



Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education: Background and Funding

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Summary

The Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) supports projects to encourage innovative reform and expand education opportunities to underrepresented groups. This report describes the historical context leading to the establishment of the Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education, provisions governing the program, and the variety of projects funded by FIPSE. As part of the Higher Education Act (HEA), FIPSE would likely be part of any HEA reauthorization in the 110th Congress. This report will be updated to reflect major legislative action on FIPSE reauthorization.

Contents

Background	1
FIPSE Provisions and Projects Funded.....	1
Funding History	3
Legislative Action in the 110 th Congress.....	4

Tables

Table 1. FIPSE Funding, 2001-2008; Including FIPSE-Specific Funding and Congressionally Directed Awards	4
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Contacts

Author Contact Information	4
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Since its inception over 30 years ago, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) has funded projects to encourage innovative reform and expand educational opportunities to underrepresented groups. Through grants under this program, institutions of higher education (IHEs) have developed programs to improve teaching and curriculum. FIPSE was created by the Education Amendments of 1972 (P.L. 92-318) as an amendment to the Higher Education Act (HEA).¹

Background

In 1967, the Carnegie Foundation Commission on Higher Education's *Quality and Equality: New Levels of Federal Responsibility for Higher Education* proposed an independent federal agency, a national foundation, to encourage experimental development in higher education. A 1971 report by the Newman Task Force, *Report on Higher Education*, also favored federal actions to support innovation in higher education.²

College enrollments greatly increased in the decade leading up to passage of the Education Amendments of 1972. This was attributable to several factors including the baby boom generation reaching college age, the civil rights movement, and the expanded student aid provisions of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (P.L. 89-329).³ As the college student population became increasingly diverse, issues of access and affordability grew. With the passage of the 1972 Amendments to the HEA, the debate over assistance to students versus institutional aid for funding higher education was settled in favor of aid to students in the form of Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (BEOG). FIPSE, a small program to improve postsecondary education, was a remnant of earlier proposals for a foundation to support innovation in education. FIPSE was created in part to help revitalize a traditional and less inclusive higher education system.

FIPSE Provisions and Projects Funded

As authorized by the HEA, FIPSE supports innovative projects to achieve a variety of purposes. These include efforts to

- encourage the reform and improvement of postsecondary education and provide equal educational opportunity for all;
- create institutions and programs offering new paths to career and professional training and new combinations of academic and experimental learning;
- establish institutions and programs based on communications technology;
- carry out changes in the internal structure and operations in postsecondary educational institutions to clarify priorities and purposes;
- design and introduce cost-effective methods of instruction and operation;

¹ P.L. 92-318, Title III, § 404.

² For background on the 1972 Amendments to HEA and proposals for an innovation entity in higher education, see Lawrence E. Gladieux and Thomas R. Wolanin, *Congress and the Colleges: the National Politics of Higher Education* (Lexington, MA: Heath and Co., 1976), pp. 50-54.

³ Virginia B. Smith et al., *Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education: The Early Years* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002), p. 1.

- introduce institutional reforms to expand opportunities for individuals to enter and reenter institutions of higher education and pursue programs of study tailored to their needs;
- introduce reforms in graduate education, in the structure of academic professions, and the recruitment and retention of faculties; and
- create new institutions and programs for examining skills and awarding credentials, and reform current institutional practices relating to credentialing.⁴

A National Board composed of 15 members and a Director appointed by the Secretary of Education serve in an advisory capacity to the Secretary. Members serve for overlapping three-year terms and represent public interest groups, including students and the education field. Those from education constitute a minority of the Board. Selection to the Board is based on an individual's ability "to contribute an important perspective on priorities for improvement in postsecondary education and strategies of educational and institutional change." The Board advises the Secretary on the preparation of grant competitions and the means of evaluating, disseminating, and adapting demonstrated improvements in postsecondary education.⁵

To achieve the goals set forth in its legislation, FIPSE awards grants that support "exemplary, locally developed projects that are models for innovative reform and improvement in postsecondary education."⁶ The FIPSE National Board, along with the Secretary, establishes funding competitions, priorities, and procedures for granting awards. Because FIPSE defines higher education broadly, applicants for its discretionary grants and contracts include not only IHEs but a variety of public and private nonprofit institutions and agencies offering education after high school. These can include technical and business schools, testing agencies, professional associations, cultural institutions, and student groups.⁷ Awards are typically three years in duration but some may be five-year grants.

FIPSE supports projects that define a widely felt need in higher education, present a strategy for meeting the need, and also demonstrate the ability to implement the strategy. Seed money from FIPSE promotes innovative educational reforms for specific local problems identified by the grant applicants. Funded projects should have the potential for greater dissemination and wider influence. Currently, the discretionary grant programs supported by FIPSE include

- **Comprehensive Program**—Most awards are made through this program and focus on projects that improve practices in higher education. Each year FIPSE announces invitational priorities in the *Federal Register* for those areas of reform and improvement that the Administration, working with the educational community and FIPSE staff, has determined to be most critical. Applicants must submit a preapplication to be eligible to submit a final application. The

⁴ 20 U.S.C. § 1138.

⁵ 20 U.S.C. § 1138a.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, *Fiscal Year 2008 Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to the Congress*, vol. II (2007), p. R-60. (Hereafter cited as ED, *FY2008 Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to Congress*.)

⁷ *Operating Principles of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education*. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oep/fipse/princp.html?exp=0>.

competitions generate numerous applications and, on average, 1 in 30 receives funding, making FIPSE one of the most competitive federal grant programs.⁸

- **International Consortia Programs**—These programs include the U.S./European Community Program, the North American Mobility Program (United States, Mexico, and Canada), and the U.S./Brazil Program. ED and the Russian Federation are currently discussing a US/Russia program. Funding supports educational consortia of institutions from the different countries to promote mutual understanding, and increase educational opportunities and student and faculty exchanges.⁹

In 2002, FIPSE priorities were revised to reflect the Administration's priorities in higher education. While applicants may propose any project within the scope of the authorizing statute (20 U.S. C. § 1138), the invitational priorities of particular interest to the Administration include

- improving the quality of K-12 teaching through improved teacher preparation;
- promoting reform in curriculum and instruction from college preparation through graduate levels using student-centered or technology-mediated strategies;
- designing cost-effective methods of improving postsecondary instruction and operations; and
- supporting ways of ensuring equal access to postsecondary education and improving rates of retention and program completion especially for underrepresented students.¹⁰

Funding History

Over time, annual appropriations for FIPSE have been significantly increased by congressionally directed funding for specific projects added during the appropriation process. In FY2005, FIPSE received 418 congressionally directed, noncompetitive grants totaling \$145.2 million. Competitive grants received \$17.4 million. This funding went to support continuing multi-year grants. Consequently FIPSE cancelled its FY2005 competitive grant process.¹¹

In FY2006, FIPSE received \$21.9 million in appropriations. There were no congressionally directed funds in the final FY2006 appropriation. During the FY2007 appropriation process, the House proposed \$90.1 million and the Senate proposed \$80.5 million in congressionally directed funds for FIPSE. With the passage P.L. 110-5, the Revised Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2007, FIPSE was level funded at the FY2006 amount. **Table 1** shows Presidential requests and final total appropriations for FIPSE from FY2001 through FY2008, distinguishing FIPSE-specific funding from congressionally directed funding.

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, *Fiscal Year 2001 Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to the Congress*, vol. II (2000), p. S-64.

⁹ ED, *FY2008 Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to Congress*, p. R-60.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, "Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education-Comprehensive Program (Preapplications and Applications); Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 2003," 67 *Federal Register* 79066 (December 27, 2002). The same priorities are in the *FY2008 Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to Congress*, p.R-61-62.

¹¹ As per telephone conversation with Levenia Ishmell at FIPSE, March 8, 2005.

Table 1. FIPSE Funding, 2001-2008; Including FIPSE-Specific Funding and Congressionally Directed Awards

Fiscal Year	Presidential Request	FIPSE-Specific Funding	Congressionally Directed	Total Appropriations
2001	\$31,200,000	\$31,187,000	\$115,500,000	\$146,687,000
2002	\$51,200,000	\$31,222,000	\$149,700,000	\$180,922,000
2003	\$39,138,000	\$31,968,000	\$139,100,000	\$171,068,000
2004	\$39,138,000	\$32,000,000	\$125,700,000	\$157,700,000
2005	\$32,000,000	\$17,400,000	\$145,200,000	\$162,604,000
2006	\$22,211,000	\$21,989,000	\$0	\$21,989,000
2007	\$21,989,000	\$21,989,000	\$0	\$21,989,000
2008	\$21,988,000	to be determined	to be determined	to be determined

Source: ED, *Fiscal Year 2006 Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to the Congress*, vol. II (2005), p. S-60; ED, *Fiscal Year 2008 Justifications*, p. R-61, and ED Fiscal Year 2008 President's Budget Table (3/28/2007).

Legislative Action in the 110th Congress

The HEA was last fully reauthorized by the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 (P.L. 105-244). Though authorization expired in FY2003, authorization of the HEA has been extended three times by P.L. 108-366, P.L. 109-81, and P.L. 109-238. Legislation relating to FIPSE may be part of an overall reauthorization of the HEA. No legislation has, as yet, been proposed.

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