



BOARD OF SCIENTIFIC COUNSELORS

**SCIENCE TO ACHIEVE RESULTS (STAR)/GREATER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES
(GRO) FELLOWSHIP SUBCOMMITTEE**

Conference Call Summary

January 26, 2006

2:00–4:00 p.m. EST

Welcome and Introduction of Subcommittee Members

Dr. Clifford Duke, Subcommittee Chair

Dr. Duke welcomed the Subcommittee members and introduced himself as the Director of Science Programs for the Ecological Society of America, a member of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC), and Chair of the STAR/GRO Fellowship Subcommittee. He then asked the Subcommittee members and EPA staff participating in the call to introduce themselves.

Overview of Subcommittee Objectives and Purpose of the Program Review

Dr. Clifford Duke, Subcommittee Chair

Dr. Duke noted that this Subcommittee has been requested to review the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) and the Greater Research Opportunities (GRO) Graduate and Undergraduate Fellowship Programs. The objectives of the review are to determine if the desired program outcomes are being attained and to identify areas for improvement. The goal is to have a completed draft report submitted to the BOSC Executive Committee by the June 1–2, 2006, meeting of the Board. The Subcommittee's report will be reviewed by the BOSC Executive Committee and then submitted to EPA's Office of Research and Development (ORD).

This conference call was the first meeting of the Subcommittee. Dr. Duke noted that the agenda included time for Ms. Kowalski to inform the Subcommittee of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) procedures that are required for Subcommittee meetings. In addition, Dr. Kevin Teichman, Director of ORD's Office of Science Policy, will present an overview of ORD. Ms. Stephanie Willett will provide details on available background material, and the Subcommittee will discuss a draft report outline and writing assignments. Dr. Duke stated that currently no members of the public have requested time to speak, although there will be an opportunity for members of the public to make comments during the call.

Dr. Duke introduced Ms. Lori Kowalski, Designated Federal Officer (DFO) for the STAR/GRO Fellowship Subcommittee.

Administrative Procedures

Ms. Lori Kowalski, Subcommittee DFO

Ms. Kowalski is the DFO for the BOSC Executive Committee as well as for this Subcommittee. She explained that the DFO serves as the liaison between the Subcommittee and the Agency and, serving in this role, Ms. Kowalski is responsible for ensuring that the Subcommittee and its meetings comply with all FACA guidelines. Ms. Kowalski reiterated Dr. Duke's comments that the purpose of the Subcommittee review is to provide advice and recommendations in response to the draft charge questions for the program review. The Subcommittee's draft report will be transmitted to the BOSC Executive Committee, which will review and approve the report prior to submission to ORD.

Ms. Kowalski summarized the FACA rules. All meetings involving substantive issues, whether in person, by phone, or by e-mail, must be open to the public. A *Federal Register* notice must announce all meetings at least 15 calendar days in advance of any meeting. This applies to all group communications that include at least one-half of the Subcommittee members. Issues that are preparatory or administrative in nature are exempt from this requirement. The Subcommittee Chair and the DFO must be present at all meetings. EPA has a contractor for notetaking and conferencing support, but all activities are coordinated through Ms. Kowalski.

Meeting minutes are to be certified by the Subcommittee Chair and, along with any advisory documents, made available to public. The Subcommittee information has been entered into the federal docket management system (<http://www.regulation.gov>, Docket ID EPA-HQ-ORD-2005-0562).

Ms. Kowalski has worked with EPA officials to ensure that all appropriate ethics regulations have been satisfied; each Subcommittee member has filed a standard government financial disclosure report. In addition, Subcommittee members have completed annual ethics training. Because Dr. Adgate has a student who is a current applicant for a STAR fellowship, Dr. Adgate will recuse himself from participating on charge questions related to the STAR Fellowship Program. If other Subcommittee members discover potential for conflict of interest, they should notify Ms. Kowalski as soon as possible.

As the Subcommittee Chair, Dr. Duke will preside over the meetings according to a pre-approved agenda. ORD staff will respond to requests after recognition by the Chair. Subcommittee members should identify themselves before speaking. Ms. Kowalski asked that, when members are not speaking, they put their phones on mute; it may help diminish the static on the phone line. All Subcommittee members were sent background materials, including a list of other available materials that were described more fully later in the call by Ms. Stephanie Willett.

The Subcommittee will have a second conference call on February 16 and a face-to-face meeting in March. Rooms for the March meeting need to be reserved by February 17 to secure a room at the hotel where the meeting is to be held. Dr. Duke asked if there were any questions for Ms. Kowalski. Dr. Carson asked about information on the hotel accommodations. Ms. Kowalski replied that the Subcommittee members would receive logistical information by e-mail.

Dr. Scavia asked for clarification on potential conflict of interest regarding students with STAR/GRO fellowships. Is there a conflict of interest if students from a member's institution or department applied for or received a STAR or GRO fellowship? Ms. Kowalski responded no; it could be a conflict of interest if a Subcommittee member provided a reference for any student's fellowship application. Dr. Denson noted that he might have provided a letter of recommendation for a student who may be applying for a fellowship, but he was not sure of the details. Ms. Kowalski will discuss this with Dr. Denson after the call.

Dr. Duke thanked Ms. Kowalski and introduced Dr. Kevin Teichman, Director of ORD's Office of Science Policy, to present an overview of ORD's organization and activities. Dr. Duke noted that the Subcommittee members had received a copy of Dr. Teichman's PowerPoint presentation so they could follow along.

ORD Overview

Dr. Kevin Teichman, Office of Research and Development

Dr. Teichman presented information on the structure of ORD, how the Office assesses its priorities, and where the STAR and GRO fellowships fit within the structure. ORD has nearly 2,000 employees and a budget of approximately \$600 million. Of that budget, approximately \$70 million is spent on extramural research grants (including fellowships) through the National Center for Environmental Research (NCER).

ORD's mission is to advance scientific knowledge to solve the environmental problems the Agency faces. It accomplishes this mission by: (1) performing human health and ecological effects research that provides scientific discoveries responsive to the environmental questions the Agency must address; (2) supporting EPA program offices (e.g., the Office of Air and Radiation and the Office of Water), regions, states, tribes, and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations through scientific and technical advice and assistance; and (3) providing scientific leadership in identifying, studying, and resolving critical environmental health and ecological effects issues and in shaping the environmental health and ecological effects research agenda.

This work supports EPA's mission of protecting human health and safeguarding the natural environment (air, water, land) on which life depends. EPA's program offices examine the different environmental media and write policies and decisions in response to authorizing legislation. Regional offices work with regions and states to implement these environmental policies. ORD provides support to both program and regional offices, as well as serves the larger mission of the Agency.

The 13 ORD laboratory and research facilities are located throughout the United States. Their goal is to provide credible, relevant, and timely research results and technical support to inform EPA (and others') policy decisions. The ORD centers and laboratories include NCER, the National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory, the National Exposure Research Laboratory, the National Center for Environmental Assessment, and the National Risk Management Research Laboratory. ORD also has two new centers, the National Homeland Security Research Center and the National Center for Computational Toxicology. Extramural grant funding is budgeted at \$70 million and is administered through NCER, which oversees the STAR and GRO fellowships.

ORD is taking a new approach to evolving its research program with important inputs from program and regional offices as well as congressional mandates, BOSC reviews, the National Academy of Science, the Science Advisory Board, and stakeholders. Program evaluations such as the one engaged in by this Subcommittee and program and regional office feedback also help provide input for the development of the research program. ORD research programs include both problem driven (e.g., particulate matter, air toxics, drinking water, water quality, land preservation and restoration, safe pesticides/safe products, endocrine disruptors, global change, and mercury) and core areas (e.g., human health, ecological research, pollution prevention, and economics and decision sciences). NCER's STAR Program consists of funding for targeted research grants through Requests for Applications, exploratory/futures grants, competed centers, and STAR fellowships. In addition, ORD funds both GRO graduate and undergraduate fellowships.

The focus of the STAR/GRO Fellowship Program Review includes the following questions:

- ✧ Are the NCER Fellowship Programs encouraging promising students to obtain degrees and pursue careers in environmental fields?
- ✧ Does the fellowship selection process assure the selection of high-quality recipients?
- ✧ Is the research that the fellowship recipients conduct usable by EPA and others in decisionmaking?
- ✧ Are the programs' approaches, use of resources, and communication efforts effectively achieving program goals?

Dr. Teichman noted that examples that support the evaluation are helpful, and he looks forward to the BOSC's recommendations that will assist in program improvement. In summary, ORD seeks input from many sources to enhance and evolve its research programs; the BOSC program reviews are one of the most important inputs. The Subcommittee's review of the STAR and GRO Fellowship Programs will be of great value and is much appreciated.

Dr. Duke asked if members had any questions. Dr. Denson stated that he appreciated the presentation, but would like an updated presentation that clarifies the placement of the fellowship program within ORD structure. Dr. Teichman responded that he would provide an updated presentation that contains an organizational chart highlighting NCER as the center responsible for the STAR and GRO Fellowship Programs. Dr. Duke commented that the presentation included a succinct summary of the BOSC review questions that would be useful to the Subcommittee.

Dr. Duke introduced Ms. Stephanie Willett who provided an overview of materials available to the Subcommittee.

Explanation of Documentation Provided to the Subcommittee

Ms. Stephanie Willett, Office of Research and Development

Ms. Willett noted that the Subcommittee members received a master list of 57 references. The items were grouped into logical categories. She reviewed the categories and provided additional comments on the materials:

- ✧ *NCER/Fellowship Program Reviews and Assessments (1–7)*. To date, the Fellowship Programs have not been evaluated independently by an outside group, so the references included are overall NCER reviews.
- ✧ *Program Feedback and Communication (8–9)*. This area has limited resources.
- ✧ *ORD/EPA Assessments, Guidance, and Planning Documents (10–15)*. Items included are both overall EPA documents as well as ORD-specific documents.
- ✧ *Fellowship Conference Proceedings (16–22)*. These are available electronically or as a hardcopy for every year from 1996 until 2001 and for 2004.
- ✧ *NCER Data Sets, Summary Papers, Reports (23–30)*. Many of these are not publicly available. Presently available to the Subcommittee are items 23-25. EPA staff is working on compiling the others.
- ✧ *Assessments of Other Fellowship Programs (31–37)*. These are resources that may provide potential benchmarks for EPA's fellowship programs.
- ✧ *Performance Measures (38–40)*. These references are government documents on quality assurance that may be helpful.
- ✧ *STAR Requests for Applications (RFAs); Undergraduate MAI/GRO Requests for Applications (RFAs); Graduate MAI/GRO Requests for Applications (RFAs) (41–49)*. These resources identify the science areas of solicitations and may provide information on how the programs have or have not changed over the years.
- ✧ *Miscellaneous (50–57)*. Other resources that are available and may be useful to the Subcommittee.

Ms. Willett stated that all of the resources listed could be provided to the Subcommittee members; ORD staff can collect or develop additional materials if the Subcommittee believes that additional resources are needed for the review.

Dr. Duke worked with Ms. Kowalski on the initial list, and he requested the binder with items 1–6 and access to 13 from the materials list. ORD staff is working on the overview material mentioned and will have that material available by the next conference call.

Dr. Garber noted that Question 7 of the charge addresses resources. Will information be provided about ORD staff salaries and resources to provide conferences versus the amount

received by the students? Ms. Willett replied that this information would be provided in a general way as percentages of the total budget.

Dr. Denson mentioned that *The Measure of STAR* has an assessment section with information on other programs and agencies. He asked that ORD consider examining those resources.

Ms. Scott noted that little evaluation occurred from 1996 to 2002, but a good evaluation was made in 2003. Why was ORD asking for another evaluation so soon? Ms. Willett responded that the National Research Council evaluation was not a thorough review of the fellowship programs, but it noted that the programs were going well overall and provided recommendations for process improvement. The report from the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) was not a favorable review and provided recommendations for program improvements. ORD would appreciate additional feedback and practical guidance to improve the fellowship programs.

Dr. Barrett asked what response was made to the OIG report. Have the program enhancements been implemented? Ms. Willett noted that the information collected would be reflected in the overview documents. Dr. Barrett asked if NCER had concerns about the possible removal of the fellowship programs from its budget. Ms. Willett responded that she was not aware of any such concerns.

Dr. Scavia asked for clarification regarding the proportion of extramural funds that were spent on fellowships versus program administration. Ms. Willett responded that the information would be provided in relative terms. Ms. Kowalski noted that, if the Subcommittee members have specific information requests, they should submit them to the Chair in writing (by e-mail), and ORD staff would provide the information if possible. Dr. Duke encouraged the Subcommittee members to identify information needs as soon as possible so that ORD has time to respond. Ms. Kowalski instructed the Subcommittee members to clarify if they wished to receive the materials in a hardcopy or electronic format.

Dr. Barrett noted that the \$150,000 allocated to the undergraduate fellowship program seemed an extremely small amount compared to the total budget. Ms. Willett clarified that approximately \$650,000 is the actual amount. Dr. Duke confirmed that comments on resources are appropriate as part of the charge response.

Public Comment

Dr. Duke asked if anyone would like to make a public comment. EPA received no requests for comment prior to the call, and no members of public were on the call to comment.

Subcommittee Draft Charge

Dr. Clifford Duke, Subcommittee Chair

Dr. Duke stated that the specific charge questions begin on page 3 and 4 of the Draft Charge document. Question 1 focuses on the STAR Fellowship Program, and Questions 2 and 3 focus on the GRO graduate and undergraduate fellowships, respectively. Questions 4 through 7 are broad overview questions on the complete ORD fellowship program. Dr. Duke asked for questions or comments on the charge from the Subcommittee or ORD staff. Dr. Barrett asked if the information for Question 4 on the recipient selection process and decision criteria would be

provided so that an evaluation could be made. Ms. Willett responded that the information would be available prior to the next conference call.

Draft Report Outline and Writing Assignments

Dr. Duke noted that Ms. Scott had agreed to serve as the Vice Chair of the Subcommittee and thanked her for doing so. Dr. Duke directed Subcommittee members to the file he had sent to them via e-mail entitled "Proposed Report Organization and Assignments."

Dr. Duke explained that the draft Subcommittee report would include a summary preceding the body of the report; the body of the report would include an introduction explaining the background for the report. Three chapters would provide detailed evaluations of the STAR Graduate Fellowship Program, GRO Graduate Fellowship Program, and GRO Undergraduate Fellowship Program, respectively. Dr. Duke viewed charge Questions 1, 2, and 3 as specific to the respective programs, with Questions 4 through 7 applicable to both fellowship programs. Following this logic, the lead authors for Questions 1, 2, and 3 (Drs. Barrett, Adgate, and Scavia, respectively) would serve as the overall leads for their respective chapters, responsible for incorporating input from the leads for Questions 4 through 7 (Drs. Garber, Carson, and Denson and Ms. Scott, respectively). Dr. Duke will prepare the introduction and the summary with assistance from Ms. Scott. Dr. Duke asked for feedback or questions from the Subcommittee on the report outline.

Dr. Barrett expressed concern about the amount of time needed to gather information. If material is available in a past report, then the proposed time frame might be realistic. In addition, Dr. Barrett asked about the report length. Dr. Duke noted that the BOSC has completed a number of reviews of ORD programs. The reports typically have been a total of 50–60 pages. The Subcommittee should ask ORD to compile the information the members need to address the charge questions as soon as possible. If not enough information is provided, then members should ask ORD to provide more. To the extent that information does not exist or is not available from ORD, then the Subcommittee members should state that in the report.

Dr. Barrett noted that although he does not want to shirk his responsibilities to the Subcommittee, he is busy and is worried about the time that would be needed to search the reports listed and find the information needed to answer charge Question 1. Ms. Kowalski was hopeful that the overview material being collected by NCER staff would help. Dr. Duke agreed. Ms. Willett noted that the Agency has the raw data but no information from previous evaluations. The NCER Web Site (<http://www.epa.gov/ncer/fellow>) has information on the funded research. The overview material being collected will attempt to summarize this information. The *Measure of STAR* book is a good primer. The Agency has not done a formal analysis of the fellowship program and is requesting Subcommittee feedback on ways to analyze its results. ORD agreed to reorganize the reference material list, as much as possible, by charge question, and the DFO will send it to the Subcommittee. Ms. Scott commented that separating the information to be provided to the Subcommittee in accordance with the charge questions would be helpful.

Dr. Carson stated that Question 5 of the charge asks for an assessment of the linkages between fellowship recipients and research results. He asked if this had been examined in the past. Ms. Willett responded that it had not; the charge question was written to ask the Subcommittee to

assist in this area. Dr. Carson noted that such analysis could be time consuming. Is ORD asking the Subcommittee to design outcome measures? Ms. Willett replied that a key document was the OIG Report No. 2003-P-00019 (<http://www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2003/2003p00019-20030930.pdf>). ORD is exploring how to collect information to address concerns such as those listed in the OIG report. Recommendations would be useful, particularly from an academic perspective. Dr. Duke commented that the recommendations could include the types of studies ORD should undertake to understand the effectiveness of its programs.

Review of Draft Agendas

The next conference call will be held on February 16, 2006, and the face-to-face meeting will be March 2–3, 2006. The conference call will include discussion of the logistics for the March meeting and an overview of the ORD fellowship programs. The March meeting will be a day and a half meeting in Washington, DC. The tentative agenda includes opening remarks and a welcome by Dr. Bill Farland, presentations on ORD and the STAR/GRO fellowship program, client testimonials, and a poster session. Time will be provided for discussion of the peer review process and diversity issues relating to the fellowship programs. One-half of Thursday and then the half day on Friday will be dedicated to Subcommittee work sessions to reach consensus on conclusions and begin writing a draft report. The Subcommittee will further discuss the agenda for the March meeting during the February 16 conference call.

Poster Review Process/Assignments

Dr. Duke indicated that at the March meeting there would be a poster session. He asked ORD staff about the content of the posters. Ms. Willett responded that former STAR and GRO fellows would present posters, as would ORD administrative staff. Fellows were being asked to bring information on their specific research as well as information on outcomes in scientific areas and personal outcomes resulting from participation in the STAR/GRO Fellowship Program.

Dr. Adgate asked how the posters were chosen. Would the posters be representative of the variety of research conducted? Would both STAR and GRO fellows be present? Ms. Willett responded that both STAR and GRO fellows were contacted and that, although ORD attempted to provide different research areas, the response is based on those fellows who could attend. A list of all of the topics and recipients of ORD fellowships is on the NCER Web Site. Dr. Barrett asked about the number of fellows and if all were from the DC metro area. Ms. Willett responded that approximately 15 fellows would be attending and that not all are local (some are from the West Coast). Ms. Becki Clark noted that the Agency tried to get representatives across research and geographic areas, but the final list is based on availability of the fellows. Dr. Scavia asked if the poster presenters would be current or former fellows. Ms. Willett responded that all were former fellows. Dr. Barrett asked for summaries of publications and current positions of the fellows to be provided so that the different areas, positions, publications, and awards could be reviewed. Ms. Willett noted that abstracts and biographies of the fellows could be provided prior to the face-to-face meeting.

Dr. Denson asked about the scholarships for undergraduates and their ability to prepare a poster, as they probably do not have a research project. Ms. Willett noted that the posters were mostly by graduate students, though a few are by undergraduates who received fellowships and have gone on to graduate school.

Dr. Duke asked if copies of posters would be provided at the March meeting. Ms. Willett responded that copies could be made available. Dr. Duke commented that the discussion of poster assignments would take place during the next conference call as well as a review of the FACA regulations regarding the poster sessions.

Identify Additional Information Needs

Ms. Kowalski pointed out that the charge is in draft form, and it would benefit the Agency to receive feedback from the Subcommittee. If Subcommittee members think that parts of the charge are not effective, ORD can restructure it.

Dr. Barrett asked for a summary of information that would help him address charge Question 1. Ms. Willett responded that staff could work to provide materials that are helpful. Dr. Barrett stated that it would be most helpful if the materials are structured to parallel the charge and provide information pertinent to the questions. Ms. Kowalski committed to working with NCER staff to provide structure to the materials provided; however the Subcommittee members should understand that FACA regulations prevent EPA from directing the Subcommittee on what materials to use for the review. Dr. Barrett said that he understood this, but structuring the materials would be helpful for him to efficiently answer the charge questions.

Dr. Adgate commented that Question 3 of the charge discusses strengthening the research capacity of institutions by funding individuals. He is concerned about how to measure this. Ms. Willett replied that ORD can provide data on the institutions whose students received awards. ORD does not necessarily expect quantitative answers to the charge questions but would appreciate conclusions and professional opinions from the Subcommittee. For example, the Subcommittee can provide input on what are good measures. Is awarding fellowships to the same institution a good indicator? Dr. Adgate noted that this issue was raised in the OIG report.

Dr. Denson asked about the timeline for receiving minutes of the conference call. Ms. Kowalski replied that the contractor has 3 weeks to complete the draft minutes. Dr. Duke agreed to give the minutes his immediate attention and would send them out as quickly as possible.

Ms. Scott requested information on fellowship resources and processes from 1996 to the present to address Question 7 of the charge.

Adjournment

Dr. Duke adjourned the conference call at 3:51 p.m.

Action Items

- ✧ Ms. Kowalski will discuss with Dr. Denson his possible conflict of interest following the conference call.
- ✧ Subcommittee members will provide the Chair their comments or suggested changes to the charge by February 3, 2006. Dr. Duke will consolidate the comments and send them to Ms. Kowalski for response during the February 16, 2006, conference call.

- ✧ Dr. Duke will draft an agenda for the face-to-face meeting, which will be discussed during the February 16, 2006, conference call.
- ✧ Dr. Duke will send Subcommittee members his list of materials to be requested from ORD. Subcommittee members will respond to the Chair with requests for additional items that are of interest to them.
- ✧ Subcommittee members will review the materials provided by ORD.
- ✧ Ms. Kowalski will work with ORD staff to organize the reference list by the charge questions, as requested by the Subcommittee.

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APPENDIX A
Teleconference Agenda

SCIENCE TO ACHIEVE RESULTS (STAR)/GREATER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES (GRO) FELLOWSHIP SUBCOMMITTEE

AGENDA

Thursday, January 26, 2006

2:00–4:00 pm EST

CONFERENCE CALL

Participation by Teleconference Only

2:00-2:15 p.m.	Welcome - Introduction of Subcommittee Members - Overview of Subcommittee Objectives and Purpose of Program Review	Dr. Clifford Duke, Subcommittee Chair
2:15-2:30 p.m.	Administrative Procedures	Lori Kowalski Subcommittee DFO
2:30-2:45 p.m.	ORD Overview	Dr. Kevin Teichman Office of Research and Development
2:45-3:00 p.m.	Explanation of Documentation	Stephanie Willett Office of Research and Development
3:00-3:15 p.m.	Public Comment	
3:15-4:00 p.m.	Preparation for Next Call and Face-to-Face Meeting - Discuss Charge - Review Draft Agenda's - Discuss Poster Review Process/Assignments - Make Writing Assignments - Discuss Draft Report Outline - Identify Additional Information Needs	Dr. Clifford Duke, Subcommittee Chair
4:00 p.m.	Adjourn	