

SOUTH EAST REGION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
Program Review- September 9-10, 2009

BACKGROUND:

The ongoing South East Region Research Initiative (SERRI) program was established in the spring of 2006. Projects 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. This is important because a region must not only have the capacity to respond effectively in the short-term, but must also have the resiliency to sustain coordination and control through the transition to a joint response, if and when needed, when additional 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. This regional program 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 local, 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 management criteria. The end goal is to provide the public with state-of-the-art solutions that help safeguard them from natural or man made disasters.

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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 power point presentation showing current status and progress

These documents enabled evaluators 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 and objectively using the five criterion of:

- Execution & Progress
- Technical Quality
- Coordination/Collaboration
- 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

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Comments and Recommendations:

In order to improve the program and achieve several 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 projects ongoing in this program.

As a result, subject matter experts were contacted from the Office of Infrastructure Protection, Science & Technology Directorate, FEMA, and other government agencies with expertise matched to the projects being presented to act as evaluators. These SMEs could better evaluate the projects and add 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, visibility, and accountability of projects to other agencies. This exchange 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. My intent is to continue to use and improve this process. While very time-consuming to execute, this process will pay large dividends to everyone involved.

All performers were essentially on schedule with their performance, schedule, and budgets and were executing according to their plans. Three quarters of the projects ranged in the satisfactory to good progress range while one quarter ranged in the making progress with a few concerns. A great deal of credit for project oversight goes to the Oak Ridge National Lab staff responsible for the day-to-day execution of the projects. It is also strongly recommended that a scribe be tasked to capture dialogue from the very important Q&A session following each presentation in order to ensure comments and suggestions are captured as tools for the performer and ORNL staff.

I am confident that as the SERRI program reviews continue, we will show improved results but, more importantly, deliver improved products to help protect the nation.

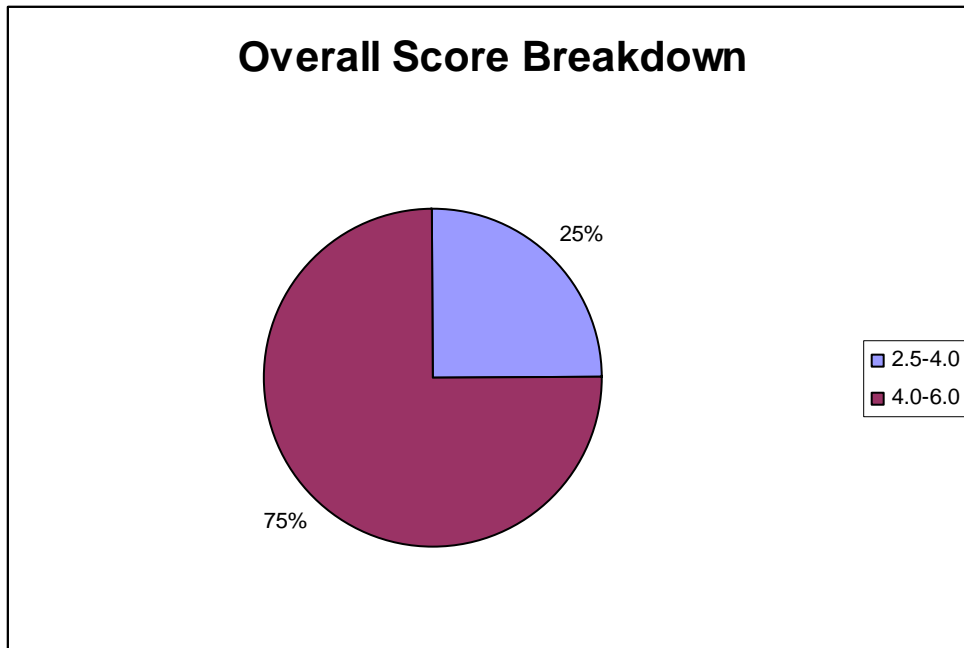
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Project Assessment:

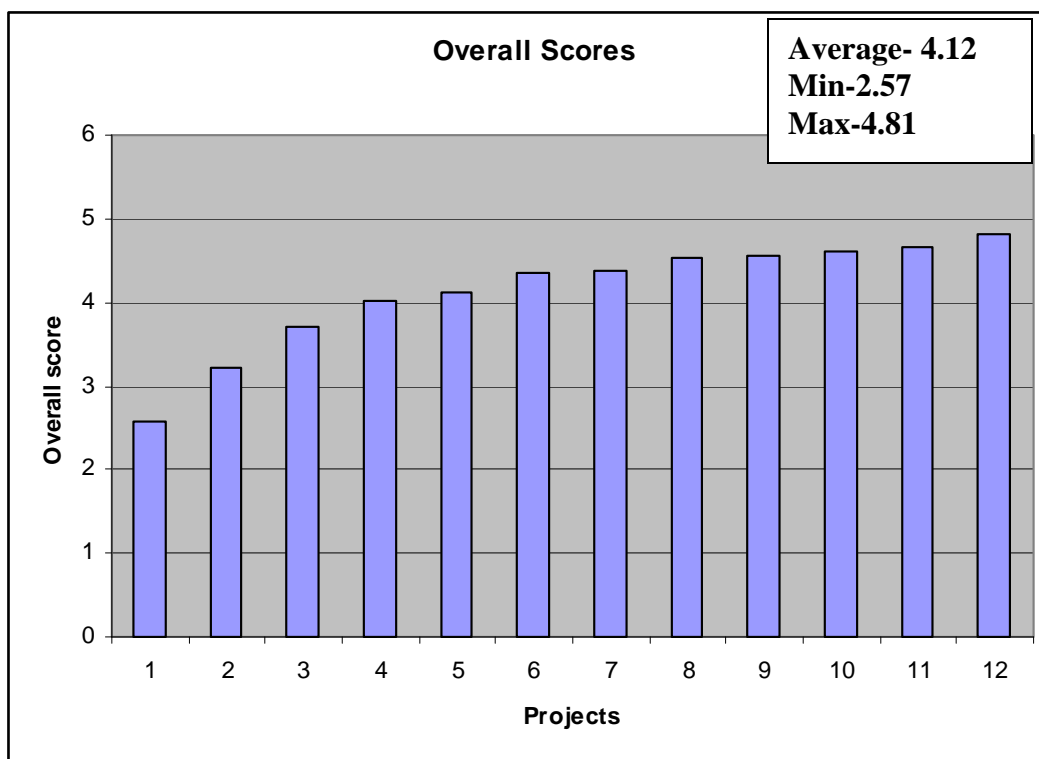
This program review served its initial purpose in evaluating the health of the projects:

Of the 12 projects briefed, overall scores ranged from 2.57 to 4.81.

- Three of the 12 projects (25%) received overall scores in the 2.0 to 4.0 range (**progress but some concerns to satisfactory progress**),
- Nine of the 12 projects (75%) received scores of 4.0 or above (**satisfactory to good progress**).



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Because the review shows most 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 continue to remain vigilant in working with performers and proactively take action to assist individual projects as needed, as identified through this report.

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.