

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) On Proposal Preparation and Award Administration**

### **A**

#### **Administrative Corrections**

**What should I do if I notice an error in a proposal I just submitted via FastLane?**

It is the responsibility of the proposing organization to thoroughly review each proposal prior to submission. On occasion, however, a problem is identified with a portion of the proposal after the proposal has been submitted electronically to NSF. The FastLane Proposal File Update Module allows the organization to request the replacement of files or revision of other Proposal Attributes, associated with a previously submitted proposal. A request for a proposal file update must be submitted by an individual who is authorized to submit proposals on behalf of the organization, and electronically signed by the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR). More information on and submission procedures for proposal file updates can be found in the Grant Proposal Guide (GPG) [Chapter III.B](#).

#### **Audit Reports**

**Where should copies of an A-133 audit report be sent?**

Under OMB Circular A-133, *Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-Profit Organizations*, for audits covering an accounting period which begins July 1, 1996 or after, a single audit format report should be sent to the Federal Audit Clearinghouse. If it is a program-specific format report, a copy of the report should be sent to the Clearinghouse as an archival copy and the report should be sent to the cognizant or oversight Federal agency for review (see Section .235 (c)(2) of the Circular).

#### **Award Administration**

**Where can I find information regarding post-award issues?**

Information regarding pre-award costs, prior approvals, extensions, transfer of PIs, reporting requirements and other award administration requirements can be found by accessing the applicable award conditions on the NSF Website. Additional information regarding the award and administration of NSF grants and cooperative agreements may be found in the *Grant Policy Manual* also available electronically on the NSF Website.

## C

### Categories of Funding Opportunities

**What types of mechanisms does NSF use to generate proposals? In what scenario is each mechanism used?**

NSF utilizes a variety of mechanisms to generate proposals. There are four categories of funding opportunities: Dear Colleague Letters, Program Descriptions, Program Announcements and Program Solicitations. For a description of each category and further information, consult the GPG [Chapter I.C.](#)

### CFDA Numbers

**What is the CFDA number and where can an awardee find it?**

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) profiles all Federal grant programs and is jointly issued by the Office of Management and Budget and the General Services Administration. The Catalog is available for reference in the government documents section of most major libraries and in the offices of State and local governments. The CFDA number is important for tracking and audit purposes. The applicable CFDA number is identified in the Summary section of NSF program announcements and solicitations. A complete listing of [NSF CFDA numbers](#), by Division, is included on the Policy Office Website.

### Collaborative Proposals

**What is a collaborative proposal?**

A collaborative proposal is one in which investigators from two or more organizations wish to collaborate on a unified research project. Collaborative proposals may be submitted to NSF in one of two methods: as a single proposal, in which a single award is being requested (with subawards administered by the lead organization); or by simultaneous submission of proposals from different organizations, with each organization requesting a separate award. [Chapter II.D.3](#) of the GPG contains additional information and instructions regarding collaborative proposals.

### Concurrent Proposals

**Can a proposer submit the same proposal to different organizations within NSF for simultaneous review?**

Only one submission should be provided to NSF even if review by multiple programs is envisioned. You may indicate on the Cover Sheet which NSF

organizational unit(s) you believe would be most appropriate for proposal review. However, NSF will determine which program will evaluate each proposal. The submission of duplicate or substantially similar proposals concurrently for review by more than one program without prior NSF approval may result in the return of the redundant proposal(s). (See [GPG Chapter IV.B](#) for the NSF return policy.)

**Can the same proposal submitted to NSF be submitted to other agencies for simultaneous review?**

Generally, proposals may be submitted to other agencies for simultaneous review. Research proposals (not proposals for conferences or workshops) to the Biological Sciences Directorate, however, cannot be duplicates of proposals to any other Federal agency for simultaneous consideration. The only exceptions to the rule for research proposals submitted to the Biological Sciences Directorate are: (1) when the proposers and program managers at relevant Federal agencies have previously agreed to joint review and possible joint funding of the proposal; or (2) proposals for PIs who are beginning investigators (individuals who have not been a principal investigator (PI) or co-principal investigator (co-PI) on a Federally funded award with the exception of doctoral dissertation, postdoctoral fellowship or research planning grants). For proposers who qualify under this latter exception, the box for “Beginning Investigator” must be checked on the proposal Cover Sheet. (Reference GPG [Chapter I.A.](#))

### **Conference, Symposia and Workshop Proposals**

**Can I apply for NSF funding to conduct a conference, symposia or workshop?**

NSF supports conferences, symposia and workshops in special areas of science and engineering that bring experts together to discuss recent research or education findings or to expose other researchers or students to new research and education techniques. Requests generally should be made at least a year in advance of the scheduled date. (See GPG [Chapter II. D.7](#) for more information.) Conferences or meetings, including the facilities in which they are held, funded in whole or in part with NSF funds, must be accessible to participants with disabilities.

### **Confidential Budgetary Information**

**How do I indicate in my proposal if I do not want salary information to be released to people outside the Government?**

The proposing organization may request that salary data on senior personnel not be released to persons outside the Government during the review process. In such cases, the item for senior personnel salaries in the proposal may appear as a single figure and the person-months represented by that amount omitted. If this option is exercised, senior personnel salaries and person-months must be itemized in a separate statement, and forwarded to NSF in accordance with the

instructions specified in [Chapter I, Section D.3](#), *Proprietary or Privileged Information*. Detailed instructions for submission of confidential budgetary information are available on the FastLane Website.

### **Consultant Rate**

#### **Is there a limitation on payments to consultants under NSF awards?**

The Appropriation Act applicable to NSF for Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 does not contain a limitation on payments to consultants under NSF awards and therefore, this constraint has been eliminated for FY 2006 appropriated funds. Payments, however, should be comparable to the normal or customary fees charged and received by the consultant for comparable services, especially on non-government contracts and grants. For further information, see the FAQs on Payments to Consultants on NSF Awards at: <http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/docs/consultantfaqs06.pdf>.

### **Cost Sharing**

#### **Where can I find more information on NSF's cost sharing policy?**

In October of 2004, the National Science Board revised NSF's policy regarding cost sharing. The cost sharing policy, as approved by the NSB, eliminates program specific cost sharing, and requires only the existing statutory cost sharing requirement (1%). The statutory cost sharing requirement applies to all unsolicited research proposals. This includes all proposals submitted in response to NSF program announcements and those submitted solely in response to the NSF Grant Proposal Guide. Further information on the revised cost sharing policy can be found on the Policy Office website at: <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/cspolicy1004.pdf>.

## **D**

### **Deviation Authorization**

**What is the process for requesting authorization of a deviation from the *Grant Proposal Guide* proposal preparation instructions?**

Deviations from NSF proposal preparation and processing instructions may be authorized in one of two ways:

1. through specification of different requirements in an NSF solicitation; or
2. by the written approval of the cognizant NSF Assistant Director/Office Head or designee. These deviations may be in the form of a "blanket deviation" for a particular program or programs or, in rare instances, an "individual" deviation for a particular proposal.

Proposers may deviate from these instructions only to the extent authorized. Proposals must identify the deviation in one of the following ways as appropriate: (a) by identifying the solicitation number that authorized the deviation in the appropriate block on the Cover Sheet; or (b) for individual deviations, by identifying the name, date and title of the NSF official authorizing the deviation. Further instructions are available on the FastLane Website.

### **Drug-Free Workplace Certification**

**Where can I find the complete text of the Drug-Free Workplace Certification?**

When the Authorized Organizational Representative (or individual applicant) electronically signs the Cover Sheet for Proposal to NSF, they are providing the necessary certifications.

The full text of the Drug-Free Workplace Certification can be found in [Appendix C](#) of the GPG.

### **E**

#### **Electronic Signatures**

**Does NSF require proposals to be "signed" electronically?**

All proposals to NSF are required to be electronically signed by the Authorized Organizational Representative. This process can occur concurrently with submission of the proposal for those organizations where the individual authorized to submit a proposal to NSF also is a designated AOR, or as a separate function for those organizations that choose to keep the certification process separate from the submission function. For those organizations that designate separate authorities in FastLane for these functions, the AOR must provide the required certifications within 5 working days following the electronic submission of the proposal.

A proposal may not be processed until NSF has received the complete proposal (including the electronic certifications from the AOR.)

**If an organization determines that those authorized to submit proposals also are designated AORs, should both the “Submit Proposals to NSF” and “Authorized Organizational Representative Functions” be checked as part of their user permissions?**

Yes, both permissions must be checked in the FastLane user permission table. For those organizations where the certification process is separate from the submission function, AORs also can be given the permission to submit proposals to NSF. They must, however, be assigned the “Authorized Organizational Representative Functions” permission in order to have the ability to electronically sign the proposal Cover Sheet.

**How and when will the AOR be notified if there is a proposal waiting to be electronically signed?**

The AOR will enter the Organizational Management module in FastLane and then click on the “AOR Functions” module. They will see a list of all proposals waiting to be electronically signed. No e-mail notification will be generated regarding proposals waiting to be signed.

### **Electronic Submission**

**Am I required to use FastLane to prepare and submit my proposal to NSF?**

Proposers may opt to submit proposals electronically either via Grants.gov or via the NSF FastLane system. The program solicitation will indicate whether use of Grants.gov is optional or required for that funding opportunity.

Grants.gov provides a single Government-wide portal for finding and applying for Federal grants online. In determining which method to utilize in the electronic preparation and submission of a proposal, proposers should be aware that all collaborative proposals submitted as separate submissions from multiple organizations must be submitted via the [NSF FastLane](#) system. [Chapter II, Section D.3](#) of the *Grant Proposal Guide* provides additional information on collaborative proposals.

For proposers who cannot submit electronically, a deviation must be approved in advance of submission of the paper proposal in accordance with GPG [Chapter II.A](#).

**Must the awardee organization code and the Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number be included on the *Cover Sheet for Proposal to the National Science***

**Foundation?** Where can a proposer find the awardee organization code and DUNS number?

The awardee organization name, address, DUNS number and Employer Identification Number/Taxpayer Identification Number are derived from the login information and therefore do not need to manually be entered when preparing the Cover Sheet.

**What is the box for "International Cooperative Activities: Country/Countries" used for on the Cover Sheet?**

Proposals for travel support for US participation in international scientific and engineering meetings held abroad are handled by the NSF organizational unit with program responsibility for the area of research interest. In addition to the international projects funded and managed by the disciplinary divisions, the Office of International Science and Engineering (OISE) provides support for bilateral and regional cooperative science and engineering projects to foster and facilitate cooperation between US investigators and their foreign colleagues in joint activities of mutual interest and benefit. (Reference GPG [Chapter II.D.8](#)) The box for "International Cooperative Activities" should be checked and the countries identified on the proposal Cover Sheet.

**When should a SF LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities, be submitted?**

The Disclosure of Lobbying Activities form, SF LLL, is required when the proposal exceeds \$100,000 and the conditions in paragraph (2) of the certification are met: specifically, if any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence a government employee, Member or employee of Congress in connection with a Federal grant or cooperative agreement. (Reference GPG [Chapter II.C.1.e.](#))

**Where should questions be directed on use of the NSF FastLane system?**

Questions related to use of the NSF FastLane system may be directed to the FastLane User Support desk at (800) 673-6188 or (703) 292-8142 or by sending an e-mail message to [fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto:fastlane@nsf.gov). In addition, for information on the availability of the NSF FastLane system, phone (800) 437-7408 for a recorded message.

### **Eligibility**

**Can an award be made to an individual?**

- Scientists, engineers or educators in the U.S. and U.S. citizens may be eligible for support, provided that the provisions in GPG [Chapter I.E.5](#) are met.

Unaffiliated individuals should contact the appropriate NSF program prior to preparing a proposal for submission.

**If an individual is not a U.S. citizen, can the individual apply for a grant? Can a permanent resident serve as a Principal Investigator at a U.S. institution?**

Except for NSF fellowships, which by statute can be made only to citizens, nationals, or lawfully admitted permanent resident aliens of the United States, there generally are no nationality restrictions in any NSF program. A proposing institution in the US may designate as Principal Investigator anyone it believes to be capable of fulfilling the role.

**Can an award be made to a foreign organization?**

NSF rarely provides support to foreign organizations. NSF, however, will consider proposals for cooperative projects involving U.S. and foreign organizations, provided support is requested only for the U.S. portion of the collaborative effort. For further information, contact the Office of International Science and Engineering. (Reference GPG [Chapter I.E.6.](#))

**Can a Federal agency apply for an NSF award?**

NSF does not normally support research or education activities by scientists, engineers or educators employed by Federal agencies or Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs). A scientist, engineer or educator, however, who has a joint appointment with a university and a Federal agency (such as a Veterans Administration Hospital, or with a university and an FFRDC) may submit proposals through the university and may receive support if he/she is a bona fide faculty member of the university, although part of his/her salary may be provided by the Federal agency. Under unusual circumstances, other Federal agencies and FFRDCs may submit proposals directly to NSF. Preliminary inquiry should be made to the appropriate program before preparing a proposal for submission. (Reference GPG [Chapter I.E.7.](#))

## **Equipment Proposals**

**Does NSF fund proposals for the purpose of purchasing equipment?**

Proposals for specialized equipment may be submitted by an organization. More information regarding how to apply for equipment proposals can be found in GPG [Chapter II. D.4.](#)



## **F**

### **Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASSED)**

**What are the Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASSED) and how can a proposer/awardee apply for one?**

As part of its effort to promote full utilization of highly qualified scientists, mathematicians, and engineers, and to develop scientific and technical talent, the Foundation has the following goals:

- to reduce or remove barriers to participation in research and training by physically disabled individuals by providing special equipment and assistance under awards made by NSF; and
- to encourage disabled individuals to pursue careers in science and engineering by stimulating the development and demonstration of special equipment that facilitates their work performance.

Requests can be made in conjunction with regular competitive proposals, or as a supplemental funding request to an existing NSF award. Specific instructions for each type of request can be found in [GPG II.D.2.](#)

### **FastLane System**

**What is FastLane? Where can a proposer find more information?**

The NSF FastLane system uses Internet/Web technology to facilitate the way NSF does business with the research, education, and related communities. The NSF FastLane system is available for proposal preparation; submission and status checking; project reporting; and post-award administrative activities. All FastLane functions are accessed by using a Web browser on the Internet, at <http://www.fastlane.nsf.gov>.

**Am I required to use FastLane to prepare and submit my proposal to NSF?**

Proposers may opt to submit proposals electronically either via Grants.gov or via the NSF FastLane system. Grants.gov provides a single Government-wide portal for finding and applying for Federal grants online. In determining which method to utilize in the electronic preparation and submission of a proposal, proposers should be aware that all collaborative proposals submitted as separate submissions from multiple organizations must be submitted via the [NSF FastLane](#) system. [Chapter II, Section D.3](#) of the *Grant Proposal Guide* provides additional information on collaborative proposals.

### **Where should questions be directed on use of the NSF FastLane system?**

Questions related to use of the NSF FastLane system may be directed to the FastLane User Support desk at (800) 673-6188 or (703) 292-8142 or by sending an e-mail message to [fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto:fastlane@nsf.gov).

In addition, for information on the availability of the NSF FastLane system, phone (800) 437-7408 for a recorded message.

### **Can I use any other electronic method to transmit my proposal to NSF?**

In addition to FastLane, NSF does accept proposals in the EDI format. NSF currently supports Version 4010 of the 194 transaction set. For further information on how to transmit an EDI proposal to NSF, see the instructions on the FastLane web site.

## **G**

### **[Grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)**

#### **What is Grants.gov and where can I learn more about it?**

Grants.gov, part of the President's Management Agenda to improve government services to the public, provides a single Government-wide portal for finding and applying for Federal grants online. Proposals submitted via Grants.gov should be prepared and submitted in accordance with the *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for the Preparation and Submission of NSF Applications via Grants.gov*, available through Grants.gov as well as on the NSF website at: <http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/docs/grantsgovguide.pdf>.

### **Group Proposals**

#### **May group proposals exceed the 15 page Project Description limitation?**

NSF encourages submission of proposals by groups of investigators; often these are submitted to carry out interdisciplinary projects. Unless stipulated in a specific program solicitation, however, such proposals will be subject to the 15 page Project Description limitation established in the GPG. PIs who wish to exceed the established page limitations for the Project Description must request and receive a deviation in advance of proposal submission. Chapter II.A of the GPG contains information on deviations.

## H

### High-resolution graphics and Color Representations

**Are there special instructions for proposals that contain high resolution graphics or other color representations?**

For cost and technical reasons, the Foundation cannot, at this time, reproduce proposals containing color. Therefore, PIs generally should not rely on colorized objects to make their arguments. PIs who must include in their project descriptions high resolution graphics or other graphics where exact color representations are required for proper interpretation by the reviewer, must submit the required number of copies of the entire paper proposal, including a paper copy of the proposal Cover Sheet, for use in the review process. Further instructions are available in GPG [Chapter I.G.1.](#)

### Human Subjects

**What is NSF's policy on the use of human subjects in research?**

Projects involving research with human subjects must ensure that subjects are protected from research risks in conformance with the relevant federal policy known as the Common Rule (*Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, 45 CFR 690*). All projects involving human subjects must either (1) have approval from the organization's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before issuance of an NSF award or, (2) must affirm that the IRB or an appropriate knowledgeable authority previously designated by the organization (not the Principal Investigator) has declared the research exempt from IRB review, in accordance with the applicable subsection, as established in section 101(b) of the Common Rule.

Additional information, including Frequently Asked Questions and Vignettes, for use in interpreting the Common Rule for Behavioral and Social Science Research, is available on the NSF Website at <http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/human.jsp>. (Reference GPG [Chapter II.D.6](#))

## I

### Information Sources

**Where can a proposer find general information about NSF programs and funding opportunities?**

The NSF Guide to Programs contains funding opportunities for research and education in science, mathematics and engineering. Additional information on a variety of funding opportunities is located on the NSF home page under Funding.

Individual program announcements/solicitations and program descriptions address specific areas that NSF is interested in funding. These funding opportunities may be accessed electronically on the NSF Website.

**What is the Custom News Service and what is the process for signing up?**

The NSF Custom News Service is an information-delivery system designed to keep potential proposers and other interested parties apprised of the issuance of new program announcements and solicitations (as well as other NSF publications and policies) through Internet e-mail or the user's Web browser. Subscribers are informed each time new publications are issued that match their identified interests. To subscribe to the Custom News Service, go to the NSF Website and click on "Custom News Service" on the toolbar.

**Where can a proposer find guidance on proposal preparation?**

NSF's proposal preparation and submission guidelines -- the *NSF Grant Proposal Guide* and the *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide*-- provide guidance for the preparation and submission of proposals to NSF, whether by the NSF FastLane System or Grants.gov. Some NSF programs have program solicitations that modify the general provisions of these Guides, and, in such cases, the guidelines provided in the solicitation must be followed. For those connected with institutions of higher education, the college or university's Office of Sponsored Programs is a good place to start gathering information.

**Where can a proposer find guidance on administration of an NSF award?**

The *Grant Policy Manual* (GPM) provides information regarding the NSF award cycle from issuance and administration of an award through closeout. See the Grant and Agreement Conditions, such as GC-1 and the Federal Demonstration Partnership Terms and Conditions, for additional information. For those connected with institutions of higher education, the college or university's Office of Sponsored Programs is a good place to start gathering information.

**Where and how can a proposer obtain copies of the *Grant Policy Manual* (GPM) and *Grant Proposal Guide* (GPG)?**

The complete text of the GPM and GPG are available electronically on the NSF Website. Organizations or individuals unable to access the GPM or GPG electronically may order paper copies (maximum of 5 per request) from NSF, 4201 Wilson Boulevard, Suite P-60, Arlington, VA 22230; Telephone: (703) 292-7827; e-mail: [pubs@nsf.gov](mailto:pubs@nsf.gov).

## Where can a proposer obtain copies of the Grants.gov Application Guide?

The *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for the Preparation and Submission of NSF Applications via Grants.gov*, is available through Grants.gov as well as on the NSF website at:

<http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/docs/grantsgovguide.pdf>.

## Where can a proposer obtain copies of the NSF Grant General Conditions?

Grant General Conditions are available electronically on the NSF, Website under Funding or they may be ordered from NSF 4201 Wilson Boulevard, Suite P-60, Arlington, VA 22230; Telephone: (703) 292-7827; e-mail: [pubs@nsf.gov](mailto:pubs@nsf.gov).

## M

### Margin and Spacing Requirements

What are the proposal margin and spacing requirements that need to be followed when developing an NSF proposal?

The proposal must be clear, readily legible, and conform to the requirements contained in the GPG [Chapter II.B.2](#).

The GPG guidelines establish the **minimum** type size requirements; however, PIs are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in selection of an appropriate font for use in the proposal. **Small type size makes it difficult for reviewers to read the proposal; consequently, the use of small type not in compliance with the above guidelines may be grounds for NSF to return the proposal without review.** Adherence to type size and line spacing requirements also is necessary to ensure that no proposer will have an unfair advantage, by using smaller type or line spacing to provide more text in the proposal.

### Merit Review Criteria

Where can a proposer find information related to NSF's merit review criteria?

All NSF proposals are evaluated through use of two National Science Board approved merit review criteria. In some instances, however, NSF will employ additional criteria as required to highlight the specific objectives of certain programs and activities.

The two merit review criteria are listed in [Chapter III.A](#) of the *Grant Proposal Guide (GPG)*. The criteria include considerations that help define them. These considerations are suggestions, and not all will apply to any given proposal.

In addition, Chapter II of the GPG specifies that Principal Investigators (PIs) must address both merit review criteria in separate statements within the one-page Project Summary. This chapter also reiterates that broader impacts resulting from the proposed project must be addressed in the Project Description and described as an integral part of the narrative.

## N

### New Grantees

**An organization is preparing a grant proposal for submission to NSF but does not have a negotiated indirect cost rate. Can the organization submit a grant proposal without a negotiated indirect cost rate, and if so, what indirect cost rate should be used in the grant proposal budget?**

Because of the volume of proposals submitted to NSF, it is not practical, nor possible, for NSF to review and negotiate indirect cost rates for all organizations that submit grant proposals. Therefore, NSF will only review and negotiate indirect cost rates for those organizations that NSF seriously considers funding. Since the grant proposal budget is an organization's estimate of total grant project costs, and is one of NSF's considerations in determining appropriate funding amounts, organizations should include estimated amounts for both direct and indirect costs on their proposal budgets.

The indirect cost rates that should be used in arriving at estimated indirect costs should be reflective of the organization's financial operations as determined in the preparation of an indirect cost proposal based on historical and/or budgeted expenditure data. More detailed information on indirect cost rates, preparing indirect cost rate proposals, and where to direct questions in this area can be accessed electronically on the NSF Website at <http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/caar/indirect.jsp>.

**What if an organization has never received NSF funding?**

An in-depth review of the organization's accounting, management, and financial practices must be undertaken and certification completed prior to finalizing a pending award. The Division of Grants and Agreements (DGA) will mail the requisite forms and the listing of information which needs to be completed and returned, upon notification from programs that an award is imminent for a new performer organization. By examining the documents, DGA, along with the Division of Institution and Award Support (DIAS), will be able to determine if the grantee organization is capable of directly receiving NSF funds and thereby is eligible to be a recipient of an NSF award.

In addition, an indirect cost rate may also need to be negotiated by the Cost Analysis and Audit Resolution Branch of DIAS. If the new performer materials

are approved, the submitting institution's name and address will be added to the NSF award database and the award processing will proceed.

**Where can a new proposer find information on the types of documents required to be completed and submitted to NSF in order for NSF to conduct the necessary administrative and financial reviews of the organization?**

The "Prospective New Awardee Guide" includes information on: Administration and Management Information; Accounting System Requirements and Auditing Information; and Payments to Organizations with Awards. This information will assist an organization in preparing documents which the NSF requires to conduct administrative and financial reviews of an organization. The guide also serves as a means of highlighting the accountability requirements associated with Federal awards. The Prospective New Awardee Guide can be accessed electronically at: <http://www.nsf.gov/pubsys/ods/getpub.cfm?pnag>.

### **Notification of Proposal Receipt**

**How will a proposer know whether NSF has received his/her proposal?**

Once the proposal is submitted, PIs can access the number assigned to the proposal via the "Submitted Proposals" list in the FastLane Proposal Preparation module. If a proposal number is not reflected in the FastLane System, contact the FastLane Help Desk at (800) 673-6188, or (703) 292-8142 or by e-mail to [fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto:fastlane@nsf.gov).

When the proposal is assigned to an NSF program, the cognizant program information is available through the FastLane "Proposal Status Inquiry" function for PIs and through the "Recent Proposals" report for Sponsored Projects Offices. Communications about the proposal should be addressed to the cognizant Program Officer with reference to the proposal number. Proposers are strongly encouraged to use FastLane to verify the status of their submission to NSF. (Reference GPG [Chapter I.G.3.](#))

## **O**

### **Outreach Opportunities**

**Where can a proposer find information about NSF outreach opportunities?**

In addition to campus visits by NSF Program Officials, NSF conducts two regional grants conferences per calendar year. These regional grants conferences are held in the spring and fall each year and are announced on the NSF Events Calendar, and on the Policy Office website at: <http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/outreach.jsp>.

These conferences cover topics such as: proposal preparation; merit review of proposals; electronic initiatives; award administration; new programs and cross-disciplinary initiatives; and future directions and strategies for the Foundation. NSF representatives also participate in educational and professional development seminars, webcasts, meetings and workshops, which focus on current issues and developments, frequently with such organizations as the National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) and the Society of Research Administrators (SRA). Also see the Policy Office home page for a listing of scheduled outreach events at: <http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/index.jsp>.

NSF also focuses outreach for different institution types and has coordinated or is planning workshops for Tribal Colleges and Universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). For further information about these and other opportunities, contact the Policy Office at: [policy@nsf.gov](mailto:policy@nsf.gov).

## P

### Person-Months

**What is the definition of "person-months"?**

The term "person-months" refers to the effort (amount of time) that PI(s), faculty and other senior personnel will devote to a specific project. The effort is based on the organization's regular academic-year, summer or calendar-year. For example, if the regular schedule is 10 months and 30% effort will be devoted to the project, a total of 3 months should be listed in the academic or calendar-year block (10 months x 30% = 3 months). (Reference GPG [Chapter II.C. 2.g.\(i\)](#))

**How do I calculate the person-months per year committed to the project for completion of the current and pending support section of the proposal?**

Multiply the percentage of your effort associated with the project times the number of months of your appointment (i.e. 10% of a 9 month AY appointment equals .9 person months; 10% of a 12 month calendar appointment equals 1.2 months). Your employer may have internal policies and procedures that relate specifically to the type of appointment under which you are employed. You should, therefore, confirm with your Sponsored Projects Office that this simplified methodology is consistent with the policy at your organization. Person months shown in the current and pending support section should usually equal the number of months on the NSF proposal budget.



## Points of Contact

### Who should a proposer contact when seeking guidance on proposal preparation?

For those connected with institutions of higher education, the college or university's Sponsored Projects Office should be the first point of contact. For general policy-related questions regarding proposal preparation, the Policy Office may be contacted on 703-292-8243 or by e-mail to [policy@nsf.gov](mailto:policy@nsf.gov). When responding to a specific program announcement/solicitation, contact the applicable Program Office. The Division of Grants and Agreements should be contacted regarding questions related to award or administration of a grant (e.g., terms and conditions of an award or special award conditions).

## Post Award Considerations

### Where can an awardee find information related to post award administration?

The *Grant Policy Manual* (GPM) provides information that follows the NSF award cycle from issuance and administration of an award through closeout. The Manual is available electronically via the NSF Website. Information on post award administration also can be found by accessing the applicable award conditions on the NSF Website.

## Prior Approval Requirements

### What types of post-award actions require prior approval from NSF and which can be submitted via FastLane?

Prior written authorization from NSF is required only for the following:

1. transfer of the project effort;
2. change in objectives or scope;
3. change in PI or co-PI;
4. a substantial change in PI effort;
5. reduction in a cost sharing amount identified on Line M of the grant budget;
6. reallocation of funds budgeted for participant support; or
7. renovation/alteration (construction) activities costing \$25,000 or more.

Changes in participant support costs require only Program Officer approval; all the other changes listed above require Program Officer and Grants Officer approval. (See also the [Grant Policy Manual Exhibit III-1](#), which highlights grantee notifications to, and requests for approval from, NSF.) All requests for prior approval to NSF must be submitted electronically via the NSF FastLane system.

## **Program Announcements and Solicitations**

**Where can a proposer obtain copies of program announcements and solicitations?**

Program announcements and solicitations are available electronically on the NSF Web site or on individual Directorates' web pages.

**If there is a conflict between the *Grant Proposal Guide* (GPG) and a program solicitation, which document should be followed?**

Instructions in an NSF program solicitation can modify general guidance in the GPG. Proposal preparation guidance contained in program solicitations has precedence over instructions in the GPG and should therefore be followed closely. The cognizant program office should be consulted with questions regarding compliance with specific programmatic requirements. (Reference GPG [Chapter I.A.](#))

**Is a proposal submitted in response to an NSF program announcement considered unsolicited?**

Proposals submitted in response to specific NSF program announcements are considered unsolicited, and are therefore subject to statutory cost-sharing requirements. In addition, unless otherwise specified, proposals are to be prepared in accordance with GPG formatting and other requirements. (Reference GPG [Chapter II.B.](#))

## **Proposal File Updates**

**Can files associated with a previously submitted proposal be replaced and if so, what procedure should be followed?**

It is the responsibility of the proposing organization to thoroughly review each proposal prior to submission. On occasion, however, a problem is identified with a portion of the proposal after the proposal has been submitted electronically to NSF.

The FastLane Proposal File Update Module allows the organization to request the replacement of files or revision of other Proposal Attributes, associated with a previously submitted proposal. GPG [Chapter III.B.](#) contains the procedures to be followed for proposal file updates.

## **Proposal Preparation**

**Can a PI request more than two months salary for the summer?**

Summer salary for faculty members on academic-year appointments is limited to no more than two-ninths of their regular academic-year salary. (Reference GPG [Chapter II.C.2.g.\(i\)](#))

**Is there a salary cap for proposals submitted to NSF?**

There is no salary cap for proposals submitted to NSF. Academic Year Salaries, however, are to be based on the individual faculty member's regular compensation for the continuous period which, under the policy of the institution concerned, constitutes the basis of his/her salary. Except as provided in [GPM 616.2, "Intra-University Consulting,"](#) charges to Federal grants, irrespective of the basis of computation, will not exceed the proportionate share of the base salary for that period. (Reference GPM 611)

**Are there specific line spacing requirements that must be used for preparation of a proposal?**

While line spacing (single-spaced, double-spaced, etc.) is at the discretion of the proposer, established page limits must be followed and there also must be no more than 6 lines of type within a vertical space of 2.5 cm. (Individual program solicitations, however, may eliminate this proposer option by requiring other type size, margin or line spacing requirements.) (Reference GPG [Chapter II.B.](#))

**Are there any specific page numbering requirements which should be used in preparation of a proposal?**

Proposers are advised that FastLane does not automatically paginate a proposal. Each section of the proposal that is uploaded as a file must be individually paginated before upload to FastLane. (Reference GPG [Chapter II.B.](#))

**May Universal Resource Locators (URLs) be included within the Project Description?**

PIs are advised that the project description must be self-contained and are cautioned that URLs (Internet addresses) that provide information related to the proposal should not be used because 1) the information could circumvent page limitations, 2) the reviewers are under no obligation to view the sites, and 3) the sites could be altered or abolished between the time of submission and the time of review.

### **What are the guidelines concerning collaborative proposals?**

A collaborative proposal is one in which investigators from two or more organizations wish to collaborate on a unified research project. Collaborative proposals may be submitted to NSF in one of two methods: as a single proposal, in which a single award is being requested (with subawards administered by the lead organization); or by simultaneous submission of proposals from different organizations, with each organization requesting a separate award. [Chapter II.D.3](#) of the GPG contains additional information and instructions regarding collaborative proposals.

### **What information should be included in the "References Cited" section of the proposal?**

Reference information is required. Each reference must include the names of all authors (in the same sequence in which they appear in the publication), the article and journal title, book title, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication. If the document is available electronically, the Website address also should be identified. Proposers must be especially careful to follow accepted scholarly practices in providing citations for source materials relied upon when preparing any section of the proposal. (Reference GPG [Chapter II.C.2.e](#))

### **What is the NSF policy on submission of appendices?**

All information necessary for the review of a proposal should be contained in Sections A through I of the proposal. Appendices may not be included unless a deviation has been authorized. GPG [Chapter II.A](#) contains information on deviations.

## **Proposal Submission**

### **How does a proposer submit a proposal to NSF?**

Proposals to NSF must be submitted electronically via either the NSF FastLane system or Grants.gov. For proposers who cannot submit electronically, an authorization to deviate from the electronic submission requirements must be approved in advance of submission of the paper proposal in accordance with GPG [Chapter II.A](#).

The same work cannot be funded twice, so a proposal should be submitted only once to NSF. If the proposer envisions review by multiple programs, more than one program may be designated on the proposal Cover Sheet. The submission of duplicate or substantially similar proposals concurrently for review by more than one program without prior NSF approval may result in the return of the redundant proposals. (See GPG [Chapter IV, Section B, Return Without Review](#), for further information.)

## What forms do I need to complete for an NSF proposal?

All proposal formats and data requirements for submission of a proposal to NSF are available in Grants.gov or the NSF FastLane system. Now that electronic submission is required, the paper-based Proposal Forms Kit has been eliminated. Detailed information about proposal preparation is available from the Grants.gov or FastLane Website.

## R

### Receipt Dates

What happens if a program announcement/solicitation deadline falls on a weekend or Federal holiday?

If the deadline date falls on a weekend, it will be extended to the following Monday; if the date falls on a holiday, it will be extended to the following business day. (Reference GPG [Chapter I.F.](#))

What is the difference between deadlines, target dates and submission windows?

The following types of due dates are utilized by NSF:

- **Target dates:** dates after which proposals will still be accepted, although they may miss a particular panel or committee meeting.
- **Deadline dates:** dates after which proposals will not be accepted for review by NSF. The deadline date will be waived only in extenuating circumstances. Such a deviation only may be authorized in accordance with GPG [Chapter II A.](#)
- **Submission windows:** designated periods of time during which proposals will be accepted for review by NSF. For purposes of NSF, the end date of a submission window converts to, and follows the same policies as, a deadline date.

These target dates, deadlines, and submission windows are published in specific program descriptions, program announcements and solicitations that can be obtained from the NSF Clearinghouse at [pubs@nsf.gov](mailto:pubs@nsf.gov) or electronically through the NSF Website. Unless otherwise specified in a program solicitation that has an identified deadline date, proposals must be received by 5 p.m. submitter's local time on the established deadline date. (Reference GPG [Chapter I.F.](#))

## **Reconsideration**

**What is the process for requesting reconsideration of an NSF funding decision?**

A PI whose proposal for NSF support has been declined generally will receive information and an explanation of the reason(s) for declination along with copies of the reviews considered in making the decision.

If the explanation provided does not satisfy the PI, he/she may request that the cognizant NSF Assistant Director or Office Head reconsider the action to determine whether the proposal received a fair and reasonable review, both substantively and procedurally. Consult the [Grant Policy Manual Section 900](#) for additional information on the NSF reconsideration process, including the categories of actions that are subject to the NSF reconsideration policy.

## **References Cited**

**Will a proposal be returned if a Website address is not included in a reference citation?**

The NSF guidelines on References Cited are available in the GPG [Chapter II.C.2.e](#).

If the proposer has a Website address readily available, that information should be included in the citation. It is not NSF's intent, however, to place an undue burden on proposers to search for the URL of every referenced publication. Therefore, inclusion of a Website address is optional.

## **Resubmissions**

**Can a proposer resubmit a previously declined proposal?**

A declined proposal may be resubmitted, but only after it has undergone substantial revision. Resubmittals that have not clearly taken into account the major comments or concerns resulting from the prior NSF review may be returned without review. The Foundation will treat the revised proposal as a new proposal, subject to the standard review procedures. (Reference GPG [Chapter IV.E](#).)

## **Returns**

**For what reasons does NSF return a proposal?**

The various reasons why NSF may return a proposal without review are listed in the GPG [Chapter IV.B](#).

## S

### Senior Personnel

**How is the term "senior personnel" defined?**

The term "senior personnel" includes:

(Co)Principal Investigator(s) - the individual(s) designated by the grantee and approved by NSF who will be responsible for the scientific or technical direction of the project. If more than one, the first one listed will have primary responsibility for the project and the submission of reports.

Faculty Associate (faculty member) - an individual other than the Principal Investigator(s) considered by the performing institution to be a member of its faculty or who holds an appointment as a faculty member at another institution, and who will participate in the project being supported. (Reference GPG [Appendix F](#))

### Small Grants for Exploratory Research (SGER)

**Can SGER grants be extended beyond their initial funding period?**

At the discretion of the Program Officer, and with the concurrence of the Division Director, a small fraction of especially promising SGER awards may be extended for a period of six additional months and supplemented with up to \$50,000 in additional funding. Requests for extensions must be submitted one to two months before the expiration date of the initial award. For more information about the SGER program, see GPG [Chapter II.D.1](#).

### Special Considerations

**Where can a proposer find information on conflicts of interest (the investigator financial disclosure policy)? Does NSF provide a written sample of an institution conflicts of interest policy? Who should a proposer contact if there are questions?**

The *Grant Policy Manual* provides information on the conflicts of interest policy. This section also contains references to university associations and scientific societies that have issued guidance on conflicts of interest policies. NSF does not provide written samples of such policies. Additional information in the form of Frequently Asked Questions has been developed and issued jointly with the Department of Health and Human Services. Questions regarding the NSF conflicts of interest policy should be directed to the Office of the General Counsel on 703-292-8060. (Reference [GPM Section 510](#).)

**Are there any special requirements for proposals which involve the use of human subjects?**

Projects involving research with human subjects must ensure that subjects are protected from research risks in conformance with the relevant federal policy known as the Common Rule (*Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, 45 CFR 690*). All projects involving human subjects must either (1) have approval from the organization's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before issuance of an NSF award or, (2) must affirm that the IRB or an appropriate knowledgeable authority previously designated by the organization (not the Principal Investigator) has declared the research exempt from IRB review, in accordance with the applicable subsection, as established in section 101(b) of the Common Rule. (Reference GPG [Chapter II D.6.](#))

### **Special Programs**

**Does NSF fund projects for targeted or special programs?**

NSF sponsors many funding programs for special purposes. Examples include doctoral dissertation research grants, international travel grants and cooperative activities and research experiences for undergraduates. Information about these and other programs can be found on the NSF Website.

### **Subawards**

**If a proposer is including a subaward in their proposal, should the budget from the subawardee be signed by the subawardee?**

Signed subaward budgets do not need to be submitted to NSF. Submission of a paper budget signed by the AOR of the subawardee organization is not necessary.

**What documentation is needed for subawards?**

The basic items are a clear description of the work to be performed, the basis for selection of the subawardee (except for collaborative/joint arrangements) and a separate budget for each subaward. (Reference GC-1 Articles 8.a. and 9, and GPG [Chapter II.C.2.g.\(vi\)\(e\)](#))

### **Submission Windows**

**I'm familiar with deadlines and target dates, but what is the definition of a submission window?**

Submission windows are designated periods of time during which proposals will be accepted for review by NSF.



Target dates, deadlines, and submission windows are published in specific program descriptions, program announcements and solicitations that can be obtained from NSF at [pubs@nsf.gov](mailto:pubs@nsf.gov) or electronically through the NSF Website.

## **Supplements**

### **How do I apply for supplemental funding?**

In unusual circumstances, small amounts of supplemental funding and up to six months of additional support may be requested to assure adequate completion of the original scope of work. The grantee must submit a request for supplemental funding at least two months before funds are needed.

Requests for supplemental funding must be initiated in the FastLane system by using the "Supplemental Funding Request" function. Such requests must include a summary of the proposed work, a brief justification, and a budget for the requested funds.

Grantees should contact the cognizant NSF Program Officer prior to submitting a request for supplemental funding. (Reference GPG [Chapter V.B.4](#))

## **T**

### **Transfer of Principal Investigator**

**What procedure should be followed if a PI plans to leave an organization during the course of an active grant?**

If a PI plans to leave an organization during the course of a grant, the organization has the prerogative to nominate a replacement PI, request that the grant be terminated, or transfer the grant (via NSF) to the PI's new organization. Replacement PIs are subject to NSF approval. In those cases where a particular PI's participation is integral to a given project and the PI's original and new organizations agree, a grant transfer request shall be submitted via the Notification and Request module in the FastLane system.

See [GPG VI.D](#) and [GPM 312.8](#) for additional information on PI transfers.

### **Tuition Remission**

**What is NSF's policy on treatment of tuition remission?**

Tuition remission is generally treated as part of an organization's fringe benefit rate or as a direct cost. NSF's policy is that colleges and universities should budget tuition remission consistent with its established indirect cost rate methodology and negotiated rate agreement. If tuition remission is budgeted as a direct cost, it should be listed in the "Other" category of the Budget under "Other Direct Costs."

## **Types of Submissions**

**What types of submissions may be required under NSF program solicitations?**

NSF utilizes two types of submissions under program solicitations – Letters of Intent and Preliminary proposals.

More information on these types of submissions and the circumstances under which they would be used can be found in the GPG [Chapter I.D.](#)

## **V**

### **Vertebrate Animals**

**What is NSF's policy on the use of vertebrate animals in research?**

For proposals involving the use of vertebrate animals, sufficient information must be provided within the 15-page project description to enable reviewers to evaluate the choice of species, number of animals to be used, and any necessary exposure of animals to discomfort, pain, or injury.

Consistent with the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act [7 U.S.C. 2131 et seq] and the regulations promulgated there under by the Secretary of Agriculture [9 CFR, 1.1-4.11], NSF requires that proposed projects involving use of any vertebrate animal for research or education be approved by the submitting organization's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) before an award can be made. For this approval to be accepted by NSF, the organization must have a current Institutional Animal Welfare Assurance established with the Public Health Service (PHS). (Reference GPG [Chapter II.D.5.](#))

## **W**

### **Withdrawal of a Proposal**

**What is the procedure for the withdrawal of a proposal?**

A proposal may be withdrawn at any time before a funding recommendation is made by the cognizant NSF Program Officer. Proposals must be electronically withdrawn via the FastLane Electronic Proposal Withdrawal System. This module in FastLane automates the proposal withdrawal process and provides a mechanism that will help organizations to more effectively manage their proposal portfolio, as well as to help eliminate the submission of duplicate proposals to NSF. Further information regarding proposal withdrawal procedures can be found in the GPG [Chapter IV.A.](#)