

Your Proposal's Panel Evaluation : (Preliminary Version)

I. Proposal 0528025 - University of Washington - Cascades Site

The suitability of the site:

The site is not currently used as a mine or underground research facility. It is in effect a greenfield site. However, it does appear that there is enough room for the laboratory facilities. In view of the opposition to the laboratory among the members of the neighboring community, there is some question whether space will be available for the facilities outside the laboratory itself. The geological and hydrological characterization is necessarily incomplete at this stage of the project, but the existence of two transportation tunnels in the same geological formation does indicate that the hopes expressed in the proposal may be realistic. The site appears to be available, but there are potential environmental issues associated with disposing of spoil from excavation and with truck traffic during construction. There is also significant, informed local opposition. The site is reasonably near to Seattle, and there seems to be adequate transportation access. The geology of this site seems to present one of the better situations available for this project - a batholith with direct horizontal access. Even if the environmental issues are addressed successfully, the cost of building the access tunnels would be high and uncertain.

The suitability of the proposal based on the qualifications of the team:

The team is exceptionally well qualified, with respect to both the scientific experiments to be performed in the facility and the construction and project management necessary to put the facilities in place. The education, outreach, and diversity issues are addressed adequately in the proposal, and the staff is well qualified. One of the PIs is a well-known geotechnical engineer on the civil engineering faculty, and the project has identified well-known engineering firms to carry out the investigations and design.

The suitability of the plan for developing the conceptual design:

The plans for developing the site and carrying out the experiments are well thought out for this stage of the work. Opportunities for international cooperation are as good as they are for any other site proposed for this laboratory. Plans for developing the technical aspects of the site and for carrying out the permitting have been developed. There is no other activity such as mining with which the facility needs to be shared. A major planning problem is how to deal with the local opposition to the development. This seems to be vocal, active, and well informed. Those members of the panel with the greatest experience in large construction projects found that construction will be extremely costly, the project has a high potential for negative environmental impact, and permitting would be problematic.

Management plan:

The responsibilities of the PI and co-PIs are well laid out and appropriate. The timeline and cost information requires further development.

Likelihood of construction by 2008-2012:

The major potential reasons to doubt that the facility can be implemented by the desired time are the local opposition and high costs. Despite the efforts of the collaboration to deal with it, the panel was concerned that this opposition could tie up the progress of the DUSEL at this site indefinitely. Permitting could also be a problem. This is a greenfield site, at which costs of implementing DUSEL are expected to be high.