Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

IN FOCUS

November 17, 2026

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy: Overview and Considerations for Congress

Congress has a long-standing interest in federal science and technology (S&T) policy, including the coordination of multiagency research and development (R&D) initiatives and the alignment of executive branch priorities with congressional direction. Congress established the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) within the Executive Office of the President through the National Science and Technology Policy, Organization, and Priorities Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-282). Formally, OSTP leads executive branch S&T policymaking, advising the President on S&T matters of national importance, coordinating federal R&D activities, and working with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and federal agencies to develop Administration R&D priorities through the federal budget process. This In Focus describes OSTP's background and statutory responsibilities, highlights selected OSTP activities during the second Trump Administration, and identifies selected issues for Congress.

Overview and Key Functions

Congress established the basic organizational structure for OSTP (42 U.S.C. §6612), which allows for one office head—the OSTP Director—to be nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate; not more than four Associate Directors, also to be nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate; and a chief technology officer (CTO), who also serves as an Associate Director and who is subject to confirmation by the Senate. Statute does not prescribe specific policy divisions or teams within OSTP. Therefore, presidential Administrations may structure OSTP according to their preferences and policy priorities. This structuring has typically included the creation of divisions or teams to organize the office's advisory and coordination duties into specific policy areas. Congress provides funding for office staffing and operations through the annual Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations acts. OSTP has traditionally been staffed by a combination of permanent staff, political appointees, individuals on assignment from federal agencies, individuals on temporary assignment from outside the federal government, and fellows.

Advising the President

Statute directs OSTP to serve as "a source of scientific and technological analysis and judgment for the President with respect to major policies, plans, and programs of the Federal Government" (42 U.S.C. §6614). S&T policy issues tend to reach the presidential level if they involve multiple agencies; have substantial budgetary, economic, national security, or foreign policy dimensions; or are highly visible to the public. When these matters reach the Oval Office, Presidents generally seek information and advice from OSTP and two advisory councils for which it provides leadership and administrative support: the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC)—a cabinet-level body of federal advisors—and the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST)—a federal advisory committee primarily composed of nonfederal advisors. In some Administrations, the President has concurrently appointed the OSTP Director to the position of Assistant to the President for Science and Technology (APST), a position that does not require Senate confirmation and that allows for the provision of confidential advice to the President on matters of S&T.

Coordinating Federal R&D Initiatives

Statute also requires the OSTP Director to evaluate the "scale, quality, and effectiveness" of federal S&T activities and assist with the coordination of federal R&D programs (42 U.S.C. §6613). Recognizing that certain lines of research or national challenges are best confronted when the nation's S&T resources work in concert, Congress has established several multiagency R&D initiatives in statute, including the National Nanotechnology Initiative (NNI), the National Quantum Initiative (NQI), and the National Artificial Intelligence Initiative (NAII). For each of these initiatives, Congress has tasked OSTP and the NSTC with varying roles in coordinating and administering cross-agency planning and collaboration.

S&T Priorities and the Federal Budget Process

A primary means by which OSTP fulfills its statutory duties to establish, coordinate, and implement S&T priorities across the federal government is through its participation in the President's annual budget proposal. OSTP and OMB typically issue guidance identifying Administration R&D priorities, which agencies are encouraged to consider in preparing annual budget submissions to OMB. OSTP subsequently works with OMB in reviewing agency submissions to ensure they reflect these priorities. The President, the OMB Director, and the Cabinet make the final decisions reflected in the President's budget.

OSTP Under the Second Trump Administration

During the 119th Congress, the Senate confirmed Michael Kratsios as Director of OSTP and Ethan Klein as both an Associate Director of OSTP and U.S. CTO. President Trump also appointed Kratsios to serve concurrently as APST and OSTP Director. OSTP's public website does not indicate whether policy-focused teams have been created (as they were during the Biden Administration and for at least a portion of the previous Trump Administration). For FY2026, Congress provided OSTP with $8.0 million through P.L. 119-74, the same amount it provided for FY2024 and FY2025. Though enacted appropriations

legislation does not specify staffing levels, the President's FY2027 budget requested support for 33 full-time equivalent (FTE) personnel, equal to the estimated FY2026 FTE staff level and an increase of 9 FTE personnel over the actual FY2025 FTE staff level. Total OSTP staff levels are unclear, however, as FTE personnel represent only a fraction of staff working at OSTP. The office has typically relied heavily on federal agency detailees, fellows, and individuals serving on temporary assignment under the Office of Personnel Management's Intergovernmental Personnel Act mobility program (referred to as IPAs).

Under the current Trump Administration, OSTP has issued several documents outlining the Administration's S&T priorities. Summaries of selected policy memoranda and reports that may be of interest to Congress are provided below.

Science: A New Golden Age

In a July 2026 report to the President titled *Science: A New Golden Age*, OSTP Director Michael Kratsios issued a critique of the current U.S. S&T ecosystem and proposed a series of related reforms. In the report, Kratsios argued that despite the continued value of federally funded science, U.S. researchers "are fighting against an increasingly calcified system that has driven up the cost of scientific progress over time." Citing direction from President Trump to "revitalize the national science enterprise," the report proposed a wide range of changes to federal science institutions, including approaches to collaboration with universities, industry, and private philanthropy. Proposed changes detailed in the report are intended to align with four overarching goals: (1) ensuring that the U.S. research system prioritizes individual scientists over legacy institutions; (2) changing how the federal government allocates, distributes, and assesses research funding; (3) setting clear scientific goals and building industrial capacity to translate discovery into technological advances; and (4) preparing the research enterprise for the artificial intelligence (AI) "revolution."

National Security Science and Technology Strategy

In August 2026, OSTP issued the first *National Security Science and Technology Strategy* (NSSTS), pursuant to Section 10612 of the CHIPS and Science Act (P.L. 117-167; 42 U.S.C. §19221), which directed OSTP to issue a strategy "on the Nation's economic security, science, research, and innovation" in support of each issuance of the *U.S. National Security Strategy* (NSS). Building on strategic security priorities identified in the NSS, the NSSTS presented a strategy for the U.S. S&T enterprise that rests on four pillars: (1) focusing S&T activities toward technologies that enable "battlefield advantage," (2) building technological resilience to reduce risk across critical mission and technology areas, (3) accelerating the pace of innovation and technology adoption in the national security sector by incentivizing collaboration with the private and academic sectors and reducing administrative and regulatory burdens, and (4) protecting the S&T ecosystem from foreign theft, diversion, and exploitation.

FY2028 Federal R&D Priorities

For FY2028, OSTP and OMB have directed federal agencies to prioritize funding for certain areas of foundational research; R&D that aligns with the Administration's national S&T missions in AI, quantum, fusion, space, robotics, and semiconductors; research that seeks to leverage AI to transform the process of scientific discovery; R&D infrastructure; and manufacturing R&D across strategic technologies. OSTP and OMB's memo also outlines four "R&D Priority Practices," which translate many of the general principles articulated in *Science: A New Golden Age* into concrete direction for agencies. For example, the memo directs agencies to expand support for grants lasting five years or more. The memo also encourages agencies to establish "metascience" capabilities to evaluate the efficacy of agency programs and funding mechanisms with an eye toward driving organizational reforms. The memo directs certain agencies to submit an implementation plan for these priority practices to the APST and OMB Director within 90 days of July 21, 2026.

Considerations for Congress

Congress may consider several issues related to OSTP's statutory responsibilities and policy priorities under the current Trump Administration.

Proposed Research Enterprise Reforms

Congress may evaluate the potential effects of reforms proposed by *Science: A New Golden Age* to the research enterprise, such as adjustments to federal R&D grantmaking, including "fast grants" with rapid funding decisions and "golden tickets" to fund grants without consensus support during review. Congress may also consider whether proposed changes to how agencies evaluate funding proposals and make funding decisions may or may not align with existing statutory authorities and direction given to federal agencies.

National Security S&T Strategy Requirements

Congress may assess the efficacy of the NSSTS as specified in 42 U.S.C. §19221, as well as whether any potential changes to its scope may be needed. The statutory requirement is set to terminate on August 9, 2027. Congress could extend the requirement for a specified period or indefinitely. Alternatively, Congress could take no action and allow the requirement to sunset. In considering these options, Congress may weigh the unique value of the information provided by the strategy against the potential time and resources required for its production. Additional considerations may include the extent to which the 2026 strategy informs the budget process for FY2027 and FY2028 as well as congressional oversight.

Alignment of Federal R&D Priorities

Congress may consider the extent to which the Administration's FY2028 R&D priorities align with congressional priorities. Congress may also seek to review agency "R&D Priority Practices" implementation plans to assess alignment with congressional priorities.

Emily G. Blevins, Specialist in Science and Technology Policy

IF13354

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.