



National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22230

NSF 14-026

Dear Colleague Letter: Sequestration Effects on MPS

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Dear Colleagues:

I know that many of you are curious about the consequences for the Mathematical and Physical Science Directorate (MPS) of the sequestration of funds during FY 2013 and the lapse in funding (“shutdown”) during the first 16 days of FY 2014. Now that we have closed the books on FY 2013, we can assess these effects quantitatively and give you some idea about their impact.

The Research and Related Activities (R&RA) budget, through which we fund research awards and facilities, decreased by about 3.5% for the Foundation and by about 4.5% for MPS. The Divisions in MPS did not share the decrease uniformly, and individual investigator awards suffered the largest reduction. This differential arose from a Foundation-wide policy of protecting existing awards, such as those supporting facilities infrastructure, centers, and early-career programs. I expect that any future budget restrictions will affect these previously protected programs.

Sequestration strongly affected our competitive research awards program. MPS made 13% (258) fewer competitive research awards in FY 2013 than in FY 2012, and those awards were 9% smaller on average. The funding rate for competitive research proposals in MPS fell to 22% from 25% in FY 2012, continuing a trend of more than a decade. The future budget picture remains uncertain, but we are committed to supporting excellent research. MPS continues to provide over a billion dollars each year to fund exciting and important fundamental science.

We were delighted to get back in action after the 16-day government shutdown that ended on October 17. Our primary focus has been on our core functions of receiving, reviewing, and acting on proposals along with oversight and management of existing awards. The consequences of the interruption will last much longer than the interruption itself, and we have established priorities for the most important tasks, concentrating on the merit review process. MPS has rescheduled the nine review panels that fell during the shutdown. The hard work and careful planning of our Program Officers and Administrative Staff also allowed us to conduct 15 of the 17 panels scheduled during the first two weeks after our return. This accomplishment was no mean feat and kept us from losing even more ground. I greatly appreciate the dedication and foresight that made it possible. Like all Directorates in the Foundation, we had to cancel our Fall Advisory Committee meeting, but we will resume the regular schedule with a virtual meeting in January, 2014.

Interaction with the scientific community is one of the keys for MPS in dealing with challenging times. I appreciate your participation in the work of the Foundation as you send us your excellent ideas, provide insightful reviews of proposals, and serve on advisory bodies. My colleagues and I are eager to hear your thoughts and suggestions, and we welcome continued communication in these challenging times. With your help, MPS will continue to support excellent, fundamental research across the physical and mathematical sciences.

Sincerely,

F. Fleming Crim
Assistant Director, National Science Foundation
Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences