

April 13, 2020

Dear Chairwoman Johnson, Ranking Member Lucas, and staff of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input for a future near-term response and longer-term economic stimulus package(s) to address and mitigate the impacts of the current COVID-19 crisis.

The Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences (FABBS) represents 26 scientific societies and nearly 70 university departments whose scientific members and faculty share a commitment to advancing knowledge in the sciences of mind, brain, and behavior. Understanding the human element of our most pressing challenges through research in these sciences has a potential to improve the health and education of our citizens.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) plays a critical role supporting behavioral sciences to help understand the origins, contain the spread, and limit the effects of life-threatening viruses. NSF has acted quickly and effectively to maximize the value of the \$75 million received in the CARE Act to support COVID-related projects. While NSF has already played an active role, more is needed.

Opportunities for Additional R&D and Related Activities Specific to COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Even with the additional funding for COVID-related research, NSF is unable to fund all of the rigorous, compelling and timely applications for the Rapid Response Research, Early-Concept Grants for Exploratory Research, and base grant programs.

The COVID-19 situation has highlighted a massive need for R&D to create telehealth-compatible neuropsychology measures, needing support from both NSF and NIH. Currently, nearly all clinical activities have ceased as tests are designed to be given in person and are not viable via telehealth. Even for tests administered verbally, privacy and cyber security issues prevent clinicians from using them. These evaluations are essential for health and economic reasons as individuals require testing to qualify for SSI or other government services. Neuropsychological testing waitlists were already months long in most areas even before the pandemic. NSF needs funding to support knowledge, technology, and the workforce to develop and administer secure measures that will benefit rural communities and patients with transportation limitations post-COVID.

COVID-19 makes clear the wisdom of and need for additional investment in the current NSF initiative on the [Future of Work at the Human Technology Frontier](#). COVID-19 is forcing transformations in the workforce and conferences. We do not yet know what this will mean for changing work patterns, its impact on employee well-being, the effect of social isolation, or ripple effects on the economy or the transportation sector.

Given the sudden and complete move from classrooms to distance teaching and learning at all levels of education, educational research needs and opportunities have increased dramatically. The NSF's Education and Human Resources (EHR) directorate has the knowledge and infrastructure, if not the funding, to best manage additional grants in these areas.

Furthermore, during the pandemic, numerous reports have pointed to environmental benefits of reduced human activity including reduced air pollution and improvements to water quality. This period of time is providing a window of opportunity to examine the consequences of widespread human behavior change and decisions not otherwise possible to observe. These are just a handful of areas in need of additional R and D investment in the short and long term.

Near-Term Response to COVID Impacts on the Larger Research Enterprise

COVID-19 has already caused considerable consequences for NSF-funded researchers at all levels in their education and careers as well as for the scientific enterprise. Research has slowed for a wide range of reasons – both professional and personal. For university-based researchers, many of the institutions have limited access to laboratories, office buildings, delayed human subject research, or administrative approvals. Even when generally able to conduct research, many faculty are consumed by efforts to transfer to online teaching or taking care of their own children suddenly home from school. Recognizing all of these complications for NSF-funded researchers, FABBS encourages NSF to raise the acceptable ceiling for research supplements needed for active grants impacted by the pandemic.

In addition, recognizing that graduate student and post-docs are expected to face a bleak job market, FABBS recommends allowing post-docs an extra year or two of support as the country recovers economically. Furthermore, graduate students receiving NSF fellowships and traineeships, including NSF's Graduate Research Fellowship and National Research Traineeships, are also expected to face significant obstacles to completing their work in a timely manner. FABBS recommends extending the support to these individuals to account for lower productivity during the months of the pandemic.

Another important consideration about the impact of COVID-19 on the scientific enterprise is the significant damage to scientific societies resulting from cancelled research conferences. These events provide unique opportunities for researchers to present their work, receive feedback and guidance, and advance research agendas. In addition to the loss of the benefits to attendees of the meetings themselves, scientific societies are losing needed revenue from cancelled conferences. Scientific societies support fields of science in numerous ways including rigorously reviewed publications, professional development, mentor, and fellowship opportunities. With additional funding, NSF could support professional societies and associations to continue their role advancing science.

NSF Support for Long-term Economic Stimulus/Recovery

Advancing the STEM workforce will be essential for the long-term economic recovery of our country. NSF needs to continue to lead efforts and bolster existing programs to support under-represented minorities in STEM. FABBS recommends additional funding for INCLUDES, ADVANCE, Noyce and other established programs designed to broaden participation in STEM.

Currently, NSF directs the Scholarships in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (S-STEM) program that supports low-income and academically talented students with demonstrated financial need who are pursuing STEM degrees. However, this non-discretionary program limits eligible fields of research, excluding disciplines represented by SBE and EHR directorates – core education research. To expand the reach of this program and better support diversity in STEM, FABBS recommends additional funding to NSF to supplement this program, offering additional scholarships to low-income academically talented students in behavioral, social and education fields of science.

In closing, it would be remiss not to mention that NSF has previously demonstrated responsible management of a large increase in competitively awarded research funding in a short period of time. Within six months of the signing of the ARRA Act, the Foundation had effectively awarded and obligated 80 percent of its total funding. Acknowledging this track record, FABBS recommends that NSF be afforded similar flexibility to manage any additional funding.

Thank you for inviting our feedback and for your hard work to support NSF programs and scientists. I would welcome the opportunity to be a resource in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Juliane Baron". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "B".

Juliane Baron
Executive Director