Proposal & Award Policy Newsletter

What's Inside

NSF Pilots a *New Collaborator and Other Affiliations* Template

Last month NSF began piloting a new format for submitting *Collaborators and Other Affiliations Information* in FastLane. Proposers are required to include collaborators and other affiliations information for principal investigators (PIs), co-PIs and other senior project personnel. NSF uses this information to manage reviewer selection.

The pilot standardizes the collection of this data across the Foundation and ensures that the information is submitted in a searchable format. This reduces the burden on NSF program staff who currently must spend time manipulating non-searchable files. Likewise, for the community, proposers can rest assured knowing that their format is acceptable to NSF.

The new format requires PIs, co-PIs and other senior project personnel who are identified on the proposal to individually upload their *Collaborators and Other Affiliations Information* as a Single Copy Document which are only seen by NSF staff and not by reviewers.

Proposers will be directed to the new spreadsheet template while in FastLane. The template is fillable, and the content and format requirements must not be altered by the user. Proposers should not convert the file to PDF format prior to submitting the proposal to NSF, rather it should be completed and saved in .xlsx or .xls format to ensure preservation of searchable text, and uploaded into FastLane as a Single Copy Document. Using any other file format may delay the timely processing and review of the proposal.

The template has been tested in Microsoft Excel, Google Sheets and LibreOffice.

In addition to benefiting the merit review process, this template provides a compliant and reusable format for PIs to maintain
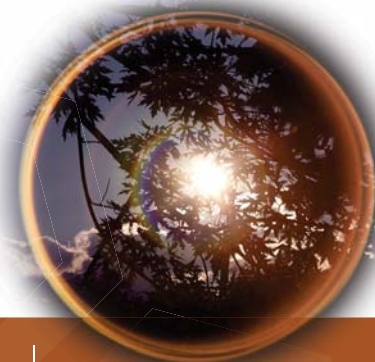
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Contact

Links

Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG)

FAQs on Proposal Preparation & Award Administration

NSF Grants Conference

Presentations from Recent Events

This issue showcases images from Earth Sciences – one of the many research and education areas funded by NSF. SOURCE: nsf.gov/news/mmg.

Research Terms and Conditions Implementation

As announced on March 14th in the Federal Register, the revised Research Terms and Conditions (RTCs) have been made available to research agencies for use with research and research-related awards. The RTCs address and implement the *Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards* (2 CFR 200).

The revision was an initiative of the National Science and Technology Council's (NSTC) Committee on Science's Research Business Models (RBM) Interagency Working Group. One of the RBM's priorities is to create greater consistency in the administration of Federal research awards. Given the complexity of interdisciplinary and interagency research, it has become increasingly important for Federal agencies to manage awards in a similar fashion.

The RTCs incorporate the entire Uniform Guidance by reference and clarify or supplement existing provisions where appropriate. They further incorporate by reference the most recent Office of Management and Budget (OMB) FAQs in the Uniform Guidance. Pertinent sections of the Uniform Guidance are presented on the left side, and clarifications for research and research-related awards on the right. This clarification and supplementary guidance incorporates the following appendices:

- Appendix A – Prior Approval Matrix;
- Appendix B – Subaward Matrix; and
- Appendix C – National Policy Requirements.

Agencies also supplement these documents with Agency Specific Requirements.

On behalf of the RBM, NSF has agreed to continue to serve as the sponsor of the updated version of the RTCs and all associated documents, all of which are accessible on the NSF website. The RTCs are being implemented by agency per the following timeline:

April 2017
- National Science Foundation (NSF)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/ National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)

June 2017
- U.S. Department of Agriculture/ National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

October 2017
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).
- U.S. Department of Transportation/ Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
- U.S. Department of Commerce/ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NOAA)
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

December 2017
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Because agency implementation dates are staggered, Agency Specific Requirements and updated appendices will be posted on the NSF website as they become available. Questions for NSF on the RTCs should be directed to the Policy Office in the Division of Institution and Award Support (DIAS) by sending an email to policy@nsf.gov. ■

Upcoming NSF Outreach

The Policy Office in the Division of Institution and Award Support routinely provides updates on NSF policies and procedures to the research administration community. We recently presented updates at several NCURA and SRA regional meetings. Recent presentations from these meetings are available on the Policy Office website. NSF will be attending and presenting many sessions at the national NCURA meeting in August in Washington, DC.

The Fall NSF Grants Conference will be held in Phoenix, AZ at a to be determined date. To be notified of additional information about this conference, please navigate to the NSF Grants Conference website and click, "Get Notified." In addition to the full, two-day conference, NSF expects to webcast and record the plenary sessions. ■

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and update for use in subsequent proposal submissions to NSF.

The new *Collaborators and Other Affiliations* pilot only applies to FastLane proposal submissions. Grants.gov proposal submissions shall continue to follow the instructions in the Grants.gov Application Guide, Chapter VI. 2.4. ■

Public Comment on Future Changes to NSF Policies and Procedures

Each year, NSF releases an updated version of the *Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG). While a final version of the PAPPG is issued in the fall each year and is implemented at least 90 days later, there are opportunities for the research community to provide input to proposed changes. This year will be no different. NSF expects to release a draft version of the PAPPG in May in the Federal Register for public comment.

Each spring we encourage the community to review the proposed revisions and provide valuable input to the proposed revisions. The revised PAPPG and Federal Register Notice will be placed on the Policy Office website at https://nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy. Upon receiving all comments, the Policy Office reviews each comment and provides a response. We value your input and look forward to receiving your feedback. ■

"While a final version of the PAPPG is issued in the fall each year and is implemented at least 90 days later, there are opportunities for the research community to provide input to proposed changes."

Participant Support Costs Explained

The Policy Office receives questions related to many aspects of proposal and award policy. The most common questions as of late, however, revolve around the topic of participant support costs. The policy as stated in Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG) Chapter II.C.2g(v) defines the participant support budget category as direct costs "such as stipends or subsistence allowances, travel allowances, and registration fees paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with NSF-sponsored conferences or training projects." This definition is straight from the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR § 200.75). In accordance with the PAPPG, participant support costs must be specified, itemized and justified in the budget justification of the proposal; indirect cost recovery is not permitted.

The questions we receive cover a wide range of issues related to participant support, so we have included a representative sampling below. Of course, you can always send your specific questions to policy@nsf.gov.

Q: May I include conference speaker fees in the participant support costs section of the budget?

A: No, the participant support category is for the support of participants or trainees only. Speakers and trainers are not considered participants and should not be included in this section of the budget.

Q: We would like to rebudget our NSF award to move funds out of the participant support category. Do we need NSF approval to do this?

A: Yes. While NSF does provide rebudgeting authority for many categories, you must receive the approval of the cognizant NSF program officer to reallocate funds **out of** the participant support category. You may, however, rebudget funds **into** this category without prior NSF approval.

Q: How should student employees be budgeted?

A: A student cannot be compensated partially as an employee and as a participant on the same grant. It is up to the proposing organization to determine whether they should be a student employee or a participant based on the role of the student in the project. Student employees are compensated for services rendered and their level of compensation is tied to the number of hours worked. Participant support costs should be used to defray the costs of students participating in a conference or training activity related to the project.

Q: Are costs such as room rental fees, catering, supplies, etc. related to an NSF-sponsored conference considered participant support costs?

A: No, the participant support cost line in the NSF budget should not be used for such costs.

Q: Do participant support costs apply for all participants, or do they only apply for non-awardee organization participants?

A: Participants from the submitting institution and other institution(s) could be considered participants.

Q: May human subjects that are being paid as survey takers be considered participants?

A: No, the participant support section of the budget may not be used to provide incentive payments to research subjects. Human subject payments should be included on line G6 of the NSF budget under "Other Direct Costs," and indirect costs should be calculated on the payments in accordance with the organization's federally negotiated indirect cost rate.

Q: We are preparing a Research Experiences for Undergraduate Research (REU) proposal. Is it acceptable to categorize students as both employees and participants if we have made the appropriate determination?

A: No, the REU program is different in that the goal of the program is to provide a practical educational experience for undergraduate students, rather than simply a job. The role of an REU student differs from the role of a student employee because the REU program is aimed at developing the students' research skills and providing a high-quality mentoring experience. Based on this role, an REU student is considered a participant in a training activity and funds for their support should be included as a stipend in the participant support cost section of the budget.

If you don't see your specific question here, feel free to send it to policy@nsf.gov! ∎

ERA Forum Information

Systems that support the needs of NSF's research community don't just happen in isolation. That's where NSF's Division of Institution and Award Support (DIAS) and the Division of Information Systems (DIS) spring into action! The DIAS Research.gov Business Office, Policy Office, and Systems Office work closely together with DIS to provide efficient and effective systems and to modernize NSF's externally-facing FastLane system. DIAS works collaboratively with internal and external NSF stakeholders to identify and advocate for the business requirements of externally-facing NSF proposal and award services available through Research.gov.

In 2016, DIAS launched the NSF Electronic Research Administration (ERA) Forum to improve the quality and timeliness of NSF electronic research administration user input. It regularly engages the community to collect opinions and perspectives on NSF electronic research administration activities, particularly those related to reducing administrative burden.

The ERA Forum holds regularly scheduled webinars, administers surveys, and maintains a listserv of all members for email communications. Since its inception, the ERA Forum has nearly doubled its membership and held three webinars focused on the Proposal Submission Modernization (PSM) initiative, a multi-year effort to modernize the proposal preparation and submission process and migrate this essential function from FastLane to Research.gov. PSM will reduce the administrative burden on the research community and NSF staff associated with preparation, submission, and management of proposals. Among some of the topics discussed during the first two webinars were: 1) Tailoring the proposal interface and providing an overview and demonstration of how a proposal will be prepared in the new system; and 2) Conceptualizing the Budget, Budget Justification, and a new Personnel proposal section.

Most recently, in March 2017, more than 500 members of the research community participated in a PSM-focused webinar facilitated by Maria Koszalka (Staff Associate, Research.gov, DIAS), Jeremy Leffler (Outreach Specialist, Policy Office, DIAS), Jeff Vieceli (Head, Systems Office, DIAS), and Bill Daus (Project Manager, DIS). The presentation covered Sponsored Projects Office (SPO) and Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) functions, which are essential to the overall NSF proposal preparation and submission process. Concepts presented included SPO and AOR access to in-progress proposals, AOR submission of in-progress proposals, view-only access to proposals, and post-submission actions.

The March webinar also provided an update and gathered opinions on automated proposal compliance checking capabilities. Automated compliance checking helps to reduce administrative burden levels on both NSF programs and the research community and promotes equity in the merit review process. Core PAPPG proposal section, page count, budget, and deadline requirements are checked during proposal preparation and submission activities in FastLane. Click here for a complete listing of current FastLane compliance checks.

Following each ERA Forum, participants and their colleagues are encouraged to complete a brief survey to allow NSF to gather the research community's opinions about the topics and concepts presented, areas for improvement or of concern, and priority topics for future events. The feedback received following these webinars helps shape the future of proposal submission in Research.gov. We are excited to announce that during our last webinar in April we received more than 100 questions from the research community!

DIAS and DIS would like to extend their appreciation to everyone who participated in the March ERA Forum webinar. To receive the latest updates about ERA Forum events and activities, join our listserv by sending an email to nsf-era-forum-subscribe-request@listserv.nsf.gov. You can also find webinar agendas and presentation materials on the ERA Forum website. Email us your questions and suggestions at nsferaforum@nsf.gov. ∎