



**Public Comment from the Federation of Associations in Behavioral & Brain Sciences (FABBS)**

Re: Request for Information on FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan

Date: January 27, 2026

- **What opportunities exist that could help enable progress toward NSF's objectives and strategies?**

The Strategic Plan, as written, does not reflect the mission (*To promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; and to secure the national defense*), vision, and core values of the National Science Foundation (NSF) as presented on the website and in authorizing legislation such as the CHIPS and Science Act and the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act. Specifically, the CHIPS Act authorizes investments in curiosity-driven, exploratory research and use-inspired, translational research to advance the most innovative ideas across all areas of science and engineering and accelerate translation to solutions at speed and scale.

Our organization very much supports the Strategic Plan's aspirations to "benefit the American people" and "to provide societal benefits." In order to accomplish these goals, NSF must understand not only how humans learn, think, and decide, but also how new and emerging technologies impact those very functions. FABBS urges NSF to continue to invest in the behavioral and brain sciences in order to enable the important progress towards NSF goals. Not only do we need more information about human decision making, cognitive functioning, and brain development, we need to understand how it is affected by technology.

The rapid rollout of new technologies poses significant questions about the quality of work product and information generated in addition to the impact on productivity and well-being. As NSF invests in technology, it must, in tandem, invest in the human aspects of use, adoption, and productivity. Consider this important article, [\*Artificial intelligence tools expand scientists' impact but contract science's focus\*](#) (Hao, Q., Xu, F., Li, Y. et al. Nature (2026). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-025-09922-y>).

While behavioral and brain sciences have already contributed substantially and are critical to emerging technologies, FABBS cautions that this plan is a very narrow objective for NSF; innovation can happen across all scientific disciplines. To this point, more than 400 local, regional, and national business leaders signed a [letter](#) in support of strong funding for all of NSF.

- **How might NSF foster partnerships with a wide range of organizations to implement the strategies in its *FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan*?**

The proposed Strategic Plan does not adequately acknowledge the existing partnerships with the higher education community and misses opportunities for strengthening these partnerships. While FABBS appreciates the focus on community colleges to support STEM workforce development, we recommend that NSF intentionally leverage these partnerships to bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world application.

FABBS strongly recommends that NSF prioritize K-12 systems as essential partners. Early exposure and digital fluency in K-12 are foundational for developing a STEM identity, which research shows is critical for long-term career retention. Partnerships with K-12 systems are essential to ensuring students are prepared for the adaptation and responsible use of the technologies which will increasingly shape every sector of the workforce.

The NSF has historically worked in partnerships across the federal government and mission driven federal agencies. For example, insights from NSF-funded research has informed how the Department of Defense has trained soldiers, developed sensors and technologies to facilitate NIH brain research, and influenced how the Institute of Education Sciences supports the most effective practices for reading instruction. NSF should continue to improve upon partnerships across the federal government.

NSF should also consider partnerships with disciplinary scientific societies. These organizations drive new methods, foster open science practices, provide professional development opportunities, and host unique convenings – among many other important roles. In service of the goal to more effectively scale science, NSF should work with practitioners who both provide a practical and real world perspective and whose practice could benefit from leveraging science across health, to education, and national security.

FABBS encourages NSF to reinstate and strengthen Advisory Councils. These bodies promote transparency, improve communication with stakeholders, and provide structured mechanisms for expert input across disciplines and sectors.

- **What data or evidence should NSF consider as it develops mechanisms to evaluate progress and measure success in achieving the objectives in its *FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan*?**

To ensure accountability, NSF should implement rigorous, specific metrics to track progress and evaluate the long-term success in achieving its strategic objectives. As currently drafted, the identified measures are not meaningful and lack the breadth required to capture the societal benefits of foundational research.

FABBS recommends that NSF align its evaluation framework with established theories of human capital investment, including those pioneered by Nobel Laureate Theodore Schultz. Schultz's work demonstrated how investment in education and training is central to sustained innovation. NSF should also draw on frameworks developed by Nobel Laureates Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt, whose research identifies the "continual flow of useful knowledge" and the process of "innovation-driven growth" as the primary engines of long-term prosperity.

NSF should consider applying these advanced evaluation tools to develop a robust science for measuring how foundational discoveries scale into societal benefits. This approach aligns with the intent of the CHIPS and Science Act, ensuring that NSF's strategic objectives are measured by their ability to accelerate the translation of innovative ideas into high-impact societal solutions.

Additionally, FABBS cautions against overly narrow strategic measures that focus primarily on the number of workers in STEM occupations tied to fields deemed critical to economic security. As advocated in our response to the [NSF TIP Roadmap for Workforce Development](#), workforce motivation and retention extend beyond high-paying jobs. NSF should prioritize research into behavioral and social factors that influence STEM participation and address the human element of technology adoption and use.

- **Is there any other information that would assist NSF in achieving the goals and objectives under its *FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan*?**

NSF would benefit from additional information about the development and sustainability of the nation's STEM talent ecosystem. In particular, further research is needed to understand how scientific literacy develops across the lifespan. A science literate population is essential for an effective STEM workforce and for responsible development and use of emerging technologies.

NSF serves a unique and irreplaceable role in the broader scientific ecosystem. The proposed Strategic Plan does not capture the essential function. A seminal report by the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation [Federally Supported Innovations: 22 Examples of Major Technology Advances that STEM from Federal Research Support](#) in 2014, traced how early university investments in information technology led to substantial economic impact. As technological development accelerates, NSF has a role to bolster all of the components from discovery and translation to workforce and scaling.

NSF's operational effectiveness depends on the expertise and capacity of its scientific and administrative workforce. FABBS members have a long history of engaging with NSF, from receiving funding to serving on Advisory Committees or Committees of Visitor, and even as rotators. Over time, FABBS has consistently been impressed by the scientific credentials and character of NSF staff.

FABBS supports NSF goals to leverage AI to streamline operations and focus staff time on high-value work. However, we caution that AI remains far from being able to produce high quality reports and documents. While advances in technology and automation have the potential to improve efficiency and reduce burden, they cannot replace the judgment, creativity, and institutional knowledge of a highly skilled workforce.

In service to streamlining research regulations and administrative processes, FABBS encourages NSF to refer to the recommendation of the National Academies' report [Simplifying Research Regulations and Policies: Optimizing American Science](#) (2025). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/12366>.

Beyond administrative streamlining, FABBS suggests greater transparency regarding funding prioritization to strengthen the Strategic Plan's implementation. The Plan notes that NSF intends to "review and revise its funding opportunities... phasing out lower-priority opportunities and launching new ones to capitalize on emerging ideas," yet it remains unclear how these priorities will be determined. Providing additional clarity about how priority areas are identified, how tradeoffs are assessed, and how stakeholder input will inform these decisions would support confidence in the process and help maintain balance across the scientific enterprise.

FABBS appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft Strategic Plan and the ambitious goal "to achieve global supremacy." To that end, we note this will require robust and reliable funding, allowing scientists and innovators to focus on what they do best.