September 14, 2016

ATE Program Officer
National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington VA 22230

Dear Colleague:

The University of Central Florida has a proud history of support for the optics and photonics industry, as well as for education in the field of optics and lasers. OP-TEC, the NSF/ATE National Center for Optics and Photonics Education, shares our interest in advancing the discipline of optics and photonics, and I support the re-funding of OP-TEC with enthusiasm.

The mission of OP-TEC is to “build the capacity and quality of two-year colleges to educate and prepare an adequate supply of photonics technicians in the United States.” This mission complements one of the goals of this university, which is to achieve international prominence in optics and laser graduate study and research. Both OP-TEC and UCF support the development of the photonics field and industry, which is vital to our country’s security and economic development.

UCF is a national leader in photonics. Through the Center for Research and Education in Optics and Lasers (CREOL), we are researching and testing new devices and applications in photonics. The university also offers baccalaureate and advanced engineering degrees with specializations in photonics. And, UCF is the home of the Florida Photonics Cluster (FPC), which networks and coordinates companies in our region that work in the field of photonics.

OP-TEC staff members and partner colleges interact frequently with CREOL and the FPC to share ideas, exchange expertise, and compare corporate contacts. Last year, OP-TEC and the FPC partnered to create national certification standards for Photonics and Precision Optics Technicians. This year, OP-TEC staff members worked with CREOL to identify and predict regional and national needs for scientific and technical workers in photonics. OP-TEC project leaders are also working with members of our university’s staff to establish the National Institute for Additive Manufacturing.
Because of the mutually beneficial relationships between OP-TEC and UCF, we at UCF are committed to the long term sustainability of this important national center. Specifically, UCF is committed to the following:

- offer technical expertise and photonics laboratories to support the development and testing of OP-TEC educational curriculum and teaching materials,
- explore cooperative efforts between OP-TEC, CREOL, and FPC to provide professional development opportunities for two-year-college photonics faculty members,
- support members of the OP-TEC staff through administrative services,
- provide communication of OP-TEC services and materials through UCF media and relevant professional society contacts,
- make available resources and organizational structures through the Research Foundation of the UCF Office of Research and Commercialization to establish and maintain long-term initiatives that will assure the vitality and support for OP-TEC’s operation, if and when the NSF/ATE grants are no longer available, and
- collaborate with OP-TEC to create new initiatives that provide information and learning experiences in optics and lasers for high school teachers and students.

OP-TEC is completing 10 years of successful operations as the National Center for Optics and Photonics Education and proposing to transition this to a Support Center. The proposed Support Center is crucial for the continued success of the nation-wide, technician-training network that has been established by Op-TEC. This program has earned the support of UCF, and it is worthy of support by the National Science Foundation.

OP-TEC’s past successes predict greater attainments in the future, and its mission is critical to the current and future success of the optics and photonics college programs. I support without reservation this proposal for its lasting impact on the security and economic well-being of our nation, as well as for its promise to educate and train talented technicians for high-wage jobs.

Thank you for your consideration of our proposal.

Cordially yours,

John C. Hitt
President