As researchers, we know what it’s like to work for months or (dare I say it) even years on a project and not see results. Unfortunately, the same can be true in the policy world. Congressional staff and advocates can work tirelessly on an issue or bill only to see it sputter and die just before it reaches the finish line. It’s a discouraging feeling to say the least. However, researchers and advocates also know the feeling of triumph when your time and hard work pays off with meaningful outcomes.

I’m happy to report that the policy world got a pretty significant victory a few weeks ago on an issue that we’ve been dealing with for more than two years: sequestration. Sequestration refers to automatic, across-the-board cuts to federal discretionary spending. In fiscal year (FY) 2013, sequestration resulted in a 5% cut to all nondefense discretionary (NDD) programs, including research funding agencies like the National Science Foundation, USDA, and the Department of Energy.

These sequestration cuts, along with several years of flat or decreasing budgets, have put a significant strain on our nation’s research funding agencies, resulting in fewer grants, fellowships, and training programs—the very lifeblood of the research enterprise. While it is important to maintain fiscal responsibility, ignoring critical investments in research and technology will ultimately undermine our global competitiveness.

To amplify the strength of that message, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA partnered, not only with other scientific disciplines, but with more than 3,000 domestic organizations in a massive advocacy effort. This unique coalition, called NDD United, has been working with Congress for more than two years to end sequestration. During this time ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, along with our coalition partners, have been reaching out to Congress, writing op-eds, and developing reports to show the negative impacts of sequestration and urging Congress to replace sequestration with a more responsible plan.

The Power of Advocacy

And you know what? It worked. In December, Senate Budget Committee Chairman Patty Murray and House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan announced a two-year budget agreement had been reached. The bill set the overall funding level for FY2014 and FY2015 and provided relief from sequestration, increasing discretionary spending by about $63 billion above sequester levels for FY2014. Not only does this agreement provide much needed relief from sequestration, but it also helps restore order to the budget process so that Congress can work to set meaningful budget priorities as opposed to governing from crisis to crisis as it has over the past few years.

The budget agreement is a tremendous victory for our community and shows the power of grassroots advocacy. In fact, a recent article in The Hill lauded the combined efforts of NDD programs to end sequestration as one of the “top 10 lobbying efforts of 2013.”¹ When we work together with a united voice, we can enact change.

While we in the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Science Policy Office are, of course, encouraged by the budget deal and the reprieve from sequestration, we hope that our members see the important role they played in achieving this goal. Only through your efforts—your emails, your tweets, your signatures—could we have gotten here. So share in this victory—you earned it.


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