NSF 13-076
Dear Colleague Letter - Stimulating Research Related to the Use and Functioning of the Civil Justice System

Date: March 15, 2013

Law and Social Sciences (LSS) scholars have a rich tradition of describing and explaining how people and organizations mobilize the law, and, in turn, how legal institutions respond to legal demands. In order to stimulate research concerning the use and functioning of the civil justice system, the Law & Social Sciences program announces its continuing interest in supporting research in this area.

LSS scholars have developed useful knowledge concerning how people understand the law, what they do about their legal concerns, and how organizations define, mediate and answer legal concerns. In turn, courts and other legal institutions shape and impact people’s family lives, their housing choices, and their business and employment options. These impacts are central both to theory-building concerning legal mobilization and decision making by institutions and to understanding where and how law structures people’s lives.

The Law & Social Sciences program invites research on how people and organizations define legal claims, whether and how they mobilize the law on their behalf, and how legal institutions respond to questions about civil justice.

Proposals concerning civil justice are invited to consider problems involving and not limited to the following:

- Individual decisions to engage legal institutions and assistance, and the institutional, cultural, social and economic factors that shape those decisions;
- Mediating institutions that define, mobilize or manage legal claims, and the differences they make in process and outcomes; and
- The process and outcomes of decision-making in courts, both trial and appellate.

Appropriate methods can include all of those used within the social and behavioral sciences, including and not limited to collecting and analyzing documents, conducting lab and field experiments, conducting surveys and interviews, and engaging in ethnographic research. Comparative approaches in which scholars analyze change over time or compare across jurisdictions are welcome.

Successful proposals will be based on a theoretically driven research design incorporating appropriate methods to: (1) formulate appropriate research questions; (2) implement the collection and analysis of data; (3) interpret the resulting measures and findings generated by the study; and (4) outline steps for successful dissemination to and beyond the scholarly community.

This is not a special competition or new program. Scholars with appropriate proposals should submit to the existing Law & Social Sciences program. Successful proposals will meet NSF’s criteria in terms of both intellectual merit and broader impacts. Proposals will be evaluated through the standard review process.

Sincerely,
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