

# Exploring the Intricacies of Science Funding

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Born in South Africa and raised in Israel, Dorit Zuk came to the U.S. for a postdoc at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and moved on to become scientific editor at the journals *Cell* and *Molecular Cell*.

Her interest in the AAAS Fellowships was piqued by explorations of how people who conduct scientific research interact with those who fund it. She spent a year at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), in the Office of Extramural Research, where she saw the “big picture” of how policy decisions affect funding. Dorit worked with staff across NIH, tracking how money flows within the agency and in labs and universities around the country and throughout the world.

For example, Congress passed a law in September 2007, mandating that all clinical trials be registered with the ClinicalTrials.gov database administered by the National Library of Medicine at the NIH. Dorit helped craft the policy that interprets the new rules, and wrote documents that communicate compliance issues to NIH grantees. She also delved into the area of financial conflicts of interest for researchers, updating and expanding information that explains the law governing conflict of interest and how to implement it.

What she found most fascinating was “to really see how you get from a sentence in a Congressional bill signed by the President to a working policy, while considering what that means to a scientist working at, say, the University of Minnesota.”

Dorit wanted two things out of her fellowship: a larger overview of how science policy is done, and to meet people doing it. She achieved both, and left Washington with a more nuanced understanding of policymakers and a greater appreciation for why things are done the way they are in the federal government. “Everybody knows that the government sometimes moves really slowly,” she said. “I found out why. The review and clearance process is really important, as anything the government does affects the lives of many people.”

Dorit initially took a post as program officer for science policy at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, but was lured back to NIH, where she is now special assistant to the deputy director for Extramural Research. “These are jobs that the fellowship prepared me for and that I probably couldn’t have gotten without it,” she said.

