



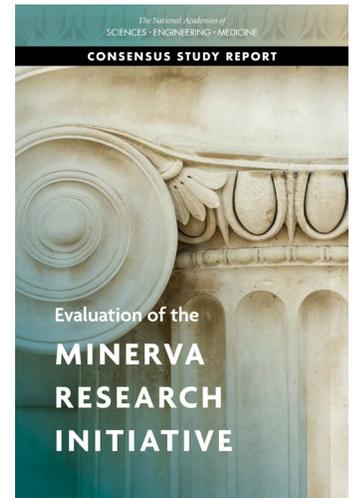
Evaluation of the Minerva Research Initiative

ISSUE BRIEF: COMMITTEE METHODS

The Minerva Research Initiative is a Department of Defense (DoD) social science grant program that funds unclassified basic research relevant to national security. The goal of the program is to make use of the intellectual capital of university-based social scientists to inform understanding of issues important to DoD and the broader national security community. At the request of DoD, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine convened a committee of experts to evaluate the program's successes and challenges during its first decade of operation and to offer guidance on the best path going forward. This issue brief summarizes the methods used by the committee to evaluate the Minerva program.

NATIONAL ACADEMIES PROGRAM REVIEW AND EVALUATION CONSENSUS STUDIES

A National Academies program review or evaluation consensus study assesses the direction, content, or capabilities of a federal or other governmental agency program. The activity is carried out by an appropriately knowledgeable and balanced ad hoc committee. Study committees are appointed by the National Academies and are subject to the institutional process of reviewing potential sources of bias and conflicts-of-interest. To guide its deliberations, a committee can collect information and conduct evidence-based analyses in a variety of ways. The committee's consensus is expressed in a report, which describes the evidence and analysis on which the consensus relies and presents the committee's findings, conclusions, or recommendations. Consensus study reports are subject to a confidential, independent peer-review process prior to release.



COMMITTEE TO ASSESS THE MINERVA RESEARCH INITIATIVE AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE TO ADDRESSING SECURITY CONCERNS

The committee appointed by the National Academies to evaluate the Minerva Research Initiative included experts in program review and evaluation as well as social scientists with broad, interdisciplinary backgrounds and experience with grants and journal publication standards in a range of fields. Several of the committee members also had in-depth experience with federal science-funding mechanisms. The names and affiliations of the committee members are listed at the end of this brief.

THE COMMITTEE'S INFORMATION-GATHERING ACTIVITIES

The committee undertook several information-gathering activities to gain an in-depth understanding of the Minerva Research Initiative and stakeholder perceptions of the program. These activities are summarized below. The committee's report describes the data, analyses, and limitations in further detail.

Reviews of Department of Defense and Other Public Records

The committee asked DoD to provide any available historical documentation about the program, including memoranda, speeches, presentations, and information about the grants that have been awarded over the years. In addition, National Academies' staff compiled background information and records relevant to the Minerva program available from public sources.

Interviews with Department of Defense Staff

To complement the information obtained from available records related to the Minerva program and learn about the perspectives of program staff, individual telephone interviews were conducted with current and former DoD staff involved with the Minerva Research Initiative over the years. Interviewees included current and former Minerva

program directors, staff from the Basic Research Office and the Office of Policy, Minerva program managers within the military service branches, and others affiliated with the program.

Grantee Survey

To understand the perspectives of the grantees and learn about the outputs of their research, a web survey was sent to the Principal Investigator of record for every grant awarded through 2017. Topics covered included: experiences with the Minerva program compared with other social science grant programs; level of engagement among social scientists; challenges associated with conducting research relevant to national security; opportunities resulting from the grant; and outputs resulting from the research. The survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago and had a 78 percent response rate (including 3 percent partially completed surveys).

Survey of Administrators of Sponsored Research at Academic Institutions

A web survey was administered to a census of administrators of sponsored research at institutions rated as having “highest research activity” and “higher research activity” based on the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Topics covered included: experiences with the Minerva program compared with other social science grant programs; level of engagement among social scientists; and perceptions of research relevant to national security. The survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago and had a 48 percent response rate (including 8 percent partially completed surveys).

Minerva Conference

Three committee members and a National Academies staff member attended the 2018 conference of Minerva grantees, held in Washington, DC. The event provided a valuable opportunity for the committee to gain further understanding of the grantees’ work, listen to their questions and comments, and experience firsthand the Minerva program’s main dissemination event.

Public Information-Gathering Sessions

Input obtained from stakeholders and experts during public meetings with the committee was an important source of information for the committee’s evaluation. Efforts were made to reach out to a broad range of stakeholders with diverse viewpoints. The committee heard from grantees, national security experts, representatives of social science organizations, staff from other government agencies and organizations with similar social science grant programs, and others.

THE COMMITTEE’S REPORT

Through the activities described, the committee gathered a substantial volume of information and input reflecting diverse perspectives. The committee’s report, [Evaluation of the Minerva Research Initiative \(2020\)](#), contains findings and recommendations based on the collective judgment and expertise of the committee, as informed by the information gathered and the qualitative and quantitative analyses conducted.

The committee concluded that the Minerva program has demonstrated its ability to make meaningful contributions to the body of social science research on a range of topics related to national security. The report also highlights ways to build on the Minerva Research Initiative’s vision to strengthen the program’s foundations and take advantage of opportunities for broadening its reach and usefulness.

In addition to the committee’s full-length report, [highlights of the findings](#) are available from the National Academies Press website (nap.edu). A [brief that includes highlights from three National Academies’ reports](#), including this study, and focuses on the role of social science research in national security is also available online.

COMMITTEE TO ASSESS THE MINERVA RESEARCH INITIATIVE AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE TO ADDRESSING SECURITY CONCERNS

ALLEN L. SCHIRM (*Chair*), Mathematica Policy Research (retired); **BURT S. BARNOW**, The George Washington University; **KAREN S. COOK**, Stanford University; **SUSAN E. COZZENS**, Georgia Institute of Technology; **BARBARA ENTWISLE**, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; **IVY ESTABROOKE**, PolarityTE, Inc.; **PAUL A. GADE**, U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (retired); **ROBERT M. HAUSER**, American Philosophical Society; **STEVEN G. HEERINGA**, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan; **DANIEL R. ILGEN**, Michigan State University; **VIRGINIA LESSER**, Oregon State University; **KATHRYN E. NEWCOMER**, The George Washington University; **MARK L. WEISS**, National Science Foundation (retired).

Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education

The National Academies of
SCIENCES • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE

The nation turns to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine for independent, objective advice on issues that affect people’s lives worldwide.

www.national-academies.org