

Innovations in Biological Imaging and Visualization (IBIV)

An Ideas Lab activity to stimulate transformative approaches to biological image analysis and data visualization

PROGRAM SOLICITATION

NSF 10-538



National Science Foundation
Directorate for Biological Sciences
Division of Biological Infrastructure
Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences
Division of Environmental Biology
Emerging Frontiers

Preliminary Proposal Due Date(s) (**required**) (due by 5 p.m. proposer's local time):

April 12, 2010

Deadline to submit applications to participate in the Ideas Lab, to be held May 24-28, 2010

Full Proposal Deadline(s) (due by 5 p.m. proposer's local time):

July 15, 2010

Deadline for submission of Invited Proposals. Only invited submissions will be considered for funding.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND REVISION NOTES

A revised version of the **NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide** (PAPPG), [NSF 13-1](#), was issued on October 4, 2012 and is effective for proposals submitted, or due, on or after January 14, 2013. Please be advised that the guidelines contained in [NSF 13-1](#) apply to proposals submitted in response to this funding opportunity. Proposers who opt to submit prior to January 14, 2013, must also follow the guidelines contained in [NSF 13-1](#).

Please be aware that significant changes have been made to the PAPPG to 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. Changes will affect the project summary and project description sections of proposals. Annual and final reports also will be affected.

A by-chapter summary of this and other significant changes is provided at the beginning of both the [Grant Proposal Guide](#) and the [Award & Administration Guide](#).

Please note that this program solicitation may contain supplemental proposal preparation guidance and/or guidance that deviates from the guidelines established in the [Grant Proposal Guide](#).

Please be advised that the **NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide** (PAPPG) includes revised guidelines to implement the mentoring provisions of the America COMPETES Act (ACA) (Pub. L. No. 110-69, Aug. 9, 2007.) As specified in the ACA, each proposal that requests funding to support postdoctoral researchers must include a description of the mentoring activities that will be provided for such individuals. Proposals that do not comply with this requirement will be returned without review (see the PAPPG Guide Part I: *Grant Proposal Guide* Chapter II for further information about the implementation of this new requirement).

SUMMARY OF PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

General Information

Program Title:

Innovations in Biological Imaging and Visualization (IBIV)

Synopsis of Program:

The IBIV activity supports the development of novel approaches to the analysis of biological research images through the innovative "Ideas Lab" project development and review process. The analysis and visual representation of complex biological images present daunting challenges across all scales of investigation, from multispectral analysis of foliage or algal bloom patterns in satellite images, to automated specimen classification, and tomographic reconstructions in structural biology. Analysis of biological image data is complicated by a host of factors, including: complicated signal to noise profiles; variable feature size, density, scale, and perspective in images; experiment-specific metadata considerations; and reliance on subjective classification criteria. Advances in biological image analyses have the potential to facilitate the automation of analytic processes, improve synthetic approaches to the analysis of large or heterogeneous data collections, and permit higher-order dimensional

analyses of complex research models. The goal of this activity is to identify opportunities for investment to advance the state-of-the-art in biological image analysis, data visualization, archiving, and dissemination. Participants selected through an open application process will engage in an intensive five-day residential workshop to generate project ideas through an innovative, real-time review process. Members of the biological research community, computational theorists and engineers, mathematicians, imaging specialists from other fields, educators involved in training the next generation of researchers, and a range of other specialists (artists, illustrators, etc.) are all strongly encouraged to participate.

Cognizant Program Officer(s):

Please note that the following information is current at the time of publishing. See program website for any updates to the points of contact.

- Kamal Shukla, telephone: 703 292-7131, email: kshukla@nsf.gov

Applicable Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number(s):

- 47.074 --- Biological Sciences

Award Information

Anticipated Type of Award: Standard Grant

Estimated Number of Awards: 2 to 10 Awards will be made in FY2010, pending availability of funds and the type, scale, and variety of project ideas developed at the Ideas Lab.

Anticipated Funding Amount: \$5,000,000 Approximately \$5,000,000 will be available in FY2010, pending availability of funds.

Eligibility Information

Organization Limit:

The categories of proposers eligible to submit proposals to the National Science Foundation are identified in the Grant Proposal Guide, Chapter I, Section E.

PI Limit:

None Specified

Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:

None Specified

Limit on Number of Proposals per PI: 1

The limit on number of proposals per PI applies to the preliminary proposal stage only.

Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions

A. Proposal Preparation Instructions

- Letters of Intent: Not Applicable
- Preliminary Proposals: Submission of Preliminary Proposals is required. Please see the full text of this solicitation for further information.
- Full Proposals:
 - Full Proposals submitted via FastLane: NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide, Part I: Grant Proposal Guide (GPG) Guidelines apply. The complete text of the GPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=gpg.
 - Full Proposals submitted via Grants.gov: NSF Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for the Preparation and Submission of NSF Applications via Grants.gov Guidelines apply (Note: The NSF Grants.gov Application Guide is available on the Grants.gov website and on the NSF website at: http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=grantsgovguide)

B. Budgetary Information

- Cost Sharing Requirements: Cost Sharing is not required under this solicitation.
- Indirect Cost (F&A) Limitations: Not Applicable
- Other Budgetary Limitations: Not Applicable

C. Due Dates

- Preliminary Proposal Due Date(s) **(required)** (due by 5 p.m. proposer's local time):
April 12, 2010
Deadline to submit applications to participate in the Ideas Lab, to be held May 24-28, 2010
- Full Proposal Deadline(s) (due by 5 p.m. proposer's local time):
July 15, 2010

Deadline for submission of Invited Proposals. Only invited submissions will be considered for funding.

Proposal Review Information Criteria

Merit Review Criteria: National Science Board approved criteria. Additional merit review considerations apply. Please see the full text of this solicitation for further information.

Award Administration Information

Award Conditions: Standard NSF award conditions apply.

Reporting Requirements: Standard NSF reporting requirements apply.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary of Program Requirements

- I. Introduction
- II. Program Description
- III. Award Information
- IV. Eligibility Information
- V. Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions
 - A. Proposal Preparation Instructions
 - B. Budgetary Information
 - C. Due Dates
 - D. FastLane/Grants.gov Requirements
- VI. NSF Proposal Processing and Review Procedures
 - A. Merit Review Principles and Criteria
 - B. Review and Selection Process
- VII. Award Administration Information
 - A. Notification of the Award
 - B. Award Conditions
 - C. Reporting Requirements
- VIII. Agency Contacts
- IX. Other Information

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern biological research is increasingly dependent on the ability to capture large numbers of high-resolution, multi-dimensional images of highly dynamic biological systems. Development of novel instrumentation and technologies to generate and to interpret such images quantitatively and in real time will be crucial to investigate and characterize biological systems in the future. Although many useful analytical tools have been developed by independent groups, there is also a significant and growing need to make these tools as accessible and as user-friendly as possible for the biological community at large.

The need for new tools and approaches can be illustrated at all levels of biological scale and complexity. For example, many recent discoveries in cell and molecular biology have resulted from significant technical advances in microscopy, which in the near future promise routine identification of individual macromolecules and biochemical events with exquisite spatial resolution within the ultrastructure of living cells. However, many significant challenges remain, which include the need to develop improved methods to detect and track new and evermore sensitive tracers and probes for specific molecular entities, to capture high resolution three-dimensional images rapidly in real time from whole living systems, and to standardize and quantify image data for purposes of detailed analysis and comparisons. Finding solutions to the analytical challenges will continue to be aided enormously by a growing number of sophisticated computational methods, which nevertheless require ongoing development and refinement as applied to, for instance, tomographic reconstruction of cells and organelles, molecular feature extraction and averaging, multi-dimensional presentation and modeling of highly dynamic cell structures and processes, and other important steps in the capture and analysis of microscopic images.

At the other extreme of biological scale, applications of image analysis in ecology span a range from the visualization of spatial relationships and associations between microbes in natural communities, to object-oriented classification for feature recognition and documentation of landscape-scale ecological change. At the organismal level, evolutionary biologists need to document phenotypic traits (phenomics) as exhaustively as genetic traits (genomics) to understand the process of natural selection on phenotypes. Phenomic studies will require high-throughput imaging approaches for analyzing a large number of specimens, producing datasets of high dimensionality. Similarly, high-throughput image analysis will dramatically accelerate the collection of morphological data for systematics, phylogenetic analysis, and studies of character evolution. Image analysis will also enable sophisticated automated approaches to species identification and documentation of collections.

Such examples illustrate the scope of image utilization, but are by no means inclusive of all the fields in which image data contributes to biological research. Because of the diverse scales of investigation, analysis of biological image data is complicated by a host of factors, including: inconsistent signal to noise profiles; variable feature size, density, scale, and perspective in images; experiment-specific metadata considerations; and reliance on subjective classification criteria. Despite these limitations, high-

throughput imaging platforms are common in all areas of biological research. The development of algorithms and applications for automated feature recognition, extraction, analysis, semantic annotation, data handling practices, and storage plans will improve the utilization and efficient dissemination of image content.

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The goal of this activity will be to identify opportunities for investment that will advance the state-of-the-art in biological image capture, analysis, archiving, and dissemination. The Ideas Lab process entails participation in an intensive five-day residential workshop, the development of collaborative proposals through a real-time and iterative review process, and the subsequent submission of full, invited proposals. The process is designed to engage creative individuals in the development of novel project ideas with the potential to advance a field of research. Participation from molecular and cell biologists, biophysicists, ecologists, evolutionary and population biologists, computational theorists and engineers, mathematicians, imaging specialists from other fields, educators involved in training the next generation of researchers, and a range of other specialists (artists, illustrators, etc.) is strongly encouraged. Potential applications of biological image capture and analysis are diverse, but offer many scientific and educational benefits:

- Automated feature recognition in complex biological images
- Enhanced algorithms for filtering data from images with low signal-to-noise profiles
- High throughput image or video capture and analysis for quantification or classification of subject matter
- Improved multidimensional spatial registration and object tracking in sequential series or overlapping images
- Validated analysis of heterogeneous data submitted by "citizen scientists"
- Enhanced representation and visualization of multi-dimensional datasets for dissemination of scientific findings

A myriad of challenges and barriers must be overcome for biological image analysis to reach its full potential. Advances in the applications listed above, or in one of many other areas, could have profound impacts on the biological research community, and other scientific disciplines.

The Ideas Lab

The NSF Ideas Lab process was modeled on the "IDEAs Factory" program developed by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) of the United Kingdom (UK). The concept of the IDEAs Factory program is to organize intensive interactive workshops ("Sandpits") involving 20-30 participants, with the aim of developing new and bold approaches to address grand challenge questions for topics that could benefit from a new dimension in thinking. The aim of this NSF Ideas Lab is to stimulate the development of research projects in biological image analysis and to fund new interdisciplinary collaborations among US scientists to foster major advances in current research practices. Anyone eligible to apply for funding from the NSF is eligible to apply to participate in the Ideas Lab.

In brief, interested PIs should respond to this solicitation by submitting preliminary proposals to apply for participation in the Ideas Lab activity, scheduled from May 24 to May 28, 2010. Submission of the preliminary proposal will be considered an indication of availability to attend and participate through the **full** course of the five day residential workshop. Travel and subsistence costs to attend the workshop will be reimbursed. At the time of publication of this solicitation, selection of the venue was in progress. Information about the venue, travel, and other logistics will be provided to all selected participants, once it has been finalized. Participants will be selected on the basis of the interests, expertise, and other characteristics described in their submitted preliminary proposals. All participants should be willing to engage in frank disclosure and assessment of ideas in a collegial and professional fashion. A team of mentors, selected for their relevant expertise, and professional facilitators will be assembled by NSF Program staff to aid the workshop participants in the discussion of workshop topics and development of project ideas.

Participants in the Ideas Lab will frame a series of challenges in the analysis and dissemination of biological research image data. Mentors and participants will then engage in a real-time review process of constructive feedback to develop and refine promising ideas to address these challenges. Iterative project development activities will be used to select and advance the most meritorious, transformative, and innovative project ideas. The facilitators will guide the creation of interdisciplinary teams and the creative development of ideas and will ensure that the workshop progresses productively. Mentors will participate in the activity to guide the development of project ideas. At the end of the workshop, the mentors will provide a consensus report summarizing their evaluation of each project idea.

The recommendations provided by the mentor panel are advisory to the NSF. Within seven days following the workshop, NSF will determine which participant teams will be invited to submit full proposals. The final funding decision(s) will occur after the full proposals have been received and reviewed. Additional guidance on the proposal content will be provided to workshop participants. Only invited full proposals will be considered for funding.

III. AWARD INFORMATION

Estimated program budget, number of awards and average award size/duration are subject to the availability of funds.

IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

Organization Limit:

The categories of proposers eligible to submit proposals to the National Science Foundation are identified in the Grant Proposal Guide, Chapter I, Section E.

PI Limit:

None Specified

Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:

None Specified

Limit on Number of Proposals per PI: 1

The limit on number of proposals per PI applies to the preliminary proposal stage only.

V. PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

A. Proposal Preparation Instructions

Preliminary Proposals (**required**): Preliminary proposals are required and must be submitted via the NSF FastLane system, even if full proposals will be submitted via Grants.gov.

The Project Description section of the preliminary proposal is limited to two pages. Standard NSF formatting guidelines will apply (see the NSF Grant Proposal Guide for guidance). The Project Description must conform to the following guidelines:

1. Page one:

- Provide a brief summary of your professional background (no more than one-half page).
- What expertise do you bring that is relevant to biological image analysis and visualization? (no more than one-half page).
- In fifty words or less, describe an imaging challenge you think should be addressed at the Ideas Lab.

2. Page two: Please spend some time considering your answers to the following questions. Your responses (no more than 100 words each) should demonstrate that you have suitable skills and aptitude to participate in the Ideas Lab event (unrelated to your research track record).

- What is your personal experience with working in teams?
- How would you describe your ability to explain your research to non-experts?
- The Ideas Lab environment is especially suited to individuals who are willing to step outside their particular area of interest or expertise, who are positively driven, who enjoy creative activity, who can think innovatively and who can settle in easily in the company of strangers. Please describe an experience you have had in a comparable environment.
- What would you personally and professionally gain from participating in this Ideas Lab event?

Figures depicting some element of the applicant's imaging expertise or research interests may be included in the Project Description, but must fit within the 2-page limit.

Applicants must include a Biographical Sketch and a Current and Pending Support document (prepared in accordance with standard NSF formatting guidelines). All other elements of a "full proposal" are waived (Project Summary, References Cited, Budget, Budget Justification, Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources). No appendices or supplementary documents may be submitted.

Following the conclusion of the Ideas Lab, NSF program staff will invite the submission of full proposals related to one or more of the ideas developed during the Ideas Lab.

Full Proposal Preparation Instructions: Proposers may opt to submit proposals in response to this Program Solicitation via Grants.gov or via the NSF FastLane system.

- Full proposals submitted via FastLane: Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation should be prepared and submitted in accordance with the general guidelines contained in the NSF Grant Proposal Guide (GPG). The complete text of the GPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=gpg. Paper copies of the GPG may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-7827 or by e-mail from nsfpubs@nsf.gov. Proposers are reminded to identify this program solicitation number in the program solicitation block on the NSF Cover Sheet For Proposal to the National Science Foundation. Compliance with this requirement is critical to determining the relevant proposal processing guidelines. Failure to submit this information may delay processing.
- Full proposals submitted via Grants.gov: Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation 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. The complete text of the NSF Grants.gov Application Guide is available on the Grants.gov website and on the NSF website at: (http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=grantsgovguide). To obtain copies of the Application Guide and Application Forms Package, click on the Apply tab on the Grants.gov site, then click on the Apply Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package and Application Instructions link and enter the funding opportunity number, (the program solicitation number without the NSF prefix) and press the Download Package button. Paper copies of the Grants.gov Application Guide also may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-7827 or by e-mail from nsfpubs@nsf.gov.

In determining which method to utilize in the electronic preparation and submission of the proposal, please note the following:

Collaborative Proposals. All collaborative proposals submitted as separate submissions from multiple organizations must be submitted via the NSF FastLane system. Chapter II, Section D.4 of the Grant Proposal Guide provides additional information on collaborative proposals.

Important Proposal Preparation Information: FastLane will check for required sections of the proposal, in accordance with *Grant Proposal Guide* (GPG) instructions described in Chapter II.C.2. The GPG requires submission of: Project Summary; Project Description; References Cited; Biographical Sketch(es); Budget; Budget Justification; Current and Pending Support; Facilities, Equipment & Other Resources; Data Management Plan; and Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan, if applicable. If a required section is missing, FastLane will not accept the proposal.

Please note that the proposal preparation instructions provided in this program solicitation may deviate from the GPG instructions. If the solicitation instructions do not require a GPG-required section to be included in the proposal, insert text or upload a document in that section of the proposal that states, "Not Applicable for this Program Solicitation." Doing so will enable FastLane to accept your proposal.

Information on the format and required elements of the full proposal will be provided to participants at the Ideas Lab. Only invited full proposals will be considered for funding.

B. Budgetary Information

Cost Sharing: Cost sharing is not required under this solicitation.

C. Due Dates

- Preliminary Proposal Due Date(s) (**required**) (due by 5 p.m. proposer's local time):
April 12, 2010
Deadline to submit applications to participate in the Ideas Lab, to be held May 24-28, 2010
- Full Proposal Deadline(s) (due by 5 p.m. proposer's local time):
July 15, 2010
Deadline for submission of Invited Proposals. Only invited submissions will be considered for funding.

D. FastLane/Grants.gov Requirements

- For Proposals Submitted Via FastLane:
Detailed technical instructions regarding the technical aspects of preparation and submission via FastLane are available at: <https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/a1/newstan.htm>. For FastLane user support, call the FastLane Help Desk at 1-800-673-6188 or e-mail fastlane@nsf.gov. The FastLane Help Desk answers general technical questions related to the use of the FastLane system. Specific questions related to this program solicitation should be referred to the NSF program staff contact(s) listed in Section VIII of this funding opportunity.
Submission of Electronically Signed Cover Sheets. The Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) must electronically sign the proposal Cover Sheet to submit the required proposal certifications (see Chapter II, Section C of the Grant Proposal Guide for a listing of the certifications). The AOR must provide the required electronic certifications within five working days following the electronic submission of the proposal. Further instructions regarding this process are available on the FastLane Website at: <https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/fastlane.jsp>.
- For Proposals Submitted Via Grants.gov:
Before using Grants.gov for the first time, each organization must register to create an institutional profile. Once registered, the applicant's organization can then apply for any federal grant on the Grants.gov website. Comprehensive information about using Grants.gov is available on the Grants.gov Applicant Resources webpage: http://www07.grants.gov/applicants/app_help_reso.jsp. In addition, the NSF Grants.gov Application Guide provides additional technical guidance regarding preparation of proposals via Grants.gov. For Grants.gov user support, contact the Grants.gov Contact Center at 1-800-518-4726 or by email: support@grants.gov. The Grants.gov Contact Center answers general technical questions related to the use of Grants.gov. Specific questions related to this program solicitation should be referred to the NSF program staff contact(s) listed in Section VIII of this solicitation.
Submitting the Proposal: Once all documents have been completed, the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) must submit the application to Grants.gov and verify the desired funding opportunity and agency to which the application is submitted. The AOR must then sign and submit the application to Grants.gov. The completed application will be transferred to the NSF FastLane system for further processing.

VI. NSF PROPOSAL PROCESSING AND REVIEW PROCEDURES

Proposals received by NSF are assigned to the appropriate NSF program for acknowledgement and, if they meet NSF requirements, for review. All proposals are carefully reviewed by a scientist, engineer, or educator serving as an NSF Program Officer, and usually by three to ten other persons outside NSF either as *ad hoc* reviewers, panelists, or both, who are experts in the particular fields represented by the proposal. These reviewers are selected by Program Officers charged with oversight of the review process. Proposers are invited to suggest names of persons they believe are especially well qualified to review the proposal and/or persons they would prefer not review the proposal. These suggestions may serve as one source in the reviewer selection process at the Program Officer's discretion. Submission of such names, however, is optional. Care is taken to ensure that reviewers have no conflicts of interest with the proposal. In addition, Program Officers may obtain comments from site visits before recommending final action on proposals. Senior NSF staff further review recommendations for awards. A flowchart that depicts the entire NSF proposal and award process (and associated timeline) is included in the GPG as [Exhibit III-1](#).

A comprehensive description of the Foundation's merit review process is available on the NSF website at: <http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/meritreview/>.

Proposers should also be aware of core strategies that are essential to the fulfillment of NSF's mission, as articulated in [Empowering the Nation Through Discovery and Innovation: NSF Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years \(FY\) 2011-2016](#). These strategies are integrated in the program planning and implementation process, of which proposal review is one part. NSF's mission is particularly well-implemented through the integration of research and education and broadening participation in NSF programs, projects, and activities.

One of the core strategies in support of NSF's mission is to foster integration of research and education through the programs, projects and activities it supports at academic and research institutions. These institutions provide abundant opportunities where

individuals may concurrently assume responsibilities as researchers, educators, and students, and where all can engage in joint efforts that infuse education with the excitement of discovery and enrich research through the variety of learning perspectives.

Another core strategy in support of NSF's mission is broadening opportunities and expanding participation of groups, institutions, and geographic regions that are underrepresented in STEM disciplines, which is essential to the health and vitality of science and engineering. NSF is committed to this principle of diversity and deems it central to the programs, projects, and activities it considers and supports.

A. Merit Review Principles and Criteria

The National Science Foundation strives to invest in a robust and diverse portfolio of projects that creates new knowledge and enables breakthroughs in understanding across all areas of science and engineering research and education. To identify which projects to support, NSF relies on a merit review process that incorporates consideration of both the technical aspects of a proposed project and its potential to contribute more broadly to advancing NSF's mission "to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense; and for other purposes." NSF makes every effort to conduct a fair, competitive, transparent merit review process for the selection of projects.

1. Merit Review Principles

These principles are to be given due diligence by PIs and organizations when preparing proposals and managing projects, by reviewers when reading and evaluating proposals, and by NSF program staff when determining whether or not to recommend proposals for funding and while overseeing awards. Given that NSF is the primary federal agency charged with nurturing and supporting excellence in basic research and education, the following three principles apply:

- All NSF projects should be of the highest quality and have the potential to advance, if not transform, the frontiers of knowledge.
- NSF projects, in the aggregate, should contribute more broadly to achieving societal goals. These "Broader Impacts" may be accomplished through the research itself, through activities that are directly related to specific research projects, or through activities that are supported by, but are complementary to, the project. The project activities may be based on previously established and/or innovative methods and approaches, but in either case must be well justified.
- Meaningful assessment and evaluation of NSF funded projects should be based on appropriate metrics, keeping in mind the likely correlation between the effect of broader impacts and the resources provided to implement projects. If the size of the activity is limited, evaluation of that activity in isolation is not likely to be meaningful. Thus, assessing the effectiveness of these activities may best be done at a higher, more aggregated, level than the individual project.

With respect to the third principle, even if assessment of Broader Impacts outcomes for particular projects is done at an aggregated level, PIs are expected to be accountable for carrying out the activities described in the funded project. Thus, individual projects should include clearly stated goals, specific descriptions of the activities that the PI intends to do, and a plan in place to document the outputs of those activities.

These three merit review principles provide the basis for the merit review criteria, as well as a context within which the users of the criteria can better understand their intent.

2. Merit Review Criteria

All NSF proposals are evaluated through use of the 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 below. Both criteria are to be given full consideration during the review and decision-making processes; each criterion is necessary but neither, by itself, is sufficient. Therefore, proposers must fully address both criteria. ([GPG Chapter II.C.2.d.i.](#) contains additional information for use by proposers in development of the Project Description section of the proposal.) Reviewers are strongly encouraged to review the criteria, including [GPG Chapter II.C.2.d.i.](#), prior to the review of a proposal.

When evaluating NSF proposals, reviewers will be asked to consider what the proposers want to do, why they want to do it, how they plan to do it, how they will know if they succeed, and what benefits could accrue if the project is successful. These issues apply both to the technical aspects of the proposal and the way in which the project may make broader contributions. To that end, reviewers will be asked to evaluate all proposals against two criteria:

- Intellectual Merit: The Intellectual Merit criterion encompasses the potential to advance knowledge; and
- Broader Impacts: The Broader Impacts criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes.

The following elements should be considered in the review for both criteria:

1. What is the potential for the proposed activity to
 - a. Advance knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields (Intellectual Merit); and
 - b. Benefit society or advance desired societal outcomes (Broader Impacts)?
2. To what extent do the proposed activities suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts?
3. Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities well-reasoned, well-organized, and based on a sound rationale? Does the plan incorporate a mechanism to assess success?
4. How well qualified is the individual, team, or organization to conduct the proposed activities?
5. Are there adequate resources available to the PI (either at the home organization or through collaborations) to carry out the proposed activities?

Broader impacts may be accomplished through the research itself, through the activities that are directly related to specific research projects, or through activities that are supported by, but are complementary to, the project. NSF values the advancement of scientific knowledge and activities that contribute to achievement of societally relevant outcomes. Such outcomes include, but are not limited to: full participation of women, persons with disabilities, and underrepresented minorities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); improved STEM education and educator development at any level; increased public scientific literacy and public engagement with science and technology; improved well-being of individuals in society; development of a diverse, globally competitive STEM workforce; increased partnerships between academia, industry, and others; improved national security; increased economic competitiveness of the United States; and enhanced infrastructure for research and education.

Proposers are reminded that reviewers will also be asked to review the Data Management Plan and the Postdoctoral Researcher Mentoring Plan, as appropriate.

Additional Solicitation Specific Review Criteria

The Ideas Lab approach is designed to support the development and implementation of creative and innovative project ideas that have the potential to transform research paradigms and/or solve intractable problems. We anticipate that awards made through this solicitation will be high-risk/high-impact, as they represent new and unproven ideas, approaches and/or technologies. Projects that involve the application of novel, collaborative, or interdisciplinary approaches will therefore receive priority during the consideration process. In addition, full proposals will be evaluated to determine if the scientific themes/objectives in the project are congruent with the ideas presented at the Ideas Lab, and if any significant changes in project scope or resources from those presented at the Ideas Lab have been justified.

B. Review and Selection Process

Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation will be reviewed by Panel Review and/or Internal NSF Review, or Ideas Lab mechanism.

This solicitation includes provisions to employ innovative review processes to generate novel research ideas. Proposals awarded through this solicitation will be developed and reviewed through the following stages:

Stage 1: Applicants must submit a preliminary proposal through Fastlane describing, in 2 pages or less, their interests and expertise that make them desirable candidates for participation in the Ideas Lab. A panel consisting of the Ideas Lab mentors and an occupational psychologist will review the preliminary proposals and advise NSF on participant selection. Preliminary proposals will be reviewed on the basis of professional background (preparation and training), descriptions of involvement with imaging and image analysis, and indications of experience or proficiency in collaborative environments. Demographic factors will also be considered to provide for a diversified pool of workshop participants (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.).

Stage 2: Applicants selected by the NSF Program Officers will participate in an intensive 5 day residential workshop, during which participants will develop collaborative research ideas which will undergo real-time peer-review. Participants will present and iteratively refine their ideas based on the immediate feedback received from mentors and other participants.

Stage 3: After the workshop, NSF Program Officers will contact selected individuals or groups from the Ideas Lab activity to invite submission of full proposals of the research concepts developed during the workshop.

Stage 4: Invited full proposals will be reviewed by the Ideas Lab mentors and by the cognizant NSF program officers. For assessment purposes, NSF may also seek evaluation from panel or ad hoc reviewers (or both) who did not participate in the Ideas Lab workshop.

Reviewers will be asked to formulate a recommendation to either support or decline each proposal. The Program Officer assigned to manage the proposal's review will consider the advice of reviewers and will formulate a recommendation.

After scientific, technical and programmatic review and consideration of appropriate factors, the NSF Program Officer recommends to the cognizant Division Director whether the proposal should be declined or recommended for award. NSF is striving to be able to tell applicants whether their proposals have been declined or recommended for funding within six months. The time interval begins on the deadline or target date, or receipt date, whichever is later. The interval ends when the Division Director accepts the Program Officer's recommendation.

A summary rating and accompanying narrative will be completed and submitted by each reviewer. In all cases, reviews are treated as confidential documents. Verbatim copies of reviews, excluding the names of the reviewers, are sent to the Principal Investigator/Project Director by the Program Officer. In addition, the proposer will receive an explanation of the decision to award or decline funding.

In all cases, after programmatic approval has been obtained, the proposals recommended for funding will be forwarded to the Division of Grants and Agreements for review of business, financial, and policy implications and the processing and issuance of a grant or other agreement. Proposers are cautioned that only a Grants and Agreements Officer may make commitments, obligations or awards on behalf of NSF or authorize the expenditure of funds. No commitment on the part of NSF should be inferred from technical or budgetary discussions with a NSF Program Officer. A Principal Investigator or organization that makes financial or personnel commitments in the absence of a grant or cooperative agreement signed by the NSF Grants and Agreements Officer does so at their own risk.

VII. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Notification of the Award

Notification of the award is made to *the submitting organization* by a Grants Officer in the Division of Grants and Agreements. Organizations whose proposals are declined will be advised as promptly as possible by the cognizant NSF Program administering the program. Verbatim copies of reviews, not including the identity of the reviewer, will be provided automatically to the Principal Investigator. (See Section VI.B. for additional information on the review process.)

B. Award Conditions

An NSF award consists of: (1) the award letter, which includes any special provisions applicable to the award and any numbered amendments thereto; (2) the budget, which indicates the amounts, by categories of expense, on which NSF has based its support (or otherwise communicates any specific approvals or disapprovals of proposed expenditures); (3) the proposal referenced in the award letter; (4) the applicable award conditions, such as Grant General Conditions (GC-1); * or Research Terms and Conditions * and (5) any announcement or other NSF issuance that may be incorporated by reference in the award letter. Cooperative agreements also are administered in accordance with NSF Cooperative Agreement Financial and Administrative Terms and Conditions (CA-FATC) and the applicable Programmatic Terms and Conditions. NSF awards are electronically signed by an NSF Grants and Agreements Officer and transmitted electronically to the organization via e-mail.

*These documents may be accessed electronically on NSF's Website at http://www.nsf.gov/awards/managing/award_conditions.jsp?org=NSF. Paper copies may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-7827 or by e-mail from nsfpubs@nsf.gov.

More comprehensive information on NSF Award Conditions and other important information on the administration of NSF awards is contained in the *NSF Award & Administration Guide (AAG) Chapter II*, available electronically on the NSF Website at http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=aag.

C. Reporting Requirements

For all multi-year grants (including both standard and continuing grants), the Principal Investigator must submit an annual project report to the cognizant Program Officer at least 90 days prior to the end of the current budget period. (Some programs or awards require submission of more frequent project reports). Within 90 days following expiration of a grant, the PI also is required to submit a final project report, and a project outcomes report for the general public.

Failure to provide the required annual or final project reports, or the project outcomes report, will delay NSF review and processing of any future funding increments as well as any pending proposals for all identified PIs and co-PIs on a given award. PIs should examine the formats of the required reports in advance to assure availability of required data.

PIs are required to use NSF's electronic project-reporting system, available through Research.gov, for preparation and submission of annual and final project reports. Such reports provide information on accomplishments, project participants (individual and organizational), publications, and other specific products and impacts of the project. Submission of the report via Research.gov constitutes certification by the PI that the contents of the report are accurate and complete. The project outcomes report also must be prepared and submitted using Research.gov. This report serves as a brief summary, prepared specifically for the public, of the nature and outcomes of the project. This report will be posted on the NSF website exactly as it is submitted by the PI.

More comprehensive information on NSF Reporting Requirements and other important information on the administration of NSF awards is contained in the *NSF Award & Administration Guide (AAG) Chapter II*, available electronically on the NSF Website at http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=aag.

VIII. AGENCY CONTACTS

Please note that the program contact information is current at the time of publishing. See program website for any updates to the points of contact.

General inquiries regarding this program should be made to:

- Kamal Shukla, telephone: 703 292-7131, email: kshukla@nsf.gov

For questions related to the use of FastLane, contact:

- FastLane Help Desk, telephone: 1-800-673-6188; e-mail: fastlane@nsf.gov.

For questions relating to Grants.gov contact:

- Grants.gov Contact Center: If the Authorized Organizational Representatives (AOR) has not received a confirmation message from Grants.gov within 48 hours of submission of application, please contact via telephone: 1-800-518-4726; e-mail: support@grants.gov.

IX. OTHER INFORMATION

The NSF Website provides the most comprehensive source of information on NSF Directorates (including contact information), programs and funding opportunities. Use of this Website by potential proposers is strongly encouraged. In addition, National Science Foundation Update is a free e-mail subscription service designed to keep potential proposers and other interested parties apprised of new NSF funding opportunities and publications, important changes in proposal and award policies and procedures, and upcoming NSF Regional Grants Conferences. Subscribers are informed through e-mail when new publications are issued that match their identified interests. Users can subscribe to this service by clicking the "Get NSF Updates by Email" link on the [NSF web site](#).

Grants.gov provides an additional electronic capability to search for Federal government-wide grant opportunities. NSF funding opportunities may be accessed via this new mechanism. Further information on Grants.gov may be obtained at <http://www.grants.gov>.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent Federal agency created by the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended (42 USC 1861-75). The Act states the purpose of the NSF is "to promote the progress of science; [and] to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare by supporting research and education in all fields of science and engineering."

NSF funds research and education in most fields of science and engineering. It does this through grants and cooperative agreements to more than 2,000 colleges, universities, K-12 school systems, businesses, informal science organizations and other research organizations throughout the US. The Foundation accounts for about one-fourth of Federal support to academic institutions for basic research.

NSF receives approximately 55,000 proposals each year for research, education and training projects, of which approximately

11,000 are funded. In addition, the Foundation receives several thousand applications for graduate and postdoctoral fellowships. The agency operates no laboratories itself but does support National Research Centers, user facilities, certain oceanographic vessels and Arctic and Antarctic research stations. The Foundation also supports cooperative research between universities and industry, US participation in international scientific and engineering efforts, and educational activities at every academic level.

Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities provide funding for special assistance or equipment to enable persons with disabilities to work on NSF-supported projects. See Grant Proposal Guide Chapter II, Section D.2 for instructions regarding preparation of these types of proposals.

The National Science Foundation has Telephonic Device for the Deaf (TDD) and Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) capabilities that enable individuals with hearing impairments to communicate with the Foundation about NSF programs, employment or general information. TDD may be accessed at (703) 292-5090 and (800) 281-8749, FIRS at (800) 877-8339.

The National Science Foundation Information Center may be reached at (703) 292-5111.

The National Science Foundation promotes and advances scientific progress in the United States by competitively awarding grants and cooperative agreements for research and education in the sciences, mathematics, and engineering.

To get the latest information about program deadlines, to download copies of NSF publications, and to access abstracts of awards, visit the NSF Website at <http://www.nsf.gov>

- Location: 4201 Wilson Blvd. Arlington, VA 22230
- For General Information (NSF Information Center): (703) 292-5111
- TDD (for the hearing-impaired): (703) 292-5090
- To Order Publications or Forms:
Send an e-mail to: nspubs@nsf.gov
or telephone: (703) 292-7827
- To Locate NSF Employees: (703) 292-5111

PRIVACY ACT AND PUBLIC BURDEN STATEMENTS

The information requested on proposal forms and project reports is solicited under the authority of the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended. The information on proposal forms will be used in connection with the selection of qualified proposals; and project reports submitted by awardees will be used for program evaluation and reporting within the Executive Branch and to Congress. The information requested may be disclosed to qualified reviewers and staff assistants as part of the proposal review process; to proposer institutions/grantees to provide or obtain data regarding the proposal review process, award decisions, or the administration of awards; to government contractors, experts, volunteers and researchers and educators as necessary to complete assigned work; to other government agencies or other entities needing information regarding applicants or nominees as part of a joint application review process, or in order to coordinate programs or policy; and to another Federal agency, court, or party in a court or Federal administrative proceeding if the government is a party. Information about Principal Investigators may be added to the Reviewer file and used to select potential candidates to serve as peer reviewers or advisory committee members. See Systems of Records, [NSF-50](#), "Principal Investigator/Proposal File and Associated Records," 69 Federal Register 26410 (May 12, 2004), and [NSF-51](#), "Reviewer/Proposal File and Associated Records," 69 Federal Register 26410 (May 12, 2004). Submission of the information is voluntary. Failure to provide full and complete information, however, may reduce the possibility of receiving an award.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, an information collection unless it displays a valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 3145-0058. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 120 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions. Send comments regarding the burden estimate and any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to:

Suzanne H. Plimpton
Reports Clearance Officer
Division of Administrative Services
National Science Foundation
Arlington, VA 22230

[Policies and Important Links](#) | [Privacy](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact NSF](#) | [Contact Web Master](#) | [SiteMap](#)



The National Science Foundation, 4201 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22230, USA
Tel: (703) 292-5111, FIRS: (800) 877-8339 | TDD: (800) 281-8749

Last Updated:
11/07/06
[Text Only](#)