NSF 19612 - Law & Science (LS)

SBE/SES

Next due 3 August 2020

The Law & Science Program considers proposals that address social scientific studies of law and law-like systems of rules, as well as studies of how science and technology are applied in legal contexts. The Program is inherently interdisciplinary and multi-methodological. Successful proposals describe research that advances scientific theory and understanding of the connections between human behavior and law, legal institutions, or legal processes; or the interactions of law and basic sciences, including biology, computer and information sciences, STEM education, engineering, geosciences, and math and physical sciences. Scientific studies of law often approach law as dynamic, interacting with multiple arenas, and with the participation of multiple actors. Fields of study include many disciplines, and often address problems including, though not limited, to: Crime, Violence, and Policing; Cyberspace; Economic Issues; Environmental Science; Evidentiary Issues; Forensic Science; Governance and Courts; Human Rights and Comparative Law; Information Technology; Legal and Ethical Issues related to Science; Legal Decision Making; Legal Mobilization and Conceptions of Justice; Litigation and the Legal Profession; Punishment and Corrections; Regulation and Facilitation of Biotechnology (e.g., Gene Editing, Gene Testing, Synthetic Biology) and Other Emerging Sciences and Technologies; Use of Science in the Legal Processes

The Law & Science (LS) Program is a standing, interdisciplinary program in the Division of Social and Economic Sciences (SES), and in the Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE). LS considers and funds proposals from many disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives in support of innovative research on law and law-like systems of rules. LS collaborates with other programs in SES and SBE, and at the Foundation more broadly. In addition, LS partners with other federal agencies, including the National Institute of Justice, to support the study of social, behavioral, and forensic sciences.

Successful proposals describe research that advances scientific theory and understanding of the connections between human behavior and law, legal institutions, or legal processes, as well as studies of how science and technology are applied in legal contexts. Scientific studies of law often approach law as dynamic, made in multiple arenas, with the participation of multiple actors. Scholars study mobilization, the creation and implementation of law, the meanings of rules or laws to both individuals and institutions, and the impact of law on societies. The Program considers proposals that examine historical, social, cultural and policy-related questions that arise concerning law. The Program invites proposals relying upon qualitative and/or quantitative methods. The Program also considers and funds proposals from many different disciplines, including anthropology, communications, criminology/criminal justice, economics, legal scholarship, political science, psychology, public policy, sociology and other STEM disciplines. The Program also invites proposals addressing the interactions of law and basic sciences, including biology, computer and information sciences, STEM education, engineering, geosciences, and math and physical sciences. The sites for the study of law are multiple and may include appellate and trial courts; domestic and international regulatory offices; federal, state, and local law enforcement; and the variety of settings in which organizations deploy law. Proposals are welcome that address legal processes that extend beyond any single nation, as well as about how local and national legal institutions, systems, and cultures engage transnational or international phenomena.

Themes below are representative of previous awards from the Law & Science Program, but do not constitute an exclusive listing of relevant topics.

* Crime, Violence, and Policing: Research develops theories of crime and methods of crime control (e.g., policing) based upon social and forensic science theories. It examines the etiology of violence in the context of domestic criminal behavior, terrorism, and cross-national conflict, as well as the use of new technologies in crime detection and prevention.
* Economic Issues: Research explores the significance of property rules or contracts in legal disputes, claims in social welfare states, and the role of law in labor and migration policies.
* Forensic Science: Research examines the development, implementation, and the reliability of various forensic technologies such as DNA, fingerprinting, and weapons analysis, especially with respect to the technologies' human dimension (e.g., assessment and interpretation of accuracy).
* Governance and Courts: Research examines the deployment of law, including conceptions of what counts as law both cross-nationally and over time. Inquiry in this area addresses how rules have been understood, and the varying format that governing takes in local, regional, national and transnational settings, including trial and appellate courts at various levels.
* Human Rights and Comparative Law: Research examines the claims processes for rights violations and mechanisms for providing restitution. Research also explores legal systems in other nations from anthropological, historical, jurisprudential, and sociological perspectives.
* Legal Decision Making: Research examines how people and institutions make decisions in the context of particular rules or statutes, and the values revealed in those decisions concerning pressing public issues, civil and criminal justice processes. Research also examines how law is interpreted and reinterpreted by individuals, and how expectations concerning the law influence how people claim rights and responsibilities.
* Legal and Ethical Issues Related to Biotechnology, Environmental Science, Cyberspace and Information Technology: Research explores the intersection between law, technology and science with a focus on how scientific innovation influences the legal system and how the law regulates scientific discovery.
* Legal Mobilization and Conceptions of Justice: Research assesses how and when people understand their challenges as legal problems, how individuals choose among systems to pursue justice (e.g., family, communities, non-profit organizations, or state actors), how individuals or groups access justice systems, as well as various equity issues that arise in mobilizing justice; and how well individuals and groups understand justice.
* Litigation and Legal Professions: Research addresses the mutual constitution of the legal professions and the world in which they work and assesses the influence of these professions on public policies and practices. Research also investigates the various forms of litigation and legal services available to people, professionals' understanding of their ethics and responsibility, and issues regarding equity in participation in the profession.

General Comments

* It is great that there are research questions and hypotheses on page 5. Consider presenting an overarching research question that helps frame the proposal, present this overarching research question on Page 1.
* It would be stronger to indicate who is going to do what. The proposal discusses the activities using ‘we’ a lot, but who is we? Are postdocs, graduate students, or undergraduates going to be involved? If so, what will their responsibilities be? Are any of them women or underrepresented minorities?
* The Project Management plan needs details. There are 3 faculty members associated with this project. How will they meet to discuss things? How will they co-mentor graduate students? How many students are involved?
  + Talk a little about how the project will be managed. How will you know if you are on target to make the goals for each year. What will the consequences be. Where are your students coming from?
* Given the level of interactions / recruitments / interviews what are some of the things that can go wrong? It is customary to have a section on possible pitfalls and alternate strategies that can help you overcome some of the easy-to-anticipate problems.
* Compliance violations (that will get the proposal returned without review):
  + Need a section labeled Broader Impacts
  + Need a section labeled Results from Prior NSF Support
* Need to identify innovation / novelty on Page 1, on Page 3 (Research Objectives and Hypotheses), and Page 10 (Technical Plan and Methodology).
* Milestones / metrics for some of the activities listed on page 14 are not possible. How do you measure some of these?
* Need an evaluation plan that allows you to judge what you have accomplished. Suggest presenting a Gantt chart / logic model that allows summative and formative assessment of what you will do.