



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22230

DIVISION OF ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCES

26 February 2001

Dr. David J. Carlson
Director
Atmospheric Technology Division
National Center for Atmospheric Research
P.O. Box 3000
Boulder, CO 80307-3000

Dear Dr. Carlson:

For several years the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Atmospheric Technology Division (ATD) at NCAR have had discussions on the future of the aging Electra aircraft. During this time discussions have been held with our interagency partners (NOAA, NASA, ONR/NRL) in an attempt to identify a suitable alternate platform. The primary requirement for the platform is to carry ELDORA and collateral instrumentation. Early on it was concluded that the only viable platform was a P-3, which as you know is a derivative of the commercial Electra aircraft.

As you are well aware, the financial and human resource constraints are becoming critical within ATD, and this is probably no more apparent than in the Research Aviation Facility (RAF). NSF has asked ATD to use their limited resources for the long-term betterment of the capabilities offered to the community. The decision was made to retire the Electra after considering the resources available within RAF. Constraints and commitments most prominently considered were the on-going maintenance cost to keep the Electra operating safely and the commitment ATD and NCAR have to providing the HIAPER platform to the community as soon as possible.

Potential schedule impacts were carefully considered before making this decision. Clearly, there was no perfect time to terminate the Electra program and transfer the ELDORA to an alternate platform, but we have tried to minimize programmatic interruptions.

During the last year detailed discussions have been held with NOAA, NASA and ONR/NRL. All three of these organizations operate P-3s for scientific purposes. NRL (Naval Research Laboratory) was the only organization that could meet our requirements, especially in a timely manner, and provide assurances to support our science missions in the future. Consequently, an MOU was prepared and signed by the Assistant Director of

NSF (Geosciences Directorate) and the Commanding Officer of the Naval Research Laboratory.

It is clear that we will be entering a new way of doing business, and that there are a number of issues that remain to be addressed. However, ATD, NSF and NRL are strongly committed to development of an efficient and effective working relationship. We also look forward to enhanced interagency cooperation, something that has been strongly advocated by the Office of Management and Budget and Congress.

I believe that, in the near future, NSF will have greater opportunity to use the ELDORA in campaigns not previously possible and consequently it will enhance discovery and understanding that are key elements in our mission. In considering the transition we were sensitive to the needs of our research community, including our French colleagues, and we will ensure they have opportunity to use ELDORA for their planned airborne science campaigns.

I want to thank you and your staff for all of the analyses they did to determine the viability of the NRL P-3 as a platform for ELDORA.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 703.292.8521.

Sincerely,

James R. Huning
Program Officer
Lower Atmospheric Observing Facilities

Cc:
C. Jacobs
J. Moyers