

## **Assessment of the National Science Foundation's Overseas Offices: Summary**

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September 2013



## Executive Summary

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Increased globalization of science and improved communication capabilities coupled with recommendations from the OIIA-ISE Advisory Committee for International Science and Engineering and the Office of Management and Budget prompted the National Science Foundation (NSF) to ask the IDA Science and Technology Policy Institute (STPI) to systematically evaluate the role, function, and value of its overseas offices, and to consider the implications of an expanded NSF presence internationally. The NSF Office of International and Integrative Activities, International Science and Engineering (OIIA-ISE)<sup>1</sup> section operates three overseas offices, one each in Europe (NSF/E, initiated in 1984), Japan (NSF/J, initiated in 1960), and China (NSF/C, initiated in 2006).

The STPI team used a multi-method approach to data collection, synthesis, and analysis to assess the primary office functions and goals. These methods included interviews, site visits, and a request for information. Data collection also added historical documentation, budget information, travel data, and knowledge and impressions of NSF and office staff members and other stakeholders. The task specified that an expert panel be assembled to advise the STPI team on relevant literature, assessment strategies, design and analysis, and data limitations.

Following a detailed examination of the origins and missions of the overseas offices, the STPI team developed a generic logic model to guide the assessment of the offices' facilitation, representation, and reporting activities and goals. Based on the results of the logic modeling process, the activities and goals were operationalized as shown in the table that follows.

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the organization in which the overseas offices are housed has changed, as well as its location in the NSF organizational structure. Throughout the document, the current name (OIIA-ISE) is used.

### Operationalized Goals of NSF Overseas Offices

| Facilitation  | Representation  | Reporting   |
|---|---|---|
| Supporting existing or developing new programs between NSF and counterpart agencies | Liaising with counterparts<br>Assisting counterparts in developing NSF-like structures      | Reporting to NSF staff on highlights of trips/meetings attended   |
| Facilitating contacts between U.S. and international researchers                    | Attending meetings on behalf of NSF<br>Representing the U.S. to international organizations | Reporting to NSF staff on the science and technology landscape or research in country or region of interest |
| Facilitating visits by U.S. researchers or students                                 |   | Reporting/translating highlights of publications in country or region                                       |
| Facilitating visits by NSF staff  |   |   |

Following extensive data collection and analysis, the STPI team convened the expert panel on February 21, 2013 to discuss the alignment of each overseas office’s activities with its mission, goals, and priorities, and the differences observed across the offices. Consistent with its tasking, the panel provided findings and recommendations:

- *Overarching Findings* identified the need to develop and implement a strategic international vision to define the role and function of the NSF overseas offices, especially in an era of budgetary austerity. The panel viewed overseas offices located in countries and regions where NSF has active, large-scale collaborations as important to the NSF mission.
- *Strategy Recommendations* focus on collaboration between OIIA-ISE and the NSF Directorates to develop a year-to-year, region-by-region strategic plan for international engagement that includes the overseas offices and OIIA-ISE’s strategic vision in that region.
- *Office Location Recommendations* identify Brussels as the optimal location for NSF/E, Beijing for NSF/C, and Tokyo for NSF/J with this office developing a regional focus on North Asia. The panel suggested an additional office in SE Asia, perhaps Singapore, and that NSF explore other low-cost models to expand NSF’s international presence.
- *Facilitation Recommendations* highlight expanded collaboration between overseas offices and NSF Divisional leadership in the development of international research programs and in planning and executing in-country and regional travel. The panel also endorsed an annual operational plan for each overseas office that specifies facilitation-related priorities and goals and a small budget for events that support program development.
- *Representation Recommendations* suggest increased emphasis on representation activities that facilitate program development and inclusion of priority

representation activities and goals in each overseas office's annual operational plan.

- *Reporting Recommendations* focus on conveying information that is only obtainable by having an in-country presence or of specific interest to the NSF Directorates. The panel confirmed the importance of the Office Head trip reporting function and recommended wider dissemination of these reports throughout NSF and across the U.S. Government, as appropriate. S&T news clippings of publicly available information should be eliminated and detailed reports reinstated if valuable to the broader scientific community.
- *Staffing Recommendations* emphasize the need for an Office Head with deep knowledge of NSF who would be given a longer term appointment than the current 2 years. The panel proposed that the Science Assistant focus on facilitating program development and that the Administrative Assistant be responsible for reporting functions. AAAS Fellows could fill the role of Science Assistant or supplement current office staff. OIIA-ISE should engage in defining the requirements for locally employed staff and in selecting them.
- *Other Recommendations* identify improvements in coordination of overseas offices with Embassies and other U.S. Federal agencies' overseas offices, revision of the budgetary approval process to give Office Heads managerial oversight, and improved IT systems administration.

To assist the NSF in its strategic analysis of the STPI review, the panel's recommendations, and the agency's international mission, multiple approaches to international engagement, four potential business models, and criteria and metrics to establish and monitor overseas commitments are provided.