



Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation

December 5, 2014

The late Honorable Frank Annunzio
Founder

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Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20503

RE: FY 2016 Passback Notification

Dear Director Donovan,

This communication is in response to your December 2, 2014 Passback notification. The Foundation wishes to appeal the notification of “0” dollars allocated in the President’s budget.

The Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation was established by Congress in 1992 through Public Law 102-281. As an independent federal government agency, the Board of Trustees is appointed by the President. Our scientific and education mission: community service through science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) by middle school and high school students nationwide. Our focus: competitions and awards driving STEM education’s practical application benefitting communities from urban to rural America.

We request your reconsideration based upon multiple factors discussed below. As noted in our mission above, the agency has undertaken significant change since your original denial of funds. Indeed, we believe that review of our FY 2016 submission will reveal multiple concrete steps which have I) well addressed your ongoing concerns, II) developed excellence in government programs and III) moved dynamically on national priorities mandated for action by this administration.

I) The annual denial reads: *“The Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation has nearly exhausted its endowed Trust Fund, which was established in 1992 for fellowships “to encourage and support research, study, and labor designed to produce new discoveries in all fields of endeavor for the benefit of mankind.” The Foundation has not consistently demonstrated clear outcomes from its awards and has high overhead costs. No Administration has proposed funding for the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation since the creation of the Foundation almost two decades ago.”* We appreciate that response to the specifics of this denial will be of value in generating further discussion.

As described in earlier filings, decisions in the late 1990's and early 2000's to spend trust funds in order to enable expanded multiple program impact, based upon assumptions of economic recovery, and had difficult consequences. Yet, they have little to do with the vibrant and dynamic CCFE effort underway in FY's 2014 and FY 2015 and certainly in FY 2016. Please note that the endowed trust has been repeatedly augmented by private sector partnerships (PPP's) and other public and private sector efforts significantly expanding programing.

A specific business decision, which we strongly endorse, was reportedly at the heart of the determination as to "high overhead". As you may know, the Board determined to use the OMB return of Rescission suspended funding in what we understand to be an unusual fashion among federal agencies. Rather than hurrying to spend the now available funds before the end of the fiscal year – the Board determined to hold and carefully invest the roughly 250,000 in program initiatives for the coming fiscal year. In the following year, these were specifically allocated for science education. These monies were ascribed to "overhead" when in fact, they had been retained in an effort of fiscal responsibility.

It is our belief that, contrary to the finding of "high overhead", our 2016 operations will be quite efficient, exceeding requirements, with examples such as utilizing only two of 5 authorized staff. It is worth noting that a significant portion of our funding is devoted to either paying other Executive Branch agency fees or, as to staff responsibilities, fulfilling multiple Federal regulatory requirements. Further, we have repeatedly reviewed operations and process's utilizing "common practice" private sector analysis to achieve our current performance.

Our 2016 proposal further implements the Boards, well publicized, vital 2014 - 2016 drive to "refocus, retool and rebuild". New mission driven initiatives opened in September 2013 with Board of Trustees action leading to: 1) March 2014 reorganization; 2) relocation to Washington, DC; 3) installation of new staff leadership; 4) FY 2015 creation of new Public-Private Partnership (PPP) initiatives; and 5) at its core, the new vision to efficiently and effectively implement Congressman Annunzio's (D-Illinois) mission. The three-year program fully reshaping operations is underway.

The Board fully recognizes that no previous administration had, at the time of the OMB finding, requested funding for the Foundation. The Foundation's need for such support resulted from the above noted, but then "new", depletion of trust held funds. As it had not been previously required – it had not been requested. The Foundation has, since inception, been supported through Presidential Statements, EOP program integration and bi-partisan Presidential appointments, in cooperation with House and Senate leadership, providing the necessary personnel to complete our mission.

II) The Administration's drive for "excellence in government programming" has been a continuing objective. Vital to Foundation development, this has been the adoption and pursuit of our new mission built upon the Christopher Columbus Awards (CCA) STEM education competitions and awards. Frankly, any assertions as to the lack of demonstrable results are not accurate.

The 19 years of devotion to STEM education efforts have been remarkably productive. As detailed in our proposal, the Foundation's efforts will continue to drive enhancement of our CCA program. We enthusiastically invite your review of this competition's program

and would urge that you begin with consecutive CCA Community Grant award winning teams participating in the White House Science Fair, addressed by the President, all 4 years of its existence.

Today's CCA produces demonstrable and remarkably consistent high grade results. In 2014, as in previous years, students were challenged through the Christopher Columbus Awards competitions to identify a problem in their community and apply the scientific method to create an innovative solution. From thousands of team proposals, first 30 semifinalist teams and then eight finalists of three to four students and their adult coaches attended the National Championship Week – learning at the Christopher Columbus Academy in Walt Disney World.

Academy competitions are year+ long efforts spanning up to three fiscal years. The finalists compete for valuable scholarships, 2 Gold Medal awards and a \$25,000 Community grant to bring the winning STEM solution to life in their communities. Each winning grant team builds upon new community leadership, scientific guidance, private and public resources and extensive volunteer energy. Extensive volunteer leadership and private sector participation across the nation are vital to team performance and community benefit.

Many thousands of middle school students from across the country, 50+ percent girls and 40+ percent minorities, take part in this unique STEM education program. Public Private Partnership (PPP), student and team nurture, ongoing mentor education, program mobility and required community service are among the unique elements of this effort. Its application through volunteers, in-kind contributions, expert guidance and continuing support provides tangible results. All students - not just winners - are enabled and rewarded throughout. Nationwide, this program is delivering results.

As described in the FY 2016 submission, rededicated middle and high school programs, built upon proven subject matter expertise, are underway to enhance and diversify the CCA model in answering new and currently unimagined, challenges. Each will recognize teams, as well as their STEM mentors and leaders, in addressing select themes and “national challenge” opportunities.

In our 2016 Budget, we detailed funds for rededication of demonstrated Foundation expertise in ‘national challenge’ opportunities including Agriscience and Life Sciences.

III) Administration priorities drive vital initiatives. As noted, our plans for 2016 are very much in concert with Presidents drive for Government adaptability to serve vital national priorities. STEM education is of course a core effort.

Examples of recent \$25,000 Community Service grant programs reflecting specific response to this Administrations stated priorities include, as shown below : Honey Bee population decimation and Agriscience, Tribal support and minority education, Environmental activism and Natural disaster response.

‘Bee Aware’ from Elk Banner, North Carolina. The team learned of and approached ongoing precipitous decline in the honeybee population. Compiling data and scientific analysis they constructed and offered practical approaches to remediation and population growth. Their outreach program, endorsed by the state legislature and honored by its own

License plate, builds model safe habitats, encourages agricultural community participation and educates the public. The year-long 2014 and 2015 program is well underway;

‘Rez Protectors’ from the Crow Reservation in Montana. The all-girl team, faced and addressed inadequate school facilities and community housing. Utilizing the scientific method, they developed and spread straw block school halls, from indigenous materials, to other reservations. In addition to multiple media appearances, including an Oprah Winfrey feature, they continued community leadership initiatives on the Reservation and beyond;

‘Zero Waste’ of Hockessin, Delaware. The 3-member team successfully launched city-wide environmentally aggressive composting plans and brought their message of economic and efficient community action to the state legislature, Congress, the White House and back to neighboring communities where municipal review is underway; and

‘The River Rangers’ of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina utilized technology to open up navigable waterways and clear repeated natural disaster damage. FEMA and state agency input supported local and civic action. White House Science Fair recognition drove wide attention and problem focus.

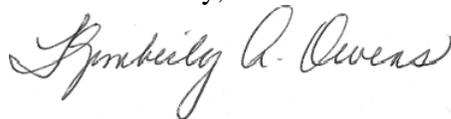
In addition to these Grant winners, literally thousands of education support and semifinalist winners have presented projects addressing their community concerns reflecting administration priorities including environment, diversity, healthy lifestyles, consumer product safety, child abuse, auto and traffic safety, affordable housing and energy conservation among others.

As we are now awaiting Presidential appointment of a new Chair, the Foundation has selected Conveners from among its members to provide governance in this interim period.

We hope that this proves helpful to you. Please allow us to be of any assistance in this appeal.

If you have any questions regarding this appeal, please contact Hall Northcott, Executive Director of the Foundation, at: (202) 401- 9765 or via email at: JH.Northcott@Christophercolumbusfoundation.gov

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kimberly A. Owens".

Kimberly Owens
Convener