

February 24, 2012

Dr. John Wingfield
Assistant Director for Biological Sciences
National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22230

Dear Dr. Wingfield:

In recent years, the National Science Foundation (NSF) and more specifically the Biological Sciences Directorate (BIO) have supported important new initiatives to advance digitization of our nation's biological collections and improve our understanding of biological diversity. For these efforts, we offer our sincere gratitude. We write today, however, to express our concern with a provision in the President's fiscal year (FY) 2013 budget request for NSF that we feel would harm our nation's biological specimen collections. We note with concern that the budget request proposes changing the Collections in Support of Biological Research (CSBR) from an annual to a biennial competition and that the funding for this program would effectively be cut by half.

The CSBR program provides vitally important support to our nation's biological sciences research collections. We respectfully urge you to consider the negative consequences of this proposed change to the program and the funding level.

As you are aware, biological science collections are a vital component of our nation's research infrastructure and warrant a sustained investment from the NSF, in the same way that other components of our scientific research and education infrastructure are supported. Whether held at a national museum or in a university science department, these scientific resources contain genetic, tissue, organismal, and environmental samples that constitute a unique and irreplaceable library of Earth's history. The specimens and their associated data drive cutting edge research on the significant challenges facing modern society, such as improving human health, food security and availability, and climate change, and inspire novel interdisciplinary research that drives innovation and addresses some of the most fundamental questions related to biodiversity, including:

- How are species distributed in geographical and ecological space?
- What is the history of life on Earth?
- How are major groups of organisms related to one another?
- What factors lead to speciation, dispersal, and extinction?
- What are the impacts of climate change likely to be?
- What information is needed for effective conservation strategies?

The federal Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections recognized the value of scientific collections in their 2009 report, which found that "scientific collections are essential to supporting agency missions and are thus vital to supporting the global research enterprise." In light of the importance of scientific collections to U.S. research, Dr. John Holdren, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, issued a memorandum in October 2010

directing federal agencies to budget for proper care of collections. The NSF is the primary federal agency that provides support for non-governmental collections. Thus, at the same time federal agencies are being tasked with supporting governmental collections, we would hope that NSF would sustain its support for non-governmental research collections.

In addition to preserving important biological specimens for ongoing and future research, CSBR awards are an important source of financial support to American-owned companies that specialize in cabinetry and supplies used by museums and universities. CSBR awards also directly employ researchers and curators, and are used to train the next generation of biological scientists and collections specialists.

Given the current financial strain at many museums and universities, CSBR funding is a critical lifeline that helps to ensure proper curation of specimens. We urge you to reconsider the proposed change to the CSBR program.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us or Dr. Robert Gropp, AIBS Director of Public Policy, at 202-628-1500 x 250 or rgropp@aibs.org.

Sincerely,

Larry Page, Ph.D.
President
Natural Science Collections Alliance

Christopher Norris, Ph.D.
President-Elect
Society for the Preservation of Natural
History Collections

Ford W. Bell, DVM
President
American Association of Museums

Richard O'Grady, Ph.D.
Executive Director
American Institute of Biological Sciences

Bonnie Styles, Ph.D.
President
Association of Science Museum Directors