

Coalition of Scientific Organizations Defend NSF Peer Review

May 20, 2013

The Honorable Lamar Smith
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith:

The undersigned organizations are concerned about recent Congressional actions that call into question the National Science Foundation's (NSF) merit review process for awarding research grants. NSF's merit review process relies upon the expertise of leading scientists and engineers, and it has a proven track record in supporting outstanding, fundamental research across all disciplines of science and engineering. Indeed, NSF's expert merit review process is a model for identifying research projects that are worthy of taxpayer-funded support and have the best opportunity to advance science and innovation. If the criterion for awarding grants shifts away from scientific merit as the primary goal, the quality of research proposals will suffer, as will the science and engineering that is ultimately funded. This would have negative impacts on our nation's entire research and innovation enterprise.

Research and education projects supported by NSF contribute to the development of the knowledge base needed for pushing the frontiers of the biological, mathematical, physical, geo, computer, social, behavioral, and economic sciences, and engineering. NSF support is also critical to scientific and engineering advancements requiring interdisciplinary collaboration where insights from one field inform questions posed in another and tools that are developed by one discipline are used to conduct experiments in another. The NSF merit review system has a tradition of identifying the research that will enhance the knowledge base of these fields and interdisciplinary exploration.

Funding basic research in all NSF-supported disciplines should be a national priority. Support of this goal should not force significant and potentially detrimental tradeoffs between one field of science and another. In creating NSF, Congress removed its political influence from the evaluation and selection process for awarding research grants, establishing a peer-review process to determine the best candidates for research funding. While past Congresses and administrations have at times identified areas of science for funding emphasis at NSF such as in nanotechnology, robotics, information technology, and cybersecurity, they have prudently and appropriately allowed these research areas to be informed by priorities set by the National Science Board and other national scientific advisory committees and to be guided by the science community through a strong system of merit review.

It is imperative that NSF's system of support for basic research be based upon excellence, competitive scientific merit, and peer-review. While Congress does play an important role in oversight of federally funded research, it should avoid legislative attempts that could undermine a decades-long system of success and ultimately impede discovery and innovation.

Sincerely,

Academy Health
American Anthropological Association
American Association for Dental Research
American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Association of Anatomists
American Association of Physics Teachers
American Astronomical Society

American Chemical Society
American Economic Association
American Educational Research Association
American Geophysical Union
American Geosciences Institute
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Institute of Physics
American Mathematical Society
American Physical Society
American Physiological Society
American Political Science Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Society for Engineering Education
American Society for Microbiology
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Civil Engineers
American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists
American Society of Limnology and Oceanography
American Society of Plant Biologists
American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene
American Sociological Association
American Statistical Association
ASME, American Society of Mechanical Engineers
Association for Environmental & Engineering Geologists
Association for Psychological Science
Association for Women in Mathematics
Association for Women in Science
Association of American Geographers
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Ecosystem Research Centers
Association of Population Centers
Association of Research Libraries
AVS - Science and Technology of Materials, Interfaces, and Processing
Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences
Biophysical Society
Boise State University
Botanical Society of America
Center on Aging
Coalition for the Advancement of Health Through Behavioral and Social Sciences Research
Coalition for the Life Sciences
Coalition to Promote Research
Cognitive Science Society
Consortium for Ocean Leadership
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council on Undergraduate Research
Crop Science Society of America
Ecological Society of America
Entomological Society of America
Federation of Associations in Behavioral & Brain Sciences
Genetics Society of America
Geological Society of America
History of Science Society

HIV Medicine Association
Hubbs Sea World Research Institute
Human Factors and Ergonomics Society
IEEE-USA
Incorporated Research Institutes of Seismology
Indiana University
Institute for Coastal Science and Policy, East Carolina University
International Society for Developmental Psychobiology
Long Term Ecological Research Network
Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium
Materials Research Society
Mathematical Association of America
Mental Health America
National Association of Graduate-Professional Students
National Association of Marine Laboratories
National Communication Association
National Ground Water Association
National Science Teachers Association
National Society of Professional Engineers
National Women's Health Network
Natural Science Collections Alliance
Population Association of America
Research!America
Romberg Tiburon Center, San Francisco State University
SAGE Publications Inc.
Seismological Society of America
Skidaway Institute of Oceanography, University of Georgia
Society for Behavioral Neuroendocrinology
Society for Computers in Psychology
Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics
Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology
Society for Judgment and Decision Making
Society for Mathematical Psychology
Society for Neuroscience
Society for Personality and Social Psychology
Society for Research in Child Development
Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues
Society for Women's Health Research
Society of Experimental Social Psychology
Society of Multivariate Experimental Psychology
Soil Science Society of America
Southeast Community Research Center
SPIE, The International Society for Optics and Photonics
The Optical Society
The Psychonomic Society
University Corporation for Atmospheric Research
University of Florida
University of New Mexico
Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution
Wrigley Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Southern California