



CONSORTIUM *of* SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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Testimony in Support of Fiscal Year 2016 Funding for the  
National Science Foundation, Census Bureau, National Institute of Justice, and  
Bureau of Justice Statistics

Prepared for the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations

United States House of Representatives

Submitted by Wendy A. Naus, Executive Director

Consortium of Social Science Associations

April 8, 2015

On behalf of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), I offer this written testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies for inclusion in the official committee record. For fiscal year (FY) 2016, COSSA urges the Subcommittee to appropriate \$7.7 billion for the National Science Foundation (NSF), \$1.5 billion for the Census Bureau, \$52.5 million for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), and \$61.4 million for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).

COSSA serves as a united voice for a broad, diverse network of organizations, institutions, communities, and stakeholders who care about a successful and vibrant social science research enterprise. We represent the collective interests of all fields of social and behavioral science research, including but not limited to sociology, anthropology, political science, psychology, economics, statistics, language and linguistics, population studies, law, communications, educational research, criminology and criminal justice research, geography, history, and child development.

Social and behavioral science research is supported across the federal government, including at the National Science Foundation and the Department of Justice. Further, federal statistics collected by the Census Bureau and other federal statistical agencies provide important data needed to conduct social science research that informs policy decisions. Taken together, federal social and behavioral science and statistical data help to provide us with answers to complex, human-centered questions such as:

- How to convince a community in a path of a tornado to heed warnings; or
- What are the best strategies for slowing the HIV/AIDS epidemic, or more recently, the Ebola crisis; or
- How to thwart cybercrime and protect American's privacy and security in an increasingly connected world.

Without this science, policy-making on major national issues will not be based on evidence and billions of dollars will be wasted.

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American Anthropological Association • American Association for Public Opinion Research • American Economic Association • American Educational Research Association • American Historical Association • American Political Science Association • American Psychological Association • American Society of Criminology • American Sociological Association • American Statistical Association • Association of American Geographers • Association of American Law Schools • Law and Society Association • Linguistic Society of America • Midwest Political Science Association • National Communication Association • Population Association of America • Society for Personality and Social Psychology • Society for Research in Child Development

## National Science Foundation (\$7.7 billion)

First, I wish to thank the Subcommittee for its longstanding support for federal science agencies. Despite the tough, ongoing fiscal challenges, the Subcommittee has remained vigilant in its efforts to ensure adequate funding for basic research, particularly at the National Science Foundation. Thank you.

I urge your consideration of three requests with regard to the National Science Foundation's budget for FY 2016. **First, COSSA joins the broader scientific community and the 136 Representatives who signed the March 24 Dear Colleague in support of \$7.7 billion for NSF in FY 2016, an increase of 5.2 percent.** This amount would put NSF back on a growth trajectory and would allow the agency to recover some of the purchasing power lost in recent years due to sequestration and caps on discretionary spending.

The request would also attempt to put NSF back on track with the vision of the *America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010*, which authorized NSF at \$7.4 billion in FY 2011, \$7.8 billion in FY 2012, and \$8.3 billion in FY 2013. If the U.S. is to maintain its scientific competitiveness on the global stage, we as a nation must continue to prioritize investments in science and technology and not abandon the aspirations set forth in the original *America COMPETES Act of 2007* and its reauthorization in 2011.

**Second, COSSA urges the committee to maintain current practice when appropriating funds for NSF.** As you know, a topic of discussion during the March 17 CJS Subcommittee hearing with NSF Director France Córdova was a proposal to set specific funding levels for NSF's seven research directorates. The scientific community strongly contends that experts at NSF, the merit-review process, and the vast network of scholars around the country who provide technical and content expertise to the NSF leadership are better suited to advise the agency on how best to use the funding it receives each year. Making such a change would place scientific disciplines (i.e. biology, engineering, chemistry, social science, etc.) in direct competition with one another for what are already scarce resources, thereby discouraging interdisciplinary science, which is becoming increasingly necessary for answering complex societal challenges. In addition, it would dismantle the scientific infrastructure that has been assembled over the last several decades by side-stepping the multifaceted, merit-based process that has served the agency so well since its founding. For this reason, **we hope you will reject proposals to appropriate specific funding levels for NSF's seven research directorates and maintain the current practice of appropriating funds to NSF's Research and Related Activities account and allow the experts at NSF to determine how best to allocate funds.**

**Third, as you move through the appropriations process this year, COSSA urges you to discourage and object to amendments that would defund or otherwise compromise specific research areas or programs at NSF,** as we saw with the amendment targeting NSF's political science program in FY 2013. The U.S. scientific enterprise must remain insulated from political and ideological pressure if we are to encourage the most innovative science. The social and behavioral sciences have come under such pressure in recent years, with some arguing that this science is not worthy of federal taxpayer support. This suggests a lack of understanding about what social scientists do and the impact their research has on society.

It is first important to understand the financial impact of social science supported by NSF. The Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE) at NSF accounts for less than 5 percent of the entire NSF budget. However, the SBE directorate funds approximately 55 percent of all university-based basic social and behavioral science research in the United States. While we are not talking about a very large amount of money when compared to other NSF directorates or fields of science, NSF's SBE directorate is the largest single source of funding for basic social and behavioral science researchers at universities across the country. Its impact is profound.

Baseless attacks on social and behavioral science projects can be very damaging, not only to those seeking to pursue careers in social science research, but in other fields as well. Publicly holding up individual research grants for ridicule based solely on their titles or abstracts—research projects that a distinguished panel of scientific peers has determined meritorious and in the national interest according to NSF's mission—misleads the American public by asserting that taxpayer funding is being wasted without fully understanding the projects, their intent, and the benefit to society and/or the progress of science. Such efforts also unjustly vilify researchers who have dedicated their careers to science and

discovery. The nature of basic science is to explore fundamental questions that may not have an immediate application, but that contribute to a cache of knowledge that builds and progresses over time. It would be folly to undercut basic research that provides the building blocks for future discoveries, especially in the social and behavioral sciences.

So many of the questions facing us today are left unsolved because we do not understand the human dimensions. Consider this – There are as many people dying from tornadic events today than 60 years ago, despite the tremendous advancements in weather prediction and modeling. Why? Because in the end, this is a human problem – technology is useless if we do not invest in furthering our understanding about how humans process information, make decisions, and communicate with one another and with technology.

The examples illustrating the benefit of social and behavioral science are endless. As a result of NSF-supported social and behavioral science research, we are:

- Enhancing teaching and learning in education, including STEM education;
- Improving the safety of our troops in combat areas;
- Reducing violence among our youth;
- Improving public health;
- Modeling water planning to enhance sustainability;
- Improving the effectiveness of the criminal justice system; and
- Helping paralyzed individuals communicate, to name a few.

I hope the committee will continue to see value in NSF's role as the funder of *all fields of basic science* so that we may continue to advance the progress of science for the betterment of society.

## Census Bureau (\$1.5 billion), U.S. Department of Commerce

COSSA urges the Subcommittee to appropriate \$1.5 billion to the U.S. Census Bureau in FY 2016, the amount requested by the President. Accurate, objective, representative, timely, reliable and accessible data and statistics are necessary ingredients to the conduct of evidence-based analyses of federal programs.

Statistics from the Census Bureau (and a dozen other federal statistical agencies) measure progress in our nation and gauge, among other things, the state of the American economy; employment, retirement, and the labor force; the health of the American people; educational attainment and progress; agriculture, farming, and food in the U.S.; energy and natural resources; our transportation network; and the crime and justice system.

Statistics from the Census Bureau and other federal statistical agencies are necessary for a range of activities affecting the American people, including:

- Allocating fairly, to whom and where needed, over \$400 billion in federal funds to states, cities and local governments for public health and safety, education, housing, poverty and other services.
- Developing a Homeland Infrastructure Protection Plan.
- Producing the economic indicators the Federal Reserve Board uses to determine interest rates.
- Measuring the nation's food security.
- Drawing school district boundaries.
- Establishing and enforcing fair lending practices.
- Helping small businesses make good business decisions.

Federal statistical agencies have been underfunded for at least the last three years, causing some of them to stop producing certain measures and jeopardizing the confidence with which others can provide the statistics that help the country, its businesses, and communities run efficiently and effectively.

One critically important function of the Census Bureau is the American Community Survey, which is the nation's only source of comparable (across geography), consistent (across time), timely (updated annually), high quality demographic and socio-economic data for all communities in the U.S. The ACS replaced the Census "long form" in 2005 at the behest of Congress. The accuracy of the data collected

by the ACS relies on the mandatory nature of the program. If successful, efforts to make the ACS voluntary could translate to a decline in response rates by at least 20 percent and an increase in survey costs by about \$100 million, according to agency estimates. More importantly, reliable socio-economic data would be lost for entire communities, especially those in rural areas.

COSSA urges the committee to appropriate \$1.5 billion for Census in FY 2016 and maintain the mandatory status of the American Community Survey.

## **National Institute of Justice (\$52.5 million) and Bureau of Justice Statistics (\$61.4 million), U.S. Department of Justice**

COSSA urges the Subcommittee to appropriate \$52.5 million for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and \$61.4 million for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) within the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). These levels are equal to the President's FY 2016 budget request. Taken together, NIJ and BJS represent the only dedicated sources of federal research support committed to enhancing our understanding of crime and the criminal justice system.

Social science research supported by the agencies informs policymaking on timely crime and justice issues like:

- Human trafficking;
- Evaluation of anti-gang programs;
- Policing;
- Children exposed to violence;
- Sentencing alternatives to incarceration;
- Elder abuse; and
- Reentry and probation.

As the research arm of DOJ, NIJ plays a critical role in helping us understand and implement science-based strategies for crime prevention and control. The President's request seeks to continue DOJ's school safety initiative and proposes a new \$4 million research program on domestic radicalization to better understand violent extremism and advancing evidence-based strategies for effective prevention and intervention. COSSA urges the Subcommittee support these activities. The school safety initiative in particular will help ensure that policies and investments made at U.S. schools to address the safety of students, teachers and administrators will be evidence-based.

As a federal statistical agency, BJS' national data collections play an important role in providing statistical evidence needed for criminal justice policy decision makers. In particular, these programs provide the critical data infrastructure supporting the Administration's commitment to focus on data-driven, evidence- and information-based, "smart on crime" approaches. COSSA supports the request for an additional \$1 million for the National Survey of Public Defenders and an additional \$1.5 million for the National Public Defenders Reporting Program.

Increased investment in criminal justice science is needed to ensure future policies and decisions are evidence-based and to contain escalating costs associated with public safety. COSSA applauds NIJ's increased efforts to disseminate research results to practitioners, putting it in the hands of those who need it.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of the social and behavioral science research community. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information.

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