Update on Funding for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences at NSF
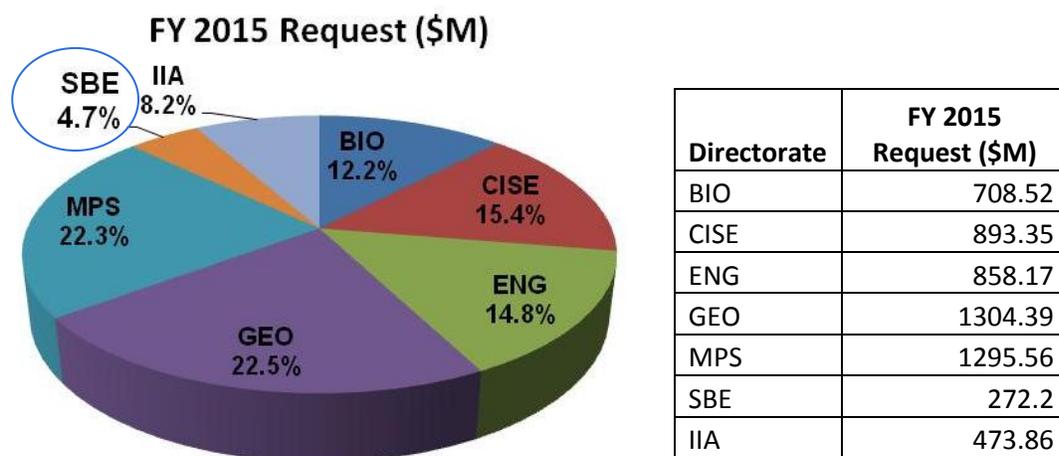
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Many may not realize that the National Science Foundation is the largest funder of academic research in the social sciences in the nation. While it's true that funding for the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) Directorate at NSF is much smaller than funding for some of the other NSF directorates, SBE sciences are gaining increasing prominence at NSF. In our April 2014 issue, we discussed new interdisciplinary funding opportunities at NSF for social science funding. In this article, we'll focus on recent funding developments in NSF's SBE Directorate.

Budget and Priorities

Researchers interested in research grants from SBE might be excused for being discouraged when they discover that the SBE Directorate has the smallest budget of all the directorates (Figure 1); however, it's important to remember that SBE projects, in general, require smaller budgets than most engineering or geoscience projects. Looking at the number of grants awarded by SBE, in FY 2014, SBE funded about 600 grants for individual and small group research projects out of approximately 3,000 proposals. Based on NSF's FY 2015 budget request, SBE's average funding amount was about $143K and the median amount was about $104K, with an average award duration of 2.6 years. In FY 2014, the overall funding rate was 19% for each of the two research divisions within SBE: the Division for Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences (BCS), and the Division of Social and Economic Sciences (SES), which is higher than it is for many divisions in the Engineering Directorate.

Directorate	FY 2015 Request ($M)
BIO	708.52
CISE	893.35
ENG	858.17
GEO	1304.39
MPS	1295.56
SBE	272.2
IIA	473.86

Research and Related Activities FY 2015 Budget Request by Directorate

However, as with any funder, if you plan to submit to an SBE program for funding, it's important to understand the program's priorities and culture. A 2011 NSF report, Rebuilding the Mosaic, which presents the findings of a year-long study on future programmatic priorities for SBE, provides some insight into SBE's priorities and where they want to go. Many of the new funding opportunities released by SBE in recent years can be understood through the lens of those priorities, which include the support

and promotion of **"data-intensive, multidisciplinary, collaborative, and frequently problem-oriented"** SBE research, "frequently to address global challenges," as well as a focus on specific topics within the various SBE disciplines. The report also recommends a focus on developing new tools and methods, for example, capitalizing on enhanced computational technologies. Four important **crosscutting themes** were identified:

- **Population Change** – the report notes that demographic research has previously been funded primarily by NIH, but that they now see many issues raised by a changing population to fall within the purview of NSF/SBE.
- **Disparities in Experience and Access to Resources** – focus here is on the sources of inequality in multiple aspects, including economic, environmental, health, and education.
- **Communication, Language and Linguistics** – this theme, which includes connections between communication and neuroscience, has been further enhanced by the White House BRAIN Initiative.
- **The Study of Science and Technology** – this includes the study of the impacts of new technologies and underlying assumptions.

The report also outlined three broad decadal goals and strategies:

- Support *new approaches* to fundamental questions, including *interdisciplinary research* within the SBE sciences and across traditional divisions to reach out to biology, ecology, computer science, and engineering (among others).
- Help scientists form *collaborative teams* and find ways to enable continuing training in new techniques and methods.
- Provide the *infrastructure of data, services, and programs* to enable computationally intensive, data-rich investigations, scenario- and model-building, and integrated multidisciplinary investigations.

In addition to the above priorities and goals, a big influence on funding out of the Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences is the White House BRAIN Initiative (discussed in detail in last month's issue) and the programs NSF has initiated in response to that initiative. Most of those funding opportunities are cross-cutting (meaning they are supported by multiple directorates), but many researchers in fields such as cognitive neuroscience, developmental and learning sciences, and linguistics (all of which are supported out of BCS), clearly are well-positioned to pursue this funding.

It is probably clear from the discussion above that NSF is interested in supporting particular types of SBE research. Furthermore, each program within SBE also has its own cultural preferences regarding the types of projects it supports, and it's important for any PI who is planning to submit a proposal to one of those programs to understand those preferences. For example, the Sociology program prefers research that is grounded in a strong theoretical model. The Program Directors and reviewers feel very strongly about that issue, so a PI who neglects to place her proposed research in a theoretical context is very unlikely to be funded.

As we've discussed before, the best way to understand NSF programs, including those within SBE, is to look at the synopses on their program pages, scroll to the bottom of the page and click on the "What Has Been Funded" link in order to read the project summaries for projects funded out of the program, talk to colleagues who have been well-funded by (and probably have reviewed for) the program, read supporting documentation if available (see the "related URLs" link at the bottom of the program webpage for a start), and when you have a specific project idea, talk to the Program Director (PD), who

are named at the top of the program page. The PDs in SBE vary in how they like to be contacted. Some prefer that you develop a 2-page white paper and send that to them, while others are open to scheduling a phone conversation after you email them a short description of your project idea.

Recently Released SBE Funding Opportunities and Dear Colleague Letters

Integrative Strategies for Understanding Neural and Cognitive Systems (Cross-cutting) – two research themes for 2015: Neuroengineering and Brain-Inspired Concepts and Designs, and Individuality and Variation. Webinar scheduled for Dec. 3, 2014. Letter of Intent due Dec. 10, 2014.

Science, Technology, and Society – This is a core program, but it has recently added a separate *Scholars Awards* category that provides full-time release for an academic year and a summer to conduct research.

Dear Colleague Letter: Intent to support an Ideas Lab on multiscale integration of brain activity and structure with brain function using predictive theoretical models and innovative experimental methodology.

SBE Postdoctoral Research Fellowships: Renewal of previous solicitation, with broader eligibility requirements

FAQs for the Science, Technology, and Society Program

Interdisciplinary Research in Hazards and Disasters (renewal of previous solicitation)

Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) – data infrastructure and computational methods (renewal of previous solicitation with changes for DEL Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants)

Dear Colleague Letter: International Collaboration Opportunities related to the NSF Investments in Understanding the Brain

Dear Colleague Letter: Submission of I/UCRC Proposals in Response to NSF 13-594 in Areas Related to Understanding the Brain's Structure and Function

Cultivating Cultures for Ethical STEM – revamp of previous Ethics Education and Enginering program

Dear Colleague Letter – Youth Violence: Opportunity for Breakthroughs in Fundamental Basic Research

Dear Colleague Letter: International Collaboration Opportunities related to the NSF Investments in Understanding the Brain

SBE Core Programs and other Funding Opportunities

(Note: Be aware that the SBE webpages list some programs that are no longer accepting proposals.)

Social and Economic Sciences

Decision, Risk and Management Sciences (DRMS)

Economics

Interdisciplinary Behavioral and Social Science Research (IBSS)

Law & Social Sciences (LSS)

Methodology, Measurement, and Statistics (MMS)

Political Science

Science of Organizations (SoO)

Science, Technology, and Society (STS)

Sociology

Science of Science and Innovation Policy (SciSIP) (out of SBE Office of Multidisciplinary Activities)

Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences

Anthropological Sciences Cluster

Archaeology and Archaeometry

Archaeology Program - Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Awards (Arch-DDRI)

Biological Anthropology

Cultural Anthropology

High-Risk Research in Biological Anthropology and Archaeology (HRRBAA)

Geography and Environmental Sciences Cluster

Dynamics of Coupled Natural and Human Systems (CNH)

Geography and Spatial Sciences Program (GSS)

Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) - cross cutting

Psychological and Language Sciences Cluster

Cognitive Neuroscience

Developmental and Learning Sciences (DLS)

Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) – cross cutting

Linguistics

Perception, Action & Cognition (PAC)

Social Psychology

Additional Opportunities

Cultural Anthropology Scholars Awards

Interdisciplinary Behavioral and Social Science Research (IBSS) - see 2012 Dear Colleague Letter

Secure and Trustworthy Cyberspace (SaTC) – cross cutting

Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grants (DDRI)

Note that SBE has a global DDRI announcement, but then most programs have more specific instructions in separate announcements

Global SBE Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants solicitation

Archaeology Program – Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Awards – more specific instructions for Arch-DDRI

Linguistics Program – Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Awards – more specific instructions for Ling-DDRI

Biological Anthropology Program - Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants (BA-DDRIG)

Geography and Spatial Sciences Program - Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Awards (GSS-DDRI)

Cultural Anthropology Program - Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants (CA-DDRIG)

Science of Science and Innovation Policy Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants (SciSIP-DDRIG)

Sociology Program - Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Awards (Soc-DDRI)

Other Resources

A Full List of Active SBE Funding Opportunities

Presentation by SBE Program Director F. Chowdhury

SBE Presentation at the latest NSF Regional Grants Conference

Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research – 2003 Workshop Report