

AAG Washington Monitor

Lightfoot Discusses NSF Research Directions

On October 31, in remarks at the annual meeting of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), David Lightfoot, Assistant Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF) for the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE), highlighted the work of SBE and the foundation as a whole and made specific reference to several areas where the discipline of geography has taken a leadership role.

At the outset, Lightfoot mentioned the NSF's involvement in the federal response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster, in part through the agency's Human and Social Dynamics (HSD) priority area. Under HSD, the foundation has issued several time-sensitive awards for researchers to get into the affected areas quickly. In addition, several NSF-funded scientists have used existing grant monies to undertake research projects in Gulf Coast communities. As part of these activities, geographers are taking lead or key supporting roles with multidisciplinary teams to conduct important and timely interdisciplinary research. Specific information about the awardees and their projects should be available within a few months after awards have been finalized.

Lightfoot additionally discussed the priority the NSF and SBE in particular have placed on forming collaborations between directorates and encouraging inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary research. As an example, he noted that the geography program and geographers have been very successful in working with and receiving funding from the foundation's Environmental Research Directorate.

Also chief among the agency's cross-cutting priorities has been work in the cyberinfrastructure field. Owing to the importance of computing and information technology to new methods of exploration and inquiry, NSF has decided to make a major coordinated investment in cyberinfrastructure. Lightfoot explained that the geographical sciences are ahead of other SBE programs in terms of responding to this priority because of the importance and rapid rise of geographic technologies, such as integrated GPS/GIS systems.

Census, NSF Receive Budget Increases

As Congress completes its work on the FY 2006 federal appropriations bills, there was good news for both the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS).

The Conference Committee on funding for Science, State, Justice, and Commerce provided \$5.654 billion for NSF. This is approximately 3.3 percent above the FY 2005 funding level and is a boost of \$50 million over the president's budget request. The Census Bureau's ACS, meanwhile, which has faced elimination on a yearly basis since it was adopted to replace the Census long form, was funded at a level of \$169.9 million. This sum will enable the bureau to keep the ACS in operation for at least another year. (For more on the ACS, please see the January 2005 edition of this column).

The AAG has written numerous letters and also worked closely with the Consortium of Social Science Associations, the Coalition for National Science Funding, and others in Washington to promote federal investments in research and geographic data collection. Given the current budget climate in Washington, we and other science and social science data advocates were quite pleased with how both the NSF and the Census Bureau fared. ■

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