WASHINGTON NEWS

NSF Seeks International Materials Research Collaborations, Part II

In the National Science Foundation's (NSF) continuing efforts to encourage U.S. materials researchers to collaborate with their international counterparts (see *MRS Bulletin*, March 2001, p. 167), NSF officials are putting the finishing touches on a new "Dear Colleague Letter" involving Canada and Mexico. The letter will be similar to the one issued in 1999 involving NSF and the European Commission (EC). These efforts build on a series of international workshops held over the past five years.

According to the NSF-EC Letter, U.S. researchers may join multilateral consortia as participants in EC programs, but they may not receive EC support. The activity links U.S. researchers with a larger EC research effort called the "Framework Programme" (see *MRS Bulletin*, August 1998, p. 4). It is a scheduled series of calls for proposals for coordinated research efforts in many scientific fields. In the materials area, proposals to the EC from European researchers may involve

- cross-cutting generic materials technologies,
- advanced functional materials,
- sustainable chemistry,
- expanding the limits and durability of structural materials, and
- support for research infrastructure in the materials sciences.

Proposals from U.S. researchers may address any of the broad range of materials research and education topics appropriate for NSF support.

According to Adriaan de Graaf, executive officer for NSF's Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences (MPS), NSF has been developing a similar "Dear Colleague Letter" with counterpart officials in Canada and Mexico for several months. The exchanges have produced a draft document, which is under final review in all three countries in anticipation of a joint announcement later this year. "We have three organizations, each with its own requirements, trying to come up with one document. The fact that it's going to take place is extraordinary," said de Graaf, who has been participating in NSF's dialogue with Canada and Mexico.

Meanwhile, NSF is pursuing possible future agreements in four other geographic areas. Perhaps most imminent—although still at least several months away—is South America. Informal communications are under way with Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. According to de Graaf, progress has been slowed because all three nations have recently installed new administrations. "If possible, we would like to set up a joint meeting this spring," he said, "and work toward a joint announcement perhaps as early as this fall."

Further in the future is a possible agreement with seven African nations—Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. De Graaf said that officials in each nation have shown interest, and he believes a joint meeting is possible later this year.

A fifth region for cooperation involves the United States and Asian Pacific countries. An Asian Pacific workshop was held in Hawaii in 1998. NSF is exploring ways to implement the workshop's recommendations.

NSF is also interested in fostering research interactions with the Middle East—the sixth potential region for materials research cooperation. Division of Materials Research (DMR) officials visited Egypt, Turkey, and Jordan last fall to explore possible interest in a workshop there, according to Lance Haworth, executive officer of DMR. It is also clearly important to include Israel and other Middle Eastern countries in the workshop. "We've encountered lots of interest in cooperative research in the region," Haworth said, but conditions in Israel are such that scheduling a workshop would be premature for the time being.

Meanwhile, NSF and EC officials are near announcing the second round of awards based on 25 proposals for joint materials research that were submitted last fall. NSF is also starting to examine ways to expand opportunities for international education and training, allowing researchers to move from institution to institution more easily.

Another area of progress, according to Haworth, is the embryonic Materials World Net, which is intended to provide researchers from many nations with easily accessible data on materials properties, publications, facilities, and experts. Efforts to start up network nodes in the United States, Canada, and Mexico will begin as soon as the joint research plans are in place.

The World Net also is meant to foster easy and efficient electronic communications, including e-mail, data transfer, and video teleconferencing. "After all," de Graaf said, "if you're here in the U.S. and you're involved in a project in South Africa, you can't travel there every week."

PHIL BERARDELLI

ATP Requests Proposals for FY 2001 Competition

In FY 2001, the Advanced Technology Program (ATP) of the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is instituting a proposal-review process under which proposals can be submitted and funded throughout the fiscal year. No less often than every two months, or after ATP has received approximately 100 proposals, it will group all proposals received during that period and review them. The proposals will be distributed to technology-specific source evaluation boards in areas such as advanced materials, biotechnology, chemistry, electronics, and information technology.

The ATP Proposal Preparation Kit may be accessed at www.atp.nist.gov or be requested by phone: 1-800-ATP-FUND (1-800-287-3863); fax: 301-926-9524 or 301-590-3053; e-mail: atp@nist.gov; or letter addressed to NIST, Advanced Technology Program, 100 Bureau Dr., Stop 4701 (Administration Bldg. 101, Rm. A413), Gaithersburg, MD 20899-4701, USA.

Maintaining S&T Leadership Listed as Priority by Council on Competitiveness

The recently published report from the Council on Competitiveness, "U.S. Competitiveness 2001: Strengths, Vulnerabilities and Long-Term Priorities," highlights the role of innovation as a source of U.S. competitive advantage and a driver of productivity and growth. At the same time, the study uncovers a serious drop in public investment in research and innovation as a share of national wealth during the past decade.

The report identifies long-term policy priorities in three areas needed to ensure global leadership and a rising standard of living. These include maintaining world leadership in science and technology, boosting overall work force skills, and strengthening regional clusters of innovation.

Data cited in the report indicate that the bar for continuing U.S. competitiveness is rising as the global capacity for innovation grows. For example, the supply of scientists, engineers, and technicians is growing abroad and declining in the United States. More nations are also acquiring high-end innovation capabilities through the use of concerted investment in research and development.

The report can be accessed at www.compete.org, or ordered by calling the Council on Competitiveness at 202-682-4292 or sending e-mail to council@compete.org.

The Council is a nonpartisan forum of 212 corporate chief executives, university presidents, and labor leaders, working together to set a national agenda to strengthen U.S. competitiveness while boosting the standard of living for all U.S. citizens. □

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