

Transcript of Question and Answer Period during the Division of Environmental Biology Virtual Office Hours on the CAREER Solicitation held on May 18th, 2020.

Q: How should we handle hosting workshops that are meant to be in person, continue with budgeting etc. as normal or host everything online? How should we handle travel to meetings and conferences in the budget in light of COVID?

A: We encourage you to look at the [NSF COVID-19 guidance webpage](#). This will help inform current awardees of the options allowed by NSF. In general, we encourage you to adhere to your institution's policies for hosting workshops, but we would also recommend that you have a plan to host a virtual meeting as a backup.

As for traveling to meetings and conferences, again, you should follow your institution's policies on travel. For new proposal submissions, if your institution doesn't have any policies in place for the coming year, you should think about the best case scenario and types of meetings that would be necessary for you and your trainees to attend.

Q: If IRB is needed (for student questionnaires), does an IRB application need to be submitted before the CAREER proposal is submitted?

A: No, the approved IRB is not needed for submission of the proposal.

Q: What are the differences among the three submission platforms (FastLane, Research.gov, Grants.gov)?

A: All three are options for submitting proposals. Research.gov and Grants.gov offer options for submission to other Federal agencies and may be familiar to investigators who have submitted to USDA, NASA, etc. We encourage you to reach out to your SRO office and work with them to determine what would be the right platform for you to submit to as they may have more experience in one platform over another.

Q: Are proposals closer to \$1 Million usually awarded (assuming scope matches budget)?

A: We encourage investigators to ask for what is needed to conduct the proposed research, and to make sure that all funds requested are sufficiently justified.

Q: The 20-1 PAPPG does not require that the project description to include a separate section on Intellectual Merit. It does however require a section on broader impacts. Correct?

A: That is correct; there only needs to be a section titled "Broader Impacts", but you should still discuss intellectual merit within the project description. Please keep in mind that the project summary still requires "Intellectual Merit" as well as "Broader Impacts" headings.

Q: If someone has been granted tenure but it is effective starting mid-August, is it still possible to apply for a CAREER grant?

A: Yes, per the CAREER solicitation, the proposer must be untenured at time of application. Other eligibility requirements can be found [here](#). Please note that faculty members who are Associate

Professors or in equivalent appointments, with or without tenure, are not eligible for the CAREER program. Faculty members who hold Adjunct Faculty or equivalent appointments are not eligible for the CAREER program.

Q: Is the education component focused just on higher education?

A: Reviewers want to see that part of the education plan is in line with the institutional goals and that you have the appropriate resources to conduct the proposed activities. However, that does not preclude you from engaging in broader impacts activities away from your home institution. We encourage investigators to do things that they want to do, and that create educational opportunities.

Q: Is there a typical stipend amount that NSF prefers we budget for summer Research Experience for Undergraduates?

A: No, there is not a prescribed stipend amount for summer REU students. Investigators should take a look at the REU solicitation ([NSF 19-582](#)) for more information since these students have independent research projects. The costs should be associated with participant costs within your budget. If the undergraduate student is to be treated as a summer employee, check with your institution for pay and fringe etc., since they are paid hourly and do not generally have an independent research project.

Q: Can support for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows be included in the budget?

A: Yes, both are allowed. Investigators need to justify their support in the budget justification, and if a postdoctoral fellow is included, there needs to be a postdoc mentoring plan attached to the proposal.

Q: Are indirect costs (institutional overhead) allowed in the budget?

A: Yes, just like a regular core proposal to NSF, CAREER proposals require indirect costs based on your institution's negotiated rate.

Q: How much preliminary data would be appropriate for a successful proposal? How critical is preliminary data in a successful CAREER proposal?

A: Reviewers like to see that you can accomplish the methods you say you are going to use. This includes a combination of your publication record, relevant citations, and enough preliminary data to show the work can be conducted.

Q: Does the CAREER solicitation support interdisciplinary projects, and if so, are there any suggestions on which program to choose given the interdisciplinary nature of a research project?

A: Investigators will submit proposals to the CAREER solicitation but indicate the core program to which they're submitting. This is the primary program of interest, but investigators can also indicate another program that may be relevant.

As with other proposals, CAREER proposals can be co-reviewed by multiple programs. For more information on what this entails check out our [blog post](#) on demystifying the co-review process, as well as our November Office Hour [recap](#) on the same topic. The CAREER solicitation also includes additional details on Cross-Disciplinary Opportunities.

Q: Regarding the integration of education and research plans, if the main connection between the two is teaching one of the methods being used, is that a strong enough natural extension?

A: Successful CAREER proposals tend to have a very strong integration of the research and education activities and provide a clear and detailed plan for how the integration will be achieved. Many successful plans illustrate how the educational activities will contribute to the research objectives and vice versa.

Q: Does having a pending proposal with NSF affect the CAREER application?

A: No, each proposal is reviewed independently, but make sure you indicate in your current and pending support section that you have a proposal pending with NSF. We encourage you to think about whether you are over-committing your time for two proposals, should they both be awarded.

Q: Do you have guidance about whether we should apply for a CAREER instead of a regular grant through the core program?

A: Two important considerations are the scope of your research plan (CAREER proposals are for 5 years, but submissions to the core programs may be for less time), and how fully your education activities and research are integrated.

Q: Does the length of time a proposer has been untenured play into the evaluation of CAREER proposals?

A: No. There is no length of time a proposer has been untenured that will play into the evaluation of the proposal. However, if the faculty member is an associate professor or equivalent OR holds an adjunct faculty or equivalent appointment, they are NOT eligible.

Q: I want to include funds for an overseas consultant - what criteria do you use to differentiate consultants (which are fundable) from collaborators (which aren't fundable)?

A: As per the CAREER solicitation, you are not allowed to submit a collaborative proposal. The award is made to your home institution, so the overseas consultants would need to be a subaward and need to be very well justified. Contact a Program Officer for more information on international component.

Q: If one has different proposal ideas, one is submitted to CAREER, do we have any limitations to how many proposals can be submitted to different programs?

A: There is no limitation for the number of different proposal ideas that can be submitted to NSF, however, only one proposal can be submitted to the CAREER solicitation per year. In addition, a Principal Investigator may not participate in more than three CAREER competitions. Proposals that are not reviewed (i.e., are withdrawn before review or are returned without review) do not count toward the three-competition limit.

Q: Is there anything a researcher from a non-R1 university should consider or emphasize to be competitive for a CAREER proposal?

A: There isn't anything that a non-R1 researcher should emphasize. Proposals are evaluated based on the questions and hypotheses you're putting forward. Within the facilities section of the proposal, you will have an opportunity to provide more details on feasibility given your institutional resources and constraints. We encourage you to determine if you are a qualified primary undergraduate university (PUI), which can be highlighted in your proposal. This indication provides additional information to reviewers as they evaluate the timeframe required to carry out your research since faculty at PUIs generally have greater teaching requirements than those at non-PUIs.

Q: Specific budget format to follow?

A: Yes, there is a specific budget format to follow. We encourage you to look at the [PAPPG 20-1](#), which describes the format to follow and your SRO will be able to help you prepare the budget sheet and justification in adherence to NSF specifications.

Q: Is it possible to access any funded and expired proposal document?

A: If you are curious about what types of proposals are awarded, we encourage you to utilize the awards search function on NSF.gov to find examples. However, if you are looking for examples of full proposals submitted to NSF, you can check out [ogrant.org](#).

Q: Difference between the intellectual merit & broader impacts written in project summary and project description?

A: The project summary is a brief summary of the intellectual merit and the broader impacts of a proposal (analogous to an abstract), whereas the project description provides a more thorough explanation of the merit criteria and how the proposer plans to achieve these criteria.

Q: Going back to a previous question about integrating Research and Education plans, do I understand your answer correctly that if the education plan does not feed directly back into research aims, the proposal will be less competitive?

A: As described in the solicitation, CAREER proposals should describe the integration of research and education, and we encourage researchers to think creatively about reciprocal activities that will help them to accomplish their research and educational goals.

Q: What are the major differences of the newly updated PAPPG and the impacts on CAREER proposals?

A: There are two major differences with the updated PAPPG. These include a change to the current and pending support section, as well as the biosketch section. More information can be found in this [blog post](#).

Q: Can I include a faculty as a collaborator, not Co-PI, to cover some activities in the CAREER proposal?

A: Collaborators are allowed but the majority of the work should be your own. If critical for the completion of the project, collaborators can be requested as senior personnel or consultants or as a subawards to another institution.

Q: Beyond what is in the solicitation, are there other guidelines/resources a Chair should be aware of when writing the Departmental Letter?

A: No, the solicitation has very specific information about the information that should be provided in the Department Letter.

Q: What proportion of the budget should be devoted to Education and Outreach? How significant should these budgets be (e.g., 1/3 of the budget)?

A: There is no specific proportion of the budget that should be devoted to education and outreach activities. Investigators should request the appropriate amounts to complete the activities outlined in a proposal.

Q: For proposals coming from a PUI, is it appropriate to request REU support for more than two undergraduate students?

A: Yes, a request for more than two REU student is appropriate. Investigators should include clear details about the activities that will be conducted by the students.

Q: If we had an NSF Postdoc, but it ended >5 years ago should this be included in the prior funding section?

A: You are free to include results from a grant that ended more than 5 years ago, but it is not required. PIs are required to report any pending (past 5 years) and current funding. Guidance on how to report this information can be found in the PAPPG.

Q: I'm on a 3-yr contract at a non-tenure-track college. Am I eligible to apply for a CAREER grant? My Departmental Letter will NOT say I have "continuing appointment that is expected to last the five years of a CAREER grant."

A: No, you are not eligible. There must be an expectation that the appointment will last for at least five years.

Q: In order to get quick feedback on our idea and the fit to the proper program, is it possible to send a proposal summary to the program director? If yes, what should the summary contain?

A: If you are unsure of where your proposal might fit best, contact a program officer in the most appropriate program. If you send an email with a one-page prospectus outlining your research questions and approaches attached, that is usually sufficient for a program officer to determine the best program for your proposal. If not, they can follow up with you for more information.