



February 9, 2017

Robert Kavlock, PhD
Acting Assistant Administrator
Office of Research and Development
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Dear Bob,

This letter is to provide you with the observations and comments of the Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC) on social science integration into EPA research based on our meeting in Research Triangle Park (RTP), Raleigh-Durham, NC, held January 11-13, 2017.

The integration of social science is essential for addressing the environmental and health challenges that are the focal points of ORD's National Programs. We applaud ORD's strong commitment to this mission and the leadership you provide for the Agency as a whole. While ORD's social science integration initiatives to date are impressive and ambitious, we suggest that weaving in the dynamic and complex nature of social dimensions into ongoing environmental and health science efforts will require long-term commitment and patience. Interdisciplinarity is inherently challenging and requires major shifts in thinking and learning as well as practice. We also note that not every project in ORD needs or would benefit from the integration of social sciences. ORD already produces impressive and impactful research in the more traditional sciences. The addition of social sciences in an integrative fashion is intended to enhance the good research that already takes place, and can serve as a coordination point across ORD. We highlight four major points related to the issue of social science integration that we observed.

First, we are delighted and strongly support the appointment of Dr. Bryan Hubbell to the newly created position of Senior Advisor focused on social sciences. Dr. Hubbell has a great knowledge of and enthusiasm for the uses of social science and how it can improve EPA research. His charge to create the capacity and infrastructure to support social science integration in research reflects ORD's commitment to the social sciences. His White Paper that lays out a framework for how to meet this charge has been reviewed by two of our members and they not only found it very thoughtful, they encourage it to be finalized and widely

disseminated to the EPA research community. By creating this Senior Social Science Advisor position, ORD has positioned critical leadership for the road ahead.

Second, we are pleased with the design and implementation of the workshop (“Social Science Bootcamp”) held on October 4-5, 2016 in RTP. Two BOSC members, Courtney Flint (University of Utah) and Robert Richardson (Michigan State University), designed and led the workshop. They were pleased with the level of engagement and interest of the scientists that attended, as well as the integration of workshop content into Cross-Cutting Roadmaps and other National Program efforts described in subsequent interactions. **We recommend that the Draft Workshop Summary be finalized as a shorter Executive Summary to be subsequently disseminated to the research community in EPA. Further, we recommend that similar workshops be provided for other audiences within EPA, such as the other National Programs, and Regional and Program Office scientific staff.**

Third, we note that while the integration of social science is still nascent within ORD, there is already a comfort level within the National Program leadership of having contributions of social scientists at all stages of research design, including the critical starting point of problem formulation. This seems the case across each of the National Programs as well as the crosscutting programs. This cultural shift needs to be nurtured and encouraged and we believe that BOSC can play a role in this. The Air, Climate and Energy (ACE) program has deeply engaged the integration of social science in the past two years and the BOSC subcommittee review in 2016 focused on this topic. **We recommend that all of the other research programs determine priority research areas where social science can be most effectively integrated, and engage BOSC as needed to review these efforts.** Within the coming year, **we specifically recommend that BOSC review the SHC program’s efforts to integrate social science** as part of their annual review cycle, since they are also making progress with integration. Sharing the successes and lessons learned would benefit all national research programs.

The Social Environmental Science Exchange (SESE) established in 2016 is a promising vehicle for providing internal dialogue on the integration of social science in EPA research. **We recommend that BOSC review this program for meeting ORD’s needs.**

In short, we commend your significant efforts in this area and stand ready and eager to encourage further progress in this important aspect of your research programs.

Sincerely,



Deborah L. Swackhamer, PhD
Chair, Board of Scientific Counselors