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Science Technology and Communications Staff

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 3
- A. Workload Distribution/Staffing 3
- B. Program Management 8
- C. Evaluation and Results Tracking 23
- D. Program Office Support 24
- E. Role of Contractor Support 25
- F. Relationships with State Department and USAID Bureaus 27
- G. Impact of Reengineering 28

III. CONCLUSION 29

IV. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS 30

APPENDICES:

A. Scope of Work
B. Interview List
C. STC Management Review Questions
D. Reference Documents
E. Overseas Questionnaire
F. Program Support Functions to be Performed by Contractor

I. INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of an analytical review carried out by the Bureau for Management, Office of Management Planning and Innovation (M/MPI), at the request of the Associate Assistant Administrator, Science, Technology and Communications Staff in the Global Bureau (G/STC). The review was requested in April, 1996, a Scope of Work was agreed to (See Appendix A), and the review began in May.

In the final stages of report preparation, a Reduction in Force at USAID resulted in the abolishment of STC. The team was instructed to complete the report based on original findings since the information collected would be useful in decisions about future management of these functions. One of the most important themes which came out of this review is that significant efficiencies can be achieved by managing the MERC, CDR, and CDP programs from one operating unit. Integrated management of these programs is also desirable due to the complimentarity of each program's goals and the political prominence they share. Observations, findings, and recommendations are presented in the sections that follow.

Purpose and Methodology

The primary purpose of this study was to conduct a review of the management processes and systems used for G/STC's small research grants and technical assistance programs, as well as to evaluate the work processes and identify administrative arrangements which would contribute to improved workload distribution and management efficiency. Each element of the management framework was analyzed, from preproposal submission through program evaluation. A three-person team was formed by the Office of Management Planning and Innovation, Management Consulting Division. The Team consisted of two Management Analysts full-time, and one senior Management Analyst part-time. The team had available, if necessary, a "research expert", recommended by G/STC. Pertinent background information and previous studies were collected and analyzed for the review. Interviews were conducted with individuals both inside and outside of G/STC who are familiar with its work. A list of individuals interviewed is included at Appendix B.

Background

The Science, Technology and Communications Staff is located in the Office of the Assistant Administrator, Global Bureau. The Staff is responsible for the management and oversight of six research/science related programs -- including the Middle East Regional Cooperation Program (MERC), the Cooperative Development

Program (CDP), the U.S.-Israeli Cooperative Development Research Program (CDR), the Cooperation in Applied Science and Technology program (CAST), the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences Fellows program (AAAS), and the Program of Science and Technology Cooperation (PSTC). Brief descriptions of the individual programs follow and analysis of management processes are included at Section IIB.

CDR: The U.S.-Israel Cooperative Development Research program supports research cooperation between Israeli scientists and scientists in USAID-recipient countries. There is a special initiative under the CDR which funds collaborative research with scientists from the Central Asian Republics (CAR) of the former Soviet Union. CDR receives program support from an institutional contractor, Metrica.

MERC: The Middle East Regional Cooperation Program supports collaboration among Israel and its Arab neighbors on priority common economic and social development problems to broaden the base of cooperation in the region in support of the Peace Process. The CENTECH group, an institutional contractor, provides program support.

CDP: The U.S.-Israeli Cooperative Development Program supports on a matching basis the identification and delivery of Israeli technical assistance and training to developing countries. Administered by the Division of International Cooperation in Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MASHAV), CDP activities are carried out pursuant to annual plans approved jointly by USAID and MASHAV.

CAST: The Cooperative Applied Science and Technology program, funded through a cooperative agreement with the National Academy of Sciences, provides incentive grants to U.S. universities to help bring scientists from the republics of the former Soviet Union to the U.S. for a semester or an academic year. The exchange scientists generally conduct research in U.S. laboratories, participate in seminars and work actively to make contact with U.S. industry. No new funding is available for this program.

PSTC: The Program of Science and Technology Cooperation fully funds investigator-initiated research proposals which are relevant to development, have scientific merit, are innovative and contribute to host country research capacity. New grants under this program have been suspended.

AAAS: The American Association for the Advancement of Sciences Fellows program in USAID is managed by STC. The program offers a career development

opportunity for scientists interested in international development and helps bring science and technology to the service of USAID.

II. OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Workload Distribution/Staffing

G/STC is composed of five U.S. Direct Hire staff (including one support staff), three AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Sciences) Fellows, and two COMSCI (Commerce Science) Fellows. Established just over a year ago, the STC office is still in a transition phase in terms of addressing workload distribution issues. Staff assigned to STC brought the programs they previously managed in other offices with them. Consequently, workload associated with each research and technical assistance program are handled differently. Varying levels of administrative support are available to each staff person.

It is evident that current program support must be restructured to provide consistent and adequate assistance to each program. Although the goals of each of the STC programs differ, there is sufficient similarity in terms of administrative requirements to justify unification of separated tasks. The team believes consolidation of contractor program support would lessen current staff workloads and would serve as a foundation for a more efficient system of program management. Specific recommendations regarding contractor support are given in Section IIE.

The team observed that further workload balance might be obtained by STC through transfer of certain management responsibilities to other USAID and Department of State (DOS) units. Transfer of identified responsibilities would not impair STC's technical leadership role. In fact, the team believes that STC staff would be able to concentrate their efforts more on providing substantive direction to the unit's research programs.

Associate Assistant Administrator (Unit Chief)- The AAA supervises a staff of three officers and one support staff and guides the work of three fellows. Two additional fellows are mentored by other office staff. The staff are responsible for oversight and program management in the areas of science, technology and communications. Working with three vacant staff positions, the Office has been unable to undertake the range of programs assigned. The telecommunications initiative, a key function of the unit, has been implemented on an intermittent basis

because of lack of staff resources. Anticipated future transfers of additional management responsibilities to STC for the U.S. TTI telecommunications project will further strain staff capacity.

Aside from providing leadership on policy issues, the AAA spends a reasonable amount of time initiating discussions and actions which help refine the mission and scope of STC's functional responsibilities. The team was advised that STC had been assigned several new functions without being allowed to recruit technical staff to undertake the tasks. The most important and time consuming of these has been the donor coordination function, especially support to the AA/G on the Japan Common Agenda and the development of B-4 procedures.

In order to reduce unnecessary layering and promote the development of a cohesive team, the AAA should eliminate subordinate supervisory responsibilities in the Unit. Use of a flexible team approach would enable the AAA to make shifts in the staff's work assignments as needed. A team approach should also breakdown the isolation of individuals accustomed to operating independently and help integrate staff into a cohesive whole.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** STC should eliminate supervisory responsibilities below the AAA level and organize as a team to accomplish work requirements.

Program Manager (Physical Scientist) - This Program Manager's responsibilities include management and oversight for AAAS Fellows, PSTC, CDR and CAST programs and advising AAA/STC on science and research policy issues. Estimated breakdown of time spent on each responsibility is as follows: CDR - 50%, Fellows 20%, PSTC and CAST -10%, other, including policy development, assistance with MERC and serving as mentor for two AAAS fellows -20%. Most of the program support activities associated with these responsibilities are undertaken by non-Agency personnel. Alleviated of many of the routine tasks, the manager is able, for the most part, to focus on substantive program issues. Specifics about management of individual programs are contained in Section IIB.

With the imminent retirement of this employee and given current constraints on the Agency's budget, it is probable that STC will need to redistribute the program manager's responsibilities to other office staff already on board. Continued use of external contractor support is critical if remaining personnel are to pick up these duties. Remaining projects under PSTC and CAST are expected to be completed within the next 2-3 years. No new funding is available for PSTC. However, a proposal has been submitted to ENI for future funding of CAST. If approved, management of

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any follow-on programs to CAST could reside in an appropriate ENI unit.

Program Manager (Program Analyst) - Responsible for CDP and MERC programs, this Manager personally executes many of the program support activities related to management of these programs. This manager divides his time between management of CDP, MERC and other ad hoc assignments, estimated at MERC 75%, CDP 20% and Other 5%. Unlike the CDR and CAST activities, MERC has limited its use of contractor resources to assist with program support activities. No contractor support is involved in the implementation of the CDP grant to Israel.

Preparation of funding documentation to award grants under MERC is very time consuming. In addition to work involved with putting together the PIO/T package, a number of clearances, including field posts and the Department of State (DOS), must be obtained. Based on available staff resources, STC should devote proportionately more time to the grant award process and providing technical direction for the program. The review team believes that less labor intensive options for disbursing grant funds should be pursued. A precedent exists as the CDR program has already established a successful record of working with DOS to disburse grant funds. Review team meetings with DOS staff revealed a willingness to discuss alternatives for managing the MERC program and improving technical direction. DOS' willingness is based on the political importance of the MERC program. Even though some of the decisions for the MERC program are politically based, USAID involvement with the program at the technical level can contribute to the Agency's development goals. The feasibility of a uniform system to handle financial management for both CDR and the MERC program should be explored in order to promote consistency in how grant fund disbursements are made for both programs.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Meet with DOS to determine feasibility of expanding current MOU for CDR program to include MERC, with the intention that DOS field staff will handle grant funds disbursement and financial management.

With six months of experience working on the MERC program, contractor staff seem capable to assume the full range of necessary program support functions. A complete shift of these tasks to the contractor should enable the MERC manager to focus more on providing technical direction for the program.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Contractor should undertake full range of program support activities associated with MERC program management.

Additional steps which can be taken to simplify management for the MERC and

CDP programs are discussed in Section IIB.

Acting Program Officer (Science and Technology Specialist) - In the reorganization that established STC, the Unit lost program support for its programs originally provided by HCD. A recent addition to STC, the Acting Program Officer provides support to the staff in areas such as the budget and the reengineered operations of the Agency. In line with the reengineered operations, the Acting Program Officer has been coordinating STC's R2, preparing its Strategic Objectives and also the Strategic Plan for the Office. Over time, the team believes this person could gradually assume more project management duties and responsibilities, thus eliminating some of the burdens placed on others. As discussed in Section IID, assuming the duties normally performed by a Program Officer would be an excellent role for this individual to play.

Fellows - STC currently employees five Fellows, three AAAS and two Commerce Science (ComSci) fellows. In general the Fellows are satisfied with the amount and types of work they perform.

AAAS Fellows can work for the Agency for one or two years. After the first year, they can leave the program, opt to remain with their current office, or choose another assignment for their second year. Of the three AAAS Fellows currently in STC, one will be renewing for a second year assignment in STC. In the past, the AAAS Fellows program was seen more as a recruitment tool for the Agency. However, with USAID's shrinking resources, that is no longer the case.

Direct hire staff consider AAAS Fellows in STC an extremely valuable asset in both their technical expertise and the support they provide associated with administration of STC's projects. The amount and types of work they perform is varied and ranges from providing technical input in reviews, both for MERC and CDR, evaluating preproposals, proposals, as well as responses to provisos. They also identify scientific experts to do "mail reviews", set up panels for technical reviews, participate in project evaluations, and provide other general types of support to the project managers. They constitute a wealth of scientific knowledge and their technical expertise is invaluable to STC.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** In the technical review of preproposals/ proposals, greater use of expertise from Fellows elsewhere in the Agency should be pursued.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** STC must ensure that Fellows continue to be treated in strict compliance with Agency policies regarding fellowship programs (General Notice dated 9/18/95 "Appropriate Use and Funding of USAID's Non-Direct Hire Workforce", and General Notice dated 7/8/96 "Implementation of Policy Guidance Concerning Fellows").

Since USAID's travel budget is extremely scarce, offices and bureaus are looking more and more to their Fellows to travel to the field and report back on projects. However, the suitability of Fellows traveling without benefit of a direct hire staff member on their teams, to undertake tasks such as project evaluations, should be examined.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Evaluations should be planned more explicitly and greater attention given to appropriate roles for direct hires and Fellows.

The Commerce Science (ComSci) Fellows generally are more senior (GS-14-15), with a variety of specialties, and are U.S. Department of Commerce direct hire employees. Their length of stay at USAID is 10 months and USAID receives ComScis at no cost. The ComSci Fellows have been handling critical work of the office related to technical direction on policy issues, i.e., donor coordination, telecommunications. Because these Fellows are more senior, they have greater expectations of receiving administrative/clerical assistance. Both of these Fellows are scheduled to leave STC soon and the issue of their replacement is a concern because of the work they handle.

Although Fellows provide a wealth of knowledge and contribute greatly while performing their Fellowships, they also require training and orientation in the administrative practices of the Agency. The one STC support staff provides this training -- tasks, for example, from showing them how to prepare cables, USAID formats for memos, to obtaining clearances on those memos, and obtaining country clearances for overseas travel. The fact that these Fellows stay for fairly short amounts of time means the secretary is constantly training Fellows.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** When individuals begin their Fellowship with the Agency and attend orientation, a greater amount of time should be spent on the Agency's administrative practices. Such training should be included as part of the orientation briefing required by the 07/08/96 General Notice "Implementation of Policy Guidance Concerning Fellows".

Support Staff (Secretary) -The issue of support staff utilization is a contentious one. The one individual assigned as support staff has had a long history with much of the program, dating back to 1985 when PSTC and CDR were programs under the purview of the Office of the Science Advisor. With the institutional memory that comes with one so long associated with the program, it's no wonder she is called upon constantly by all. Because of the strength of existing relationships and the demand for the support staff's institutional memory, she has been able to provide only minimal support to AAA/STC. This individual provides support not only to the Associate Assistant Administrator, which, of course, should be first and foremost in her mind, but attempts to provide administrative/clerical support to all individuals on the staff.

During the interview process it was apparent that this individual is performing duties which she should not. "Maintaining the calendar" of a project manager, other than the AAA, should not be on her list of responsibilities nor should the handling of security clearances for some 30-40 Fellows. She appears to be providing support to too many individuals -- including most of the direct hire staff, as well as the Fellows assigned to the office. Additionally, because of the collocation of STC and HCD, some routine matters such as greeting visitors, sorting faxes, and general inquiries, when added up, can consume a disproportionate amount of time. The team also noted that Guidelines for Preproposal/Proposal Submission for CDR have this individual's telephone number listed for inquiries.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** In connection with implementation of recommended changes contained in this report, the AAA should determine support staff priority duties and advise support staff of limitations on responses to non-priority requests from STC and HCD. Additionally, her telephone number should be taken off CDR Guidelines, and the appropriate project manager or the contractor should be listed.

B. Program Management

Program management differs greatly among the projects managed by STC -- some are managed almost entirely from within STC, while others are managed almost exclusively by contractors. The team was fortunate to have the opportunity to observe a MERC Executive Committee Review meeting which provided a fairly in-depth look at that aspect of the process. Additionally, since MERC has more "in-house" involvement, much more information was available to the team in general.

U.S.-Israel Cooperative Development Research (CDR)

The U.S.-Israel Cooperative Development Research program supports research cooperation between Israeli scientists and scientists in USAID-recipient countries. There is a special initiative under the CDR which funds collaborative research with scientists from the Central Asian Republics (CAR) of the former Soviet Union. This program is one which receives support from an institutional contractor, Metrica.

The CDR is designed to take advantage of Israel's world class science and experience in applying science to development problems. CDR grants fund applied cooperative research and the focus of these grants is on typical development problems, such as arid land agriculture, water resource management and health. The program awards grants up to $200,000 for 3-5 year research projects.

Within the CDR there is a special grants competition to support Israeli collaboration with selected republics of the Former Soviet Union. Joint research conducted by Israeli and FSU scientists is funded for up to $150,000 and up to three years.

In the 12 years since its inception, CDR has progressively obtained assistance from non-Agency resources to execute certain program management responsibilities. With this help, one program officer in STC is able to manage a portfolio of approximately 75 research grants in addition to other work assignments. The combination of program support from the Department of State (DOS) and a contractor, and technical support from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) has greatly reduced the normal project officer workload associated with this type of activity.

At the same time, prominent areas of concern identified during the management review stem from the high level of involvement in CDR program administration of outside personnel. The team would note that it was difficult to assess certain aspects of the program management because few USAID staff are involved with the program. The team also made several unsuccessful efforts to obtain copies of project status documentation. A review of the project status reports would have assisted in assessing current and future workloads generated by the program.

Overview of Management Structure

A well defined management system has been established for the CDR program. Most of the program support activities are handled by Metrica, a firm which has held the contract for the program for the past 6 years. The continuity of this program support has resulted in the institutionalization of routine mechanisms for handling each aspect of program management. The contractor maintains a series of databases and tracking files to assist in managing CDR program support functions. A variety of checklists, forms and letters are used at different stages in the process. The CDR program officer is able then to focus his efforts on providing oversight and technical direction for the activity.

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) provides STC with access to a pool of relevant technical expertise to evaluate proposed CDR projects. STC obtains the services of the NAS through a cooperative agreement. Under the cooperative agreement, NAS provides scientific expertise to assist in proposal evaluation and recruits technical experts as needed for review panels. Involving the NAS assures that the projects under consideration receive high quality scientific peer review.

Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DOS to handle financial management for CDR grants, STC is able to transfer and obligate funds in a block each fiscal year. Staff at the Embassy in Tel Aviv are responsible for making the grants to local Israeli institutions. STC is thereby alleviated of the burden of executing individual grant disbursements. There have been some problems in transferring the funds to State, but for FY 96 a new process has been worked out which should eliminate these concerns.

STC Internal and Peer Review Process

The funding cycle for the CDR program begins in November with a deadline for submission of three page preproposals. CDR received approximately 200 preproposals last year. Each December, an STC internal review group initially determines which preproposals have met the minimum program requirements as outlined in the CDR grant guidelines. Included in this internal review group is the CDR Program Officer, selected AAAS Fellows and NAS staff. After the initial review, remaining preproposals are then evaluated for creativity, innovation and development

impact. Individual score sheets are used to grade and rank the preproposals. The group's consensus decides which offerors will be invited to submit full proposals which are due the following August.

Working with minimal assistance from the AAAS Fellows, NAS recruits experts to sit on technical "peer review" panels to evaluate CDR full proposals. These panels are organized by specialty. Technical experts participating in the reviews do so without compensation. Interview respondents noted that peer reviewers are lured by the professional exchange offered by participation on the panels. As organizer of the review, the NAS also enhances the credibility of the review. Reviews are held in late October through November. Reviewers rank the proposals individually and then as a group. Once the technical caliber of the proposal is ranked, the ranking is reconsidered to assess their relevance to development goals. Submissions are then reranked accordingly. All applicants receive written critiques of their proposals prepared by the reviewers. Highly ranked applicants are also informed about "provisos" (additional questions) which require response prior to award of funding.

The CDR review process appears to function smoothly and reliably. Several interview respondents indicated their concern about the process being excessive for the size of grants provided under the CDR. While the mechanics of the review process seem to operate well, it seems that steps might be taken to shorten the process. Currently CDR offerors can expect to wait one and a half to two years to receive funding.

Although the volume of preproposals received each year under CDR has decreased, approximately 200 preproposals were reviewed during the most recent funding cycle. Some interview respondents attribute this volume to the broad range of topics considered for CDR funding. The current review cycle used for CDR appears to allow the necessary time to review the huge number and variety of proposals submitted. Greater efficiency in the review cycle and a significant reduction in the CDR workload could be achieved if priority research areas for funding under CDR were specified. By targeting the research funded under CDR, STC could expect to receive fewer preproposals and subsequent proposals. Proposals would also be more easily grouped, facilitating the set-up of peer review panels. USAID staff might also be more inclined to be involved with the program if they could see that funded research contributes to or supports their areas of interest. Better integration of the projects and their results to the work of the Agency could also be expected.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** As part of its strategic planning, STC should assess the value of sharpening priorities of the CDR program to encourage activities which complement USAID goals and have country development priorities.

Due to the timing of this management review, the team was unable to observe any of the STC internal or technical peer reviews for the CDR program. One concern raised by respondents was that repeated use of the same reviewers could produce biased results. The program seems to depend on heavy contributions of reviewers from the University of Maryland and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. STC does attempt to counter possible bias by sending a percentage of proposals out for mail reviews in addition to the panel review. Respondents also noted that many of these repeat peer reviewers are burned out. Additional outreach to expand the pool of potential reviewers is necessary as is broader use of mail reviews to protect the integrity of decisionmaking within the review process.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** CDR's technical database should be updated and expanded to include additional reviewers from institutions outside of Washington, D.C. Staff should increase use of Internet to help diversify review pool and input on proposal evaluations.

Program Integration

Even though Missions must provide clearance for project funding, other Agency staff generally know little about the program. Most regard their involvement as cursory and marginal to the process. The team does not sense this situation is wholly attributable to STC management. It can be credited partly to diminishing Agency technical capability and increased staff workloads, and the fact that some staff may not feel that research funded by CDR is relevant to their development priorities.

Some respondents strongly feel that the CDR research activities should be directly tied to Agency program goals and strategic objectives. Others feel just as strongly that CDR provides cutting edge research and should not be constrained by Agency strategic objectives. Many CDR results are unexpected, leading to expanded knowledge in the field. Despite declining Agency technical capacity, the team believes that better integration of CDR activities and project results with other Agency goals is feasible without reducing the innovative aspects of the research. Involvement of experienced USAID staff in CDR is critical to assure the quality of the projects, and to foster development impact and widespread use of project results.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** A greater effort should be made to involve and obtain input from appropriate Agency personnel in the proposal review process especially during considerations of development impact.

Middle East Regional Cooperation Program (MERC)

The Middle East Regional Cooperation Program supports collaboration among Israel and its Arab neighbors on priority common economic and social development problems to broaden the base of cooperation in the region in support of the Peace Process. This program receives support through the CENTECH group, an institutional contractor.

Legislated by Congress in 1979, MERC was initiated following the Camp David Accords as a means to support the peace process. Through the MERC program, USAID provides grants to fund cooperative research and related technical assistance project activities which involve Israeli and Arab institutions and scientists. Typically a U.S. institution fulfills project management responsibilities for the grant in addition to serving as facilitator and participant. MERC projects may be funded for up to five years with a limit of $3 million.

Grants made in the early years of the MERC program supported institutions in Egypt and Israel which could be key promoters of peace in the region. Projects were funded through U.S. institutions which played intermediary roles between the Egyptian and Israeli organizations which otherwise seldom had direct contact with one another. Characterized by large grants when the program began (up to $5 million), the program relied on U.S. institutions to provide leadership and management oversight for separate but similar research conducted by local scientists in participating countries. Since then, MERC has evolved parallel to transitions in the peace process to better accommodate the changing relationships among countries in the region and to account for the increasing institutional capacity of local organizations. These changes are evidenced by the diminishing role of U.S. institutions as intermediaries, the growing involvement of other Arab countries besides Egypt in the program, and more smaller grants for truly collaborative efforts.

Over the years, management responsibility for MERC has shifted among several different USAID offices. Management responsibility came to rest with the STC staff, transferred from the Center for Human Capacity Development (HCD), after being transferred from the Asia Near East (ANE) Bureau. Constant shifts in the location of the program seem to be attributable to the political prominence of the activity. As with the other STC grants programs, there is a general perception by many USAID staff

that they cannot influence decisions related to MERC project activities, given the political necessities which the Agency is unable to control or influence. Although unintentional, this situation has led to a layered management approach for MERC which is extremely labor intensive and cumbersome.

The review process and related decisionmaking system are primary areas for management reform. Issues related to communication, evaluation and results tracking can be addressed secondarily. Interviews confirmed that proposal review procedures are confusing to both USAID and DOS staff. This confusion has caused uncertainty among review committee members as to what constitutes the review, how and when decisions are made and who the members of the committee are.

At the beginning of this study, the team was made aware of the political imperatives from Congress and the Department of State (DOS) which affected the management of MERC. Some STC staff seemed to view these political interests as constraints to change in the management of MERC program activities. While other interview respondents agreed that MERC has high political visibility, they did not view Congressional and DOS interests as so limiting.

The review team believes that the STC staff can and should use a transparent management approach keeping senior management informed and incorporating sufficient flexibility to address political concerns as required. Among the necessary supports for this type of transparent management process are: 1) clearly defined guidelines for grant proposals, 2) simplified proposal review procedures, 3) identification of decisionmaking authorities, and 4) clarification of the role of the responsible project officer in the review and decisionmaking process. Once these system refinements are made, the team believes communication and results tracking difficulties will be lessened.

Overview of the Management Process

The first stage in the process is the circulation of guidelines for the program. Guidelines for the MERC program are distributed by USAID and DOS staff in Washington and the field. Both preproposals and full proposals are accepted as initial application for funding. Preproposals and proposals submitted for funding consideration are evaluated by a review committee against the following criteria: 1) contribution to the Middle-East Peace Process, 2) level of regional collaboration, 3) technical merit, and 4) development impact.

Functioning somewhat as a decisionmaking body, the MERC Executive Review Committee evaluates both preproposals and proposals together and selects projects for grant awards. Membership of the Review Committee varies but usually consists of representatives from the Regional Bureaus and technical offices as well as the Department of State. The Review Committee meets three to four times a year depending on the volume of applications and availability of funding. Each offeror is notified of the review committee's decision by letter detailing deficient aspects of the proposal, requesting further explanation of the project, or indicating approval. For proposals not receiving approval offerors may submit follow-up responses and elaborations which the review committee considers in subsequent meetings.

Once projects are selected for funding, the STC program officer drafts separate PIO/Ts to obligate money for each activity. Relevant USAID Bureau and DOS staff provide clearance for each funding action. Grant funds are made available to the U.S. partner organization which subsequently makes subgrants to the involved Israeli and Arab institutions. Each grantee is required to submit a progress and financial management report. Informational copies of the midterm and end of project reports are distributed to relevant Washington and field staff. The grantee is also responsible for conducting a midterm and end of project evaluation. Reports from these assessments are submitted to USAID and distributed internally.

Program Guidance

In 1994, the MERC program guidelines were revised to reflect changes in the program which would affect the consideration of unsolicited proposals. Program goals are outlined as are the components for a good proposal. Currently the program receives proposals in a variety of formats and lengths, some address most of the required categories and others totally omit them.

While a certain level of variance is expected in any unsolicited proposal process, interviews confirmed that the guidelines are ambiguous and should be reformatted and revised to provide clearer instructions to offerors. Comments from field staff support the need to provide clearer guidance to proposal developers. Instructions should include a sample format for preproposal and proposal submissions which not only lists the necessary categories and items to be included, but also gives the required order.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Revise MERC program guidelines to be more instructional to proposal offerors and issue new guidelines prior to next program funding cycle .

Adherence by offerors to these instructions would enable reviewers to evaluate application elements easily thereby reducing workloads attributed to preproposal and proposal review. Submissions which were severely deficient could be readily identified and weeded out quickly. Straightforward application instructions would also assist in eliminating the current confusion about how and what to evaluate as part of the review. Contractor support could be used to revise and issue new program guidelines. CDR guidelines could be a useful model.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Determine acceptable lengths for preproposal versus full proposal submissions, keeping in mind that the preproposal review is intended to be a preliminary assessment of the general concept, and incorporate new requirements into MERC program guidelines.

Proposal Review Process

Grant proposals for MERC funding are accepted throughout the year and are typically scheduled for review quarterly depending on volume as well as available funding. In the early years of the MERC program, full grant proposals were accepted as application for funding. Grant proposals received were generally over 40 pages and often did not adequately address the program criteria. Much of the time spent reviewing these proposals was wasted since a majority of submissions were inadequate. The idea of using a preproposal was implemented as a way to streamline the process of identifying worthwhile project ideas prior to requesting full proposals. Preproposals are now routinely submitted as initial application but there is still little distinction between a preproposal and a full proposal either in terms of information provided or time allocated for consideration by the Review Committee.

Review Committee respondents generally feel that too much time is wasted on preproposal reviews and that many of these submissions are inadequate for consideration. There is consensus that the most time should be invested in the review of full proposals which contain sufficient information to recommend or reject for funding. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine when decisions for project funding will be made due to the revolving nature of the reviews as illustrated by the following example.

In one case, a preproposal was submitted and reviewed by the Committee in April 1992. After many iterations over a period of years to develop an acceptable proposal, and much work being done both in USAID and the submitting entity to "fix" it, the Committee recommended that the proposal be declined without any invitation for revision or further resubmission in August of 1996. Guidelines for the program should be clear enough to (1) substantiate turning down the preproposal, if warranted, early in the process and (2) provide reasonably precise requirements against which submissions will be judged and that makes Committee feedback useful.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Earlier in the preproposal process, greater effort should be made to identify and reject unacceptable project ideas based on revised guidelines.

There is now no established schedule for review and decisions on proposals. In order to alleviate the workload associated with the review and subsequent funding documentation, as well as to give offerors a clearer idea of when they might receive a response, regular deadlines and timeframes must be established for each aspect of the process. Completion of proposal approval and funding decisions early in the fiscal year would also facilitate timely disbursement of grant funds by the Office of Procurement. Preproposal and full proposals could continue to be accepted throughout the year but would be considered for funding according to the published, established schedule.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** The current system of reviewing preproposals and proposal submission on a ad hoc basis should be restructured to achieve a better distribution of the workload throughout the fiscal year.

Establishment of a more predictable program schedule would support better communications with the field since field staff could expect to participate at predetermined times during the year. Comments received from the field regarding a recent review indicated that certain field offices had only a few days to evaluate several lengthy proposals.

If MERC program guidelines are revised as recommended, preproposal submissions should be shorter and simpler to evaluate. Since offerors are basically presenting a concept paper in the preproposal stage, a more limited review would be appropriate. This limited review would be more of an STC in-house group incorporating a DOS staff person and a person(s) with relevant broad-based technical expertise. STC Fellows would be useful participants in this review.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** That STC initiate a regularly scheduled limited preproposal review process based on program criteria and revised guidelines as a step prior to the full proposal review.

During the "in-house" review, committee members would verify that the preproposals first met general program guidelines and secondly, that they presented political criteria concepts that satisfy program criteria and do not conflict with legislative directives. Based on this review, a group of offerors would be invited to submit full proposals. Making the preproposal review in fact a preproposal review would eliminate the need for extensive evaluations of preproposals by the larger group when only a small percentage of preproposals merit invitation of a full proposal.

Offerors rejected at this stage could resubmit a preproposal for the subsequent funding cycle. Rejection letters sent to offerors, as currently done, would note the deficient aspects of the proposed project and indicate that a future preproposal submission would be welcomed. This approach would allow the review process to continue to foster applicants' development of stronger preproposals for future funding applications.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** A standard progressive program review and funding cycle should be established which supports completion of funding decisions prior to, or early in the fiscal year.

When considering how to time the review cycle, STC should consider existing schedules for CDR and CDP activities in order to maximize use of direct hire, Fellows and contractor staff capability. Although the technical merit of MERC grants was not the focus of this management review, it was suggested to the team that the technical evaluation of MERC proposals could be strengthened through their integration with peer reviews for CDR. It appears that implementation of this suggestion would not only enhance the technical review but would assist in paneling topical areas for CDR, and help to maintain a more consistent standard of project quality across the programs.

Evaluation criteria to be used by the full MERC Review Committee needs to be clearly communicated by STC to Review Committee members and institutionalized. Although Committee members agreed that they have a general understanding of applicable criteria, most are unsure of how each criteria should be weighted. A proposal evaluation process should be established to reduce confusion during review meetings and support a more timely review of proposals. Views of each participating member of the Committee would also be recognized regardless of whether they

attend the meeting or not. This is particularly critical in order to appropriately consider opinions of Mission and Embassy staff. If considered at one time during the year as recommended, proposals could be ranked for funding as funds become available which would eliminate the need for subsequent meetings.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Evaluation/scoring sheets to simplify, standardize and institutionalize review procedures and capture meeting results should be developed and used.

Decisionmaking and related Authorities

Interview respondents voiced their concerns about how decisions for grant funding are made. During attendance at the recent MERC Review Meetings, the team observed three different decisionmaking processes in operation. It appeared that the process used at a given point in the meeting was determined by either type of project, who was the project offeror, or the "mood" of Committee members. Depending on the case, a vote was taken, or the group consensus was confirmed, or a unilateral decision was made. Committee members mentioned having left previous review meetings unsure what projects were approved. Other instances noted by Committee members include decisions being reversed after Committee meetings finished, and projects which had been rejected during the review meeting subsequently being approved without further discussion in the Committee.

In addition to raising issues about who has decisionmaking authority in the review, this unreliable and inconsistent approach hinders the review process. While STC staff may want to retain final authority for decisions, designation of a consistent decisionmaking process is essential. All members of the Committee must understand their role and how decisions are made in order to improve the current system. The adaptation of an evaluation score sheet and ranking system as recommended could be a first step in the review decisionmaking process.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION**: Designate and implement consistent standardized system for decisionmaking and keeping records of those decisions.

It seems that the membership of the MERC Review Committee is not well defined. Approximately 40% of the individuals included on the meeting memo distribution list were either represented at the meeting or submitted written comments on the preproposals and full proposals. However, to some interviewees who participated in the committee meeting, it was unclear who was a "member" of the Committee and therefore has influence in decisions taken by the Committee. Even

invited participants who attended the review stated that composition of the Review Committee's actual membership is unknown. Depending on the decisionmaking approach chosen for future reviews, STC may want to establish a tiered membership structure which weights each person's input based on relationship to proposed project activities.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Formalize Review Committee structure by identifying members of the Committee and their decisionmaking authorities. Additionally, a Chairperson should be identified who does not have direct project management responsibilities in order to prevent any appearance of bias.

U.S.-Israeli Cooperative Development Program

The U.S.-Israeli Cooperative Development Program supports on a matching basis the identification and delivery of Israeli technical assistance and training to developing countries. The CDP assists developing countries to apply Israeli experience in the use of modern technologies and applied science for development in selected areas. This program is implemented through a cooperative agreement with the Government of Israel (GOI) which has a much larger role in this program than in the others. Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, known as MASHAV, is responsible for administering the program. STC advertises CDP and USAID Missions apply for support/assistance training via CDP. Yearly workplans are agreed to during annual consultations hosted alternately by USAID and GOI. Based on workplans, the GOI disburses funds and oversees financial management for the program. This program is implemented through a cooperative agreement.

In general, existing procedures seem appropriate for this type of agreement. STC's primary management responsibilities for CDP include preparation of yearly funding documents (one obligation action), coordination and participation in annual consultations and distribution of program reports. Distribution of program reports seems to create the largest administrative burden for the STC manager and it's not clear how much these reports are used. Solutions are needed to ensure timely circulation of these intermittent project reports, especially to Missions in countries where these activities take place.

Interview respondents indicated that field staff who are aware of the program think it is solely an Israeli, not a USAID activity. Better distribution of project reports could improve field staffs' knowledge of CDP and encourage their input to annual workplans. Greater integration of the program and its results would enhance the development impact. Those interviewed believed that the Annual Consultation

between MASHAV and USAID is an opportunity to increase USAID staff input into the program, while at the same time increasing MASHAV's access to development information.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Regularize distribution of selected reports to Agency and Mission staff based on geographic or technical relevance. Discuss with MASHAV feasibility of submitting additional copies of reports to accomplish necessary distribution.

Cooperation in Applied Science and Technology Program (CAST)

The Cooperative Applied Science and Technology program, funded through a cooperative agreement with the National Academy of Sciences, provides incentive grants to U.S. universities to help bring scientists from the republics of the former Soviet Union to the U.S. for a semester or an academic year. The exchange scientists generally conduct research in U.S. laboratories, participate in seminars and work actively to make contact with U.S. industry. No new funding is available for this program.

Prior to suspension of funding, three competitions were held each year for $15,000 grants. Grants were given for six or twelve month research activities. The U.S. host is responsible for making all of the travel and housing arrangements for their NIS colleagues who come to the U.S.

The National Academy of Science (NAS) administers the CAST program under a Cooperative Agreement with STC. The NAS advertises the program, receives proposals, conducts proposal reviews, disburses grant funds, and conducts program evaluations. STC oversees the cooperative agreement. No ENI staff are involved with the operation of the CAST program.

With its extensive experience in managing grants programs, the NAS seems able to easily handle the administration of CAST. Activities under the NAS Cooperative Agreement are due to expire in September, 1996. STC has requested an extension of the agreement to enable completion of projects in FY97.

Program in Science and Technology (PSTC)

The Program of Science and Technology Cooperation fully funds investigator-initiated research proposals which are relevant to development, have scientific merit,

are innovative and contribute to host country research capacity. Initiated in 1981, PSTC was the earliest effort by USAID to fund innovative research ideas. Although funding for new grants has been suspended, there are approximately 35 active grants remaining from the total of 140 projects funded under the program. The review team was unable to estimate future workload for PSTC due to lack of access to project status reports.

American Association for the Advancement of Sciences (AAAS) Program

The AAAS places post-doctoral scientists and engineers in fellowship programs in a number of institutions, including USAID. The American Association for the Advancement of Sciences Fellows program in USAID is managed by STC and includes some 30-40 fellows per year. The program offers a career development opportunity for scientists interested in international development and helps bring current science and technology expertise to the service of USAID.

Management of the program appears to run smoothly. Much of the work done by the STC staff for the AAAS Fellows program relates to initiation of the program each year. Yearly activities include coordination of requests for Fellows' placements in USAID/W and overseas, coordination of the approval process under which M agrees to a funding and ceiling for Fellows, coordination of OYB transfers from other Agency offices to pay for Fellows they host, execution of AAAS agreement amendments, review of Fellows applications, participation on interview and selection panels, and the administrative tasks associated with submitting security clearance forms. A staff person at AAAS handles remaining tasks required to operate the program.

Advertisements for fellowships go out each September. Fellowship advertisements are published in scientific journals and recruitment posters are sent to Universities. January 15 is the deadline for submitting applications. Approximately 160-170 applications are received. A "virtual committee" is created to review applications in particular fields. In February a panel consisting of State, USAID, AAAS Staff and former Fellows rate applications. From this rating individuals are selected for interviews. In early March an interview panel is put together by AAAS consisting of USAID project officers, others from AID, World Bank, National Academy of Sciences and others. Applicants submit a CV including 4-5 letters of recommendation and state why they want to do the fellowship. Placement interviews are then arranged. Once matches have been made between the Fellows and the receiving offices, STC prepares an approval memo for the AA/M.

After approval, Bureaus and Offices make OYB transfers of program funds to STC, usually in April-May. This funding is consolidated in one PIO/T as an amendment to the AAAS grant which is usually completed in August. Orientation, in which STC staff participate, for the Fellows takes place in September.

Interviewees suggested the need for more detailed assistance to Fellows on specific USAID administrative and operational procedures relevant to their work. Much of this load now falls on STC's single support staff, although new fellows can also receive some help from second year Fellows who have learned the ropes. A central source of information and assistance is needed on which the fellows could depend.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Bureaus that buy into the fellowship program should include an additional small amount of money which would fund clerical support for these program funded fellows. The Bureaus' contribution for clerical support should be proportionate to the number of fellows placed in the respective Bureau.

C. Evaluation and Results Tracking

A variety of evaluation methods have been used to identify the results and impact of the research grants managed by STC. Evaluations have been initiated by grantees as well as by STC. Funded research has generated a number of licenses, journal articles and other peer publications in addition to leading to the creation of commercial products.

AAAS Fellows have a major role in making site visits to observe research activities. Fellows are valuable participants on evaluation teams. Unfortunately, STC staff have not been able to participate much on project evaluations due to lack of travel funds. Other USAID staff have occasionally been members of evaluation teams. These staff are a resource which might be tapped on a more regular basis, depending on future direction of funded research. Although contract staff can provide needed assistance in organizing evaluations, the interests of the Agency are best represented by direct hires. Sometimes USAID staff or Fellows are involved in these evaluations, but they tend to be unplanned and conducted on a fairly ad hoc basis. There is no annual evaluation plan in STC for CDR, CDP, or MERC. Objective assessments of grantee accomplishments are important to maintaining program quality. Recognizing frequent shifts in projects and their completion dates, STC should establish crosscutting priority areas for evaluation. These would complement and hopefully facilitate the required mid-term and end-of-project reviews.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Develop and implement a yearly project evaluation plan using a combination of fellow, direct hire and contractor resources.

Project results have been shared at peer conferences and workshops as well as in scientific publications. Although widely published in peer journals and research fora, the grant project results are less well known by Agency staff. When possible, STC staff and fellows have written summaries of significant research advances for distribution within the Agency. Despite the scientific importance of research results achieved, a few interview respondents did not believe these were relevant to the work of the Agency. These individuals feel that it is more crucial to fund research which could be readily applied in current programs versus funding research for the sake of research. STC will need to address these concerns in conjunction with issues regarding program focus and priorities and integration if increased involvement of Agency staff is desired. In the interim, regular circulation of the evaluation plan and project results could assist in building Agency awareness.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Incorporate summaries of project discoveries and project evaluations on STC HomePage currently being developed.

D. Program Office Support

The Office of Program Development and Strategic Planning (PDSP) serves as the staff office in the Global Bureau for strategic programmatic and oversight matters. It provides advice and support for overall strategic direction for the Bureau, ensures program integration, oversees the introduction of reengineering concepts throughout the Bureau, and works with Centers to monitor progress toward Bureau and Agency strategic objectives. PDSP tracks the overall Bureau budget and maintains those systems, processes PIO/Ts and OYB transfers, etc.

Each of the five centers in Global has its own Program Office support function. However, since STC is a staff unit attached to the Assistant Administrator's office, the question of where to turn for program office support continues to come up. Through the end of FY 1993, When the programs currently managed by STC were in HCD, STC was able to obtain help from that Center's program office. PDSP currently tracks the OYB transfer that is required in connection with administration of the AAAS program handled by STC. PDSP provides advice and support to the Bureau as a whole and they are there for STC when advice is needed. PDSP is not able, however, to provide ongoing program assistance for STC.

PDSP has been training an STC staff member (an agricultural economist) in areas associated with program support. This individual has been serving as the Acting Program Officer. This person assists with the budget for STC and has been responsible for coordinating the R2 and working on the Strategic Plan and Strategic Objectives for STC.

When the NMS comes on line, and other recommendations included in this report are adopted, it should alleviate some of the work associated with STC's project management. For example, as mentioned previously in this report, if a different funds disbursement mechanism for MERC were to be chosen, the need for program support to process PIO/Ts would be greatly reduced.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** STC should continue to take advantage of PDSP's willingness to train someone in the program support function. Additionally, STC should arrange training on the NMS for all staff with project management responsibilities.

E. Role of Contractor Support

Use of contractor services is critical to daily administration of STC's grant and technical assistance programs. Many of the tasks associated with managing and implementing these activities are labor intensive and time-consuming. Given STC's small staff, routine program support functions are most efficiently handled by a contractor with the necessary staff and technology. STC's contractors are responsible for maintaining and operating the systems which ensure adequate management and tracking of program paperwork and project status. In providing program support, contract staff liaise with grantees, technical experts, personnel overseas and other USAID offices. Assistance in the assessment and evaluation of proposals is also provided by contractor staff.

STC has three separate agreements which provide access to program and technical support. Each agreement is tailored to support a specific program and contains different levels of efforts based on the scope of work. Consolidation of contractor-provided program support has been an issue of great concern to the program managers since the programs were housed in the Center for Human Capacity Development (HCD). The transfer of the research programs to STC disrupted original plans to issue a consolidated scope of work. In addition to gaining cost efficiencies, consolidation of program support under one contract would

increase consistency in management and standards of quality of all programs. Complementary aspects of the individual programs could be better integrated under a single program support system.

Current contracts will need to be extended in order to provide continued support until a new contract can be issued. As a interim step to consolidation of contractor support, STC should extend only one of the current contracts and expand it as necessary to cover all projects. Contractor staff could assist in the adaptation and implementation of recommendations made in this report in addition to continuing to undertake tasks currently performed.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Initiate procurement action to consolidate program support activities for the research grants and technical assistance programs.

Centech - The current contractor for MERC, Centech, has only begun to organize the administrative framework for handling the program. Since the start of the contract in December 1995 much progress has been made but significant work to establish reliable project tracking and management systems still remains. Prior to the Centech contract, Winrock International provided technical assistance but their contract did not contain provisions for other program support activities. The team feels that the current contract is more appropriate for the heavy administrative workload inherent to MERC. A small technical assistance component is included in the current contract which provides necessary access to technical experts as needed.

Interviews confirmed the usefulness of preproposal and proposal analysis provided by Centech. Provision of this type of assistance should be continued in any subsequent contract.

Metrica - For several years Metrica has provided program support for the AAAS, PSTC and CDR programs. Over the years a number of databases, forms, tracking systems, etc . have been instituted to facilitate program management. Workloads attributable to these research activities were greater when the contract was originally signed with Metrica. Suspension of new grants under PSTC and reduced funding for CDR has led to a reduced level of effort. Although the original contract provided for 5 1/2 positions, it appears that Metrica is more than sufficiently staffed at 4 1/2 employees to handle the current work.

National Academy of Sciences -- Through a cooperative agreement with the NAS, the Agency has access to technical advice for all of its research activities. STC

obtains scientific support for some of its activities from the NAS. Expertise provided by NAS is considered to be high quality and cutting edge. Of those interviewed, most felt that NAS has a comparative advantage in terms of staff experience and breadth of institutional knowledge which may justify the cost of services provided.

The NAS provides assistance to STC in the review of grant proposals, project evaluations and review of scientific reports for CDR, CAST, and PSTC. Involvement of the NAS with the STC programs seems to lend credibility to the projects. Outside reviewers are also inspired to participate in peer reviews, pro bono, due to the professional prestige associated with the NAS.

Questions concerning definition of a future role for the NAS were raised during the review. There was general agreement among those interviewed that USAID needed to have access to the type of expertise offered by the NAS. Because consolidation of program support activities provided by contractors is cost effective, future agreements with scientific organizations could be limited to provision of advisory and expert services but these could be expanded to include provision of technical expertise for MERC. Although a number of private firms are capable of providing these kind of services, STC will need to weigh the added value to the development process of partnering with the NAS or other scientific groups.

F. Relationships with State Department and USAID Bureaus

STC staff have generally established good working relationships with other USAID Bureau and DOS counterparts. Communication between STC and other offices seems adequate to secure necessary clearance and approvals. Representatives from both the technical and regional units participate as requested in MERC project reviews and CDP program consultations. There is less active involvement of these staff in CDR and CAST due to the external peer review process used for these programs.

Even though regional and technical bureau staff can give input to certain STC decisions, they don't feel their influence is sufficient to encourage program focus on critical issues within their areas. Some Agency staff are deterred from involvement with STC's programs because they are scientific and difficult for most to understand.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** STC should host presentations, in conjunction with CDIE, which highlight and summarize project results in a way that is understandable to employees who do not have scientific backgrounds.

DOS relies on USAID's technical expertise regarding project decisions and seeks mainly to have input regarding political relevance/impact of proposed activities. Additionally, interviews indicated that DOS staff are concerned that USAID staff have not always consulted with them regarding use of program funds for contractor support. Closer consultations with DOS staff regarding these issues seems appropriate.

STC coordinates as appropriate with PPC. Each feels their responsibilities regarding research are clear to them, there is little, if any, duplication, and their working relationship is good.

G. Impact of Reengineering

STC is making progress in applying the principles of reengineering to their daily work. They have developed their two Strategic Objectives, the first being "Integration of improved information and communication technology into USAID development activities", and the second, "Improved application of science and technology by developing countries." Additionally, they have one Special Objective, "Increased understanding and collaboration among Middle Eastern countries and support to transition countries". However, some staff felt they were not included in the entire SO development process. This contributes to the perception that there is a lack of teamwork in the Office. It also contributes to the Office's lack of focus. Some are not sure where the Office's priorities lie.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** During the next cycle of drafting the Office's Strategic Objectives, all staff should participate as a team and have access to an approved strategic plan so goals and priorities are clear.

STC's efforts at customer service are laudable, and are evidenced by the responsiveness and quality of work that goes into the preproposal/proposal review process. Definition of the Office's Strategic Objectives is an important step towards managing for results. As part of its strategic planning exercise, STC must now also identify trackable performance indicators in order to judge progress on strategic objectives. STC staff seem "empowered" to undertake tasks necessary to accomplish their work but some staff don't feel they have adequate clerical or staff support of any kind. Empowerment and accountability for work assignments seems to cause some STC staff to be overly cautious. Information is kept very close, with little sharing unless absolutely necessary. This type of behavior is detrimental to the smooth functioning of the office. As mentioned earlier, improvement in the area of "teamwork " is needed.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** Organizing around SO teams is necessary to encourage greater cooperation, educate all staff about the different programs, and foster a team mindset.

Much of the reengineering effort is focused on the application of technology to improve the Agency's management systems and to track results. In addition to the NMS, Agency staff must be able to use automation and communications technology to operate effectively in the changed environment. Beside NMS training, STC staff could benefit from training on E-mail, Windows, and the Internet.

☞ **RECOMMENDATION:** In conjunction with yearly workplan development, STC staff should assess individual computer training needs and include areas for improvement in Individual Development Plan (IDP). Progress in automation skills development should be evaluated as part of performance cycle.

III. CONCLUSION

Management of the STC programs is labor intensive and at times unwieldy. Use of an integrated management system which incorporates the unique needs of the separate programs, yet treats similar aspects comparably, will enable STC to capture multiple efficiencies. By maximizing complementary aspects of these activities STC can expect to achieve greater program integration. If adapted, system reforms recommended in this report will lead to a better balance in workload distribution, enhanced program quality and integrity and cost savings. STC's ability to secure these efficiencies becomes more important as staff and funding resources are constrained. As programs such as PSTC and CAST close out, STC will be able to redirect staff capacity to its larger ongoing activities. Transfer of certain management responsibilities, where feasible, will further reduce workloads and support the development of an effective management framework. Consolidation of contractor services to provide program support is critical to the establishment of more efficient management processes.

Despite the high political visibility of these programs, the STC research grants and technical assistance activities have made a number of positive contributions to the Agency's development objectives. Improvements in the management systems will enable STC to have an even greater development impact.

IV. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

-- STC should eliminate supervisory responsibilities below the AAA level and organize as a team to accomplish work requirements.

-- Meet with DOS to determine feasibility of expanding current MOU for CDR program to include MERC, with the intention that DOS field staff will handle grant funds disbursement and financial management.

-- Contractor should undertake full range of program support activities associated with MERC program management, as is the case for CDR.

-- In the technical review of preproposals/proposals, greater use of expertise from Fellows elsewhere in the Agency should be pursued.

-- STC must ensure that Fellows continue to be treated in strict compliance with Agency policies regarding fellowship programs (General Notice dated 9/18/95 "Appropriate Use and Funding of USAID's Non-Direct Hire Workforce", and General Notice dated 7/8/96 "Implementation of Policy Guidance Concerning Fellows").

-- Evaluations should be planned more explicitly and greater attention given to appropriate roles for direct hires and Fellows.

-- When individuals begin their Fellowship with the Agency and attend orientation, a greater amount of time should be spent on the Agency's administrative practices. Such training should be included as part of the orientation briefing required by the 07/08/96 General Notice "Implementation of Policy Guidance Concerning Fellows".

-- In connection with implementation of recommended changes contained in this report, the AAA should determine support staff priority duties and advise support staff of limitations on responses to non-priority requests from STC and HCD. Additionally, her telephone number should be taken off CDR Guidelines, and the appropriate project manager or the contractor should be listed.

-- As part of its strategic planning, STC should assess the value of sharpening priorities of the CDR program to encourage activities which complement USAID goals and have country development priorities.

- CDR's technical database should be updated and expanded to include additional reviewers from institutions outside of Washington, D.C. Staff should increase use of Internet to help diversify review pool and input on proposal evaluations.

- A greater effort should be made to involve and obtain input from appropriate Agency personnel in the CDR proposal review process especially during considerations of development impact.

- Revise MERC program guidelines to be more instructional to proposal offerors and issue new guidelines prior to next program funding cycle.

- Determine acceptable lengths for preproposal versus full proposal submissions, keeping in mind that the preproposal review is intended to be a preliminary assessment of the general concept, and incorporate new requirements into MERC program guidelines.

- Earlier in the MERC preproposal process, greater effort should be made to identify and reject unacceptable project ideas based on revised guidelines.

- The current system of reviewing MERC preproposals and proposal submission on an ad hoc basis should be restructured to achieve a better distribution of the workload throughout the fiscal year.

- That STC initiate a limited preproposal review process for MERC based on program criteria and revised guidelines as a step prior to the full proposal review.

- A standard progressive program review and funding cycle should be established for MERC which supports completion of funding decisions prior to, or early in the fiscal year.

- Evaluation/scoring sheets to simplify, standardize and institutionalize MERC proposal review procedures and capture meeting results should be developed and used.

- Designate and implement consistent, standardized system for decisionmaking, and keeping records of those decisions, during MERC proposal reviews.

- Formalize MERC Review Committee structure by identifying members of the Committee and their decisionmaking authorities. Additionally, a Chairperson should be identified who does not have direct project management responsibilities in order to prevent any appearance of bias.

- Regularize distribution of selected MERC reports to Agency and Mission staff based on geographic or technical relevance. Discuss with MASHAV feasibility of submitting additional copies of reports to accomplish necessary distribution.

- Bureaus that buy into the fellowship program should include an additional small amount of money which would fund clerical support for these program funded fellows. The Bureaus' contribution for clerical support should be proportionate to the number of Fellows placed in the respective Bureau.

- Develop and implement a yearly project evaluation plan using a combination of Fellow, direct hire and contractor resources.

- Incorporate summaries of project discoveries and project evaluations on STC HomePage currently being developed.

- STC should continue to take advantage of PDSP's willingness to train someone in the program support function. Additionally, STC should arrange training on the NMS for all staff with project management responsibilities.

- Initiate procurement action to consolidate program support activities for the research grants and technical assistance programs.

- STC should host presentations, in conjunction with CDIE, which highlight and summarize project results in a way that is understandable to employees who do not have scientific backgrounds.

- During the next cycle of drafting the Office's Strategic Objectives, all staff should participate as a team and have access to an approved strategic plan so goals and priorities are clear.

- Organizing around SO teams is necessary to encourage greater cooperation, educate all staff about the different programs, and foster a team mindset.

-- In conjunction with yearly workplan development, STC staff should assess individual computer training needs and include areas for improvement in Individual Development Plans (IDP). Progress in automation skills development should be evaluated as part of performance cycle.

SCOPE OF WORK - STC MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Purpose

M/MPI has been asked to conduct a review of the management processes and systems used for G/STC's small research grants and technical assistance programs. The purpose of this review is to evaluate the work processes and identify administrative arrangements which will contribute to improved workload distribution and management efficiency. Each element of the management framework will be analyzed, from preproposal submission through program evaluation. This analysis will include an examination of the various roles of direct-hire staff, contractor support and outside technical experts.

Background

The Global Bureau's Science, Technology and Communications Staff (STC) is responsible for managing a number of small research grants and a program of technical assistance. Most of the new funding for these programs comes from other USAID Bureaus. Management responsibility for some of these activities was transferred to the Global Bureau at the end of FY 1994, others were inherited from the R&D Bureau. STC uses a combination of USAID staff, contractors, and technical experts to manage these programs. Some activities are jointly managed with the Israeli aid agency (MASHAV), a department of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv.

While there are similarities in program implementation and the issues/needs that arise, the management process for each is dependent on different assigned staff and contractor resources. All of these activities have now been combined in one office for management purposes and staff resources are declining. As a result, STC management would like to achieve organizational and systems efficiencies which would make optimum use of available direct-hire staff while ensuring the integrity of these programs, consistency of standards and high program quality.

It should be noted that while some programs are gradually phasing out, demand for project grants has increased yearly resulting in increased workloads for both direct-hire and contractor staff, even as resources shrink. Requests for technical assistance have also expanded.

Methodology

The study team will carry out the analysis using traditional management analysis approaches including interview, document research and analysis, and workflow analysis techniques. The study team will report to the Associate Assistant Administrator, STC.

Statement of Work

M/MPI will initiate a review of STC's management systems for its scientific research and technical assistance programs. Programs included in this review are the Cooperative Development Program (CDP), Cooperative Development Research (CDR), Middle East Regional Cooperation Program (MERC), the Cooperation in Applied Science and Technology (CAST) and Program and Science Technology Cooperation (PSTC) programs. To accomplish this review, the following work will be performed:

1. Interviews with STC staff, select Bureau and Agency staff as well as contractor and cooperating agency representatives, and possibly U.S. Embassy staff.

2. Review of related studies and background information.

3. Analysis of steps in operational process including: preproposal and proposal submission, technical review, project selection, grant award, project implementation and evaluation. The system of consultations/clearances with other interested agency offices, MASHAV and State will also be reviewed. Comparison across programs will be completed as part of this analysis to determine consistency with Agency reengineering principles, including teamwork, customer service, accountability and empowerment.

4. Evaluation of use of outside resources in program management, specifically, technical and staff support provided by contractors and cooperating organizations and cooperative arrangements with the Government of Israel.

M/MPI Team Responsibilities

The MPI Team will consist of two management analysts on a full-time basis and one on a part-time basis. The MPI team will have primary responsibility for coordinating and carrying out this activity and producing agreed upon deliverables.

STC Responsibilities

STC will ensure that staff are available as needed for interviews and to provide pertinent background documents. STC will assist MPI in contacts with its contractors and counterpart organizations. STC management will review and provide feedback on the draft report within the timeframe specified below.

Term of Performance and Deliverables

This activity will begin on or about April 29, 1996. A draft report will be delivered 6-8 weeks after commencement of the study. A final report will be delivered within a two week period after STC management has reviewed the draft report.

INTERVIEW LIST

G/DAA
Ann Van Dusen
G/AA/STC
John Daly (CDR, CAST, AAAS, PSTC)
Edward Lijewski (CDP and MERC)
Jiryis Oweis
Brian Bock, AAAS Fellow
David O'Brien, AAAS Fellow
Leslie Johnston, AAAS Fellow
Raghu Kacher, COMSCI Fellow
Kimberley Krehely, COMSCI Fellow
Vicky Ose
G/AMS
Drina Shuler
G/PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING (PDSP)
Dave Erbe
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OVERSEAS
Israel
Egypt
Kazakhstan

STC Management Review Questions

(NOTE: Questions were tailored to the individuals interviewed, whether within STC or outside.)

A. WORKLOAD DISTRIBUTION/STAFFING

QUESTION: Describe which activities you are responsible for and what your duties entail.

1. Which projects are you responsible for in the office? What aspects of project management do you handle?

2. How much time would you estimate that you spend on each project? What percentage of your time is spent on administrative tasks versus substantive programmatic work?

3. Who is responsible for project monitoring, ongoing liaison with awardee? What type of reporting is required? To whom?

4. What aspects/part of the process are the most labor intensive? Why? What could be done to simplify this part of the process or how could the workload be redistributed and to who?

B. PROGRAM OFFICE SUPPORT

QUESTION: Describe the role of the Bureau's Program Office in your day-to-day work.

5. What level of support do you receive from the Bureau program office? What type of additional assistance do you need from the Program Office?

C. ROLE OF OUTSIDE/CONTRACTOR SUPPORT

QUESTION: Describe the role of individuals who support you in your work, whether they are Fellows, institutional contractors, technical experts, Israeli counterparts, or other government officials.

6. What type of contractor and/or fellow support is available to assist you? Who assists you and what do they do? When and how are the fellow assignments

determined? Is there additional work that would be appropriate for the contractors or fellows to handle? Do you feel there are more, or different, types of activities that could be performed by the institutional contractors?

7. How is funding for fellows, contractors and technical experts allocated? Who supervises/oversees their work? When in the process are staffing levels for these resources determined? Are there shifts during the year?

8. How and when are technical experts used. Is there an established system for identifying and selecting these experts?

9. What is the nature of interaction/working relationship with MASHAV, Israeli Embassy? What is the scope of cooperative agreements with the Government of Israel? What type of consultation/clearance is required from the Israeli Embassy or Government of Israel?

D. RELATIONSHIPS

QUESTION: Describe your relationships with those outside the Bureau who are involved in your program, such as State, OP, Regional Bureaus, etc.

10. How and when are the Regional Bureaus involved in the process? What other agency staff provide input or undertake action related to management and implementation of the grants and technical assistance programs? i.e procurement, State. Are these interactions productive and efficient to handle the necessary tasks?

11. What is the clearance process associated with the management of the program? For what actions do the State Department and Regional Bureaus provide clearance?

E. DECISION MAKING AND COMMUNCIATIONS

QUESTION: Do you feel the lines of communication are sufficient to allow for informed decisions?

12. Who are the parties involved with decisionmaking related to the programs? What is their role and at what stage in process?

13. What are the lines of communication, internally and externally? Is there a routine system for clear communications which support informed decisions? Is the level and nature of communication with senior management sufficient and effective?

F. REENGINEERING

QUESTION: Are you familiar with the precepts of the Agency's new reengineered systems and ways of doing business and what has been their impact on your daily work?

14. In line with the principles of reengineering, specifically empowerment and accountability, do you feel that the necessary authorities have been delegated to the appropriate levels to support a responsive and efficient management system? If not, what authorities need to be redelegated and to whom?

15. Are you familiar with the precepts of the Agency's reengineered program operations system? What impact do you believe they will have on the work of your office? What more needs to be done to bring STC in line with the reengineered systems?

G. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT (For each program)

QUESTION: Describe the process for managing a research or technical assistance program.

16. Please describe the solicitation process for preproposals? On average, how many preproposals do you receive?

17. What is the decisionpoint for reviewing the preproposals and requesting a full proposal? Who is involved in this initial review? How would you rate the quality of research proposals received? On average, how long does the review process take? Do you think too much time, or not enough time, is spent on the review process? Can you suggest ways to speed/simplify the proposal review process without sacrificing quality of the programs?

18. How is the technical review coordinated? How are participants selected for the technical review? How often are these reviews held? Can you explain why some activities that appear similar are treated differently? For instance, CDR proposals are peer reviewed by the NAS while MERC is done in-house.

19. Describe the decisionmaking process for selecting and funding a research project or technical assistance program. How are priorities for funding decided? How are funding levels for each activity determined. How is funding provided to awardee? Grants, subgrants? What is the average length of time for award funding?

20. Are there bottlenecks that you routinely encounter in managing these programs?

What steps can be taken to remove these bottlenecks?

21. When are program/project evaluations conducted? Who conducts evaluation? What have been some of the findings of these evaluations? (get copies)

22. In general, do you have any ideas for streamlining or simplifying any of the activities or processes that the Staff is involved in?

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

1. MERC

   a. Guidelines for Prelininary and Invited Proposals (MERC)
   b. Summary of Active and Approved Projects
   c. Review of the Middle East Regional Program, Devres, Inc., February 6, 1991
   d. Planned FY 1996 Obligation Actions

2. CDR/CAR

   a. Report - December, 1993, Office of Research, USAID - The U.S.-Israel Cooperative Development Research Program
   b. Guidelines for Preproposal submission
   c. Preproposal Review Form
   d. Proposal Review Guidelines
   e. Report - January, 1994 - Review and Assessment Report of the AID/Israel Cooperative Development Program prepared by Management systems International

3. CDP

   a. Cooperative Program Agreement Amendment No. 8
   b. Annual USAID-MASHAV Consultations on the Cooperative Development Program - February 20-23, 1996
   c. Executive 1995 Up-date and planned activities for 1996. Report - for the CDP Annual Consultations on FY 1995 and 1996.

4. AAAS

   a. Grant Agreement with the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences dated August 31, 1995

5. PSTC

   a. Report - June, 1992, Office of Research, USAID - Cutting Edge Research for Development, the AID Program in Science and Technology Cooperation

6. CAST

a. Cooperation in Applied Science and Technology (CAST) Program Factsheet and Application Instructions - 1995/96
b. Draft Assessment of the Cooperation in Applieid Science and Technology -1992-19996, National Research Council

OTHER:

- STC Staffing Pattern

- USAID General Notice - Policy - Appropriate Use and Funding of USAID'S Non-Direct Hire Workforce, September 18, 1995

- USAID General Notice - Policy - Implementation of Policy Guidance Concerning Fellows, July 8, 1996

- M/MPI Study dated April 13, 1995 - Limited Review of Global and Regional Bureau Technical Resources

- Memorandum - AA/M, Larry Byrne to the Deputy Administrator - Subject: Distribution of Responsibilities for Research

- Office of Federal procurement Policy (OFPP) Policy Letter 92-1, "Inherently Governmental Functions"

Appendix E

Mission Staff Questionnaire for STC Management Review

G/STC has requested the Management Bureau to conduct a review of the management processes and systems used for G/STC's small research grants and technical assistance programs. The purpose of this review is to evaluate work processes and identify administrative arrangements which will contribute to improved workload distribution and management efficiency.

As part of this review we are asking staff in several missions and the Embassy in Tel Aviv to respond to the following questionnaire. Please email or fax your responses to Colleen Allen, M/MPI/MC by COB June 27, 1996. Ms. Allen's fax number is (202) 736-7189. Any questions regarding the questionnaire or this management review should be directed to Ms. Allen. Ms. Allen may also be contacted by telephone on (202)647-2172. Thank you for your responses.

Please answer the following questions based on your involvement with the programs listed below. Please indicate which program(s) you are familiar with in your comments.

Program in Science and Technology Cooperation (PSTC)
Cooperative Development Program (CDP)
Cooperative Development Research (CDR)
Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC)
Cooperative Applied Science and Technology Program (CAST)

1. Does the structure and timing of the review/approval process for these programs enable field staff to have adequate input to decisions on project awards? Please rate the review/approval process on a scale of 1-5 (1=poor and 5=excellent) and give reason(s) for the rating. What changes to the process would you recommend?

2. Is the system of communication between the Mission and STC sufficient to keep field staff informed about ongoing projects and their results? Please rate the communication system on a scale of 1-5 (1=poor and 5=excellent) and give reason(s) for the rating. Have project results complemented mission strategic objectives? How can the system of communication be enhanced?

3. What are the key issues/problems you have experienced or see in the operation of any of the programs? What are the advantages of how implemented systems work?

4. In general, do you have recommendations for simplifying or improving the management of any of these programs?

RECOMMENDED PROGRAM SUPPORT FUNCTIONS TO BE PERFORMED BY CONTRACTOR

FUNCTION	MERC	CDR/CAR	CDP
Maintains paper files, guidelines, forms, etc.	X	X	X
Assists with general correspondence	X	X	X
Logs in preproposals	X	X	
Maintains log of preproposal status	X	X	
Manages logistics of preproposal review	X	X	
Find outside advice on preproposals	X	X	
Participate in preproposal review	X	X	
Manages mailing of responses to preproposals	X	X	
Manages database on consultants	X	X	
Maintains log of invited/ received proposals	X	X	

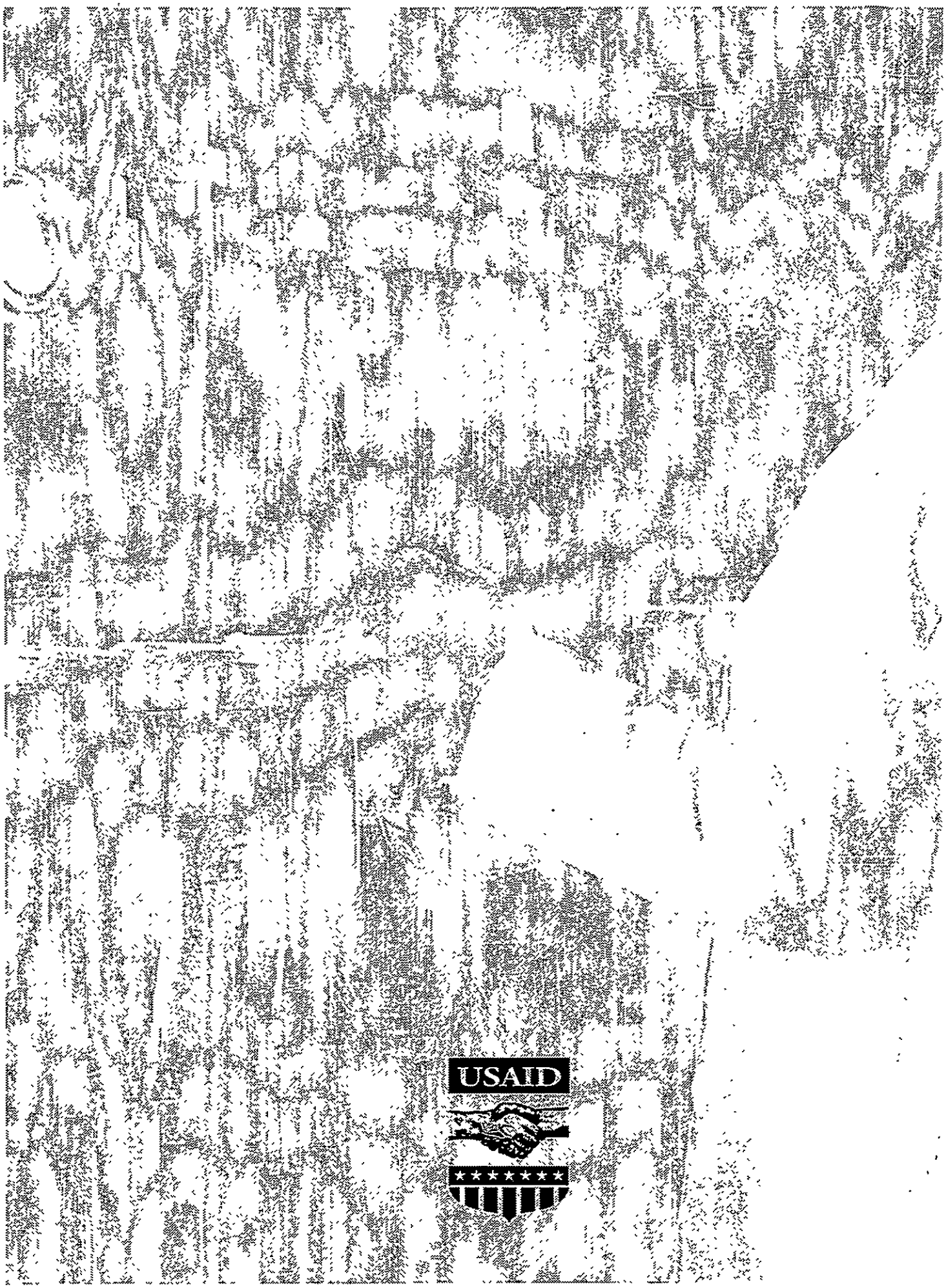
	MERC	CDR/CAR	CDP
Help organize proposal peer reviews	X	X	
Mails packages to reviewers	X	X	
Host proposal reviews	X	X	
Seek mail reviews	X	X	
Prepare summaries of panel reviews	X	X	
Participate in the evaluation of the reviews	X	X	
Manages mailing of responses to proposals	X	X	
Manages mailing of thank yous to reviewers	X	X	
Mails results of reviews to Missions	X	X	
Maintains database on recommended projects	X	X	
Assists in allocation of funds to proposals	X	X	
Assists in drafting MOU/grant agreement	X	X	

	MERC	CDR/CAR	CDP
Maintains database on funded projects	X	X	
Helps prepare PIO/T(s)	X	X	
Maintains log of reports and reviews them	X	X	X
Drafts correspondence following reports	X	X	
Logs in Vouchers	X	X	
Assists in verifying vouchers for payment	X	X	
Drafts correspondence related to vouchers	X	X	
Conducts Analyses	X	X	
Develop and implement yearly project evaluation plan	X	X	
Preparation for Site visits	X	X	
Participate in evaluations	X	X	
Develop and manage calendar for reviews and funding cycles	X	X	

	MERC	CDR/CAR	CDP
Write summaries of project discoveries	X	X	
Announcement of courses available	X	X	
Assist in coordination of the Annual Consultation			X

NOTE: For the remaining active PSTC projects the contractor will provide the appropriate program support services

For MERC, the following additional tasks should be undertaken: 1) Revise Program Guidelines, and 2) Prepare Review Scoring Sheets.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