

# Serving on the EPA Science Advisory Board

A Handbook for Members and Consultants

EPA-SABSO-12-001

March 2012

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to serve on an EPA  
fedEach of these advisory bodies operates under its

own charter, reports independently to the EPA  
Administrator and is subject to the requirements  
of the FACA.

SAB members and additional  
invited experts or consultants. All such groups  
report to the chartered SAB. Authority to  
approve and transmit advice to the EPA  
Administrator lies solely with the chartered SAB.

### Committee Websites

The SAB Staff Office maintains public websites to share information presented to or prepared for and by committees and panels. Materials are organized by advisory topic and meeting. The sites also include charters and authorizing legislation, calendars of meetings, final reports and agency responses, a search function, and special pages for nomination of panel experts.

- Science Advisory Board:  
[www.epa.gov/sab](http://www.epa.gov/sab)
- Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee: [www.epa.gov/casac](http://www.epa.gov/casac)
- Advisory Council on Clean Air Compliance Analysis:  
[www.epa.gov/advisorycouncilcaa](http://www.epa.gov/advisorycouncilcaa)

## ETHICS REQUIREMENTS

Your participation on an advisory committee is a public service to the agency and the country. To

members and consultants are subject to certain conflict of interest and ethics rules.

Before beginning your service, and annually thereafter for the duration of your appointment, you must complete a confidential financial disclosure form.<sup>2</sup> This form provides information that allows the SAB Staff Office to determine if your participation in an advisory activity would present a conflict of interest or might raise an

<sup>1</sup> 5 USC App. 2 section 2(a).

<sup>2</sup> Title I of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), Executive Order 12674 (as modified by Executive Order 12731), and 5 CFR Part 2634, Subpart I





ensuring that email discussions do not violate the FACA open meeting requirements and retaining email records in accordance with legal requirements.

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

In addition to FACA record-keeping requirements, the SAB Staff Office retains federal records, including emails, pursuant to other federal laws and responds to requests for records under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).<sup>5</sup> Email communications between yourself and other members of committees and panels and with the SAB Staff Office are subject to the FOIA.

## FORMS OF ADVICE

The majority of SAB advisory meetings involve peer review of a draft agency product and preparation of a consensus advisory report, as described below. On occasion, the SAB also conducts original studies requested by the agency or initiated by the SAB with support from the agency.

In addition, SAB members and consultants may engage in a consultation with the agency. A consultation is a public meeting in which individual panel members provide advice to the agency on a project that is in the early stages of formulation or when rapid advice is needed (e.g., in the event of an emergency such as a natural disaster). Although individual members may prepare written comments, no consensus report is prepared for a consultation because no consensus advice is given. However, a brief letter is sent to the EPA Administrator to notify him or her that the consultation was held.

## GETTING READY FOR MEETINGS

### Review Materials

-meeting comments are shared with the panel, they also are posted to the committee website to help the agency and the public understand your initial thinking. During the meeting, your views may be influenced by your panel colleagues. This is a strength of the committee process and your preliminary comments do not necessarily represent your final



the advisory process are federal records and may be requested under FOIA. The DFO should be copied on all such communications.

Members may conduct fact-finding with outside experts, including colleagues both inside and outside the agency. However, these contacts should first be discussed with the DFO and the DFO should be copied on any email communications.

During the deliberative phase, members should refrain from characterizing study conclusions and recommendations to the press, the agency, or other members of the public. Requests for comment should be referred to the DFO.

### Role of the Chair:

## AFTER THE MEETING: REPORT PREPARATION

### Report Format

Although draft reports often are prepared by a subgroup or panel, all final reports are approved and transmitted to the agency by the chartered committee. The advice is conveyed to the agency in a written report with an executive summary and a cover letter to the EPA

Administrator. The audience for these three documents differs.

- The **cover letter**, a few pages in length, addresses the larger science issues in a policy context that is expected to be meaningful to the Administrator. The letter should summarize the charge and present the key findings and recommendations with a minimum of technical jargon and detail.
- The **executive summary** is directed at senior agency managers and should provide more detail on the issues addressed in the report, including summary responses to each of the charge questions.
- The **body** of the report, written for the scientists, contains the greatest level of detail along with supporting scientific references, data and analysis.

The focus of the report is on the consensus advice of the SAB. Appendices with detailed editorial remarks are discouraged, as are comments of individual panelists that have not been discussed by the panel. Individual member pre-meeting comments remain part of the public record and should not be appended to final reports.

### Report Development Process

Draft reports usually are developed by the chair, with assistance from the DFO, based on the discussions at the meeting(s) and the writing assignments submitted by panel members. The chair is responsible for the technical accuracy of the report and the DFO is responsible for ensuring that the report is written in such a way that it is understandable to the agency.

Once the draft text has been integrated, placed into standard format and edited to read with one voice, draft reports are provided to the authoring panel for review and concurrence. More than one round of review and revision may be necessary. Substantive discussions and revisions must be conducted in a public meeting,<sup>9</sup> often conducted as a teleconference. During report drafting, the DFO is an important resource for editorial support, including development of consensus language and technical fact-checking. The Staff Office also ensures that final reports are prepared in a consistent format. However, the report represents the views of the panel, not the views of the DFO or other staff.

When the chair determines, based on the deliberations at a public meeting, that the draft reflects the findings and recommendations of the panel, members are asked to concur on the draft report or to concur with minor editorial comments. In rare cases, a panel member may conclude that his/her technical viewpoint cannot adequately expressed within the report. In such instances, the non-concurring member(s) may draft a short dissenting view or minority report that is appended to the draft panel report. The final draft report is provided to the chartered committee for discussion and disposition (see Report Approval ).

#### Role of the Agency

The agency should not in any way approve or attempt to influence the content of draft panel or committee reports. However, the agency is provided an opportunity to request technical corrections (errors of fact) or clarification of text in draft reports. These requests should be made in writing and are posted to the committee website. Occasionally the DFO requests additional information from the agency on behalf of the panel, and this information also is a public record.

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<sup>9</sup> 5 USC section 10(a).

#### **Role of the Chair: Spokesperson for the Panel**

The chair of a committee or panel is the designated spokesperson for the group, both during the active phase of the project and when the advice has been finalized. Always check with your DFO before speaking with the press.

During the advisory process, the chair may respond to press inquiries to provide general background information on the issues under

process. The chair also may refer interested parties to public drafts, meeting minutes and other materials on the committee website. The chair should not characterize panel conclusions until a consensus report is available. After a final report has been conveyed to the EPA Administrator, the chair of the committee or panel may speak about the report and its findings and recommendations.

#### **REPORT APPROVAL: QUALITY REVIEW**

##### Parent Committee Review

Under the terms of their charters, the parent committees are the only bodies that can offer advice directly to the agency. When specialized subgroups or panels are used to conduct an advisory activity (e.g., an SAB standing committee, perhaps augmented with additional experts, or an *ad hoc* report must be reviewed and approved by the parent committee.<sup>10</sup> Under FACA, the parent must be substantive and

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quality, technical accuracy and clarity of the report, is an important function of the chartered

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<sup>10</sup> 41 CFR section 102-3.145.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*





Agency Response

After final reports are submitted to the EPA  
Administrator, a forma