ADVOCACY

Policy Update on NSF Solicitations, Staffing, and Leadership

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On February 25, 2026, the National Science Board (NSB), the advisory body for the National Science Foundation (NSF) with approval power over changes to NSF policies, held a meeting during which interim NSF leadership announced intentions to make changes to grant solicitations. According to NSF's Chief of Staff Brian Stone and Chief Management Officer Micah Cheatham, the NSF would soon attempt to consolidate funding solicitations for grant awards to half or fewer of the typical number of solicitations expected under current practices, making each solicitation broader in scope. Cheatham claimed this consolidation would reduce workload within the agency and may help applicants by reducing the number of solicitations to review. However, some NSB members including Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Dorota Grejner-Brzezinska, expressed concerns over the consolidation of solicitations reducing the ability of junior faculty to receive awards for the first time and that it would lead to further reduction of how many researchers are awarded grants each year. NSF leadership failed to provide a timeline or many other details for the rollout of the new solicitation process, leaving more questions than answers.

On Friday, April 3, 2026, the Trump Administration released the President's budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2027. While the overall budget request for NSF includes a proposed 54 percent cut for NSF, it also called for the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) Directorate to be dissolved and have its funding eliminated in the next fiscal year. On the same day, it was also reported that NSF leadership announced during an internal all-staff meeting that they would preemptively start making moves to dissolve the SBE Directorate in alignment with the proposed dissolution in the budget request.

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM CURRENT PROCESS?

As of April 3, 2026, political scientists have two solicitations that are the best fit for most research projects: Accountable Institutions and Behavior (AIB) and Security and Preparedness (SAP). Both the AIB and SAP programs are housed within the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate at NSF. Full proposals may be submitted to either of these solicitations at any time. However, since that date, both programs are currently awaiting a new publication and not accepting new submissions. There are other NSF solicitations that may be a good fit for some large-scale political science projects, such as the Research Infrastructure in the Social and Behavioral Sciences (RISBS) within the Social and Economic Sciences Division. This program is also awaiting a new publication and not accepting submissions. Other types of projects, such as interdisciplinary or STEM education research, can be submitted through the Office of Multidisciplinary Activities or the Directorate for STEM Education. Interim NSF leaders did not specify at the February 2026 NSB meeting whether the program consolidation would be spread amongst its directorates or if it will impact specific programs more than others, making it unclear how much the proposed consolidation will impact solicitations specifically within the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences SBE Directorate.

For political science graduate students, funding opportunities through NSF remain limited. The Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) allows for submissions from late-stage undergraduate and first year political science graduate students. The NSF made the 2026 GRFP announcements on April 12, 2026, awarding 5 fellowships and 1 honorable mention for political science. In late 2025, the NSF archived most of the remaining Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant (DDRIG) solicitations for doctoral candidates for the social sciences. The APSA DDRIG program, administered by APSA rather than the NSF since 2020, submitted a proposal to the NSF in December 2025 to continue the program. As of April 8, 2026, APSA has no update from NSF on the status of its proposal.

Beyond the possibility of consolidating the number of funding solicitations, the NSF has made several other significant changes to its Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG) that impact researchers' preparation of NSF proposals. According to the notice (NSF 26-200) issued on December 8, 2025, NSF made several changes to the proposal submission requirements. The notice states that no NSF funds may be awarded to an Institution of Higher Education (IHE) that maintains a contract or agreement between the IHE and a Confucius Institute unless specifically approved in a waiver by the NSF Director; that recipients are required to share all data supporting NSF funded publications at the time of publication; that full proposals, unless excepted, must be reviewed by at least two reviewers, which can be conducted internally by NSF staff; among other changes. Another notice (NSF 26-202) issued on January 22, 2026, revised and clarified the Public Access to Research Products, Dissemination and Sharing of Research Results, and Data Management and Sharing Plan to align with NSF's Gold Standard Science implementation plan. Collaborating with your institution's research office and contacting the program officers will help you navigate these PAPPG changes.

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HOW MIGHT THIS IMPACT POLITICAL SCIENTISTS SEEKING FUNDING?

Despite the unknowns, political scientists at all career stages should continue to submit to the current open NSF solicitations that best fit their proposed projects. Prospective grantees should feel free to contact the program officers for the solicitation they are interested in to have a better understanding of what is required for proposal submissions and whether that project would be a good fit for that specific solicitation. Newly prioritized cross-disciplinary solicitations, such as the recent influx of solicitations focused on artificial intelligence, may also be accessible for some political science proposals on a case-by-case basis. APSA will continue to monitor updates from the NSF about its internal organization and funding opportunities and will inform its members about any changes to the state of federal political science funding.

NSF STAFFING AND LEADERSHIP

Stone and Cheatham also announced during the February 2026 NSB meeting that NSF would be seeking approval to hire more employees at the agency due to staffing shortages felt in the aftermath of the Trump administration's policies of deferred resignation and termination of temporary staff across government. It is unclear how many employees NSF would seek to hire or a timeline of when the hiring process could take place.

Lastly, NSF has been withouta permanent director since April 2025, when then-Director Sethuraman Panchanathan stepped down in the middle of his term. NSF's Chief of Staff Brian Stone has de-facto served as Acting Director since that departure. On March 2, 2026, President Trump formally nominated Jim O'Neill to be the NSF Director. Mr. O'Neill, who does not have a research background, was previously the Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Acting Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from April 2025 to February 2026 and was a loyal supporter of HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy. Mr. O'Neill's appointment to the position of NSF Director will require Senate confirmation.

Any questions regarding the future of political science funding at NSF should be directed to advocacy@apsanet.org.■

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