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Congress is currently working on passing the U.S Competition and Innovation Act, formerly known as the Endless Frontier Act, out of the Senate. However, with over 400 amendments that have been proposed, Senate leaders decided to move forward with a vote to create a commission to investigate the January 6th incident at the Capitol, which was ultimately unsuccessful. Congress is hoping to find an agreement in June before kicking it off to the White House to be signed. Furthermore, the White House and individual agencies are releasing full budget details throughout the day today and more details on the full budget request will be included in next week’s newsletter.

The University of Minnesota Washington Update provides intelligence and analysis on recent federal activities. Faculty visiting Washington, D.C. are encouraged to contact Sarah Neimeyer, Director of Government Relations, at neimeyer@umn.edu. Contact Christina Laridaen, Lewis-Burke Associates LLC, at christina@lewis-burke.com with any questions or comments related to the Update’s content.

Congressional and Administration Updates

Congressional Update: House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees Meet to Discuss FY 2022 NIH Budget

As part of the annual Congressional appropriations process, the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies met this week to discuss the National Institutes of Health (NIH) budget for fiscal year (FY) 2022. The hearings featured testimony from NIH Director Francis Collins with additional support from other NIH leadership including:

- Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID);
- Dr. Norman “Ned” Sharpless, Director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI);
- Dr. Gary Gibbons, Director of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI);
- Dr. Diana Bianchi, Director of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD);
- Dr. Nora Volkow, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA);
- Dr. Eliseo Perez-Stable, Director of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD); and
- Dr. Bruce Tromberg, Director of the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB).
The timing of these hearings was unusual, in that they took place before the release of the Biden Administration’s full budget request for FY 2022, which is expected to be released on May 28. While Dr. Collins and his colleagues were not able to go into detail on some topics, so as to not preempt the Administration’s budget release, they did provide insights on several areas of interest for NIH in the upcoming fiscal year.

As the nation reaches the milestone of 50 percent of adults vaccinated against COVID-19, the pandemic remained a focus of discussion during both hearings. Dr. Collins noted that while he typically shares a story of a patient whose life was saved due to NIH research at these hearings, this year, not one person can be singled out this year because all Americans who have received a COVID-19 vaccine are an NIH success story. Members of Congress continued to give NIH praise for the work it was able to do to develop diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines for COVID-19 in record time, and Members and NIH leadership both emphasized throughout both hearings that it was due to the robust and steady funding increases that were provided to NIH over the past six years.

Members were interested in hearing more about the COVID-19 research efforts that are ongoing at NIH. Particularly, there was significant interest in how COVID-19 impacts children, including the research on multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) and the behavioral and developmental impacts of prolonged social isolation, virtual learning, and the eventual return to in-person environments. There was also concern over patients dubbed “long haulers” who are experiencing lingering symptoms from COVID-19. NIH leadership noted they are working hard to understand the symptoms of these “long haulers” through the Post-Acute Sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC) initiative, for which Congress provided $1.15 billion over four years. During the hearing, several Republican Senators and Representatives questioned the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed their dissatisfaction with NIH funding labs in China. Overall, Members of Congress were excited about the work NIH has done to get the country through the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed their desire for many of these accelerated research efforts to be applied to other public health challenges.

A major topic of discussion at both hearings was the new Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H), which was proposed by President Biden in his “skinny” FY 2022 budget request that was released in April. Members of Congress were very interested in obtaining additional details about this proposed agency, including how it would complement the existing NIH portfolio, how NIH would balance continued investments in basic research with new investments in translational work, and how NIH would make decisions about what research topics ARPA-H would pursue. Members of Congress, including House Appropriations Committee Chair Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO), Jerry Moran (R-KS), and Richard Shelby (R-AL), specifically questioned how ARPA-H would complement and/or overlap with the mission of the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS). Dr. Collins said that ARPA-H would be akin to taking the NCATS model and putting it “on steroids,” and emphasized that ARPA-H would build on the successes of NCATS to incorporate a translational approach more broadly across NIH. He also noted that structural changes, such as relocating the Cures Acceleration Network and the Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSAs) from NCATS to ARPA-H, could be considered, but that additional stakeholder input would be needed before any such changes were made. Dr. Collins also noted that Directors of the NIH’s Institutes and Centers would be sought out for their ideas on projects ARPA-H could tackle to complement their existing work, and repeatedly expressed his overall excitement at the potential advances that ARPA-H could make in biomedical research.
Dr. Collins and his colleagues also used these hearings as an opportunity to discuss emerging research priorities across NIH and topics that would be receiving increased attention in FY 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to apply a greater focus on health disparities. Dr. Collins faced questions in both hearings about NIH’s need to redouble its efforts to address health disparities and structural racism in health and biomedical research. Members of Congress pointed out many examples of inequities in disease outcomes in communities of color and pressed NIH leadership on their plans to move beyond recognizing these disparities and towards concrete action. Dr. Collins pointed to NIH’s new UNITE Initiative as the agency’s major effort in this space and also used the Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL) Against COVID-19 initiative as a specific example of NIH’s efforts to engage more meaningfully with underserved communities. Another area poised for increased focus in FY 2022 is the intersections of climate change, environmental exposures, and human health. Dr. Collins highlighted ongoing research on air quality and asthma as an example of NIH’s interests in this space and agreed with Members of Congress that this is an opportune moment to take a more holistic approach to environmental health sciences across NIH’s portfolio.

Lastly, these two hearings also included discussion around ongoing priorities for Congress and the NIH including research topics such as opioids and the development of non-opioid pain treatments, youth depression and suicide, firearm violence, and marijuana use in adolescents. Members of Congress also asked about policy topics such as sexual harassment in the scientific enterprise, the use of animal models in research, relief for researchers and institutions impacted by pandemic-related disruptions, and efforts to increase paylines at NIH’s Institutes and Centers.

Following these hearings and the release of the full budget request House and Senate appropriators will work on their own versions of FY 2022 NIH funding bills. Those bills and their accompanying reports, including specifics on individual programs and funding levels, are likely to be drafted in the coming weeks and months. Completing the FY 2022 appropriations process is one of many competing priorities for Congress this year, and so the NIH (along with other federal agencies) may face a Continuing Resolution at the beginning of the next fiscal year. Lewis-Burke will continue to provide updates on the NIH budget for FY 2022 as they become available.

Sources and Additional Information:

Funding Opportunities and Agency Updates

Funding Opportunity: SBA Announces Competitions to Support Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The Small Business Administration (SBA) recently released a solicitation with two distinct tracks that are focused on enhancing regional innovation and entrepreneurship. The solicitation aligns with SBA’s role as coordinator of the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer programs (SBIR/STTR), which are cornerstone investments by federal agencies to commercialize federally funded basic research. Tracks include the Growth Accelerator Fund Competition (GFAC), which supports individual entrepreneurial training organizations, and SBIR Catalyst, which supports clusters of organizations. Through
these awards, SBA provides funding to local innovation facilities to further support the development of start-up companies and awareness of SBIR/STTR.

The solicitation specifically seeks to identify models for addressing longtime directives to improve SBIR/STTR participation and success among women, socially/economically distressed individuals, and individuals from states and regions that are historically underrepresented in the programs. While funding for these programs is limited, they represent a small number of federal opportunities that explicitly fund efforts to support commercialization and entrepreneurship across disciplines and they could be of interest to innovation organizations and university technology transfer offices.

Applications for both tracks must include a PowerPoint presentation similar to one used in a pitch competition and a 90-second video. Organizations can apply for both tracks but cannot be selected as the lead applicant for both.

**Track One: Growth Accelerator Fund Competition**

*Award Information:* SBA will award up to 84 prizes of $50,000 each. This is 24 more than the last competition in 2019.

*Overview:* GFAC provides additional resources to accelerators and incubators to “help these entities provide focused assistance to high tech entrepreneurs, including support for company formation as well as awareness and education of the SBIR and STTR programs.” Applicants must focus proposed efforts to support entrepreneurs in one of the priority groups listed in the solicitation, including those underrepresented in SBIR/STTR as designated by SBA and entrepreneurs building technologies in key areas, including but not limited to:

- “Clean Energy: such as electric vehicles, solar, wind, geothermal, nuclear, energy efficiency;
- Supply Chain Resilience: such as semiconductors, pharmaceuticals and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), high-capacity batteries, critical minerals, agricultural commodities;
- Infrastructure: such as broadband, electrical grid, water supply and sewer, transportation infrastructure, electric vehicle charging stations; and
- Other STEM/R&D areas.”

SBA intends for no less than 50 percent of Growth Accelerator prizes to go to first-time GAFC winners, and no less than 50 percent of GAFC prizes to go to applicants located in the 29 states/territories receiving the fewest number of SBIR/STTR Phase I awards, which are listed in the solicitation.

**Track Two: SBIR Catalyst**

*Award Information:* SBA will award up to seven prizes of $150,000 each. Although it is not required, competitive preference will be given to applicants that secure matching funding.

*Overview:* The SBIR Catalyst will support collaborative partnerships between organizations that support entrepreneurs in underserved communities. Contestants will be expected to submit a proposal involving multiple entrepreneur support organizations and partners from different states/territories in a large geographic area. Funding may be used to establish and scale partnerships, expand access to mentorship in early-stage technology development, train applicants to submit competitive SBIR/STTR proposals, develop
commercialization pathways for STEM companies, and importantly, seek to fill gaps in the innovation ecosystem.

**Dates:** The submission period for entries is ongoing and will end **July 2, 2021 4:00 PM EDT**. An informational webinar will be held **June 2, 2021 at 2 PM EDT**.

**Eligibility:** Eligibility is broad and includes citizens over 18 years old and individuals submitting on behalf of both for-profit and non-profit organizations. Universities are eligible to apply.

**Sources and Additional Information:**
- More information on the funding opportunity, including a link to register to the webinar and templates for the slide decks can be found at [https://www.sbir.gov/accelerators](https://www.sbir.gov/accelerators).

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**Funding Opportunity: EPA Releases Solicitation for the Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program**

On May 24, the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Office of Pesticide Programs released a Request for Applications (RFA) for the Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program (PESP) Grant Initiative. The program aims to support practices, technologies, education, and solutions that promote smart and sustainable pest control in agriculture. Under the Biden Administration, EPA has set strategic goals of decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and creating a cleaner environment writ large, and this program aims to support those goals by supporting the adoption of integrated pest management (IPM) practices.

IPM combines physical, chemical, biological, and cultural tools to limit pests and the use of pesticides which benefits both the environment and human health. EPA is seeking to fund projects that find innovative ways to integrate pest, soil, water, and crop management practices into sustainable agriculture or conservation planning. The term sustainable agriculture, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture, refers to site-specific plant and animal production practices that satisfy food and fiber needs over time, enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base, efficiently use nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources, sustains the economic viability of farm operations, and enhanced farmer’s quality of life.

Applications should utilize demonstration, education, and outreach projects to encourage adoption of IPM practices. EPA seeks to support projects that will have lasting impacts and strongly encourages applicants to use existing training and outreach materials, rather than developing new ones. EPA is looking for projects that would:
- “Encourage partnerships between producers, commodity groups, scientists, extension, local/state/federal government agencies, and other stakeholders to demonstrate, promote, and utilize reduced risk/IPM practices in the field.
- Actively engage scientists, producers, industry, and local/state/federal partners/Tribal stakeholders in the specifics of meeting the objectives.
- Quantitatively measure and document the effects of using the reduced risk/IPM programs on the environment, human health, community, and greenhouse gas emissions.
Facilitate a sustainable systems approach that utilizes reduced risk/IPM practices and leads to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Demonstrate region-specific pest management practices and integrated crop management systems.”

**Due Dates:** Applications are due by **July 9, 2021 at 11:59 pm ET.**

**Total Funding and Award Size:** EPA anticipates awarding approximately $1 million to support 10 projects, one from each EPA region. The maximum individual award is $100,000 for a period of up to two years.

**Eligibility:** The solicitation is open to State universities, the 50 States, District of Columbia, any territory or possession of the U.S., any agency of the State, and all Federally recognized Native American Tribes. Non-profits and private institutions are not eligible to apply.

**Sources and Additional Information:**