

EMPOWER OVERSIGHT

Whistleblowers & Research



May 24, 2022

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION: FOIA@NSF.Gov

National Science Foundation
Attn: FOIA Officer
2415 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

RE: FOIA Request for Documents Related to NSF's Funding of Grants to EcoHealth Alliance

Dear Ms. Chapman:

INTRODUCTION

Empower Oversight Whistleblowers & Research (“Empower Oversight”) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit educational organization dedicated to enhancing independent oversight of government and corporate wrongdoing. We work to help insiders safely and legally report waste, fraud, abuse, corruption, and misconduct to the proper authorities, and seek to hold those authorities accountable to act on such reports by, among other means, publishing information concerning the same.

BACKGROUND

Last year, *Newsweek* reported that the National Institutes of Health (“NIH”) funded risky “gain of function” virus research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (“WIV”). This was done through an NIH grant that was made to EcoHealth Alliance, a nonprofit that is directed by Peter Daszak. EcoHealth Alliance subcontracted part of its NIH-funded research to WIV researchers.¹ When EcoHealth Alliance’s NIH grant later became public knowledge, reporters with two media outlets confirmed that research funded by it included gain-of-function and that funds were provided to the WIV.^{2, 3}

¹ Guterl, Fred, *Dr. Fauci Backed Controversial Wuhan Lab with U.S. Dollars for Risky Coronavirus Research* (April 28, 2020), available at <https://www.newsweek.com/dr-fauci-backed-controversial-wuhan-lab-millions-us-dollars-risky-coronavirus-research-1500741> (last accessed on May 9, 2022).

² Lerner, Sharon; Hvistendahl; Hibbett, Maia, *NIH Documents Provide New Evidence U.S. Funded Gain-Of-Function Research in Wuhan* (September 9, 2021), available at <https://theintercept.com/2021/09/09/covid-origins-gain-of-function-research/> (last accessed on May 19, 2022).

³ Eban, Katerine, *In Major shift, NIH admits Funding Risky Virus Research in Wuhan* (October 22, 2021), available at <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2021/10/nih-admits-funding-risky-virus-research-in-wuhan> (last accessed on May 19, 2022).

On September 23, 2021, U.S. House of Representatives voted to include an amendment prohibiting the provision of federal funding to EcoHealth Alliance in the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 4350).⁴

A month later, *The Washington Post* editorial board wrote that Mr. Daszak should testify before Congress to explain what he knows about the research conducted at the WIV.⁵ The editorial board wrote:

Mr. Daszak must answer these questions before Congress. His grants were federal funds, and it is entirely appropriate for Congress to insist on accountability and transparency. He might also help the world understand what really happened in Wuhan.

According to a database of federal awards, The National Science Foundation (“NSF”) has provided millions of dollars in grants to EcoHealth Alliance. Two of these grants are called the “Viral Interactions Within Hosts Influence Transmission Dynamics Between Hosts,” which awarded \$2.5 million from 2019-2024; and the “Southeast Asian Bat Research Unit,” which runs from 2011-present.

RECORDS REQUEST

To shed light on NSF’s funding of EcoHealth Alliance’s research efforts, Empower Oversight respectfully requests, pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”),⁶ copies of:

1. All communications regarding NSF grant award “Viral Interactions Within Hosts Influence Transmission Dynamics Between Hosts.” The time span of this request covers January 1, 2019, to the present.
2. All communications regarding NSF grant “Southeast Asian Bat Research Unit.” The time span of this request covers January 1, 2011, to the present.
3. All communications regarding the submission of applications from, or award of contracts or grants to, EcoHealth Alliance. The time span of this request covers January 1, 2015, to the present.

DEFINITIONS

“COMMUNICATION(S)” means every manner or method of disclosure, exchange of information, statement, or discussion between or among two or more persons, including but not limited to, face-to-face and telephone conversations, correspondence, memoranda, telegrams, telexes, email messages, voice-mail messages, text messages, Slack messages, meeting minutes, discussions, releases, statements, reports, publications, and any recordings or reproductions thereof.

⁴ Press Release, *House Passes Reschenthaler Amendment Defunding EcoHealth Alliance* (September 23, 2021), available at <https://reschenthaler.house.gov/media/press-releases/house-passes-reschenthaler-amendment-defunding-ecohealth-alliance> (last accessed on May 19, 2022).

⁵ Editorial Board, *One Person Might Know What Really Happened In Wuhan* (October 25, 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/10/25/one-person-who-might-know-what-really-happened-wuhan/> (last accessed on May 19, 2022).

⁶ 5 U.S.C. § 552.

“DOCUMENT(S)” or “RECORD(S)” mean any kind of written, graphic, or recorded matter, however produced or reproduced, of any kind or description, whether sent, received, or neither, including drafts, originals, non-identical copies, and information stored magnetically, electronically, photographically or otherwise. As used herein, the terms “DOCUMENT(S)” or “RECORD(S)” include, but are not limited to, studies, papers, books, accounts, letters, diagrams, pictures, drawings, photographs, correspondence, telegrams, cables, text messages, emails, memoranda, notes, notations, work papers, intra-office and inter-office communications, communications to, between and among employees, contracts, financial agreements, grants, proposals, transcripts, minutes, orders, reports, recordings, or other documentation of telephone or other conversations, interviews, affidavits, slides, statement summaries, opinions, indices, analyses, publications, questionnaires, answers to questionnaires, statistical records, ledgers, journals, lists, logs, tabulations, charts, graphs, maps, surveys, sound recordings, data sheets, computer printouts, tapes, discs, microfilm, and all other records kept, regardless of the title, author, or origin.

“PERSON” means individuals, entities, firms, organizations, groups, committees, regulatory agencies, governmental entities, business entities, corporations, partnerships, trusts, and estates.

“REFERS,” “REFERRING TO,” “REGARDS,” “REGARDING,” “RELATES,” “RELATING TO,” “CONCERNS,” “BEARS UPON,” or “PERTAINS TO” mean containing, alluding to, responding to, commenting upon, discussing, showing, disclosing, explaining, mentioning, analyzing, constituting, comprising, evidencing, setting forth, summarizing, or characterizing, either directly or indirectly, in whole or in part.

INSTRUCTIONS

Requested records include all attachments to such records.

The words “and” and “or” shall be construed in the conjunctive or disjunctive, whichever is most inclusive.

The singular form shall include the plural form and vice versa.

The present tense shall include the past tense and vice versa.

In producing the records described above, you shall segregate them by reference to each of the numbered items of this public records request.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Bryan Saddler by e-mail at bsaddler@empowr.us.

FEE WAIVER REQUEST

Empower Oversight agrees to pay up to \$25.00 in applicable fees, but notes that it qualifies as a “representative of the news media” and requests a waiver of any fees that may be associated with processing this request.

Empower Oversight is a non-profit educational organization as defined under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, which helps insiders safely and legally report waste, fraud, abuse, corruption, and misconduct to the proper authorities, and seeks to hold those authorities accountable to act on such reports by, among other means, publishing information concerning the same. Empower Oversight has no commercial interest in making this request.

Further, the information that Empower Oversight seeks is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute to the public understanding of the NSF's funding of research by EcoHealth Alliance.

Empower Oversight is committed to government accountability, public integrity, and transparency. In the latter regard, the information that that Empower Oversight receives that tends to explain the subject matter of this public records request will be disclosed publicly via its website, and copies will be shared with other news media for public dissemination.

For ease of administration and to conserve resources, we ask that documents be produced in a readily accessible electronic format.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Cordially,

[/Jason Foster/](#)

Jason Foster
Founder & President