Testimony of:

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Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Broun, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to speak on the National Science Foundation's participation in the America Recovery and Reinvestment Act. I am Dr. Cora Marrett, Acting Deputy Director and Senior Accountability Officer for Recovery Act Activities for NSF.

The Foundation is grateful and honored that our role in stimulating the American economy has been recognized. The $3 billion Recovery Act investment in NSF programs will sustain and advance major research initiatives, enhance support for science, technology, engineering and mathematics education, and help renew America's research infrastructure.

The immediate impact of this investment will be felt by investigators, post-doctoral fellows, graduate and undergraduate students, and teachers throughout the nation. NSF funding now helps to support nearly 200,000 of these individuals every year. We expect to add approximately 50,000 in FY 2009 with Recovery Act funds.

Over the longer term, a vibrant research and education enterprise will help meet increasing demands for the new knowledge and innovative technologies that contribute to sustainable economic prosperity and quality of life.

As you know, the Recovery Act mandates an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability. NSF is confident that the agency can maintain the highest standards of competitive merit review, distribute Recovery Act funds in a timely manner, and meet all requirements for accountability and transparency.

1. How soon will you begin to allocate funds for your agency programs funded through the Recovery Act?

The Foundation has developed formal policies and procedures for implementing the Recovery Act and a plan and framework for allocating funds. Moreover, we have proposals in place that merit the funding and we have and procedures for handling expeditiously other proposals we will receive. For these reasons, NSF is confident that we can begin to make the first awards within the next few weeks.

As you know, NSF Recovery Act funds total $3 billion. $2.5 billion is available for Research and Related Activities, and includes $300 million for Major Research Instrumentation (MRI) and $200 million for Academic Research Instrumentation (ARI). The remaining $2 billion supports new research grants and critical infrastructure needs, with an emphasis on deferred maintenance and enhancements for existing research facilities.

In addition, the Recovery Act stipulates $400 million for Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction, and $100 million for Education and Human Resources. The $100 million includes $25 million for the Math and Science Partnerships Program and $60 million for the Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program, and $15 million for a Science Masters program authorized in the America Competes Act.

Not only will NSF distribute these funds expeditiously, we expect that the science and engineering communities are poised to immediately expend funds that will advance discovery and innovation, and enhance the economy. The highly rated proposals we have been unable to support provide ample evidence of this. Colleges and universities have urgent needs to retain talented faculty, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. They are also prepared to use Recovery Act funds to refurbish laboratories and upgrade information systems technology.

2. There will be increased pressure to bypass standard procedures in order to accelerate the delivery of Recovery funds through grants and contracts. How will you ensure the expedited awards maintain a selection and management process that is fair, competitive, and advances the President's long term policy agenda?

In awarding Recovery Act funds, the Foundation recognizes the importance of building and maintaining the confidence and trust of Congress and the American people. NSF maintains a steadfast commitment to established merit review processes, considered by many to be the "gold standard" for achieving excellence, accountability, transparency and effectiveness in grant-making activities.

The NSF merit review process relies on a pool of over 50,000 volunteer reviewers, selected from a pool of national and international experts, to evaluate the proposals we receive. Proposals are weighed against two established criteria: intellectual merit and

broader impacts of the proposed research. The second criterion considers the impact that the research can have beyond the advancement of new knowledge, for example in teaching, training and learning.

NSF will not, and need not bypass these established procedures in order to move funds rapidly. We have proposals already reviewed through the merit process this fiscal year that we could not fund with our regular budget. The budgets for these highly rated proposals total at least $2 billion. Reviews underway or to be completed shortly will generate additional proposals appropriate for Recovery Act funding. NSF will not compromise the fairness and competitiveness that marks the review process.

The Foundation's first priority is to fund highly-rated proposals that would otherwise be declined for lack of funds. These investments clearly reflect the Administration's commitment to advance science and innovation to build a sustainable economic future.

NSF places a high priority on using Recovery Act funds to support proposals from first time principal investigators and for high risk and transformative research. Both of these goals are also priorities for the Administration.

3. How will you ensure the agency staff responsible for contracts and grant management have the knowledge and skills necessary to properly award and manage contracts and grants funded by Recovery Act resources?

The Recovery Act clearly requires NSF to employ highly qualified staff to execute the critical responsibilities of grant and contract management. As you know, awarding and managing grants and contracts is the bread-and-butter business of the Foundation. In addition to well established merit review processes, NSF has a cadre of highly experienced grants management staff. Effective management processes, refined over many decades, are already in place to ensure that Recovery Act funds are awarded in a timely manner while maintaining the integrity of award management processes.

4. What structures do you plan to establish to ensure compliance with directions from the Office of Management and Budget? How will these structures ensure the timely delivery of information on Recovery Act projects to the public web portal, Recovery.gov, as directed by the Act and President Obama?

NSF has more than a plan; we have a structure in place. The Senior Accountability Officer, my role, oversees a Recovery Act Steering Committee drawn from across the agency. Many members of the steering committee themselves direct "tiger teams" with specific responsibilities aligned with the requirements of the Recovery Act.

NSF management continues to work closely with the National Science Board, our governing body, and the Office of the Inspector General to develop appropriate procedures to meet the enhanced monitoring and reporting requirements of the Recovery Act. The responsibility for the timely delivery of information to the Recovery.gov web portal rests with the Chief Accountability Officer. A single office compiles the information that currently is required on a weekly basis.

In conclusion, the high expectations accompanying the Recovery Act are a direct reflection of the discoveries and innovations that NSF and its partners in the research and education community have brought to the nation over the past six decades. This landmark legislation provides the means to move forward and to greatly strengthen these contributions to the nation and the American people.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions.