

**SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
Program Review – September 16-17, 2008
Michael Matthews**

Table of Contents:

SERRI Background	Page 2
Program Review Process and Government Team	Page 3
Presenters & Scoring the Projects	Page 4
Project Assessment	Page 5
Recommendations	Page 7

SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
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SERRI 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 was 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.

SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
Program Review – September 16-17, 2008
Michael Matthews

Program 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.

The 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 Government Team:

The national program manager assembled a diverse team of independent evaluators to review, evaluate, and score the proposals. The evaluators were:

Dr. Mary Ellen Hynes	DHS, S&T IGD, Director of Basic Research
Milagros Kennett	DHS, S&T IGD, Program Manager
Will Laska	DHS, S&T IGD, Program Manager
Mary Hanson	DHS, S&T Interagency
Mike Matthews	DHS, &T IGD, Program Analyst/Meteorologist
Sarah Mahmood	DHS, S&T IGD, SETA Support

This panel of evaluators brought with them extensive backgrounds of knowledge to draw upon from their various government agencies. Additionally, a number of external observers from government agencies and the private sector were invited to learn about these projects and to provide comment 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.

SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
Program Review – September 16-17, 2008
Michael Matthews

The Presenters:

- Jackson State University
- Mississippi State University
- University of Mississippi
- Savannah River National Lab
- Alcorn State University
- Oak Ridge National Lab
- University of Kentucky
- Morehead State
- University of Tennessee
- Y-12 National Security Complex

Scoring The Projects:

The 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
- Technical quality
- Progress
- Coordination
- Project management.

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

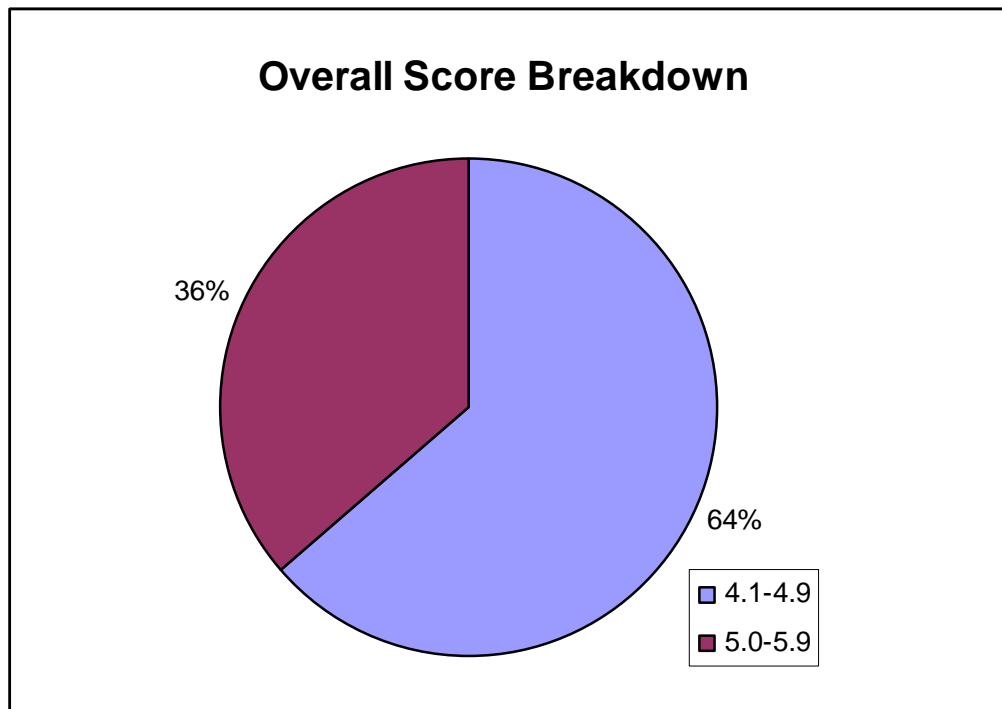
SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
Program Review – September 16-17, 2008
Michael Matthews

Project Assessment:

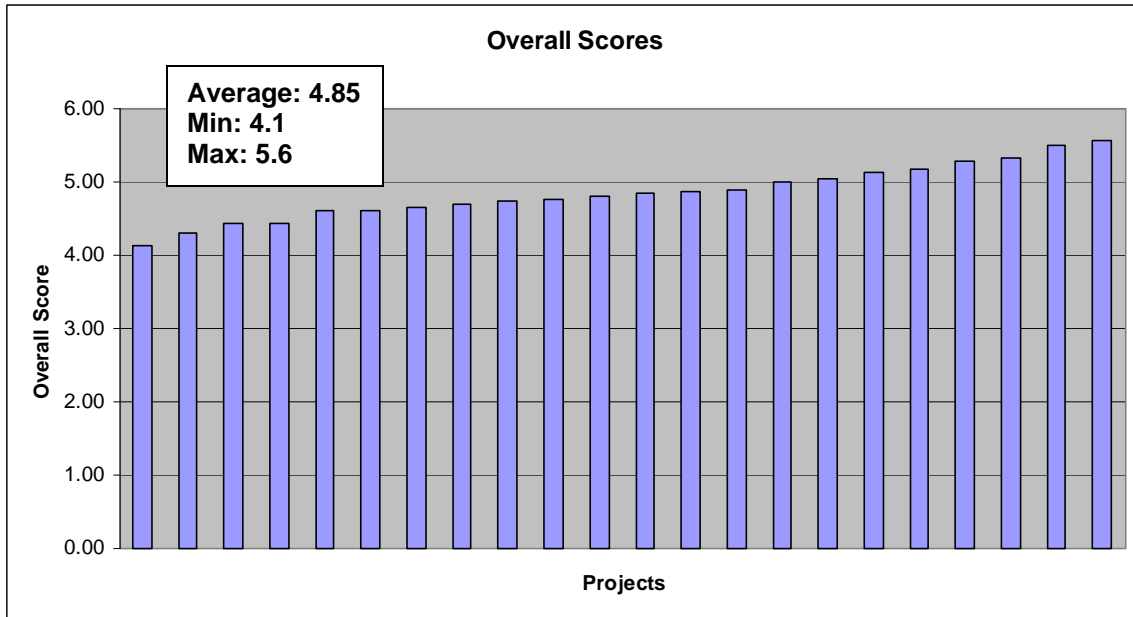
This program review served its initial purpose in evaluating the health of the projects:

Of the 22 projects briefed, overall scores ranged from 4.1 to 5.6.

- Fourteen of the 22 projects (64%) received overall scores in the 4.1 to 5.0 range (**satisfactory to good progress**),
- Eight of the 22 projects (36%) received scores of 5.0 or above (**good to excellent progress**).



SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
Program Review – September 16-17, 2008
Michael Matthews



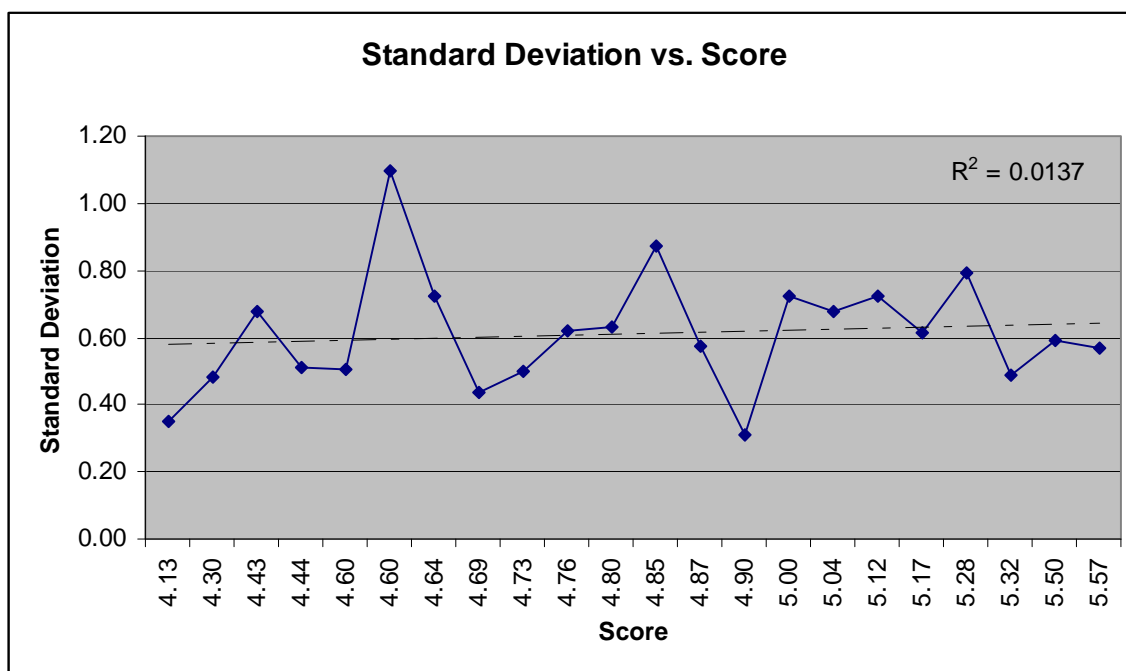
Because the review shows 100% of the projects performing in the satisfactory to good range, the program’s projects are performing well. Nevertheless, there are some areas that can be improved upon.

In general, the lowest scores were received in the areas of progress and technical quality. It is recommended that the local management team should remain involved in reviewing the monthly progress reports of each project and proactively take action to assist individual projects as needed.

In assessing the performance of the projects evaluated in this program review and related report, it is clear that most of the Principal Investigators (PIs) were executing their projects on time and in accordance with their budgets, and delivering what they said they would deliver in their original proposals. The continued dedication and enthusiasm by these PIs was clearly evident.

As seen below, this report uses standard deviation qualifiers for project scores in order to show the variance between the individual reviewers.

SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
Program Review – September 16-17, 2008
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Overall, the assessment of this program review finds SERRI in good health. There are, however, several recommendations the review panel has suggested for improving future reviews.

Recommendations:

Programmatic:

1.) As the SERRI projects mature they will need additional technology transfer guidance and support. There were several projects that demonstrated the potential to deliver useful products in the near future. In order to accelerate progress through the various project life cycle states stages of:

- Basic Research
- Technology Development
- Technology Demonstration
- Operational Test and Evaluation
- Production and Deployment

PIs should be provided with adequate technology transfer support and leadership. This will help guide and accelerate their progress and facilitate technology transfer opportunities.

2.) Some of the presentations were incomplete and lacked basic programmatic background and reporting information previously supplied and requested by DHS. These

SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
Program Review – September 16-17, 2008
Michael Matthews

are critical for evaluating progress and in order for a reviewer to make a fair assessment of the project's progress.

Local management at ORNL should:

- Require that presentations be submitted to ORNL a couple of weeks in advance in order for ORNL to review and evaluate the PIs submission in order to ensure adherence to previously submitted presentation format requirements.
- Limit the number of slides to ~30. Some presenters had in excess of 80 slides.
- Presenters should make certain they express the project's relation to the DHS need. This can be found in the original RFP and selected proposal.

3.) The existing model of the program review evaluation should be modified to:

- Ensure PI's are afforded a more comprehensive evaluation by subject-matter experts
- Separate the existing 2-day comprehensive review into two-three separate individual reviews based on topic areas - lasting roughly 1 day each to be less burdensome on presenters and reviewers.

This method will allow a better opportunity for the recruitment of appropriate subject matter experts for the review panel of the individual focused section.

It is recommended that the ORNL local management team use their resources to coordinate and select appropriate subject matter experts for each of the sections.

- 4.) ORNL should develop a mechanism to ensure DHS is aware of SERRI-funded PI presentations to DHS and other government agencies. This situational awareness is important to the program manager. ORNL should be able to capture and report these engagements to DHS.