

## **A Strategic Asset at Risk: The National Science Foundation's Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences**

***“Federal support for social, behavioral, and economic sciences research serves the strategic interests of our nation and the day-in-day-out priorities of the American people. NSF's Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences should be bolstered, not bulldozed.”***

***- Research!America President and CEO Mary Woolley***

### **Overview**

Federal investment in social, behavioral, and economic sciences (SBE) research ensures that scientific and technological advances translate into real-world benefits. These fields provide critical insights into how people make decisions, how systems function, and how policies perform in practice. At the same time, global competitors, most notably China, are investing heavily in these areas to inform national strategy and strengthen economic and geopolitical positioning. Without sustained U.S. investment, the nation risks ceding strategic advantage in how knowledge is applied.

### **Turning Discovery into Impact**

Advances in medicine, technology, and data science depend on public understanding and adoption. SBE research improves how complex information is communicated, builds trust in science, and ensures that innovations, such as vaccines and artificial intelligence, are designed and used in ways that reflect human needs and behavior.

### **Strengthening the Economy and Workforce**

A competitive economy requires a workforce equipped with problem solving ability, adaptability, and strong interpersonal skills. SBE research helps align education and training with employer needs, supports workforce participation, and drives productivity and growth.

### **Improving Government Effectiveness**

Public investments achieve greater impact when informed by evidence. SBE research identifies what works, for whom, and under what conditions across areas such as housing, education, and disaster response. This leads to more efficient use of taxpayer dollars and better outcomes for communities.

### **Enhancing Health, Safety, and Well Being**

Research in psychology, economics, and related fields has improved mental health treatment, reduced stigma, strengthened public health communication, and informed practices that enhance fairness in the justice system. These contributions directly improve quality of life and public safety.

### **Providing Essential Data for Decision Making**

Demographic and economic research form the backbone of informed decision making. Data on population trends, economic activity, and social conditions guide policy, business investment, and resource allocation across sectors.

### **Competing Globally Requires Competing on SBE Research**

China is making sustained, strategic investments in social sciences, behavioral research, and economics through major state-backed institutions and funding streams. These efforts are designed to directly inform policy, shape markets, and strengthen national governance. Chinese investment in these fields has grown steadily, often in alignment with long-term economic and geopolitical priorities. In contrast, U.S. leadership depends on continued federal support for open, high-quality SBE research that informs democratic decision-making and fuels innovation. Falling behind in these disciplines risks weakening the nation's ability to compete, govern effectively, and lead globally.

### **Conclusion**

Social, behavioral, and economic sciences research is essential to maximizing the return on federal investments in science and technology. It ensures that innovation works in practice, strengthens the economy, improves government performance, and positions the United States to compete and lead in a rapidly changing global landscape.

### **Sources**

Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA): <https://www.cossa.org/>

National Social Science Fund of China (NSSFC): <http://www.nopss.gov.cn/>