November 20, 2020

Dear Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairwoman Lowey, and Ranking Member Granger:

The Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF) – a broad-based group of professional organizations, universities, scientific societies, and businesses – appreciates Congress’ continued support for the fundamental scientific research and educational programs supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF). As Congress seeks to finalize fiscal year 2021 (FY21) appropriations legislation, we urge Congress to negotiate and pass the FY21 Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill and make a significant funding increase for NSF a high priority.

We greatly appreciate the good work of both chambers to increase the government’s investment in NSF. We request that Congress appropriate at least $8.548 billion for NSF in FY21, as reflected in the House mark. We recognize the challenges faced this year by budget caps and the tight funding environment.

We respectfully suggest, however, that this level of funding is insufficient to address the effects of years of underinvestment in the fundamental scientific research and STEM education supported by NSF and falls short of the funding trajectory needed to continue U.S. leadership in science and technology.

CNSF supported a request of $9 billion for NSF in FY21, seeking to address the effects of years of high-quality grant proposals that go unfunded due to limited funding. Those unmet needs continue. A 2019 National Science Board report stated that in FY 2018, “approximately $3.4 billion was requested for declined proposals that were rated Very Good or higher in the merit review process.” The U.S. is leaving potentially transformative scientific research and efforts to enhance STEM education on the table, while other countries are making significant investments. One effective way to combat this concern is to ensure that NSF receives the highest funding level to support as many of its strong proposals as possible.
This will allow NSF to support burgeoning national priorities such as addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, artificial intelligence, and quantum information sciences, and ensure that long term curiosity-driven research lays the foundation for future national priorities that we can’t envision today.

We are also at a critical time building and ensuring a stable STEM workforce of the future, a challenge exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is vitally important that the NSF is able to support graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and other early career scientists, who are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the most likely to have had their career goals deferred or derailed. At this challenging time, we cannot risk losing a generation of scientists who leave the field and never return. This is also an especially important time to enhance public understanding of science. NSF plays a critical role in supporting these STEM career pathways, as well as supporting research to adapt our STEM education system to meet the enormous challenges of education in the time of COVID-19, a rapidly evolving economy and preparing for a future with AI, and building diversity and growing our STEM capacity by engaging all of America’s talent. To address these disruptions and ensure that cutting-edge research and talented young scientists are not adversely affected for years to come, Congress must also provide emergency funding to the agency now.

We are grateful for your continuing interest in the work of scientists and science educators and your support for the NSF. For the last 70 years, NSF has been an essential pillar of America’s scientific enterprise and is the only federal agency with the mission of supporting all the scientific disciplines. Research supported by the agency is vital to the public interest and essential if our country is to stay at the forefront of scientific progress and the cutting edge of technology and innovation. Now is the time for the U.S. to make a significant and robust investment in NSF.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF)
American Anthropological Association
American Association of Geographers
American Association of Physicists in Medicine (AAPM)
American Association of Physics Teachers
American Astronomical Society
American Chemical Society
American Educational Research Association
American Geophysical Union
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering (AIMBE)
American Institute of Physics
American Mathematical Society
American Physical Society
American Physiological Society
American Political Science Association
American Psychological Association
American Society for Microbiology
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Association of American Colleges and Universities
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Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
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