

Charge of the Working Group of the NIH Council of Councils on Trans-NIH Research Opportunities in the Basic Behavioral and Social Sciences

Background:

In 2004, a Working Group (WG) of the NIH Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD) reported on the [Research Opportunities in the Basic Behavioral and Social Sciences](#). The report described the basic Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (bBSSR) funded by the NIH at that time and recommended a “home” for bBSSR that is relevant to the NIH mission but does not fit within the mission of any one NIH Institute or Center (IC). This report was the impetus for creating [OppNet](#), a trans-NIH initiative, funded from 2009 to 2014 primarily through IC taps, and since 2014 via voluntary support from participating ICs.

In the over 15 years since this report was issued, much has changed, both in the bBSSR field and in NIH support for this area of research. Updated analyses and directions for bBSSR are needed that reflect these changes.

- Although funding for bBSSR increased only modestly during years of flat NIH funding (from \$1.15B in FY08 to \$1.23B in FY14), during the past six years, when NIH funding increased by approximately 30% (from \$23.5B in FY14 to \$31.2B in FY19), bBSSR funding more than doubled (from \$1.23B in FY14 to \$2.56B in FY19). Grants coded as bBSSR now account for 8% of NIH extramural funding, and in the context of increased bBSSR funding over the past six years, the concern is less about adequate NIH investment in bBSSR and more about how well coordinated and adequately targeted the NIH investment is toward promising areas of research that have a plausible translational pathway to applied health research.
- The trans-NIH effort specifically designed to advance bBSSR, Oppnet, was [productive](#) in its five years of dedicated funding; however, as it has shifted to voluntary funding (OBSSR matches IC contributions up to \$2M, resulting a maximum OppNet budget of only \$4M per FY), its ability to address trans-NIH bBSSR needs is severely limited.
- A number of trans-NIH initiatives launched in recent years have the potential to support bBSSR related to epidemiology (e.g., AllofUs, ECHO, ABCD) and neuroscience (e.g., Blueprint, BRAIN). Identifying promising bBSSR directions can provide useful input to these trans-NIH initiatives on how they can best advance bBSSR within their respective missions while also identifying those directions outside their missions that will need to be pursued through other trans-NIH bBSSR efforts.
- Recent OBSSR analyses of applied behavioral and social sciences intervention grants reveals an insufficient translation of basic research into innovative behavior change approaches (only 14% of NIH-supported behavioral clinical trials awarded in FY18 evaluated novel intervention components or packages). In addition to various translational efforts, a bBSSR portfolio targeted toward promising areas of research with a plausible translational pathway to applied health research will facilitate the translation of basic research into novel intervention approaches.
- Tools developed by the Office of Portfolio Analysis (OPA) provide for more in-depth analyses of bBSSR funding, not only at NIH but at other agencies as well (e.g. NSF),

providing an opportunity to review and coordinate research goals across agencies and ensure that NIH's funding is complementary with other agencies.

- Scientific advances in neuroscience, behavioral assessment (e.g., sensors), data science, and AI and computational modeling are transforming the basic behavioral and social sciences. Future directions for NIH-supported bBSSR need to be considered in the context of these transformative advances.

Charge:

In light of these changes since the 2004 report, the Council of Councils WG on Trans-NIH Research Opportunities in the Basic Behavioral and Social Sciences is charged with addressing the following questions:

1. What are the promising and emerging areas of bBSSR that are priorities for NIH support (i.e., have a plausible translational pathway to health-relevant applied research; not supported under the mission of another funding agency)?
2. Which of these emerging areas of research are not adequately supported by the current NIH bBSSR portfolio?
3. Can these inadequately addressed emerging areas of research be addressed by individual IC efforts, or do some require a trans-NIH effort to address?

Working Group Membership:

Co-chairs: Graham Colditz (Council of Councils Member), William Riley (Associate Director for Behavioral and Social Sciences)

Working Group Members selected from editors of bBSSR journals, scientific leadership from bBSSR organizations). Members also will include ESIs and basic biomedical researchers. Membership will be diverse, both by gender and race/ethnicity.