

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

Updated January 2013

## 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). The Proposal File Update module, however, may not be used for submission of revised budgets. All budgetary revisions must be submitted through use of the FastLane Revised Proposal Budget Module. More information on and submission procedures for proposal file updates can be found in the [Grant Proposal Guide \(GPG\) Chapter III.C](#).

### 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 the award, 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 NSF [Award and Administration Guide](#) (AAG).

## B

### Biographical Sketches

**Instructions for the Biographical Sketch(es), Products section indicate that “acceptable products must be citable and accessible.” Accessibility may be difficult to accomplish in the case of manuscripts submitted or accepted for publication and other documents and materials. Access may need to be provided through institutional or personal websites. Will that be sufficient to meet the proposal submission requirements?**

The language was changed from “publications” to “products” in order to allow proposers to receive appropriate credit for research products that may not be traditional publications. The requirement that all products be "citable and accessible" is not a submission requirement, in the sense of blocking a proposal from consideration, but a definition of the standard to which proposers should adhere. It was introduced because of experience with citations that are not readily available, including web references that are inaccessible or out of date and is intended to indicate that such mistakes have demonstrably downgraded a proposal in the judgment of reviewers. References to websites, even private ones, are appropriate, provided that the site is available for a reasonable percentage of the time. Such material is often the best way to demonstrate the applicant's ability to carry out the project.

**For Biographical Sketch(es), now that “Publications” has become “Products”, are proposers still limited to the same number of Products as they were Publications?**

Yes. The proposer may include up to five products most closely related to the proposed project and up to five other significant products, whether or not related to the proposed project.

## 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 DIAS/[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. **All components** of the collaborative proposal must meet any established deadline, and, failure to do so may result in the entire collaborative proposal being returned without review. [Chapter II.D.4](#) 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. Proposers may indicate on the Cover Sheet which NSF organizational unit(s) they 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.G.2](#).)

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

## Conflict of Interest

### Will NSF be changing its conflict of interest policy to be similar to NIH's Financial Conflict of Interest (FCOI) regulation?

No. NSF will not be changing its conflict of interest policy to be similar to the NIH FCOI regulation effective August 24, 2012. In NSF 13-1, the only modification to the NSF policy is to specify that, when the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) is notified of an unmanageable conflict of interest (COI) via FastLane, OGC will contact the institution making the report, obtain a copy of that institution's policy, and follow up with the institution regarding what actions the institution will take with respect to the reported COI. See [AAG Chapter IV.A.](#) for further information.

## Consultant Rate

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

No, there is no limitation on payments to consultants under NSF awards. Payment for consultant services 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.

Additional information on charging consultant costs to an NSF award is available in [AAG Chapter V.B.6](#).

## Cost Sharing

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

The National Science Board issued a report entitled "[Investing in the Future: NSF Cost Sharing Policies for a Robust Federal Research Enterprise](#)" (NSB 09-20, August 3, 2009), which contained eight recommendations for NSF regarding cost sharing. In implementation of the Board's recommendations, NSF's revised guidance<sup>1</sup> (see [GPG Chapter II.C.2.g\(xi\)](#)) is as follows:

- Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited.
- When mandatory cost sharing is included on Line M and accepted by NSF, the commitment of funds becomes legally binding and is subject to audit. Failure to provide the level of cost sharing required by the NSF solicitation and reflected in the approved award budget may result in termination of the NSF award, disallowance of award costs and/or refund of award funds to NSF by the awardee.

More information can be found in the [GPG Chapter II.C.2.g\(xi\)](#) and the [AAG Chapter II.D.](#)

**The *Grant Proposal Guide* (NSF 13-1) Chapter II.C.2.g.(viii) states, "Except as noted in GPG II.C.2.g.(v) or II.D.9, or in an NSF program solicitation, the applicable indirect cost rate(s) negotiated by the organization with the cognizant negotiating agency must be used in computing indirect costs (F&A) for a proposal." Does this mean that institutions cannot request a reduced or waived rate because this would constitute voluntary committed cost sharing?**

Yes. Unless the proposal would be considered a noted exception, an institution must use its current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement in computing indirect costs for a proposal. Otherwise, foregoing full indirect cost rate recovery would be considered voluntary committed cost sharing and is therefore prohibited by NSF.

### **What is the distinction between voluntary committed cost sharing and voluntary uncommitted cost sharing?**

The definition of cost sharing is found in 2 CFR § 215.23. One of the aspects of this definition is that cost sharing must be included on the approved budget from the Federal awarding agency. If a contribution is not included on the budget, it is not considered to be voluntary committed cost sharing. Voluntary committed cost sharing is any cost sharing offered by the proposer that is not mandatory and that is captured in the budget or budget justification.

Per [OMB Memorandum M-01-06](#), voluntary uncommitted cost sharing effort is defined, for the purpose of the memorandum, as university faculty (including senior researchers) effort that is over and above that which is committed and budgeted for in a sponsored

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<sup>1</sup> See NSF's Revised Cost Sharing Policy Statement for the Foundation's overarching policies on cost sharing.

agreement. OMB Memorandum M-01-06 states that voluntary uncommitted cost sharing should be treated differently from committed effort and should not be included in the organized research base for computing the F&A [Facilities and Administrative] rate or reflected in any allocation of F&A costs. Furthermore, such faculty effort is excluded from the effort reporting requirement in section J.10 of 2 CFR 220 (formerly OMB Circular A-21).

**Where can the PI describe the time they'll spend if they don't request salary?**

A Biographical Sketch and Current and Pending Support information are still required for them and, the Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources section should contain an aggregated description of the resources that the organization will provide to the project (both physical and personnel), should it be funded. The description should be narrative in nature and must not include any quantifiable financial information.

**D**

**Data Management Plan**

**Where can I find more information about the requirement for a data management plan?**

The *Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) contains a clarification of NSF's long standing data policy. All proposals must describe plans for data management and sharing of the products of research, or assert the absence of the need for such plans. FastLane will not permit submission of a proposal that is missing a Data Management Plan. The Data Management Plan will be reviewed as part of the intellectual merit or broader impacts of the proposal, or both, as appropriate.

More information can be found in the [Grant Proposal Guide Chapter II.C.2j](#).

**For a separately submitted collaborative proposal, do non-lead organizations need to submit a data management plan?**

No. The lead organization should submit one data management plan for all the collaborating institutions. A non-lead organization does not need to submit a data management plan for a separately submitted collaborative proposal. More information can be found in the [Grant Proposal Guide Chapter II.C.2.j](#).

**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?**

The full text of the Drug-Free Workplace Certification can be found in [Exhibit II-3](#) of the GPG.

## **E**

## **Early-concept Grants for Exploratory Research (EAGER)**

### **What is the EAGER mechanism and where can I find information about submitting an EAGER proposal?**

The EAGER funding mechanism may be used to support exploratory work in its early stages on untested, but potentially transformative, research ideas or approaches. This work may be considered especially "high risk-high payoff" in the sense that it, for example, involves radically different approaches, applies new expertise, or engages novel disciplinary or interdisciplinary perspectives. These exploratory proposals may also be submitted directly to an NSF program, but the EAGER mechanism should not be used for projects that are appropriate for submission as "regular" (i.e., non-EAGER) NSF proposals. PI(s) must contact the NSF program officer(s) whose expertise is most germane to the proposal topic prior to submission of an EAGER proposal. This will aid in determining the appropriateness of the work for consideration under the EAGER mechanism; this suitability must be assessed early in the process.

More information about the EAGER program can be found in the [GPG Chapter II.D.2](#).

## **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?**

Unless otherwise specified in the solicitation, 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. [GPG Chapter II.D.4](#) 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.9](#)) 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 specific 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 Help 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.

**Can an individual who is not a U.S. citizen serve as a Principal Investigator on a proposal?**

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 U.S. 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 person from a non-U.S. institution be a co-PI on a project?**

There is no general prohibition against someone from a non-U.S. institution serving as a co-PI on a project. NSF does allow subawards to non-U.S. organizations and per the Grant Proposal Guide (GPG) Chapter II.D.4.a, we allow collaborators from the subaward organization to be named as co-PIs under the prime's proposal (although that is at the discretion of the prime). The only reason this would not be the case is if different guidance was specified in an NSF solicitation.

### **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.5.](#)

## **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 Chapter II.D.3](#).

## **Facilities and Administrative (F&A) Costs (see Indirect Costs)**

### **Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources**

#### **What should be included in the Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources section of the proposal?**

This section of the proposal is used to assess the adequacy of the resources available to perform the effort proposed to satisfy both Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts review criteria. Proposers should describe only those resources that are directly applicable. Proposers should include an aggregated description of the internal and external resources (both physical and personnel) that the organization and its collaborators will provide to the project, should it be funded. Such information must be provided in this section, in lieu of other parts of the proposal (e.g., budget justification, project description). The description should be narrative in nature and must not include any quantifiable financial information. Reviewers will evaluate the information during the merit review process and the cognizant NSF Program Officer will review it for programmatic and technical sufficiency.

Although these resources are not considered cost sharing as defined in 2 CFR § 215.23 (OMB Circular A-110), the Foundation does expect that the resources identified in the Facilities, Equipment, and Other Resources section will be provided, or made available, should the proposal be funded. AAG Chapter II.B.1 specifies procedures for use by the awardee when there are postaward changes to objective, scope or methodology.

If there are no Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources to describe, a statement to that effect should be included in this section of the proposal and uploaded into FastLane.

#### **Is an organization obligated to provide the resources described in the Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources section, should an award be made? What should an awardee do if they cannot provide some of those resources?**

The resources described in the Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources section are evaluated during the merit review process and, as such, NSF does have an expectation that they will be made available, should the proposal be funded. Therefore, organizations do need to ensure that they are provided if an award is made.

Should an awardee not be able to provide some of those resources, they should discuss the situation with the cognizant NSF Program Officer. Prior NSF approval is required for any change to the Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources section of an approved proposal that would constitute a change in objectives, scope or methodology (see the *NSF Award & Administration Guide* (AAG) Chapter II.B.1 for further information).

## **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; and post-award administrative activities. Beginning in Spring 2013, all project reporting will transition from FastLane to Research.gov. All FastLane functions are accessed at: <http://www.fastlane.nsf.gov>. Research.gov project reporting is available at: <https://www.research.gov/>.

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

Unless otherwise specified in the solicitation, 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.D.4](#) 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 Help 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.

## **Fringe Benefits**

### **Can proposers use projected fringe benefit rates when submitting budgets to NSF?**

No, proposers should be using their currently approved fringe benefit rate for budgeting purposes.

NSF policy does allow awardees to re-budget funds, within the award, to cover fringe benefit costs that are finalized higher than budgeted. Therefore, if funds under the award are available, the actual fringe rates may be charged.

## G

### Grants.gov

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

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

### 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

### 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 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.7](#))

I

## **Indirect Costs (Facilities and Administrative (F&A) Costs)**

**If the fixed predetermined indirect cost rate changes during the life of the award, may an awardee charge indirect costs to NSF awards based on newly negotiated rates in effect at the time the charges were incurred?**

As a college or university, OMB Circular A-21 (2 CFR Part 220) requires that awardees charge indirect costs based on fixed rates in effect at the time the award was made for the life of the award.

Organizations covered by OMB Circular A-122 (2 CFR Part 230) Non-profits, A-87 (2 CFR Part 225) State and Local Governments, and the Federal Acquisition Regulations Part 31, however, are not bound by this restriction on the use of a fixed rate in effect at the time of the award. These organizations may charge indirect costs based on newly negotiated rates in effect at the time the costs are incurred provided this will not affect the scope, increase award costs, decrease the period of support, or otherwise be inconsistent with the indirect cost rate provisions of the award.

**Given the complex nature of the above question, can an example be provided to better illustrate the correct application of the indirect cost rate?**

A college or university submits a proposal to NSF for consideration in April and at that time, their approved predetermined indirect cost rate is 45%. In June of that year, they negotiate a new rate with their cognizant agency. The new agreement contains the following rates:

Predetermined            July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012    47%

Predetermined            July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013    50%

If the proposal is funded in September, they can use the 47% rate. In fact, for any award made after July 1, they can re-budget and claim indirect costs at the 47% rate.

If, however, the rate agreement will be negotiated again in 2013 and is more than what was previously approved, the higher rate cannot be applied to the current award. Awardees subject to OMB Circular A-21 (2 CFR Part 220) can charge no more than the rate that was in effect at the time of the award, for the life of the award. They cannot re-budget for indirect cost rate changes negotiated after the award was made.

**GPG Chapter II.C.2.g.(viii) states, "Except as noted in GPG Chapter II.C.2.g.(v) and II.D.9, or in an NSF program solicitation, the applicable indirect cost rate(s) negotiated by the organization with the cognizant negotiating agency must be used in computing indirect costs (F&A) for a proposal." Does this mean that a college or university is required to claim the entirety of its negotiated cost rate?**

Yes. Unless the proposal would be considered a noted exception, an institution must use its current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement in computing indirect costs for a proposal.

## Information Sources

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

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 NSF Update service and what is the process for signing up?**

The NSF Update 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). Subscribers are informed each time new publications are issued that match their identified interests. To subscribe to NSF Update, go to the NSF Website, scroll down to the bottom of the page, and click on the blue circle icon with a white envelope inside of it on the right-hand side of the page.

### **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 *Award and Administration Guide* (AAG) provides information regarding the NSF award cycle from issuance and administration of an award through closeout. See the Research 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.

### **Are there presentations and other materials available to help me with proposal preparation and award administration?**

The Policy Office in the Division of Institution & Award Support (DIAS) frequently posts presentations from recent events such as the NSF Grants Conference. Presentations are available at: <http://nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/outreach.jsp#present>.

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

## 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 typefaces that may be used are identified below:

- Arial, Courier New, or Palatino Linotype at a font size of 10 points or larger
- Times New Roman at a font size of 11 points or larger
- Computer Modern family of fonts at a font size of 11 points or larger

In addition to the typefaces listed above, Macintosh users also may use Helvetica and Palatino typefaces.

A font size of less than 10 points may be used for mathematical formulas or equations, figure, table or diagram captions and when using a Symbol font to insert Greek letters or special characters.

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.**

#### If a proposer uses a prescribed typeface and font size, will their proposal comply with formatting requirements?

It is the responsibility of the proposing organization to thoroughly review each proposal prior to submission. Use of a particular typeface and font size are simply two of the required formatting elements. A proposer should also ensure that there are no more than six lines of text within a vertical space of one inch and that margins, in all directions, are at least an inch. Formatting requirements are described in *Grant Proposal Guide* Chapter II.B.

## **Mentoring (see Postdoctoral Researcher Mentoring Plan)**

### **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 GPG. Further information about the review process can be found on the [NSF Merit Review Website](#).

#### **Were the merit review criteria recently revised? Where can a proposer find information on the revised criteria?**

Effective January 14, 2013, the National Science Foundation will implement revised merit review criteria based on the National Science Board (NSB) report, *National Science Foundation's Merit Review Criteria: Review and Revisions*. While the two merit review criteria remain unchanged (Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts), guidance has been provided to clarify and improve the function of the criteria. Revisions based on the NSB report have been incorporated into the Foundation's policies and procedures manuals, websites, and systems. Proposers should familiarize themselves with the Merit Review Principles and Criteria described in [GPG Chapter III.A](#). For comprehensive outreach and training materials visit the [Revised Merit Review Criteria Resource site](#).

#### **Are there FAQs specific to the revised merit review criteria?**

Yes. FAQs on the revised merit review criteria are available at [http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit\\_review/mrfaqs.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit_review/mrfaqs.jsp).

## **N**

### **New Awardees**

#### **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) or the Division of Acquisition and Cooperative Support (DACS) 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 and DACS, along with the Division of Institution and Award Support (DIAS), will be able to determine if the awardee 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>.

## **Nondiscrimination Certification**

### **Where can I find the complete text of the Nondiscrimination Certification?**

See [GPG Exhibit II-6](#) for the full text of the Nondiscrimination Certification. These obligations also apply to subrecipients, subgrantees, and subcontractors under the award.

## **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. This information is also available through [Research.gov](http://Research.gov) Grants Application Status for both PIs and SPOs. 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 or Research.gov to verify the status of their submission to NSF. (Reference [GPG Chapter I.G.5.](#))

## O

### Outreach

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

In addition to campus visits by NSF Program Officials, NSF conducts two grants conferences per calendar year. These grants conferences are held in the spring and fall each year and are announced on the NSF Events Calendar, and on the DIAS/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). See the DIAS/[Policy Office website](#) for additional information.

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 DIAS/Policy Office at: [policy@nsf.gov](mailto:policy@nsf.gov).

#### **Will the slides for the NSF Update or Updates to the Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG) presentations be made available? Is the PAPPG webcast available?**

Yes. Please see the Recent Presentations section:  
<http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/outreach.jsp#present>

## P

### **Person-Months (for “2 month rule” information, see Senior Personnel)**

#### **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 20% effort will be devoted to the project, a total of 2 months should be listed in the academic or calendar-year block (10 months x 20% = 2 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?**

An individual serving as PI or other senior personnel should multiply the percentage of effort associated with the project times the number of months of his/her 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). Organizations may have internal policies and procedures that relate specifically to the type of appointment under which an individual is employed. PIs or other senior personnel should, therefore, confirm with their Sponsored Projects Office that this simplified methodology is consistent with its organizational policy. 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 DIAS/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 or the Division of Acquisition and Cooperative Support should be contacted regarding questions related to award or administration of an award (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 *Award and Administration Guide* (AAG) 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.

## **Postdoctoral Researcher Mentoring Plan**

### **Where can I find more information about NSF's requirement for a postdoctoral researcher mentoring plan?**

Each proposal that requests funding to support postdoctoral researchers must include, as a supplementary document, a description of the mentoring activities that will be provided for such individuals. Please be advised that if required, FastLane will not permit submission of a proposal that is missing a Postdoctoral Researcher Mentoring Plan. In situations where a postdoctoral researcher is listed in Section A of the NSF Budget, and is functioning in a Senior Project personnel capacity (i.e., responsible for the scientific or technical direction of the project), a mentoring plan is not required.

More information about this requirement can be found in the [GPG Chapter II.C.2.i](#).

## **Primary Place of Performance Zip Code Field**

### **What is the Primary Place of Performance?**

The Primary Place of Performance is the location at which the research is actually being conducted. Many projects are performed at a location other than the Awardee Organization. As a result, the National Science Foundation (NSF) requires applicants to list a Primary Place of Performance for each proposal ([GPG Chapter II.C.2.a](#))

### **Do I have to enter an address for the Primary Place of Performance if it's the same as the address for the Awardee Organization?**

Yes. Proposers may select to make the Primary Place of Performance name the same as the Awardee Organization name; however, they must re-enter the full address in the Primary Place of Performance address fields.

### **Why is it necessary to enter a 9-digit zip code for the Primary Place of Performance?**

A 9-digit zip code is required for consistency with the requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA). The 9-digit zip code is validated against the U.S. Postal Service's (USPS) database, which ensures that the location can be accurately identified and aligns with the correct congressional district.

### **What if I don't know my 9-digit zip code?**

Proposers can find the 9-digit zip code for the Primary Place of Performance through the USPS website (<http://usps.com>) by selecting "Look Up a Zip Code" under the "Quick Tools" menu on the homepage and entering the street address for the performance location.

### **Should I enter a dash ("-") in my 9-digit zip code?**

No, do not enter a dash. Enter only the digits of the zip code.

### **How do I enter a foreign address for the Primary Place of Performance?**

Enter the street address in the Street Address field, and then select the appropriate country. Zip code and state are not applicable for non-US addresses, and those fields should be left blank.

### **I received an error message “a valid zip code is required” when entering a zip code for the Primary Place of Performance. How do I correct it?**

If this error message appears, a proposer must enter the correct 9-digit zip code for the Primary Place of Performance in order to submit the proposal. The 9-digit zip code for the Primary Place of Performance can be found through the USPS website (<http://usps.com>) by selecting “Look Up a Zip Code” under the “Quick Tools” menu on the homepage and entering the street address for the performance location.

### **Why won't FastLane recognize my institution's 9-digit zip code?**

Some institutions assign unique 9-digit zip code combinations within the institution, which are not registered with the USPS. To verify that the correct USPS-recognized 9-digit zip code for an institution is being used, visit the USPS website at <http://usps.com>, select “Look Up a Zip Code” under the “Quick Tools” menu on the homepage, and enter the street address for the performance location.

### **Why is FastLane only allowing me to enter 8 of the 9 digits of my zip code?**

Verify that only digits are being entered for the zip code. Do not enter a dash. If only digits are being entered and issues continue to occur, contact the FastLane Helpdesk ([fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto:fastlane@nsf.gov) or 1-800-673-6188, 7AM-9PM EST Monday – Friday except Federal holidays).

## **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. 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 [AAG Exhibit II-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' webpages.

### **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.](#))

## **Project Outcomes Report for the General Public**

### **How does the Project Outcomes report differ from the Annual and Final project reports?**

Annual and Final project reports provide NSF program officers and administrative offices with information on the progress of supported projects and the way these funds are used. Beginning in spring 2013, annual, final and interim project reports will be submitted in Research.gov.

The Project Outcomes report is a brief summary (200-800 words), prepared specifically for the public, of the nature and outcomes of the project. The Project Outcomes report is submitted in [Research.gov](#). Additional information is available on the [Project Reports](#) page of Research.gov.

### **What should be included in a Project Outcomes report?**

The [AAG Chapter II.E.3](#) describes the contents of the required reports.

### **For a collaborative project, who should submit a Project Outcomes Report?**

For a collaborative project where a single award is made to one lead organization (which administers subawards to other organizations), the PI for the lead organization is responsible for submitting the Project Outcomes Report. For a collaborative project where a separate award is made to each organization in the collaborative, the PI for each separate award is responsible for submitting a Project Outcomes Report.

## 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. The Proposal File Update module, however, may not be used for submission of revised budgets. All budgetary revisions must be submitted through use of the FastLane Revised Proposal Budget Module. [GPG Chapter III.C](#) contains the procedures to be followed for proposal file updates.

### **After my proposal was submitted, I discovered that my postdoctoral mentoring plan needs to be corrected. FastLane is not allowing me to do a Proposal File Update to make the correction. What should I do?**

If a proposer discovers that a postdoctoral mentoring plan needs to be corrected, the proposal must be withdrawn and resubmitted prior to the deadline. The postdoctoral mentoring plan cannot be corrected through the Proposal File Update module.

## Proposal Not Accepted

### **What does “proposal not accepted” mean?**

Proposal not accepted is defined as FastLane will not permit submission of the proposal because a required component of the proposal is missing. If a proposal does not contain a Project Summary, Data Management Plan, or Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan (if applicable), FastLane will not permit submission of the proposal. More information is available in GPG Chapter IV.B.

## Proposal Preparation

### **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 [AAG Chapter V.B.6.b](#) “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.

### **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 one inch. (Individual program solicitations, however, may eliminate this proposer option by requiring other type size, margin or line spacing requirements.) (Reference [GPG Chapter II.B.2](#))

**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.1](#))

**May Uniform 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. **All components** of the collaborative proposal must meet any established deadline, and, failure to do so may result in the entire collaborative proposal being returned without review. [Chapter II.D.4](#) 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. If there are no references cited, a statement to that effect should be included in this section of the proposal and uploaded into FastLane. (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.

**If the project will be performed at a location different than the awardee organization, how should that be reflected in the proposal?**

If the project will be performed at the awardee organization, the designated box on the Cover Sheet should be checked. If the project, however, will be performed at a location other than the awardee, the following information (where applicable) should be provided:

- Organization Name (identify the organization name of the primary site where the work will be performed, if different than the awardee);
- Street;
- City;
- State;
- Country; and
- 9-digit Zip Code.

For further information, see the [GPG Chapter II.C.2.a\(4\)\(g\)](#).

## **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.

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.B](#) 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. All sections of the proposal listed in [Chapter II.C.2](#) of the GPG are required parts of the proposal, and must be submitted electronically. Failure to submit the required sections may result in the proposal not being accepted or being returned without review. Detailed information about proposal preparation is available from the Grants.gov or FastLane website.

## **R**

### **Grants for Rapid Response Research (RAPID)**

#### **What is the RAPID mechanism and where can I find information about submitting a RAPID proposal?**

The RAPID funding mechanism is used for proposals having a severe urgency with regard to availability of, or access to data, facilities or specialized equipment, including quick-response research on natural or anthropogenic disasters and similar unanticipated

events. PI(s) must contact the NSF program officer(s) whose expertise is most germane to the proposal topic before submitting a RAPID proposal. This will facilitate determining whether the proposed work is appropriate for RAPID funding.

More information about the RAPID program can be found in the [GPG Chapter II.D.1](#).

## 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 Federal holiday, it will be extended to the following business day. (Reference [GPG Chapter I.F.](#))

### **What is the difference between target dates, deadline 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](#) or in the circumstances outlined in [Chapter I.F.2](#).
- **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.](#))

### **If a proposer needs to request extension of a deadline due to a disaster (hurricane, flood, etc.), what process should be followed?**

In the event of a natural or anthropogenic disaster that interferes with an organization's ability to meet a proposal submission deadline, proposers should contact the cognizant NSF Program Officer in the Division/Office to which they intend to submit their proposal and request authorization to submit a "late proposal." Such contact should be via e-mail (or telephone, if e-mail is unavailable). Proposers should then follow the written or verbal guidance provided by the cognizant NSF Program Officer. Further information can be found in [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 [GPG Chapter IV.D](#) 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.

## Renewal Proposals

### **What guidelines are important to know when submitting a renewal proposal?**

A renewal application competes with all other applications and must be developed as fully as though the applicant is applying for the first time. In preparing a renewal proposal, proposers should assume that reviewers will not have access to previously submitted versions of the proposal. In addition, the National Science Board strongly endorses the principle that all expiring awards are to be recompeted. See [GPG Chapter V](#) for more information on renewal proposals and a link to the NSB resolution.

## Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR)

### **What is the Research Performance Progress Report?**

The [Research Performance Progress Report](#) is the result of a government-wide effort to create greater consistency in the administration of federal research awards by streamlining and standardizing reporting formats. The RPPR will be used by agencies that support research and research-related activities for use in submission of progress reports.

NSF has developed the RPPR as a service within Research.gov. PIs and co-PIs will use Research.gov to meet all NSF project reporting requirements, including submission of annual, final, interim, and Project Outcomes Reports.

### **When will the RPPR be implemented?**

The transition began in fall 2012, and the roll out to all awardee organizations is anticipated in 2013.

### **Where can I find more information about the RPPR?**

More information may be found on the [Project Reports](#) page of Research.gov.

## **Research.gov**

### **What is Research.gov?**

Led by the National Science Foundation, Research.gov improves customer service for the research community by increasing access to information and services while streamlining and standardizing business processes amongst partner agencies. Research.gov provides a menu of services tailored to the needs of the research community. Research.gov enables organizations and researchers to access streamlined services for multiple federal agencies in one location. All Research.gov functions are accessed at <http://www.research.gov>.

## **Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)**

### **Where can a proposer find more information about NSF's RCR policy?**

Information about NSF's RCR policy, including links to important documents, is available on the DIAS/Policy Office webpage: <http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/rcr.jsp>.

## **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:

1. (co) Principal Investigator(s) -- the individual(s) designated by the proposer, and approved by NSF, who will be responsible for the scientific or technical direction of the project. NSF does not infer any distinction in scientific stature among multiple PIs, whether referred to as PI or co-PI. If more than one, the first one listed will serve as the contact PI, with whom all communications between NSF program officials and the project relating to the scientific, technical, and budgetary aspects of the project should take place. The PI and any identified co-PIs, however, will be jointly responsible for submission of the requisite project reports.
2. 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 Exhibit II-7)

#### **Does the "2 month" salary rule apply to all senior personnel or only to faculty on academic appointments?**

While the salary policy contained in GPG Chapter II.C.2.g.(i) does apply to all senior personnel listed on the NSF budget, the policy does allow for flexibility to request more than two months of salary per year. If proposers request more than two months, the needed salary support should be put on the proposal budget and will need to be very well justified in the budget justification. If more than 2 months is approved by NSF, it will be included on the award budget.

#### **Must awardees request prior NSF approval if making a change post-award to the amount originally budgeted for senior personnel salary?**

NSF has not changed the terms and conditions or any of our post-award prior approval requirements. See AAG Exhibit II-1. Therefore, under the normal rebudgeting authority, an awardee can internally approve an increase in person months devoted to the project after an award is made, even if doing so results in salary support for senior personnel exceeding the 2 month salary rule. No prior approval from NSF is necessary. The caveat is if the change would cause the objective or scope of the project to change, then the awardee would have to submit an approval request via FastLane. Since salary can amount to a large part of the budget, there may very well be a scope change with addition of salary, especially if, for example, the PI decided not to hire a grad student in order to have enough money to cover the salary increase.

**Is it possible to remove the PI or other senior personnel from the budget in FastLane?**

For consistency with the NSF cost sharing policy, if person months will be requested for senior personnel, a corresponding salary amount must be entered on the budget. If no person months and no salary are being requested for senior personnel, they should be removed from section A of the budget. Their name(s) will remain on the Cover Sheet and the individual(s) role on the project should be described in the Facilities, Equipment and other Resources section of the proposal.

**If PIs can be taken off the budget in FastLane, does this mean that there is no minimum effort requirement for PIs on NSF-sponsored projects?**

The functionality to remove the PI from the FastLane budget does not imply any changes to the existing practice of sharing in the costs of faculty salaries, and NSF has not made any changes to its current salaries and wages policy. In addition, the GPG coverage reminds recipients that they remain subject to the provisions of OMB M-01-06, "Clarification of OMB A-21 Treatment of Voluntary Uncommitted Cost Sharing and Tuition Remission Costs," regarding requirements for committing and tracking "some level" of faculty (or senior researcher) effort as part of the organized research base.

### **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 [AAG Chapter IV.A](#) provides information on the conflicts of interest policy. NSF does not provide written samples of such policies. Questions regarding the NSF conflicts of interest policy should be directed to the Office of the General Counsel on 703-292-8060.

**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 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.7.](#))

### **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 [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.

For purposes of NSF, the end date of a submission window converts to, and follows the same policies as, a deadline date.

## **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 awardee 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. Awardees should contact the cognizant NSF Program Officer prior to submitting a request for supplemental funding. (Reference [AAG Chapter I.E.4](#))

## **System for Award Management (SAM)**

### **Does a proposer have to be registered in SAM?**

Each proposer must be registered in the SAM database prior to submission of the proposal. Subawardees named in the proposal, however, do not need to be registered in SAM. SAM is the primary registrant database for the U.S. Government. SAM collects, validates, stores, and disseminates data in support of agency assistance and acquisition missions, including Federal agency grant and contract awards. This SAM registration must be maintained with current information at all times during which the organization has an active award or a proposal under consideration by NSF. Failure to comply with SAM registration requirement prior to proposal submission may impact the processing of the proposal. To register in SAM, go to <https://www.sam.gov>. Proposers are advised that it takes approximately three-to-five business days to complete the registration process.

## **T**

### **Technology Expenses**

#### **Can technology devices such as Smartphones, iPhones, iPads, etc. be charged directly to an NSF award?**

In general, these IT devices fall into the same category as general purpose equipment and therefore should not be charged directly to an NSF grant. This is because their use and benefit is not for the sole purpose of a particular project and extends beyond use on a particular project. An organization might purchase these items with NSF funds provided for indirect costs, depending on the awardee's internal policies.

In cases where the new technology devices are specifically required for the project, please consult the Grants and Agreements Official named on the award to discuss.

### **Transfer of the Award**

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

If a PI plans to leave an organization during the course of an award, the organization has the prerogative to nominate a replacement PI, request that the award be terminated, or transfer the award (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, an award transfer request shall be submitted via the Notification and Request module in the FastLane system.

See [AAG Chapter II.B.2.h](#) for additional information on award transfers.

## Travel

**I will be flying to a location that does not have a City Pair fare with my starting destination, but I will change planes in a city that does have a City Pair fare with my final destination. Am I required to fly an American carrier for the part of the trip that has a City Pair fare?**

No. The requirement is only that the awardee determines if there is a City Pair fare between the starting airport and the final destination airport. If there is no city pair between the starting airport and the final destination, the traveler could fly the entire way on a foreign flag air carrier or part of the way on a U.S. flag air carrier and part of the way on a foreign flag air carrier.

## 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 thereunder 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 Public Health Service (PHS) Approved Assurance. (Reference [GPG Chapter II.D.6](#) and AAG Chapter VI.B.3.)

## **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](#).