



CONSORTIUM *of* SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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Testimony in Support of Fiscal Year 2020 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 4, 2019

On behalf of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), I offer this written testimony for inclusion in the official committee record. For fiscal year (FY) 2020, COSSA urges the Committee to appropriate **\$9 billion for the National Science Foundation (NSF), \$8.45 billion for the Census Bureau, \$46.5 million for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), and \$48 million for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).**

First, I wish to thank the Subcommittee for its longstanding support for federal science agencies. Despite tough, ongoing fiscal challenges, the Subcommittee has continued to maintain funding for basic research as a top priority. This would not be possible without science champions such as yourselves. Thank you.

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 STEM disciplines engaged in the rigorous study of why and how humans behave as they do as individuals, groups and within institutions, organizations, and society.

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 produced 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 provide answers to complex, human-centered questions.

To cite just a few examples:<sup>1</sup>

- Major leaps in emulating human mental capabilities in the fields of information technology and computer science, such as in machine translation and artificial intelligence, have been possible thanks to basic *linguistic* research.
- *Anthropologists* applied expertise in cultural practices to guide policy and shape interventions and strategy in combatting the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.
- Research in *psychology* and *economics* has shown that individuals are not saving enough for retirement and led to enactment of the *Pension Protection Act of 2006*, encouraging the use of practices such as automatic enrollment, employer contribution, contribution escalation, and qualified default investment alternative practices.

In short, knowledge derived from social and behavioral science research has made our population healthier, our democracy fairer, our nation safer, and our economy stronger. Without these sciences, policy-making on major national and global issues would not be based on evidence, and billions of dollars would be wasted.

## National Science Foundation

COSSA joins the broader scientific community and the 173 Members of the House of Representatives who signed the March 28, 2019 bipartisan letter in support of \$9 billion for the National Science Foundation (NSF) in FY 2020. As the letter states, “We feel this amount is the minimum level of funding needed to prepare future generations to help our nation remain a world economic leader and to reflect the rising costs of research.” Most importantly, NSF and the broader U.S. scientific enterprise require stability, predictability, and sustainable funding growth, as well as federal policies that are patient and can tolerate a reasonable amount of risk in order to achieve the greatest payoff.

NSF is the only U.S. federal agency tasked with *supporting basic scientific research across all fields of science*. NSF supports about a quarter of all federally-funded basic scientific research conducted at colleges and universities nationwide and serves as the largest single funder of university-based basic social and behavioral science research. Though the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE)—one of seven research directorates at NSF—represents less than five percent of the entire NSF research budget, it supports around two-thirds of total federal funding for academic *basic research* in the social and behavioral sciences (excluding psychology). As the primary funding source for the majority of our disciplines, stagnant or reduced funding for SBE has an outsized impact on the social and behavioral science community—and resulting discoveries—simply because of the centrality of the directorate to the research community.

Further, while by far the smallest of the research directorates, SBE’s impact is huge. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine stated in its 2017 consensus report, *The Value of Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences to National Priorities*, that “nearly every major

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<sup>1</sup> More examples at <https://www.whysocialscience.com>

challenge the United States faces—from alleviating unemployment to protecting itself from terrorism—requires understanding the causes and consequences of people’s behavior. Even societal challenges that at first glance appear to be issues only of medicine or engineering or computer science have social and behavioral components.”<sup>2</sup>

While continuing to serve as the home for basic scientific discovery, NSF has also been planning and funding research activities as part of its 10 Big Ideas for Future NSF Investment over the last several years. The concepts, goals, and directions of the Big Ideas are exciting and promise to push the frontiers of science. However, we remain concerned about NSF losing its defining characteristic, which is to be the incubator for basic scientific discovery across all areas of science. While we encourage support for the Big Ideas in FY 2020, we hope that such investments do not come at the expense of NSF’s core research activities. NSF’s investigator-initiated, discovery-driven identity is what makes it special and has kept the American science enterprise at the leading edge of innovation. **COSSA urges the Committee to ensure a balanced approach is taken within NSF to support the 10 Big Ideas and NSF’s core research activities.**

## Census Bureau U.S. Department of Commerce

**COSSA urges the Committee to appropriate \$8.45 billion for the U.S. Census Bureau, including at least \$7.581 billion for the 2020 Census, in FY 2020.** FY 2020 will be the culmination of nearly a decade of research, planning, testing, and preparation for the next decennial census. As in previous decennial cycles, the Census year requires a substantial appropriation from Congress to support the massive scale of the Census operation, the nation’s largest non-military mobilization. Further complicating 2020 preparations is the potential addition of a citizenship question, which, while currently in legal limbo, could be re-added to the questionnaire before Census Day. Given the potential—and currently unquantified—impact this question could have on self-response, it is crucial that the Bureau have sufficient FY 2020 funding to enable it to nimbly respond to contingencies like this to protect the quality of the Census.

FY 2020 funding will be used for a final push of preparation ahead of Census Day, including opening field offices nationwide, forming partnerships with local organizations, finalizing the advertising campaign, and printing and packaging the mailings. Once the decennial census has begun, efforts will continue to encourage self-response by internet, telephone, and paper; hundreds of thousands of field staff will be trained and deployed to collect responses; and the Bureau will work to coordinate the operations, data collection, and data processing systems. As the count wraps up, the Census Bureau will begin to process, analyze, and prepare the results for publication and close out the massive operation. Underfunding the Census in its final push towards Census Day on April 1, 2020 could undo years of work and preparation, resulting in disastrous consequences for the accuracy of the census count.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24790/the-value-of-social-behavioral-and-economic-sciences-to-national-priorities>

In addition, **COSSA calls on Congress to fully fund the American Community Survey (ACS) and maintain its status as a mandatory federal survey.** The ACS is the only source of comparable, consistent, timely, and high-quality demographic and socio-economic data for all communities in the U.S. As a component of the Constitutionally-mandated Decennial Census, the ACS is a “mandatory” national survey. The accuracy of the data collected by the ACS relies on this mandatory status. Targeted cuts and changes to make the survey voluntary would significantly undermine the ability to collect usable data on all U.S. counties, particularly in less populous, rural areas of the country.

## **National Institute of Justice and Bureau of Justice Statistics U.S. Department of Justice**

**COSSA urges the Committee to appropriate \$46.5 million for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and \$48 million for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) within the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) in FY 2020.** NIJ serves as the research arm of the Department of Justice, filling an important role in helping the agency to understand and implement science-based strategies for crime prevention and control. It supports rigorous social science research that can be disseminated to criminal justice professionals to keep communities safe. Both agencies received devastating cuts in FY 2019, making increases in FY 2020 even more crucial as NIJ and BJS must now address new Congressional mandates, including implementation of the *FIRST STEP Act*.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is one of 13 principal federal statistical agencies. BJS produces data that provides statistical evidence needed by researchers and criminal justice policy decision makers. Taken together with NIJ, these modest annual investments represent the only dedicated sources of federal research support committed to enhancing our understanding of crime and the criminal justice system, including around topics like victimization, law enforcement, recidivism and reentry, drugs and crime, and tribal justice.

Numerous pressing criminal justice and law enforcement issues are at the fore of public consciousness today, including understanding the mental health needs of people involved in the justice system, the drivers of domestic radicalization, effective solutions to opioid addiction, and ways to improve police officer safety and community relations. By working with jurisdictions at all levels to compile data and support research, DOJ—through NIJ and BJS investments—provides key insights that improve public safety. Making the results of this research available to state and local officials and the public allows justice and law enforcement professionals to learn what works, adopt best practices, and improve public safety by leveraging the best research and data to protect the public, reduce recidivism, and support law enforcement and communities. Congress must prioritize federal data collection and research if we are to provide local, state, and federal officials with the information they need to develop strategies to improve public safety in our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this statement. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information.