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A Community Approach to Social Science Advocacy

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More than 30 years after the founding of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), we in the social science advocacy community find ourselves fighting many of the same battles that inspired the creation of COSSA decades ago, whether it's having to justify how or why federally funded social and behavioral science research is in our "national interest," fending off attacks on individual grants simply because their titles lure additional scrutiny, or beating back attempts to pit fields of science against one another, especially in times of scarce resources. There will always be policy makers in need of convincing when it comes to the value of social and behavioral science. The best thing we can do is come together as a community and be prepared with the cogent arguments that we all know to be true.

I joined COSSA as its new executive director on January 1 of this year, replacing Howard Silver who retired at the end of 2013. There was no easing into the job, as strong community response was needed in just the first few weeks of 2014 to combat legislative efforts that would compromise our science. Thankfully, out of the crises of the recent past (e.g., the so-called Coburn amendment that targeted NSF's political science program in FY 2013) has blossomed a diverse community willing to go to bat for social and behavioral science funding. This has included a concentrated effort by COSSA in recent months to enhance its education and outreach to elected officials and to ensure our members—including APSA—receive timely information on policy developments that impact them. More notable, though, has been the efforts of the broader scientific community in defending social science. In recent months, national associations and societies representing broad fields of science, national higher education associations, university presidents, corporate heads, and even the National Science Board have spoken out publicly about the federal government's necessary role in funding social and behavioral science research. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, the Association of American Universities, and the Coalition for National Science Funding, to name a few, have been unwavering in their objection to bad policy proposals, such as the FIRST Act (H.R. 4186), that would decimate federal social science funding.

Grassroots engagement has also exploded as a result of recent challenges. APSA has led the charge in engaging its membership in outreach to the Hill to promote the value of federal funding for political science research. COSSA, too, has used the challenges of recent years as an opportunity to more fully engage the broad social and behavioral science community in advocacy. Nearly 4,000 communications have been sent to Capitol Hill in the first five months of 2014 stemming from COSSA action alerts, urging members of Congress to support social and behavioral science funding in both

appropriations and authorizing bills. Combined and in close coordination with the efforts of APSA and countless other groups that have been lending their voice to the cause, the social science community is positioned for real impact.

And this could not come at a better time, given the considerable challenges that lie ahead in the foreseeable future. Assuming social science programs across federal agencies make it through the FY 2015 appropriations process unscathed, which is hardly a certainty, calendar year 2015 promises to bring a new set of potential hurdles. For starters, the new 114th Congress will be seated in January, bringing a throng of newly elected policy makers to Washington whom we will need to educate about our science. In addition, with the Senate within reach of a Republican takeover next year, we are left with even more question marks when trying to anticipate our cast of characters in 2015, as is the case when any house of Congress flips. Further, an unfortunate certainty is the loss next year of key congressional science champions, including Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ), Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA), Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), and Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV). Thankfully, a number of champions remain, including Rep. David Price (D-NC) and Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D-IL), both proud political scientists.

Lastly, while sequestration was avoided in FY 2014 and FY 2015 thanks to the bipartisan budget agreement brokered in late 2013, the painful draconian cuts are scheduled to return in FY 2016, which will undoubtedly reignite the partisan battles over spending that have all but paralyzed Congress in recent years, unless additional steps are taken. This is the backdrop for our advocacy in 2015, further solidifying the need for all community partners to join the conversation in support of social and behavioral science funding.

The challenge to our community as we look to the future will be balancing the need to stay proactive in our outreach and advocacy while playing defense as discrete attacks arise. We have to resist the urge to be lured in by negative rhetoric that is often spun about social science and instead shift the conversation and advocate for social and behavioral science on our terms.

Despite the challenges of late, and any that may lie ahead, I am encouraged about our community's collective efforts to promote the value of social and behavioral science in meeting challenges of national importance. We are grateful to APSA's leadership in advocating for political science research and for its ongoing support as a COSSA Governing Member. The true value of COSSA is the opportunity for what may otherwise be dispersed disciplines to come together for a common cause to pursue shared goals. I'm thrilled to be part of the team.