



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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OFFICE OF THE
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
FOR MATHEMATICAL AND
PHYSICAL SCIENCES

March 28, 2007

Dear Members of the MPS Advisory Committee:

I am writing to you concerning the meeting of the Mathematical and Physical Sciences Directorate Advisory Committee (MPSAC) that will take place Friday morning, April 6. As you already know, this meeting will be in the form of a telephone conference call between members of the MPSAC and MPS staff. This is because of budget constraints resulting from the FY 2007 NSF budget approved by Congress and signed into law by President Bush in February 2007. The budget, while providing for the President's request to Congress for support of Research and Related Activities (an increase of 6.0% for MPS) restricted other budget areas to FY 2006 amounts. This includes salaries and expenses from which Advisory Committee expenses are paid. These very tight constraints are why we are holding the April meeting of the MPSAC via a conference call. I expect to return to our regular format for the November 2007 MPSAC meeting.

Given the format of this meeting, we are faced with both significant time constraints and communications challenges. But it is important that we continue the positive directions of our November meeting and that you understand the importance of the impact of your advice and comments on our activities and plans. In this regard, we are planning for each MPS Division to conduct the normal breakout sessions on Thursday afternoon, April 5, via teleconference with their respective MPSAC members and feed this into the full MPSAC teleconference on Friday.

I am attaching an agenda for this meeting that has been developed in consultation with the MPSAC Chair, Dr. Michael Witherell. I will be reporting to you on the impact of the FY 2007 budget and the MPS budget request for FY 2008. We will also have reports by the Chairs of the Committee of Visitors for the Division of Mathematical Sciences and the Division of Chemistry; the reports cover meetings that took place in February. The two COV reports/discussions are allocated an hour of our time because they represent a major formal responsibility of the MPSAC. They will also provide input relevant to our later discussions on planning.

At the November 2006 MPSAC meeting we anticipated creating several subcommittees, and I would like to report on the status of these subcommittees.

- A subcommittee on the American Competitiveness Initiative, chaired by Dr. Cynthia Burrows of the University of Utah has been meeting via teleconference, and, following the reports of the Committee of Visitor Chairs, Dr. Burrows will be reporting on the work of that subcommittee.

- A subcommittee on facilities, to be chaired by Dr. Witherell, is still in the process of formation. There have been some preliminary communications between Michael and some potential members of this subcommittee. It is our intention that this subcommittee has representation of all MPS disciplines. A charge will be provided at this meeting for subsequent discussion and adoption.
- A subcommittee chaired by Dr. Susan Coppersmith was formed to assist in the search for a Director of the Division of Materials Research, and they have had a number of teleconferences. At the time of the original deadline, we were concerned that the number of applications was low, so we extended the deadline to March 28.

The rest of our meeting will be concerned with the Directorate's long-range planning activities, as we are beginning preparations for the NSF budget request to the Office of Management and Budget. It is here that we are most explicitly seeking your advice and input. In preparation for these discussions, we are asking that a significant fraction of the Divisional breakout sessions being held Thursday afternoon be devoted to a discussion of the Division's long-range plans, with emphasis on implications for FY 2009 budget preparation. At the Friday meeting, as we begin to consider elements of an integrated MPS-wide long-range plan, we are asking that the MPSAC reporters of these breakout sessions report on and update the MPSAC on the most important aspects of the Divisional plans. Your input is, and will be, very important in planning for our budget requests.

Given the time constraints of the meeting, we would like to have a second MPS teleconference in late May devoted to further development of the ideas and concepts with respect to planning and the FY 2009 budget that will arise from our Friday discussions. We would be particularly interested in identifying possible new NSF-wide initiatives that MPS could lead, rather than simply participate in. We suggest that the MPSAC Chair, the Chairs of the divisional breakout sessions, and interested MPSAC members work with us in preparation for this second teleconference.

We will be implementing a secure web site where materials that will be discussed during the teleconference can be accessed. The COV reports and the MPS responses to these reports will also be posted on this site.

I have included, as attachments to this letter, the Divisional breakout assignments and a conflict-of-interest form. If you did not attend the November meeting, but will be participating in the teleconference, it is essential that you fill in the form and either fax (703-292-9151) or email the completed form to Ms. Alta Jones (ajones@nsf.gov) prior to the teleconference. If you attended the November 2006 meeting it is not necessary to fill in the form. We must provide the completed forms to our General Counsel's office. Briefing materials for the Advisory Committee meeting will be sent to you by the end of next week.

Should you have any questions concerning the meeting or its arrangements, please feel free to contact Dr. Morris Aizenman (maizenman@nsf.gov 703-292-8807).

I am looking forward to a productive meeting.

With best wishes,

Tony F. Chan
Assistant Director