

House Science, Space, and Technology Committee: NSF, NIST FY 2016 budget hearing

February 27, 2015

On February 27, the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee held a hearing on the President's proposed fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget for both the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). Witnesses testifying at the hearing included NSF Director France Córdova, National Renewable Energy Laboratory Director Dan Arvizu, and NIST Acting Director Willie May.

Córdova testified about NSF's new communication strategies, which were crafted to add clarity to the merit review process. These strategies include creating clearer proposal titles and abstracts including additional, non-technical descriptions on the impact of proposed research and how it contributes to the national interest. Córdova explained that the changes may take time as the new policies require culture change and NSF receives a large number of proposals that must be processed, but improvements are already underway. Recently, NSF revised manuals and began new training for program officers. Córdova reinforced that important projects may have obscure titles, and it is important for NSF to make their worth apparent. For example, Google originally came from a project titled 'BackRub'.

Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) expressed his appreciation for the new, clearer communication and non-technical descriptions and asked if NSF would approve of language in the Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science, and Technology Act of 2014 (H.R.4186), or FIRST Act, which was introduced in the 113th Congress. Córdova agreed NSF was in line with and approved of FIRST Act language. Dr. Arvizu stated his support for the goals of the FIRST Act and said that what he has seen of the language so far is appropriate.
