



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON D.C. 20460**

**OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR
SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD**

January 30, 2014

EPA-SAB-14-004

The Honorable Gina McCarthy
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Subject: Concern about the Future of the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Fellowship Program

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

The Science Advisory Board wishes to register strong concern about changes to and the possible demise of the STAR fellowship program, which has provided support since 1995 for graduate students pursuing advanced degrees in environmental science. As the National Research Council has noted, the STAR fellowship program has made an important contribution to training promising students to obtain advanced degrees and pursue careers in environmentally related fields and to developing the next generation of environmental scientists.¹ Over the lifetime of the program, 1,681 graduate fellows have received support for their careers as environmental scientists, spanning a wide range of fields including public health, epidemiology, ecology, relevant social sciences, and environmental engineering. The program has been highly competitive, serving as the only federal fellowship program designed exclusively for students pursuing advanced degrees in these fields.

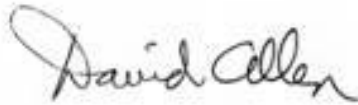
The SAB has learned that EPA granted no new STAR fellowship awards in 2013, despite having received 1,387 applications for the program, and that the agency has not issued a STAR fellowship announcement for the 2014 academic year. The SAB understands that this interruption in the program resulted from a federal government effort to consolidate existing graduate education programs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) under the auspices of the National Science Foundation. At a recent SAB meeting, an EPA representative explained that this consolidation occurred in an effort to improve the delivery, impact, and visibility of STEM graduate education programs.

¹ National Research Council, *The Measure of STAR: Review of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Research Grants Program Committee to Review EPA's Research Grants Program*, National Research Council. ISBN: 0-309-51672-2. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2003

Because of the important role STAR fellowships play in training future environmental scientists and engineers whose research will help meet the agency's mission, the SAB has several questions and concerns, because the NSF mission and research priorities may not align entirely with EPA's research mission to inform decisions to protect human health and the environment. How will the EPA interact with NSF to ensure that agency priority science needs would be addressed? How will EPA's mission-critical needs for future environmental scientists and engineers be taken into account by the National Science Foundation (NSF)? How will EPA and the NSF work together to improve the delivery, impact, and visibility of graduate programs in environmental science and engineering in the new consolidated program? When and how will the next graduate fellowships in environmental science and engineering be awarded? If the NSF program does not specifically support graduate fellowships in environmental science and engineering or does not support them at least at the level provided by the EPA STAR program, how will the EPA encourage new generations of environmental scientists who will develop the new methods and science needed by the agency?

The SAB considers the STAR fellowship program to be an important component of the EPA extramural research program that has played an important role in making the agency a leader in environmental science and research. Although a small program, it plays such a significant role in creating the future science and research needed by the EPA that we wanted to bring our concerns to your attention and to offer our assistance as appropriate. We look forward to the agency's response to the questions and concerns in this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David Allen", with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr. David T. Allen, Chair
Science Advisory Board

Enclosure

(1) Roster of SAB Members

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