

Translation



This transcript of a 2016 PRC Ministry of Science and Technology press conference announces the creation of China's overarching "National Key R&D Program." Notably, the National Key R&D Program absorbs the former 973 and 863 Programs, two major PRC technology development plans that had been in place for decades.

Title

Press Conference on the "Launch and Implementation of the National Key R&D Program": Summary Transcript

“国家重点研发计划启动实施”新闻发布会：文字摘要

Source

PRC Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST; 科学技术部; 科技部) website, February 16, 2016.

The Chinese text of the summary transcript is available online at:

http://www.most.gov.cn/xwzx/twzb/gjzdyfjh/twzbowzzy/201602/t20160216_124128.html

A Chinese-language notice providing context for the press conference is available online at:

<http://www.most.gov.cn/xwzx/twzb/gjzdyfjh/index.html>

Archived versions of these two documents are available online, respectively, at:

<https://perma.cc/XFZ3-3AMX>

<https://perma.cc/3B3H-TKGE>

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Translator

Etcetera Language Group, Inc.

Editor

Ben Murphy, CSET Translation Lead

[Director of the General Office (办公厅) of the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) and MOST Spokesperson] Wu Yuanbin (吴远彬): Good morning to our friends in the press, and welcome everyone to MOST's first regular press conference of 2016. We thank all our friends in the media for their concern and support for science and technology (S&T) endeavors. Since fully launching management reform of the central government fiscal [budget-funded] S&T programs (special projects, funds, etc.) at the end of 2014, under the correct leadership of the Party Central Committee and the State Council, and under the kind care and guidance of Vice Premier [Liu] Yandong, MOST, the Ministry of Finance, the [National] Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), and relevant departments, reform tasks have been actively assigned and implementation of reform has been promoted, a number of breakthroughs have been made, and the work is beginning to show results. Today [February 16, 2016], with the first batch of guidelines for key special projects of the National Key Research and Development (R&D) Program (国家重点研发计划) beginning to be issued, the reform

work has taken an important step forward. In the following, we asked Vice Minister of Science and Technology Hou Jianguo (侯建国) to brief us on the relevant progress of the National Key R&D Program.

Hou Jianguo: The core tasks of national program management reform are—in accordance with the requirement to fully implement the innovation-driven development strategy—to improve the efficiency of S&T programs, enhance innovation capacity, establish an open and unified national S&T management platform, build a new framework and layout for the S&T program system, and focus on solving the major deep-seated problems that constrain the innovation and development led by China's S&T programs. While following the objective laws of S&T development, and giving full rein to the enthusiasm and creativity of S&T personnel, we shall better promote S&T innovation as the core of comprehensive innovation.

In terms of building a new framework and layout for the S&T program system, among the five types of programs, the National Key R&D Program was one of the earliest for which reforms were launched, and it is also the most integrated, with the former 973 Program, 863 Program, National S&T Support Program, and special research programs for industries that contribute to the public good (公益性产业) all within it. From a functional positioning perspective, the National Key R&D Program is to provide S&T support for all major industries for national economic and social development. It involves a wide range of areas and is of great concern to all sectors of society. Its reform has a benchmarking function, and also shoulders the important mission for the other four types of plans of “building bridges and paving roads” for optimization-integration and management reform. We must exploit the more efficient innovation supply capabilities of the reformed new mechanism, and fully verify the scientificity (科学性) and feasibility of reform measures.

To this end, one year after the launch of the reform, government departments and experts from all sides having collaborated and put in much painstaking attention and effort, the National Key R&D Program has finally been officially launched and implemented. This is a concentrated manifestation of the substantive progress made in various reform tasks thus far, and it also lays a solid foundation for the ultimate success of the reform.

Hou Jianguo: Previous S&T programs were categorized according to the different stages of R&D, such as basic research, strategic high technology, and applied technology research. The key special projects of the National Key R&D Program being launched today, though, all feature full-chain innovation design and integrated organization and implementation, and integrated linking of basic research, key general purpose technologies (共性关键技术), application demonstration, and other aspects of the work. This will drive more rapid conversion of the latest basic and cutting-edge

achievements into practical applications and the development of applied technology, and more proactively and effectively serve the transformation of the mode of economic development (经济发展方式转变) and economic restructuring.

In terms of organization and implementation, the innovative nature of the Key R&D Program is reflected not only in changes in the solicitation of requirements and condensation of projects, but also in project validation and in layout decisions. During organization and implementation, reform efforts were increased and a new project formation mechanism and a new management process were proposed in accordance with the spirit of Documents No. 64 and No. 11 of the State Council, as well as on the basis of in-depth investigation and study, and listening to the opinions of all parties.

In the special project demonstration process, full play has been given to the role of experts. Relying on experts, they have been fully validated from multiple levels and multiple angles. This not only ensures the scientificity and advanced nature (先进性) of each key special project, but also gives overall consideration to angles such as keeping various domains in balance and the sustainable development of science, the importance and urgency of different special projects, and the maturity of the implementation program, so as to ensure that the overall layout and design of key special projects is consistent with national macro-strategic needs. In layout decisions, we have made full use of the decision-making mechanism of inter-ministerial joint meetings to achieve scientific and democratic decision-making. At the same time, relevant proposals for the overall layout of 59 key special projects and the priority launching of 36 key special projects were formed by considering the degree of departmental consensus, and the balance of S&T development in different domains, as well as financial capacities, and they were approved by the State Council after being considered and approved by the State Leading Group for Science and Technology Structural Reform and Innovation System Construction (国家科改领导小组).

Hou Jianguo: In order to widely solicit the major needs of the whole society with regard to S&T innovation, in early 2015, MOST issued a call for key R&D tasks to various departments, localities, and relevant industry associations, and collected 2,698 R&D task proposals. Based on these, MOST, the Ministry of Finance, and NDRC, in conjunction with various departments, condensed them to 62 task directions in 8 areas, centered around major national development strategies such as Made in China 2025, the "Belt and Road,"¹ the Strategic Action Plan for Energy Development (能源发展战略行动计划), Internet+, etc., thereby both implementing the nation's major strategic deployments and embodying the S&T needs of industries and the balanced development of different fields.

¹ Translator's note: Translator's note: The "Belt and Road" ("一带一路") refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt (丝绸之路经济带) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (21世纪海上丝绸之路).

After that, a total of more than 50 departments, more than 20 industry associations and localities, and nearly 900 high-level experts across the country participated in preparation and discussion, and formed the implementation plans for the 59 key special projects. It's worth noting the fact that the Special Invitation Advisory and Evaluation Committee (特邀咨评委会), together with more than 240 experts in different fields divided into seven groups, conducted an advisory review of the key special projects for the Key R&D Program in 2016. This was the first holistic, large-scale advisory review of the future layout of the national S&T program by the Special Invitation Advisory and Evaluation Committee since implementation of national S&T program management reform was launched, creating a decision-making reference for inter-ministerial joint meetings.

Hou Jianguo: We mainly focused on the “systems, transparency, and self-discipline” aspects of work to ensure that the organization and implementation of the new plan would be “fair, open, and just.”

We put a lot of effort into system construction. First, we have formulated and announced a number of management systems, including the management methods of the Key R&D Program, project management procedures, and management regulations for professional organizations, to clarify the division of labor and responsibilities of different management bodies at each management step. Second, the specific systems are used to ensure the orderly regulation of management work in project review and establishment, and other steps. During evaluations, for example, professional organizations must select randomly from the unified pool of experts in accordance with the specified qualifications and quantity requirements, and experts cannot be used selectively. It is also necessary to implement a strict expert recusal system. Experts who participated in preparing the implementation plans and annual guidelines of key special projects cannot apply for and review related projects, completely separating the “athletes” from the “referees.” And third, evidence-based management² and random inspections have to be done for the entire acceptance and evaluation process.

In terms of information transparency, we have also adopted a series of reform measures to strengthen the active disclosure of information. For example, when we issue the application guidelines for key special projects, we also publish a list of the experts in the group that prepared the guidelines, the requirements for formal review, the person responsible for the formal review, etc., simultaneously, as we strive for openness and transparency and clear accountability at the very sources of project

² Translator's note: "Evidence-based management" (痕迹化管理) refers to the process of keeping all documents, recordings, and other records related to a decision, often a decision related to a promotion or award. This is to demonstrate that the decision was made based on the facts, rather than on subjective factors.

management. At the same time, drawing on prior experience in the work of organizing application filing for the six pilot key special projects in the early stage, the answers to frequently asked questions on project application filing were compiled and will be published on the [National] Science and Technology Information System Public Service Platform (科技管理信息系统公共服务平台) along with the guidelines. This will make it convenient for filers to look up and find answers to questions, prepare filing materials efficiently, and save time and energy.

In addition to openness and transparency and establishing rules and regulations, we also require workers and scientists participating in the Key R&D Program to adhere to professional standards and scientific ethics. By improving the self-discipline of experts and the behavior of workers, together we can build a clean and upright atmosphere. When project applications are submitted, both the organization that is applying and the person in charge of making the application must sign a pledge of integrity, promising to eliminate five behaviors that may affect fair evaluation. Project evaluation experts must also sign a pledge of integrity, promising to abide by professional standards and scientific ethics, and abide by evaluation rules and work discipline. All the more so, staff of MOST and of professional institutions must be law-abiding, fair, and honest. These kinds of measures work together with the systems described earlier for optimum combined effect.

Hou Jianguo: The formal launch and implementation of the National Key R&D Program marks a big step forward in the reform of the national S&T program, but the subsequent reform tasks will still be difficult and weighty.

In the S&T program management reform work that comes next, we will focus on five aspects of work. The first is to closely focus on national strategic requirements and cutting-edge S&T development, oriented toward prominent problems, with cohesive goals. The second is to be more open and transparent in evaluation and other aspects of management, and give tasks and projects to the most appropriate teams and scientists. The third is to do both project work and process management well, to improve innovation performance, and to pay more attention to the quality of scientific research. The fourth is to improve rules and regulations and pay more attention to management details. And the fifth is to strengthen proactive services and pay more attention to the appeals of the S&T community, and to respond to them.

In 2016, focusing on the formulation and implementation of S&T plans in the 13th Five-Year Plan, and making full use of integrated allocation of S&T resources under the new mechanism, and the strengths of various industries and ministries, we will complete all the main tasks for reforming national S&T program management within the three-year transition period, in strict accordance with the spirit of Document No. 64 and the requirements of the Office of the Central Commission for Comprehensively

Deepening Reform (中央改革办). Work on S&T program optimization and integration, professional institution reconstruction, supervision and evaluation system and plan management information system construction, and other endeavors, will be grasped and advanced in unison, so as to accelerate the formation of the new normal in plan management. Through continuous implementation of the national S&T program management reform tasks, the new program management system will be established and perfected as soon as possible, in order to improve the quality and efficiency with which the national S&T program supplies innovation.

Xinhua News Agency reporter: How has the progress of national S&T program management reform been?

[Director of the Resource Allocation and Management Department (资源配置与管理) of MOST] Zhang Xiaoyuan (张晓原): All the main reform tasks should be completed within the three-year reform transition period from 2014 to 2016, in accordance with the requirements of 2014 Document No. 64 of the State Council. At present, an open and unified national S&T management platform has been initially formed. It includes “a mechanism, three pillars, and a system.” The mechanism refers to the inter-ministerial joint meetings, which have become an important platform for consensus building, consultation, and decision making. The three pillars include: the Special Invitation Advisory and Evaluation Committee, which has begun to play an important strategic advisory role; professional institutions, with the first batch of seven institutions having already started their reconstruction and preparation for undertaking project management functions; and the “fully embedded” monitoring and evaluation system that is taking shape. The system refers to the program management information system, which has begun to provide services for the S&T community.

People’s Daily reporter: After the reform of S&T program management, will funding be cut?

[Deputy Director of the Education, Science, and Culture Department (教科文) of the Ministry of Finance] Huo Bugang (霍步刚): Integration of the S&T program is not “integration for the sake of integration,” but rather focuses on the nation’s major strategic requirements, and on creating whole-chain, integrated design. Government investment in S&T will not decrease due to the optimization and integration of S&T programs. On the contrary, it will increase stable funding support for universities and research institutions and investment in basic research.

People’s Daily reporter: With the government no longer specifically managing projects, will professional institutions have too much power?

[Zhang Xiaoyuan] The government decides “what to do,” while professional institutions decide “how to do it.” For example, when a professional organization

conducts a project evaluation, it does not appoint experts as it pleases, but must select experts randomly from the national pool of experts who meet the requirements. An initial group of seven professional institutions has already started reconstruction and they are preparing to undertake project management functions. These seven institutions, coming from MOST, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the [National] Health and Family Planning Commission (卫计委), and other subordinate institutions, will improve service awareness and standardize the management process, from project proposal acceptance to provision of professional services.