



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

MAY - 9 2005

OFFICE OF
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Dr. James H. Johnson, Jr.
Chair, Board of Scientific Counselors
College of Engineering, Architecture, and
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Howard University
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Dear Dr. Johnson:

The Office of Research and Development (ORD) would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the rest of the members of the Board of Scientific Counselors for your review of our communication practices, methods, and achievements.

Your input and recommendations on how we can improve our internal and external communication have helped us to raise awareness about communication across the organization, explore its relevance to our research planning processes, and sensitize ORD staff about the importance of communicating our research with stakeholders.

Communication of ORD science promotes a broad understanding of the high quality science behind the Agency's environmental decisions, builds support for the Agency's research programs, and is critical to the long-term success of ORD. Throughout the organization, the ORD staff is committed to getting the word out, is interested in working across labs, centers, and offices to tell our stories widely and effectively and demonstrate through new communication channels that we are doing "the right science for the right questions."

As a follow-up to the meeting in January where you heard an update on ORD communication and status of various initiatives, we wanted to highlight ORD's progress on each of the BOSC recommendations and provide you with details of how we are building an organization that is poised to amplify ORD's voice in EPA and in the scientific community.

ORD is aligning communication staffing, structures, operations and activities to show results and to serve employees, internal clients and the general public. Last July, ORD hired Donna Vincent Roa, a Ph.D. in communication and an internationally-accredited business communicator, to direct ORD public affairs and science communication efforts.

To date, Dr. Roa has met with more than 350 staff at every level of the organization to conduct strategic advantage profile interviews and diagnostics of ORD communications. In these interviews, staff provided input on communication capacity, communication issues and opportunities, quality of products, resources, perception of ORD in the agency, organizational perception of communication, internal communication, etc. Dr. Roa used the information to develop a draft multi-year strategy and work plan.

She presented the strategy, which was fully informed by the BOSC communication recommendations, to the Tri-Council (Executive Council, Science Council and Management Council) last October. The strategy was externally peer-reviewed and presented to the Management Council in December for funding and final prioritization of activities.

In March, the Executive Council unanimously approved the proposed Office of Science Communication, a new organization tasked with a) supporting ORD's business goals, b) ensuring that ORD's research results are communicated widely, and c) providing direct support to the Management Multi-Year Plan.

The mission of science communication across ORD is to leverage ORD research results to elevate EPA's reputation for sound science and its position as a public health and environmental protection agency. The new Office of Science Communication is responsible for:

- Serving as an in-house communication agency providing support across ORD for high-profile events and activities and organization-wide communication activities
- Helping ORD senior management develop programs and activities that effectively deliver ORD's science and research results to internal and external stakeholders
- Using communication to create a more customer-focused ORD
- Creating public interest for EPA science and showing how our work provides the foundation for solid environmental decision-making at the Agency.

The Office of Science Communication is staffed with a director, two senior science communication officers, an ORD news director, a special projects director, a science communication manager, a writer-editor, and an assistant. The communication teams in NCER, NCEA, NRMRL, OSP, ORMA and NHEERL work directly with and are supported by the IOAA-based Office of Science Communication. Each lab, center and office communication director, except for one, reports directly to the organization's director and plays an important role in helping the organization to meet the requirements of the BOSC recommendations.

The science communication staff members continue their work to engage scientists and management in discussing communication issues early in the project life cycle. We are directly benefiting from the partnerships that have been established and the continuing support from ORD's lab, center, and office senior leaders for our multi-year strategic plan and activities.

In the coming months, the science communication team will continue to meet with staff and management in our labs to raise the visibility of our communication work and to identify their communication needs and opportunities. The Office of Science Communication will also work closely with the newly approved National Program Directors to integrate strategic communication into their work and to ensure that ORD's research outcomes are effectively communicated to our various stakeholders.

The BOSC recommendations will continue to guide our work. We have provided below a summary of how ORD is working to fulfill the recommendations.

Develop a more systematic effort to characterize audiences and prioritize their needs. Increase use of formal and informal methods of soliciting early input and involvement from priority audiences to improve communication of research and results.

ORD has begun work to focus more strategically on key stakeholders and is putting systems in place to understand their needs. Efforts are underway to evaluate communication with the program offices and create an implementation plan to improve the way we do business with our customers. OSP will be conducting a formal customer needs survey before the end of the fiscal year to explore how ORD might better serve the program offices.

In the coming months, a formal, target audience segmentation for communication will be conducted to identify needs, barriers, potential messages and message themes, and preferred channels for communication. The project team will examine opportunities for improving our communication with target audiences, and will use these findings to help define specific approaches that we can take to raise the profile and visibility of ORD among our stakeholders.

ORD will continue to work hard to understand the needs of its varied audiences and will regularly work with those audiences to identify needs and science issues.

Develop a system to report on how labs and centers insure that they understand the needs of and are reaching Program Office staff.

Each lab, center, and office communicates directly with the program offices and regions through a variety of methods and provides counterparts with opportunities for input and feedback on "how are we doing" and "are we meeting your needs?" In the coming months ORD will examine how labs and centers are communicating with program offices and will analyze best practices to share across the organization.

STAR – Identify audiences for STAR research results and reach them more effectively.

NCER is focusing on the regional offices' needs for usable research information. All presentations given at the STAR and STAR/ORD regional seminars have focused on information that the regions can use. NCER's "progress review" workshops focus on the needs of scientists in the program offices. Presentations at these workshops are designed to give scientists updates on research results. NCER is presently developing one-page descriptions of all research projects that can be distributed to numerous audiences. These descriptions are easily understood, have graphics, and describe who can use the information and how they can use it. NCER is also writing Science Summary Reports for specific audiences in the programs and regions. These can also feed into OMB Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) and are used by other external audiences.

While much of the work on this recommendation is being conducted by NCER, the Office of Science Communication plans to work with NCER to help the organization achieve its business goals in this area. One staff member has been identified to serve as the OSC-NCER liaison and will provide strategic communication counsel and guidance in this area.

Strategic planning for communicating research results should be integrated explicitly into research management efforts.

This is a growth area for ORD. The Office of Science Communication is devising on a plan to:

- Work closely with scientists to map out and understand the research planning processes
- Engage researchers in planning processes to discuss and address critical communication issues
- Make recommendations that guide the communication outputs
- Develop tools to guide the process and the interactions.

Give communication staff enough time and resources to allow them to provide assistance to one another and to exchange ideas in an ORD-wide forum. Continue efforts to improve communications practices. Develop a centralized up-to-date annotated directory of communication expertise.

The *esprit de corps* of the ORD science communication team and the commitment to bringing our science to market are driving results. There is renewed interest across all of ORD Science Communication staff to work together to support the multi-year strategy, to share best practices, to improve standards of performance for communication and to offer cross-support where and when possible. Several organizations have hired additional staff members and have put contracts in place to support communication efforts.

The Office of Science Communication just completed a Request For Quotation to support the work in the Multi-Year Strategic Communication Plan and help to strengthen ORD's capacity to carry out the BOSC recommendations. The team will (list not exhaustive):

- Conduct market and target audience research

- Create an impact and effectiveness metrics plan and strategy
- Develop design, branding and collateral development standards
- Develop branded products and materials for external audiences
- Provide guidelines to staff on how to ensure they meet the requirements of a new visual identity for ORD
- Develop communication products to support the work of our scientists
- Work with the EPA Office of Public Affairs to improve the visual identity of the EPA Web presence
- Support the Management, Executive and Science Council communication efforts and initiatives
- Create an ORD-branded, cutting-edge intranet that helps employees do their jobs better, orients new employees, etc.
- Establish a Science Writer's Circle that supports research, writing, editing of feature articles for consumer and trade publications and other products
- Establish an ORD speakers' bureau.

Communication staff and management across ORD are open to trying new methods for communicating our work. In NCEA, for example, the communication team is developing new materials, requesting feedback on workshops and information, and constantly talking to programs and regions to understand how to better serve their needs. NCEA, like other organizations, works as a partner with other parts of ORD to improve communication practices in ORD and the Agency and is participating as much as possible given competing priorities and limited resources in these activities.

Our last bi-annual meeting in RTP, which had record attendance including the Acting Assistant Administrator for ORD, was rated as the best we have had yet. We designed the forum to include a business meeting, training and networking. The meeting included presentations from scientists and participation from scientists.

Our next meeting in Narragansett, R.I., will include the same elements, and will add exercises that can help communication staff "get into the science." We will also invite one communication director from the EPA program offices, a public affairs director from a regional office, and one staff member from the EPA Office of Public Affairs.

We are adding a science roundtable and will work with the lab's senior management and scientists to identify potential story ideas for articles that we can place in consumer magazines. Each attendee will be responsible for one communication output from the meeting in R.I.

Develop systematic methods of tracking when and how research results influences policy.

OSP has a system in place that keeps track of how ORD's work influences the regulatory agenda of the program offices, helps program offices to use the best science possible, and makes sure that what is happening in our labs influences the Agency policy.

OSP tracks on a weekly basis the interactions ORD program support staff has with program offices to bring the best science to the table during regulatory discussions. OSP will work to increase the identification of how regions are applying our work to their processes. While OSP is mandated to track how ORD research results inform policy, other labs, centers, and offices are working to better understand the direct impact of its work on Agency decision making processes.

The Office of Science Communication also plans to examine the BOSC report outputs to cull examples of how program offices are using our research and will work to disseminate those stories widely.

Standardize and increase flexibility of access to and use of research bibliographies and databases where possible to facilitate their use.

The Environmental Information Management System (EIMS) and Science Inventory are important vehicles for sharing information. Teams across ORD are working to insure that the information in these two databases is accurate and complete. There are efforts underway to upgrade and improve these two databases before the end of the fiscal year.

Agency scientists also use the IRIS database. The Intranet version of IRIS track, available to all EPA staff, tells EPA users the name and telephone number of the chemical manager. Importantly the first entry in the milestones for any assessment is a literature search, and any EPA scientist will be able to obtain the results of the literature search. In addition, a pilot program is underway that will make the citations available online as well. This pilot is building on a process that has been used during the development of the air quality criteria documents. NCEA will continue this activity.

NCER has uploaded the titles of almost 23,000 grantee publications to its Web site. When available, the full text of published journal articles is given (more than 7,000 journal articles are available). NCER is increasing its ability to determine the number of times these publications have been cited. In addition, all NCER publications are on our Web site with a link from the homepage. NCER has purchased a site license for Reference Manager software and is exploring the feasibility of linking project officers' databases of grantee publications to the NCER Oracle-based Web database for more timely updates and accurate data dissemination of the results coming out of the grant projects.

In summary, ORD is poised to use communication to improve its effectiveness as a cutting-edge research organization and to maximize organizational and individual performance. We will work to develop the communication tools that managers need to build understanding about ORD's business goals and objectives.

The continuing commitment of leadership and management is a critical component to the success of our efforts. We believe that as communication delivers results, it will directly affect how managers view and use communication in their business and planning processes.

Sincerely,



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