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Behavioral & Brain Sciences

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Monday, November 14, 2022

Re: FABBS Comments on OBSSR Strategic Plan 2023-2028

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the OBSSR strategic plan for 2023-2028. I write on behalf of the Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences. FABBS represents 28 scientific societies and nearly 60 university departments whose scientific members and faculty share a commitment to advancing knowledge in the sciences of mind, brain, and behavior. Many of our members are supported by individual institutes and all benefit from the work of OBSSR and the critical role that it serves.

FABBS commends OBSSR on the recent reports [Trans-NIH Opportunities in the Basic Behavioral and Social Sciences](#) and [Integration of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research at NIH](#). We trust that these reports will continue to guide the important work of OBSSR to best serve the mission of NIH. We encourage NIH institutes to, regardless of the biological mechanisms, consider quality of life of patients, recognizing that well-being includes considerations of mood, cognition, and behavior.

### Scientific Priorities

FABBS strongly supports the proposed scientific priorities. We offer several specific observations and recommendations.

**Scientific Priority 2 – Enhance and promote research measures, methods, and infrastructure needed to support an integrated and more cumulative approach to behavioral and social sciences research.** FABBS scientists have encountered some unintentional consequences of NIH infrastructure developed to address biological research. For example, our community continues to await a final resolution to the considerable challenges of registering basic experimental studies with humans (BESH) into [clinicaltrials.gov](https://clinicaltrials.gov). Our members have reported similar challenges for behavioral scientists working to navigate administrative requirements of Clinical and Translational Science Awards. As NIH enforces new data management and sharing requirements, many of our members collecting qualitative data have voiced reservations about how NIH will balance the goals of facilitating standardized data management with the kinds of data that are not as neatly captured in existing repositories.

- Objective 2.2. When elaborating on the emphasis on enhanced data quality, harmonization, and sharing, FABBS encourages OBSSR to consider



opportunities to strengthen the psychometric properties of behavioral measures, as addressed in this article by Daniel McNeish: [Limitations of the Sum-and-Alpha Approach to Measurement in Behavioral Research](#) in *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences* Volume 9, Issue 2.

**Scientific Priority 3 – Accelerate sustained adoption of behavioral and social sciences research findings in practices.** FABBS encourages OBSSR to develop measures for evaluating the current adoption of behavioral and social research findings in order to set tangible goals and assess progress. Given the considerable capacity of the Office of Portfolio Analysis, FABBS encourages developing a measure of translation to help set goals and assess progress in advancing cures.

#### Cross Cutting Themes

FABBS also supports the cross-cutting themes and offers the following comments:

**Integration of BSSR across NIH Research –** FABBS offers three areas of opportunity for increased integration across NIH: engaging individual institute and center (IC) directors, assuring representation of our disciplines on institute advisory committees, and weaving attention to our disciplines into the review process as supported by the Center for Scientific Review.

- IC Directors - Over time, FABBS members have witnessed a wide range of understanding and support for the basic behavioral sciences at NIH. It is the perception of our members that the degree of integration of our sciences is often directly related to the leadership of individual directorates. FABBS encourages OBSSR to prioritize engaging with institute leadership to demonstrate how the behavioral sciences are 'tools in their toolbox' to help accomplish their mission. OBSSR might consider developing an IC director orientation, training, or welcome document, identifying the tools (training) and resources (Common Fund/OppNet) available. Incoming directors, working to meet the NIH diversity goals, might not appreciate the value of the behavioral and social sciences to help meet these goals. As our members listened to Dr. Collins reflect on the NIH response to COVID and 'not thinking to worry if, once we had the vaccine, if people would take it,' we reflected on how we might better communicate such an inherently behavioral question. Recognizing that not all scientists can anticipate all dimensions of a health issue, OBSSR could offer institute directors the opportunity to be made aware of the behavioral and social blind spots as they work to meet their missions.
- Representation of our disciplines on institute advisory committees – This important consideration was addressed in the previously referenced *Integration of BSSR* report. FABBS regularly recommends scientists to our colleagues at NIH institutes to consider for their advisory committees. FABBS



would be very happy to share our lists and be of assistance in identifying outstanding candidates to serve in these roles.

- **Grant Review Process** – Another key opportunity to focus integration efforts is to build consideration of behavior into the scientific review process. Much as applicants are instructed to address whether the applicant has considered sex as a biological variable, applicants should be encouraged to address the role of behavior as a contributing variable. FABBS encourages NIH to include behavioral expertise on review panels broadly.

**Science of Science** – Increasingly, federal agencies and academic institutions are touting the value of interdisciplinary research and of diverse measures. Similarly, we see a growing recognition for the importance of behavioral and social science, including social determinants of health. Nonetheless, it can be challenging for researchers to initiate meaningful interdisciplinary research. FABBS encourages OBSSR to explore ways to help facilitate the collaborative conception of research questions that brings together behavioral and biological researchers.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)** – The *Trans-NIH Research* report captured ways in which the behavioral and social sciences are critical to diversifying the gender and race/ethnicity of the scientific work force, funded researchers, and research topics and design, to achieve DEIA goals. FABBS strongly supports this priority and recognizes the work that needs to be done in our own disciplines as well as the ways our members and disciplines can contribute to progress. Again, we welcome any opportunity to be a resource or to support these efforts.

Many thanks for considering our comments,

Juliane Baron  
Executive Director