

Workshop FAQs

1. What is the objective of the NNI workshop on “The Perception, Assessment, and Management of the Potential Risks of Nanotechnology?”

It is important to recognize that risk can mean different things to various communities. For example, business risk means the possibility that a company will have lower than anticipated profits; safety risk involves the likelihood that a person may be harmed. This workshop is being held to assess the state of research progress in risk assessment, management, and communication as it aligns with an important core research area of the 2011 NNI EHS Research Strategy (http://nano.gov/sites/default/files/pub_resource/nni_2011_ehs_research_strategy.pdf; 5th core research area entitled: Risk Assessment and Risk Management Methods).

2. Why is the NNI hosting this workshop now?

The Nanotechnology Environmental and Health Implications working group of the Nanoscale Science, Engineering, and Technology (NSET) Subcommittee, the interagency body responsible for coordinating the NNI, has established a 3-year review cycle to assess implementation of the NNI EHS Research Strategy. Three years ago, the NNI conducted a series of workshops (<http://www.nano.gov/node/647>) that helped formulate this strategy, including research needs pertaining to Risk Assessment and Risk Management Methods. This workshop is being held now to discuss the state of the progress (with respect to research and practice) in this research area.

3. What is the purpose of the breakout sessions?

The purpose of the breakout sessions is to gather inputs on the state of research that supports risk-based decision-making (including NNI-funded research), and synthesize risk information linkages across various types of risk-based decisions and communities of decision-makers.

4. How are the breakout sessions structured (i.e., how can I participate in the breakout sessions)?

Each breakout session will start with a brief presentation featuring a real-world case study followed by a group exercise based on a theoretical vignette. During the group discussion, participants will be asked to comment on four thematic questions (see Vignette document in the meeting handouts), based on their experience in their various roles in the development of nanotechnologies. Participants are encouraged to share as much real-world experience as possible, in line with the overall goal of this meeting to move beyond generic discussions on risk analysis and toward discussions of real-life situations and real experience with identifying and navigating knowledge gaps.

5. What criteria were used to develop the theoretical vignette?

The vignette has been developed with the following criteria in mind:

- The vignette should be general enough that it does not implicate a specific individual or organization as well as a specific product or material.
- There should be a potential for release of a material; that is an opportunity to consider fate, exposure, and toxicity.
- The vignette should have applications that all participants can relate to easily.
- The vignette should have an application, not just a specific nanoparticle.
- There should be some compelling societal benefits as well as some potentially serious risks associated with the example.

6. What are the expected outcomes of the breakout sessions and how will they be integrated into the overall workshop outcomes?

Inputs gathered from each breakout session group, whether it includes feedback from Day 1 breakout groups (Type of Decisions) or Day 2 groups (Decision-Makers), will be summarized across four thematic questions (please see the Vignette document for the questions). All breakout groups will be answering these same four questions based on the same theoretical vignette. Results from these discussions will provide information on each group's perspective in approaching risk, including risk-based questions, decisions to be made, relevant tools and methods, and decision drivers. These inputs will be mapped across various breakout groups to identify commonalities in risk-based information.

7. What is the expected outcome of the workshop and how will it be used by the NNI?

The expected outcome of this meeting is to highlight practical tools non-Federal decision makers are using in their consideration of potential risks, including quantitative and qualitative assessment and management methods. Results from this workshop will help inform the NNI and its member agencies on the current state of progress in implementing its EHS research strategy.