

# Taking The Pulse of NEES: An Organizational Development Assessment

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## Approach

- A revisiting of the December, 2001 round of interviews
- 16+ interviews, representing SI, CD, ES, and NSF
- Open-ended questions about how the program, and each awardee, was doing
  - Focus on the good first, advice to improve second
- Recommendations based on issues raised by multiple participants

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## Working Well

- Most participants are generally optimistic about the progress of the program:
- There is momentum, especially with the Equipment Sites and SI – and despite some very difficult constraints/boundary conditions
- Roles are more clearly understood, the players are known, and relationships have formed
- Community appears to be forming

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## Needs Work

- Abandon “myths” about how the project should be
- Somebody still needs to take a global view to address the gaps in the system and coordinate efforts; funding to do this is miniscule compared to the overall project budget and will have a huge return
- The relationship between NSF, the SI, and the CD needs to improve
  - Part of this stems from three fundamentally different operating modes

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## Systems Integrator

- Much improvement has occurred since December
- Room for improvement still exists, especially in:
  - Producing concrete deliverables
  - Improving relationships with the CD
  - Clarifying scope, and
  - Continuing to improve responsiveness

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## Systems Integrator

- Much improvement has occurred since December:
- Met first big deadline and now shifting towards implementation
- Improved communication with and attitude towards equipment sites
- Written some well-received documents

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## Systems Integrator

- Room for improvement still exists:
- There is still skepticism among sites (e.g., "\$10 million sure doesn't seem to buy very much in the SI world")
- The relationship with the Consortium Development team has room for improvement, beyond uniting to complain about bureaucracy at NSF
- Even though spiral development makes this hard, other awardees can't move forward and some significant gaps can't be funded until you get better at clarifying your scope

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## Systems Integrator

- Advice:
- Show a concrete initial product quickly, something tangible, and let more than early adopters see it (and this is forthcoming!)
- Continue to develop frequent forums to discuss issues with the CD and clarify boundaries (as with the monthly teleconference organized by Anke Kamrath and Cristina Beldica)
- Even if it seems like a Catch 22, do a better job clarifying your scope
- Have one dedicated person who receives emails and commits to a response time/contact person

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## Sites

- Sites and other awardees were complimentary about two issues in particular; keep these up:
  - The way that sites are "getting in the trenches" and implementing
  - The Technical Forum meetings, and an increase in conversations about the overall system
- For those who aren't, take the high road on the overall system, despite pressures on your time and resources, and the flaws inherent in the design of the project:
  - Respond to CD requests for information, and participate in forums that emerge about training, hardware purchases, etc.
  - Take a systems view when speaking with other awardees
  - See the larger possibility of a successful NEES
- Create a forum to help Phase II awardees get up to speed, have an equal voice, and benefit from the painful lessons you have learned
- Does the Site Chair have to rotate so frequently?

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## Consortium Development Team

- The engineering community (unfortunately not NSF) gave uniform compliments about the regional workshops (e.g. “an unqualified success”)
- Participants still appreciate the quality of participants on the CD
- There is room to improve:
  - Clear up relationships with NSF and the SI, and clarify scope boundaries with SI
  - Make tangible progress faster
  - See the gaps and issues with NSF as an opportunity to lead in the engineering community

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## Consortium Development Team

- Clear up relationships with NSF and the SI, and clarify scope boundaries with SI:
- Create more frequent, small-scale forums with the SI to handle the large volume of issues coming up
- Clear up current relationships with NSF, especially by producing key deliverables and accepting that, like it or not, “NSF is NSF is NSF”
- Hold smaller, more frequent meetings within the CD, and with other key awardees, to build relationships and generate top-level consensus – especially as deadlines approach
  - Test ideas and points of view here, and then bring them to the more general community

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## Consortium Development Team

- Make progress faster, even if it means being a bit more autocratic:
- In future workshops/meetings, come prepared with compelling, non-obvious proposals and a point of view for participants/community to react to; do more preparation in advance
- Publish compelling deliverables on time (e.g., the vision paper)
- Consider accelerating next national workshop in order to have more time for last-minute consensus building and to complete a thorough proposal
- Focus on the 20% of activities that will achieve 80% of the result

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## Consortium Development Team

- See the gaps and frustrations with NSF as an opportunity to lead:
- Keep pushing on resolving major gaps; put the past in the past
- Create forums to help resolve issues that emerge in the community; follow the lead of the Technology Forums
- Insist on full compliance of requests to equipment sites

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## NSF

- There is general empathy among the awardees that working at NSF on this MRE is a nearly can't win proposition and an extremely difficult job
- Three pieces of advice to help alleviate current frustration of awardees and have a better outcome:
  - Senior management at NSF needs to recognize the importance of this project and take a larger stake in it
  - Even with legal requirements, there is room to streamline the management of the individual projects and prioritize effort on overall program leadership
  - Re-open the dialogue on the gaps, or the program will not achieve its full benefits and it will cost a lot more to repair these gaps later