

Archived Information

Interim Evaluation of the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning

I. Brief Overview of Laboratory

The regional educational Laboratory serving the Pacific Region is a five-year contract between the U.S. Department of Education and Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) which began in 1995. PREL describes itself as “an independent, non-profit corporation funded by the US Department of Education to serve the educational communities in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia—Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap—Guam, the state of Hawai’i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau.” This is the fourth year of the five year contract, and the second such contract for the organization, following a five year period as a project of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. The Pacific region is the newest of the regions served by regional educational Laboratories. PREL’s main office is in Honolulu, Hawai’i at 1099 Alakea Street, where staff occupies the 24th and 25th floors of a downtown office building. Decentralized service centers currently operate in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and Yap State.

The US Department of Education sponsors ten regional Laboratories to “promote knowledge-based educational improvement to help all students meet high standards through development, applied research, dissemination, and technical assistance conducted with local, state, and intermediate agencies.” PREL exists “to assist education, government, community agencies, businesses, and labor groups to maintain cultural literacy and improve the quality of life by helping to strengthen educational programs and processes for children, youth, and adults.” PREL doesn’t distinguish between its mission as an organization and the mission of the regional

educational Laboratory.

The regional educational Laboratory is governed by a regional Board whose members include the ten chief state school officer equivalents (one from each of the regional entities and one from each of the Federated States of Micronesia) and ten “constituent” members representing important role groups. This organization began with a single employee, John Kofel, who serves as President and Chief Executive Officer. Currently PREL has 80 employees and the regional educational Laboratory, 21 full time equivalent employees¹. Thomas Barlow is responsible for all the programmatic work of PREL², and Jeve Chang directs the regional Laboratory efforts.

The regional Laboratories have existed in concept since the mid-sixties. During the past thirty years, their missions, regions, and relationship with the funding agent have changed dramatically.

- In their earliest inception, the educational Laboratories were modeled after the national science Laboratories (although their funding never began to reach levels that would support institutions of that scope and scale.) In contrast, at another period they were viewed as simple “pipelines” through which research flowed to teachers in classrooms. When that strategy did not yield the sought-after results, they were urged to become producers of new knowledge (a function that had been the purview of Centers.) They have been required to be diffusers of innovation, disseminators of information, and builders of infrastructure (working “with and through” other service providers.)
- The number of Laboratories has varied from a high of more than thirty to a low of six, with corresponding changes in the area to be included in each region. Until 1985, when the Northwest Regional Laboratory began serving Hawaii and the Pacific territories, commonwealths, and freely associated states, these entities had been effectively ignored.
- As federal budgets in support of education have swelled and shrunk, relationships the government has looked covetously at the Laboratory funds, hoping to capture them

¹ PREL’s organizational intention is to integrate its work across contracts and many employees work on several complementary contracts for portions of their time.

² PREL also holds federal contracts for the Pacific Center, the Math and Science Consortium, and PRELStar.

directly for other Executive Branch work, or at least to control the direction of their expenditure. The Labs, on the other hand, have continued to work with the Executive Branch agencies and around them, directly with Congress, to secure more resources (and to increase the stability and independence of their organizations.)

- A creative, chronic tension exists on the locus of control of the Labs' agendas. The government, at one point, tried to specify exclusively the areas in which the Labs would work. Conversely, the Labs would prefer to set their own agendas (one of the purposes of establishing regional governing boards.)

Finally, because both the government and the Labs, individually and as a system, are manifest in people, the personalities of the people in each system influence the quality of the interactions. The history of the Laboratories, well known to the founders and current CEO of PREL, has shaped this organization. PREL could have little influence on shifting federal purposes for Laboratories in general, so the organization was created with broad purposes of assistance to multiple constituencies “maintaining cultural literacy and improve the quality of life by helping strengthen educational programs and processes for children, youth, and adults” (emphasis added), by assisting “education, government, community agencies, businesses, and labor groups.” The upside of this decision is that almost any function the US Department of Education determines fits under PREL's mission, the downside is that the potential needs and clients are unlimited.

As the newest region, the Pacific's culture, context, and challenges remain little understood by the federal government, which means that PREL has an educative task each time it proposes a program of work (in the current proposal, 75 percent of requested funding for a specialty area in language and culture was denied because the reviewers assumed that any research in this area would be of limited relevance.) The “Pacific Way” is based on a paradigm of sharing and mutual assistance, rather than one of individual benefit and competition. Every other region is more culturally homogeneous than PREL's. Other regions have existing

infrastructure (reliable, convenient, and relatively cheap transportation, for example, and well-trained human service providers) that simply doesn't exist in the Pacific. Because this region is geographically vast and has comparatively few residents, PREL has been significantly under-resourced by a system that primarily uses numbers of children as the metric for allocating funds.

As organizations, most Laboratories initially were exclusively devoted to providing Lab services through a single federal contract, and PREL began this way as well. A clearer understanding of regional needs and sensitivity to the vagaries of federal funding pushed PREL to secure a more stable funding base. At the end of 1997, PREL reported an overall budget of more than \$8 million from “dozens” of funding sources (Guidebook for Board of Directors, page 3.)

PREL's agenda is set by its regional Board. Board roles and responsibilities include, “establishing, maintaining, and evaluating long-range and annual plans for accomplishing the mission” (Guidebook for Board of Directors, page 4.) It is PREL's management that ensures that long-range and annual plans provide room to take advantage of funding opportunities as they arise. This requires a certain global approach to planning, and what can be perceived as vagueness in language on the part of outside evaluators may seem a strategic and necessary provision for flexibility and responsiveness to the organization.

PREL has been masterfully served by its only head, John Kofel, who creates an atmosphere of good will with his colleagues in the government, in the other Laboratories, and in PREL, the organization he has created and leads. The regional Laboratory program of PREL appears to operate in an environment of mutual respect, where the Labs and the Department of Education's Office of Education Research and Improvement (OERI) have recognized their common purposes and interdependence. The PREL program officer, Joseph Wilkes, has an

uncommon understanding of the region. He is an effective advocate for the Lab inside OERI because he has taken the time to visit seven of the region's eight entities over the years that he's been responsible for this work and brings a first hand understanding of the distances, issues, and diversity of the region to discussions of their work.

The Pacific region is unlike any other, and PREL's Laboratory is, it follows, necessarily unique. The distinctive governmental structures, distances, and cultures combine to create a context that significantly influences both the content and process of their work. Unless one has experienced the environment in which PREL works first hand, it is difficult to read program plans that must account for serving simultaneously remote schools without electricity and some of the most sophisticated educational plants in the nation. Furthermore, until one has heard from the constituents of the Laboratory about how they go about their work, it is hard to imagine a paradigm of resource allocation (which is the ultimate purpose of setting priorities) based on collective good, rather than individual benefit. John Kofel describes PREL's purpose as "minimizing dependency on outside resources to affect Pacific education change." (Interview, May 19, 1999) Given the history and current circumstances of the region, PREL's work begins at very different places than in the continental states. PREL is an organization that must be evaluated in context.

Because I believe that context is so important to evaluating this work, I've devoted more than usual space to what is usually a brief overview of the Laboratory. The remainder of this report follows provides evidence of strengths in five areas (implementation and management, quality, utility, outcomes and impact, national reputation) in response to eight questions. Each question includes, where appropriate, areas in which improvements might be made and recommendations. It concludes with an overall evaluation of total Lab programs, products and

services and a broad summary of strengths, areas of and strategies for improvement.

II. Implementation and Management

A. To what extent is the REL doing what they were approved to do during their first three contract years?

PREL exceeds expectations in meeting the terms of their contract in the first three contract years, based on my reading of the proposal and comparing what they said they would do with what the twelve quarterly reports say that they've done. The inevitable changes in deliverables and the schedule for their accomplishment fall well within reasonable limits. This organization has a complex, sophisticated, and innovative system of assigning responsibilities to staff and accounting for accomplishments, and "resets itself" during all-staff retreats twice a year (Interview with Kofel, Brown, Barlow, Von Broekhuizen, Hammond, and Chang, May 19, 1999; Fifth quarterly report, pages 2, 5-6, 8; seventh quarterly report, twelfth quarterly report page 8; external/internal evaluation, page 1.)

PREL understands the context of its region and insists on operating "the Pacific Way" (Proposal, pages 6, 13-20, 81; first quarterly report, page 4; second quarterly report, page 19; third quarterly report, page 19; fifth quarterly report, page 3; updated annual plan for year three, page 10; eleventh quarterly report, page 7.) PREL has an unusual burden to continue to explain to its mainland readers why decisions are made jointly (and sometimes slowly), but bears that responsibility with seeming good cheer. PREL uses internal organizational resources, external resources, and continues to establish networks and alliances (quarterly reports, Self-Study, page 41.)

The first signature work is an invaluable resource to the region (PREL's Annual Reports

(page 5 and 7, 1996; page 9, 1997; pages 10-12, 1998.) The fact that PREL selected a process as a signature work, rather than a product, reinforces the Laboratory's emphasis on building capacity and a research infrastructure and reflects PREL's sensitivity to its region. The Pacific region can only get about the business of improving educational outcomes for students as it develops an infrastructure and local capacity to understand, value, and participate in research-based decision-making. John Kofel explained to the panel the current lack of such capacity when he reported that his advertisement for the first PREL employee received 80 responses, none of which were qualified applicants from within the region (Interview, May 17, 1999.) This perception was echoed in the telephone interview on May 17th with Board member Damien Sohl, who reported that "we are short on personnel and stingy about letting the Pacific Educators in Residence stay on at PREL" as staff, suggesting that there are few Pacific people trained, credentialed, and seeking careers in educational research, development, and educational improvement.

The composition of the Research and Development Cadre is intended to address this issue, using a "grow our own" strategy. The significant role that the Cadre plays in creating research agendas that meet entity needs, methodologies that "work within existing cultures and administrative structures...and build upon local resources and capacity" and dissemination conduits for research results, provides evidence that PREL is devoting significant resources to its purpose, "minimizing dependency on outside resources to affect Pacific education change." The effectiveness of this strategy, and the value added by PREL is clear as Jean Olopai, a former cadre member and currently director of the PREL assistance center on CNMI, provided the panel compelling evidence of the learning that Cadre members receive. She told us, in a telephone interview on May 18, 1999 that she now knew "statistics, the importance of knowing how to read

results, how to be conscious of the audience when doing surveys, how to get certain information, (not to ask one question and expect you get something else.” Jean reinforced the importance of PREL’s approach to bringing people together, “I feel very fortunate to work with people in different entities, to learn about the problems they face when they go home.” She also testified that Cadre membership “developed us as presenters to share with others and gave us more pride in the work we are doing.”

Signature work two, the language and literacy work, is based on Board priorities (minutes of the Board meeting) and appear well received. Evidence of its value can be found, for example, in a letter from Kanchi Hosia, from Majuro, the Marshall Islands, dated November 3, 1997 in which he requests assistance on behalf of his entity and makes a financial contribution to the work.

While PREL clearly exceeds expectations in terms of doing what they were contracted to do in the first three years, I have some concerns and suggestions.

- The proposal is strong on context (although I have several suggestions that follow) but it seems weak on specifics, and does not make as compelling a case for the PREL approach in writing as staff members make verbally. PREL could have taken more risks in this proposal, explaining clearly that the differences between OERI’s goals for this competition and PREL’s mission. Had PREL described its approach to “promot(ing) knowledge-based educational improvement to help all students meet high standards” as needing to begin, in this region, with capacity and infrastructure building, and included its overarching intention to “minimize dependency on outside resources to affect Pacific education change”, the connections between its vision, mission, purposes and work would have been more self-evident to this external review team.
- Here is another suggestion, based on my initial reading of this proposal that might be incorporated into the next one. I wish PREL had explained more clearly what “development, applied research, dissemination, and technical assistance” mean in the region. Then, there might have been a better match between the evaluative questions required by this effort and the realities of the work. I believe the panel came to that understanding, but personally mine was based much more on discussions and presentations than the pre-visit reading.

- More clarity in the proposal purposes could lead to more detail in describing the work at the level of the regional Laboratory (I appreciate why the organization as a whole must maintain broad language to describe itself, I'm recommending more specificity at the level of individual contracts. Specific goals, objectives, activities, timelines, and outcome measures could have been established that track the work more closely. It is important to note that responsibility for this lack of specificity is shared, in my mind, between the proposal writers, who are vague on details of outcomes and timelines for activities, and the reviewers, who didn't require more detail. Without that detail, it becomes more difficult to evaluate the individual and cumulative effect of the work and for PREL and the Laboratory staff to receive the credit they have earned, particularly with funders and potential funders. PREL has a strong internal commitment to quality work that was shown, rather than asserted. I acknowledge the Pacific reluctance to take credit, to "toot one's own horn", however, in some instances (such as competition for mainland funds), PREL might be better served by a less self-effacing approach.
- I'd like to see more evidence of on-going conversations between the funding agency and the recipients of this significant investment in federal funds. Joe Wilkes, the OERI program officer, told the panel in an interview on May 17, 1999 that he is in weekly conversation with the CEO/President of PREL, and with other staff as necessary. There is no written record of these conversations, of his responses to quarterly reports, or of his site visits. This absence makes it difficult to track problems surfaced, solutions suggested, and agreements reached. OERI has a responsibility to initiate, participate, and document its response to the progress of this contract, and PREL might be more reflective in its reporting, using the quarterly reporting requirement as a time for internal conversations about progress, problems, and potential solutions. I would urge both OERI and PREL to take advantage of their mature, positive relationship by engaging in on-going conversations and by documenting how they work together on their mutual purposes.
- The context description in the proposal, while good and necessary, does not go far enough for me, and I'd like to see PREL assume an even more substantive on-going educative role with OERI and other audiences. For example, I'd hope the next proposal (and PREL's presentations about its region) would include an explanation of the reciprocal nature of the arrangements with the trust territories, commonwealths, and freely associated states that could establish the U.S. responsibility to serve these areas (mainlanders are chauvinistic and painfully ignorant of policies regarding sovereign nations and other treaty relationships and PREL can help the readers understand that services to the region are in the U.S. strategic interests, not simply charity.) Then, more examples of the unusual costs that distance requires, similar to the example of the cost to the Board Chair of 40 hours of travel for an eight hour meeting of Directors and Board Chairs, would help establish that insistence on the unique nature of the region is more than special pleading.
- I recommend that the next proposal take more risks, be clearer on the implications of the context for PREL's approach to regional Laboratory operations. PREL's mission

statement lists all the members of the community with a stake in education, and is an important political document. However, within the organization, at the level of individual contracts such as the regional educational Laboratory, it would be useful to create a more focused statement of intentions, a shorter list of priorities, fewer target audiences for the effort (perhaps by distinguishing between the immediate target, which for the R&D Cadre would clearly connect to purpose, and the long-range audience of teachers who will benefit by the increased local capacity to design, conduct, and apply educational research.) While mission, goals, and audiences may well change over time, greater clarity and sharper focus on where the greatest needs are for the next five year period will enable PREL to provide guidance for staff and managers. It will also permit more specificity in describing goals, objectives, activities, timelines and a “results management system”.

B. To what extent is the REL using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs and issues of the region?

PREL, and every other regional educational Laboratory, strike a balance between responsiveness and leadership. In the Pacific region, the Laboratory plays three roles:

- As a facilitator, PREL translates among cultures, working to build local capacity for educational improvement.
- As an exporter, PREL brings to the rest of America’s attention the vast information, knowledge and wisdom of Pacific peoples.
- As an information conduit from the mainland, PREL identifies and imports appropriate information, opportunities, and people. In order to do this well, PREL has set up multiple channels through which its constituents can give it feedback and feedforward, or advance notice of emerging issues, problems and concerns.

PREL’s creates opportunities to listen to its constituents so that it can match needs with strategies for addressing issues. Board member Maula Peter reported (via a phone interview on May 17 1999) “time is provided at each meeting to review the needs of every entity and for members to share concerns”, and that Board members add items to each meeting agenda. The Board also “discusses issues presented to us by John Kofel.” The R&D Cadre reviews research intentions, foci, methodology, and raw data as part of the PREL research process, and there is ample evidence that “customer” needs and issues drive decisions (presentation and materials by

Zoe Ann Brown, May 18, 1999 on the RAPSTA study and design for the PLUS study; R&D Cadre Seminar I, 1996, page 5; R&D Cadre Seminar III, 12/96, page 8.) Entity meetings surface needs, which are then prioritized (Interview with Ormand Hammond, May 19, 1999.) The Pacific Curriculum and Instruction Consortium provides input (Interview with Tom Barlow, May 19, 1999.) Finally, PREL listens to its Board. Board member Damien Sohl, Director of Education from Pohnpei says PREL's Board is "a governing Board, it meets to set policies, approve priorities, and John and his people follow the priorities, execute the priorities." (Phone interview, May 17, 1999)

Feedback and self-monitoring from staff closest to the work complement needs sensing conducted with constituents outside the agency. Internally, PREL is one of the most reflective organizations I've seen, as evidenced by the self study and the external/internal evaluations conducted in 1997 and 1998 and the care with which the recent reorganization solicited staff opinions (Annual Report, 1997, page 11; External/Internal Self Study, 1997, Interview with Brown, Barlow, Chang, Hammond and Kofel, May 19, 1999.)

PREL has instituted a Quality Assurance program, trained staff in its use, and modifies the system as new product issues arise. PREL also practices soliciting expert opinion on its work in the design, planning, implementation, and dissemination stages.

A small set of concerns arises for me given the fallacy of misplaced concreteness that seems to undergird assumptions about quality assurance programs. One is the old quandary that everything that can be measured isn't important and everything that is important can't be (easily, inexpensively) measured. So, for example, with some effort (sun visors as incentives to turn in surveys for the Pacific Educational Conferences) some responses immediately following events are obtained, but the response rate is generally low and the meaning of the responses in the

context of all the participants, illusive. Similarly, responses to satisfaction survey data are minimal in number and mysterious in meaning.

I think PREL is responsive to feedback, to felt needs of the field, to the issues of the region, driven, as it is, by the urgent desire to be in a different relationship with its constituents than the traditional western, expert posture (Interviews with Kofel, Wilkes, May 17,18). PREL exceeds expectations in this area.

III. Quality

To what extent is the REL developing high quality products and services?"

PREL is committed to quality. In the Guidebook for Board of Directors, page 9, PREL writes, "Of course, there is a need to do all work with the highest possible quality. There is simply no substitute for quality work. Quality work is the most important prerequisite to getting more work and giving PREL the best chance to have long-term survivability. This is a PREL-wide responsibility, starting with the board and including every member of PREL's staff. While the specific nature of PREL's various programs of work will change over time, the requirements of it will not."

PREL's products and services are perceived by its constituents and by national organizations as being high quality. Quarterly reports document the research syntheses that precede work in new areas and new products (Quarterly reports, interview with Zoe Ann Brown, May 19, 1999.) PREL is willing to change materials when they don't fit the cultural context, as evidenced by their modification of CEDaR publications (First quarterly report, page 14; interview with Stan Kiko, May 19, 1999.) The RAPSTA study was modified when the cultural nature of stress became evident (eleventh quarterly report, page 7.) PREL is gaining increasing

recognition for products, programs, and services as PREL makes significant contributions to cross-Lab efforts in spite of high participation costs due to travel (Updated Annual Plan for Year 2, page 2) and PREL's work is recognized as it is asked to create a national teleconference on its language and literature work (interview with Von Broekhuizen, May 19, 1999), to have its work solicited for the NCBE Website (letter from Patricia Di Cerbo, NCBE, April, 1999) and to make presentations at national meetings (Thank you letter from Delia Pompa, OBEMLA, no date.) Local testimony suggests, "PREL conducts very serious and well intended work (phone conversation with Crag Choudron, University of Hawaii, May 18, 1999.) This growing national and state recognition of the work of PREL and the contributions to be made by Pacific people is proof positive of scaling up, in my opinion.

PREL, true to its intentions, makes strong use of local expertise, for instance, by having the R&D Cadre provide peer review for products and services (R&D Cadre Seminar Reports.) PREL also uses outside experts, and I have a single concern about their selection. I recommend that PREL create a set of criteria by which experts will be chosen that will free them from the appearance of exclusive reliance on personal networks to identify people who bring unique skills, reputations, and knowledge to the Pacific region.

IV. Utility

A. To what extent are the products and services provided by the Laboratory useful to, and used by customers?

Users report products and services are valuable to them via on-going evaluations of responses (Quarterly reports, Self Study Report, 1997, pages 20-26) and by testimonials (Mike McCartney, Hawaii State Director of Personnel said, "John has a sensitivity to meeting needs

throughout the region, to cultural nuances” and that he sees PREL “as a leader, facilitator, convener, and bridge from the Federal Government, a translator for the region to DC. PREL promotes dialogue, common understanding and trust. PREL is about hope in this region...its more than programs, PREL has done a good job of training leaders” (interview, May 17, 1999.) Ron Toma, Director of the school renewal group for the Hawaii Department of Education notes, “PREL understand our mission and vision and helps us move our agenda forward (interview, May 17, 1999.) Terrina Wong, from the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools reported, “PREL is instrumental in conference planning.” Maura O’Connor, project development director of the Moanalua Gardens Foundation said, “PREL is very helpful, their infrastructure for distance learning provides a base to get our programs out (to young people) (interview, May 17, 1999.) Janet Morse was delighted with “the eclat of PREL is important, it really helped (her organization, Hawaii Literacy, Inc.) with the Department of Education, gives us access to materials for training, and confirmation that we are doing important work (interview, May 19, 1999.)

The entities use PREL to help them develop comprehensive plans. Each entity prepares a schedule of PREL services, and the fact that they are completed quickly is evidence of the importance that is placed on them, these are obviously given priority in the busy lives of education officials (third quarterly report, page 6.) PREL workshop materials show interactions with users and include more testimonials about utility (Leadership Development Initiative, pages not numbered.)

PREL products are available in a variety of forms, including electronic (Annual Report, 1996, pages 22-23; Annual Report, 1997, page 12; Annual Report, 1998, pages 15-16.) R&D Cadre members are increasingly links via e-mail (R&D Tails, 1997, Appendix B; see also

electronic communication on October 5, 1998 regarding PLUS.) Evidence that PREL does a fine job of tailoring its products and services, producing materials in a variety of languages and media (for instance, videotapes where CD ROM technology is not available, homework posters in multiple languages, and creates new information where existing information is outdated or not available (the PowerPoint presentation on *Language Use in Home and School* (Updated Annual Plan for Year Three, page 8; first quarterly report, page 14; fifth quarterly report, page 3; seventh quarterly report, pages 15 and 38; eighth quarterly report, page 22.)

PREL solicits feedback through relationships it has established directly (R&D Cadres, Leadership Teams, PCIC, PRESS trainers, Mathematics and Science Regional Consortium, the Technology Task Force, PEIRS, and local service centers) and each of these groups reaches out as well (Self Study, 1997, page 17; Pacific Region Educational Laboratory Knowledge Gaps and Research Plans, no date; Annual Meeting, PREL Board of Directors, YAP, 1999.) Advisory groups expand to reach even more customers and ascertain and serve their needs (Letter, October 5, 1998, organizing PLUS study Advisory Group.) Customer feedback is then used to refine products and services (eleventh quarterly report, page 7.)

B. To what extent is the REL focused on customer needs?

Refer to IV. A.

V. Outcomes and Impact

A. To what extent is the REL's work contributing to improved student success, particularly in intensive implementation sites?

PREL addresses issues of national significant in several ways. First, it concentrates on literacy, a national goal, and one of particular salience in the Pacific region. Second, it is

breaking new ground in its research and development on language, culture, and their impact on teaching and learning. Student success must be increased when students have access to attractive materials in their home languages for the first time. Third, PREL works under some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable in terms of poverty, politics, teacher and student motivation (videotape of Eybe, produced by Hilde Heine, shown to the panel on May 20, 1999) and is making fundamental contributions to student success through this direct work. Fourth, it conducts its work in a universe of unending need with scarce resources (it is appalling that this Laboratory, in a region with these needs, is allocated only 5 percent of the Laboratory system budget. (Interview with Kofel, May 19, 1999; Proposal; quarterly reports, Self Study, External Review Panel.)

PREL continues to increase knowledge and understanding, in the Pacific and on the mainland. It conducts basic and original research, participates (at unusual expense) in mainland meetings, conferences, and cross-Lab activities, and its staff is patiently willing to educate mainland reformers (quarterly reports.)

Evidence of PREL's impact is found in its reports, through the feed-back of its constituents, the on-going support of its widely representative Board (evidenced by their almost 100 percent attendance at Board meetings), the willingness to negotiate ISPs, the increasing demand for its products and services, and the alacrity with which other organizations, associations, and entities seek to partner with PREL. To expect more, for instance a causal relationship between PREL's work and an increase in any individual student's reading score, is to misunderstand both causality and the role that an REL can play (quarterly reports.)

B. To what extent does the Laboratory assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

PREL is in a position of creative tension on the scale-up issue. It needs to remain sensitive to the multiple and disparate entities that comprise the region. Each has its own needs and priorities, a reality that PREL recognizes and serves. At the same time, PREL produces products and services that have generative value that the rest of the REL system recognizes (see Operation Books; fifth quarterly report, page 21 and reports that follow, also the willingness of other Labs to adapt *Language Use in Home and School*, seventh quarterly report, page 38.) It manages this tension well.

PREL works individually with entities through ISPs, pushing where appropriate for comprehensive, systemic change (third quarterly report, page 6.) Each entity is engaged, at the level most appropriate for them, in comprehensive school improvement with PREL's assistance (for some, that means developing and implementing five year plans, for others it is creating school improvement plans at the individual school level. (R&D Cadre Seminar Reports.) The value of this work is proven by the financial contributions entities are willing to make to support the work (Letter from Kanchi Hosia, Majurao, Marshall Islands, November 3, 1997.) Through its resource center, PREL provides research-based information to staff and an increasing number of constituents each month (quarterly reports.) PREL has created a dazzling array of strategic alliances (quarterly reports; Self Study, 1997.) The Comprehensive School Reform Program Fact Sheet, as just one example, lists in user-friendly ways programs and provides instructions for becoming involved with the CSRD program that PREL manages.

C. To what extent has the REL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?

PREL, operating at 25 percent of the budget it proposed for the specialty area, has made significant contributions to the national understanding of Pacific language and culture and of issues of language and culture generally (quarterly reports.) PREL has formed alliances with national organizations (i.e., NBCE, ASCD) that recognize its expertise in language and culture. Internationally as well, PREL is seen as, “a major player in the education area of the RMI...Collaboration with PREL may, in fact, be the most likely avenue by which a joint Japan/US aid initiative could be promoted” (External/internal Evaluation, Self Study Report, 1997, page 41.) My belief is that PREL is breaking new ground in research on the impact of language and culture on teaching and learning, and new ground in establishing and maintaining productive working relationships across multiple political jurisdictions and political boundaries. We all have much to learn from this organization about creating strategic alliances and working collaboratively in inter-organizational relationships.

VI. Overall Evaluation of Total Laboratory Programs, Products and Services

The regional educational Laboratory at PREL is exceeding expectations in the performance of its contract with the US Department of Education. The governing Board is established and is engaged. Expectations of for Board members are clearly stated in print documents, and an orientation session is held with incoming members. The Board members with whom we spoke represented a range of regional interests, were well informed about Laboratory operations, and were enthusiastic supporters of the work.

The managers of both the work of the regional educational Laboratory and the larger

organizations were articulate, well prepared, and highly energized as they talked about the contributions that PREL was making to the Pacific region. Dedication to high quality work permeates the organization, and was reflected in the wide variety of materials, in print and other media, that we saw. The multiple contracts held by PREL are intentionally integrated to provide synergy, more than the sum of the parts, and tasks are reflect the complexity of the environment. I believe PREL is achieving the synergy they seek, and that the regional educational Laboratory contract benefits from its position in this rich mix of work.

Management structures organize the work in a sophisticated way for tracking purposes, assigning, supporting, and evaluating the work of more than 80 people in a variety of roles: staff who began the organization, others who represent rapid and recent expansions. They are natives of the region (on staff, by design, are people native to each of the Pacific entities PREL serves) and mainlanders. Roles include full time, permanent people, Pacific educators in residence (one to two year appointments), part time help, and visiting scholars. In addition, people outside the organization swim through, acting at one time as a “client”, at another as a “supplier”, and most often, as a “partner.” They, and all staff, are seen as valued resources to the Laboratory and to the region. PREL has achieved, to a remarkable degree, an organization that models internally the relationships it seeks to establish externally.

A note about labels. This evaluation was prepared using the term “client” to identify those people intended to benefit from the regional educational Laboratory’s work. PREL calls them “constituents”. The distinction is an important one, and part of the reason this Laboratory is so effective.

VII. Broad Summary of Strengths, Areas for Improvement, and Strategies for Improvement

PREL's strengths include:

- A deep commitment to understanding its region and the people it serves.
- Courage to be counter-mainland-cultural, to do its work in a way that builds local capacity for self-determination and improvement.
- Patience to build the infrastructure necessary to empower democratic processes in the Pacific.
- Belief in local wisdom and that “everybody brings something to the party” that results in an enormous variety of alliances, partnerships, collaborations, and mutual support.
- Creativity and openness to new opportunities.
- An organizational design that models respect, joy in diversity, and expectations of the highest quality work and accountability.

Areas for improvement include:

- PREL should continue evolve, articulate, and share its “story”, inside and outside the region.
- OERI needs to become more informed and supportive of PREL and the Pacific region.
- PREL, as an invaluable and unique national resource, should devote time, attention, and resources to questions of its survival as an organization.

Strategies for Improvement:

- “PREL is dedicated to helping the Pacific region develop its own human resources”, with all the reasons that is necessary and the contribution that each body of work makes, seems the way the organization might talk about itself, to itself and the essence of every proposal. Then within each proposed body of work, more specificity in goals, objectives, timelines and anticipated outcomes will enable PREL, its funders, and outside observers more comfortable that the appropriate balance is being reached between the predictability expected by an industrial/technical society and the indeterminacy that results from local decisions and context.
- OERI, with the single exception of Joe Wilkes, has little understanding of the Pacific region and the challenges faced by PREL. If OERI were to invest in having more of

its own staff, particularly people at decision- and policy-making levels, experience the Pacific region by traveling to the most distant sites, it would increase its capacity to be a supportive, useful, and responsible partner in the regional Laboratory work of PREL. Similarly, OERI has a responsibility to provide the Pacific region with informed reviewers prior to making funding decisions.

- PREL can help OERI build its capacity to understand the region by providing more informative and reflective quarterly reports. The executive summary, rather than simply recapping the data in the report, could be an opportunity for Laboratory management to talk about the progress that is being made in increasing Pacific capacity for education improvement.
- As PREL evolves as an organization, it will do the highest quality work by continuing to attract the highest quality staff and create in an environment in which they can share their gifts. PREL leadership's task is complex as the organization grows. This is an organization that has made an excellent beginning, and like all new organizations, been energized by the vision of its founder. John Kofel should live forever, however the Board needs to consider his eventual replacement, and the changes that simple size and time bring to every organization and make appropriate, on-going plans to ensure the continuation of the excellent regional Laboratory work.