On March 4, President Obama released preliminary details of his fiscal year (FY) 2015 budget request to Congress. The proposal totals $3.901 trillion, including $1.014 trillion in discretionary spending, which keeps the caps set by the budget agreement brokered by Congress at the end of 2013. Total federal R&D funding would reach $135.4 billion in FY 2015, $1.7 billion more than FY 2014, and would include $65.9 billion for non-defense R&D, an increase of $477 million.

The budget also includes a proposal for an additional $56 billion in discretionary spending, split between defense and non-defense discretionary programs, to be paid for with spending cuts and revenue created by closing tax breaks, according to the White House. If funded, this new “Opportunity, Growth and Security Initiative” would provide $5.3 billion in additional R&D funding to agencies such as the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Energy, National Institute of Standards and Technology, and other agencies. This funding is intended to supplement the President’s requested levels. However, House and Senate appropriations committee chairs have already indicated that they plan to write their bills according to the budget caps set last year, signaling that the President is unlikely to receive the additional $56 billion as part of his initiative.

The release of the President’s budget request marks the official start of the FY 2015 appropriations process. Accordingly, House and Senate appropriations and authorizing committees have begun their oversight hearings, and appropriations chairs have set an ambitious timeline, with committee markups occurring as early as May and floor consideration over the summer. In addition, Senate Budget Committee Chairwoman Patty Murray (D-WA) indicated last week that her committee will not prepare a budget resolution this year given the budget agreement produced last year that sets discretionary spending caps for FY 2015. However, she has expressed interest in working with House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) to revisit the caps to address the priorities outlined in the President’s initiative. Chairman Ryan has focused his attention recently on critiquing federal entitlement programs and calling for a rewrite of federal anti-poverty programs.

Preliminary details of the budget proposal are outlined below. Many of the agency- and program-specific details are being reserved until agencies hold their respective budget briefings over the next few weeks. COSSA will provide a full analysis of the President’s FY 2015 budget request for federal agencies and programs of interest to the social and behavioral sciences community in our special budget issue in the coming weeks. In the meantime, additional information can be found on the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) website.
National Science Foundation

The President’s request includes $7.255 billion for the National Science Foundation (NSF), which is $83 million or 1.2 percent more than the FY 2014 enacted level. Within this amount, NSF’s research account, Research and Related Activities, would see a decrease of about 0.03 percent below FY 2014. Accordingly, nearly every directorate would be held flat or see a small decrease under the President’s proposal, with the exceptions of the Social, Behavioral and Economic (SBE) sciences directorate, NSF’s smallest directorate, which is slated for a $15 million or 6 percent increase, and the Education and Human Resources (EHR) directorate, which would see a $43 million or 5 percent increase. Details of these increases are not yet available.

Also of note, the request includes a $40 million or 13.4 percent increase for the Agency Operations and Award Management line, which largely accounts for the planned 2016 relocation of NSF headquarters to Alexandria, VA. In addition, the NSF request includes funding to “develop a repository where the public can access articles by NSF-funded researchers,” which is a nod to Congressional concerns about NSF’s transparency and award decision-making process. Finally, the request proposes a total of $552 million as part of the President’s Opportunity, Growth and Security Initiative, which would be used to support an additional 1,000 research grants and expand graduate student training in research priority areas such as neuroscience, advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, and other areas.

National Institutes of Health and Other Health Agencies

For the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the FY 2015 budget request would provide $30.362 billion, an increase of approximately $211 million above the FY 2014 enacted level. In FY 2015, NIH intends to focus on the following priority themes: (1) Today’s Basic Science for Tomorrow’s Breakthroughs, (2) Precision Medicine, (3) Big Opportunities in Big Data, and (4) Nurturing Talent and Innovation. The NIH Common Fund, which would receive an increase of $50 million bringing it to a funding level of $583.039 million in FY 2015, will be used to support the themes. Programs under consideration for FY 2015 support include 3D Nucleome, Bioelectronics, Citizen Science, Glycomics, and Mechanisms Underlying Benefits from Physical Activity (see Update, February 10, 2014).

In addition to the President’s base budget request for NIH, the President’s special initiative—if appropriated—would provide NIH with an additional $970 million for new grants to restore funding lost due to sequestration. It would be used for NIH’s signature activities, including The BRAIN Initiative, the Big Data to Knowledge (BD2K) initiative, Alzheimer’s disease research, vaccine development (including a universal flu vaccine), and a new “Accelerating Medicines Partnership,” launched in February 2014 as a public/private partnership with pharmaceutical companies.

The President’s budget would allocate a total of $440 million to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), a decrease of $24 million from FY 2014. This total is comprised of a $106 million transfer from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Trust Fund and $334 in Public Health Service Evaluation Funds.

The FY 2015 request would provide the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with a discretionary program level of $5.9 billion (not including mandatory funding), a decrease from FY 2014’s level of $6.1 billion. The President’s request for the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) would maintain the FY 2014 funding level of $155.4 million.
Statistical Agencies

The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) would receive $111 million under the President’s proposal, an increase of $12 million or 12 percent over the FY 2014 enacted level. The request includes $4 million to “improve the measurement and understanding of U.S. foreign direct investment as part of ‘Build it Here, Sell it Everywhere’...,” and $2 million to initiate a new “Big Data for Small Business” program aimed at collecting a new small business gross domestic product measure.

The President’s request includes a total of $1.211 billion for the Census Bureau, which is $267 million or 28 percent above FY 2014. The increase would be used to “support key research and testing of innovative design methods necessary to achieve an effective 2020 decennial census at the lowest cost possible.”

The request would provide the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) with $610.1 million in FY 2015, which is about $18 million or 3 percent over the FY 2014 enacted level. The request includes increased funding within the Labor Force Statistics line for annual supplements to the Current Population Survey, and within the Prices and Cost of Living line for the Consumer Expenditure Survey “to support the Census Bureau in its development of a supplemental statistical poverty measure using CE data.”

Department of Education

The President’s budget would provide $68.6 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Education, a decrease of $70.6 billion from FY 2014 enacted levels. The Administration requests $637.2 million in FY 2015 for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), an increase of $60.3 million over FY 2014. Of this amount, $190.3 million would go to research, development and dissemination, an increase of $11.3 million from FY 2014. The national assessment program within IES would see a decrease of $7.4 million compared to FY 2014, to a new total of $124.6 million.

The Department of Education’s International Education and foreign language studies programs would receive an increase of $4 million to a new total of $65.1 million in FY 2015. The entirety of the increase would go the domestic programs of Title VI, and the Fulbright-Hays overseas program would remain unchanged at just over $7 million.

The “First in the World” program, which was initially funded in the FY 2014 omnibus and falls under the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, would see an increase of an additional $25 million, raising its overall funding to $100 million in FY 2015. This program provides grants to colleges and universities in order to implement strategies that improve educational outcomes. Also under the Fund, a new program of college success grants for minority-serving institutions would receive $75 million in FY 2015.

Department of Justice

The President’s budget request would provide a total of $136.9 million for Research, Evaluation and Statistics within the Office of Justice Programs. Within this amount, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) would receive $47.5 million, an increase of $7.5 million over FY 2014 levels. The increase in funding includes an additional $3 million for social science research on indigent defense. An increase of $10.4 million was requested for the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which would bring the new total to $55.4 million in FY 2015.
The National Institute of Food and Agriculture’s (NIFA) competitive grants program, Agricultural Food and Research Initiative (AFRI), would receive $325 under the President’s budget. Activities funded under the Hatch Act would receive $244 million. The request would allocate $83.4 million to the Economic Research Service (ERS). The budget would provide $179 million for the National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS), of which $48 million would be allocated to the Census of Agriculture.

STEM Education

With respect to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, the administration has abandoned its attempt to consolidate federal STEM programs, in light of Congressional objection last year. Instead, proposed consolidations would occur within agencies as opposed to across agencies; there is no proposal to transfer STEM programs to other agencies. The budget proposes a total of $2.9 billion for federal STEM programs. In addition, agencies will coordinate to implement the federal STEM education 5 year strategic plan through the Committee on STEM Education (CoSTEM).