2019 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA
for SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

❶ Cancel harmful sequestration cuts and protect non-defense discretionary spending.

Non-defense discretionary programs encompass a wide range of critical federal functions from education and job training to housing, science, natural resources, services for veterans, public health, safety, and security. These and other programs have been cut dramatically and disproportionately in recent years as lawmakers have sought to reduce the deficit. However, experts across the political spectrum agree that the discretionary side of the federal budget is not the driving factor behind our nation's mid- and long-term fiscal challenges.

Congress must work this year to once and for all replace sequestration with a balanced approach to deficit reduction that takes into account the deep cuts non-defense discretionary programs have already sustained since 2011. In addition, it is critical that the principle of parity between non-defense and defense funding be maintained in any deal to replace sequestration, recognizing the equally important role of both defense and non-defense programs in protecting the safety and security of Americans.

❷ Provide real growth in research funding, including for basic research, across all STEM disciplines.

Federal science agencies like the **National Science Foundation (NSF)** and the **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** have kept American innovation ahead of global competitors, thanks to decades-long, sustained support for **basic research**. We cannot risk ceding our leadership to other countries that are enhancing their investments in scientific research. Government investment in basic research is just that—an investment. The economic, national security, and health-related benefits of basic research tend not to be immediately realized as basic research is a long-term endeavor; it is impossible to predict where the path of scientific inquiry will lead us, other than forward. But, like any investment, divesting in science today has significant impacts on the future timeline of discovery. **The U.S. scientific enterprise requires stability, predictability, and sustainable funding growth, and federal policies that are patient and can tolerate a reasonable amount of risk in order to achieve the greatest payoff.** It is important to see real growth in all areas of STEM, including the social and behavioral sciences.

❸ Invest in and protect the federal statistical and data enterprise.

Federal statistics and data provide decision makers on the federal, state, and local levels with much-needed empirical evidence for making policy and evaluating the performance of government programs. They are used in the private sector to determine where and how to make strategic investments, and the availability of objective, public data helps level the playing field in the economy and keep markets stable. Federal statistical data are rigorously collected and analyzed, generalizable, comparable across time periods, and touch on nearly every aspect of life in America, including demographics, health, the economy, employment, transportation, agriculture, crime, education, energy, and science. **The federal statistical system can be significantly strengthened by providing adequate resources and safeguards to ensure that federal statistics are appropriately free from external influences and bias.**

The **Census Bureau**, for example, is responsible for the Constitutionally-mandated decennial census for apportionment and redrawing of Congressional districts. In addition, the data are also used to inform the

distribution of over $800 billion in federal aid to states and localities each year, not to mention the utility of the data to businesses, local governments, emergency managers, and scientific researchers. In the last year before the 2020 Census begins, the Bureau will be finishing its extensive preparations and entering the decennial census' peak operations phase as it works to ensure that the count is both successful and cost-effective. The Census Bureau requires a robust budget that will allow the agency to conduct the government's largest civilian mobilization and operation. **COSSA supports strong funding for the Census Bureau and opposes the addition of last-minute, untested questions to the 2020 enumeration.**

A vital component of census data collection is the **American Community Survey (ACS)**, which is the nation's only source of comparable, consistent, timely, and high-quality demographic and socio-economic data for all communities in the U.S. Inadequate resources as well as changes to the mandatory nature of the survey could mean that annual data would not exist for entire communities, particularly in less populous, rural areas of the country.

Finally, continuing the momentum of the **Evidence-Based Policymaking** movement will strengthen the federal statistical system and incentivize decision-making based on sound science, while ensuring the careful stewardship of confidential information. This includes building on the progress of the Commission for Evidence-Based Policymaking report[1] and the passage of the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act* by exploring innovative ways to improve the production and accessibility of federal data, enhance privacy protections, and strengthen the government's evidence-building capacity.

❹ Support the use of social science research across federal agencies to ensure policies are based on sound evidence.

While NSF and NIH provide the lion's share of federal support to social and behavioral science researchers, other departments and agencies support and, just as importantly, utilize social science research in service of their missions. Federal investment in the social and behavioral sciences helps to ensure that policy-making is based on evidence and that tax-payer dollars are wisely allocated. This science touches all sectors, from national defense to agriculture, health, education, and justice. For example:

- Through the **National Institute of Justice** and **Bureau of Justice Statistics**, the Department of Justice provides local jurisdictions with information on pressing issues such as drivers of domestic radicalization, mental health needs of people involved in the criminal justice system, community policing, and officer safety.
- The **Department of Defense** looks to social science to study regions of the world of strategic importance to the U.S. and to understand questions like how information is spread and how organizations change.
- The **Institute of Education Sciences** provides critical evidence to support the Department of Education's efforts around improving child outcomes and developing sound educational assessment measures.
- The **Department of Agriculture** relies on social science to help reduce childhood obesity, address water shortages, and protect our food supply, all through understanding behavior and economic incentives.
- The **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality** has used social science to identify ways to reduce hospital-acquired conditions by 17 percent over 5 years, saving an estimated 87,000 lives and $20 billion in health care costs.
- The **Office of Evaluation Sciences at the General Services Administration** partners with agencies across the government to translate research insights[2] into recommendations to improve federal programs, policies, and operations to drive efficiency, improve mission performance, and achieve savings.

Learn more at www.COSSA.org and www.WhySocialScience.com

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[1] https://www.cep.gov/cep-final-report.html
[2] https://oes.gsa.gov/work/

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