



DEPARTMENT OF ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

14 May 2013

Dr. Kelly Falkner
Director, Division of Polar Programs
National Science Foundation
4201 N. Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22230

Dear Dr. Falkner,

The Advisory Committee (AC) of the Division of Polar Programs herewith submits the 2013 Committee of Visitors report for Antarctic Science (ANT) and Antarctic Infrastructures and Logistics (AIL) Sections of the Division. The report is the outcome of a series of telephone conference calls and a site visit of the COV in March 2013. The COV report was thoroughly discussed and approved as written by a unanimous vote at the meeting of the AC held May 1, 2013.

The report provides a critical review of the ANT and AIL sections as well as some NSF-wide functions. The sections were reviewed together to allow evaluation of the coordination between the two. The COV was impressed by the management of both sections and found the close collaboration between sections is meeting scientific requirements. They found the portfolio of supported research to be appropriately balanced. The COV supported the broad scope of most solicitations, allowing proposers to define research objectives and leading to support of the best possible science. Proposals that include new and innovative approaches to science and/or technology reviewed favorably and lead to awards for projects that are potentially transformative. The COV noted that proposal success rates are about equal for men and women in the last three years.

The COV recommends that all reasonable efforts be made by NSF to increase the capital budget for Antarctic infrastructures and to develop long-term plans for future needs. They also recommend that AIL and ANT draft plans for high demand logistics items, especially aircraft support. The COV viewed favorably the timeline of proposal submission and the occurrence of logistics reviews. They anticipate further improvement may be gained from new requirements for proposals to include a section on Logistical Requirements and Field Plans, in place of old procedures.

The AC and COV commend ANT and NSF for the exceptionally high quality of the review process, which is widely viewed as a standard of excellence both nationally and internationally. The process relies on the combination of ad hoc and panel review, and there is a strong sense that both aspects are essential to its success. The COV also stressed the value of the detailed analysis of these reviews that is conducted and transmitted by the program officers. The COV recommends effort toward more uniform quality of panel summaries and documentation of the review process. Some members of the AC feel that face-to-face panel reviews are indispensable.

The quality of the review process and the complexity of project management for fieldwork in the Antarctic contribute to a heavy workload among program officers. *The AC urges NSF not to eliminate either ad hoc reviews or panel reviews as a compromise to reduce workloads*, but instead to consider other measures suggested by the COV, such as by making greater use of science assistants or associate program managers and by requiring grant-supported project management on large and complex proposals.

To improve efficiency and strengthen the ad-hoc review of science proposals, the AC endorses the recommendation of the COV that NSF develops a system to improve tracking of reviewer requests to review. The system should ask reviewer to accept or decline the request

to review, ask questions up-front that quickly identify potential conflicts of interest in the review process, and provide automatic reminders. Such a system would improve the likelihood of each proposal receiving an adequate number of reviews in a timely manner.

Numerous times in their report, the COV identified negative impacts of NSF staff travel restrictions. The COV found travel restrictions inhibit early career investigators especially since they are denied the chance to meet program officers. Program officers need to travel to communicate program goals and research priorities to the community, gain knowledge about emerging research directions, and educate new grant applicants on the logistic hurdles inherent to work in Antarctica.

The COV was composed of eight members, including the chair and AC representative, with broad representation of Antarctic research areas. The AC is grateful to the COV for their time and effort on the review and we thank ANT and AIL for engaging with the COV and us in undertaking this assignment. We look forward to reading your response to the recommendation in this report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cecilia M. Bitz".

Cecilia M. Bitz
Chair, Division of Polar Programs Advisory Board
Associate Professor, University of Washington

Enclosure: Committee of Visitors Report

Cc: Cora Marrett, OD

Roger Wakimoto, GEO

Scott Borg, ANT

Brian Stone, AIL