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Science in the Second Trump Administration

What will happen to my grant funding?

At the time of this writing, we are aware of the unusually broad “freeze” on public communications from several grantmaking agencies, including the National Institutes of Health, which has canceled and delayed essential meetings and publications, including parts of the grant review process. The AFT is closely monitoring this situation and will update affiliates as it evolves.

Federal research funds already granted or obligated can be rescinded only under limited circumstances. All major scientific agencies have policies spelling out these procedures, which require notice and documentation to the principal investigator.

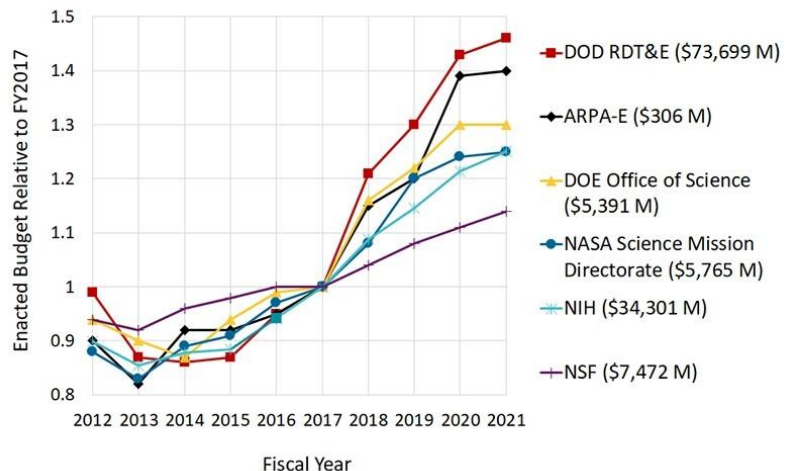
For more information on NIH grants, see the NIH Grants Policy Statement, section 8.5.2—Remedies for Noncompliance or Enforcement Actions: Suspension, Termination, and Withholding of Support.¹

For more information on National Science Foundation grants, see the NSF’s Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide, Part II, Chapter XII—Award Administration Disputes and Misconduct.²

Though the current “freeze” is distressing, during the first Trump administration Congress largely rejected draconian cuts to major science agencies.

Budget Trends for Selected Science Agencies

(figures in () are the FY17 enacted amounts)



Emergency appropriations for COVID-19 response are excluded.

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¹ National Institutes of Health, NIH Grants Policy Statement (NIHGPS), 8.5.2—Remedies for Noncompliance or Enforcement Actions: Suspension, Termination, and Withholding of Support, https://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/nihgps/html5/section_8/8.5.2_remedies_for_noncompliance_or_enforcement_actions_-_suspension_termination_and_withholding_of_support.htm.

² National Science Foundation, Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG), Part II, Chapter XII—Award Administration Disputes and Misconduct, <https://new.nsf.gov/policies/pappg/24-1/ch-12-disputes-misconduct>.

The AFT is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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What changes will we see over the next four years?

We understand why members are concerned. It's unclear how much COVID-19 has changed the fundamentals of support for science, especially for research outside of public health and virology (e.g., cancer research or space science). The known Trump nominees for research agencies have expressed some views on science, including vaccines and COVID-19, that are not evidence-based. And there is growing Republican hostility to universities in general.

Republicans have to pay for at least part of their "big beautiful bill" to cut taxes and address immigration at the southern border, and they may do that in part by cutting research funding. Though the earliest estimates predict the bill will be on Trump's desk in May, the process of drafting and horse-trading has already begun.

The executive branch also will have authority to set agency funding priorities for new grant awards. We have already seen an executive order attacking diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs and diversity, equity, inclusion and access (DEIA) programs, calling them wasteful and illegal. Trump's executive order titled "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing"³ directs the Office of Management and Budget to gather information on "Federal grantees who received Federal funding to provide or advance DEI, DEIA, or 'environmental justice' programs, services, or activities since January 20, 2021."

One initiative from the first Trump term that directly affected researchers was the China Initiative, a Department of Justice program that purported to combat intellectual property theft and espionage. But an *MIT Technology Review* analysis showed "China Initiative investigations increasingly focused not on individuals suspected of spying or stealing trade secrets, but on Chinese and Asian American researchers and scholars alleged to have omitted details in immigration paperwork or U.S. grant applications."⁴ This created a chilling effect on many researchers that threatens real advancements in science. If this initiative is revived, we will update members based on additional information.

The Trump administration's attacks on the civil service will have impacts on university researchers. A hiring freeze and mandatory return-to-office policies will mean more vacancies among the staff who write, post, review and convene the review committees of research grant proposals.

What can affiliates, researchers and scientists do?

Don't comply in advance. Follow all applicable procedures and provide required documentation, but there is no need to change the focus of your research or stop collaborating with colleagues. Participate in the process to the best of your capacity. For example, now more than ever we will need participants on peer-review committees with a strong sense of scientific integrity. Sign on to letters, submit comments and call your members of Congress when science is under threat.

³ The White House, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing," executive order, January 20, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/>.

⁴ Brennan Center for Justice, "The 'China Initiative' Failed U.S. Research and National Security. Don't Bring It Back," September 23, 2024, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/china-initiative-failed-us-research-and-national-security-dont-bring-it>.

If you have an individual concern, contact AFT Higher Education by email at highered@aft.org or by phone at 202-879-4400.

If you have concerns about your funding or feel your specific research area may be targeted, please reach out so we know to pay extra attention to particular agencies or grant types. Your information will not be made public without your knowledge. We will also continue to provide updates to this and other guidance as we learn more.