

NSF 03-017

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the MATH AND SCIENCE PARTNERSHIP (MSP) – NSF 02-190

The new MSP program has generated much enthusiasm around the country. The official guidelines for submission of MSP proposals can be found in the Program Solicitation NSF 02-190 (<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02190/nsf02190.htm>). Step-by-step submission instructions are also available at this site. The following questions and answers are intended to be helpful supplements to the program guidelines, and have been generated at recent workshops and through communications with the MSP Cognizant Program Officers.

As additional questions are raised, please continue to review these FAQs as they will be updated on a regular basis.

General MSP Questions

Question – Discussions of the two merit review criteria, intellectual merit and broader impact of the proposed activity, are woven throughout our proposal. Is that sufficient?

Answer – No. The Program Solicitation NSF 02-190 (under Section V. PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS, A. Proposal Preparation Instructions, Project Summary) states: “Note that the abstract MUST address both NSB-approved merit criteria in separate statements. Effective October 1, 2002, NSF will return without review proposals that do not address both merit review criteria in separate statements.” Partnerships are STRONGLY ENCOURAGED to submit relevant information on the (single) Project Summary page in three sections, clearly labeled as: Abstract, Intellectual Merit Criterion, and Broader Impacts Criterion. Further clarification of what is entailed in the merit review criteria can be found in Section VI, PROPOSAL REVIEW INFORMATION, of the MSP Solicitation and in NSF’s **Grant Proposal Guide**.

Question – How does the MSP differ from NSF programs of the past decade?

Answer – The MSP requires that mathematicians, scientists and engineers from institutions of higher education participate fully in the improvement of K-12 mathematics and science education. In all cases MSP proposals must demonstrate commitments among school districts, institutions of higher education, and other partners. Partnership models will be extensively studied to learn how partners’ commitments result in institutional changes that will lead to scalability and sustainability of their efforts. The MSP program expects to learn and share how the partnerships contribute to a national capacity for success in educational reform.

Question – Will there be another round of proposals for the MSP after the January 7, 2003 deadline?

Answer – When initially conceived, it was anticipated that the MSP program would receive funding from Congress each year for five years. If Congress appropriates funding consistent with this timeline, then we anticipate MSP competitions for Comprehensive and Targeted proposals after the January 7, 2003 submission deadline. In addition we anticipate two other competitions in FY 2003, for the MSP Research, Evaluation, and Technical Assistance (RETA) component and for MSP Teacher Institutes. Details are forthcoming.

Question – What is a Cooperative Agreement (indicated in the Solicitation under the description for Comprehensive awards)?

Answer – A cooperative agreement is very similar to a contract and includes explicit benchmarks and deliverables on a yearly basis throughout the lifespan of an award. Cooperative agreements will be negotiated with each partnership that receives a Comprehensive award. This step follows the review process and commitment to accept the award by a partnership.

Question – Under Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions, B. Budgetary Information, the following statement appears: "Indirect cost (F&A) Limitations: Not Applicable". Does this mean that there are no limitations on indirect costs other than the rate negotiated by an organization with the cognizant Federal negotiating agency? Or, does this mean that indirect costs are not applicable to this solicitation?

Answer – It means that there are no limitations on indirect costs other than the rate negotiated by an organization with the cognizant Federal negotiating agency.

Question – Do we need to send a Letter of Intent before submitting a proposal?

Answer – No, however, partnerships are STRONGLY ENCOURAGED to enter specific information about their projects into the MSP Data Registry. Details can be found in the Program Solicitation under section V. PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS, A. Proposal Preparation Instructions. The registry can be accessed at <http://www.ehr.nsf.gov/msp/msppartner/>. Information entered into the registry can be modified until the time of proposal submission on or before January 7, 2003.

Eligibility Rules

Question – Can my institution be the lead organization on proposals for both a Comprehensive and a Targeted Award?

Answer – A single institution can be the *lead on only one* proposal. The lead is defined as the institution that submits the proposal, acts as the fiscal agent and is responsible for overall management of the proposed project. An institution may participate in more than one partnership proposal. However, a school district can participate in no more than two proposal submissions of which no more than one can be for a Comprehensive award.

Examples –

- *An institution of higher education in which two departments in a college want to participate in separate proposals with different partners.* This is allowed, but the college can be the lead organization on only one of the proposals; the departments must negotiate with each other on which proposal would have their college as the lead. For the other proposal, the department and college would be a partner with some other organization acting as the lead. ***A cautionary note:*** Institutional change within colleges and universities participating in the MSP is one of the expected outcomes when an institution is a Core partner in a proposal. When there are multiple efforts involving different departments/units of an institution of higher education, care must be taken to ensure a common model of change to which all parties will commit.
- *A school district would like to work on a mathematics proposal with one set of partners and a science one with other partners.* This is permitted, as long as only one proposal is for a Comprehensive award (or if both proposals are for Targeted awards).
- *A state educational agency submits a proposal involving school districts and institutions of higher education.* This is allowable and the state educational agency, as a Core partner, must demonstrate commitment to institutional change. However, at least one institution of higher education and at least one school district would also have to be Core partners in order to meet eligibility requirements of MSP Solicitation NSF 02-190.

Question – Is a school district that received funding from the first round of proposals now excluded from involvement and partnership in all subsequent proposals?

Answer – Solicitation NSF 02-190 does not put any restrictions on currently funded school districts. However, the onus will be on the Partners of a proposal involving a currently funded school district to provide compelling rationale and documentation for the need for this proposal given the currently funded endeavor and the relationship of the proposed effort to the funded endeavor. In the case of a school district that has received funding for a Comprehensive MSP under Solicitation NSF 02-061, which means that K-12 mathematics AND science are being addressed, this rationale and documentation would need to be convincing.

Question – Our partnership will have many partners. Should we provide information within the body of the proposal on all partners? And what about the Supplementary Documentation? If we include a letter of commitment from all core partners we will already exceed the 40-page limit. And that's before attaching baseline data and the other required documentation. What should we do?

Answer –

- i. You should provide information on each entity that will share in the goals, the responsibility, and the accountability of the project. You should also discuss the identified intended institutional change for each Core partner.
- ii. When there are several partners with common commitments, they can sign-off on ONE letter of commitment, but the letter should contain description of substantive commitments. As for the baseline data on students and teachers, it is up to the Partnership to gather the necessary data and to present the (disaggregated) data in a coherent fashion.

Ultimately, it is a Partnership decision as to what must be placed in the Supplementary Documentation. All proposals submitted, regardless of size of Partnerships, will be held to the same page limitations.

Project Requirements

Question – In a proposal for a Comprehensive award, do we have to work on issues of both mathematics and science education?

Answer – No. You may submit a proposal for a Comprehensive award that address K-12 science (amounts awarded will be up to \$4 million/year), K-12 mathematics (up to \$4 million/year), or both K-12 mathematics and K-12 science (up to \$7 million/year).

Question – May a partnership submit a proposal for a Targeted award that is K-12 Mathematics and/or Science?

Answer – By definition, a project that covers K-12 mathematics and science, or K-12 mathematics, or K-12 science, is a Comprehensive project. Targeted projects are intended to have specific grade level and/or content focus. For example, a project addressing geometry in K-12 would be appropriate as a proposal for a Targeted award. Similarly, a project focusing on just grades 6-8 or grades 5-9, etc., would be appropriate as a proposal for a Targeted award.

Question – The Program Description states, "the MSP program seeks to improve K-12 achievement through a sharp focus on three interrelated areas..." Is it important to address all three (3) areas in a Targeted project?

Answer – Yes, regardless of whether the proposal is for a Comprehensive or Targeted award, the three interrelated issues should be addressed. In a Targeted project, partnerships will address student achievement gains in a specific grade range and/or within a content emphasis.

Question – What are the “challenging curricula,” discussed in the Program Solicitation, which MSP programs should utilize? What is the expectation for inclusion of NSF-funded curricula in MSP projects?

Answer –There is no intent on the part of NSF to designate or proscribe a specific curriculum in schools, as curricular decisions are viewed by NSF as a local or state decision-making process. Partnerships are expected to evaluate the relevant literature on high expectations for all K-16 students and to make decisions consistent with state mathematics and science student academic achievement standards. MSP projects must start with disaggregated data indicating which students are in which courses and develop benchmarks indicating how partnership activities will lead to all students being engaged in challenging curricula that promote the development of increasingly sophisticated levels of problem-solving and critical thinking and reasoning skills in mathematics and science, as well as increased student participation and success in advanced coursework. Students’ curricular options and assessments should parallel the benchmarks that are developed, as should support of the teacher workforce. Ultimately, partnerships must utilize evidence for K-12 student achievement in the selection of materials for use in schools, as well as in teacher education and professional development programs.

Question – Must all of the proposed work be new development and design or can the work be centered on existing proven initiatives?

Answer – The MSP is not meant to replace, continue or supplement previous efforts funded under other NSF programs or other funding sources. A proposal for funding through the MSP may be based on prior work that demonstrates credible evidence of success. Beyond simply building on effective programs that have been funded in the past, the MSP seeks to support strong partnerships that will result in increased student achievement while also stimulating new, innovative solutions to issues in mathematics and science education.

Question – Do projects have to impact at least 10,000 students?

Answer – The figure “10,000 students or more” is identified as a guideline only and indicates that the scale of the partnership, i.e., the number of students and/or teachers impacted by the project, is one factor in the strength of a proposal. This guideline is not meant to stifle innovation nor exclude sparsely populated areas from participating. However, as noted in the Solicitation, projects that incur high costs but which impact small numbers of students and teachers typically do not hold as much promise for broad dissemination as more cost-effective approaches. All costs must be well justified in the Budget Justification and must directly correlate with the scope, complexity and scale of the proposed project.