

Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board Adapts To Engage - 16459

Belinda Price and David Hemelright

Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board

ABSTRACT

Environmental Management (EM) Site Specific Advisory Boards (SSABs) are representative of their communities and exist for the purpose of advising DOE EM. As such they are the conduits between the public and the DOE EM. To remain relevant to the community they cannot exist in a vacuum and the public needs to be aware of the Boards' function, purpose, and progress and have opportunities for input. Since the SSABs generally deal with fairly complex issues related to environmental cleanup, and the members of the Boards represent a diversity of background, there are many challenges associated with informing and eliciting input from Board members as well as informing and engaging the public. To that end, Oak Ridge SSAB (ORSSAB) has instituted changes to facilitate Board and public engagement.

As the ORSSAB has matured and the work has become routine, it has become a challenge to keep members interested and invested. So the Board asks its members to provide input on how to make the process better. Through our annual member surveys and facilitated meetings, we query the board for ideas, and the results of these surveys and meetings are discussed at the annual planning meetings. Agreed changes are instituted in the following year. Recently the ORSSAB has instituted positive changes in the meeting structure, locations, and content. There are fewer formal meetings and these meetings are shorter. The board has also incorporated field trips to specific sites prior to presentations on those areas to further enhance membership understanding of the problems at hand, site conditions, and enormity and scope of the work to be undertaken. Changes of meeting location have occurred. Instead of the standard meeting room, the ORSSAB has met at local restaurants (in private rooms) where food service is available, and the atmosphere is more relaxed and informal. This gives members an opportunity to interact with each other rather than sitting in designated places at a formal meeting with video cameras rolling. Not only are the members more at ease, the presenters are more relaxed in their response to questions. Open discussion sessions have also been added to the meeting agendas.

The ORSSAB participates in both public outreach and public engagement. Public outreach activities have included: presentations to local citizens groups; televising meetings on public access cable channels in three local communities; publishing *The Advocate*, a quarterly newsletter; and recently setting up and maintaining a Facebook page. Activities related to public engagement included the Board's participation at a DOE-sponsored community budget workshop.

The ORSSAB strives for value and relevancy, attempting to convey a clear message to the community and to DOE. It also strives to inform its membership in a way that allows for clarity of understanding, and above all it tries to be enjoyable to its membership. The

ORSSAB listens to its membership and has evolved its process to allow for effective advocacy.

INTRODUCTION

The Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board (ORSSAB) is a federally appointed citizens' panel that provides advice and recommendations to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management (OREM). The group was formed in 1995 and is chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act [1]. The ORSSAB is representative of its community and it exists for the purpose of advising DOE OREM. As such it is the conduit between the public and the DOE OREM. To maintain the participation of its membership and to engage the public in its mission the ORSSAB has recently has evolved its process to allow for effective advocacy.

THE ORSSAB

Mission Of The ORSSAB

The Mission of the ORSSAB is to *"provide informed advice and recommendations concerning site specific issues related to the...DOE's...EM Program at the [Oak Ridge Reservation]. In order to provide unbiased evaluation and recommendations on the cleanup efforts related to the Oak Ridge site, the Board seeks opportunities for input through collaborative dialogue with the communities surrounding the [ORR], governmental regulators, and other stakeholders"* [1].

The Board over its lifetime has provided 229 recommendations to DOE OREM at the ORR. Most recently the Board made a recommendation on the Preferred Alternative for the Proposed Plan for Water Treatment at Outfall 200 at Y-12 National Security Complex, supporting the DOE's recommended alternative.

Make Up of the ORSSAB

The Board is composed of up to 22 members, chosen to reflect the diversity of gender, race, occupation, views, and interests of persons living near the ORR. Members must be American citizens and they are appointed by DOE and serve on a voluntary basis, without compensation [1] for 2-year terms with a maximum of three terms. The board is presently made up of 7 women and 12 men with varied backgrounds and education that are invaluable to the board in developing recommendations and board operations:

- The Board currently consists of members from five counties surrounding the ORR: Anderson, Blount, Knox, Loudon, and Roane.
- The Board represents a diversity of technical background and knowledge of the DOE OREM mission, including personnel with advanced degrees in disciplines such as radiation protection, engineering, geology, hydrology, and chemistry. We have retired ORNL employees, retired clean-up contractor employees, retired educators, and one distinguished professor from the University of Tennessee. In addition we have one member who is Chief of Staff for the local county Mayor; personnel with education and backgrounds in the medical and legal fields; and personnel with construction and facility maintenance, transportation, and logistics backgrounds.

- The ethnic background of the board members is varied and we have a diversity of national origin including members being born in Great Britain, Jamaica, and China.

Non-voting liaisons include representatives from DOE OREM, the EPA Region 4, and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC). These members advise the Board on their agency's policies and views. The board, to be effective and unbiased, must be open to communication at all levels from local citizens and environmental groups, state and federal regulators, as well as the DOE OREM team. It is of utmost importance that the DOE Deputy Designated Federal Officer and her alternate for the board keeps the board apprised of all ongoing activities because an informed board makes better decisions. The ORSSAB considers itself fortunate that the representatives from DOE OREM, EPA Region 4, and TDEC participate fully in our Board meetings and provide full and open communication. Two non-voting student representatives also serve on the Board to represent the viewpoints and concerns of area youth.

EVOLUTION OF THE BOARD PROCESS

There are many challenges associated with informing and eliciting input from Board members as well as informing and engaging the public. To that end, ORSSAB has instituted changes to facilitate Board and public engagement.

Engaging the Board

Since the only requirements to being a Board member are citizenship and interest, in order to maintain an energized Board, its members have to be interested enough in its process to remain engaged on a regular basis. As the ORSSAB has matured and the work has become routine, it has become a challenge to keep members interested and invested. So the Board asks its members to provide input on how to make the process better. This is affected through our annual member surveys and facilitated meetings. At these focused meetings we query the board for ideas and the results of these surveys and meetings are discussed at the annual planning meetings with agreed changes instituted in the following year.

Some of these changes have taken time to evolve. Committees in particular have changed over time to reflect the emphasis of board operations. In 1998 there were ten committees:

- Budget & Prioritization – the purpose was to develop an understanding of the DOE Oak Ridge EM budget, prioritization, and sequencing.
- End Use – this served as a link between the board and the End Use Working Group, which the board established to study future uses of contaminated areas of the Oak Ridge Reservation.
- East Tennessee Technology Park (ETTP) Remediation & Reindustrialization – this committee was developed to understand DOE Activities concerning remediation and reindustrialization at the ETTP (the former Oak Ridge Gaseous Diffusion Plant) and serve as a focal point for public involvement.
- Federal Facility Agreement (FFA) Appendix E Documents – this committee acted as a focal point for stakeholder review and comment on Appendix E documents which were the enforceable milestones in the FFA.

- Equity Issues – the purpose of this committee was to develop an understanding of issues related to how DOE conducts activities across the DOE complex.
- Public Outreach – this committee provided a communication link between the board and the public.
- Technology Development and Deployment – this committee was formed to develop an understanding of DOE technologies in development or in experimental deployment.
- Waste Cell Management – the purpose of this committee was to study the on-site waste disposal cell being considered at the time.
- Bylaws – this committee provided recommendations to the board concerning amending bylaws.
- Executive Committee – this committee consisted of the Board officers and committee leaders. The goal was to set the general administrative agenda for the board and to coordinate committee teams' work.

By 2003 the number of committees had been reduced to six:

- Board Finance – this committee was responsible for budget prioritization and control for the board.
- Board Process – this committee served as the board's forum for initial debate on issues involving board process. Scope included bylaws, standing rules, board meeting structure, and standards and formats for submitting recommendations.
- EM – the purpose of this committee was to evaluate and make recommendations on DOE' planning and implementation of ORR environmental restoration and treatment storage, disposal, and transportation of wastes.
- Executive – this committee was unchanged.
- Public Outreach – this committee was unchanged.
- Stewardship – the purpose of this committee was to make recommendations on long-term stewardship of areas where contamination is remediated in place.

The Finance and Process committees were merged in 2008 and the other committees remained in place, with the addition of a few ad-hoc committees until recently. At the 2013 Annual Planning Meeting there was discussion on the lack of involvement in committees. It was decided that it was not possible to require participation in committees therefore the Board gradually instituted changes in the number and focus of committees over a number of years that have resulted in all functions being covered adequately by Board members. The EM and Stewardship Committees were combined into one with joint committee chairs. The Process and Finance Committee was retooled to focus on process only and its meetings were reduced to quarterly, and the duties of the Public Outreach Committee were transferred to the Executive Board. This has resulted in all functions being covered adequately by Board members with no Board member being unduly burdened.

In advance of the Annual Planning Meeting in 2014, Board members were asked to provide their ideas or suggestions about Board structure, operations, and/or processes and to provide any thoughts about the ways they can be improved.

One of the outcomes of the 2014 Annual Planning Meeting was the desire to experiment with holding a couple of meetings in local restaurants. To that end the Board held one

facilitated planning meeting in Knoxville and on another occasion held one meeting at a restaurant in Oak Ridge where the Oak Ridge City Manager provided the city's perspective on DOE OREM work on the ORR. Although the meeting was in a private room at the restaurant, it was still open to the public (as are all of the ORSSABs meetings). Also at the Annual Planning Meeting in 2014, it was decided to provide time at the end of the meetings for open discussion for Board members to speak on any subject or concern they might have related to Board business or any EM related topic.

Recently in advance of the Annual Planning Meeting in 2015, the Board was asked the following questions:

1. Did you think the general changes made this year (fewer meetings, more tours, dinner meetings) were beneficial? Are there other general changes you would like to see next year?
2. Is there anything specific that could be incorporated into the ORSSAB meetings or changed about them that would increase their value to you? Should board meetings be shorter or longer, or are they OK as they are?
3. What would you like to see the board to do to make your participation more active?

Through discussion of these questions at our Annual Planning Meeting, consensus was reached and changes were instituted to make the meetings more relaxing, informative and productive. One of the most requested change was to make the formal Board meetings shorter as many members have long distances to travel to attend the meetings. Meetings have been gradually shortened through the years. Board meetings have always started at 6:00 p.m. However in 2006 Board meetings were two and a half hours long. By 2011 the meetings were 15 minutes shorter. In 2015 a big change was instituted, removing a "break" and reducing the amount of time spent on routine discussion of Committee reports. This resulted in a reduction in the meeting time so that formal meetings are currently only one and a half hours long. This has been received well by the Board membership.

With the shortened Board meeting times, questions of the evening's presenter at full Board meetings have to be more general in nature. Therefore in order to achieve the more in-depth understanding to be able to formulate recommendations, additional changes to the process were instituted. These changes are reflected in DOE's ORSSAB Fiscal Year 2016 Work Plan [1]. Site visits are now offered to Board members with an interest in the topic. These site visits are scheduled at convenient times (usually a Saturday morning) after a full board meeting but in advance of the EM/Stewardship Committee meeting for that month. The site visits allow for in depth discussion and provide a more informal setting for ongoing dialogue between Board members and DOE representatives. Following the site visit, the EM/Stewardship Committee discusses the topic in greater detail at a regularly scheduled meeting. If the Committee deems the subject important enough to warrant writing a recommendation, then an interested member of the EM/Stewardship Committee takes on the task of preparing a recommendation. After review by the other committee members, the recommendation is presented to the Executive Board at its regularly scheduled meeting and then, if sent forward, it is presented to the full Board for a vote at the next opportunity. Recommendations, if approved by the board, are then sent on to DOE OREM for consideration and response.

In general, the Board thought that the experiment the previous year of holding a couple of meetings in local restaurants was successful and wanted to continue that. Members felt that the atmosphere was more relaxed and informal. It also gave members an opportunity to interact with each other rather than sitting in designated places at a formal meeting with the added discomfort of video cameras rolling. Not only are the members more at ease, the presenters are more relaxed in their response to questions.

Scope of Community Reach

The ORSSAB participates in both public outreach and public engagement. To remain relevant to the community the ORSSAB cannot exist in a vacuum and the public needs to be aware of the Board's function, purpose, and progress and have opportunities for input. Board members have participated in numerous events over the years with the goal of highlighting the Board's purpose and successes, and to inform the public of DOE OREM successes on its behalf.

Another goal of public engagement is to find new Board members. Events for example: presentations to local citizens groups such as the local Civitan Club and a Community School presented by the Oak Ridge League of Women Voters, have proved to be successful in a number of areas. They have been successful conduits for highlighting the board's accomplishments and what the board's future direction will be as well as avenues to find additional Board members.

As previously noted the ORSSAB recently held a meeting with a representative of the city of Oak Ridge to hear and understand concerns particularly with respect to siting a proposed new DOE OREM waste disposal facility. This is an example of successful outreach and was very helpful in facilitating discussion on the concerns of the city administration.

Of particular importance is the flow of Federal money to the DOE OREM program, and each year in April, the ORSSAB participates in a public budget meeting sponsored by the Oak Ridge Partnership Alliance which is a conglomerate of contractors, citizen's groups, and local educators. The subject of discussion is the proposed budget priorities of DOE OREM, and the ORSSAB is a presenting body at that meeting. This year Board members were asked to rank the importance of certain projects of importance to DOE OREM. The rankings were compiled and a recommendation was prepared that included the concerns and priorities presented by other presenters at the public budget meeting. The ORSSAB recommendation was sent forward to DOE OREM for consideration at DOE Headquarters.

Earth day is a major event in the City of Oak Ridge, and the ORSSAB has always had a presence in the form of members manning a booth to answer questions, promote our work, recruit new members, and 'network' with the other citizen groups present. Recently we have participated in the Earth Day Treasure Hunt. This involves the booth participants to affix stickers to a collection card for children who then, once the card is filled with stickers, receive a prize from the organizers. This very simple outreach allows the participating ORSSAB member to briefly engage with the children and accompanying adults to share information about our work and our goals.

In addition to directly engaging with the public, articles in local papers highlight the board's work. The ORSSAB also publishes a quarterly newsletter, ***The Advocate***. This

newsletter reports on accomplishment of the board, profiles members, and includes articles of importance to the Board and hopefully of interest to the general public.

In order to allow more access to the public all of our formal meetings include a Public Comment Period at a specific time. This comment period is open to anyone for comment on any EM related subject. Participants have included the local chapter of the League of Women Voters, ex-Cold War workers, and the general public.

The ORSSAB televises the first hour of the monthly Board meetings (including the presentations and question and answer period) on four public access cable channels in three local communities:

- Knoxville: Charter Channel 6, Comcast Channel 12 - two Sundays a month at 8 p.m.
- Lenoir City: Charter Cable Channel 193 - Wednesdays at 4 p.m.
- Oak Ridge: Channel 12 – one Monday a month at 7 p.m.
- Oak Ridge: Channel 15 - Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 8 a.m. and noon.

Broadcasting videos of our meetings on television has been successful; however, how people watch television and access information is an area of rapid change. Many people now access information on the internet and to reach the “YouTube generation”, videos of the ORSSABs meetings are available on the internet via YouTube. In addition, thanks to the suggestion of one of our Student Representatives the ORSSAB now has its own Facebook page.

CONCLUSION

The ORSSAB strives for value and relevancy, attempting to convey a clear message to the community and to DOE. It also strives to inform its membership in a way that allows for clarity of understanding, and above all it tries to be enjoyable to its membership. The ORSSAB listens to its membership and has evolved its process to allow for effective advocacy.

REFERENCES

1. DOE, 2015 Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board Fiscal Year 2016 Work Plan, October 1, 2015 – September 30, 2016.