FYI SCIENCE POLICY BRIEFS

White House details R&D priorities

In September, the Trump administration released a memo that lays out its federal R&D priorities for fiscal year 2027. Although it will not directly influence federal spending, it outlines the administration's science goals, which include boosting economic growth, strengthening national security, and promoting US leadership in key technology areas.

The memo is authored by Russell Vought, director of the Office of Management and Budget, and Michael Kratsios, director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy. They criticize years of "unfocused Federal investments weighed down by woke ideology and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives"—a stark contrast to a memo, also with Vought as coauthor and published during the first Trump administration, that called for federal agencies to prioritize "activities that advance innovation in STEM education and increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in STEM."

Key R&D priorities outlined by Vought and Kratsios include advancing critical and emerging technologies, such as AI, quantum science, semiconductors, and advanced manufacturing. They emphasize achieving "American energy dominance" through support for fossil fuels, nuclear technologies, geothermal energy, and hydropower. They also call for increased private-sector involvement in later-stage energy R&D while maintaining federal support for foundational research infrastructure.

National and economic security are also central themes, for which Vought and Kratsios urge support for increased military capabilities, strengthened cybersecurity capabilities, and President Trump's Golden Dome missile defense system. They also prioritize safeguarding US health and biotechnology by focusing on the most urgent health challenges, boosting biosafety, and building domestic biomanufacturing capabilities.

Maintaining global space leadership is another priority. The authors express support for crewed missions to the Moon and Mars and for basic and applied research into such areas as novel sensing modalities and radiation-belt remediation.

Vought and Kratsios urge agencies to "prioritize research and associated research infrastructure investments that enhance America's ability to observe, understand, and predict the physical, biological, geologic, and socioeconomic processes and interacting systems of the Arctic to protect and advance American interests and ensure prosperity of America's Arctic residents." —LM

Scientific societies protest grant-making executive order

More than 50 scientific and medical organizations are urging Congress to block key elements of the grant-making executive order (EO) that President Trump issued in August (see the October 2025 *FYI* science policy brief "Trump gives political appointees final say on grants"). The groups argue that the order will increase politicization of federally funded research and add inefficiencies to the grant-making process. "The EO does not advance the Administration's goal of implementing Gold Standard Science," reads their 24 September letter. (Several member societies of the American Institute of Physics, which publishes PHYSICS TODAY, signed the letter.)

> "It is critical that we safeguard the integrity of the merit-based peer review process."
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> —From the September letter to Congress by more than 50 scientific societies

The EO requires agencies to launch new grant-review processes that are overseen by political appointees. In their letter, the groups say that such processes will slow down the awarding of grants and increase the administrative burden on researchers.

The signatories "urge Congress to ensure that independent peer review remains the cornerstone of the scientific grantmaking process, such that the most meritorious proposals are funded in this and all future administrations." Trump's order states that agencies may use peer-review methods for grant making on an advisory basis but places ultimate decision authority in the hands of political appointees. But, the organizations write, "shifting final authority to political appointees will significantly undermine the grant review and award system and could distort federal research priorities based on ideological or partisan agendas, stifle innovation, and erode public confidence in research."

The organizations also ask Congress to reject the EO's requirement that science agencies permit "termination for convenience" for all grants. The groups warn of a "chilling effect" on any research that could be perceived as controversial. In its efforts to reduce federal research spending, the Trump administration appears to have found it easier to void grants and contracts with termination-for-convenience clauses than those without them. The administration has cited misalignment with agency priorities as the reason for terminating thousands of grants without those clauses.

Additionally, the signatories call on Congress to block the order's directive for agencies to prioritize research proposals from academic institutions with the lowest rates of indirect costs, which cover research-related facilities and administrative expenses. The Trump administration has sought to cap indirect cost rates at 15% (see the August 2025 *FYI* brief "Higher-ed groups propose new indirect-cost models") but has been blocked repeatedly in court. —CZ PT

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