

May 23, 2008

Dr. Andrea Lloyd  
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Dear Dr. Lloyd,

This letter provides the response of the NSF Office of Polar Programs to Committee of Visitor (COV) reviews of our Antarctic and Arctic science programs. The COV's were constituted as subcommittees of the Office Advisory Committee. Their reviews covered the period 2003-2006, and can be found in the "For OAC Members Only" section of [http://www.nsf.gov/events/event\\_summ.jsp?cntn\\_id=111247&org=OPP](http://www.nsf.gov/events/event_summ.jsp?cntn_id=111247&org=OPP). (These files are password protected: use ID: nsfdocs; Password: oac\_only.)

The Antarctic and Arctic Science Division Directors, Scott Borg and Simon Stephenson, drafted initial responses to the COV recommendations (posted at the previously referenced site) on behalf of their Divisions and these responses were discussed with the Advisory Committee on May 17, 2007 and November 8-9, 2007. All of us in the Office found the recommendations and the discussions to be very informative and helpful in thinking about how we might modify our procedures in order to be more efficient and responsive to science community needs.

Following those discussions your predecessor as the Chairman of the Advisory Committee, Dr. James T. Hollibaugh, summarized the conclusions of the Committee in the attached letter. I am now responding on behalf of OPP.

A principal recommendation for the Antarctic Division was to improve coordination between the reviews of scientific merit and of logistics supportability that proposals undergo. As one step toward addressing that recommendation we have created a new position within the Division for the purpose and are currently recruiting to fill it. A related recommendation was to encourage prospective proposers to consult with Division Program Officers prior to developing a research proposal requiring extensive logistics support. The Division has revised the language in its proposal solicitation to recommend this procedure and to encourage prospective proposers to discuss their logistic requirements in advance with the logistics providers. OPP will create a mechanism to facilitate these discussions and to capture information that will help us allocate resources over the longer term. A third recommendation was to develop a mechanism for informing the community in advance concerning future logistics availability. A first step in this direction is the new entry on the web (<http://www.usap.gov/proposalInformation/>) listing Twin Otter and Basler 67 availability. I welcome the Committee's comments on this experimented web site.

The principal recommendation to the Arctic Science Division was to take steps to ensure that the research community has a good understanding of the balance considerations that

come into play among the different components of the Division's research programs and logistics allocations, as well as how they are addressed by management. A key consideration is the dynamic balance between proposal pressure and quality and the funding allocations that enable the different programs in the Division to respond to the proposals. OPP appreciates the attention devoted to this issue by the Committee of Visitors and by the Advisory Committee and recognizes that balance will require periodic review and adjustment in order to reflect the changing priorities of the research community. The Division Director recently provided additional funding to the Arctic Natural Science Program and looks forward to discussing Division balance issues in more detail with the Committee at its upcoming meeting.

The Committee also commented that when NSF asks COV's to address questions requiring quantitative data, the Agency should assure that the required data are available to the reviewers. The Committee noted, as have previous Committees, that the NSF database does not meet this requirement in every case. This issue is the subject of continuing review within NSF.

Finally, the Committee urged NSF to make the grantees' final project reports available to the public in order to insure the widest possible benefit from the research supported by the Agency. NSF is developing a procedure to accomplish this objective in a way that does not jeopardize grantees' ability to publish their work in scholarly journals (many journals refuse to publish work that has already made its way into the public domain). We should be able to provide the Committee with a progress report on this work when we next meet.

Sincerely,

Karl A. Erb  
Director