

TO: Cliff Gabriel
Office Director (acting), Office of Integrative Activities (OIA)

FROM: Craig C. Henderson
Staff Associate, Office of Integrative Activities (OIA)

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SUBJECT: Report on Diversity, Independence, Balance, and Resolution of Conflicts for the 2010 Major Research Instrumentation (MRI) Committee of Visitors

This memo reports on the diversity, independence, balance, and resolution of conflicts of the Committee of Visitors (COV) for the Major Research Instrumentation (MRI) program held on June 10 and 11, 2010.

The credibility of the COV mechanism rests, in large measure, on the selection of credible, independent experts who are able to provide balanced and impartial assessments to NSF. Prior to issuing letters of invitation to serve on the MRI COV, the program officers who serve as the MRI technical coordinators in each NSF directorate and office were solicited for recommendations for COV members, and the OIA Office Director and Senior Advisors were consulted regarding the resulting list of potential candidates. The final COV roster of thirteen members was accepted by the OIA Office Director. All thirteen of the invited COV members attended the meeting.

To be consistent with the scope of the MRI program, which involves all technical directorates and offices within NSF, the COV represented the broadest spectrum of disciplines possible, including chemistry, biochemistry, neuroscience, immunology, biology, oceanography, astronomy, geology, physics, electrical engineering, chemical engineering, computer science, and polar science. Ten of the members are from academic institutions, two from non-profit research organizations, and one from government. Five members are women, and three are from an underrepresented minority. Among the academic institutions represented, seven institutions are doctoral-granting institutions, two are master's level institutions, and one is a baccalaureate college. The thirteen COV members work in twelve states and one U.S. territory, including four EPSCoR jurisdictions.

Four of the thirteen members had served on previous Committees of Visitor panels at NSF, although none had served on a MRI COV. The chair of the MRI COV had also served previously as an Advisory Committee (AC) member at NSF. Ten of the members had not submitted proposals to the MRI program within the past five years. Each of the three members who had participated in the MRI program within the past five years had received a MRI award in that timeframe, although no COV member had a proposal pending with the MRI program at any time during the COV process.

A conflict of interest briefing was provided prior to the COV meeting as well as at the start of the COV meeting. All COV members were required to complete the NSF Conflict of Interest form. All members of the COV were barred from seeing proposals from their home institutions. Upon reviewing the list of proposals assigned for review, one COV member noted a conflict with a single proposal, and access to that particular proposal by the COV member was removed immediately to resolve the conflict. No other real or apparent conflicts arose during the course of the meeting.

Submitted by:



Craig Henderson, Staff Associate

Office of Integrative Activities (OD/OIA)



Kathryn Sullivan, Senior Advisor

Office of Integrative Activities (OD/OIA)