
THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES (NAS)

FACTS

Date Started: 1863

Charter

To meet the government's urgent need for an independent adviser on scientific matters, President Lincoln signed a congressional charter forming the National Academy of Sciences in 1863 to "investigate, examine, experiment, and report upon any subject of science."

Products/Deliverables

- Published Consensus Reports,
- Journals,
- Periodicals, and
- Education Outreach Programs.

MISSION

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine are trusted and valuable resources for independent, expert advice -- not only for Congress and the federal government, but also for state and local government agencies, nonprofit institutions and foundations, and others. Those who request a study depend upon our reputation for independence and unique ability to bring together leading experts, weigh the evidence, and produce reports that inform sound policies and educate the public. "The nation's pre-eminent source of high-quality, objective advice on science, engineering, and health matters."

BENEFIT AND USE OF FINDINGS

Government agencies may need independent reviews of their programs or guidance on future research efforts. Congress or the administration may want an assessment of the latest scientific evidence before making policy decisions. Nongovernmental organizations or nonprofits may want to raise awareness about the science behind certain issues. Other sponsors provide fundamental support for ongoing activities. Although we are best known for our consensus studies, sponsors may choose to support a variety of projects or activities to meet their needs, including:

- Workshops that bring together leading experts and interested parties;
- Indepth roundtables and standing committees that meet regularly and provide ongoing guidance on particular subjects;
- Cooperative research programs, through which government agencies and other potential users of research have a direct role in the types of projects selected for study; and,
- Fellowship programs, and awards to recognize outstanding achievement in science, engineering, and medicine.

SUBJECT AREAS

Most work is conducted through 7 major programs:

- Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education
- Earth and Life Studies
- Engineering and Physical Sciences
- Institute of Medicine
- Policy and Global Affairs
- Transportation Research Board
- NAS Gulf Research Program

A relevant consensus report example is the *Independent Scientific Review of the Everglades Restoration Progress*.

COMMITTEE

All committee members serve as individual experts, not as representatives of organizations or interest groups. Each member is expected to contribute to the project on the basis of his or her own expertise and good judgment. A committee is not finally approved until a thorough balance and conflict-of-interest discussion is held at the first meeting, and any issues raised in that discussion or by the public are investigated and addressed.

Staff select members in order to form a committee that has

- (1) an appropriate range of expertise for the task;
- (2) a balance of perspectives; and,
- (3) screened for conflicts of interest.

Specific steps in the committee selection and approval process are as follows:

- Staff solicit suggestions for potential committee members then recommend a slate of nominees.
- Nominees are reviewed and approved at several levels within the Academies; a provisional slate is then approved by the president of the National Academy of Sciences.
- The provisional committee list is posted for public comment.
- The provisional committee members complete background information and conflict-of-interest disclosure forms.
- Any conflicts of interest or issues of committee balance and expertise are investigated; changes to the committee are proposed and finalized.

OVERSIGHT

Each committee is overseen by Board staff. As a final check on the quality and objectivity of the study, all Academies reports whether products of studies, summaries of workshop proceedings, or other documents must undergo a rigorous, independent external review by experts whose comments are provided anonymously to the committee members. The Academies recruit independent experts with a range of views and perspectives to review and comment on the draft report prepared by the committee. The review process is structured to ensure that each report addresses its approved study charge and does not go beyond it, that the findings are supported by the scientific evidence and arguments presented, that the exposition and organization are effective, and that the report is impartial and objective. Each committee must respond to, but need not agree with, reviewer comments that is examined by report review "monitors" responsible for ensuring that the report review criteria have been satisfied. Sponsors are not given an opportunity to suggest changes in reports.

FUNDING SOURCES

Several funding options are available to sponsors. These include contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and purchase orders. A project may have one or several sponsors. Federal sponsors interested in having the Academies conduct a study can obtain their services on a sole source basis because of their unique origins and status. The Academies do not compete for federal contracts. Grants, contracts, and gifts from states, foundations, individuals, and other sources also enable us to address critical issues on behalf of the nation.

Q: how long does it take a consensus report to be completed?

A: A typical timeline is 18 months to 2 years for a consensus report.

THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

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