

Business Systems Review Update Business and Operations Advisory Committee

National Science Foundation
Large Facilities Office
Thursday May 1, 2014

Business Systems Review

- “Business System Reviews (BSRs) of National Science Foundation’s (NSF) large Facility projects (Facilities) are an integral part of NSF’s advanced monitoring program. The BSRs are designed to provide oversight of the suite of business systems (people, processes, and technologies) that supports the administrative management of a Facility *(BSR Guide version 4.0, 2013).*”
- “The primary purpose of these reviews is to provide compliance assistance to the Awardee *(BSR Guide version 4.0, 2013).*”

Context: Business Systems Review

NSF established the BSR process in 2005 as part of a corrective action plan for large research facility projects which are defined as ‘high risk’ in recognition of the magnitude, complexity and long-term duration of their funding. The purpose of the BSR program is to provide oversight and compliance assistance to awardees.

Background: BSR Subcommittee

- The Large Facilities Office (LFO) of the Office of Budget Finance and Award Management (BFA) convened the BSR Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee for Business and Operations (B&O).
- BSR Subcommittee met three times (March 28-29, 2007; April 28-29 2008; and February 6-7, 2012) to review the Business Systems Review (BSR) processes, policies, and progress
- The guidance has been helpful to focus LFO efforts which has improved the BSR process.

2012 BSR Subcommittee Recommendations/Observations and Update

Recommendations on SCOPING/TAILORING

- “The scoping, content, and conduct of each BSR must take into account the nature of the recipient organization...”
- “BSR must result in a more focused, limited review of fewer business systems. The use of a risk-based approach is essential.”

2103/2014 Update

- The scoping/tailoring process continues to be refined with greater focus/emphasis placed on the planning aspects, and the alignment of resources to areas of greatest risk.
- This shift in focus is evident in the execution of BSRs; and as an example the two most recent consisted solely of desk reviews, each with narrow focus on a select functional areas.

2012 BSR Subcommittee

Recommendations/Observations and Status

Reviewers/Experts

- “...active participation of experienced Subject Matter Experts [SME] is essential to success of BSR Program. BSR Team should include SMEs from within NSF as well as from the awardee community. If contractors are to serve as SMEs, they must of sufficient background, training and experience to perform the duties of an experienced SME”

2013/2014 Update

- Continue work with contractor to identify content matter experts with strong interpersonal skills; targeting other Government Agencies, and/or retirees with knowledge of Federal Regulations such as three new candidates, all of whom have had 20+ years Federal Service, and one individual with direct experience with a NSF Large Facility.
- Internal guidance was sought to determine feasibility of using individuals from Awardee community; however it was not recommended by the Agency’s legal experts.

2012 BSR Subcommittee

Recommendations/Observations and Status

PROCESS/WORKFLOW

- “Business assistance” is identified as one of the two major purposes of the BSR Program... If the BSR Program is to provide business assistance to large facilities, more attention needs to be given to that aspect of the program in the design and conduct of BSRs.”
- “...continue to refine process workflow so that it is more closely aligned with program goals and objectives”
- ‘...in the process of finalizing a BSR, ...formal handoff from LFO to Division of Acquisition and Cooperative Support so that the results of the BSR become part of the ongoing post-award monitoring...”

2013/2014 Update

- Coordination of monitoring between LFO and DACS is being reviewed through an internal joint advisory group. Topics such as clarity in roles/responsibilities and timing of hand-off are being discussed, and documentation further refined.
- At a frequency of once every five years, the majority of the NSF Large Facilities have had at least one BSR. Several have either completed or are preparing for a second round. These early experiences coupled with a streamlined process has provided NSF and Awardee Community with an opportunity to focus on business assistance.
- However as broader environment changes new challenges arise (e.g., competition, transition from construction to operations etc.)

Summary

Moving forward, we continue making progress on:

- Working with BFA entities on best practices and lessons learned;
- Collaborating with the Division of Acquisition and Cooperative Support to refine roles/responsibilities for post award monitoring and to identify timeframes;
- Formalizing procedures for the handoff process.

We thank the Subcommittee for their recommendations. We will continue to pursue avenues that streamline the BSR process but don't sacrifice the importance of authority, accountability and responsibility.