



National Science Foundation  
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

SEARCH

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HOME | FUNDING | AWARDS | DISCOVERIES | NEWS | PUBLICATIONS | STATISTICS | ABOUT

## About NSF



### About

- ◆ [NSF at a Glance](#)
- ◆ [Who We Are](#)
- ◆ [What We Do](#)
- ◆ [How We Work](#)
- ◆ [Glossary](#)

### History

### Visit NSF

### Staff Directory



### Career Opportunities

### Contracting Opportunities

### NSF & Congress

### Budget

### Performance Assessment Information

### Partners

### Use of NSF Logo

## About the National Science Foundation

### NSF AT A GLANCE

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1950 "to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense..." With an annual budget of about \$5.91 billion, we are the funding source for approximately 20 percent of all federally supported basic research conducted by America's colleges and universities. In many fields such as mathematics, computer science and the social sciences, NSF is the major source of federal backing. [MORE](#)



View a 3-minute [video overview](#) of NSF's mission and focus.

### WHO WE ARE

NSF leadership has two major components: a [director](#) who oversees [NSF staff and management](#) responsible for program creation and administration, merit review, planning, budget and day-to-day operations; and a 24-member [National Science Board \(NSB\)](#) of eminent individuals that meets six times a year to establish the overall policies of the foundation. The director and all Board members serve six year terms. Each of them, as well as the NSF deputy director, is appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. At present, NSF has a total workforce of about 1,700 at its Arlington, VA, headquarters, in approximately 1,200 career employees, 150 scientists from research institutions on temporary duty, 200 contract workers and the staff of the NSB office and the Office of the Inspector General. [MORE](#)



### WHAT WE DO

As described in our [strategic plan](#), NSF is the only federal agency whose mission includes support for all [fields of fundamental science and engineering](#), except for medical sciences. We are tasked with keeping the United States at the leading edge of discovery in areas from astronomy to geology to zoology. So, in addition to funding research in the traditional academic areas, the agency also supports "high-risk, high pay-off" ideas, novel collaborations and numerous projects that may seem like science fiction today, but which the public will take for granted tomorrow. And in every case, we ensure that research is fully integrated with education so that today's revolutionary work will also be training tomorrow's top scientists and engineers. [MORE](#)



### HOW WE WORK

NSF's task of identifying and funding work at the frontiers of science and engineering is not a "top-down" process. NSF operates from the "bottom up," keeping close track of research around the United States and the world, maintaining constant contact with the research community to identify ever-moving horizons of inquiry, monitoring which areas are most likely to result in spectacular progress and choosing the most promising



people to conduct the research. [MORE](#)



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