

FYI SCIENCE POLICY BRIEFS

Trump gives political appointees final say on grants

President Trump signed an executive order in August that will give political appointees ultimate decision-making power over grants and will require them to align all awards with presidential priorities, including policies on race and gender, indirect cost rates, and compliance with “gold standard science.” The order also blocks agencies from issuing new funding opportunities until they implement grant-review processes that meet the requirements.

Critics of the order, including Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), the ranking member on the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, argue that it opens the door to bias in the grant-review process and will lead to projects being selected or rejected based on appointees’ personal interests rather than on merit. A White House spokesperson said that the order “restores merit-based grantmaking” and that the administration “is committed to ending wasteful grants.”

The Trump administration’s goal for the order is to root out funding for “anti-American ideologies,” which alludes to a report from Ted Cruz (R-TX), chair of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. The October 2024 report used keyword searches of NSF grants to determine that more than a quarter of new grants went to projects that “pushed far-left perspectives” on status, social justice, gender, race, and environmental justice. Minority staff on the House Science Committee issued a rebuttal report in April that criticized Cruz’s methodology.

The order also requires agency heads and the White House Office of Management and Budget to ensure that all new grants—and existing ones whenever possible—can be terminated for convenience, with a few exceptions. —CZ

NSF and Nvidia to partner on scientific AI models

NSF announced a partnership in August with technology company Nvidia to develop open-source AI models that are trained on scientific data and litera-

ture. The project, called the Open Multimodal AI Infrastructure to Accelerate Science, is led by the nonprofit Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence. NSF will contribute \$75 million to the project through its midscale research infrastructure program, and Nvidia will contribute \$77 million.

The program aims to increase researcher access to AI, according to a press release, given that “the cost of creating and researching powerful AI models has grown beyond the budgets of university labs and federally funded researchers.” The project will also include a development program to build an AI-ready workforce and to “expand participation and expertise beyond traditional tech hubs.” —CZ

NSF board elects new leaders

The National Science Board elected chemist Victor McCrary as its official chair and particle physicist Aaron Dominguez as its vice chair in July. McCrary, vice president for research at the University of the District of Columbia, had served as vice chair of the board since 2020, and he became acting chair earlier this year when Darío Gil stepped down after being nominated to the top science job in the Department of Energy. Dominguez joined the board in 2020 and is executive vice president and provost at the Catholic University of America.

The board’s main functions are to oversee NSF and to provide advice to the president and Congress on science and technology policy. Among the board’s current priorities that McCrary and Dominguez will continue is developing domestic STEM talent, according to the press release announcing the election results. Other priorities are “winning the technology race with China,” fostering public-private partnerships, and “championing a reimagined NSF.” —HD PT

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