

Ocean Exploration Advisory Board
A Federal Advisory Committee Act Board

May 12, 2021

Mr. Benjamin Friedman
Deputy Under Secretary for Operations
Performing the Duties of Under Secretary of Commerce for
Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
14th and Constitution, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Friedman:

The Ocean Exploration Advisory Board (OEAB) is required by law (33 USC 3405) and by its charter to conduct an annual review of the competitive grant selection process used by NOAA Ocean Exploration for the quality and effectiveness of the proposal review process established under 33 USC 3403. To that end, NOAA Ocean Exploration briefed the OEAB on its annual grants competition at our April 2021 meeting. The OEAB has determined that NOAA Ocean Exploration's process is akin to the National Science Foundation peer-review system.

The board acknowledged the value of the pre-proposal process in light of the large number of proposals the office receives relative to the number they are able to fund. This additional step is a service to all those who apply in that it streamlines the application process. But, NOAA Ocean Exploration could provide more information to applicants when their proposals are declined. To encourage and guide early career applicants in particular, the OEAB recommends that rejection letters include a statement of strengths, as well as weaknesses, and, to the extent practicable, provide actionable feedback. The OEAB also recommends that NOAA Ocean Exploration:

- Maintain statistics on how many proposals were *selectable* for funding but were *not selected* because of limited funding. This information would help refine NOAA's understanding of the funding need.
- Review private sector participation in the program to understand why so few applications are received and success is rare. Relevant questions include whether the proposals are inferior or are not cost effective.

- Consider hosting a roundtable or panel discussion to allow past awardees to advise potential new applicants, especially early career applicants.

The board voted unanimously to endorse NOAA Ocean Exploration's competitive grant selection process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Hume". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Cameron R. Hume
Chair, Ocean Exploration Advisory Board