FY 2010 Federal Initiatives Process

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Colleges' Earmarks Grow, Amid Criticism

Money from Congress flows to directed grants as peer-reviewed research struggles

By: JEFFREY BLOOMER and LINDA LINDSAY

Washington

A record-breaking number of Congressional pork-barrel projects this year has funded college and university plans with more of these controversial grants than ever before. The number of institutions receiving earmarks has shot up despite growing worries that the noncompetitive grants undermine the American scientific enterprise, and in spite of promises by some lawmakers to cut back.

An exclusive analysis by The Chronicle shows that legislators channelled more than 2,000 projects to 938 institutions, mostly for research, in the 2008 fiscal year. That is a 25 percent increase in the number of colleges and universities over 2003, when The Chronicle last surveyed earmarks. The total dollar amount for 2008 is at least $2.25 billion. The spending is a slight increase from five years ago, though it is a bit lower when adjusted for inflation. But it is a huge jump from 10 years ago, when pork spending totaled $528 million.

Earmarks are given out by members of Congress — without review of the projects' merits by knowledgeable scientists — by operating the money into annual spending bills to favor constituents. This year, for the first time, it is possible to see just how widespread the practice is. A new law requires Congress to identify the sponsors of every earmark.

The numbers and names show "a system that's out of control," says Michael S. Lifshitz, director of public affairs at the American Physical Society.

The danger of increased earmarking, critics charge, is that it continues even as legislators have fewer funds to spend for scientific grants awarded the conventional way, through open competitions and peer review. The National Science Foundation, for example, is giving just $2 billion this year to support research, a number it hoped for as recently as 2001. And the strength of that science has helped make America the world's biggest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's biggest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's biggest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's biggest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's biggest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's biggest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest, and the strength of that science has helped make America the world's strongest.
FY 2009 Federal Initiatives

• 82 Submissions (24 New Initiatives and 58 Continuing Initiatives)

• 64 Proposals Selected for Congressional Wishbook

• 19 Projects included in current appropriations bills (to date)
FY 2010 MSU Federal Appropriations Process Flowchart

1. Solicitation sent out to MSU Research Community - August
2. Presentations made to peer committee - October
3. Vice President for Research selects focused list - November
4. President Makes Final Recommendation - December
Bennie G. Thompson [D]

Chip Pickering [R]

Travis W. Childers [D]

Gene Taylor [D]
Thad Cochran [R]  
Roger Wicker [R]
A Sample Legislative Office - Who are the Major Players

• Senator/Representative - This is the person who will actually introduce legislation, and will receive credit for any successful earmark projects.
• Chief of Staff - This is the person who is responsible for the overall office, and is normally considered the #2 person within a congressional office.
• Legislative Director - This is the person who is responsible for steering proposed legislation through congress.
So, My Project Has Gone Forward …

• In order for your project to be funded:
  – Step 1: It must be written into legislation by one of the Mississippi delegation.
  – Step 2: It must have money appropriated for the project to a particular federal agency.

• Just because Step 1 happens doesn’t mean that Step 2 will occur!

• It may take several years to get a new project funded.
The Ideal MSU Federal Initiative

• So, what makes an ideal Federal Initiative?
  – It must illustrate a strong potential for economic impact to the State of Mississippi.
  – It really needs to have a “Sunset Clause” - these projects are intended to provide a “shot in the arm” and should not be considered perpetual monies.
  – There should have been groundwork laid with the targeted federal agency and the potential program manager. The best earmarks are those with an eager agency and program manager.
  – It should be clear and easy to understand to someone who does not have a strong scientific background.
  – It must be defensible to the public given the scrutiny on federal earmarks.
What Is a Tough Sell?

- Ideas that really should go towards a competitive program such as NSF or NIH.
- Anything which would be awkward on the front page of the Washington Post.
- Most “Bricks and Mortar” projects
- Overly complex ideas which are too difficult to convey to a general audience.
- Projects without a strong interest to the targeted federal agency.
Some Thoughts on Earmarks…

• Federally directed funds are not simply blank checks.
• Faculty performance expectations from federally directed projects are the same as funds garnered through the traditional peer-review process.
• Federally directed projects allow us to build research infrastructure that is often built using other monies at our peer and peer+ competitors.
• MSU is more competitive for peer-reviewed research funds than we were eight years ago.
Questions?

More Information: http://www.research.msstate.edu/