U.S. NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
2415 EISENHOWER AVENUE
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

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Dear Colleague Letter: Critical-Zone Collaborative Network Retirement

August 13, 2024

Dear Colleagues:

The CZNet (Critical-Zone Collaborative Network) program in the Division of Earth Sciences (EAR) was the successor to the Critical Zone Observatories (CZO) that began in 2007 in response to recommendations in the National Academy's report "Basic Research Opportunities in the Earth Sciences" (2001). These programs have supported research that increased understanding of processes regulating conditions at, and near, the Earth's surface. These programs also deepened understanding of the structure, development, and function of the critical zone, defined as the constantly evolving boundary layer where rock, soil, water, air, and living organisms interact. CZO and CZNet research projects have brought together interdisciplinary teams of hydrologists, geomorphologists, geochemists, ecologists, geophysicists, and climate scientists to investigate the Earth's near-surface environment. Moreover, the CZNet program has diversified the cadre of people engaged in Earth-Science research supporting several hundred undergraduate and graduate students, post-doctoral scholars, and early-career professors who consider themselves to be Critical-Zone scientists.

The Critical-Zone research community has grown in the last seventeen years, and interdisciplinary projects are currently being supported by various core programs within EAR. Accordingly, research on the critical zone has outgrown the need for a special call for proposals; there are now numerous homes for this type of interdisciplinary research across EAR, the Geosciences Directorate (GEO), and other parts of NSF.

Thus, EAR announces that starting with Fiscal Year 2025 the CZNet program will be archived and no longer accept proposals. EAR will continue to welcome proposals that take an innovative multidisciplinary approach to studying Earth's critical zone in the Division's other programs that cover these topic areas. GEO believes that this change will further expand the diversity of topics and investigators involved in critical-zone science, and firmly embed the critical zone as an important construct for studying Earth-surface processes.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Isern
Assistant Director, GEO