

Washington Monitor

NSF Releases "Science of Science" Policy Solicitation

On February 26, 2007, after several years of build-up in speeches by high-profile government officials, the National Science Foundation (NSF) finally released a program solicitation for grants aimed at fostering "the development of the knowledge, theories, data, tools, and human capital" needed to cultivate a new method of analyzing national investments into scientific research. The grant program will be administered by the NSF's Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE).

At key meetings over the last two years, presidential science advisor John Marburger and NSF leaders including Director Arden Bement, Deputy Director Kathie Olsen, and SBE head David Lightfoot have spoken extensively about science of science and innovation policy (SciSIP) and the opportunity it offers the social and behavioral sciences to utilize new analytic tools (including geographic technologies) to improve our understanding of how we prioritize scientific funding needs. The program emerged in part through a dialogue between Administration officials and social and behavioral science leaders, including AAG Executive Director Doug Richardson, regarding ways to increase the profile of the social and behavioral sciences so that they become better understood as relevant to pressing national concerns.

According to the solicitation, "SciSIP will underwrite fundamental research that creates new explanatory models and analytic tools designed to inform the nation's public and private sectors about the processes through which investments in science and engineering (S&E) research are transformed into social and economic outcomes. SciSIP's goals are to understand the contexts, structures and processes of S&E research, to evaluate reliably the tangible and intangible returns from investments in research and development (R&D), and to predict the likely returns from future R&D investments within tolerable margins of error and with attention to the full spectrum of potential consequences."

"Specifically, the research and community development components of SciSIP's activities will: (1) develop usable knowledge and theories of creative processes and their transformation into social and economic outcomes (2) develop, improve and expand models and analytical tools that can be applied in the science policy decision making process; and (3) develop a community of experts across academic institutions focused on SciSIP." The synopsis goes on to stress that interdisciplinary approaches and collaborative projects, including ones reaching across national borders, are strongly encouraged.

The full solicitation is available on line at: <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2007/nsf07547/nsf07547.htm>. Anticipated funding per grant ranges from \$50,000 to \$400,000. Future solicitations are planned that will "target research that would improve and expand science metrics and datasets."

Geography Education Bills Reintroduced in Congress

On March 1, 2007, the "Teaching Geography Is Fundamental Act" was reintroduced in both the House and Senate. Initially sponsored during the previous Congress, the legislation authorizes competitive grants through the Department of Education to promote geographic teaching and learning at the K-12 level.

The Senate bill's (S. 727) primary sponsor, Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS), is joined by a bipartisan group of colleagues. The House bill (H.R. 1228) was introduced by Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), a member of the House leadership, and Rep. Roger Wicker (R-MS).

The act focuses on providing educators with the tools they need to improve geographic literacy, and helping teachers learn better ways to communicate the importance of geography to their students. In introducing the bill, Cochran noted that "We need to be preparing our younger generation for global competition and ensuring that they have a strong base of understanding to be able to succeed. Ensuring geographic literacy prepares students to be good citizens of both our nation and the world."

Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT), a 2008 presidential candidate and one of Cochran's co-sponsors, said "The study of geography opens doors for students to a better understanding of different cultures and societies. As our world becomes increasingly connected economically, politically, and socially, it is vital that we equip our students with a worldview that allows them to compete on the global playing field."

The bills will likely be considered as each chamber's education committee takes up reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind law. We will keep you up to date on this important legislation throughout the 110th Congress.

Bill Amending Presidential Records Act Moves to House Floor

Legislation aimed at repealing a 2001 Bush Administration executive order dealing with the release of presidential records has been reported favorably by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee and was to be considered by the full House during the week of March 12. The bill, H.R. 1255, has bipartisan sponsors and is being championed by Oversight Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA), a close ally of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA).

Under the Presidential Records Act of 1978, presidential records are supposed to be released to the public 12 years after the end of an administration. In November 2001, however, President Bush issued Executive Order 13233, which overturned an executive order issued by President Reagan and gave current and former presidents and vice presidents broad authority to withhold presidential records or delay their release indefinitely. This action was viewed by many as part of a broader pattern of public data suppression by the Bush Administration. The Presidential Records Act Amendments of 2007 (H.R. 1255) would nullify E.O. 13233 and establish procedures to ensure the timely release of presidential records. ■

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