

Dear Drs. Mabee and de Couet,

I write on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Animal Behavior Society (ABS), regarding the recent decision by NSF to cut the DDIG program within the IOS and DEB programs. As you might know, the Animal Behavior Society is the principal society of its kind in the Western Hemisphere. Together with our sister organization in the Eastern Hemisphere, the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB), we edit our field's flagship scientific journal, *Animal Behaviour*. ABS also sponsors annual research conferences, educational programs, outreach activities, student research grant competitions, and a professional certification program. The feedback we have received indicates that ABS members, especially those based in the United States, are profoundly dismayed at the decision to terminate the DDIG program. Here are three points that have come up.

First, DDIG funding itself has enabled fantastic capstone research projects by our very best students. The funding packages have been relatively modest on a per-award basis, but sufficient to enable awardees to generate one or more extra publications, which in some cases have become those students' most exciting and novel work. The call for proposals of the DDIG itself encourages scientific daring and creativity, by requiring that the project extends beyond a student's mainline PhD topic.

Second, we can state with confidence that the funding needs for graduate student research have been expanding, not contracting. For decades we have been running our own graduate student funding competition, with most awards typically falling between 1K and 2.5K USD. To provide a sense of the increasing popularity of our program, here are some numbers: For our 2016 grants competition, we received 267 individual applications, more than triple compared to 2010 (85 applications). Our funding rates have fallen, and loss of the IOS DDIG program will only exacerbate that problem. The remaining funding mechanisms for supporting core research performed by graduate students are of course appreciated, but do not mesh nearly as well with ABS strategic interests.

Third, in our view the DDIG program aligns closely with ABS' own commitment to graduate students' professional development. DDIG proposals represent the first time many of our students craft independent, detailed research proposals, and it is common for our members to present courses and workshops to help our students meet these challenges. Indeed the DDIG program has been a premier mechanism for us, as faculty mentors and DDIG panelists, to offer guidance to the next generation of animal behavior researchers, from a broad diversity of institutions and backgrounds, as they move towards independence. Awards also encourage our best students to remain in science.

We appreciate the many challenges NSF BIO faces, and understand that the decision might be irrevocable. Nevertheless, we still wanted to express our great enthusiasm for the DDIG program, and our correspondingly great dismay at its apparent demise. We also would like to offer our help in case there is room to reconsider or reframe the decision.

Sincerely,

Jeff Podos  
President-Elect, Animal Behavior Society