

DRAFT, 5/24/16

Dear Colleague Letter: Seeking Community Input on NSF Polar Programs Realignment

Dear Colleague,

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is currently conducting a review of the position of the Division of Polar Programs within the Directorate for the Geosciences (GEO). Prior to 2013 the Office of Polar Programs (OPP) operated within NSF's Office of the Director. In 2013, NSF realigned several functions, including positioning OPP within the Directorate for the Geosciences (GEO) as the Division of Polar Programs (PLR). The mission of the enterprise was not changed. Now that we have several years of experience in this new configuration, NSF is conducting this review. The review process is meant to be forward-looking and data driven. Input from the science and engineering research community is an important component of the review process, and we seek your comments and thoughts.

Promoting the progress of science in the polar regions is a priority for NSF. The Foundation has a distinguished record of pioneering and supporting robust, leading-edge, polar-oriented science as well as science that exploits the unique characteristics of polar regions as platforms for research. The fascination of the public with polar regions provides excellent opportunities for learning engagement and to showcase the NSF research mission. PLR currently coordinates, manages and initiates funding of basic research and operational support for science that is best done or can only be done in the Arctic and/or Antarctica. Investments in polar science are also made by other NSF directorates, and encompass a broad array of topical areas including the geosciences, biosciences, social sciences, engineering, and astronomy and astrophysics. PLR science is also characterized by strong international collaborations. To enable research in the polar regions, PLR oversees substantial logistics capabilities and infrastructure that include research stations, specialized facilities, surface vehicles, aircraft, and ships in both Polar Regions. Organizationally, PLR comprises four Sections: Arctic Sciences, Antarctic Sciences, Antarctic Infrastructure and Logistics and the Polar Environment, Safety and Health. NSF has specific responsibilities that are staffed and implemented by PLR: Presidential Memorandum 6646 designates the NSF as the single-point manager for the United States Antarctic Program on behalf of the U.S. government. National Security Presidential Directive 66 and Homeland Security Presidential Directive 25 designate NSF to lead the U.S. in advancing Arctic research and international scientific cooperation.

NSF is interested in the perspectives of the research community on the following questions. Information is available at [XXX \(the link with the data/information\)](#).

1. Are there particular successes or failures that, in your opinion, arise directly from the relocation of the Office of Polar Programs into GEO?

2. Given the data and trends available at the above link, your direct interaction with PLR, and NSF's budgets in general, please comment on the extent to which PLR's current role within NSF supports and anticipates the needed science and operations investments in polar regions. Has NSF PLR served the needs of the science and engineering research community as well as possible in light of the current budget realities?
3. What, if any, changes might be made to enable NSF PLR to most effectively perform all of its important functions?

We would like to hear from the interested community by **X/XX/2016**. Please send your comments to

NSF PLR Realignment Review Input
XXX@nsf.gov

Sincerely,