On the Critical Importance of the U.S.-led Scientific Ocean Drilling **July 8th, 2022**

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National Science Foundation

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Dear Dr. Panchanathan,

We are a self-organized group of graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, and other early career scientists writing to express our concern regarding the future of NSF funding for U.S. scientific ocean drilling (SciOD). Over the past five decades, SciOD has led to tremendous advancements and substantial breakthroughs in Earth science. For many of us, the discoveries enabled by SciOD were what first inspired us to become Earth and ocean scientists. We are motivated by what remains to be discovered, as described in the *2050 Scientific Framework: Exploring Earth by Scientific Ocean Drilling* and are alarmed by what the potential termination of NSF support for U.S. SciOD would mean for (1) the advancement of Earth science, (2) the United States' position as a leader in this science, (3) our ability to help society prepare for the future effects of climate change and natural hazards, and (4) the educational potential of SciOD to inspire future generations of scientists.

SciOD has played a central role in shaping our understanding of the Earth system, and the success of previous and current SciOD programs is firmly established. These programs have allowed us to push the boundary of knowledge on many frontiers as evidenced by numerous discoveries and accomplishments, including verifying plate tectonics, providing detailed records of global climate change, establishing the field of paleoceanography, characterizing fault zones that result in megathrust earthquakes, and enabling the discovery of a subseafloor microbiome that contributes to the cycling of much of the planet's carbon. How many other mysteries do the oceans hold that will remain undiscovered without SciOD?

SciOD has far-reaching implications for both science and society. This research program is especially relevant now given the pressing climate challenges facing our planet, manifested by extreme weather events, ice-sheet melting, sea-level rise, ocean acidification, and ecosystem changes. SciOD represents a unique opportunity to tackle these issues by providing access to long term and high resolution climate archives that are otherwise inaccessible. Beyond climate, SciOD provides critical information on natural hazards that enriches our understanding of their underlying mechanisms, allowing us to better predict the rate and magnitude of future occurrences. All of these issues have direct and monumental societal impacts.

In addition to contributing to the advancement of science and achieving societal goals, we view SciOD as a valuable educational tool with great potential to inspire and train the next generation of U.S. scientists. Many of us have sailed aboard the *JOIDES Resolution* or participated in the workshops and meetings IODP hosts, and we can attest to the critical role these opportunities have played in enabling us to conduct impactful research, effectively communicate science, and develop a variety of skills. Thus, SciOD represents a platform to train a competitive U.S. workforce, broaden access to science, and engage students from historically marginalized groups, as well as students from smaller universities and community colleagues. We can not overstate how detrimental the termination of NSF support for U.S. SciOD would be for future generations of scientists and society as a whole, in both the loss of opportunity and the loss of critical knowledge of our Earth system.

Importantly, what we have highlighted in this letter represents only a small proportion of what SciOD is capable of providing. Rather than terminating funding for such a successful program, we hope that **NSF will fund a newly built, U.S.-led, globally ranging vessel with a design tailored to meet the *Science Mission Requirements*.** The new vessel would revolutionize Earth and ocean sciences, allowing us to take deeper cores and drill in extreme environments, such as the currently inaccessible polar regions. The proposed new vessel would also recover higher quality cores that would allow us to make new discoveries, poising U.S. scientists to successfully tackle pressing questions in Earth science. While building a new drillship can take up to a decade, continuing SciOD in the interim period is critical. We thus would like to ask **NSF to also support the 2024–2028 bridging program by extending the funding for the *JOIDES Resolution*** during these pivotal transition years. The hiatus that would occur if NSF decided to divest from this essential research program would mean that we risk losing irreplaceable expertise in our workforce if existing knowledge is not passed on, which would make restarting such a large and sophisticated research program in the future nearly impossible.

We, early career scientists, would like to express our strong support for a U.S.-led SciOD program. The support of the scientific community for funding SciOD is evident by the **208** scientists, engineers, and educators who have signed this letter, representing **17** countries from **98** different institutions and universities. Importantly, **177** of the signees are based in the United States. While we are aware that funding decisions are difficult, supporting a U.S.-led SciOD program directly speaks to the NSF's values by making the U.S. *"A nation that leads the world in science and engineering research and innovation, to the benefit of all, without barriers to participation,"* as highlighted in the *NSF 2022–2026 Strategic Plan*. Supporting SciOD will advance the progress of science, maintain the U.S. in a leadership role, train the next generation of scientists, and provide an opportunity to broaden access to science and engage students from historically marginalized groups. There is no more critical time than now to support such a crucial program.

Sincerely,

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On behalf of graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, and other early career scientists who have read, endorsed, and signed this letter. Signatures were collected **from June 17th to July 8th, 2022** via a Google Form survey**.**

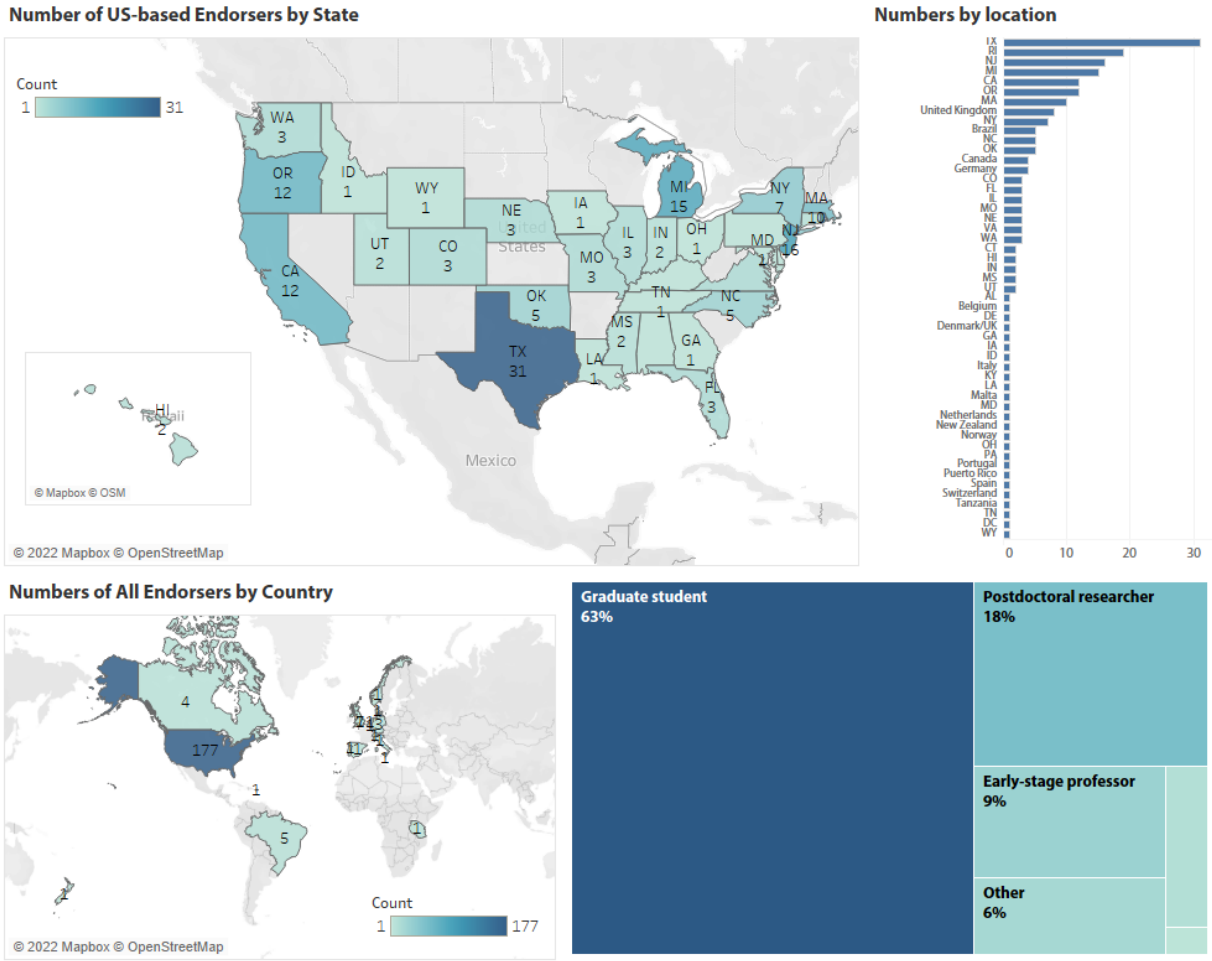

Fig. 1 A Summary Dashboard Of The Signees By State, Country, And Career Stage.

A full list of endorsers are presented in alphabetical order hereunder:

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