NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
4201 WILSON BOULEVARD
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22230

NSF 15-076

Dear Colleague Letter: Recompetition of Operations and Management of NSF-supported Facilities to Succeed the GAGE and SAGE Facilities

April 28, 2015

Dear Colleague:

The Division of Earth Sciences (EAR) in the Directorate for Geosciences (GEO) at the National Science Foundation (NSF) currently supports two large multi-user facilities -- the *Geodesy Advancing Geosciences and EarthScope (GAGE) Facility* and the *Seismological Facilities for the Advancement of Geosciences and EarthScope (SAGE)* -- that provide geodetic, seismic, and related geophysical instrumentation, data, and educational capabilities to a wide range of EAR-supported communities. NSF is preparing for a competition for future Cooperative Agreement(s) to support management and operations of one or more facilities to provide geodetic, seismic, and/or related geophysical capabilities following expiration of the current GAGE and SAGE cooperative agreements. The planned competition is the second stage in a two-stage integration and recompetition process that NSF developed, presented to the National Science Board (NSB), and described to the community in 2009 (Dear Colleague Letter NSF 10-021).

The planned competition will be held via an open, merit-based, external peer-review process consistent with the NSF Grant Proposal Guide and the NSB Resolution on Competition and Recompetition of NSF Awards (NSB-08-12). EAR is currently preparing the program solicitation for this competition, which is expected to lead to one or more cooperative agreement(s) for one or more facilities following the end of the current GAGE and SAGE cooperative agreements on 30 September 2018.

This letter provides general information regarding the upcoming competition and invites interested members of the community to contact designated NSF representatives to provide information those community members believe is important for the planned competition.

ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

The competition for management and operation of a facility or facilities to provide geodetic, seismic, and/or related geophysical capabilities will be open to U.S. universities, colleges, and other non-profit, non-academic organizations, and any industrial firm operating as an autonomous organization or as an identifiable, separately operating unit of a parent organization.Â Consortia may include international partnerships; NSF would expect the U.S. organization to be the lead organization.

Any facility or facilities resulting from the planned competition must be managed in the public interest with objectivity and independence, free from organizational conflicts of interest, and with full disclosure of its affairs to NSF. The NSF will have overall responsibility for oversight of award(s), including technical, programmatic, financial, and administrative performance. NSF anticipates that periodic programmatic and business systems reviews would be conducted.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The range of geodetic, seismic, and/or related geophysical capabilities for which proposals will be requested has not yet been fully defined, and will depend partially on community input. However, the current capabilities comprising GAGE and SAGE may serve as a preliminary guide for the possible range of facility capabilities for which proposals may be sought via the planned competition.

GAGE comprises a distributed, multi-user, national facility for the development, deployment, and operational support of modern geodetic and related geophysical instrumentation to serve national goals in basic research and education in the Earth sciences. GAGE also plays a significant role in providing geodetic infrastructure support to National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) investigators, the international community, and commercial surveyors and engineering firms, all of whom use geodetic data from GAGE to support precise positioning for an increasingly wide range of uses.

SAGE comprises a distributed, multi-user, national facility for the development, deployment, and operational support of modern digital seismic and related geophysical instrumentation to serve national goals in basic research and education in the Earth sciences, global real-time earthquake monitoring, and nuclear test ban verification. SAGE also supports activities undertaken by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in global earthquake, volcano, and tsunami monitoring and warning.

In summary, GAGE and SAGE currently provide:

- Global and regional networks of continuously operating geodetic, seismic, and related geophysical instrumentation;
- Pools of portable seismic, geodetic, and related geophysical instrumentation primarily for use by NSF-funded investigators for targeted research projects;
- Systems for archiving, managing, and distributing large volumes of diverse geophysical data; and
- Education and outreach materials and capabilities for a wide range of audiences.

GAGE is currently managed by UNAVCO (www.unavco.org), and SAGE is currently managed by the Incorporated Research Institutions for Seismology (IRIS; www.iris.edu). Each facility is managed under a cooperative agreement with NSF that began 1 October 2013 and is anticipated to end 30 September 2018. NSB has authorized maximum five-year total funding of $92M for GAGE and $152M for SAGE.

NSF'S OVERALL CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT OF FUTURE FACILITIES

NSF anticipates that the awardee organization(s) will work closely with stakeholders to ensure that, within available resources, any facility or facilities resulting from the planned competition would support, sustain, and advance frontier world-class research and education. Those stakeholders include NSF; researchers and educators that can benefit from geodetic, seismic, and/or related geophysical capabilities currently provided via GAGE and SAGE; and our Federal agency partners. Awardee(s) would be expected to meet the highest standards for service to the scientific community and to demonstrate proactive and effective approaches to performance management. Awardee(s) would be expected to ensure that such a facility operates/such facilities operate with integrity and transparency while maintaining high-quality and responsive administration and management.

ANTICIPATED COMPETITION SCHEDULE

This notice does not constitute a solicitation; therefore, no award of any kind will result from this notice. Although the competition is still in the planning stage, NSF intends to follow this general schedule:

- **1 August 2015: Deadline for submission to NSF of written comments on desired capabilities for future facility or facilities resulting from the planned competition.** NSF will consider comments received by this date when developing the final solicitation for this anticipated competition. Comments should be submitted as a PDF document not to exceed 2 pages in length, sent as an attachment to an email to the Primary Contacts listed below. NSF does not intend to respond directly to any specific written submission. NSF will also consider community input from workshop reports and other relevant documents.
- **First quarter of calendar year 2016: Release of program solicitation.** The solicitation will specify program guidelines and proposal requirements, including eligibility and budgetary information, review criteria, exceptions to NSF Grant Proposal Guide proposal preparation instructions, and other information that may be useful to proposing organizations. Also provided as part of the solicitation will be descriptions of the scope of the program, the physical and intellectual property, the expected level of service and expertise, and the nature of international agreements, property arrangements and leases, labor agreements, etc. This information will be provided in a fashion designed to ensure equal access by all proposers.
- **December 2016:** Anticipated due date for full proposals in response to the planned solicitation.

NSF anticipates that any award recommendation(s) made following the merit review of proposals submitted under the expected solicitation would require NSB approval. NSF further anticipates that successful proposer(s), if any, would be contacted for award negotiation beginning within the first half of calendar year 2018, and that any resulting award(s) would commence on or before 1 October 2018.

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

All inquiries regarding this Dear Colleague Letter and the anticipated competition should be directed in email to the Primary Contacts listed below. NSF will consider requests for individual meetings with NSF from eligible organizations interested in this anticipated competition. At such meetings, interested organizations may request clarification of general aspects of the competition or identify to NSF any information needed for proposal preparation; however, the program solicitation and any accompanying Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) shall serve as the ultimate reference. Any such requests should be submitted via email to the Primary Contacts.

PRIMARY CONTACTS

Greg Anderson, Program Director, EAR-Instrumentation and Facilities/SAGE, greander@nsf.gov
Russell Kelz, Program Director, EAR-Instrumentation and Facilities/GAGE, rkelz@nsf.gov

Sincerely,

Carol D. Frost
Director
Division of Earth Sciences
National Science Foundation