28 January 2020

White House Office of Science and Technology Policy
1650 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20504

Re: Request for Information on the American Research Environment

Dear Joint Committee on the Research Environment:

On behalf of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership (COL), which represents our nation’s leading ocean science, research, and technology organizations from academia, industry, and the larger nonprofit sector (to include philanthropy, associations, and aquariums), I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the American research environment. A strong research enterprise is critical to our nation’s strength and competitiveness, and I am pleased at your efforts to determine “actions that Federal agencies can take, working in partnership with private industry, academic institutions, and non-profit/philanthropic organizations, to maximize the quality and effectiveness of the American research environment.” I have two suggestions to ensure “the research environment is welcoming to all individuals and enables them to work safely, efficiently, ethically, and with mutual respect, consistent with the values of free inquiry, competition, openness, and fairness.”

First, as you work to determine efforts the federal government can take across each of your four key areas, I suggest working with consortia such as COL — that represent the nongovernmental parties you wish to partner with — to create an enduring advisory construct that will ensure that the best information and practices from across the U.S. research enterprise are considered as the research climate evolves. Many organizations and institutions, as well as federal agencies, already have best policies and practices in place to address issues such as sexual harassment. The challenge now is to ensure these existing (and new) best practices are consistent throughout the research environment — federal and nonfederal — and that they are upheld. Organizations like COL, that are composed of these nonfederal partners, can serve as conduits to examine best practices and shine light on those that should be adopted or publicized across the U.S. research enterprise. Federal agencies have a key role to play in empowering and enabling others through these partnerships, and every effort should be made to take advantage of mechanisms and structures that already exist to ensure a high level of consistency and avoid reinventing the wheel.


2 Ibid
Additionally, while most people may think of the “typical” research environment as a laboratory or university, it is important to note that the ocean science research environment extends beyond that, offering distinct challenges not found in other research environments. In addition to their work in labs and classrooms, researchers spend months at a time, often in close quarters, on boats, in submersibles, and in isolated field stations. It’s critically important that the challenges of these remote working conditions are considered when thinking about the research environment and that policies and procedures put in place are effective for those in any working environment.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments on the American research environment. I would be happy to meet with leadership at any time to discuss these suggestions in more detail.

Respectfully,

Jonathan W. White, RADM (Ret.), USN
President and CEO
Consortium for Ocean Leadership