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COSSA Washington Update

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SPENDING CONFRONTATION AT HAND; LABOR, HHS, EDUCATION BILL ON ITS WAY TO PRESIDENT

The inevitable confrontation between President Bush and the Democratic Congress over FY 2008 spending is finally here. The Congress will complete action on the FY 2008 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education (ED) spending bill during the week of November 5 and couple it with the Military Construction and Veterans' Affairs appropriation bill and send the combined legislative package to the White House. The President has given no indication that he will back off his oft-repeated threats to veto those bills that allocate more funds than called for in his budget request, including the Labor one.

Congress also expects to complete action soon on the Commerce, Justice, Science and the Transportation and Housing and Urban Development FY 2008 funding bills. The President will likely veto these as well. All of this suggests that the serious negotiations regarding the completion of the FY 2008 appropriations process, if they are going to occur at all, will happen post-Thanksgiving.

The preliminary numbers for the conference agreement on the Labor, HHS, ED bill suggest that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will hit the \$30 million mark for its FY 2008 appropriation, an increase of 3.8 percent over FY 2007. This is larger than either the House or Senate bill spending level; a not unusual phenomena for NIH.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would receive a \$6.288 billion appropriation, up 5.9 percent from FY 2007; while the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (AHRQ) funding would climb by \$5 million over last year to \$334.6 million.

International Education and Foreign Language programs would go up by \$5 million to \$110.7 million. Research and Statistics, would increase by 2.2 percent over FY 2007, but considerably below the 11.5 percent boost proposed by the President. This does not include the Statewide Data Systems account, which would more than double from \$24.5 million to \$49.2 million.

Funding for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) would increase to \$566.8 million, up 3.4 percent from FY 2007, but below the requested level of \$574.4 million.

Allocations for other programs affecting the social/behavioral sciences and the final report language were unavailable as Update went to press. Full coverage will occur in our next issue.

FARM BILL RENEWAL EMERGES FROM SENATE COMMITTEE

The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, chaired by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), reported out its version of the 2007 Farm Bill on October 25. Like its House counterpart the bill restructures the Department of Agriculture's research and extension activities (for House bill story, see Update, [August 6, 2007](#)).

The Senate legislation transfers all authorities under the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) to a new National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). All programs under CSREES will continue under NIFA. The Director of NIFA is required to report to and consult with the Secretary on the research activities of NIFA.

The legislation establishes four offices for NIFA. First, the Office of Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Network will include all of the infrastructure programs, also known as capacity programs, such as formula programs for State Agricultural Experiment Stations and the Extension Service. Second, the Office of Competitive Programs for Fundamental Research will house competitive programs that fund fundamental (basic) food and agricultural research, such as the National Research Initiative's projects that cover basic research. Third, the Office of Competitive Programs for Applied Research will consist of competitive programs for applied food and agricultural research. Finally, the Office of Competitive Programs for Education and Other Purposes will include competitive programs for education and other fellowships. The legislation also formalizes coordination between the Agricultural Research Service and NIFA and requires an annual report to Congress on coordination between the agencies.

The Director of NIFA will have the discretion to divide programs that intersect more than one program office. The bill authorizes appropriations for NIFA above the authorizations of individual programs. Allocations will occur according to recommendations made by the Undersecretary of Research, Education and Economics after completing a "roadmap" exercise that identifies major opportunities and gaps in agricultural research, extension, and education. Harkin, who has overseen NIH's appropriations for many years, has been impressed by Director Elias Zerhouni's fondness for a "roadmap."

The bill also reduces the membership in the National Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Advisory Board (NAREEE) from 31 members to 24 members. Members representing the following will no longer serve on the NAREEE Advisory Board: a national animal commodity organization; a national crop commodity organization; a national aquaculture association; a non-land grant college or university with a historic commitment to research in the food and agricultural sciences; the portion of the scientific community not closely associated with agriculture; an agency within USDA that lacks research capabilities; a research agency of the Federal government other than USDA; and national organizations directly concerned with agricultural research, education, and extension. One member actively engaged in aquaculture was added to compensate for the loss of representation from a national aquaculture association.

In other provisions, the bill: reauthorizes grants and cooperative agreements for policy research centers; establishes a grant program to increase participation by women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields; establishes a research program focusing on critical

rural and agricultural transportation and logistics issues facing agricultural producers and other rural businesses; reauthorizes the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants program (NRI) at \$500 million per year; and increases the allowance for indirect costs from 19 percent to 30 percent.

The bill now goes to the Senate floor and then to a conference with the House. Since Congress is likely to still be here in December there is some time to get this done in 2007.

SCIENCE PANEL SCRUTINIZES NASA DATA SUPPRESSION

On October 31, the House Science and Technology Committee, chaired by Rep. Bart Gordon (D-TN), held a hastily called hearing following press reports that NASA had suppressed the results of a survey on air safety, because as a NASA spokesperson announced, those results "could materially affect the public confidence in, and the commercial welfare of the air carriers."

NASA Administrator Michael Griffin apologized to the Committee for his agency's apparent concern for airline companies over the public's right to know about a survey concerning aviation safety. He also admitted NASA "did not manage this project well."

The survey was part of a planned, elaborate National Aviation Operations Monitoring Service (NAOMS) established in 1998. It was designed, Jon Krosnick, Frederick Glover Professor in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Stanford and a consultant to the project, explained to the panel, to collect "information on the precursors to accidents" to help improve the aviation safety analysis system. The NAOMS project would survey a representative sample of pilots every week of every year to ascertain "the number of each of a series of different specific events that they had witnessed during a specific recent time period," according to Krosnick's testimony. Other surveys of flight attendants, air traffic controllers, mechanics, and others would also become part of the NAOMS system.

There was some dispute over how many pilots were included in the sample. Griffin and Committee members kept talking about "24,000 pilots" who were interviewed, as does NAOMS Principal Investigator Robert Dodd's written testimony. Krosnick indicated that there were 24,000 total interviews and some pilots may have been interviewed more than once, although the data set does not provide the total number of people interviewed.

Griffin, throughout most of his testimony, denigrated the survey and its results. Rep. Brad Miller (D-NC) suggested that the Administrator's bottom line was that he believed the "data on its face are not credible." Griffin told the Committee he questioned the results, since "the numbers were higher than reported by other means." He also raised doubts about the methodology and insisted that it had never been peer reviewed. In addition, Griffin mentioned a National Academies' report suggesting that NAOMS was unnecessary since the already existing Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS) was sufficient. This led some members to query why NASA spent almost \$12 million on NAOMS, if ASRS could do the job.

Furthermore, Griffin expressed his concern that the survey's assurances of confidentiality to the respondents could be breached if certain fields from the survey results were not deleted. This was echoed by the Committee's Ranking Republican Rep. Ralph Hall (R-TX) and by witness Terry McVenes, representing the Airline Pilots Association. Griffin also denied Committee members' assertions that the funding for NAOMS had been cut off.

Krosnick refuted most of Griffin's assertions. He noted that the development of the survey included consultations and reviews of the methodology by survey experts. He indicated that confidentiality assurances were specific and that for the most part the data set did not include respondent identifiers. In those few cases where an airline could be identified and a pilot's name extrapolated, there were techniques to mask these cases, he argued. He pointed out that the survey had undergone OMB clearance and the methodology validated. He disputed Griffin's claim that there was "no domain expertise on the part of the surveyors," by describing the major consultations with NASA staff and other aviation experts that took place as the survey was developed and carried out.

Finally, both Krosnick and Dodd disputed Griffin's assertion that the funding for NAOMS had not been cut off. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-IL) wondered whether the demise of the funding occurred at the point where the survey of air traffic controllers was about to commence. Others, such as Rep. Mark Udall (D-CO), Chairman of the Space

and Aeronautics Subcommittee, suggested that it was a matter of reordering NASA's priorities so that human factors research and development was downgraded.

The Administrator announced that NASA would release the "cleaned" data set to the public by the end of the year. This is not soon enough for some Members, such as Rep. Jerry Costello (D-IL), who wants NASA working around the clock to scrub the data and get it to the public. Krosnick suggested that cleaning the data should take a week if NASA focused on redacting the small number of possible identifiable data points, rather than trying to delete whole fields in the survey.

In an interesting aside, Rep. James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) suggested that NASA's "mess of its own causing," would have an impact on the public's willingness to cooperate with the 2010 Census.

KEITH HALL NOMINATED TO LEAD BLS

The President has nominated Keith Hall as the next Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Hall, who currently serves as Chief Economist at the Council of Economic Advisors, would replace Kathleen Utgoff. She left BLS in late 2006. Phil Rones, BLS' Deputy Commissioner, has been Acting Commissioner throughout 2007.

Hall previously served as Chief Economist at the Department of Commerce where he provided advice to the Under Secretary of Economic Affairs regarding the economic and statistical activities of the Bureau of Census, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and STAT-USA. Earlier in his career, he served as Senior International Economist in the Research Division in the Office of Economics at the U.S. International Trade Commission, an independent agency conducting general investigations on any matter involving tariffs and international trade, including conditions of competition between U.S. and foreign industries. He has taught at the Universities of Arkansas and Missouri. Hall received his Bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia, and his Master's and Ph.D. in Economics from Purdue University.

The Senate needs to confirm Hall's nomination. No hearing has been scheduled.

ABRAMS AWARDED THE 2008 JOSEPH W. CULLEN MEMORIAL AWARD

National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) Director David Abrams has been elected to receive the 2008 Joseph W. Cullen Memorial Award from the American Society for Preventive Oncology for his "outstanding contribution to the field of tobacco research."

The Award was created to memorialize Cullen's contributions to national tobacco control, particularly in his capacity as the Program Coordinator for the National Cancer Institute's Smoking, Tobacco, and Cancer Program from 1982 to 1989. Cullen was the main author of the Surgeon General's report on smoking under C. Everett Koop, Surgeon General from 1982 -1989. The Award recognizes distinguished achievement in continued national tobacco control efforts through research, the development of prevention and cessation programs with wide-ranging public health impact, and public policy and advocacy initiatives. Abrams will accept the award and give the Joseph W. Cullen Memorial Award Lecture on March 17, 2007.

Prior to joining OBSSR, Abrams was Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior and Professor of Community Health at Brown University Medical School, and co-director of Transdisciplinary Research at Brown-affiliated Butler Hospital. He holds a B.Sc. in computer science and psychology from the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, and Masters and Doctoral degrees in Clinical Psychology from Rutgers University. Abrams joined the faculty of Brown in 1978, where he was the founding Director of the Centers for Behavioral and Preventive Medicine and its leader for 16 years. He is a licensed clinical psychologist, specializing in health psychology/behavioral and preventive medicine.

Abrams' research contributions range from basic human laboratory research on bio-behavioral mechanisms in the self-regulation of addictive behavior, to outcomes evaluation of behavior change interventions in clinical and community settings, to health policy research. His primary research foci over the past 25 years have included: (1) basic scientific research on self-control mechanisms in nicotine, alcohol, stress and mood regulation; (2) translational clinical research on evaluating behavioral/pharmacological treatments for tobacco and alcohol

abuse, obesity and physical activity; and (3) on dissemination and policy-related research to improve the widespread delivery of cost-efficient interventions to defined populations and across settings and channels including worksites and most recently using new bio-informatics screening technologies and interactive communications via the internet.

Abrams is a past President of the Society of Behavioral Medicine, a fellow and a recipient of the Society's distinguished scientist award, a fellow of the American Psychological Association, a member of the Board of Scientific Advisors of the National Cancer Institute, and a member of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Transdisciplinary Tobacco Etiology Research Network. He has served as an expert consultant on numerous occasions.

ECONOMIST GARY BECKER WINS PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM

On October 29 the White House announced this year's list of Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients. Among the winners is Gary S. Becker, University of Chicago Professor of Economics and Sociology.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian award, was established by Executive Order 11085 in 1963. The Medal may be awarded by the President "to any person who has made an especially meritorious contribution to: (1) the security or national interests of the United States, or (2) world peace, or (3) cultural or other significant public or private endeavors." President Bush honored the recipients at a White House ceremony on November 5, 2007.

The citation for Becker says: "Gary S. Becker has broadened the spectrum of economics and social science through his analysis of the interaction between economics and topics such as education, demography, and family organization. His work has helped improve the standard of living for people around the world."

Becker has also won the Nobel Prize in Economics, the National Medal of Science, and the John Bates Clark Medal from the American Economic Association, as well as numerous other awards. He has taught at Chicago since 1968, after 12 years at Columbia. He earned his B.A. at Princeton, and his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. In recent years, he wrote a column for Business Week magazine and now shares a blog with Richard Posner, a judge on the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals and a former University of Chicago Law Professor. In 1995, Becker spoke at a COSSA Congressional Seminar on his seminal work, *Human Capital*.

Other recipients of this year's Medal of Freedom include Francis Collins, director of the National Human Genome Research Institute; Harper Lee, author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the American-educated President of Liberia.

NIH SEEKS INPUT ON EMERGING PRIORITIES IN BASIC BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) and Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Initiatives (OPASI) has issued a Request-for-information (RFI) seeking input from the scientific community, health professionals, patient advocates, and the general public about emerging priorities in basic Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (bBSSR) that may offer potential for improving and accelerating health research and its impact on the health of the Nation. The information will aid OPASI, working with OBSSR expertise, in developing a congressionally-requested strategic plan for bBSSR at the NIH.

House Bill -- H.R. 3043/House Report 101-231 -- The Committee is aware that basic behavioral research focused on such areas as cognition, perception, emotion, social interaction, and learning have led to important advances and improved treatments for depression, bipolar and other affective disorders, diabetes, compliance on behavior change related to diabetes, heart disease, cancer, obesity, and more effective public health announcements and interventions. In view of the fact that eight out of the ten leading causes of death have a significant behavioral component and that basic research is the underpinning of advances in behavioral research, the Committee is concerned with the continued lack of focus of scientific leadership at NIH for this important field of science. However, the Committee views the new Office of Portfolio Analysis

and Strategic Initiatives (OPASI) within the Office of the Director as a potentially important source of leadership in encouraging NIH investment in behavioral science research. The recent NIH reauthorization placed OBSSR within OPASI. As OPASI begins to perform its function of analyzing balance and content in all NIH areas of research, it would be appropriate for OPASI to set as an initial task a review of the NIH basic behavioral research portfolio. The Committee requests that the Director of NIH instruct OPASI, using OBSSR expertise, to prepare a strategic plan for basic behavioral research. This plan should include the amount spent in fiscal years 2006 and 2007, by institute and center, on basic behavioral research, and a plan for NIH's investment in basic behavioral research for fiscal year 2008 and beyond. This strategic plan should also identify any gaps in the NIH basic behavioral research portfolio. (pg. 173) The strategic plan/report is due by May 1, 2008.

The current request for information is to supplement previous efforts to identify bBSSR priorities, including reports from the National Academies and the report from the *Working Group of the NIH Advisory Committee to the Director on Research Opportunities in the Basic Behavioral and Social Sciences (2004)*, which includes descriptions of the individual NIH Institutes and Centers portfolios in bBSSR and identifies future bBSSR opportunities for NIH. These sources and a summary of the Working Group's identified priorities can be viewed on OPASI's website at: <http://conferences.thehillgroup.com/websites/RFI2007/bBSSRrecommendation.html>.

Respondents to the RFI are asked to react to the following questions on the OPASI website at <http://www.bbssrresponse.com/>. The deadline to respond is November 26, 2007.

- 1) What are the existing essential/foundational research topics already being supported and in need of continued support or further development (i.e. core areas of bBSSR)? What existing areas need to be phased out or dropped?
- 2) What exciting new emergent areas of bBSSR are likely to significantly advance the NIH mission and address pressing biomedical and public health needs? What areas are not being addressed that ought to be addressed because they will likely lead to important or perhaps even breakthrough insights that will ultimately improve the Nation's health and well-being?

OPASI emphasizes that basic research in the behavioral and social sciences is designed to further our understanding of fundamental mechanisms and patterns of behavioral and social functioning relevant to the Nation's health and well-being, and as they interact with each other, with biology and the environment. It is also noted that as is the case with basic biomedical research, basic behavioral and social sciences research is designed to elucidate knowledge about underlying mechanisms and processes, knowledge that is fundamental to improving the understanding, explanation, observation, prediction, prevention, and management of illnesses, as well as the promotion of optimal health and well being. An expanded definition of bBSSR can be found at <http://conferences.thehillgroup.com/websites/RFI2007/definition.html>.

OHRP PROPOSES CHANGES TO EXPEDITED REVIEW CRITERIA

The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) requests written comments on the categories of research that may be reviewed by Institutional Review Boards (IRB) through an expedited review procedure.

The following is the current expedited review list, as published in the *Federal Register* on November 9, 1998:

(1) Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met: (a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review.) (b) Research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.

(2) Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows: (a) from healthy, non-pregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; or (b) from other adults and children, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection

procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.

(3) Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by noninvasive means. Examples: (a) Hair and nail clippings in a non-disfiguring manner; (b) deciduous teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction; (c) permanent teeth if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction; (d) excreta and external secretions (including sweat); (e) un-cannulated saliva collected either in an unstimulated fashion or stimulated by chewing gumbase or wax or by applying a dilute citric solution to the tongue; (f) placenta removed at delivery; (g) amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor; (h) supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus, provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques; (i) mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings; (j) sputum collected after saline mist nebulization.

(4) Collection of data through noninvasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications.)

Examples: (a) Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy; (b) weighing or testing sensory acuity; (c) magnetic resonance imaging; (d) electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography; (e) moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.

(5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis). (Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

(8) Continuing review of research previously approved by the convened IRB as follows: (a) Where (i) the research is permanently closed to the enrollment of new subjects; (ii) all subjects have completed all research-related interventions; and (iii) the research remains active only for long-term follow-up of subjects; or (b) where no subjects have been enrolled and no additional risks have been identified; or (c) where the remaining research activities are limited to data analysis.

(9) Continuing review of research, not conducted under an investigational new drug application or investigational device exemption where categories two (2) through eight (8) do not apply but the IRB has determined and documented at a convened meeting that the research involves no greater than minimal risk and no additional risks have been identified.

Proposed Changes Affecting Social/Behavioral Research

OHRP is proposing to change Category Five to:

Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that (a) have previously been collected for non-research purposes; (b) have previously been collected for research purposes, provided the materials were not collected for the currently proposed research; or (c) will be collected solely for non-research purposes.

OHRP also specifically requests comments on a recommendation by the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Human Research Protection (SACHRP) to revise expedited review Category Seven as follows:

Research (a) on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, affective states, interpersonal relationships, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior); or (b) employing methods commonly used in social, behavioral, epidemiologic, health services and educational research (including, but not limited to, survey, interview, oral history, participant observation, ethnographic, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methods). (Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Comments are due by **December 26, 2007**. Submit written comments to EXPEDITED REVIEW, Office for Human Research Protections, The Tower Building, 1101 Wootton Parkway, Suite 200, Rockville, MD 20852. Comments also may be sent via e-mail to expeditedreviewohrp@hhs.gov, or via facsimile at 301-402-2071. For further information contact: Glen Drew, Office for Human Research Protections, The Tower Building, 1101 Wootton Parkway, Suite 200, Rockville, MD 20852, 1-866-447-4777 or by e-mail to: glen.drew@hhs.gov.

For a full discussion of this notice see *Federal Register*: October 26, 2007, Volume 72, Number 207, pages 60848-60851.

NEW REPORT SUGGESTS DIGITAL DIVIDE CLOSING; ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY SPREADING

New research by the Ready to Learn Partnership (RTLTP) reveals that children from all income levels now have access to a variety of technology. The survey funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement and conducted by the Michael Cohen Group, LLC provides a snapshot of what media is being used in households and how it is being used.

On October 25, RTLTP in conjunction with the Department of Education, Education Week, and the Michael Cohen Group, LLC held a press conference for the release of their new report, *Children, Families and Media: A Benchmark*. One of the key purposes of the Ready to Learn grant that produced this report was to uncover the role that technology plays in helping young children, particularly children from lower income families, get ready to read. "For years, Congress has supported literacy-based television programming to help pre-schoolers get ready to read and to foster reading skills among school-aged children," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), it was now time to expand that help to providing technology.

The study found that all families regardless of income levels now own and use technology, although differences in participation rates based on income appear to persist. The report also shows that technology is increasingly integrated into children's lives, despite the socioeconomic status of their caregivers. Nearly 75 percent of poverty level caregivers, those with household incomes of less than \$25,000, report they subscribe to cable television, two-thirds have DVD players, more than half have mobile phones, more than one-third have computers, and more than one-quarter have home access to the internet.

According to the survey, television remains the most pervasive form of home technology with 97 percent saturation, with 84 percent of those households having either cable or satellite. Television filters down to even the youngest members of the family with 96 percent of children between the ages of two and eight watching every day. One-quarter of all children in the survey have a television in their rooms.

With regard to computer ownership, the report indicates that nearly 40 percent of those earning below the poverty level own one; and 58 percent of those households have high speed access to the internet. As expected computer ownership is higher in households with higher incomes: 97 percent for those with incomes over \$75 thousand, 81 percent with incomes between \$50K and \$75 thousand, and 65 percent with incomes between \$25 and \$50 thousand.

Despite these gaps, DeLauro stated that "this new study shows that we are making progress in closing the digital divide and that television and computers can be effective tools to reach children, regardless of income levels, in an effort to help them become productive and successful adults."

Given the growing prevalence of media and the new technology across the socioeconomic spectrum, a stark digital divide no longer adequately reflects the relationship between income and technology ownership. "The metaphor of the digital divide no longer captures the relationship...The current state is perhaps best described as a digital continuum," remarked Cohen.

NSF CONTINUES TO SEEK RESEARCH PROPOSALS ON DATA CONFIDENTIALITY

The Directorates for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE), Computer and Information Science and Engineering (CISE), and Education and Human Resources (EHR) at the National Science Foundation (NSF) continue to seek proposals to research issues of data confidentiality.

According to an NSF Dear Colleague letter, the research should seek to explore ways to improve the confidentiality of data about individuals and organizations while also permitting legitimate social and research uses of that data.

The NSF call defines confidentiality as the obligations of individuals and institutions not to transmit identifiable information regarding an individual or an organization to an unauthorized party. Rules of confidentiality protect and preserve individual privacy, and proprietary or restricted organizational information. Data confidentiality focuses on ways of effectively maintaining the agreement made to a data provider by a data gatherer regarding access to information.

NSF's concern is enhanced by new capacities to collect and integrate data about individuals and organizations that offer expanded potential for scientists and policy-makers to understand factors contributing to key national priorities like job, income and wealth creation, as well as career path, health, medical and retirement decisions. Yet, the potential benefits of these new data capabilities come with certain costs. New data collection methods and substantial archives of static information, for example income, consumption, health and genetic data, pose troubling confidentiality questions. According to NSF, the emerging cyberinfrastructure connecting observing and sensing systems, intelligent and remotely operable instrumentation, collaboratories, federated data archives, and digital libraries only compound data confidentiality problems.

Some of these issues are laid out in a National Academies' report, *Putting People on the Map: Protecting Confidentiality with Linked Social-Spatial Data*, issued by a panel chaired by former COSSA President Myron Gutmann, director of the Interuniversity Consortium of Political and Social Research. Among its recommendations is to conduct more research on technical and institutional ways to disseminate data and still protect confidentiality. (For more on the report see Update, [April 2, 2007](#).)

For questions or more information about the NSF initiative contact Cheryl Eavey, (ceavey@nsf.gov) in SBE, Le Gruenwald, (lgruenwald@nsf.gov) in CISE, and Larry Suter, (lsuter@nsf.gov) in EHR.

NIH SOLICITS MORE RESEARCH PROPOSALS EXAMINING ELSI ISSUES SURROUNDING GENOMIC RESEARCH

According to many of the National Institutes of Health (Genome, Cancer, Aging, Child Health and Human Development, Drug Abuse, Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, Environmental Health Sciences, and Neurological Disorders and Stroke) proactive and sustained efforts are needed to ensure that the potential benefits of genomic research are maximized and potential harms minimized. To achieve this goal, research that anticipates and addresses the ethical, legal, and social implications (ELSI) of the availability and use of large amounts of personal genetic and genomic information remains critical. Accordingly, the Institutes seek research projects that anticipate, analyze and address ELSI issues.

NIH particularly encourages interdisciplinary, collaborative projects among bioethicists, genome scientists, social scientists, clinical researchers, public health researchers, behavioral researchers, health economists, legal scholars, historians, theologians and/or other scholars in the humanities. **Applications are due no earlier than January 5, 2008.**

The Institutes will give high priority to those projects that examine issues and, where appropriate, develop policy options in the areas identified as "Grand Challenges" during the NHGRI/NIH planning process which focused on the future of genomic research. These include:

- Ethical, Legal and Social Factors that Influence the Translation of Genomic Information to Improve Human Health (Grand Challenges II-5, II-6, and III-1)
- Issues Surrounding the Conduct of Genomic Research (Grand Challenge III-1)
- Intellectual Property Issues Surrounding Access to and Use of Genomic Information (Grand Challenge I-3)
- Non-Medical Applications of Genomic Technologies and Information (Grand Challenge III-1 and III-3)
- The Impact of Genomics on Concepts of Race, Ethnicity, Kinship and Individual and Group Identity (Grand Challenge III-2, III-3, and III-4)
- The Implications of Uncovering Genomic Contributions to 'Normal' Human Traits and Behaviors (Grand Challenge III-3 and III-2)
- Ethical Boundaries for the Uses of Genomics (Grand Challenge III-4 and III-2).

The **Cancer Institute** interests' lie in assessing the impact of heritable cancer syndromes on individuals, their families, and extended families, especially studies of the psycho-social, behavioral, and health behaviors of affected individuals and their families.

Aging wants researchers to examine specific ELSI issues that they face and the unique safeguards necessary to protect participant privacy when genetic data is linked with a rich array of data that may include longitudinal information, behavioral, social and health measures and/or information derived from linked administrative records. These issues may include those faced by researchers, those posed by data sharing and access committees to protect privacy, and those related to concerns of individual study participants and their families.

The **Child Health and Human Development Institute** seeks projects dealing with implications for children, adults, and families in the areas of: race, ethnicity, and kinship; child development; obesity; developmental disabilities; medical rehabilitation; and assisted reproductive technologies.

The **Deafness and Communication Disorders Institute** wants applicants to address social, ethnical, and legal issues related to deafness and other communication disorders (hearing, balance, smell, taste, voice, speech, and language), especially the impact of genetic testing on the behaviors and attitudes of individuals with hearing impairment and their families.

Environmental Health Sciences seeks researchers who will address the ELSI concerns of the public related to gene-environment interactions, environmental health hazards, and genetic susceptibility to environmental exposures. The Institute's particular interest is in supporting an ongoing dialogue between scientists and the public for accurate translations of the scientific findings of research on complex, environmentally-relevant diseases, as well as assessment of educational interventions used.

Neurological Disorders and Stroke requests applications which address subjects relevant to its core mission.

For more information see: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-08-012.html>.

ELSI Small Research Grant

The above organizations have also issued a solicitation to encourage Small Research Grant applications to study ELSI issues related to human genome research. This announcement (PA-08-013) is specifically designed to:

1. Encourage the development of small, focused research projects by legal, historical, ethics, humanities, social sciences and behavioral scholars;
2. Support exploratory studies that may provide preliminary findings or pilot data for larger research proposals;
3. Support the secondary analysis of existing data;
4. Support the development of new methodologies; and
5. Stimulate and facilitate the entry of promising new investigators into ELSI research.

Applications are due on January 16, 2008. For more information see: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-08-013.html>.

CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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1522 K Street, NW, Suite 836
Washington, D.C. 20005
Phone: (202) 842-3525; Fax: (202) 842-2788

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