



May 28, 2025

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Collins and Cole and Ranking Members Murray and DeLauro:

For the last 75 years our country's edge in basic science and innovation is a result of the robust partnership that started to develop between the Federal government and research universities in the 1940s, and the innovation that powered the rise of the United States as an economic superpower since then has been driven in large part by university-based researchers sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The bonds of that partnership are now being strained to the point where they could break. We are deeply concerned that recent management announcements combined with the President's FY26 Budget Request will have the unintended consequence of hindering U.S. science and technology leadership and thereby imperil the economic security and prosperity of the nation.

According to an internal agency memo, "These actions are necessary to implement Administration guidance to reduce the size of the federal workforce and reduce federal spending. Cost savings realized through these actions will be reinvested in Administration priorities." Staffing changes are starting immediately and will be completed within about a month. While the changes may be temporarily paused by litigation, the agency continues to move forward with planning for the changes.

Making significant changes to the agency mission, structure, and personnel without any congressional oversight to align with "proposed future budgets" seems incredibly premature as the FY26 "skinny" proposal has only been released and not considered or approved by Congress.

Without a strong and vibrant NSF, we risk losing U.S. global science and technological leadership, sacrificing our national security, domestic workforce, and ability to lead in future

technology. Focusing NSF on just a few research areas (reportedly artificial intelligence, quantum information science, biotechnology, nuclear energy, and translational science) fails to recognize the fundamental fields underpinning all these areas. It also removes the potential to find the next big thing in science that doesn't neatly fit into these areas. Scientific discovery is necessarily a process of inquiry and experimentation that cannot be scripted or tightly constrained. By focusing in just a few areas NSF is certain to limit and impede, rather than grow, U.S. leadership in science and economic competitiveness for decades to come.

For example, Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR), one of the most powerful tools in biotechnology and medicine, came from NSF environmental biology research funded in the 1960s which isolated a key type of heat-resistant bacteria living in Yellowstone National Park's hot springs. The goal was to understand how life thrived at high temperatures and never anticipated the applications of PCR to forensics and medical diagnostics that emerged more than 15 years later. Alternatively, NSF work in support of memory and perception in the 1990s has resulted in applications in cybersecurity like user authentication and fraud detection in banking apps. The original work had no immediate application in mind and was simply driven by better understanding of human behavior. And even a field like AI can trace a line to undirected basic research funded by NSF, in light of the agency's support of cognitive science and the mathematical foundations of neural networks in the 20th century. Reducing NSF's broad disciplinary functions to only 5 directed areas is a guaranteed way to be caught flat-footed on the technology of tomorrow that can't be envisioned today.

We ask that you provide congressional oversight by finalizing an agency spend plan for NSF in FY25 and convening a hearing to review the NSF budget request and changes at the agency, and by supporting robust funding for NSF in your FY26 appropriations bills. We cannot allow an agency like NSF, with a mission "to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; and to secure the national defense" to diminish. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss this request further.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Barbara R. Snyder
President, AAU



Mark P. Becker, Ph.D.
President, APLU

Cc: Chair Jerry Moran
Ranking Member Chris Van Hollen
Chair Hal Rogers
Ranking Member Grace Meng
OSTP Director Michael Kratsios