

NSB STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF BROADER IMPACTS EXPERTS TO SERVE ON COMMITTEES OF VISITORS

Committees of Visitors (COV) reports are an important accountability tool used by both NSF management and NSB in its oversight role. These reports provide NSF with external expert evaluations and recommendations regarding the quality, efficiency, and integrity of the processes used for merit review of proposals and program decision-making as well as examinations of program management and portfolio balance. COV reports are submitted to the relevant directorate and the NSF Director to assist NSF management in evaluating existing programs and future directions for the Foundation.

NSB's *Vision 2030* Report calls for NSF to ensure that all NSF-funded research delivers benefits to the public and provides opportunities for all Americans to enable the U.S. to keep its lead in fundamental research and bolster the workforce of the future. The *Vision* expects that NSB will act with NSF to ensure that women and other underrepresented groups are also achieving leadership roles in the U.S. science and engineering ecosystem through appropriate policies, programs, outreach, and funding.

As a part of implementing elements of the *Vision* report, NSB's Committee on Oversight (CO) has studied how NSF's highly regarded merit review process furthers national interests and provides opportunities to all researchers. During that process, proposals are analyzed for their potential to contribute to both intellectual merit (IM) and broader impacts (BI) in the public interest. Recent COV reports consistently call attention to disparities between how the BI and IM goals of proposals are discussed in written reviews. They note that analyses of BI are more cursory, lack consistency, and are treated with less rigor than analyses of IM. A significant number of proposals reviewed in this way are still being recommended for funding despite such inadequacies. Surveys suggest that BI is an area where both proposers and reviewers lack clear understanding of requirements, thus jeopardizing the effectiveness of the merit review process.

Although COVs have a solid track record of identifying areas for improvement regarding BI review, NSB believes that COVs would be enhanced by including at least one member who has in depth experience and knowledge in BI and can analyze and make specific recommendations to improve the current review process.

NSB therefore strongly supports an NSF policy to include at least one expert in the broader impacts criterion on COV panels.