

National Science Foundation grant will fund new origins of life exhibit at Museum of Natural History & Science

SANTA FE—The New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science in Albuquerque will soon have a new permanent exhibition that takes a fresh look at the origins of life thanks to a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and an innovative collaboration led by the Santa Fe Institute (SFI).

NSF has awarded the Santa Fe Institute and a collaborative team led by SFI Science Board member Harold Morowitz and SFI Professor D. Eric Smith a grant for *Emergence: A New View of Life's Origins*, scheduled to open at the museum in May 2011. *Emergence* will replace the museum's current origins exhibit which is now 25 years-old.

“New Mexico’s most visited museum plays an important role in the education of New Mexicans of all ages,” said Stuart Ashman, Secretary of the state Department of Cultural Affairs. “The recognition of this generous grant from the National Science Foundation is a testimony to the valuable educational programs produced by the Department of Cultural Affairs.”

The *Emergence* exhibit is a joint project of scientists at the Santa Fe Institute, the Institute of Complex Adaptive Matter, media arts students at New Mexico Highlands University, Americorps, as well as staff members from the Natural History Museum and the Department of Cultural Affairs. The Santa Fe Institute and Cultural Affairs have an ongoing agreement to

collaborate on joint projects to make current science research broadly accessible and understandable to the public. The new exhibit will also update and expand on a Highlands University student-produced traveling origin-of-life exhibit called *Frontiers in Integrative Biology: From Geochemistry to the Genetic Code*.

“As far as we know, this is the first time that a museum will incorporate complex science into museum interpretation,” said Hollis J. Gillespie, Executive Director of the Museum of Natural History & Science. “It is appropriate that this happen in New Mexico, home to the Santa Fe Institute, an international center for research on complex adaptive systems. This award from the NSF will provide our museum guests with a broad view of the current understanding of life’s origins using the most significant areas of relevant scientific research.”

The *Emergence* exhibit will cover recent discoveries relating to the origin of life in biology, chemistry and geology, using the application of advanced mathematical techniques, modeling and simulation, and computer science. Research areas include the formation and geologic history of Earth, early life forms, inorganic and organic chemical pathways, as well as DNA, RNA, proteins and other biological structures.

Staff members at the Santa Fe Institute will ensure the exhibit’s scientific integrity while Highlands University students work to produce multimedia and interactive components for the exhibit. AmeriCorps will provide funding that will supplement NSF monies for internships through the Highlands newly-established AmeriCorps Cultural Technology Internship Program.