

Scientific Integrity Foundation (SIF)

The idea is that SIF would be an independent non-partisan organization¹ that would give its official “Seal of Approval” to technical policies, proposed technical legislation, reports, etc. (i.e. “initiatives”²) that met sound scientific standards. (SIF would be neither Conservative nor Liberal, Democrat nor Republican.)

This Seal³ would be like the one given by Underwriter Laboratories, Inc. (UL).

The SIF website would spell out the specific policy objectives of the Foundation, and the basis for its Seal.

Some of the key policy objectives of the Foundation would be to promote:

- 1) real science [vs consensus or pseudo science],
- 2) a greater emphasis on science in our academic institutions,
- 3) higher standards in our academic institutions [vs grade inflation], and
- 4) more Critical Thinking in our society as a whole.

The SIF Seal would be awarded if an initiative was based on objective and comprehensive evidence analyzed using the scientific method⁴. Similarly, organizations (e.g. the Sierra Club) would be granted or denied a Seal, based on whether their technology policies areas were truly science based.

A key point is that the SIF review would not be of the results but of the process. For instance, let’s say an important energy report is released by DOE. The question is: *did they use the scientific process in coming to their conclusions?*

That would entail a review of such basic process elements like: whether the authors had conflicts of interests, the objectivity of the material they referenced, the transparency of the critiques they received , etc.

So the Seal would be awarded based on their adherence to scientific standards, not the results.

The Foundation would solicit broad membership, starting in North America⁵. The intention would be that its members, the media, politicians and the public, would look for this “Seal of Approval” as an independent indication whether or not the initiative was firmly rooted in scientific fundamentals.

If the Foundation was able to get sufficient numbers of members, and public recognition, the support (or denial of such support) could have a significant impact on the success of technical policies and/or proposed legislation.

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Notes:

¹ We realize that there are other “Think Tanks” around that do some of what is being proposed here. To our knowledge, none do all of what is put forward here. From our understanding, the only one that is close is the Marshall Institute (<<<http://www.marshall.org/category.php?id=6>>>). Although their mission statement seems excellent, they have no unified or organized rating of initiatives — a significant omission.

For instance a citizen should be able to go to their website and look up the "Markey Waxman" bill, see a Pass or Fail science rating, and find an explanation for such determination. Nothing like that is on their site. (A possible explanation is that this is a tax exempt organization, and making such assessments might be perceived as a conflict with tax law.⁶)

² Although the ultimate objective would be to give a Seal of Approval to ALL technology policies and proposed legislation, it might be a wise strategy to start out by focusing on just one technology area: energy. The plan is that after experience and credibility is built up, then expand into other technical areas.

³ The thought would be that this would primarily be a Pass/Fail determination: either the Seal would be awarded for compliance with Scientific standards, or it would not be.

A possible addition would be the granting of a special Seal with the description of something like “Shows Promise.” This would mean that the initiative failed Scientific standards, but that there were many redeeming qualities about it and few deficiencies. The implication would be that this initiative was close enough that it would be worth fixing.

⁴ Ideally it would be very beneficial to also assess whether the technical policy or proposed legislation was a cost effective solution, whether it was environmentally beneficial, etc. It seems like the best strategy would be to initially focus on just how science-based the initiative is and give the Seal for that.

After the SIF standard gets established, an additional (different) Seal may be awarded based on a few select key other aspects, like its Financial sensibility. The other difficulty is awarding approvals like a Financial Seal, is that these would be somewhat more subject than the Science assessment is. Although a Pass/Fail would be easier to understand, to deal with subjectivity aspect, maybe a numerical rating of 1 to 5 might be appropriate?

⁵ Since Science knows no geographic boundaries, there is no reason that SIF (once established) couldn't eventually cover a broader based area than North America.

6 It would have to be worked out whether or not SIF would be a tax-exempt organization. It certainly would be preferable from a fund raising perspective to have tax-exempt status. However, if such status would restrict the Foundation's ability to grant their Seal, then that option would have to be excluded.

If you support this concept, please forward suggestions to John as to how it might be best implemented, and what you can do to help.