May 30, 2013

Honorable Cora Marrett
Acting Director
National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22230

Honorable Dan Arvizu
Chairman
National Science Board
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22230

Dear Acting Director Marrett and Chairman Arvizu:

On behalf of the 97 member institutions of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, the 104 university members and affiliates of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), and the 39 U.S. member institutions and 7 international affiliate members of the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy (AURA), we are writing to call attention to a troubling trend, which we believe is threatening the core programs within the National Science Foundation. It is clear that the growth in our basic research enterprise envisioned by the influential National Academy of Sciences report, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* report, is not likely to happen in the near term. Nevertheless, we believe it is in the national interest to protect and nurture, to the maximum extent possible, the core disciplines and facilities that are critical to ongoing research. These not only sustain the scientific community, they fuel the economic growth and job creation this country sorely needs.

Over the past three years, the growth in cross cutting “one NSF” initiatives, now identified as “investment priorities”, has grown from just over 1% of the NSF budget in 2011 to nearly 12% in the present request. During this period, grant success rates have plummeted and NSF facilities are facing retrenchment and drastic reductions in nearly all areas. While these cross cutting priority initiatives allow a degree of high-risk research and can exploit interdisciplinary boundaries, they should be scaled to the growth in the NSF budget itself, and should not displace core programs in a period of budgetary stagnation.

Sustained support by the NSF over its 50 year history has led to dramatic breakthroughs in understanding the phenomena that govern our climate and weather, to the forces that shape our universe and changing ocean. It has brought us into the era of “big data” and an understanding of how people and society behave. NSF research has saved lives, stimulated our economy, strengthened our national security, and enriched our intellectual heritage.

Even in this budget environment science has to move forward – but with the very real financial constraints facing the Federal research enterprise and the Foundation, NSF must still be counted on to maintain the health of the Nation’s basic research enterprise. For that overriding reason, we believe the Foundation and its Board should closely examine the balance in its portfolio between its support for core research and related infrastructure, and its particularly dramatic emphasis on the previously labeled “one NSF initiatives”. We are concerned that with the actual resources likely to be available to NSF in this budget environment, the excessive growth NSF is proposing in these areas is coming at the expense of the health of core and other related cross disciplinary research and national research infrastructure activities.
We believe that science and engineering research, even in times of great budget restraint, must always push to expand our knowledge base and train the next generation of our scientific and technical workforce. In the drive to push past the research frontier, we have to ensure the health of our basic research enterprise and the unique facilities that enable the conduct of the research and education within that enterprise.

Thank you for the opportunity to convey these views. We hope they will be seen as a constructive contribution to those faced with the daunting task of making budget and policy choices in this particularly challenging environment.

Sincerely,

William Smith
President
Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy

Thomas Bogdan
President
University Corporation for Atmospheric Research

Robert B. Gagosian
President
Ocean Leadership

cc: Honorable John P. Holdren, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology and Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy
Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Chair, Senate Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee
Honorable Richard Shelby, Ranking Member, Senate Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee
Honorable Frank Wolf, Chairman, House Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee
Honorable Chaka Fattah, Ranking Member, House Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee
Honorable Lamar Smith, Chairman, House Science, Space, and Technology Committee
Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Ranking Member, House Science, Space, and Technology Committee
Honorable Jay Rockefeller, Chairman, Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee
Honorable John Thune, Ranking Member, Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee
Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman, Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
Honorable Lamar Alexander, Ranking Member, Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee