



**National Science Foundation**  
**4201 Wilson Boulevard**  
**Arlington, Virginia 22230**

NSF 12-015

**Dear Colleague Letter: Community Update: Career-Life  
Balance in MPS**

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Dear MPS community,

The Director of the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), Dr. Subra Suresh, recently introduced NSF's Career-Life Balance Initiative (<http://www.nsf.gov/career-life-balance/>). This is a long-term plan to develop a set of forward-looking policies and practices to balance career and family life demands in the U.S. science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) enterprise. Establishing such a culture is paramount to recruiting and retaining a high-quality STEM workforce at our nation's academic institutions. Although these policies apply to both men and women, they may yield a higher participation of women in STEM-related disciplines, since family-related issues are among the factors responsible for the under-representation of women in the STEM enterprise.

In the mathematical and physical science (MPS) disciplines, the number of women earning doctoral degrees increased from 1,366 in the year 2000 (23.6 percent of doctoral degrees awarded) to 2,024 (28.5 percent) in the year 2008. Furthermore, in the year 2008, women constituted 22.2 percent of all MPS doctorates employed in academia, specifically, 18.3 percent of tenured positions and 28.6 percent of tenure-track positions. Finally, in the year 2008, 43 percent of women employed in these areas were 10 years or less from their doctorate, versus 25 percent of the men.

MPS Divisions encourage practices to support career-life balance, including: no-cost extensions or temporary suspensions of NSF awards due to family leave; flexible start dates for NSF awards; supplements for additional personnel to sustain research when principal investigators are on family leave; options for remote panel participation; local child care recommendations for panelists; flexible postdoctoral fellowships to accommodate dual-career placements; and instructions for panelists describing family-friendly practices.

MPS continues to seek creative approaches to address career-life balance issues. I encourage you to send MPS-specific ideas to [MPSplans@nsf.gov](mailto:MPSplans@nsf.gov) and general ideas to [career-life-balance@nsf.gov](mailto:career-life-balance@nsf.gov). I look forward to working with the NSF Director, the MPS staff, the MPS Advisory Committee, and all of you to implement future recommendations in order to advance career-life balance in the STEM community.

Sincerely,

Edward Seidel  
Assistant Director, Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences