

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON COUNCIL MEETING AND PROCESS EFFICIENCIES

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) received a presentation from John DeVore (Council staff) on the “Council Efficiencies and Effectiveness White Paper.” The SSC appreciates the effort and thoughtfulness from Council staff in developing this document.

The SSC discussed the contents of the white paper and the SSC’s experiences with virtual meetings in general. The SSC supports having the option to read statements to the Council virtually, which allows subject matter experts to read statements and other SSC members to be present to answer questions. The SSC supports having some of its regular meetings be entirely virtual. Continued use of virtual meetings for SSC Subcommittee meetings and workshops and other reviews also has advantages, although in-person meetings may be preferable in many cases. For in-person meetings, the SSC supports enabling hybrid (virtual/in-person) meetings, with most SSC members meeting in-person with the option for other members to participate virtually if they are unable to travel. Presentations to the SSC and public comment could also be virtual.

Future iterations of the white paper could include an estimate of the financial tradeoffs between in-person and hybrid/virtual meetings. The white paper mentions additional costs (for equipment and potential staff time) for virtual meetings, but these, to some degree, would be offset by reduced travel costs.

The SSC’s discussion recognized both the benefits and costs of in-person and virtual meetings. In-person meetings allow for easier, more meaningful interactions between participants. The SSC notes the transition to virtual-only for its meetings was relatively easy, in part because of the good relationships between members that had been built during prior in-person meetings. Some SSC members noted that focused participation and coordination between the Council and advisory bodies was better during in-person meetings. Side conversations are an example of meaningful, useful interaction that occurs in-person. However, such interactions may have some downside issues because they reduce transparency and could exclude non-participants from discussions that may affect decision-making.

Virtual meetings allow for greater participation and permit greater inclusivity, since participants need not travel to meetings. The SSC notes that the way virtual or hybrid meetings are conducted affects their effectiveness, and future work on the white paper could include some investigation of best practices for conducting these meetings.

The SSC is concerned that producing an SSC report and an additional summary for reading to the Council could reduce the precision and quality of information presented to the Council and increase workload.

The SSC discussed the idea of meeting prior to, rather than concurrent with, Council meetings. The SSC notes that other Councils do this. However, if this option is pursued, this will affect the

timelines for Council staff, science centers, and others presenting work to the SSC, as this work would need to be available for review well before the briefing book deadline.

PFMC
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