NSB STATEMENT ON TRAINING TO IMPROVE PEER REVIEWING AND ADDRESS UNCONSCIOUS BIASES IN THE MERIT REVIEW PROCESS

The National Science Foundation's (NSF) merit review process is considered the gold standard by which competitive scientific research grants are evaluated and awarded. Due to its importance, the process must be equitable and transparent in its application.

NSB's *Vision 2030* emphasizes the pressing need to improve the level of participation of women and other underrepresented groups in the broad science and engineering enterprise, and particularly in leadership roles. In pursuit of this goal, the Board's Committee on Oversight (CO) has studied the impact of the merit review process on the success of these identified groups in successfully accessing the research funding so critical to career advancement. As noted in the 2019 Merit Review Digest Overview, improvement is needed in this area.

With this in mind, and further motivated by NSF surveys of grant applicants that reveal some investigators are dissatisfied with the quality of written feedback on grants submissions, NSF developed a video to assist proposal reviewers. This training video provides information on elements of high-quality feedback to proposers and how reviewers can ensure fair and transparent consideration of proposals, including recognizing and addressing the reviewers' own unconscious biases. While over 90% of those who watched the video deemed it valuable, to date only 20% of reviewers have taken advantage of the opportunity.

NSB believes that merit review would significantly benefit from maximizing the preparedness of reviewers to fulfill their critical role in meeting the high standards and expectations of the process. NSB strongly advocates for the goals of ensuring fair and transparent consideration of all proposals, ensuring awareness of reviewers' possible implicit biases, and providing optimally useful written feedback, but leaves the specifics of appropriate training to NSF's discretion.