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Dr. Pramod Khargonekar
Directorate for Engineering
National Science Foundation

Dear Pramod,

This letter is to formally acknowledge that the NSF Engineering Advisory Committee has accepted the Committee of Visitors (COV) report on the Electrical, Communications, and Cyber Systems (ECCS) Division, and the COV report on the Emerging Frontiers in Research and Innovation (EFRI) program. The Engineering AdCom voted unanimously to accept both reports.

I will summarize the comments of the AdCom members in the discussion of the COV reports in the next paragraphs.

The COV for ECCS made a number of very positive observations about the division and its response to a previous COV report as well as its efforts to manage the very large proposal volume in creative ways. The COV made a number of suggestions around those efforts to deal with the proposal volume, in particular to develop a way of assessing the success of some of the experiments tried in order to assess their impact on different constituents—in particular younger faculty proposers. There was some concern that a single proposal window might be particularly challenging for proposers who benefit from a rapid cycle of feedback, revision, and resubmittal. A specific example cited was new faculty starting in September perhaps being not ready for a single November proposal submission window, and having to wait until the following year for a first proposal submission, or submitting and having to wait a year for a re-submission. The AdCom supported the idea of assessing the impact of the single window approach, with particular attention on younger faculty proposers. Another issue raised by the COV in its report that also generated significant discussion among AdCom members was the sometimes inconsistent expectations and evaluation of the Broader Impact portion of each proposal. The COV observation was that the intent and practice of demonstrating Broader Impact in ECCS proposals seemed inconsistent; further, it was not clear panelists or reviewers had a consistent sense of what to look for or how to weight Broader Impact relative to other proposal criteria. The AdCom does not have a specific recommendation for this challenge, as it seems to occur in a number of divisions across the Foundation. Still, concerted effort to clarify what is expected from proposers and how reviewers and panelists should evaluate and weight that part of a proposal would be quite helpful. A number of members of the COV, as well as a few in the AdCom suggested that Broader Impact might be considered over the Division's entire portfolio, not on a proposal-by-proposal basis. This view is not shared by all, but may be worth further consideration.

The COV for EFRI was also very positive in their report, noting particularly some recent EFRI efforts to broaden participation in EFRI proposals and among NSF PI's in general. The one topic from the COV report that was discussed at the AdCom was the issue of industry representation on the EFRI review panels. Apparently the COV itself was split regarding whether the current representation, a minimum of one industry participant, but often not more than one, was sufficient. The general AdCom view is that industry participation in evaluating these proposals for very new areas of research is important, and the AdCom itself did not take a firm position on whether the minimum number of industry participants in review panels should be significantly changed.

The Engineering AdCom wishes to reiterate its appreciation of the work of the COV members and for their thorough and thoughtful reports. It is clear the NSF staff take this feedback very seriously, and AdCom members value the efforts within NSF to address any issues identified.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Patrick Farrell".

Patrick Farrell
Chair NSF Engineering Advisory Committee
Provost, Lehigh University