



**National Science Foundation**

4201 Wilson Boulevard  
Arlington, Virginia 22230

**Title: FAQs about the Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER)  
Program for submission in years 2008, 2009 and 2010 (NSF 08-557)**

**Date: May 5, 2008**

**Replaced: NSF 05-027**

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the  
Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) Program**

**Includes information on the NSF component of the  
Presidential Early Career Awards for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE)**

**SUBMISSION DEADLINES:**

Proposals must be submitted via FastLane or Grants.gov by 5:00 p.m., submitter's local time, on or before the applicable deadline date below:

**2008**

July 22: BIO, CISE, EHR

July 23: ENG

July 24: GEO, MPS, SBE, OPP

**2009**

July 21: BIO, CISE, EHR

July 22: ENG

July 23: GEO, MPS, SBE, OPP

**2010**

July 20: BIO, CISE, EHR

July 21: ENG

July 22: GEO, MPS, SBE, OPP

The following set of questions and answers refer to frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the CAREER Program Solicitation. They are not intended to be a modification of the Program Solicitation. If there are any inconsistencies between the CAREER Program Solicitation and these FAQs, the information in the Program Solicitation prevails.

Before preparing a CAREER proposal please read the CAREER solicitation, this FAQ document, and refer to the general information about NSF proposal submission including the Grant Proposal Guide (GPG) submission guidelines.

CAREER Contacts List: <http://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/career/contacts.jsp>

NSF Grant Proposal Guide (GPG):

[http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=gpg](http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=gpg)

FastLane FAQ's:

[https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/NSFHelp/flashhelp/fastlane/FastLane\\_Help/fastlane\\_help.htm#fastlane\\_faqs\\_introduction.htm](https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/NSFHelp/flashhelp/fastlane/FastLane_Help/fastlane_help.htm#fastlane_faqs_introduction.htm)

NSF Staff Directory (and to browse by NSF Organization):

<http://www.nsf.gov/staff/>

NSF Guide to Programs (for descriptions of NSF's research-supporting programs):

<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/papp/index.jsp>

Merit Review Broader Impacts Criterion: Representative Activities:

<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/gpg/broaderimpacts.pdf>.

The following sections of this document can be directly accessed by selecting the appropriate heading:

- A. ELIGIBILITY
- B. PROPOSAL AND BUDGET PREPARATION AND FASTLANE SUBMISSION
- C. CAREER PROPOSAL REVIEW
- D. ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAREER AWARDS
- E. POST-AWARD ADMINISTRATION

#### **A. ELIGIBILITY**

##### **Whom should I contact to discuss my ideas for a CAREER proposal?**

Your primary contact is a Program Officer in a division or program that is closest to your area of research. The NSF website provides information about the NSF programs and the NSF staff directory provides contact information for program directors.

##### **The CAREER Program Solicitation states that a proposer must have the title of assistant professor or equivalent. I am non-tenured but hold the title of associate professor. Can I apply?**

No. An associate professor (with or without tenure) is not eligible to apply for a CAREER award. Only assistant professors without tenure are eligible. The

CAREER Program is intended for faculty members who are at or near the beginning of their careers.

**My title at the time of the CAREER deadline will be assistant professor in a tenure track. Will I be eligible if my title changes to associate professor (either tenure-track or tenure) before or after October 1st?**

Yes. You must have the title of assistant professor or equivalent by October 1st after the submission deadline. If your title were to change to associate professor after October 1st, you would be eligible for a CAREER award. If it changed before October 1<sup>st</sup>, you would not be eligible.

**The CAREER Program Solicitation requires that I hold a doctoral degree by the proposal submission deadline. I have defended my thesis but will not have my diploma by the submission deadline. Can I apply to the CAREER Program this year?**

No. You are not eligible unless you receive the official, dated diploma, by the proposal deadline.

**I held a tenured position at my former organization, but I am not in a tenured position now. Am I eligible to apply?**

Yes. Previous employment in a tenured position does not affect eligibility.

**I received my Doctorate six years ago. Am I eligible to apply?**

Yes. CAREER eligibility is not limited by time from degree or time in a tenure track.

**Am I eligible if I hold a dual appointment at a university?**

Yes. Generally, only one Department will grant tenure. In that case, the chair of that Department should write the letter. It may be co-signed by the other Chair.

**I am in a shared appointment with my husband. Both of us are in a tenure track line and I have the title Assistant Professor. Am I eligible?**

Yes, if you meet the other eligibility requirements.

**I do not currently have a CAREER-eligible appointment, nor do I have a signed contract for an appointment. I have applied for a position and may have a contract after October 1. Can I apply?**

No. You must be employed in a CAREER-eligible or have a contractual agreement with such an organization to begin a CAREER-eligible appointment by October 1<sup>st</sup> following the submission deadline.

**I am not a U.S. Permanent Resident or citizen. Can I apply to the CAREER Program?**

Yes. You may apply if you are employed at a U.S. organization and meet the other CAREER eligibility requirements. You will not be eligible for a PECASE award.

**My department (or organization) does not offer tenure, so I am not in a tenure-track appointment. How can I determine if my appointment is a tenure-track equivalent appointment?**

For an appointment to be considered a tenure-track-equivalent, the following conditions must be met: 1) the department or organization does not offer tenure and 2) the appointment is a continuing one. Research, Adjunct and Instructor positions are not considered CAREER-eligible tenure-track-equivalent positions nor are individuals in soft-money or visiting positions.

You will certify that your position meets the CAREER-eligibility requirements when you prepare the proposal cover sheet. In addition, your Department Chair will verify this information in the Department letter. NSF can provide guidance on what is considered a tenure-track equivalent appointment, but it is up to the proposer and the proposer's institution to determine whether or not the appointment meets the requirements.

**Am I eligible to apply if I work at a non-degree-granting organization such as a museum, observatory, or research lab?**

Yes, but you must have a tenure-track or tenure-track-equivalent appointment, substantial educational responsibilities as part of your employment, and meet all other CAREER eligibility requirements.

**Although my organization offers tenure, the research institute that employs me does not. Am I eligible?**

You can apply as long as your appointment meets the requirements for tenure-track equivalency, you have substantial educational responsibilities, and you meet all other CAREER eligibility criteria.

**Am I eligible if I work at a 2-year college or a community college?**

Yes, as long as your appointment meets the other CAREER eligibility requirements. NSF encourages submission from Community Colleges that award degrees in fields supported by NSF.

**I am an assistant professor at an undergraduate institution that does not give graduate degrees. Am I eligible to apply?**

Yes. NSF encourages submission from primarily undergraduate institutions.

**I am a new faculty member at an institution that qualifies as an undergraduate institution under the provisions of the Research in Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) Program Solicitation, NSF 00-144. Is it possible to apply for the CAREER Program under the RUI provisions?**

No. You must choose to submit a proposal to RUI or to CAREER. You may not include the additional Certificate of RUI Eligibility or the RUI Impact Statement on a CAREER proposal.

**If I have received funds from the Federal Government to perform research, am I still eligible?**

Yes. You may submit a CAREER proposal if you have NSF or other Federal awards. You may not submit a CAREER proposal if you already have a CAREER award. You may not submit a proposal for research that is substantially the same as that supported by any Federal agency.

**I am a new assistant professor (or equivalent) in a tenure track position. Since I can participate in three CAREER competitions, should I apply now or wait until next year. What should I do?**

The most important consideration is whether you are ready to write a proposal with an innovative research idea, an education plan and a plan for integrating education and research. You might discuss your readiness with your Department Chair or an NSF Program Officer.

**I have a Doctorate in Mathematics Education. Am I eligible to apply?**

Yes. NSF supports educational research both through the Directorate for Education and Human Resources (EHR) and in the other Directorates. A person with a Ph.D. in Education or an Ed.D. would probably conduct research that is most applicable to the EHR Directorate.

**How are proposals reviewed for compliance?**

CAREER proposals will be checked for compliance with formatting instructions in the Grant Proposal Guide and the specific requirements of the CAREER solicitation. Program Directors will not approve or accept proposal file updates after the deadline, unless there is a technical problem due to PDF conversion. The following is a list of items for which proposals often are non-compliant:

- A co-principal investigator is listed on the cover page.
- The proposal did not use the cover page from the CAREER solicitation 08-557.
- Font and margin requirements are not met.
- Project summary exceeds one page.
- Project summary does not address both merit review criteria (intellectual merit and broader impacts) in separate statements.
- Project description exceeds 15 pages.
- Project description does not include a separate section describing results from prior NSF support (if appropriate).
- Project description does not describe, as an integral part of the narrative, the broader impacts resulting from the proposed activities.
- Biographical sketch of the PI is not prepared in the appropriate NSF format and/or exceeds two pages.
- Current and Pending Support form for PI is missing.

**B. PROPOSAL AND BUDGET PREPARATION AND FASTLANE SUBMISSION**

**What is an appropriate level of funding to request?**

The CAREER budget request should reflect the scope of the research and education plans, and the practices within your discipline. The minimum CAREER award size is \$400,000, including indirect cost or overhead, for a 5- year period except in the Directorate for Biological Sciences (BIO). Proposals to that Directorate must request a minimum of \$500,000 (approximately \$100,000 per year) for the 5-year duration. There is no maximum award size.

Although there is a CAREER minimum award size, the average CAREER award size varies across NSF. Many Directorates or Divisions, such as the Directorate for Engineering, usually fund CAREER awards at or near the \$400,000 minimum, while some others have a higher average award size. Before preparing your CAREER proposals, you are strongly encouraged to contact your disciplinary Program Officer or your Division CAREER contact to discuss your budget request.

**May I request academic year salary on a CAREER proposal?**

In some cases it may be appropriate to include academic year salary support in a CAREER budget. A PI who has heavy teaching responsibilities or whose proposed activities may involve a limited period of fieldwork or other extraordinary career-development activity in research or education may be justified in requesting academic year salary support on their budgets. Before including any academic year salary support on your CAREER budget you should contact your disciplinary program officer to discuss your individual case.

**What if my proposal is submitted after my submission deadline?**

The proposal will be returned without review. A CAREER proposal must be submitted in FastLane by your organization before 5:00 p.m. your local time on or before the primary Directorate or Office deadline that you have selected. NSF program officers are not authorized to grant extensions of the CAREER deadlines.

**My proposal seems to fit in two different programs. What should I do?**

You may designate more than one disciplinary program in FastLane if you think two or more programs should jointly review your proposal. It is very important that you select the most relevant program as the primary organization since that is the organization that is most likely to have primary responsibility for reviewing your proposal. Do not submit duplicate CAREER proposals to multiple disciplinary programs. Your proposal must be submitted by the CAREER deadline for the primary Directorate or Office you select. You are strongly encouraged to contact the program officer most closely related to the subject matter when preparing a cross-disciplinary proposal.

**Can I submit my CAREER proposal through FastLane or through Grants.gov?**

You may submit the proposal through either system. However, the forms for

eligibility certification are not available on Grants.gov. After you submit the proposal through Grants.gov and it is accepted, you must use the Fastlane File Update procedure to submit these forms. You may submit these forms up to two days after the deadline. If you have any questions, please contact the NSF Helpdesk.

**I need information about how to submit through Grants.gov. Is there a publication I could read?**

Yes. Please see the Grants.gov Application Guide at [www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=grantsgovguide](http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=grantsgovguide) . You may also call the Grants.Gov helpline Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. (excl. Federal holidays) at (800) 518-4726 or send a question by email to [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov).

**I am having problems submitting my proposal in FastLane or in Grants.gov and the CAREER deadline is almost here. Who should I contact?**

Issues and questions related to the NSF FastLane system should be directed to the FastLane User Support desk at (800) 673-6188 or (703) 292-8142. You can also send an e-mail message to [fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto:fastlane@nsf.gov). For information on the availability of the NSF FastLane system, phone (800) 437-7408 for a recorded message. If FastLane is unable to resolve the problem and you cannot submit your proposal by the deadline, contact FastLane. For NSF to consider a deadline extension you must provide NSF with supporting documentation from FastLane of a FastLane problem at the time of submission.

A possible slow down of FastLane of Grants.gov due to volume is not a valid reason for an extension. ***PIs are strongly encouraged to submit their CAREER proposals in advance of the deadline to allow for any problems that may occur in the submission process.***

**I just noticed a major problem with my CAREER proposal. My CAREER deadline has not passed so can I fix the problem?**

Yes, if you see a problem **before the deadline**, you may use the FastLane Proposal File Update Module to replace files or revise other Proposal Attributes of a submitted proposal. An automatic request for a proposal file update will be accepted only if submitted prior to your CAREER deadline.

On rare occasions, a proposal has technical problems due to PDF conversion. If your deadline has passed and you discover this problem, contact your disciplinary Program officer to discuss whether NSF will approve a proposal file update.

No other types of file updates or modifications to your proposal will be allowed after the deadline has passed. You should thoroughly review your proposal before it is submitted, including identifying any PDF conversion problems.

**Do I submit a proposal to just CAREER or to a particular program at NSF and how do I decide to which program I should submit my CAREER proposal?**

CAREER proposals must be submitted to one primary program or unit. First, you should determine if the proposed research project falls within the realm of research that NSF normally supports. Then you will need to identify one or more disciplinary programs related to your research goals. One way to get a good overview of NSF is to look at the titles of the Directorates, Divisions and Programs. The NSF Guide to Programs and Directorate and Division web pages provide descriptions of the topic areas supported by NSF disciplinary programs.

If NSF determines that your proposal is more appropriate for a different program than the primary one you selected, the proposal will be reassigned to the appropriate organizational unit. NSF will make the final determination of where your proposal will be assigned and considered. You can track your proposal's assignment and progress through FastLane.

**I have two possible projects. Can I submit two CAREER proposals?**

No. You may submit only one CAREER proposal per competition.

**May I submit a CAREER proposal and another proposal to NSF in the same year?**

Yes, but only if the research is substantially different. NSF will return without review a second proposal on a closely related research topic.

**I will have a collaborator on my proposal. Can I include the collaborator as a Co-PI or other senior personnel on my budget?**

No. You may provide funds for others to work on your research or educational activities, but they may not be listed as Co-PI or in the senior personnel section of the proposal--either in the primary budget or within a sub award to a collaborating institution.

**What documentation can I submit to show any collaborative efforts?**

Describe the collaborative efforts in the project description. You may also submit a short letter from each collaborator stating the nature of the collaboration or support. Scan the signed and dated letter(s) into the Supplementary Documents section. The letters should follow the departmental letter and only describe the planned collaborative effort(s). Letters of recommendation are not permitted and you will have to remove them from the proposal prior to review. Do not submit any other documentation such as biographical sketches or other NSF forms for collaborators.

**I am interested in adding an international dimension to my proposal. How would I find out what kinds of activities are eligible for support?**

Plans for international cooperative research and education activities are encouraged. The opportunity to collaborate with outstanding foreign researchers and educators, and to gain access to unique sites, equipment or facilities, may provide substantial



benefits to the research and education activities proposed. For information on the types of activities that are eligible for support, contact your disciplinary program officer and the appropriate county program officer in the Office of International Science and Engineering (<http://www.nsf.gov/od/oise/about.jsp>.)

**How many pages should I devote to describing research and how many to education?**

No number is specified. Use the 15 pages allowed for proposal Section C, Project Description, including any results from prior NSF support, to your best advantage. A major objective of the CAREER Program is to encourage the integration of research and education. The research and educational activities do not need to be addressed separately, if the relationship between the two is such that the presentation of the integrated project is better served by interspersing the two throughout the Project Description.

While excellence in both education and research is expected, activity of an intensity that leads to an unreasonable workload is not. For instance, teaching additional courses or taking on additional duties is not expected. A justification for released time may be appropriate for extraordinary curriculum development or education innovation. What is expected is a well-argued and specific proposal for activities over a 5-year period that will build a firm foundation for a lifetime of integrated contributions to research and education. Refer to the CAREER Program Solicitation for representative examples of educational activities. CAREER proposers may also find the document “Merit Review Broader Impacts Criterion: Representative Activities” useful in preparing their CAREER proposals. <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/gpg/broaderimpacts.pdf>.

**What should be addressed in the departmental letter?**

The departmental letter should demonstrate an understanding of, and a commitment to, the effective integration of research and education as a primary objective of the CAREER award, and acknowledges institutional commitment to the professional development and mentoring of the PI. The departmental letter will be included as part of the consideration of the overall merits of the proposal and must follow the format prescribed in the CAREER Solicitation. A letter that fails to acknowledge institutional commitment to the professional development and mentoring of the PI may disadvantage an otherwise outstanding proposal. Department letters should be about one page in length.

**I would like to submit some additional tabular material that would exceed the 15-page limit on the length of the project description. Can I submit this as an appendix?**

No. An Appendix is not permitted in a CAREER Proposal. As with all NSF solicitations, exceptions may be given in writing by the appropriate NSF Assistant Director, but these are rarely granted. This must be done before a proposal is submitted. A proposal submitted with an Appendix that does not include the

required written deviation from the appropriate Assistant Director or designee may be returned without review.

**I have additional information posted on my website I would like the reviewers to see. May I refer readers to my web site within the Project Description?**

PIs are advised that the project description must be self-contained and are cautioned that a web site that provides 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.

**I would like to be considered for a PECASE award. What is the process?**

Each participating Federal agency has its own nomination procedures. To be eligible for a PECASE award through NSF, you must submit a CAREER proposal and have certified you were PECASE eligible on the CAREER and PECASE Eligibility Certifications. In addition to meeting the CAREER eligibility requirements, PECASE nominees must be U.S. citizens, U.S. Nationals, or U.S. Permanent Residents who hold that status on or before their CAREER submission deadline. NSF will select its PECASE nominees from among the most meritorious PECASE-eligible CAREER awardees who applied to that year's CAREER competition. The number of nominees allocated to each directorate is proportionate to the directorate's level of participation in the CAREER Program. During the nomination process, NSF will request proof of citizenship status and information necessary for a security clearance from a potential list of nominees. PECASE awards at NSF are honorary and carry no additional funding.

**If I held an NSF postdoctoral fellowship, do I need to include a "Results from Prior Support" section?**

Yes, you must include a "Results from Prior Support" section whenever you have served as a PI or co-PI on any NSF grant within the last 5 years. This includes postdoctoral fellowships, grants in equipment programs such as Major Research Instrumentation, and educational grants. If you have received more than one prior award (excluding amendments), you must report on the award that is most closely related to the CAREER proposal. (See the GPG for the required information.)

**Which programs in the Directorate for Education and Human Resources (EHR) accept CAREER proposals and what are appropriate research plans for that Directorate.**

All EHR divisions fund CAREER proposals. Research should be oriented toward laying the conceptual foundations and expanding the knowledge base necessary to support the enhancement of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education at all levels in both formal and informal settings from pre-K through adulthood. Please see specific EHR solicitations for program emphasis.

**I am preparing a CAREER proposal for submission to the Office of Polar Programs. Whom should I contact?**

For guidance on submitting information about fieldwork proposed in the Arctic or Antarctic, you should contact the program officer in the Office of Polar Programs who is associated with the program most closely aligned with the research being proposed. The Office of Polar Programs Web page can be found at: <http://www.nsf.gov/dir/index.jsp?org=OPP>.

### **C. CAREER PROPOSAL REVIEW**

**My work is multidisciplinary and I want to request that two different programs review my CAREER proposal. To which program should I submit my proposal and how will my proposal be reviewed?**

NSF encourages multidisciplinary proposals and every attempt is made to ensure the best fit for these proposals. Proposals with a multidisciplinary focus are commonly reviewed by different programs, or by special multidisciplinary panels and/or ad-hoc reviewers. However, only one program can serve as the managing or primary program. Do not submit duplicate proposals. The primary organization you select on the cover page in FastLane should be the program that supports the main thrust of your proposed research. The deadline of the primary organization is the one in effect when submitting your proposal.

NSF may choose to have your proposal reviewed by two panels. Alternatively, the managing Program Officer might ask for names of reviewers from the second program.

**In addition to the two NSF merit review criteria (intellectual merit and broader impacts), what other factors will be considered in the review process?**

Reviewers are asked to address the two NSF merit review criteria, but they are also asked to note the effective integration of research and educational activities. Specifically they are asked to note how well the proposal addresses the following:

- A description of the proposed research project, including preliminary supporting data where appropriate, specific objectives, methods and procedures to be used, and expected significance of the results;
- A description of the proposed educational activities, including plans to evaluate their impact;
- A description of how the research and educational activities are integrated with one another; and
- Results from prior NSF support, if applicable

### **D. ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAREER AWARDS**

**When will I be notified of the final decision on my CAREER proposal?**

Most proposers will be notified within six months of submission. You can check the status of your CAREER proposal by accessing the FastLane website. If you have not received notification of a decision on your proposal by February and your proposal status is shown as "pending" in FastLane, you can contact the program or division to which your proposal was assigned to inquire about the status of your proposal.

## **E. POST-AWARD ADMINISTRATION**

### **Are the reporting requirements for CAREER awards the same as for other NSF awards?**

In addition to meeting all of the requirements for annual and final reports that apply to other NSF awards, the reports for CAREER awards must summarize progress in both research and educational activities and indicate how well these activities are being integrated. Collaborative activities should also be described. In addition, annual reports for CAREER awards must include a note from the PI's department head, or equivalent, indicating the department's continued commitment to mentor the PI and support the integrated research and educational activities.

### **What types of supplemental funds are available for CAREER awards?**

CAREER awards are eligible for supplemental funding as described in the GPG. Contact your disciplinary Program Officer to ask about supplemental funding opportunities for CAREER awards.

### **What happens to my CAREER award if I leave my academic appointment?**

CAREER awards must be relinquished if the principal investigator transfers any time prior to or during the duration of the award to a position that is not tenured, tenure-track, tenure-track equivalent and/or to an institution that is not CAREER-eligible. This includes transfer to a university or college outside the U.S. or to a non-academic institution.

In some cases if you leave an eligible position while the CAREER award is active, funding may be expended to allow the student(s) to continue to be supported on the award for the remaining funded year. The award would then terminate at the end of that funded year. Contact the disciplinary Program Officer as soon you know you will be leaving to inquire about this possibility. If approved, a substitute PI will be placed on the award for the remaining year of support. The substitute PI will not receive any salary support on the CAREER award.