

SIO Science Advocacy Follow-Up Discussion

A Scripps community response to the OMB proposed Federal Financial Assistance Rule

Meeting Information

Date: 2026-06-02

Time: 17:00 to 18:10 PDT

Location: Virtual (Zoom)

Convener: Helen Amanda Fricker (SIO)

Series: SIO follow-up to the national Stand Up for Science (SUFS) online event held the same afternoon at 13:00 PDT

Executive Summary

Context

OMB has published a proposed Federal Financial Assistance Rule (Docket OMB-2026-0034) that would place political appointees in control of federal grant awards, reduce independent peer review to advisory status, and impose sweeping new restrictions on research, publication, conferences, and international collaboration. The rule would bind every federal science agency by October 1, 2026, and the public comment period closes on or about July 13, 2026. This session brought a circle of SIO academics together, immediately after the national Stand Up for Science event, to agree on a strategic frame and a concrete action plan.

Key Outcomes

- **Public comment is the top priority:** The group will mobilize substantive, provision-specific public comments to regulations.gov before the July 13 deadline. Under the Administrative Procedure Act, OMB must read and respond to every significant comment, and the record lays groundwork for litigation.
- **Strategic frame adopted:** Make the rule too politically expensive for elected officials to support. It takes very few senators to block measures, so the effort concentrates pressure on a small number of pivotal members.
- **Writing party planned at MJH:** A gathering combining TG with a hands-on writing party will guide community members through filing comments, using a prompt-based template. A hold is in place on MJH for June 17.
- **Coordination beyond SIO:** The group will engage SIO Government Relations (Kathleen Ritzman), build a shared resource drive, and coordinate across R1 institutions and other universities, recognizing that partners with Washington relationships face constraints the SIO group does not.

Background: The OMB Proposed Rule

The threat at the center of this meeting is OMB's proposed rule, published in the Federal Register on May 29, 2026 (Docket OMB-2026-0034). Elizabeth Ginexi, a former NIH program official, has published a widely circulated summary identifying the rule's most consequential

changes. The provisions below are the ones most directly relevant to SIO. They are drawn from her summary, which catalogs roughly nineteen changes in total.

Provision	Effect
Political control of awards (§200.205)	Senior political appointees must personally review every discretionary grant before award and are forbidden from deferring to peer reviewers.
Peer review demoted (§200.205(d))	Peer review recommendations become advisory only, dismantling the post-WWII merit-based system used by NIH, NSF, DOE, and NASA.
“Gold Standard Science” test (§200.205)	An undefined standard, tied to EO 14303, that lets the administration favor or disfavor institutions at its discretion.
Grants terminable any time (§200.340)	Active, multi-year awards can be terminated for being “inconsistent with agency priorities,” with only a brief written rationale.
International collaboration barred (§200.220)	Broad prohibition on funds for bilateral or multilateral collaboration with covered foreign countries, disrupting partnerships foundational to climate and ocean science.
Conferences need pre-approval (§200.432)	Conference attendance on grant funds is allowable only if expressly approved and written into the award at the outset.
Publication costs unallowable (§200.461)	Page charges, APCs, and open access fees are presumptively unallowable, in conflict with existing open access mandates.
Public communication restricted (§§200.421, 200.450)	Public relations costs and “issue advocacy” are barred, which could stop researchers from speaking publicly about their own findings.

Bottom line: The rule layers political control over every stage of the federal science funding lifecycle, from program design through publication, and would be binding on every agency by October 1, 2026. The full summary is linked in the Appendix.

Background: Stand Up for Science National Event

This SIO discussion followed the national Stand Up for Science (SUFS) online event held at 13:00 PDT the same day. About 4,000 people registered and roughly 2,200 attended, with ASL interpretation. The speakers and their core messages are summarized below.

Speaker	Role	Key Points
Colette Delawalla	Founder and CEO, Stand Up for Science	Framed the rule as a “five-alarm fire.” Urged public comments and calls to Congress. Gave comment guidance: cite the provision number, address impacts, do not copy and paste, anonymous comments allowed, and both individuals and organizations can comment.
Carolyn Bertozzi	Nobel Laureate (2022), biomedical scientist	Placed the moment in historical context. Science serves the nation and humanity, and the OMB policy threatens the entire scientific enterprise.
Timothy Snyder	Historian of authoritarianism, author of <i>On Tyranny</i>	Science and democracy go together. If this can happen to science, it can happen anywhere. Compared the approach to late Stalinism, when science became subject to political approval and the USSR fell behind.

Speaker	Role	Key Points
Judy Chu	U.S. Representative, CA-28	The rule would reshape roughly \$1 trillion in science funding and impose political control. Cited \$1.5B in cancelled grants, a proposed 50% NSF cut, and the April firing of 22 National Science Board members. Response: Legislate, Litigate, Activate. "We are with you. We will fight back."
James Walkinshaw	U.S. Representative, VA-11	The rule lets political appointees review, override, and cancel grants on political grounds, part of a broader effort to empower the executive and weaken Congress and science. Committed to working with SUFS.
Bruno Perrin	Rationalist Union	Founded in the 1930s to combat fascism, awarded its 2025 prize to SUFS. Called for a fight for knowledge, enlightenment, and rationalism.
Norman Eisen	Co-founder, Democracy Defenders Action	Leading national court fights. Described OMB as a "battering ram." Cited recent legal wins and offered Democracy Defenders and SUFS collaboration on legal action.
Craig McLean	Former NOAA Chief Scientist	Spoke to courage and integrity in science, recounted his dismissal after "Sharpie-gate," and warned the US is slipping behind China. "Be loud, be proud. Stand up for science."
Elizabeth Ginexi	Former NIH program official (22 years)	Left NIH over violations of the Public Service Act. Wrote the Substack summary of the rule and a step-by-step primer for commenting. Substantive, provision-specific comments carry far more weight than form letters, and anonymous comments are allowed.

Helen Fricker had circulated the invitation to both events by email on May 30, along with channels for staying engaged: an encrypted SIO PI Signal group, the UCS Science Rising launch (June 3), and UC system faculty advocacy led by Walter Leal at UC Davis.

Participants

Present (active in the session)

Name	Role / Affiliation	Notes
Helen Amanda Fricker	Professor, SIO. Convener.	
Steve Diggs	CDO, Keeling Curve Foundation; Visiting Scholar, SIO	
Nan Renner	Birch Aquarium and UC San Diego / SIO	
Karen Stocks	SIO	Departed approx. 17:45
Lihini Aluwihare	Professor, SIO	
Valentina Di Santo	Participant	

Name	Role / Affiliation	Notes
Debi Kilb	SIO	Departed approx. 18:05

Roles reflect best available information and should be confirmed before distribution.

Referenced for follow-up (not present)

- Kathleen Ritzman, SIO Government Relations, the coordination point for institutional and congressional engagement.
- Christine, to organize meetings with congressional representatives.
- Lauren Wood (SIO Comms), to be asked whether she will attend the writing events. Steve will see her at the Hollywood Climate Summit.
- Donna Shabkie (SIO Events) , who handles scheduling for the MJH venue.
- Ralph Keeling and Tom Karl, authors of cited op-eds tying the science to public stakes.

Topics Covered

No formal agenda was set. The topics below emerged over the course of the discussion.

- Situation briefing: the OMB rule and the Stand Up for Science event
- Core strategic frame: making the rule politically expensive
- Tactics for political pressure
- How to comment effectively
- Coalition building and coordination
- Community mobilization: the writing party
- Supporting evidence tying SIO science to economic viability
- Logistics and the SIO action plan

Discussion Points

Situation Briefing and Strategic Framing

Key Points

- Helen opened with a “flood the zone” framing. The opposition's strategy is to overwhelm, so the scientific community needs to respond in kind and flood the zone back.
- Nan shared Elizabeth Ginexi's Substack summary of the OMB rule, which anchored the group's understanding of the stakes.
- Lihini noted that more than 2,000 people joined the earlier national call, a base of engagement to build on.

Key Insight

- National participation is large, so SIO can act as one node in a much larger effort rather than carrying the load alone.

Core Strategic Frame: Make It Politically Expensive

Key Points

- Steve stated the organizing principle plainly. The goal is to make the rule too politically expensive for elected officials to support.

- Nan pressed the practical question of how to operationalize that frame.
- Steve observed that it takes very few Republicans, especially in the Senate, to block measures, so concentrated pressure on a small number of members can be decisive.
- The group also wants to make clear that OMB must read and respond to every comment, and that the comment record creates a legal foundation for later challenges.

Key Insight

- Targeting a handful of pivotal members, and building a strong formal record, is more effective than diffuse messaging.

Tactics for Political Pressure

Key Points

- Hold local representatives accountable. Constituents expect their representatives to be their voice, with a clear message that failure to act carries consequences.
- Map, geographically, where the rule would cause the most severe economic damage, identify the members of Congress representing those areas, and target them.
- Write op-eds in mainstream media, with the case framed for red districts and states, forecasting the consequences for those constituents.
- Draw lessons from recent political setbacks for the administration (the “America 250” matter and the January 9 fund were cited) as evidence that sustained public pressure can shift outcomes.

How to Comment Effectively

Comment mechanics were a focus of the national event and carry directly into the SIO plan. The guidance below comes from Colette Delawalla and Elizabeth Ginexi.

Filing a public comment that counts

- Submit to regulations.gov, Docket OMB-2026-0034, on or before approximately July 13, 2026.
- Reference the specific provision number and describe concrete impacts on your research.
- Do not copy and paste shared text. Identical comments may be counted only once, so personalize every submission.
- Substantive, provision-specific comments carry far more weight than form letters.
- Anonymous comments are allowed, and both individuals and organizations can comment.
- Comments from red districts and states are especially valuable, since a bipartisan congressional stay is possible and the record supports litigation.

Coalition Building and Coordination

Key Points

- Steve framed two coordination tracks. First, work with Kathleen Ritzman and SIO Government Relations. Second, begin coordinating across R1 institutions such as WHOI, Texas A&M, the University of Washington, URI-GSO, and Miami, and with other universities.
- He emphasized that SIO does not have to do this alone, and clarified that broader R1 coordination is an eventual goal rather than an immediate one.
- An important distinction surfaced. Kathleen must preserve her relationships with staffers in Washington, while the SIO group operates without that constraint and can be more direct.

- Scientific societies were weighed as coordinators.

Key Insight

- Advance the grassroots and R1 tracks in parallel rather than depending on scientific societies, whose appetite for political engagement is uncertain.

Unresolved Questions

- Whether AGU, NASEM, or other societies will engage politically.
- The right sequencing between working through Government Relations and standing up an independent SIO and R1 effort.

Community Mobilization: The Writing Party

Key Points

- ????? proposed a gathering, framed as a party held around TG, as an enjoyable and impactful way to show that the SIO community is concerned.
- Karen endorsed a writing party, especially one paired with examples or a fill-in-the-blanks template that participants customize with their own information.
- Valentina suggested brainstorming at TG and then writing elsewhere, and flagged graduate students and postdocs as a key audience.
- The group discussed showing worked examples (such as Logan Spector's comment), inviting people to bring a copy of their comment, and offering a prize to encourage participation.
- The group also flagged a participation gap, and stressed broadening engagement across the **whole** community.

Key Insight

- A structured template plus a social, low-barrier setting turns individual concern into a volume of substantive, provision-specific comments, which is the input that actually carries weight.

Supporting Evidence: Tying SIO Science to Economic Viability

Several resources were surfaced to connect ocean and climate science to concrete economic stakes. These are compiled in the Appendix.

Key Points

- Ralph Keeling's invited op-ed in The Economist on the implications of the administration's posture toward climate science.
- Steve and Tom Karl's 2025 Eos feature on the looming data loss that threatens public safety and prosperity.
- Reporting on climate change as a systemic financial and insurance risk, including Allianz warnings and the emerging insurance crisis.
- The US Argo float data operational usage atlas, which illustrates the program's concrete, measurable value.

Decisions Log

ID	Decision	Rationale	Impact
D1	Make public comment on the OMB rule the SIO group's top priority, targeting the July 13 deadline.	Comments are the most direct lever, must be	Channels community energy into the highest-leverage action.

ID	Decision	Rationale	Impact
		answered under the APA, and build the legal record.	
D2	Adopt “make it politically expensive” as the organizing strategic frame.	Concentrated pressure on a few pivotal members of Congress is more effective than diffuse messaging.	Directs limited time toward the highest-leverage targets.
D3	Hold a writing party (with TG) at MJH built around a prompt-based template.	Substantive, personalized comments outperform form letters, and a social setting lowers the barrier.	Increases the volume and quality of comments filed before the deadline.
D4	Build a shared resource drive and coordinate beyond SIO.	National participation is large; SIO can act as one node and avoid duplicated effort.	Expands reach across Government Relations, R1s, and other universities.

Action Items

ID	Task	Owner	Priorty	Due	Status
A1	Create a shared Google Drive of resources for the effort.	Steve Diggs	High	ASAP	Not started
A2	Create a public comment template with prompts.	Nan Renner	High	Before June 17	Not started
A3	Organize the gathering (TG plus a writing party) to guide people through commenting.	TBD	High	June 17 (hold)	In progress
A4	Confirm MJH availability sooner than July 7.	Steve Diggs	High	2026-06-03	In progress (June 17 hold secured)
A5	Develop communications and show worked examples (e.g., Logan Spector).	TBD	Med	Before June 17	Not started
A6	Invite attendees to bring a copy of their comment and enter to win a prize.	TBD	Low	June 17	Not started
A7	Engage Kathleen Ritzman and Government Relations; share Ginexi's Substack with her.	Lihini Aluwihare	High	This week	Not started
A8	Ask Christine to organize meetings with congressional representatives.	TBD	Med	TBD	Not started
A9	Ask Lauren whether she will attend the writing events.	Steve Diggs	Med	During Hollywood Climate Summit	Not started

ID	Task	Owner	Priority	Due	Status
A10	Coordinate across R1 institutions and other universities (see also Reddit threads).	TBD	Med	Eventual	Not started
A11	Coordinate organizational responses (institutional comments).	TBD	Med	Before July 13	Not started
A12	Reach out to professional and personal networks to encourage comments.	All participants	High	Through July 13	Not started
A13	Mobilize the local community to file comments on the OMB rule.	All participants	High	Through July 13	In progress

Risk Register

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation	Owner
Comments treated as duplicates or form letters	Med	High	Use a prompt-based template, not boilerplate. Coach each person to cite specific provisions and personalize.	Nan Renner
Participation gap; the same small circle carries the load	Med	Med	Broaden outreach to networks, grad students, and postdocs. Use the prize and the social setting to draw people in.	Group
Scientific societies stay on the sidelines	Med	Med	Advance R1 and grassroots tracks in parallel. Do not depend on AGU or NASEM to lead.	Group
Coordination friction with DC-facing partners	Med	Med	Respect Kathleen's relationship constraints. Let the SIO group take a more direct public posture.	TBD
Deadline pressure (July 13)	High	High	Lock the June 17 writing party, stand up the resource drive now, and start network outreach immediately.	Steve Diggs

Next Steps

Immediate Priorities (Next Two Weeks)

- Stand up the shared resource Google Drive and Nan's comment template.
- Confirm the MJH date and lock logistics for the writing party (June 17 hold).
- Lihini to share Ginexi's summary with Kathleen Ritzman and Government Relations.
- Begin network outreach and the geographic impact mapping to identify target members of Congress.

Upcoming Milestones

Milestone	Target Date	Owner	Status
UCS Science Rising launch	2026-06-03, 12:00 PT	External	Register and attend
Community writing party at MJH	2026-06-17 (hold)	Steve Diggs	Venue hold placed
OMB public comment deadline	approx. 2026-07-13	All	Template in development
Rule effective government-wide	2026-10-01	n/a	Comment record and litigation groundwork

Next Meeting

Event: Community writing party (TG plus writing)

Date: 2026-06-17 (hold placed, to be confirmed) ●

Location: MJH (Martin Johnson House), Scripps

Preliminary focus:

- Walk through Nan's comment template and worked examples.
- Brainstorm, then draft substantive, provision-specific public comments.
- Bring in graduate students and postdocs, and invite people to file on the spot.

Additional Notes

- The SIO PI Signal group (encrypted) is the coordination channel. Members join by contacting Helen directly.
- Steve will be at the Hollywood Climate Summit with Lauren for the two days following the meeting.

Appendix: Resources Referenced

The rule and how to comment

Federal Register, regulation for federal financial assistance (Docket OMB-2026-0034):

<https://www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection/2026-10817/regulation-for-federal-financial-assistance>

Elizabeth Ginexi, summary of key changes in the OMB proposed rule:

<https://elizabethginexi.substack.com/p/summary-of-key-changes-in-ombs-proposed>

Stand Up for Science, public comment campaign:

<https://fight2win.standupforscience.net/campaign/163675/>

Stand Up for Science, take action: <https://www.standupforscience.net/>

Press and analysis

Ars Technica, on OMB's renewed effort affecting US science:

<https://arstechnica.com/science/2026/05/the-office-of-management-and-budget-tries-again-to-cripple-us-science/>

Op-eds and features

The Economist, implications of the administration's stance on climate science (Ralph Keeling, invited):

<https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2025/07/30/donald-trumps-war-on-climate-science-has-staggering-implications>

Eos, the looming data loss that threatens public safety and prosperity (Karl, Diggs, et al.):

<https://eos.org/features/the-looming-data-loss-that-threatens-public-safety-and-prosperity>

Climate as economic and insurance risk

The Guardian, climate crisis on track to destroy capitalism, Allianz warning:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/03/climate-crisis-on-track-to-destroy-capitalism-warns-allianz-insurer>

The Conversation, climate change is becoming an insurance crisis:

<https://theconversation.com/climate-change-is-becoming-an-insurance-crisis-260952>

Value of ocean observing

US Argo float data operational usage atlas:

https://atlas.mindmup.com/usargodatausage/us_argo_float_data_operational_usage/index.html

Advocacy channels (from Helen's May 30 email)

Union of Concerned Scientists, Science Rising launch (June 3, 12:00 PT):

<https://secure.ucs.org/a/2026-6-3-science-rising-launch-x>

- UC system faculty advocacy, Walter Leal (UC Davis): wsleal@ucdavis.edu

*Meeting notes compiled by: SC Diggs
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