



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Request:

- We join the larger science community, including the Association of Science-Technology Centers, in urging Members of Congress to continue to recognize the value of informal STEM education by:
 - Restoring the proposed reduction for the Informal Science Education (ISE) program at the National Science Foundation (NSF), and
 - To the maximum extent possible, re-vitalizing the ISE program at a rate commensurate with the Administration's intent to double NSF's budget over the next ten years.

Introduction:

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1950 "to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense..." With an annual budget of \$6.9 billion for FY 2010, NSF is the funding source for approximately 20 percent of all federally supported basic research conducted by America's colleges and universities. In many fields such as mathematics, computer science, and the social sciences, NSF is the major source of federal backing.

The agency is also charged with promoting the vitality of the nation's science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) research and education enterprises. As part of this mission, the Directorate for Education and Human Resources (EHR) has primary responsibility for providing national and research-based leadership in STEM education. EHR emphasizes six themes in fulfilling this responsibility: (1) Furthering public understanding of science and advancing STEM literacy; (2) Broadening participation to improve workforce development; (3) Promoting learning through research and evaluation; (4) Promoting cyber learning strategies to enhance STEM education; (5) Enriching the education of STEM teachers; and (6) Preparing scientists and engineers for tomorrow.

It is worth noting that, in addition to Informal Science Education, the Directorates for Biological Sciences, Education and Human Resources, Geosciences, and Social, Behavioral & Economic Sciences have all supported museums in the areas of collections improvements and digitization, database development, and educational programming. Museum exhibitions and educational programs and resources are built on a firm foundation of research, and museum researchers are making major original research contributions to the art, anthropology, and science communities.

For more information, please contact American Association of Museums' Government Relations at 202-289-1818 or visit us online at www.speakupformuseums.org.

EHR's Informal Science Education (ISE) program – funded at \$66 million in FY10 – invests in projects that promote lifelong learning of STEM in a wide variety of informal settings. Funding is provided for projects that advance understanding of informal STEM learning, develop and implement innovative strategies and resources for informal STEM education, and build the national professional capacity for research, development, and practice in the field.

Talking Points:

In 2009, the National Research Council of the National Academies released a report entitled *Learning Science in Informal Environments: People, Places, and Pursuits*. The report included the following findings:

- “Each year, tens of millions of Americans, young and old, explore and learn about science by visiting informal learning institutions, participating in programs, and using media to pursue their interests.”
- “Do people learn science in nonschool settings? This is a critical question for policy makers, practitioners, and researchers alike – and the answer is yes.”
- “Designed spaces – including museums, science centers, zoos, aquariums, and environmental centers – can support science learning. Rich with real-world phenomena, these are places where people can pursue and develop science interests, engage in science inquiry, and reflect on their experiences through sense-making conversations.”
- “Virtually all people of all ages and backgrounds engage in informal science learning in the course of daily life. Informal environments can stimulate science interest, build learners’ scientific knowledge and skill, and – perhaps most importantly – help people learn to be more comfortable and confident in their relationship with science.”
- “Informal environments can have a significant impact on science learning outcomes for individuals from non-dominant groups who are historically underrepresented in science.”

Status:

Informal Science Education funding is determined annually in the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. The President’s budget request included a \$1.6 million reduction for FY11.

Funding History:

	FY 2004 enacted	FY 2005 enacted	FY 2006 enacted	FY 2007 enacted	FY 2008 enacted	FY 2009 enacted	FY 2010 enacted	FY 2011 proposed
Appropriation <i>(in millions)</i>	\$62.1	\$62.8	\$62.7	\$63.9	\$64.5	\$65.7	\$66.0	\$64.4