

To: Roger Wakimoto, Assistant Director for Geosciences
Via: Kelly K. Falkner, Director, Division of Polar Programs
From: Scott Borg, Head, Antarctic Sciences Section
Brian Stone, Head, Antarctic Infrastructure and Logistics Section
Subject: GEO/PLR/ANT & AIL Committee of Visitors convened March 2013
- Summary of Diversity and Independence of COV members
- Management of Conflicts of Interest
Date: 18 September 2013

General Considerations

Because of the intertwined nature of science and science support within the US Antarctic Program (USAP), the ANT and AIL COV that convened in March 2013 was constructed to review issues related to both merit review of science decisions as well as decisions about science support for those projects that requested field work in the Antarctic. In addition to finding people knowledgeable of the kinds of science and science support issues faced by the USAP, NSF requires that the membership be appropriately independent, that membership be appropriately diverse, and that membership be balanced. While there are no quotas related to diversity, NSF policy requires that at least 25% of the COV membership consist of individuals who have not competed in the science programs for at least 5 years in order to ensure independence. Appropriate balance is also a goal, considering issues such science topics, institution types etc.

The ANT and AIL COV needed to balance a diverse science range from astrophysics to biology, to processes active in the solid, liquid and gaseous Earth at present to research on the records of these processes in Earth's deep time. Extensive efforts were made in consultation with the OPP/AC COV liaison member to find COV members who covered this broad portfolio and who represented diverse personal and institutional backgrounds.

COV Membership

A COV chair was selected following discussions with the OPP/AC and in consultation with the AC-COV liaison member, Dr. Jordan Powers. A list of a large number of potential COV member candidates was generated, drawing on Program Officers in ANT and AIL and from elsewhere in the Foundation as well as from OPP/AC members and from the COV Chair, Dr. John Cassano. Discussions between the COV Chair, the COV-AC liaison, and Heads of ANT and AIL led to the goal of a COV consisting of 6-8 members in addition to the Chair and liaison.

From the long list mentioned above, a short list of about 20 names was developed for careful consideration. Subsequently, another 14 names were added to the short list as people declined or were excluded because of conflict of interest.

Confirmed membership of the COV consisted of 7 members, in addition to the Chair and liaison, for a total of 8 for the COV (excluding the liaison). Of the eight members:

- 3 are external (e.g. had not competed for support within the last 5 years)
- 4 are women
- 5 are from research intensive universities
- 1 holds an appointment at a minority serving and undergraduate institution
- 1 has a joint appointment with another federal agency
- 1 is African American

The day before the COV was scheduled to meet, one COV member (male, African-American, from a PhD granting, non-research intensive university) withdrew because a child was hospitalized. This person was dropped from the COV because it was clear that the family emergency would persist for several days. Another was sick and was unable to travel to NSF. This person participated in the COV discussions via teleconference and was able to provide useful input. Thus, the final COV membership for consideration of the questions and development of the report consisted of the Chair and 6 members.

Conflicts of Interest

No COV members had proposals pending within Antarctic Sciences. This factor disqualified a number of people who had initially been considered as potential candidates.

COV members were briefed on Conflicts of Interest (COI) principals and NSF rules. Proposals and COV members were analyzed to identify potential COI situations (involvement in a proposal, involvement with a PI as a collaborator, institutional ties, etc.). Proposals were not assigned to people with COIs. NSF did retain the possibility to substitute proposals in cases where COIs would have prevented the COV membership from completing the COV activity as defined by the questions presented for examination. NSF used the electronic panel system to help control access based on COI issues. In addition, COV members were advised to contact NSF when a potential COI issue emerged so that it could be dealt with appropriately.