

## Fermilab Employee Advisory Group Meeting

June 28, 2012

9:30 AM – 12:30 PM, One East

### AGENDA TOPICS

- Management updates
- Communication Procedures for Voluntary Separations
- Review of Outstanding EAG Recommendations
- Characteristics of Effective EAG Input
- Reflections on the “New Normal
- Key EAG Topics for 2012-2013

### MEETING SUMMARY

#### 1) Management Update

Once a year, Fermilab provides a plan to DOE and spends time with the Office of Science to talk about the future. This year’s meeting went well on all fronts. The lab is still waiting to get DOE signature on CD1 for LBNE. This will likely be sometime before the end of 2012, moving up from the current timeframe of March 2013. This CD1 will be for the new phased version of the project, which will allow the project to move forward. Three options were presented to DOE and the likely option will still be at Homestake Mine with a detector on the surface rather than underground. Over the next decade there are a number of new projects that will be operating at the lab, with construction beginning soon on Mu2e.

Budgets will continue to be tight, and this is just a reflection of the financial condition of the entire country. Pier is working on getting the message out to make sure we understand that these tight budgets are likely to be the normal condition for some time. These tight budget conditions are also resulting in changing rules and regulations. New rules are in place when creating partnerships with non-US partners, with changes to how the Memorandums of Understanding are to be established. Fermilab has always engaged in many such arrangements and they will be much more laborious and restricted than in the past. This is important because we have lots of relationships with international projects and scientists. This will affect the ongoing ability to hold the international conference at Snowmass, which has already been cancelled for next year.

In addition, rules for travel and hosting and attending conferences have been dramatically changed and tightened. Any meeting that costs more than \$100k total expenditures across the entire department of energy now requires an undersecretary approval. Anything over \$500k will require signature by the Secretary. Even regular travel will have to go through much more paperwork and approval. Requests will have to be made earlier.

The Fermilab Board of Directors met at the lab and raised the issue that the field of high energy physics needs to do more to educate the public about its benefits and achievements for society. DOE is also making a big push on intellectual property that it has created over time.

The shutdown of the Tevatron continues to go well, and there is still much work to be done. The NOvA project is also moving forward well, quite a number of modules have been produced, and will be shipping to Minnesota shortly.

Fermilab will be hosting a reception Monday morning to discuss the final results of the search for the Higgs at the Tevatron, as analysis of that data is now completed. Then on July 4 CERN will announce their results from two of their experiments, a significant announcement is expected though we do not yet know the specifics.

Thursday morning, July 5, Fermilab will hold a brief good news all hands meeting to discuss these announcements in layman's terms, to provide all lab staff a chance to hear about and understand these discoveries and be able to share information with others.

Two questions for the EAG—is this a good idea, would staff be interested in attending? Would it be a good idea to follow the announcement with a reception with some food? Would like to take the opportunity to have a good news meeting as so many recent all hands meetings have been to share negative news, and do not want to suggest that we only roll out the food for physics items.

**EAG FEEDBACK:**

- It's a bad week, because a lot of folks will be on vacation and will likely only get about half the usually crowd, but we understand that we can't control the timing.
- Overall it is a good idea, we don't often get a chance for regular staff to get involved.
- The only challenge is that food can set a precedent; want to avoid too nice a spread giving the current budget issues.
- The fact of having this meeting is important in itself, food not that important. We all want to know these things.
- It needs to be advertised open and well. It is always a good idea to make people feel included. Need to encourage more people from outside Wilson Hall to attend, they are often discouraged from attending these meetings, need to encourage supervisors. Important opportunity to help bridge the gap to help people feel connected. How would the leadership get this message across that people feel they can go? Technicians need very explicit direction to take the time off. Scheduling notes are not sufficient, they don't get down to staff all the time.
- In the announcements, be very clear that it is good news, make sure to hammer that home. Also make it clear that it will be brief and in layman's terms.
- Is there a way to get this out to the community as well, they want to know what is going on and what it means for them.

- Our neighbors often ask us what's going on and it is helpful to have information in a form that we can share. It really does need to be in layman's terms, it needs to be accessible.
- Run these presentations by laymen to get some feedback first. Even the general meetings that Pier and Young Kee are having are not accessible enough.
- While this is good news, also need to be ready for questions about other issues like the separation.
- Create some sort of handout as well so people have something to share.
- Consider videotaping the presentation for others who are not able to attend and to share with neighbors..
- Would be nice to identify all the things that have come out of the Tevatron over the years.
- Make the physicists available to answer questions afterward in smaller groups, kind of like the "ask a scientist" program.
- How can we get back on the national radar screen, such as appealing to the show "The Big Bang Theory" and get them to visit Fermilab? CERN has stolen our spotlight, and we need to do more to get it back.

## **2) Communication Procedures for Voluntary Separations**

35 people applied for the voluntary separation, one was ineligible, 2 rescinded their applications, of the 32 remaining, five were turned down. It was noted that the statement in Fermilab Today seemed less clear about the numbers applied and accepted, and should try to do a clearer depiction of the numbers.

The EAG asked how was the acceptance or non-acceptance of people communicated? Though their management, in private one-on-one meetings with management and their local HR person. Some EAG members got feedback that it was less personal than that. Should not have happened that way, and management will look into it.

In general, staff does not understand how some people get picked and others don't, it has not been well communicated. It also leaves those people who are not picked in a vulnerable position, as it becomes known that they want to leave. The primary reason someone would be denied is that jobs that are vacated cannot be filled for a year under the contract, as this would undermine the purpose of the reduction. Therefore, people holding positions that are critical would not be allowed to leave under the voluntary program as that position would have to remain empty for a year.

The lab is still looking at 80 total positions in this reduction, but will be affected by other personnel activities over the coming months, which affect total employment. Also, Fermilab is self insured for unemployment so any applications for unemployment will come out of next years budget. It is the total numbers that matter as we are constantly balancing against total payroll.

### 3) Review of Outstanding EAG Recommendations

Eileen Berman provided an overview of the EAG Sharepoint site and the revised summary of EAG recommendations. This is part of an ongoing effort to clarify, track, and communicate the work of the EAG. There are three main categories of EAG information that are posted at the Sharepoint site:

1. General feedback and recommendations that are provided by the EAG within its meetings, these are generally captured in meeting summaries but not provided as separate or formal recommendations,
2. Formal recommendations or reports prepared by the EAG on specific topics, generally as a result of longer-term effort on an issue,
3. Questions and requests from staff that are presented to the EAG on its web site, these are recorded and any EAG action identified.

There is no internal EAG forum on the Sharepoint site, EAG discussion between meetings is done by email. EAG members are able to weigh in on anything that they want on the Sharepoint site. EAG members are also encouraged to bring issues to the meetings, and to stay in contact with their peers to ensure that we are hearing the full range of issues at the lab.

Feedback on the Sharepoint site included the following:

- Provide a statement noting that this is a work in progress, and older items have not been included yet, so that people don't think this is the total list,
- Connect all the major recommendations documents and input in one area to show the total range of EAG work,
- Ensure that all recommendations have been captured,
- Create an overview all of the things that the EAG has achieved to date,
- Check in on the outstanding items each month to prompt appropriate action and communication.

**EAG ACTION:** All EAG members are encouraged to please provide input on the Sharepoint site, and share with all members through the email listserv.

### 4) Characteristics of Effective EAG Input

Continuing members reflected on progress in the first years of the EAG both to discuss what has worked and to help new members understand how the EAG has operated. Projects by small groups have worked very well, and we have learned a lot from those processes. The groups are effective in conducting research and presenting ideas for the full EAG to discuss and refine. The EAG has produced a number of good products through this process. All members are strongly encouraged to get involved at this level.

What the EAG has done with these formal recommendation products has not always worked well. We have these good documents but do not always figure out how to make effective use of them. We have not always gotten these ideas to the right people and

provided our own follow-through in communication and getting feedback.

The EAG needs to be as specific as possible in framing the question to be addressed, more vague questions are much harder to answer and have not led to effective products.

New EAG members noted that they have been approached by coworkers about their role on the EAG. Lots of folks have raised issues such as the salary freeze, time charging, and communication. The pay freeze is particularly important to staff. People are getting pay increases through various other methods like promotions, equity raises, merit raises—and this is causing some concern among other employees.

Staff also ask what does the EAG really do? There is concern it is just smoke and mirrors.

We can't address everything, we need to bite off what we can chew, but some things are just not possible in the current budget and political environment. It is very hard to convey that back to our coworkers. People need to know that the lab management cares, this is a really important part of making it all work. Management needs to get more involved, show more care. Not enough walking around and seeing what is going on in the departments--too much staying on the second floor. Be more accessible, and really listen to the issues and take real attempts at action. If folks don't see it then it isn't really happening, they need to know what is happening and what is going on in the system.

There have been quite a few times when the EAG has bumped up against DOE rules, greatly restricting the types of recommendations that are possible. The rewards and recognition recommendation is a great example--there is just too small a pot of money available to do much of what was recommended. In response, we went back and identified a lot of suggestions that could be done at very low or no cost, but we now need to do more to get these addressed.

Overall, we need to be more specific in getting recommendations to be formally presented to the appropriate person or office rather than just direct all of them to Pier. We need to cc: the Director and COO and do a better job tracking and communicating our recommendations.

**ACTION:** Ask Kay VanVreede to walk through any outstanding HR-oriented recommendations with us at the next meeting to identify the scope of activities already taken, what is still under consideration, and anything that cannot be addressed and to ensure these are accurately portrayed in the Sharepoint table. In particular, the recommendations regarding rewards and recognition.

## 5) Reflections on the “New Normal”

EAG members discussed current conditions among staff. People who have been at Fermilab for a while are waiting for things to get “back to normal”, newer folks don’t feel that way as they were not part of that previous lab culture. Overall, people don’t feel that the lab has a clear direction; they are waiting for things to settle out, and think the future is just around the corner.

People put huge efforts into projects that then get cancelled, it is very demotivating. It is harder to get invested in the project and the science, and becomes just more work. This is very different than what people are used to. It appears to be getting to a breaking point, we are going too many directions at once and people are getting worn out by it. There are just too many priorities, and they are constantly changing, dropping one thing to run with the next emergency. It is wasting time and energy, and wearing people down.

Can we learn from Argonne? How do they do it, they have never had a single focus? We are a single program lab, we are funded by only one DOE program and look at only one area of science. Argonne is a multi-program lab and have no clear mission and less focus. They do have funding from lots of different government pots, but it means everything is focused on the individual projects. When a particular project is defunded, all those folks go away, they are harder to absorb into the lab. Argonne has different benefits including more flexible work schedules, and it depends on what is most important to workers as to which is better.

## 6) Key EAG Topics for 2012-2013

Bruce talked with Pier about their priorities for the next year where they would like EAG assistance, these include:

- **Morale** at the lab, how do we get back that unit cohesion that is no longer at the lab? How do we learn to deal with the new normal, the negative things that are happening at the lab from outside forces?
- Trying to come up with creative suggestions to improve **management** quality, management culture
- How to communicate what we do more effectively to non-technical people at the lab, and what it means
- Old culture vs. current reality, how to communicate this and talk about how we are going to move forward
- Work/life balance, flexible work schedule, review existing procedures and approaches and look for opportunities moving forward

The EAG will look at this as a focus of its July meeting.

### **EAG ACTION:**

Review documents on related issues to remind or get up to speed on where the EAG has been on these issues to assist in having a constructive dialogue on how to focus our agenda and topics for the coming year.

**REMAINING 2012 MEETING DATES**

Meetings are currently scheduled for the following Thursdays

All meetings 9:30 AM - 12:30 PM

- July 26 - Comitium
- August 23 - Comitium
- September 27 - Comitium
- October 25 - Comitium
- November 15 - Comitium
- December 20 - Comitium