Science Societies

Federal science funding: A look back

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When President Trump released his first budget proposal in the spring of 2017, many in the science and research community were worried. The Trump administration had the explicit goal of cutting overall government spending, while also increasing funding for defense, so it came as no surprise that parts of the spending pie were going to get squeezed.

Significant cuts to many discretionary programs were proposed in this budget, including to federal research agencies. The National Science Foundation, The Department of Energy Office of Science, and USDA research programs all had proposed 10–15% cuts to their fiscal year (FY) 2018 budgets with most other federal

science agencies faring the same. The research community braced for the worst.

And then the worst never came. Even though the House and Senate were both controlled by the president's party, the administration's proposed cuts to federal research programs were almost universally rejected by Congress. For FY2019 and 2020, a similar pattern emerged: the administration proposed cuts to federal science agency budgets, and Congress disregarded the request, instead providing most federal science agencies with funding *gains.*

Though the FY2020 budget process was several months delayed, the final funding numbers for food, agriculture, and natural resources research programs (see Table 1) were quite good.

Table 1. Final funding numbers for food, agriculture, and natural resources research programs for fiscal year (FY) 2020

Agency-program	FY 2019 final	FY 2020	Difference	% Difference
USDA-NIFA	$1.471 billion	$1.527 billion	$56 million	+ 4%
USDA-AFRI	$415 million	$425 million	$10 million	+ 2%
USDA-ARS	$1.303 billion	$1.414 billion	$111 million	+ 9%
NSF	$8.075 billion	$8.278 billion	$203 million	+ 3%
DoE-Office of Science	$6.585 billion	$7.000 billion	$415 million	+ 6%
ARPA-E	$366 million	$425 million	$59 million	+16%

Great Win for Science Advocates

Another highlight was the new USDA research equipment grants program, which received $5 million. Our Societies advocated for this program to be included in the

2018 farm bill and then specifically requested $5 million in funding during our Congressional Visits Day. This is the first time there will be specific funding for research equipment at USDA. This is a great win for our Societies and for advocates like you.

Since FY2017, the DOE Office of Science is up more than 30%, NIH is up 30%, AFRI is up more than 20%, and NSF is up 10%. For the three years in a row, ARPA-E has been slated for elimination in the president's budget but has seen almost 40% growth over the same time. This is some of the strongest growth for research funding in history.

The annual federal funding process can feel a bit like the movie *Groundhog Day*, reliving the exact same thing over and over each year. It can be challenging to keep up enthusiasm with our advocates and with our allies on the Hill. But when we look back over the past several years of federal science funding, we should all feel proud of what we have achieved.

Looking back at federal science funding over the past several years illustrates Congress' "power of the purse." We can also see that focusing our advocacy efforts on fostering new congressional champions for food, agriculture, and natural resources research is the key to continued growth for these programs. The ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Science Policy Office will continue our work on this front, and we will rely on advocates like you to share your stories with policymakers.

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