

Why an Independent Review...Why a Standing Review Board?

What is an "Independent Life Cycle Review": NPR 7120.5D calls for an independent review of the project or program at the life cycle milestones specified in the appropriate life cycle figure. To expand on the definition in 7120.5D:

"A review of the program/project at each life cycle milestone by competent individuals who are not dependent on or affiliated with the program and project^[1] to objectively assess: the adequacy and credibility of the technical approach (including but not limited to requirements, architecture, and design), schedule, resources, cost, risk, and management approach; progress against the Program/Project Plan; readiness to proceed to the next phase; and compliance with NPR 7120.5 and 7123.1 requirements."^[2]

Why an Independent Life Cycle Review: There are three reasons for conducting Independent Life Cycle Reviews: first, we want the program/project to receive independent assurance that they are doing the right thing; second, NASA senior management needs to understand that the program/project is on the right track, is performing according to plan, and that externally-imposed impediments to its success are being removed; and third, the Agency needs to provide our external stakeholders assurance we are doing the right thing. In this last regard, our external stakeholders require us to have reviews at major milestones to ensure sufficient management involvement in the decision process prior to continuing into the next phase. These formal reviews provide an independent assessment of emerging designs against plans, processes and requirements to ensure an objective assessment of the design and development plans. By having independent experts conduct these reviews, we (all of us) are provided a unique view that we may have overlooked as a consequence of our close involvement with the ongoing program/project work.

A significant additional benefit to the program/project is that preparation for the milestone review requires the program/project to examine its progress holistically against specific criteria for each milestone. This permits both the development team as well as the independent review team to see how well the work holds together and examine the assumptions and analyses that support the conclusion the program/project has reached regarding its maturity and readiness to proceed.

Why Standing Review Boards (SRBs)?: The Agency's governance structure of programmatic authority, institutional authority (of which technical authority is part), and the independent assessment of progress work together to ensure the success of the program/project. Programs and projects depend on both the programmatic and institutional authorities to accomplish their efforts successfully. Independent review needs to be performed with members independent of the program/project. Thus, the SRB is a group that can provide good, independent assessment of the program/project for the Agency as it advances through its key decision points. This means that the SRBs have to be staffed with individuals outside of the programmatic or institutional authorities related

to the program/project in question. This does not mean, however, that center personnel cannot participate on SRBs. In fact center personnel are encouraged to participate in these important assessments.

SRBs are the Agency's approach to answering the Administrator's charge: You can't grade your own homework, regardless of the position you hold as part of the program and project.

[1] Derived from the dictionary, but there are many ways to write this including "free from the influence, guidance or control of another or others."

[2] Summary of words from 7120.5D