



October 16, 2013

The Honorable Lamar Smith  
Chairman, House Science, Space  
and Technology Committee  
2321 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith,

As representatives of U.S. science, engineering, and higher education organizations, we write to thank you for your recognition of the important contribution social and behavioral sciences research brings to critical societal issues.

In your remarks at the Subcommittee on Research and Technology's recent hearing on methamphetamine addiction, you noted that the National Science Foundation (NSF) "...will play an integral role towards a more complete understanding of this problem. Hypothesis-based data-driven social science research can be used to understand the behavior science behind addiction." Your example demonstrates how fundamental research in the social and behavioral sciences can inform the important challenges we face.

At the same time, we are concerned about your recent *USA Today* piece that calls into question certain NSF grants deemed as not worthy of federal funding. Targeting specific grants or eliminating entire sets of disciplines would produce a chilling effect across the scientific community that inhibits scientific progress and our ability to tackle societal challenges. We encourage lawmakers to work in partnership with the NSF to address concerns over the allocation of federal research funding.

Therefore, we wish to express our united support for the federal research and development budget of the NSF and its mission to advance research across a broad spectrum of disciplines. NSF is unique among federal agencies in that it supports **all** disciplines in a balanced portfolio that uses the peer review system to ensure that research grant awards are based on merit.

As you know, every major issue facing modern society, including our economic competitiveness, requires knowledge drawn from multidisciplinary research that integrates advances in the physical and biological sciences with the social and behavioral sciences. Fundamental research in the social and behavioral sciences is critical to effectively responding to disasters; enhancing intelligence analysis; understanding decision-making and its impact on public health and business investments; improving international relations; and providing the infrastructure for the collection of critical data on the social, political, and economic attitudes and behaviors of Americans.

For example, NSF is funding research to address the persistent underrepresentation of women and minorities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields; to estimate the economic return from Research and Development (R&D) spending; to assess the links

between economic development, early maturation (e.g., puberty) and public health consequences; and to analyze how people respond during massive evacuations resulting from extreme weather events.

In addition, critical research to help evaluate political stability across the world has relied on the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT), an initiative that permits near-real-time forecasting of conflict using publicly available political event data. GDELT has been funded by the NSF Political Science Program and other SBE programs dating back to the 1970s. Although not known at the time the initiative was created, the research, which incorporates mathematical modeling, coding, and other components, has made an important contribution to national security efforts.

Many more examples of this type of research are highlighted in a recent NSF report, [\*Bringing People Into Focus: How Social, Behavioral and Economic Research Addresses National Challenges\*](#).

We recognize the challenge that our nation faces in addressing the deficit and revitalizing our national economy, and we understand that Congress must exercise its oversight responsibilities. Our nation's leaders, however, should never allow politics to interfere negatively with the scientific process.

The undersigned organizations urge you to protect the integrity of the scientific enterprise by ensuring that the NSF and its independent scientific panels determine where the best scientific opportunities are and how to balance limited resources. Allocating federal investments competitively through scientific merit review is the very process that has led this country to be the world leader in science.

Simply put, we need all scientists and scientific disciplines working —individually and collectively — to advance our knowledge base.

Sincerely,

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American Educational Research Association  
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