

SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE (SERRI)
Regional Research and Operations Support Semi-Annual Review
September 6, 2007

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Background

The South East Region Research Initiative (SERRI) program was established at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in the spring of 2006 through an Interagency Agreement (IAA) between Department of Homeland Security's Science & Technology (S&T) Directorate and the Department of Energy (DOE). 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. The SERRI Program is designed to build upon existing collaborations and the active regional engagement in the Southeast in order to pilot a regional homeland security initiative.

SERRI operates on the principle of partnerships. Savannah River National Laboratory and Y-12 National Security Complex are two key DOE partners with ORNL in implementing SERRI. Because of its diverse and representative infrastructure makeup, the state of Mississippi serves as a vital location to implement the SERRI Program by establishing public, private, and academic partners in Mississippi. Additionally SERRI is developing new partnerships throughout the Southeast region to accomplish the goal of the program.

The major thrust areas of the SERRI Program are the Mississippi Research Initiative (MRI) and the Regional Research and Operations Support (RROS) Initiative. The MRI focuses on areas of research involving five Mississippi universities (Alcorn State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, University of Mississippi, and University of Southern Mississippi) addressing homeland security coastal issues relevant to preparedness and protection, response, and recovery from man-made and natural disasters. SERRI funded 20 projects with these five universities in 2006. These projects were reviewed with DHS on August 22-23, 2007 for the purpose of providing researchers feedback to expand the results of their projects.

The RROS Initiative of SERRI is a strategy to fully develop, implement, and integrate a regionalization pilot program into the national homeland security mission. One of the objectives of the RROS Initiative is to establish research projects with educational institutions in several Southeastern states that is relevant to particular homeland security gaps and shortfalls and that is consistent with Homeland Security missions and objectives, as well as being complementary to the research funded in the State of Mississippi. Another objective of the RROS Initiative is to create homeland security-based relationships across the region with Departments of Homeland Security, with private industries, and with state educational institutions. At present the RROS Initiative includes about 10 projects with operations in MS, TN, AL, SC, GA, VA, and FL. These projects are collaborations between ORNL and industry and university partners, as well as projects conducted by educational institutions in the region and by private industries.

As a principal activity, SERRI will continue to sponsor university research directed toward 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.

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Program Review – Purpose

The purpose of this program review is to 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.

Program Review – Projects Participants

Projects participants included in the SERRI Regional and Operational Support Initiative include:

- Jackson State University (JSU), Jackson, MS
- Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), Oak Ridge, TN
- Saliant, Inc., Florida
- Tennessee State University (TSU), Nashville, TN
- University of Kentucky (UK), Lexington, KY
- University of Tennessee (UT), Knoxville, TN
- Western Carolina University (WCU), Cullowhee, NC

Program Review Process

The 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.

The Review Team

A team of independent evaluators were assembled to review, evaluate, and score the projects. The evaluators were:

Johnnie Cannon	Oak Ridge National Laboratory, National Security Directorate - Director, Strategic Planning
Michael Kuliasha	Oak Ridge National Laboratory, National Security Directorate – Chief Scientist
Michael Matthews	Department of Homeland Security, Science & Technology (S&T) Division - Program Analyst/Meteorologist
Margaret Spurlin	Oak Ridge National Laboratory, National Security Directorate – Director, ORNL Homeland Security Programs

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This panel of evaluators brought with them extensive backgrounds of knowledge. Their participation was critical toward ensuring synergy between funded projects by S&T and needs and requirements from the customer. Additionally external observers from government agencies, the private sector, and universities attended and provided comments and insights to the PIs. These participants shared their thoughts and recommendations and in some cases were able to provide a wider landscape assessment of similar projects and provide opportunities to leverage like projects with complementary technologies.

Scoring the Projects

The evaluators were provided copies of the project abstracts and the current PowerPoint presentation showing current status and progress. These documents enabled them to compare the projects' initial deliverables with the current state of progress and direction. Armed with this information and evaluation sheets, the evaluators scored each project independently using the five DHS provided criterion listed in the table below.

Evaluation Criteria	Definition
1. Execution	Is the project being executed consistent with programmatic objectives and goals?
2. Technical Quality	Is the work of high technical quality relative to other projects in this field? Does the team have the right people working on it and are they top-notch? Is the underlying concept (science) sound? Are products being engineered up to best standards?
3. Progress	Is the project on time and on budget?
4. Coordination	Is the project being reviewed periodically and progress shared with interested entities in a timely fashion? Are the performers sufficiently aware of other efforts in this area?
5. Management	Are the results consistent with the purpose or objective? Is the ultimate user being kept in the loop? How likely is it that this project will result in a product? Will there be acceptance issues? Is there a reliance on a policy push?

After the review, the scoring sheets and comments were collected and consolidated. 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

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Project Assessment

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

Of the projects briefed, scores ranged from 2.8 to 5.3.

- Twenty percent (20%) scored above 5.0 (good progress to excellent progress).
- Fifty percent (50%) scored in the 4.1 to 5.0 range (satisfactory progress to good progress).
- Twenty percent (20%) scored in the 3.1 to 4.0 range (progressing with some concerns to satisfactory progress).
- Ten percent (10%) scored in the 2.1 to 3.0 (poor progress to progressing with some concerns).

Of the projects scoring below 3.0 (satisfactory progress), two of the three were less than two or three months in execution. Only one of the three projects has been in execution for less than four months. This particular project was not fully implemented during the four months due to contracting delays which have been resolved. Overall the review showed 70% of the projects performing well. Although, there are small weaknesses with projects that are just getting started, these projects also have time to show significant progress and improvement before completion.

In summary, the focus of the local management team will not solely be on the projects in obvious need of assistance, but all projects and especially on projects that have demonstrated potential to deliver useful products in the “near” future.

DHS Recommendations

DHS encourages the local ORNL management team to closely review all of the project scores and comments, paying particular attention to the projects scoring 4.0 and below. These scores indicate weaknesses in one or all of the rating categories and the local management team is encouraged to work closely with the PIs to improve the performance of the projects. The ultimate goal is not a one time fix, but rather toward achieving continuous improvement of the projects over their life cycle.

DHS also recommends a reevaluation of projects that appear to be poised to deliver substantive useful products in the “near term” and provide the necessary support and leadership to effect the rapid transition from development to delivery and deployment.

Projects in the next program review in March (or April) of 2008 should be able to demonstrate and validate actions taken by the SERRI ORNL team toward improvements as a result of the findings of this report.