

opportunity to comment on information collection requests. OMB may amend or waive the requirement for public consultation to the extent that public participation in the approval process would defeat the purpose of the information collection, violate State or Federal law, or substantially interfere with any agency's ability to perform its statutory obligations. The Acting Deputy Chief Information Officer, Office of the Chief Information Officer, publishes this notice containing proposed information collection requests prior to submission of these requests to OMB. Each proposed information collection, grouped by office, contains the following: (1) Type of review requested, e.g., new, revision, extension, existing or reinstatement; (2) Title; (3) Summary of the collection; (4) Description of the need for, and proposed use of, the information; (5) Respondents and frequency of collection; and (6) Reporting and/or Recordkeeping burden. OMB invites public comment at the address specified above. Copies of the requests are available from Patrick J. Sherrill at the address specified above.

The Department of Education is especially interested in public comment addressing the following issues: (1) is this collection necessary to the proper functions of the Department, (2) will this information be processed and used in a timely manner, (3) is the estimate of burden accurate, (4) how might the Department enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected, and (5) how might the Department minimize the burden of this collection on the respondents, including through the use of information technology.

Dated: May 13, 1998.

Hazel Fiers,

*Acting Deputy Chief Information Officer,
Office of the Chief Information Officer.*

Office of the Under Secretary

Type of Review: New.

Title: An Evaluation of the Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers.

Frequency: One time.

Affected Public: State, local or Tribal Gov't, SEAs or LEAs.

Reporting and Recordkeeping Hour Burden:

Responses: 2,620.

Burden Hours: 1,140.

Abstract: This evaluation will describe the work of the Comprehensive Centers, identify particularly promising strategies and assess the availability, quality, and effectiveness of the Centers' services. Recipients and non-recipients of Center services will be surveyed, and

Center staff, staff of partner organizations, and ED staff will be interviewed.

[FR Doc. 98-13206 Filed 5-18-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4000-01-P

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Submission for OMB Review;
Comment Request**

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Submission for OMB Review;
Comment Request.

SUMMARY: The Acting Deputy Chief Information Officer, Office of the Chief Information Officer, invites comments on the submission for OMB review as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

DATES: Interested persons are invited to submit comments on or before June 18, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be addressed to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Attention: Danny Werfel, Desk Officer, Department of Education, Office of Management and Budget, 725 17th Street, NW., Room 10235, New Executive Office Building, Washington, DC 20503. Requests for copies of the proposed information collection requests should be addressed to Patrick J. Sherrill, Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 5624, Regional Office Building 3, Washington, DC 20202-4651.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Patrick J. Sherrill (202) 708-8196. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 3506 of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35) requires that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) provide interested Federal agencies and the public an early opportunity to comment on information collection requests. OMB may amend or waive the requirement for public consultation to the extent that public participation in the approval process would defeat the purpose of the information collection, violate State or Federal law, or substantially interfere with any agency's ability to perform its statutory obligations. The Acting Deputy Chief Information Officer, Office of the Chief Information Officer, publishes this notice containing proposed information collection requests prior to submission

of these requests to OMB. Each proposed information collection, grouped by office, contains the following: (1) Type of review requested, e.g., new, revision, extension, existing or reinstatement; (2) Title; (3) Summary of the collection; (4) Description of the need for, and proposed use of, the information; (5) Respondents and frequency of collection; and (6) Reporting and/or Recordkeeping burden. OMB invites public comment at the address specified above. Copies of the requests are available from Patrick J. Sherrill at the address specified above.

Dated: May 13, 1998.

Hazel Fiers,

*Acting Deputy Chief Information Officer,
Office of the Chief Information Officer.*

Office of Educational Research and Improvement

Type of Review: Revision.

Title: Common Core of Data Surveys.

Frequency: Annually.

Affected Public: Federal Government; State, local or Tribal Gov't, SEAs or LEAs.

Reporting Burden and Recordkeeping:
Responses: 57.

Burden Hours: 10,901.

Abstract: The Common Core of Data Surveys collect data annually from state education agencies about students and staff involved in the public elementary and secondary education system: membership, number of graduates and dropouts, and staff employed in instruction, administration, and support. The surveys also collect information about school and agency characteristics, and revenues and expenditures for public elementary and secondary education.

[FR Doc. 98-13207 Filed 5-18-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy

Objective Merit Review of Discretionary Financial Assistance Applications

AGENCY: Department of Energy.

ACTION: Notice of Objective Merit Review Procedure.

SUMMARY: This Notice establishes the procedure followed by program and regional support offices under the purview of the Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (AEE) in conducting the objective merit review of discretionary financial assistance applications.

EFFECTIVE DATE: May 19, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Kathy A. Martin, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, EE-60, U.S. Department of Energy, 1000 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20585-0121, (202) 586-9108.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Table of Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Applicability of Notice
- III. Distinction between Solicited and Unsolicited Proposals
- IV. Objective Merit Review Procedure
- V. Deviations
- VI. EE Selection Process

I. Introduction

The Department of Energy (DOE) today gives notice of the procedure for the objective merit review of discretionary financial assistance in the Offices of the Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy. Financial assistance is provided, in the form of a grant or cooperative agreement, when the principal purpose of the transaction is the transfer of money or property to accomplish a public purpose of support or stimulation as authorized by Federal statute. Discretionary financial assistance is financial assistance provided under a federal statute which authorizes DOE to select the recipient and the project to be supported and to determine the amount to be awarded. This differs from a procurement, which refers to instruments used when the principal purpose of the transaction is the acquisition of supplies or services for the direct benefit of the Government. The procedure implements the objective merit review provisions of the DOE Financial Assistance Rules in (10 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), § 600.13).

II. Applicability of Notice

The procedure covers the evaluation of all discretionary financial assistance applications within the programs of the DOE Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy and apply to both solicited and unsolicited applications.

III. Distinction Between Solicited and Unsolicited Proposals

Solicited proposals are direct responses by interested organizations or individuals to published requests issued by DOE for the submission of applications for discretionary financial assistance awards. Solicited proposals are awarded on a competitive basis using the criteria set forth in 10 CFR 600.8. When a proposal is submitted solely on the proposer's initiative and

the idea, method or approach which would not be eligible for assistance under a recent, current, or planned solicitation, and if, as determined by DOE, a competitive solicitation would not be appropriate, the proposal is considered an unsolicited proposal. Unsolicited proposals are awarded on a noncompetitive basis using the criteria set forth in 10 CFR 600.6 (c). The two types of proposals are treated differently, as described in paragraph IV. (c), below.

IV. Objective Merit Review Procedure

(a) *Definition and Purpose.* Merit review is the process of evaluating applications for discretionary financial assistance using established criteria. The review is thorough, consistent and independent and is completed by individuals knowledgeable in the field of endeavor for which support is requested. The purpose of the review is to provide advice on the technical and cost-related merits of applications to the Selection Official with decision-making authority over the award of discretionary financial assistance.

(b) *Basic Review Standards.* (1) Initial Review. All financial assistance applications received by EE will be assigned to the respective EE program official who will initially review the document(s) for conformance with the technical and administrative requirements stated in the program rule, notice or solicitation and funding availability. (2) Evaluation. Applications which pass the initial review will be evaluated in accordance with stated evaluation criteria set forth in the program rule, notice, solicitation, or, where appropriate, the unsolicited proposal criteria. Those applications not meeting the evaluation criteria of the program rule, notice, solicitation, or the unsolicited proposal may be returned to the sender to be corrected or modified/supplemented by the sender. Those applications judged to be so inadequate that an evaluation is not warranted will be returned to the sender.

(c) *Criteria for Merit Review.* Applications which pass the initial review and meet the evaluation criteria set forth in the program rule, notice or solicitation are subjected to an objective merit review for discretionary financial assistance. The criteria used for the evaluation of solicited applications must be clearly stated in the solicitation along with the relative importance given to each criterion. The criteria, and other mandatory information specified in 10 CFR 600.8, must be in the solicitation. If an unsolicited proposal is initially favorably evaluated against program/policy factors, it should be considered

for an objective merit review for discretionary financial assistance. The criteria used for the evaluation of unsolicited proposals is set forth in 10 CFR 600.6 (c).

(d) *The Merit Review Committee.* (1) The ASEE has the ultimate responsibility for appointments to a merit review committee (the Committee). The ASEE may delegate the appointment authority and decision-making authority (Selection Official function) to Deputy Assistant Secretaries (DAS), Office Directors and Regional Support Office Directors.

(2) The Committee, whether a standing committee or other review committee, shall be comprised of three or more professionally and technically qualified persons. The committee members may be a mixture of federal and non-federal experts. Non-Federal members shall be selected on the basis of their professional qualifications and expertise.

(3) Members of the merit review committee should exclude anyone who, on behalf of the Federal Government, performs any of the following functions:

- (i) Providing substantial technical assistance to the applicant;
- (ii) Approving/disapproving or having any decision-making role regarding the application;
- (iii) Serving as the Contracting Officer (CO) or performing business management functions for the project;
- (iv) Auditing the recipient for the project; or
- (v) Exercising line authority over anyone ineligible to serve as a reviewer because of the above limitations.

(4) The Selection Official must appoint one member of the merit review committee to serve as chairperson. The chairperson is responsible for:

- (i) Obtaining signed certificates of confidentiality from all committee members;
- (ii) Preparing the written summary of the evaluation and recommendations for the Selection Official for the applicant's file; and
- (iii) Performing the merit review duties of a regular committee member.

(5) The nature of EE's program solicitations will dictate the feasibility of using standing or ad hoc committees. When solicitations are generally being issued to meet specific program objectives with time or subject limitations, EE program offices will use ad hoc committees. Ad hoc committees are also appropriate under the following circumstances:

- (i) For small numbers of applications received intermittently;
- (ii) For programs of short duration, usually under one year;

(iii) To supplement review by standing committees when the volume of applications is usually large, and for applications with special review requirements.

(6) The regular use of ad hoc committees does not preclude the use of standing committees under the following circumstances:

(i) When required by legislation,

(ii) When a sufficient number of applications on a specific topic are received regularly and there is a sufficient number of qualified experts willing to serve on the committee for a prolonged tenure; and

(iii) When the legislative authority for the particular program involved extends for more than one year.

(7) Field readers may be used as an adjunct to a review committee. Field readers must be fully briefed by the designated Contract Officer's Representative so as to understand the process, including the review criteria, the weight given each criterion, and the fact that any criteria not specified in the solicitation are not to be used to evaluate the applications. The field readers must sign a certificate of confidentiality, as provided in 10 CFR 600.13(d). Field readers should follow, as closely as possible, the procedures that would have been used by a standing committee.

(e) *Conflict of Interest.* Members of the review committee must act in a manner consistent with 10 CFR 1010.101. Reviewers who do not meet these requirements shall not review, discuss, or make recommendations concerning the application. Review committee members with a conflict of interest shall also absent themselves from all meetings in which the application in question is discussed.

(f) *Authorized Uses of Information.* The review committee must act in a manner consistent with 10 CFR 600.15 when dealing with applications containing trade secrets, privileged, confidential commercial, and/or financial information, unless the information is unrestricted information available from other sources.

(g) *Authority Beyond Evaluation.* The Selection Official may decide not to accept a proposal that receives a favorable recommendation from the merit review committee due to policy or program factors. The explanation for the decision not to accept a recommendation from the merit review committee must be documented in writing for the applicant's file and must be prepared and signed by the ASEE or his/her designee.

(h) *Written Evaluation Summary.* Upon request, applicants are to be

furnished a written summary of the evaluation of their application.

V. Deviations

If an EE program office wants to deviate from these procedures for merit review of an application or a class of applications, but will still follow the rules of 10 CFR 600.13, that office must obtain written permission from the ASEE. Permission to use procedures which deviate from 10 CFR 600 must be requested in writing to the responsible DOE Contracting Officer in accordance with 10 CFR 600.4. The Head of Contracting Activity has the authority to approve such procedures for a single case deviation, while the DAS for Procurement and Assistance Management has the authority to approve a class deviation. A deviation may be authorized only upon written determination that the deviation is necessary for any of the reasons set forth in 10 CFR 600.4 (b).

VI. EE Selection Process

Selection of applications for discretionary financial assistance will be based on the Selection Officials' acceptance of the merit review committees' recommendations and the findings of a separate programmatic review of program/policy factors relevant to EE's mission.

Issued in Washington, D.C., on May 13, 1998.

Dan W. Reicher,

Assistant Secretary, Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Office of Energy Research

Energy Research Financial Assistance Program Notice 98-17; Innovations in Magnetic Fusion Energy Diagnostic Systems

AGENCY: Office of Energy Research, U.S. Department of Energy.

ACTION: Notice inviting grant applications.

SUMMARY: The Office of Fusion Energy Sciences (OFES) of the Office of Energy Research, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announces its interest in receiving grant applications for innovative research in magnetic fusion energy diagnostic systems. Research projects are sought that are unique, first of a kind, and provide new scientific insights. Applications for implementation of an *established*

diagnostic technique on existing or planned facilities should *not* be submitted in response to this Notice. Successful applications will be funded in FY 1999.

DATES: To permit timely consideration for awards in Fiscal Year 1999, applications submitted in response to this notice must be received no later than 4:30 p.m., August 4, 1998. No electronic submissions of formal applications will be accepted.

ADDRESSES: Completed formal applications referencing Program Notice 98-17 should be forwarded to: U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Energy Research, Grants and Contracts Division, ER-64, 19901 Germantown Road, Germantown, Maryland 20874-1290, ATTN: Program Notice 98-17. The above address must also be used when submitting applications by U.S. Postal Service Express, any commercial mail delivery service, or when hand carried by the applicant.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Darlene Markevich, ER-55 GTN, U.S. Department of Energy, 19901 Germantown Road, Germantown, MD 20874-1290, Telephone: (301) 903-4920 or 3287, or by Internet address, darlene.markevich@mailgw.er.doe.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Office of Fusion Energy Sciences is interested in receiving applications for innovative diagnostic systems that have the possibility of leading to improved understanding of plasma behavior in tokamaks, innovative confinement concepts, and burning plasma experiments. Research projects are sought that are unique, first of a kind, and provide new scientific insights. Although the main thrust of this initiative is for experimental work, consideration will be given to applications that are directed at a short-term scientific assessment of new diagnostic concepts that are not ready for extensive experimental investigation. Applications for the implementation of an established diagnostic technique on existing or planned facilities should not be submitted in response to this Notice. Also, applications for theory/modeling investigations or initiatives in Inertial Fusion Energy should not be submitted in response to this Notice.

In selecting applications for funding, the DOE Office of Fusion Energy Sciences will give priority to applications that can produce experimental results within three to five years after grant initiation. Except for assessment applications, the detailed description of the proposed project should contain the following items: (1)