

FROM: Eric S. Saltzman, on behalf of the NSF Arctic Section



TO: Craig Lee, Chair SEARCH Observing Change Panel

RE: SEARCH Community Position Paper: Arctic Observing Network

DATE: July 17, 2015

I would like to thank you for the Community Position Paper: Arctic Observing Network (AON). The Arctic Section at NSF appreciates the input from the SEARCH community – and your efforts to help develop a robust national Arctic observing capability. This is an opportunity to provide some comments relating to both the community paper and more generally to NSF’s role in Arctic observing. These comments reflect the current perspective of the NSF Arctic Section, not necessarily that of other agencies involved in Arctic research or IARPC. The SEARCH position paper uses the term AON in multiple contexts. In the interest of clarity, I will refer to the NSF program as **NSF-AON** and the broader national effort as **US-AON**.

The **NSF-AON** program is a proposal-driven peer-reviewed research program focused on observations of key environmental parameters. Time scales of a typical NSF proposal are 3-5 years. Longer time scale observations desired for AON science objectives are certainly possible, but require successful competition through the peer review process. The primary stakeholder for **NSF-AON** is the scientific research community, including the US academic and federal research communities and international research partners. SEARCH and other US and international science coordination groups play a vital role in this effort – by building communities of scholars debating ideas, developing consensus and priorities, identifying controversies, and building the relationships that lead to future collaborations.

With regard to **US-AON**, we agree that NSF could partner with mission agencies to develop operational observational networks that serve a much broader range of stakeholders including, but not limited to, the scientific community. The NSF role should be to make observations that enable discovery, develop new observing tools, cyberinfrastructure, and modeling capabilities, and to build capacity through graduate research and education. **NSF-AON** can support pilot or research-scale observations which later migrate to mission agencies for operational implementation. However, NSF is not best positioned to bear primary responsibility for critical national infrastructure designed for operational needs such as weather prediction, and storm surge, earthquake, volcano and other such monitoring.

This is a particularly challenging time for NSF-AON. Numerous NSF-AON awards supported in better financial times have now ended. Several of those projects were supplemented with FY 15 funds in order to extend them for an additional year. The challenge going forward is to achieve an NSF-AON program that is sustainable within the current fiscal constraints on the budget and to retain the flexibility to fund new ideas and develop new capabilities. Given the growing interest in NSF-AON this will likely result in lower success rates and in the discontinuation of some valued observations. We want to assure the community that the NSF Arctic Section remains committed to supporting AON to the best of our ability within available resources.

With regard to the **US-AON**, the SEARCH position paper speaks to “Governance” and “a Steering Group with vested authority to provide official advice and guidance”. The suggestion to establish such a group would need to be considered by numerous Federal agencies and would

likely be subject to the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The NSF PLR Arctic Sciences Section does not support establishment of such a committee. By law, **NSF-AON** is governed through existing NSF policies and procedures. Mechanisms already exist to provide input including the GEO Advisory committee and its subcommittees, the Polar Research Board, and IARPC collaboration team activities.

In the context of **US-AON**, it is worth noting that the US Arctic Executive Steering Committee recently established under the National Strategy for the Arctic Region (NSAR) is conducting a government-wide Gaps and Overlaps analysis to assess the nation's capacity to achieve the goals of NSAR. The Gaps and Overlaps report is scheduled for release in June 2015 and will be used to inform agency priorities going forward. We in the NSF Arctic Section look forward to being part of this process and to working with the **SEARCH** community to develop an innovative and effective Arctic observational effort for scientific research.

Finally, I am pleased that Dr. Will Ambrose has taken over as program manager for **NSF-AON** in mid-June. I am confident that Dr. Ambrose will provide active leadership for the **NSF-AON** program and will work closely with the **SEARCH** community.