



National Science Foundation  
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## Dear Colleague Letter: Interdisciplinary Research across the SBE Sciences

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National Science Foundation  
Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences

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"Interdisciplinary research is a mode of research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice." National Academies, *Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research*, 2004 and the [NSF Interdisciplinary Research web site](#).

[Rebuilding the Mosaic](#), which reports the results of the year-long [SBE 2020 visioning process](#), finds that scholars in the social, behavioral, and economic sciences believe that future research will be interdisciplinary, collaborative, and data intensive. The Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) therefore encourages investigators to submit proposals that go beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplines, span across the existing core SBE programs, or extend outside the SBE sciences. The report identifies four cross-cutting themes that appear to be potentially fertile areas for this model of research: population change; disparities in experience and access to resources; language and cognition, including communication, linguistics, and the brain; and new technology/new media and social network analysis. This DCL does not limit eligible proposals to these cross-cutting umbrella topics. The directorate anticipates future activities that will support research in some or all of these thematic areas, and proposals that address research problems from an interdisciplinary perspective within these broad topics are welcome.

A range of different opportunities exist for SBE scientists engaging in interdisciplinary research:

1. SBE has issued [a new solicitation for an annual Interdisciplinary Behavioral and Social Sciences \(IBSS\) competition](#) which seeks to support large interdisciplinary research projects and exploratory research projects.
2. SBE has issued [a new solicitation for an annual SBE Postdoctoral Research Fellowships competition](#), which now includes a track for interdisciplinary education and training.
3. Either individually or through co-review involving multiple programs, SBE programs will consider proposals submitted in response to the [Research Coordination Networks \(RCNs\) solicitation](#). RCNs support networking activities, not research per se, so that groups of investigators can communicate and coordinate their research, training and educational activities across disciplinary, organizational, geographic and international boundaries. Please note that the RCN solicitation specifies that RCN proposals for SBE programs should be submitted directly to the regular SBE programs in accordance with the due dates specified on SBE program web sites. To determine the possible appropriateness of an RCN proposal for consideration by one or more programs, contact the

program officers of the program(s) that might be appropriate. Interdisciplinary RCN projects that SBE programs find meritorious may be eligible for matching support from the SBE Office of Multidisciplinary Activities.

4. Either individually or through co-review involving multiple programs, SBE programs will consider proposals for interdisciplinary research submitted in response to the standing program announcements and program solicitations. Proposals may be submitted by individual investigators or teams but are expected to incorporate an integrated, interdisciplinary approach and generate results that will contribute to multiple disciplines. The lead PI is expected to be from a discipline appropriate for the host SBE program, but collaborators may be from any area of science or engineering. Such projects may require a large team and may also exceed the current average award size in SBE. Interdisciplinary research projects that SBE programs find meritorious may be eligible for matching support from the SBE Office of Multidisciplinary Activities.

Given the model of collaborative research that the *Mosaic* report describes, innovative partnerships and research collaborations that allow diverse individuals to work together in synergistic ways are especially encouraged. Also encouraged are projects that include beginning researchers as team members and/or that develop international partnerships, when appropriate.

Investigators submitting proposals to the Interdisciplinary Behavioral and Social Sciences (IBSS) competition or the SBE Postdoctoral Research Fellowships competition should follow the guidelines in those solicitations, noting due dates, special proposal preparation specifications, and special review criteria. Investigators submitting Research Coordination Network (RCN) proposals should adhere to specifications in the RCN solicitation but submit it to a regular SBE program in accordance with the due date in the appropriate regular program announcement or program solicitation. Individuals submitting research proposals to regular SBE programs should submit to a regular SBE program in accordance with the due date in the appropriate regular program announcement or program solicitation.

Links to SBE's programs and target dates, including contact information for program officers, are available at <http://www.nsf.gov/dir/index.jsp?org=SBE>.

Finally, when considering funding opportunities, investigators are encouraged to [review the full range of the foundation's crosscutting and NSF-wide active funding opportunities](#).

Sincerely,

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Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences