

August 2020

Comments submitted in response to the House Science Committee Discussion Draft of legislation to reauthorize the National Science Foundation.

On behalf of the Population Association of America (PAA) and the Association of Population Centers (APC), we appreciate the opportunity to submit comments in response to the Committee's Discussion Draft of NSF Reauthorization legislation.

PAA represents more than 3,000 population scientists, an interdisciplinary field that includes demographers, sociologists, economists, and statisticians, who study the implications of population change. APC represents approximately 40 federally funded, centers that foster interdisciplinary population research, some with a particular area of focus, such as aging. Population scientists have made groundbreaking and meaningful contributions on a wide array of topics relevant to society, including the social determinants of health, child and adolescent development, aging, migration, fertility, economic well-being, education, retirement, and post-disaster resiliency.

In general, we view the draft legislation very favorably. We are particularly pleased to see robust and increasing funding levels that would effectively double the funding for NSF over five years. We applaud this increase in funding, which we believe is long overdue. Second, we were extremely gratified to see the inclusion of language that articulates the importance of the Social, Behavioral and Economics Directorate and the valued contributions of the social sciences. We note that this language echoes the findings of the 2017 *National Academies Report, The Value of Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences to National Priorities*. Given that in the not too distant past, some Members of Congress have openly questioned the value of SBE and sought to limit NSF's support for the social sciences, we commend the inclusion of this language and hope that the final version of the legislation will retain this or similar language. We also appreciate the emphasis placed on STEM education and training and broadening participation.

We have a few additional comments and suggestions that we respectfully submit for the Committee's consideration as you work to refine the bill.

Mid-Scale Infrastructure

The Committee's inclusion of language supporting investments in Mid-Scale Infrastructure is important and consistent with the recent focus on Mid-Scale as part of NSF's Ten Big Ideas. We suggest that this section of the bill be enhanced with language that makes explicit the eligibility of funding for infrastructure projects that support SBE and interdisciplinary research. For example, comprehensive, broad-scale data collection networks carry the potential to unleash a vast array of social science research at a scale not currently possible. We note that Section 7(h)(4) includes language directing the NSF Director to communicate funding opportunities for SBE research in the Mid-Scale Research Infrastructure program. However, we believe that success in securing Mid-Scale awards among SBE applicants is not merely a question of increasing awareness among the SBE community. The Mid-Scale peer review apparatus, though multi-disciplinary, has lacked substantial representation from social scientists, and thus may overlook or minimize the merit of SBE proposals for Mid-Scale. Inclusion of explicit language stating the eligibility of SBE projects in Section 8(a) would signal congressional intent that SBE projects be fully considered for limited Mid-Scale funding.

Preserving Funding for Basic Research

We appreciate the Committee's provisions establishing a new Directorate for Convergence Research, which would elevate and provide a permanent home to the excellent work of NSF's Convergence Accelerator program. We concur about the importance of convergence research and, in fact, believe that population science can contribute to projects that could potentially be supported by this new Directorate. Our concern, however, is the pace of the planned growth of the new Directorate as a percentage of the overall NSF budget, which could have the unintended consequence of diminishing resources for the other research-based directorates, including SBE. We note that in the first year of funding, FY 2021, the authorization level for the Convergence Directorate represents about nine percent of the overall NSF budget; by FY 2025, the authorization level has grown disproportionately, to represent over 28 percent of the total NSF budget. We are concerned that in order to accommodate annual increases of 50% for Convergence, other Directorates' budgets would see minimal or no increases—or possibly be cut. The growth in the Convergence authorization between FY 2024 and FY 2025 alone represents about 69% of the growth in the overall NSF budget.

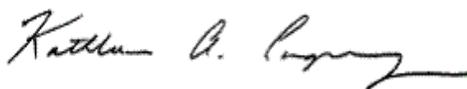
We are confident that the Committee strongly supports a robust federal commitment for basic scientific research. We therefore encourage funding authorization levels that include robust, proportional support for the other directorates funding basic research, even as the Foundation also expands its support for convergence activities.

Thank you for your consideration of these views. Should you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Suzanne Stokes Vieth of our staff at suzanne@popassoc.org.

Sincerely,



Dr. Eileen Crimmins
PAA President



Dr. Kathleen A. Cagney
APC President