Under-spending of SSGs

The following guidelines were proposed in order to give the SCAR Standing Scientific Groups (SSGs) more flexibility in their spending and allocation of funds and as a mechanism to reduce the large carry forwards seen from year to year.

Unlike the Scientific Research Programmes (SRPs), which have a large degree of flexibility with how they allocate funds, the SSGs currently produce a detailed budget for a particular year and have operated with this as a more or less rigid guideline to expenditure. The problem with this approach is that (i) many of the SSG subgroups budget requests are themselves indicative rather than concrete; (ii) many of the SSG subgroups do not spend their allocations and (iii) the practice of treating the budget as rigid doesn't allow the SSG heads to respond to new priorities or needs.

The following mechanism is suggested to bring the SSGs more in line with the SRPs in terms of budgetary management:

1. At SSG meetings, the SSG heads should produce an indicative budget based on what their subgroups intend to spend over the following 2 years; subgroups should submit an indicative budget during the SSG business meetings in writing, to be discussed in and approved by the meeting;

2. The budget should include a small "contingency" funding line to be used in a discretionary manner by the SSG heads at short notice, e.g. to provide funds for early career scientists to take part in meetings.

3. The SSG subgroups should be made aware that their budgets are (a) indicative only and (b) cannot automatically be carried forward at year end.

4. The SSG officers should review their budgets at intervals of at least 6 months (more often if the SSG heads deem necessary) to analyse the spending pattern and make adjustments as necessary (in consultation with subgroups) so as to ensure that funds get spent by year end each year, reallocating resources where necessary to meet unforeseen important and/or urgent needs that have arisen in the interim.

5. To facilitate financial management it is strongly advised that the SSG Officers elect one among themselves to manage the budget for the SSG, and to report at appropriate intervals to the Secretariat, as a further mechanism to ensure that funds get spend annually.

6. For any SSG requests above and beyond the normal block funding a written justification must be made (see Budget Request form from http://www.scar.org/members/financial/). All such requests will be judged based on all requests for supplemental funds from all parties.