
DIANE WITT

CV

PARTICIPANT OF:

GOOD PRACTICES FOR FOSTERING TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH IN HEALTH AND LIFE SCIENCES

May, 10th-11th, 2012, Barcelona

Diane Witt, Ph.D.

Program Director and Cluster Leader for the Neurosciences, [National Science Foundation](#)

Chicago native Dr. Diane Witt first became interested science when she won the Science Fair while in 8th grade. During her high school years she repeatedly ranked first place at the Chicago All-City Science Fair where she exhibited her findings at the Museum of Science and Industry. Her projects went on to be topped ranked at the Illinois Junior Academy of Science and she was ultimately awarded a Science Fair, Inc. Scholarship. With this scholarship Dr. Witt received her BS and MS from the University of Illinois at Urbana –Champaign, and then went on to obtain her PhD from the University of Maryland at College Park. Dr. Witt's neuroscience interests were further developed while conducting research at the National Institutes of Health, where as a National Research Council Research Associate she launched a program using prairie voles as a model for understanding the neural underpinnings of social behavior. Dr. Witt then moved to the National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke working on in vitro models of gene expression, and subsequently became a faculty member at Binghamton University (SUNY) in upstate New York. At the National Science Foundation Dr. Witt serves as Program Director and Cluster Leader for the Neurosciences where she makes funding decisions and awards grants for research being conducted on the nervous system. She also functioned as the NSF coordinator for the Center for Behavioral Neuroscience in Atlanta, GA. She has served as the acting Deputy Division Director for Integrative Organismal Systems in the Biological Sciences Directorate.

B-DEBATE IS AN INITIATIVE OF:



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ABSTRACT

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“Transformative Research at the National Science Foundation”

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has a long-standing history of funding successful research with wide-ranging impacts on the US economy and the well-being of Americans. Clearly, it is easy to look backwards in time identifying these winning investments in science and engineering research. However, the really difficult challenge is to look forward, continually focusing on the frontier, where science is risky, murky and without clear definition. This is what we do at NSF, and our strategic plan underscores this commitment to support discovery at the frontier. Strategies include “bottom-up” institutional mechanisms, close relationships with the academic and engineering research communities that we serve, a predominance of “unsolicited” proposals, and a healthy pursuit of potentially transformative research during our merit review process. NSF practices “constructive ambiguity” which offers the flexibility to incorporate new knowledge and perspectives as they arise, which leaves room for discovery. NSF uses a variety of funding mechanisms to support novel high-risk research. By embracing risk we realize that from the onset we cannot predict the outcome of innovative research and that most transformations resulting from research are post hoc, not a priori. I will discuss these various philosophies, funding mechanisms and the strategic experimentation that goes on at NSF in our attempt to launch research that has the potential to transform disciplines and create entirely new fields of science and engineering.

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