April 15, 2016

Dr. James Olds
Assistant Director for Biological Sciences
National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22230

Re: Restore and Expand the Collections in Support of the Biological Research Program

Dear Dr. Olds:

The Native Plant Conservation Campaign is a national association of 38 native plant societies and other native plant conservation organizations. The mission of the NPCC is to promote the conservation of native plants and their habitats through collaboration, education, and advocacy.

We are very concerned by the suspension of the Collections in Support of Biological Research (CSBR) program. The CSBR program provides vital support to our nation's herbaria and other biological specimen collections. We urge you to reconsider this decision and reinstate funding for the CSBR program. Indeed support for this critical program should be improved, as the scientific importance of biological specimen collections will only continue to increase in the future.

The essential functions of herbaria and other biological specimen collections include:

- Identifying species new to science, including extinct and newly emerging taxa.
- Understanding the processes of species emergence and extinction.
- Maintaining repositories of spatial and temporal data on biological diversity, evolution and adaptation.
- Mapping species’ historic ranges to evaluate species endangerment.
- Documenting and understanding the responses of species and ecosystems to climate change
- Understanding the spatial and temporal development, distribution, and movement of diseases and disease organisms.

Promoting the conservation of native plants and their habitats through collaboration, research, education, and advocacy
Furthermore, new uses continue to emerge for these specimens as science and technology evolve. For example, DNA sequencing has helped to identify many previously unknown species.

All of these functions not only stimulate discovery, they offer the raw materials for expanding and deepening scientific knowledge. In addition to their purely scientific value, however, these collections are critical and irreplaceable information storehouses that will be invaluable as humans attempt to cope with climate change, the extinction crisis, and the spread of invasive organisms and diseases.

This is not the time to reduce support for these collections. Many herbaria and other specimen collections are already under threat. Universities, museums, botanic gardens and other institutions are finding it ever more difficult to staff and fund these programs. The CSBR program has been a lifeline to prevent the loss of many underfunded collections. For others, the CSBR Program has provided funds to transfer significant at-risk collections to new facilities.

If collections are lost, they can never be replicated or reassembled. It is essential that the NSF continue and expand its support for these priceless resources for science and for humankind.

Sincerely,

Emily B. Roberson, Ph.D.
Director

Native Plant Conservation Campaign
Affiliate Organizations