Discussion Summary

Subgroup on Research Priorities

24 February 2015

The Council/SSC subgroup on research priorities (Bill Tweit, Glenn Merrill, and Farron Wallace) had several email exchanges, and then met via teleconference along with Council staff on February 24, 2015. The subgroup's focus was to adjust, as necessary, the draft research priority terms and definitions in order to achieve final resolution to the ongoing revisions to the Council's research priority categories. The SSC and Council will need to commit to a final set of research priority categories at the April meeting so that identification of research priorities by the SSC and Council can proceed in June.

At the February 2015 SSC meeting, a report of the Joint Plan Team subgroup was presented that expressed concerns about some of the category names and debate at the SSC meeting did not immediately resolve those concerns. A central point of discussion was the fourth category, which has alternatively been proposed to be called "low", "useful", or "strategic". Because research that may be of value to the Council, but perhaps not in the near term, would likely be put into the fourth category, the concern was that labeling such studies as a "low" or "useful" priority might work negatively toward future funding.

Discussion by the Council/SSC subgroup was fairly brief, since many improvements were achieved by circulating edits of the draft definitions prior to the call. Over the course of the discussion, it was generally agreed that the first two priority categories ("Critical Ongoing Monitoring", "Urgent") addressed research activity that was not optional in order to support the Council's management obligations, and that the difference between these two categories reflected ongoing vs. temporary nature of associated projects. The subgroup was comfortable with the category names for these two categories and modified the definition language slightly for clarity.

The subgroup agreed that greater discretion could be applied to research needs in the last two priority categories. Initially, the subgroup was comfortable with the labels "Important" and "Strategic", for these categories. What differentiated them from each other was the immediacy of the need for the research. For this reason, the category names were modified to "Important (Near Term)" and "Strategic (Future Needs)".

Modifications to the categories, definition language, and associated examples are provided in an attachment and previous definitions are provided in a second attachment.