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Letter of Intent between the Department of the Air Force and the National Science Foundation Concerning a Partnership to Coordinate Mutual Research Interests

American leadership in science and technology is critical to our national security, economic growth, job creation, and global leadership. Federal investment in research and development (R&D) programs and research infrastructure is a crucial part of the American innovation enterprise. Sustained long-term investment in basic research will ensure that we have state-of-the-art tools and technologies to defeat a growing number of emerging threats, while fostering the environment of discovery and innovation at the heart of our economy.

The Department of the Air Force and the National Science Foundation (NSF) have developed a new partnership to better coordinate mutual research projects and themes. The partnership focuses on an increased exchange of research information, supporting expanded collaboration in common research areas, and identifying opportunities for complementary activities in the “research pathways” comprising basic research, applied research, and advanced technology development. The partnership facilitates long-term planning of each organization’s research strategy, and sharing of “best practices” for portfolio shaping, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce development.

The missions of the Air Force and the NSF are independent but have many overlapping research goals that could be achieved more effectively and yield greater impact with greater transparency, collaboration, and coordinated planning between the two organizations. The Air Force benefits from greater access to NSF’s expertise in basic research across all fields of science and engineering and community of researchers. The NSF benefits with a direct pathway for the technical maturation of many of its research efforts and products, with increased relevance afforded by its direct support of the Nation’s defense posture. Both organizations benefit from the sharing of best practices, coordinated planning, and direct access to a broader research and development community, including world-class facilities and infrastructure.

We will refine the nature and structure of this partnership and explore four initial focus areas for consideration. These areas are: space operations and geosciences; advanced material sciences; information and data sciences; and workforce and processes.

We have begun to form leadership contact groups to further develop each area, and we will reconvene as a group at the NSF to discuss process and next steps.

The Air Force looks forward to continuing our history of developing and fielding innovative systems based on advances in basic science, and the NSF recognizes this as a new opportunity to broaden and directly leverage our contributions to the Nation's economic well-being, via enhanced security.