

state & society

NSF may pick up ARPA's interdisciplinary laboratories

The Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency is attempting to transfer to NSF most of its support for its 12 interdisciplinary laboratories during fiscal year 1972. Negotiations are under way to effect the transfer, but the amount and extent of the transfer is far from certain. The outcome depends ultimately on Congressional action.

Over the ten years of its existence the IDL program cost ARPA an average of \$17 million annually. According to Edward Todd, deputy assistant director for research at NSF, the ARPA withdrawal amounts to about \$12.8 million. ARPA would retain a financial interest of about \$4 million, partly for buildings but largely to continue some residual research.

Conversations have occurred among ARPA, the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology and NSF in an attempt to arrange a transfer of funds. Todd said that NSF would be expected to pay for research facilities (such as crystal growing, low-temperature research) and for the actual interdisciplinary research groups.

A spokesman for ARPA told us that the transfer is in line with the agency's practice of "planting a seed, watering it, getting it growing and then getting out." Even five or six years ago, there was discussion about transferring the IDL's to another agency. Obviously, the spokesman said, there are also considerations of tight budget. In addition ARPA is trying to respond to the sense of the Congress, as originally manifested in the Mansfield amendment, that a larger share of basic research support should be transferred to the NSF.

The IDL's have always had local campus direction, with many individual investigators at the university receiving relatively small sums out of the money the university as a whole received. They had considerable leeway about what research they conducted, almost all of which was basic. Although it was almost impossible to justify individual man years as particularly relevant, there was usually good justification for the aggregation of projects. But the whole thrust of Mansfield's criticism was that every single project must be justified.

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Jobs for physicists in city planning?

Positions in urban problem solving will probably become available for unemployed scientists and engineers, according to Assistant Secretary Floyd Hyde of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Through Hyde's work with the Model Cities program, which he heads, he found a big shortage of technical personnel in city, county and state government.

Hyde foresees 1000 to 2000 jobs available across the country that he would like to see filled by unemployed scientists and engineers, particularly those who worked in the aerospace industry. A spokesman told us that HUD, working with other agencies, would try to pool their funds to finance a program that would find the openings and match them to the unemployed. If successful HUD would organize brief (a month or so) orientation courses at two or three major universities to fa-

miliarize the technical people with urban politics and jargon. Most of their training, however, would be on the job. Their salaries would come from the cities, counties and states themselves with some federal subsidy, probably on a de-escalating basis. The program is still in the talking stage.

HUD would use various professional organizations to recruit candidates. Then it is anticipated that the Conference of Mayors, the International City Managers Association and the Conference of Governors would be asked to screen the candidates.

A physicist, for example, might join a team of lawyers, political scientists, engineers and chemists to look at a city as a system. The physicist might then consider superconducting transmission lines, high-speed transportation systems, limitations on structural materials, and their effects on urban environment.—GBL