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Through the NSC Alliance partnership with the American Institute of Biological Sciences, we are pleased to provide NSC Alliance members with the following public policy update. With proper attribution to NSC Alliance, all material from these reports may be reproduced or forwarded. We encourage you to share this report with colleagues at your institution. Anyone interested in receiving copies of the NSC Alliance Washington Report may subscribe at <http://www.NSCAlliance.org>-- it's free!

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### **Leadership Change at NSC Alliance**

Dr. Robert Gropp has accepted the position of Executive Director of the Association for Psychological Science. His work as Executive Director at AIBS and NSCA was completed on October 16, 2020. We thank Rob for his dedication and service, and wish him well in all of his future endeavors.

AIBS has for several years provided excellent support for the NSCA. NSCA leadership is currently working with AIBS leadership on plans for continued executive, membership management, basic accounting, and administrative functions for NSCA going forward.

### **NSC Alliance Writes to Congress About COVID-19 Economic Recovery**

On October 19, 2020, the NSC Alliance reiterated its request to key House and Senate leaders that any economic measures crafted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic address the financial harm being felt by natural history museums, botanical gardens, and other scientific societies and research organizations, which are an integral part of the nation's bioeconomy.

“As Congress considers the responses to the economic costs of COVID-19, we again request that you include in any economic recovery measure non-profit natural history museums, botanical gardens, and other scientific societies and research organizations which are an integral part of the nation’s bioeconomy and serve as resources with respect to understanding animal/human pathogen interactions,” noted NSC Alliance President John Bates. “We know from communication with our colleagues that many of our institutions and their staffs were helped by the previous relief measure. These scientific research and education organizations continue to suffer economic losses as a result of the need to cancel scientific meetings, workshops, and to reduce, postpone or cancel public programs, including educational programs associated with schools and other civic organizations. Recent surveys by the American Association of Museums, and the Biodiversity Collections Network clearly document the issues facing this community”

[Read the letter.](#)

### **Congress Avoids Shutdown, Relief Talks Continue**

Congress has passed and the President has signed a continuing resolution to keep the government open in the new fiscal year (FY), which started on October 1, 2020. The stopgap measure will allow federal science agencies to continue operating at FY 2020 budget levels. Decisions about FY 2021 appropriations bills have been deferred until December 11.

Pandemic relief negotiations between congressional Democrats and the White House restarted earlier this month, after the House of Representatives passed a pared-down version of the [Heroes Act](#). The revised stimulus package trims \$1.2 trillion from the initially proposed \$3.4 trillion measure, but Republican lawmakers said the \$2.2 trillion price tag was still too high. “We’re in very near agreement on all the COVID things that matter,” said Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO). “What we’re not in agreement on is about \$1 trillion worth of other things.”

The updated Heroes Act includes \$2.9 billion in emergency relief for the National Science Foundation (NSF), which is just short of the \$3 billion allocated for the agency in the [RISE Act](#) – a measure endorsed by more than 300 higher education, research, industry groups, and associations, including AIBS. The latest House bill would allocate \$2.587 billion for NSF’s Research and Related Activities and \$300 million for the Education and Human Resources account. The measure also includes \$1 million for a National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine study on the current understanding of the spread of COVID–19-related disinformation on the internet and social media platforms. Other notable provisions in the bill include:

- \$4.7 billion for the National Institutes of Health to expand COVID-19-related research.
- \$392 million to address coronavirus-related needs at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- \$20 million for the National Institute for Standards and Technology to support development and manufacturing of medical countermeasures and biomedical equipment and supplies to address the coronavirus.
- \$11.9 billion for higher education institutions.

- \$50 million for the Environmental Protection Agency to investigate links between pollution exposure and the transmission and health outcomes of coronavirus in communities that have experienced disproportionate negative health outcomes.
- \$135 million for the Institute of Museum and Library Services to support libraries and museums with costs and expenses associated with coronavirus.
- \$45 million for the Fish and Wildlife Service and \$20 million for the National Park Service to respond to the pandemic.

Days after relief talks resumed, President Trump abruptly announced on Twitter on October 6 that he had ordered an end to relief negotiations until after the November election, rejecting the Democrats' latest proposal and calling on the Senate to instead focus their attention on confirming Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court. The decision drew bipartisan criticism from lawmakers. "Now is not the time for the Congress to stop doing its work," said Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). "Alaskans desperately need relief to help mitigate both the health and economic impacts of COVID-19." Then on October 8, Trump announced that his Administration had once again resumed negotiations with congressional Democrats.

Disagreements persist between the White House and Congress on the price tag of the next stimulus package. Democrats continue to resist going below \$2.2 trillion. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin was initially willing to go up to \$1.6 trillion, but on October 9, he proposed a slightly larger \$1.8 trillion relief measure with additional funding for state and local governments and direct stimulus checks. The latest White House proposal drew bipartisan opposition, with some Republican lawmakers criticizing the spending as too high and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) saying that the measure did not contain enough spending for unemployment insurance, schools, states and local government, and testing.

At one point, President Trump expressed support for a stand-alone legislation to send another round of \$1,200 direct payments. That proposal has been rejected by Speaker Pelosi, who wants to pass a more comprehensive package. Senate Republicans on the other hand do not favor a comprehensive bill.

Prospects for the next relief measure being passed before the elections look dismal. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) plans to focus on the confirmation of the new Supreme Court nominee over the next few days and indicated that Republicans will "reengage" in relief negotiations after the elections. *E&E News* reported that McConnell has been discouraging the White House from finalizing an agreement with the Democrats prior to Election Day. He is also looking to offer a \$500 billion relief measure this week that includes \$100 billion for school safety, an extension of expanded employment benefits, funds for testing and tracing, and funding for vaccine development and distribution. The bill also includes liability protections for businesses – a provision that Democrats called a "poison pill." Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) said the bill "fails to include robust unemployment insurance; enough funding for schools and universities; or funding for rental, housing or nutrition assistance." He added that this was "not a serious attempt at pandemic relief" and just "another attempt at giving Republicans political cover before the election."

## **NSF BIO Changes Solicitations Process**

The National Science Foundation's (NSF) Biological Sciences Directorate (BIO) has announced changes to their program solicitation process, specifically the migration of BIO's "no-deadline" solicitations from FastLane to Research.gov.

BIO will [require](#) submission of full proposals via Research.gov or Grants.gov for program solicitations that have no deadlines in the Division of Environmental Biology (DEB), the Division of Integrative Organismal Systems (IOS), the Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences (MCB), and in the Research Resources Cluster of the Division of Biological Infrastructure (DBI).

According to BIO Assistant Director Joanne Tornow, the migration of these solicitations to Research.gov is the first step in an NSF-wide effort to modernize their proposal submission and review systems. The new system is intended to improve user experience while reducing administrative burdens. "We expect that new solicitations for the affected programs will be published in the coming weeks and that the migration of those solicitations to Research.gov will be effective 90 days after the new solicitations are published," stated Tornow.

NSF will be holding a series of BIO-wide virtual office hours, where the research community can learn more from BIO program officers about the migration and overall modernization efforts. The next virtual office hours will occur on Thursday, October 22 at 3 PM EDT. Members of the community are invited to register for these sessions at [https://www.nsf.gov/events/event\\_summ.jsp?cntn\\_id=301092&org=BIO](https://www.nsf.gov/events/event_summ.jsp?cntn_id=301092&org=BIO).

## **Trump Administration Proposes New Student Visa Restrictions**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a proposed rulemaking on September 25, 2020 that would impose new restrictions on international student visas. The proposed changes would require international students to apply for a visa extension after fixed terms of two to four years.

Essentially, an expiration date would be placed on most student visas that previously lasted the duration of a student's degree program. Most international student visas would expire after four years, while some students, depending on their country of origin, would have to apply for an extension after two years – specifically students born in countries on the State Sponsor of Terrorism List, including Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. Requests for extensions of stay could be approved "if the additional time needed is due to a compelling academic reason, documented medical illness or medical condition, or circumstance that was beyond the student's control." Many in the academic community worry that the limited visa terms could make it challenging for international students to complete graduate and doctoral programs.

According to the Trump administration, these changes are necessary to increase oversight of international students and address visa fraud and overstay issues.

The proposal has received swift pushback from advocates of international students. “This proposed rule is set to replace a proven, flexible policy that has served international students and exchange visitors for decades, with one that is both complicated and burdensome,” said Esther Brimmer, Executive Director and CEO of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, according to *Inside Higher Ed*. “In a system that is already extremely complex, this rule would undoubtedly create a high degree of uncertainty for international students and exchange visitors...Sadly, this proposal sends another message to immigrants, and in particular international students and exchange visitors, that their exceptional talent, work ethic, diverse perspectives, and economic contributions are not welcome in the United States.”

The scientific community is concerned that the new restrictions could weaken scientific research and undermine U.S. global leadership. “Science is international,” said Andrew Rosenberg, Director of the Union of Concerned Scientists. “That's one reason why our academic setting is so strong.”

The directive was also rebuked by members of the House Science Committee. “The proposed rule from DHS is just the latest attempt by the Trump administration to isolate the United States’ scientific and academic enterprise and lock out the global talent we need to remain a leader on the world stage,” stated House Science Committee Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) and House Science Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight Chairman Bill Foster (D-IL). “This anti-immigrant proposal serves only to antagonize students, particularly those with African and Middle Eastern nationalities, seeking to learn from and contribute to our nation’s science and research institutions.” The lawmakers urged that the 30-day comment period be extended to allow for a serious review and discussion of proposed rule’s impacts.

DHS will be [accepting public comments](#) on the proposed rulemaking until October 26, 2020.

## **USGS Names First Chief Scientist**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has appointed environmental researcher Dr. Geoffrey Plumlee to the agency's newly established position of Chief Scientist. Plumlee previously served as Senior Science Advisor to the USGS Director and Associate Director for Environmental Health. He has a bachelor’s degree in geology from the University of New Mexico and earned his Ph.D. in geochemistry from Harvard University.

“USGS has such a wide range of expertise and addresses such a broad range of complex science topics, no one individual can provide expert guidance on it all,” noted a USGS spokesperson, according to *E&E News*. “The Chief Scientist must be able to seek, integrate and interpret expert input from many different sources within and outside the USGS.” According to the spokesperson, “the position of chief scientist was added to align the USGS with other science and technology organizations that have similar Chief Technology Officer or Chief Scientist positions.”

## **Legislation Introduced to Support Early Career Researchers During Pandemic**

Members of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, led by Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), have introduced bipartisan legislation to create a new postdoctoral fellowship program at the National Science Foundation (NSF) to help keep early career researchers whose employment opportunities have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in the STEM pipeline.

“I am deeply concerned about the disappearance of STEM job opportunities and the potential long-term consequences for our STEM pipeline,” stated Chairwoman Johnson. “For established researchers, the COVID-19 crisis has severely limited their access to their laboratory space. But for early career researchers, these disruptions come at a critical juncture in their research career, threatening to derail their career path.”

The Supporting Early-Career Researchers Act ([H.R.8044](#)) would allocate \$250 million over fiscal years 2021 and 2022 “to prevent the loss of research talent due to job market disruptions caused by any economic decline during and after the pandemic.”

### **Webinar Series: Resources for Natural History Collections in a New Virtual World**

Recognizing the rapid changes happening within museum communities and the efforts being made throughout the community to adapt to these changes, iDigBio is organizing a webinar series, entitled, *Adapting to COVID-19: Resources for Natural History Collections in a New Virtual World*. The webinar series aims to help provide insight into how different groups and institutions are adapting to life in a quickly evolving world. AIBS, the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC), and the Natural Science Collections Alliance contributed to the planning of these programs.

The next two webinars will be held on October 27 and November 18 from 2:00 - 3:30 PM ET. All webinars will be recorded and held in Zoom.

#### October 27: Virtual Project Management, Tips and Tools

This webinar will focus on the basics of project management followed by lessons learned from the iDigBio community through managing multi-institution digitization projects (e.g. ADBC Thematic Collections Networks). Topics to include: organization, project tracking, communication strategies, and compiling and preparing reports. There will also be time for Q&A at the end of the webinar.

#### Speakers:

- Diego Barroso; Project Manager TORCH TCN, BRIT
- Jen Zaspel; Terrestrial Parasite Tracker Lead PI
- David Jennings, Project Manager, iDigBio

#### Zoom link:

<https://ufl.zoom.us/j/99571640979?pwd=V0VwbDBySEtBYUptNUZ2L0RQNGh0UT09>

### November 18: Engaging Public Participation in Collections Digitization

Learn about opportunities to use the Zooniverse platform for collections digitization, including examples of Notes from Nature related to transcription and phenology scoring projects. There will be a demo of available project management tools for NfN, followed by a higher-level explanation of the technology behind the platform that makes it all possible.

#### Speakers:

- Austin Mast; iDigBio, Florida State University
- Katie Pearson, Project Manager California Phenology TCN

#### Zoom link:

<https://ufl.zoom.us/j/99571640979?pwd=V0VwbDBySEtBYUptNUZ2L0RQNGh0UT09>

Visit the webinar series page for more information: <https://www.idigbio.org/content/webinar-series-adapting-covid-resources-natural-history-collections-new-virtual-world>

### **Informational Webinar on Museums for All Initiative**

The Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Association of Children's Museums are hosting a Museums for All informational webinar on November 19 at 2:00 PM Eastern.

[Museums for All](#) is an initiative dedicated to expanding community access. Learn more about how and why almost 600 museums participate in the program by registering for the webinar at <https://attendeegotowebinar.com/register/5307270469514446860>.

### **NSF Soliciting Future Topics for Convergence Accelerator**

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has announced a Request for Information (RFI) on Future Topics for the NSF Convergence Accelerator. With this RFI, NSF is seeking input from industry, institutions of higher education (IHEs), non-profits, government entities, and other interested parties on potential NSF Convergence Accelerator tracks for FY 2022.

Potential topics must have the potential for significant national-scale societal impact. Topic ideas may also relate to Industries of the Future (IotF) and/or NSF's Big Ideas. Ideas submitted in response to this RFI must be broad in scope to support and identify a set of challenges to complex problems that would be best addressed by multiple teams working together as a cohort.

The responses to this RFI must be submitted by November 9, 2020. More information can be found at: <https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2021/nsf21012/nsf21012.jsp>

The NSF Convergence Accelerator is holding an ideation webinar on October 27, 2020 at 2:00-3:30 PM ET to bring awareness of this opportunity to accelerate NSF-funded research and discovery to further societal impact. Join the webinar to learn about the program's ideation process, specifically focusing on the RFI on future topics. Attendees will learn about the Convergence Accelerator's model and fundamentals, designed to leverage a convergence

approach to transition basic research and discovery into practice. To register, visit [https://bit.ly/NSFCA\\_Oct27\\_RFIWebinar](https://bit.ly/NSFCA_Oct27_RFIWebinar)

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The Natural Science Collections Alliance is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit association that serves as an advocate for natural science collections, the institutions that preserve them, and the research and education that extend from them for the benefit of science, society, and stewardship of the environment. NSC Alliance members are part of an international community of museums, botanical gardens, herbariums, universities, and other institutions that house natural science collections and utilize them in research, exhibitions, academic and informal science education, and outreach activities. Website: [www.NSCAlliance.org](http://www.NSCAlliance.org).

The NSC Alliance Washington Report is a publication of the NSC Alliance. For information about membership in the NSC Alliance, please contact [dbosnjak@aibs.org](mailto:dbosnjak@aibs.org).