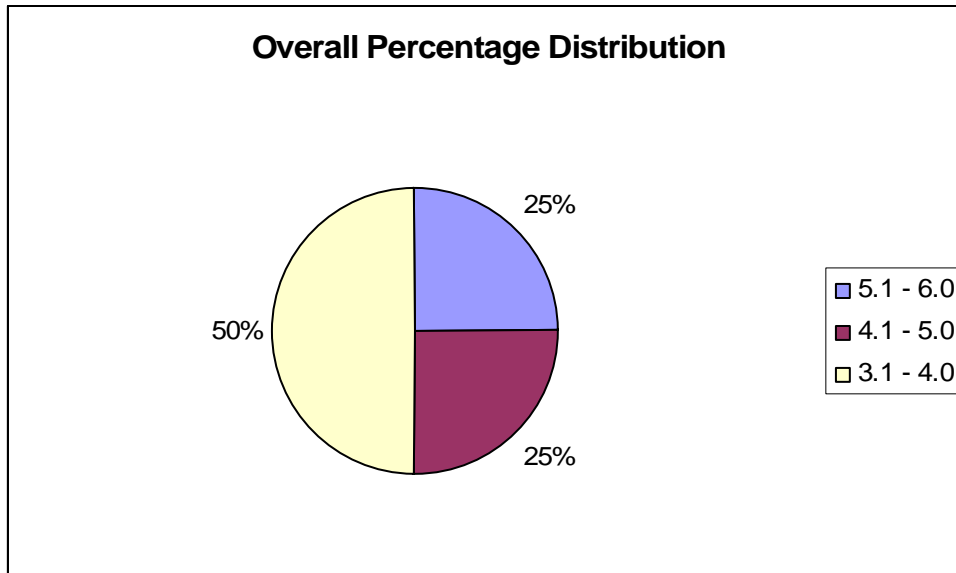
Project Assessment:

This program review served its purpose in evaluating the health of the projects:

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Of the projects briefed, scores ranged across the four categories from 3.3 to 5.2:

- Twenty-five percent (25%) of the scores ranged in the 5.1 to 6.0 range (good to excellent progress);
- Twenty-five percent (25%) ranged in the 4.1 to 5.0 range (satisfactory to good progress),
- Fifty percent (50%) ranged from 3.1 to 4.0 (satisfactory to progress with some concerns).



It was a pleasure to participate in the SERRI Program Review, and to learn so much about what programs are being funded by DHS. I came away with a much better understanding of how other areas of DHS perform in support of our mission.

~ DHS Evaluator

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Comments and Recommendations:

In order to improve the SERRI program and achieve several related objectives, the project evaluation model was changed at this program review. Previous reviews were evaluated by a small team of four or five staff members from S&T's Infrastructure & Geophysical Division. It became evident that a more diverse evaluation team was needed who possessed expanded subject matter expertise for the myriad of diverse projects ongoing in this program.

As a result, subject matter experts were contacted and asked to be evaluators. SMEs from the Office of Infrastructure Protection, Science & Technology Directorate, FEMA, and other government agencies with expertise matched to the projects being presented agreed to evaluate. These experts added more value to the process and outcomes.

Many of the comments throughout this report are a testament to this new model. Additionally, this model helps provide transparency and accountability of projects and adds visibility to other agencies. This use of people from other agencies results in increased opportunities to leverage technology across agencies that may potentially result in partnerships, cost savings, and improved products and deliverables. Many of the SERRI Principal Investigators (PIs) remarked that they were able to make valuable connections with SMEs from other agencies which opened additional doors for opportunity. This synergy is clearly advantageous to the program, the taxpayer, the agencies, and the country. Overall this new model adds more rigor and accountability to the process and improves the program with a perennial goal of continuous improvement on several levels. My recommendation and intent is to continue to use and improve this process. While very time-consuming for a small support staff, it will pay large dividends to everyone involved.

All performers were essentially on schedule with their performance and budgets and they were executing according to their plans. It is hypothesized that scoring profiles looked different because of the changed evaluation model but nevertheless, all scores ranged in the satisfactory to excellent progress range which is a sign of solid progress and sound management by the PIs and by the management team at ORNL.

I am confident that the SERRI program will continue to show positive results and deliver needed products to help protect the nation.

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I found the meeting to be valuable and worthwhile...Clearly a good deal of effort and hard work has gone into a number of these projects and overall it appears that the money has been well invested.

~ DHS Evaluator

There are a lot of good people in this country trying to make a difference under complex, complicated circumstances in a very difficult time and I count this group among them.

~DHS Evaluator

I know how much work all of your team and the participants put into this program and the projects and do not take what any of you are doing lightly... You should be proud of how far this program has come in the past few years.

~DHS Evaluator

I want to commend you on the effort you put forth to bring the whole review process together. Everything went so well that I am certain people thought it just happened.

~DHS Evaluator

According to many, the SERRI Review Meeting held last week (March 25-26) was top among the five review meetings to-date. The presentations were good and the comments from reviewers as well as the discussions and networking among the participants seemed to have been beneficial to the projects. The verbal feedback I have received from the PIs and DHS has been very positive. Thanks so much to the presenters and to all the participants for a great performance.

~ Ben Thomas, SERRI