



Suggestions for CAREER Proposal— Department Chair/Head Letter

Provided by Dr. Ted Baker, Professor Emeritus, FSU Department of Computer Science and former NSF Program Director, Division of Computer and Network Systems
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The letter should cover the elements required by the solicitation, in separate paragraphs, in the order requested. As of 2020, they were:

- 1.1. A statement to the effect that the PI is eligible for the CAREER program. For non-tenure-track faculty, the Departmental Letter must affirm that the investigator's appointment is at an early-career level equivalent to pre-tenure status, pursuant to the eligibility criteria specified above. Further, for non-tenure-track faculty, the Departmental Letter must clearly and convincingly demonstrate how the faculty member satisfies all the requirements of tenure-track equivalency as defined in the eligibility criteria specified in this solicitation.*

If this is the PI's last year of eligibility to submit a CAREER proposal, mention that. It is not a matter of NSF policy to consider whether a PI is eligible to resubmit the following year, but in my experience both reviewers and program officers tend to be more charitable to a person who will not have another chance. At least if the proposal is on the borderline of being recommended, they will not have the easy out of suggesting it be improved and resubmitted the next year.

"This is Dr. XXX's last year of eligibility. He is very grateful to the panelists that reviewed her/his last submission, and has incorporated their suggestions in this new proposal."

Note that while the NSF opens a crack in the door for non-tenure-track employees, it would be very difficult to make a successful argument for that by any institution (such as FSU) that offers tenure to any of its faculty. See the specific wording below:

"(1) the employee has a continuing appointment that is expected to last the five years of a CAREER grant; (2) the appointment has substantial research and educational responsibilities; and (3) the proposed project relates to the employee's career goals and job responsibilities as well as to the mission of the department or organization."

As I interpret the above, FSU's Specialized Faculty positions would not meet either of the first two criteria, or the intent. That is, the exception is intended for institutions that do not have tenure, but instead have some other long-term commitment based on multi-year appointments. As a program officer, I have seen proposals from "research faculty" returned without review, or if they are not caught at that stage, simply declined after review.

1.2. An indication that the PI's proposed CAREER research and education activities are supported by and advance the educational and research goals of the department and the organization, and that the department is committed to the support and professional development of the PI; and

A critical element of this paragraph is commitment of any resources needed to carry out the commitments made in the proposal that are not covered by the proposal budget. These typically include:

- Laboratory space and/or office space for RAs, especially if the proposal has special space requirements.
- Annual assignments of responsibility that are consistent with commitments of the academic year time made in the proposal. For example, if the PI commits to developing a new course related to the research, the letter should commit the department to offering the course, assigning the faculty member to teach it, and possibly allowing time for the course development if that is usual for the department.

The above are not exclusive. This is also a place to confirm any departmental or university resources or programs that will be available to the PI as help with activities toward broadening participation, such as recruiting students from under-represented groups. Since FSU is currently in an on-line instruction mode for most courses, it seems wise to mention resources that are available to faculty for on-line instruction, and for assistance in preparing on-line instructional material. I have also seen a few cases where department letters mention a reduced teaching load during the term of the grant.

1.3. A description of

1.3.1. the relationship between the CAREER project, the PI's career goals and job responsibilities, and the mission of his/her department/organization, and

Typically, when a new faculty member is hired, the department has a fairly specific notion of a gap/need in the teaching and/or research coverage of the existing faculty, which the new recruit is expected to fill. If so, explain that. If not, the PI should have at least formed her/his own ideas of how she/he hopes to contribute to the educational and research activities in the department. The chair should affirm whatever the proposal says about this.

1.3.2. the ways in which the department head (or equivalent) will ensure the appropriate mentoring of the PI, in the context of the PI's career development and his/her efforts to integrate research and education throughout the period of the award and beyond.

It helps to be specific. For example, name one or more faculty members who have agreed to serve as mentor(s). Explain what the department and university offer as assistance in teaching assessment and improvement. Note in particular the NSF requirement for assessment of the success of education and outreach activities mentioned in the proposal.