



Foreword by Walter Cronkite

It may seem ironic that I—a man who failed first-year physics at the University of Texas—am writing the foreword to a book about the National Science Foundation.

I'm not a scientist. I'll never experience the thrill of formulating a new algorithm or unlocking a new gene sequence. But you don't have to be a scientist (or even have passed a physics course) to understand and appreciate the National Science Foundation. If you've ever surfed the Web or sent an e-mail, thank NSF. NSF also played a role in the development of wireless communications, advanced medical diagnostics, and more accurate weather forecasting. The list of scientific discoveries and engineering feats that NSF has supported over the past fifty years will surprise you.

In 1982 I had the good fortune to accompany marine biologists on a deep-sea dive off the coast of Mexico. It was an NSF-funded research mission. As *The Alvin* descended deeper and deeper into the ocean, I observed a world that I never knew existed, a world beneath the surface that is vast and varied.

This book, like my adventure on *The Alvin*, opened my eyes. Eighteen years ago, I was so awed by the ocean's secrets I didn't stop to think about how they were revealed. Today, when we read a story about cloning sheep or about amazingly strong molecules, most of us don't stop to think about the years of trial and error, experimentation

and analysis it took to get to the headline. Even though we're not scientists, this book can help us all to see beneath the surface of things and to appreciate how NSF enables researchers to advance the frontiers of knowledge in every direction.

Congress established the National Science Foundation in 1950 to transform wartime research into a peacetime engine for prosperity and national security. The Foundation has succeeded masterfully, albeit quietly, in achieving these goals. Maybe that's because NSF does not operate any laboratories, conduct any experiments, or land any astronauts on the moon. Rather, NSF is the nation's single largest funder of laboratories and experiments, of the kind of exploratory research that quietly plants seeds today that make headlines tomorrow.

This book tells the stories behind those headlines—stories about the men and women who are helping us to understand the world around us. For the past fifty years, this has been the story of the National Science Foundation.

Near the end of *A Reporter's Life*, I wrote: "A career can be called a success if one can look back and say, 'I made a difference.'" After reading this book, I think you'll agree that the National Science Foundation is doing just that.



Walter Cronkite today (top) and aboard the NSF-funded expedition on *The Alvin* in 1982.