From Dr. Shafer's memo dated July 6, 2007

Changes in OSQR Procedures for the Midwest Area

Across all NPs and the Agency as a whole, the average score on OSQR's 8-point scale is about 4.5. Fully one-fourth of the Agency's plans submitted receive "Major Revision" or "Not Feasible", requiring re-review by the panel after revision. The Department and the White House Office of Management and Budget have charged the Agency with improving these statistics, thus all Area Directors have been charged, and now I am involving the field accordingly.

Effective immediately, the following procedures will be *required* for the peer review process in the MWA.

A. Project Plan Preparation Seminar for Lead Scientists. Once NPS has issued the final PDRAMs to the MWA Office to initiate the process for a National Program's process of project plan preparation and peer review according to the five-year cycle, the MWA Office will schedule a full-day meeting in Peoria to discuss effective plan preparation. All Lead Scientists for that National Program will be required to attend; no exceptions. We will do our best to accommodate everyone's schedules, but this seminar will take top priority. This seminar will be conducted for the first time for NP207/216; we are working on the details, and it may occur after the Project Plan Outlines have been finalized.

B. Ad-hoc Peer Review Prior to Area Office Approval. Each project plan must be reviewed by three people *before it is submitted the first time to the MWA Office* for initial review by the Area. When a Lead Scientist submits the first complete draft to the MWA Program Analyst, it must be accompanied by written review comments from three reviewers, and a statement from the Lead Scientist describing how the draft submitted to the MWA Office reflects these ad-hoc review comments. Reviewers can be ARS or otherwise, but all three reviewers must be people OUTSIDE THE UNIT of any ARS scientist listed as an SY on the project. A collaborator named in the draft project plan can NOT be a reviewer, either. Furthermore, one reviewer must be someone who is not directly involved in the kind of research described in the plan. In other words, if the project plan is about plant disease, one reviewer must be an agronomist or plant breeder or someone else not directly involved in that kind of research. If the plan is about animal disease, get someone like a nutritional expert. If it is about global change, get a water quality person. The reason for this is that many poor OSQR scores, especially those requiring "Major Revision" and subsequent re-review by the panel, are frequently due to poor presentation, not ill-conceived science. Basically, the panel members cannot understand what is being proposed. Someone who is in a related field of science, but not directly involved in the kind of research being described, may be able to spot problems in presentation. If they cannot understand it, the panel might not be able to, either.

Each ad-hoc reviewer must complete the Reviewer Form and sign a Confidentiality

Agreement. These forms must be sent as a separate document from the project plan.

This requirement is effective immediately, including for those project plans currently in preparation for ***NP 301.***

I am hoping that the combination of a project plan preparation seminar and early review of the draft plans before they go to OSQR will help increase the MWA's scores. If this is not successful in the next year or so, our next step will be to run our own Area-level peer review panels, which will cut drastically into the time scientists have to prepare the plans. I certainly don't want to have the MWA Office take that on, and I am sure the scientists would not like it, either. However, the Agency is under serious pressure to improve the quality of project plans at the time they are submitted for the first formal panel. We will take whatever steps necessary to demonstrate that the MWA is committed to improving our project plans.