Directory of publicly funded research projects

A large number of research projects covering many scientific disciplines are funded each year by the various scientific departments (DST, DAE, DOS, DBT, etc.) of the Government of India. Project investigators are required to submit annual or interim reports about ongoing projects and terminal reports on completed projects. These reports are often of variable quality and rigour, besides being bulky. After a brief scrutiny by Program Advisory Committees, these reports are invariably forgotten and eventually thrown out. But they contain a lot of information which may not necessarily be published eventually, but is useful to the scientific community at large. It is therefore suggested that a programme-wise directory of investigators, and brief and succinct summaries of their projects on a standard format be brought out every year and made available in a website for easy access to any interested scientist in India.

The above proposal for a directory of investigators and their project summaries within a given programme is not new. The Planetary Materials and Geochemistry Program funded by the NASA, USA, used to bring out every year a compilation of research projects within this programme. This directory consisted of just a single proposal summary sheet for each project. The summary included the following information about each project: title, principal investigator, co-investigators, brief statement of the overall objectives and justification for the same, brief statement of the progress and accomplishments of the prior year, brief listing of what will be done in the current year as well as how and why, and finally any recent publications of the investigators relevant to or stemming from the project. This directory was intended not only to acquaint all scientists as to other research projects conducted in the programme, but also as an information source for interested scientists in the country. I do not know if other US agencies like the NSF and NIH bring out similar compilations easily accessible to all interested scientists.

A directory of investigators within a given programme and succinct summaries of their research projects (ongoing and completed) will be a source of valuable information to the wider scientific community in India. In fact, such information may not be available otherwise to any interested person. One immediate effect of such directory of investigators will be the subtle pressure on them to be more productive and send timely, terse and informative summaries of their research. Such a ready access to projects already funded will avoid duplication of project proposals and can promote healthy collaboration between research teams to maximize their output. Of far more importance is the awareness the directory will create in motivated young scientists anywhere in the country to the breadth of research topics, sophisticated instruments available in the country, analytical methodologies developed, expertise on theoretical and computational methods and a wide variety of materials studied, which were either collected from natural settings (as in geology) or fabricated (as in materials science). For example, it may take many months or even longer to develop a special analytical technique which may at best get only a brief mention in any publication. Such information will certainly facilitate a large number of young Indians working in small colleges without any facility or otherwise handicapped to contact the right investigator listed in the directory, who can help them pursue their scientific interest or explore any of their untested ideas. As a very minimum, they can at least write to scientists in the area of their interest requesting basic reading material. More advanced scientists can seek interaction with research teams. The summer programme of the Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore can also foster contacts between research scientists and bright young college students resulting from the above source of information.

While there is certainly a need for strict confidentiality during the review of a project proposal, no serious purpose is served by keeping funded projects known only to a privileged few. Compilation of brief but informative summaries of ongoing and completed projects in a given programme every year and making it available in a website can be a cost-effective way to help motivated young persons anywhere in the country in their scientific aspirations. The summary for each project should include all the information listed in the second paragraph in a standard format and not exceed two pages. It may also be useful to include the budget allocated for each project. If such summaries are not received by funding agencies before a deadline in each year, the concerned projects should still be listed, but with a blank summary sheet. Views from the scientific community are welcome.

K. GOPALAN

National Geophysical Research Institute, Hyderabad 500 007, India
e-mail: gopalankl@rediffmail.com

Visionaries and institution builders

It was interesting to read about the seminal contribution of Burjorji Padshah in realizing the vision of Sir J. R. D. Tata to establish the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore[1], and make it grow as one of the best institutions in the world. I do feel that it is important for us, the people of the new generation, to know such facts. As rightly emphasized, it is a fact that persons of high calibre and grand vision are able to lead the society forward through their persistence, patience and inspiring personality. The main contribution of any great institution is to produce such personalities through its curriculum. One of the main functions of quality education is also to create such a vision among the students. I do feel that we as educators, must always keep this in mind.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **95**, 1651–1652.

SHEOJEE SINGH

Department of Physics,
Government College of Education,
Sector-20 D,
Chandigarh 160 020, India
e-mail: sheojeephy@rediffmail.com