

White House seeks broad authority over federal grants

By Jacob Taylor

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) proposed a rule on 29 May that aims to deliver on President Trump's August 2025 executive order that gives political appointees the final say on federal grant decisions—including the power to terminate grants that they deem do not meet agency priorities. The OMB is accepting comments on the proposed rule until 13 July.

Under the rule, all discretionary federal awards would be required to pass a “new pre-issuance review.” The political appointees conducting the reviews would be instructed to “use their independent judgment” and to not routinely defer to the recommendations of others. The rule states that it does not “discourage” the use of peer-review processes so long as they “remain advisory and are not ministerially ratified, routinely deferred to, or otherwise treated as de facto binding.”

The criteria for the pre-issuance review would give appointees broad discretion to block awards. For example, an award could be blocked for promoting “anti-American values” or failing to “demonstrably advance the President’s policy priorities.” The review would also give preference to institutions with lower indirect cost rates; the Trump administration has repeatedly tried to cap those rates but has been blocked by both courts and Congress.

Other stipulations included in the proposed rule:

- Active and future awards could be terminated at any time if “found to be inconsistent with program goals or agency priorities.”
- Agencies would be instructed to prioritize giving awards to “institutions that have demonstrated success in implementing Gold Standard Science.”
- Federal awards would no longer be allowed to cover publication costs, processing charges, or open-access fees, unless required by statute or approved in advance by the agency. The use of funds to attend conferences would require express agency approval in the award.
- US researchers would be prohibited, with some exceptions, from using funds for collaborations with certain countries. All foreign entities seeking to collaborate with US researchers would be subject to tighter restrictions.
- Applicants would have to pass “risk assessments”

that consider, among other things, their organization memberships and affiliations.

- Awards may not “fund, promote, encourage, subsidize, or facilitate” diversity, equity, and inclusion or “gender ideology.”
- Agencies would be encouraged to increase award lengths to reduce the administrative burden caused by recompetiting.

Republican lawmakers suggest defunding National Academies

By Clare Zhang

In response to a 4 May letter from 11 Republican lawmakers, the White House has signaled interest in investigating whether the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) should be suspended or debarred from federal funding.

Former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows posted an article on X about the letter, which criticizes the climate science chapter of the *Reference Manual on Scientific Evidence*, a major scientific resource for federal judges and that NASEM helps produce. Meadows commented, “The National Academies have weaponized tax dollars against President Trump for far too long. It’s time to end their contracts.” Russell Vought, director of the Office of Management and Budget, responded, “On it.”

The lawmakers’ letter argues that the chapter “violates Gold Standard Science” because the peer-review process did not include scientists with differing views on climate science and because its authors and funders had conflicts of interest.

The letter heavily echoes two sent earlier this year by Republican state attorneys general. In January, the attorneys general criticized the chapter and asked the Federal Judicial Center (FJC), which writes the manual with NASEM, to withdraw it. Soon after, the center removed the chapter from its website. Sixteen Democratic lawmakers wrote to the FJC’s director requesting its reinstatement.

The chapter remains available on NASEM’s website; National Academy of Sciences President Marcia McNutt rebuffed the request for its removal. In March, Republican attorneys general suggested in a letter to three cabinet members that agencies consider suspending or debarring NASEM from federal funding and that congressional committees investigate NASEM.

PT