

From: Soriano Molla, Jesus <jsoriano@nsf.gov>
Sent: Monday, January 30, 2023 6:16 PM
To: Soriano Molla, Jesus <jsoriano@nsf.gov>
Cc: Wang, Hui <hwang@nsf.gov>; Verardo, David J. <dverardo@nsf.gov>
Subject: AD-4 Pay Inequity

Dear Union Members,

This email, along with attachments, was sent to Dr. Panchanathan and Dr. Marrongelle today.

In Solidarity,

Dave

David J. Verardo
President, AFGE Local 3403 AFL-CIO
(NSF, NEH, NEA, USGS, IMLS, USDA–NIFA. ERS, ADF)

From: Verardo, David J.
Sent: Monday, January 30, 2023 6:07 PM
To: Panchanathan, Sethuraman <spanchan@nsf.gov>; Marrongelle, Karen A. <kmarrong@nsf.gov>
Subject: AD-4 Pay Inequity

Dr. Panchanathan and Dr. Marrongelle,

You recently revealed your strategy to divert funds in President Biden's December 2022 Executive Order on federal pay away from the professional scientific program staff in AD-4 pay grades at the NSF. Your strategy is to create a large and arbitrary pay gap, starting at 6% with plans for future growth, between the AD pay scale and the SES. This move created the negative effect that I warned you of in my January 24, 2023 email which has gone unanswered.

In my email, I warned of the effect on AD-4 staff for being singled out for any pay raise not in line with the President's Order. Pay is a critical issue for staff that affects their personal, professional, and familial situation. Pay is a universal trigger for angst.

If you had engaged the Union, we might have been able to work something out if you were willing. The whirlwind of condemnation aimed at the two of you as architects of this demeaning workforce strategy was predictable.

It is clear from the reaction of the AD-4 professional scientific workforce that your planned 0.5% salary increase, instead of the 4.1% salary increase ordered by President Biden, is a betrayal of the trust that AD-4 staff afford you but is not reciprocated.

Astoundingly, in the NSF FY 2023 Budget Request to Congress on page 454, the NSF proposed and subsequently received, a 4.6% raise in compensation (4.1% for salary; 0.5% for locality pay) for federal staff. You asked for, and received, the funds necessary to provide the full compensation for AD-4 staff.

On March 28, 2022, NSF wrote:

“The largest component accounting for over half of Organizational Excellence, Human Capital drives the overall funding of the portfolio. It is comprised of funding for NSF's federal staff and IPAs as well as human capital management. This investment area is increased about 31 percent over FY 2021 resulting from a cost-of-living adjustment of 4.6 percent for FY 2023, increased FTE resources across all types (federal FTE, IPA FTE as well as student FTE), and increased resources for the tools, activities, and programs to both manage and grow NSF's workforce.” (please see page 454 of the attached pdf version of the FY2023 NSF Budget Request to Congress).

The attached six pages of reaction from staff (please see attached) is but a sample of the massive negative reaction from AD-4 staff, the backbone of the NSF merit review system and mission, that either Dr. Marrongelle or I have received over the last few days about the action. They are submitted here as part of the record so you can see for yourself, without spin, how your staff feels about this situation.

The email from Dr. Marrongelle may have been meant to quell discontent but it only enhanced it as staff read the insensitive and tone-deaf justification that you both offered in wanting to create an arbitrary pay gap between the SES and the AD-4 ranks based on class structure. This comes across as arrogance wrapped in ignorance regarding the importance of the professional scientific staff as the foundation of the work of the Foundation. It appears that the ‘missing millions’ NSF refers to is about executive pay.

The AD-4 staff is at the core of the NSF mission and they lead a national and multi-national workforce of volunteer reviewers and panelists who advise the NSF on the quality of proposals seeking public support. This requires both soft and technical skills to follow the NSF mandate to ‘promote the progress of science’ by understanding not only the technical side of STEM but also the human side of it so that we create a welcoming and inclusive environment for STEM across the Nation.

These same staff, meanwhile, have to navigate a burgeoning bureaucracy at the NSF developed during your tenure that purposely separates staff from each other for meaningful interactions.

This situation that allowed the both of you, and your advisors, to become isolated from the workforce and unable to sense the pulse of the workforce.

You also isolated yourself from meaningful interaction with the Union, which has the pulse of the workforce, by not meeting or sending surrogates to meet, thereby sending the message that the workforce was not your priority.

Your 'from Panch's Desk' email missives are another example of this purposeful isolation by consistently placing yourself at the center of NSF's many successes while ignoring staff contributions or their needs.

I spoke to you both about how these 'desk' missives were perceived by staff, senior executives, and non-managerial staff, but you ignored my simple constructive suggestions, once again showing how isolated you are from the staff who are the lifeblood of the agency.

Given the feedback from AD-4 staff to your decision on pay and the attempt to spin the pay gap decision as necessary and good for the agency and staff, you both have clearly lost the confidence and trust of the AD-4 staff.

You seem to have only three choices moving forward: 1) you can apologize; 2) you can make the AD-4 staff whole with the full salary increase ordered by President Biden; or 3) you can resign.

If you cannot bring yourself to comply with number 1, then at least comply with number 2; if you cannot comply with number 2, then number 3 is your only option.

You both created an unnecessary crisis and conflict in your administration of the agency on this and other workforce issues and the time has come for you to voluntarily leave if you refuse to make this pay situation right.

Digging in your heels and hoping this will blow over is not a strategy and will erode whatever trust remains, thereby creating the conditions for an even longer and larger conflict. This strategy will not do, especially for an agency that brags that it is one of the best places to work in the federal government.

The agency has many capable leaders within its professional scientific AD-4 ranks who can step up and lead the agency through this crisis of confidence until President Biden appoints his own Director and Deputy Director who will support his workforce agenda and succeed at his STEM agenda.

Sadly, you have broken trust with staff and no one who considers themselves a leader can continue without that trust; a major course correction is required.

You brought this crisis of confidence and trust upon yourselves, so you own it, and you must fix it.

Dr. David J. Verardo

President, AFGE Local 3403 AFL-CIO

(NSF, NEH, NEA, USGS, IMLS, USDA–NIFA. ERS, ADF)