

October 19, 2007

To: J. N. McKamy  Manager, DOE NCSP
From: A. S. Garcia  Chair, DOE CSSG
Subject: CSSG Self-Assessment Report

Task 2007-06 from the NCSP manager directed the CSSG members to perform a self-assessment of their performance and effectiveness as part of the NCSP. The task statement is:

The CSSG is tasked to perform a self-assessment of the performance and effectiveness of the Group relative to its functions within the NCSP. The assessment should include an evaluation of the organization of the CSSG (i.e., its charter), the interface with NCSP management, the interface and coordination with other elements of the NCSP (NDAG, CSCT, End-users), and the performance of the CSSG relative to established expectations (i.e. current charter and formal taskings), and the role of the CSSG relative to advising the NCSP Manager relative to the NCSP elements and emergent criticality safety issues within the DOE. It is recommended that metrics for the self-assessment be derived from the ISM principle titled "Organizational Learning for Performance Improvement" (see DOE M-450.4-1) and the report should be formatted and guided by the Guiding Principles of Integrated Safety Management appropriately tailored for the mission of the CSSG. Finally, for each area needing improvement the CSSG should recommend practical and measurable corrective actions that can be implemented by the NCSP Manager and/or the CSSG to facilitate continuous improvement.

The assessment criteria and responses on the following pages represent the consensus opinions of the CSSG. Initial attempts at developing the assessment criteria were based on the ISM principle identified in the task statement. However, because the CSSG is only part of the broader, integrated NCSP, many of the criteria led to assessment of the performance of the managerial aspects of the NCSP. As a result, the final set of criteria is loosely based on the ISM principle plus other criteria developed from the CSSG charter and issues raised by the group over the effectiveness of the CSSG and its interaction with other elements of the NCSP.

In general, the CSSG performance is very good considering the scheduling demands placed upon the members by their primary duties. Improvements are needed in meeting the deadlines assigned to group taskings. Better communication with the NCSP management to identify periods when CSSG members have sufficient time for the taskings would help to solve this problem. Improved information exchange with other elements of the NCSP was identified as a goal to better integrate CSSG activities with the overall NCSP. The CSSG members will use the results of this self-assessment to improve their performance in future years.

Roles and Responsibilities of the CSSG

1. Are the roles and responsibilities of the CSSG clear?

Not always. From the CSSG charter, there is a primary and a secondary role and these are clear.

Primary: Provide operational and technical expertise to the Department, which involves providing advice and technical support to help meet the criticality safety needs of DOE missions, including stockpile stewardship, material stabilization, transportation, storage, facilities decommissioning, and waste disposal.

Secondary: Makes recommendations for implementation and execution of the DOE Nuclear Criticality Safety Program (NCSP), a program and budget administered by NNSA.

However, with the proliferation of tasks, it seems at times that the group has been relegated to the status of a low-cost consulting organization. There seems to be a lack of integration of CSSG activities into the overall DOE criticality safety program and as a result the CSSG is often not aware of the broader scope of issues on which it is supposed to be providing advice and support.

Recommendation: Consider reverting to the original NCSP interface structure in which the NDAG; CSCT, end-users and CSSG had direct lines of communication.

2. Do the CSSG activities reflect their roles and responsibilities?

Only in part. The CSSG activities seem dominated by their secondary role at the expense of the primary role.

Recommendation: CSSG activities and taskings should be directed more towards the primary goal of the group as stated in No. 1.

3. a) Do the charters, policies and work instructions for the CSSG reflect the intended responsibilities and functions of the CSSG? b) Are changes to these documents made only after discussions with the CSSG?

a) Yes. b) Not always. The CSSG should have more input into such things as charter modifications and work instructions. The charter and work instructions should be reviewed periodically and changes proposed by the NCSP manager should be sent to the CSSG for review and concurrence before being implemented.

4. Does each member of the CSSG have adequate funding for their role and responsibility?

Not always. Members with large program elements can usually supplement CSSG support funds while members with small programs generally have inadequate funding. The CSSG recognizes that the NCSP manager is trying to address this issue within budget constraints.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given to making better use of CSSG emeritus members, who with some minimal funding can provide considerable support for reviews. The CSSG will formulate a proposal on the use of emeritus members and forward it to the NCSP manager.

5. Are the relationships and organizational infrastructures between the NCSP and CSSG conducive to the assigned responsibilities?

Generally, but better communication and interaction between NCSP elements would be useful.

Recommendation: Restart the teleconferences between the program element chairs (NDAG, CSCT, end-users) and the CSSG on a monthly or quarterly basis.

6. a) Is it clear for which decisions facing the NCSP the CSSG should be consulted?

b) Are CSSG recommendations and advice acted on satisfactorily?

a) It is not always clear to the CSSG. At times this appears to be a decision based on management preference and time constraints. b) In some instances, CSSG members have felt their advice and recommendations were not acted on appropriately.

7. Does the CSSG adequately integrate the recommendations of the NDAG into the scope of CSSG activities?

Not as much as possible. When the NDAG reported to the NCSP manager through the CSSG this was true. With the program reorganization, there is room to improve the interface between the two groups.

Recommendation: Reestablish the formal lines of information exchange with the NDAG in order to keep the CSSG apprised of developments and needs in the nuclear data area.

8. Are the priorities of the CSSG to promote complex wide criticality safety or the parochial needs of home organizations?

Generally, the priorities are aimed at helping the entire community.

CSSG Membership, Assignments and Support

9. Is the selection process for membership on the CSSG sufficiently rigorous to meet the mission needs?

Yes. The CSSG membership policy procedure (April, 2006) provides a rigorous selection process that should be adequate to meet the mission need. The breadth of CSSG member knowledge and experience results in excellent responses to assigned missions.

10. Are the right members assigned the tasks which correspond to their competence?

Yes. The CSSG is composed of people with limited time for committee assignments. Assignments go to those who can work on the issue at the time. The professionalism of the members and the corporate knowledge of their strengths checks misalignments. Consensus is required before a tasking response is formally issued by the CSSG.

11. Are members exercising influence on recommendations outside their area of knowledge and competence?

No. The assignments by the CSSG chair have been, as far as possible, to match the right people to the assignment. In addition, there has been a commendable lack of parochial influence in the committee's recommendations.

12. Are members provided opportunities and encouragement to further their knowledge base and stay current with new developments?

As a group, no, but some individuals are able to use CSSG support funds for this purpose.

Recommendation: The NCSP should provide CSSG members support to attend at least two professional society meetings per year, including registration, travel and living costs. These national meetings provide a time and place for numerous meetings among the various NCSP elements and are a beneficial supplement to regular conference calls. Numerous working groups typically meet for breakfast, lunches or dinner for face-to-face discussion of many issues. In practice most of CSSG members spend considerable time working on CSSG work (some as much as 30%) during the week of ANS meetings in addition to the scheduled official meeting. (See No. 20 and associated recommendation.)

13. When assignments and taskings are given to the CSSG, are members' schedules, commitments and support (in time and money) well accommodated or contained in order to limit impacts on funded work and personal time? Are task deadlines established that take into consideration CSSG members' primary duties or are they unreasonably short?

No. This is an ongoing problem with no clear solution. Taskings often arrive with deadlines and work scopes that are not compatible with members' primary commitments. As a result, many members spend their personal time to complete CSSG assignments.

Recommendation: When circumstances permit, longer lead times should be built into tasking statements. If possible, the NCSP manager should consult with the CSSG to determine personnel availability before setting deadlines. Consideration should be given to using emeritus members whenever possible, especially for document reviews.

14. Are CSSG assignments completed in a satisfactory and timely manner, with results that are useful to NCSP and DOE management?

Assignments are completed satisfactorily but often well past the deadline. (See No. 13 and associated recommendation.)

15. Is the process to initiate CSSG activity clear and unambiguous?

Yes. Formal taskings are issued by the NCSP manager. Issues raised by CSSG members are sent to the NCSP manager who in turn issues a tasking when appropriate.

16. Is there a program/policy in place to formally document various CSSG unanimous or majority, unsolicited thoughts/discussions about concerns, issues, and/or suggestions for general program improvements, regulatory or otherwise?

Yes. The CSSG prepares documented responses to taskings from the NCSP manager. Other CSSG discussions and concerns are captured in meeting minutes that can trigger

communications to management that will result in a formal recommendation or tasking when appropriate. This methodology continues to work without a formal program.

17. Is the CSSG adequately aware of regulatory requirements when it provides programs recommendations?

The CSSG is primarily a technical body and is primarily aware of technical requirements. To the extent required for assigned reviews, CSSG members are cognizant of DOE requirements.

18. Are CSSG members sufficiently aware of the specific applications of criticality safety at DOE sites to perform the reviews and assessments assigned to the group?

Yes, especially for high-level reviews. For in-depth reviews or site assessments, members are provided site-specific documents to study before the review.

CSSG Interactions and Charter Commitments

19. Are open communications between CSSG members and other elements of the NCSP the norm?

Yes. Meetings are supplemented with frequent conference calls, email exchanges and one-on-one phone calls.

20. Are CSSG meetings called as needed, and are meeting agenda distributed prior to the meetings with information pertinent to agenda items?

Yes. However, some CSSG members question the reduction in mandatory meetings from four to two per year.

Recommendation: The NCSP manager should reconsider the value of having more than two face-to-face meetings per year and schedule enough time at the meetings for CSSG business. (For example, the one-half day scheduled at the 2007 Vegas meeting was inadequate to cover all CSSG agenda items.) Usually a majority of CSSG members attend the two national ANS meetings that provide an ideal opportunity for meetings of the NCSP elements. The CSSG will formulate a proposal on the reinstatement of CSSG meetings in conjunction with the ANS meetings. NCSP support to CSSG members will be addressed on an individual needs basis. A suggestion for sharing the costs of the meetings will be included in the CSSG proposal. (See No. 12 and associated recommendation.)

21. Are meetings conducted according to a pre-planned schedule so that all agenda items are covered, irrelevant discussions/debates are minimized, and the group is directly focused on the conclusions/positions related to the agenda items?

Yes. However, since an open exchange of ideas is encouraged, meetings often depart from agendas, but always cover the intended items in the meeting or in subsequent discussions.