

# Nitrogen: Improving on Nature (NITROGEN)

A joint Ideas Lab activity between NSF and BBSRC

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## PROGRAM SOLICITATION

NSF 12-579



National Science Foundation

Directorate for Biological Sciences  
Division of Integrative Organismal Systems  
Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences  
Emerging Frontiers

Preliminary Proposal Due Date(s) (*optional*):

September 07, 2012

required for participation in Ideas Lab otherwise optional

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

February 01, 2013

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND REVISION NOTES

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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.

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](#).*

A preliminary proposal is required for consideration of participation in the Ideas Lab workshop, to be held December 3-7, 2012 at Crewe Hall, Cheshire, UK, but is otherwise optional.

All full proposals, whether or not developed through the Ideas Lab, must be received by the February 1, 2013 deadline. Proposers do not need to have participated in the Ideas Lab to submit a full proposal.

## SUMMARY OF PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

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### General Information

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Program Title:

Nitrogen: Improving on Nature (NITROGEN)  
A joint NSF - BBSRC Activity

Synopsis of Program:

Nitrogen is critical to plant growth. A limited number of plant species have the capacity to fix atmospheric nitrogen through symbioses with nitrogen fixing bacteria; the rest need to obtain their nitrogen through soluble compounds in soil. For the majority of crop plants, nitrogen availability has been increased through the use of nitrogen-based fertilizers. However, application of artificial fertilizers is costly and is limited in developing countries, where the cost and lack of infrastructure are barriers. The process by which these fertilizers are produced is energy-intensive and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Further, much of the nitrogen applied to agricultural land through fertilizers is not used by the crop and is lost as run-off into water courses or as greenhouse gases through denitrification, resulting in deleterious impacts on the environment.

The ultimate aim of this Ideas Lab between the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the US and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) in the UK is to help meet the challenge of sustainably producing enough food for a growing population while reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. The aspiration is that mixing researchers from diverse scientific backgrounds will engender fresh thinking and new approaches that can be used to increase nitrogen availability to crop plants whilst maintaining or increasing yield, and hence decrease the need for the application of fertilizer. In addition, by bringing together

highly qualified researchers from the US and the UK, the intention is to form strong transatlantic alliances, where the resulting synergies from the expertise of each partner allow for significant added value.

US researchers may submit preliminary proposals only *via* FastLane for participating in the Ideas Lab in which a set of multidisciplinary ideas will be developed. These will be submitted as full proposals. Alternatively, US researchers who cannot or do not desire to participate in the Ideas Lab can submit full proposals directly *via* FastLane or Grants.gov in response to this solicitation. Collaboration among researchers from USA and UK is strongly encouraged in the full proposals.

The link to the BBSRC announcement is <http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/opportunities/2012/ideaslab-nitrogen-improving-on-nature.aspx>.

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.*

- Diane Jofuku Okamura, telephone: (703) 292-4400, email: [bio-nitrogen@nsf.gov](mailto:bio-nitrogen@nsf.gov)
- Gregory W. Warr, telephone: (703) 292-8284, email: [bio-nitrogen@nsf.gov](mailto:bio-nitrogen@nsf.gov)

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

- 47.074 --- Biological Sciences

## Award Information

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Anticipated Type of Award: Standard Grant or Continuing Grant

Estimated Number of Awards: 5 to 10 Up to 10 awards will be made in FY 2013 pending availability of funds and the type, scale, and variety of project ideas developed at the Ideas Lab or submitted directly to NSF.

Anticipated Funding Amount: \$8,000,000 Up to \$6,000,000 will be available for US researchers in FY 2013 for successful proposals through the Ideas Lab, pending availability of funds and compelling proposals. Equivalent funds will be available from BBSRC for UK researchers. Up to \$2,000,000 in additional funds will be available to US Researchers in FY 2013 for proposals in this competition not developed through the Ideas Lab.

## Eligibility Information

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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 or Co-PI: 1

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

## Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions

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A. Proposal Preparation Instructions

- Letters of Intent: Not Applicable
- Preliminary Proposals: Submission of Preliminary Proposals is optional. 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](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](http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=grantsgovguide))

B. Budgetary Information

- Cost Sharing Requirements: Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited.
- Indirect Cost (F&A) Limitations: Not Applicable
- Other Budgetary Limitations: Not Applicable

C. Due Dates

Preliminary Proposal Due Date(s) (*optional*):

September 07, 2012

required for participation in Ideas Lab otherwise optional

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

February 01, 2013

## Proposal Review Information Criteria

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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

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Award Conditions: Standard NSF award conditions apply.

Reporting Requirements: Standard NSF reporting requirements apply.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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Nitrogen is critical to plant growth. A limited number of plant species have the capacity to fix atmospheric nitrogen through symbioses with nitrogen fixing bacteria; the rest need to obtain their nitrogen through soluble compounds in soil. For the majority of crop plants, nitrogen availability has been increased through the use of nitrogen-based fertilizers. However, application of artificial fertilizers is costly and is limited in developing countries, where the cost and lack of infrastructure are barriers. The process by which these fertilizers are produced is energy-intensive and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Further, much of the nitrogen applied to agricultural land through fertilizers is not used by the crop and is lost as run-off into water courses or as greenhouse gases through denitrification, resulting in deleterious impacts on the environment.

The ultimate aim of this Ideas Lab between the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) in the UK and the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the US is to help meet the challenge of sustainably producing enough food for a growing population while reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

The key objective of this joint activity is to stimulate innovative and transformative research proposals that will reduce inputs of nitrogen fertilizers to non-leguminous crops whilst maintaining or increasing yield. This could be achieved by: i) giving crops the ability to fix their own nitrogen; ii) significantly increasing the nitrogen available to roots by manipulating the rhizosphere; or iii) significantly improving the crop's nitrogen use efficiency. Other approaches are also welcome (noting that precision agriculture is excluded from this call). Proposals must include ideas that could lead to a step-change in our knowledge, rather than incremental advances. The proposals will be generated by multidisciplinary teams which in addition to scientists from a traditional biology background, may include researchers with expertise in physics, chemistry, engineering, mathematical modeling, computer science or any other discipline which may help to shed light on the topic. Researchers with expertise in areas of bioscience including soil science, nitrogen fixation, nitrogen metabolism and resource partitioning in plants will also be appropriate. Given the likely complexity

of the research required, specialists in other relevant areas of the biological sciences are also strongly encouraged to participate.

The aspiration is that mixing researchers from diverse scientific backgrounds will engender fresh thinking and new approaches that can be used to increase nitrogen availability to crop plants while maintaining or increasing yield, and hence decrease the need for the application of fertilizer. In addition, by bringing together highly qualified researchers from the US and the UK, the intention is to form strong transatlantic alliances, where the resulting synergies from the expertise of each partner allows for significant added value.

## II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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### The Ideas Lab

The Ideas Lab is an interactive workshop on a particular topic, in this case reducing inputs of nitrogen fertilizers to non-leguminous crops whilst maintaining or increasing yield, involving up to 30 participants. It aims to stimulate thinking in promising new, or currently under-developed research areas relevant to nitrogen in crop plants, and to fund new collaborations between leading US and UK scientists, in order to advance current research practices from both nations.

Participants will be expected to engage constructively in dialogue with each other, the facilitators, and the Director and Mentors to develop collaborative research proposals. Collaboration will be encouraged, especially in bringing great minds together from across the Atlantic to embrace this challenge.

The Ideas Lab is sponsored by the BBSRC and the NSF. As such, only those eligible to apply for funding from either BBSRC or the NSF will be eligible to apply to attend the Ideas Lab.

The Ideas Lab will run over five days starting mid-morning on day one and finishing mid-afternoon on day five. At the outset, the participants will work collaboratively to identify and define the scope of the research challenges relating to nitrogen fixation and nitrogen use efficiency. As the Ideas Lab progresses, participants will build up thoughts about how the identified challenges may be addressed and develop their innovative ideas and activities into research projects, which should contain genuinely novel and potentially risk-taking investigations. The Ideas Lab will include inputs from a variety of sources and will aim to develop collaborative research projects. Following the Ideas Lab, up to \$12M from the NSF and BBSRC (\$6 million equivalent from each agency) will be allocated subject to the quality of proposals. Those selected to participate will receive further instructions prior to attending the event.

### How will the Ideas Lab Work?

The Ideas Lab is an intensive, interactive and free-thinking environment, where a diverse group of participants from a range of disciplines and backgrounds gets together for five days - away from their everyday worlds - to immerse themselves in collaborative thinking processes in order to construct innovative approaches.

The nature of the Ideas Lab requires a high degree of trust between participants in order to make the required breakthroughs in scientific thinking. This trust extends to allowing the free and frank exchange of scientific ideas, some being in the very early stages of development. The aim of the Ideas Lab is not to discuss ideas that are already well-developed but not yet published. Rather, the goal is to bring individuals from different disciplines together to interact and engage in free thinking on first principles, to learn from one another and create an integrated vision for future research projects. It is expected that the sharing of these ideas would be encouraged within the Ideas Lab but their confidentiality would be respected outside the Ideas Lab.

The Ideas Lab will be led by a Director whose role will be to assist in defining the topics and aid facilitated discussions at the event. The Director will be joined by a small number of Mentors. The Mentors have been selected by BBSRC and the NSF, based on their intellectual standing, their impartiality and objectivity, and their broad understanding of, and enthusiasm for, the subject area. The Director and Mentors will take full part in the Ideas Lab, and will not be eligible to receive research funding under this collaborative activity. They will therefore act as impartial peer reviewers in the process, providing a function analogous to that of an NSF review panel.

The process can be broken down into several stages:

- Defining the scope of the challenges
- Evolving common languages and terminologies amongst people from a diverse range of backgrounds and disciplines
- Sharing understandings of the challenges, and the expertise brought by the participants to the Ideas Lab
- Taking part in break-out sessions focused on the challenges, using creative thinking techniques
- Capturing the outputs in the form of highly innovative research projects
- Using "real-time" peer review to develop projects at the Ideas Lab

The Ideas Lab will be an intensive event. For the well-being of participants, the venue offers opportunities for relaxation, and the timetable will include networking and other activities as a break from the detailed technical discussions.

### Who Should Apply to Participate?

Having the right mix of participants influences the success or failure of such an activity. Applications are encouraged from individuals representing diverse research areas across a range of disciplines. Contributions to this challenge could be made by researchers working in a variety of disciplines or research areas. These will include biology, chemistry, physics, bioinformatics, computer science, mathematics, statistics, modeling and engineering. However, we are not defining the disciplines that should be represented at this Ideas Lab; rather we are asking potential participants to indicate how their expertise can address the challenge of reducing inputs of nitrogen fertilizers to non-leguminous crops whilst maintaining or increasing yield.

It would be beneficial for applicants to have some prior knowledge of the challenges associated with nitrogen fixation, nitrogen availability and/or nitrogen use efficiency in plants, but more importantly applicants will need to demonstrate an enthusiasm for cross-disciplinary research, as the future of this research area will require input from many disciplines.

The ability to develop and pursue a new approach will also be crucial. Expertise is required from a very broad range of disciplines, and applicants should not feel limited by conventional perceptions: the Ideas Lab approach is about bringing people together who would not normally interact. We actively encourage people to apply who are experts in their own research areas but have not yet applied it to this challenge.

This is an opportunity to share ideas and develop future collaborations. Participants are welcomed at any stage of their research career, however they must be eligible to apply for funding from either BBSRC or the NSF.

## Location and Date

This Ideas Lab will take place at Crewe Hall, near Crewe (UK) from December 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Further details of this venue are available at <http://www.qhotels.co.uk/hotels/crewe-hall-crewe-cheshire.aspx>. The environment will encourage free and open-minded thinking; vital for the purposes of this event. Additional information about the venue and meeting logistics will be provided to the selected participants. It should be noted that all travel to the Ideas Lab, accommodation, refreshments, breakfast, lunch and dinner costs will be met by the BBSRC and the NSF. However, all incidental costs incurred whilst at the event must be met by the participant.

## Applications for this Activity

In brief, individuals interested in participating in the Ideas Lab should respond to this solicitation by submitting applications to participate in the workshop as preliminary proposals.

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, which will be held in Crewe Hall, Cheshire, UK, December 3-7, 2012. UK investigators should submit their applications at <http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/opportunities/2012/ideaslab-nitrogen-improving-on-nature.aspx>.

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. The Director and Mentors will recommend a list of potential participants and NSF and BBSRC Program Staff will select the final list of participants from the submitted preliminary proposals.

Following the Ideas Lab, participants will submit full proposals to NSF and BBSRC by the February 1, 2013 deadline; these full proposals will reflect the outline developed at the workshop.

US proposers who did not participate in the Ideas Lab (whether or not a preliminary proposal was submitted) can submit full proposals to NSF by the February 1, 2013 deadline for consideration in this program. These proposers are also encouraged to collaborate with UK researchers in their projects, if appropriate for the scope of the project. UK Principal Investigators on these projects should secure funds from the BBSRC for their component of the research project. Participation in the Ideas Lab is not required for submission of a full proposal to this program. Further details of the proposal preparation and submission process are described in Section IV of this document.

## III. AWARD INFORMATION

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Anticipated Type of Award: Continuing Grant or Standard Grant

Estimated Number of Awards: 5 to 10 Up to 10 awards will be made in FY 2013 pending availability of funds and the type, scale, and variety of project ideas developed at the Ideas Lab or submitted directly to NSF.

Anticipated Funding Amount: \$8,000,000 - Up to \$6,000,000 will be available for US researchers in FY 2013 for successful proposals through the Ideas Lab, pending availability of funds and compelling proposals. Equivalent funds will be available from BBSRC for UK researchers. Up to \$2,000,000 in additional funds will be available to US Researchers in FY 2013 for proposals in this competition not developed through the Ideas Lab.

## IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

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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 or Co-PI: 1

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

## V. PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

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### A. Proposal Preparation Instructions

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Preliminary Proposals (**optional**): Submission of Preliminary proposals is optional. Please see the full text of this solicitation for further information.

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](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](mailto: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](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](mailto: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 full 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.

**Preliminary Proposals (conditional - see details below):**

**Submission of Preliminary Proposals is required for participation in the Ideas Lab. Please note, the Preliminary Proposal must come from one individual and cannot include Co-PIs or collaborators.** Participants in the Idea Lab will be selected on the basis of information submitted in the preliminary proposal. The applications are limited to two pages of "Project Description," that should be submitted as a preliminary proposal in the NSF FastLane system ONLY, not through Grants.gov. Standard NSF formatting guidelines will apply. See the NSF Grant Proposal Guide (GPG) for guidance.

The Project Description section of the preliminary proposal applications should conform to the following guidelines:

Page One:

- Provide a brief summary of your professional background (no more than one half page). Please note that if you are selected as a participant, information provided in answer to this question will be made available to the other participants to facilitate networking at the Ideas Lab workshop.
- What expertise do you bring that is relevant to realizing the goal of reducing inputs of nitrogen fertilizers to non-leguminous crops whilst maintaining or increasing yield? (no more than half a page).

Page Two:

Please spend some time considering your answers to the following questions. Your responses (no more than 150 words each) should demonstrate that you have suitable skills and aptitude to participate in the Ideas Lab (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?

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.

**Full Proposal Preparation Instructions:**

Full proposals developed through the Ideas lab should conform to the project outline developed at the conclusion of the workshop. If substantive changes are contemplated, an NSF Program Director should be contacted for guidance.

Full proposals submitted directly to the program should focus on the program goals as articulated in the Introduction to this Solicitation as well as the Ideas Lab section. Principal Investigators are strongly encouraged to contact an NSF Program Director if there are questions about the suitability of a proposal for this Program.

All full proposals should include a single copy document that contains a list of all persons with conflicts of interest with the investigators involved in the project. See below for required format.

In Single-Copy Documents, upload a single, alphabetized table identifying conflicts of interest for all PIs, co-PIs, and Senior Personnel for both the US and UK portions of the project. The table should list (by column): (A) full names (last, first), (B) institutional affiliations, (C) type of conflict, and (D) Name of PI/co-PI/senior personnel having the conflict. The table should be alphabetized on column (A). Conflicts to be identified are (1) Ph.D. dissertation advisors or advisees, (2) collaborators or co-

authors, including postdoctoral researchers, for the past 48 months, (3) co-editors within the past 24 months, (4) spouse or other relative, and (5) any other individuals with whom, or institutions with which, the senior personnel (PI, co-PIs, and any named personnel) have financial ties, including advisory committees (specify type), boards of directors, or prospective employees.

In case of the proposals with international collaboration, the UK collaborators should be added as senior personnel and their biographical sketches must be included. In addition, the budget of the UK component of the project requested from BBSRC should be included as a supplementary document.

## B. Budgetary Information

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Cost Sharing: Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited

## C. Due Dates

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- Preliminary Proposal Due Date(s) (**optional**):  
September 07, 2012  
required for participation in Ideas Lab otherwise optional
- Full Proposal Deadline(s) (due by 5 p.m. proposer's local time):  
February 01, 2013

All full proposals, whether or not developed through the Ideas Lab, must be received by the deadline. Proposers do not need to have participated in the Ideas Lab to submit a full proposal.

## D. FastLane/Grants.gov Requirements

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- 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](mailto: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](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](mailto: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

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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://nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit\\_review/](http://nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit_review/).

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

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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

This activity, particularly 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, if the full proposals are derived from the Ideas Lab, the 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

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

#### Review Process

**Stage 1:** Applications to attend the Ideas Lab will be considered by BBSRC and the NSF with advice from the Director and a team of mentors. Final selection decisions regarding participation in the Ideas Lab will be made by BBSRC and the NSF.

A number of criteria will be used in the selection of participants including coverage of disciplines and expertise, and demographic and institutional spread. The following specific attributes will also be assessed

- The ability to develop new and highly original research ideas;
- The potential to contribute to research between disciplines;
- The ability to work in a team across academia and industry;
- The ability to explain research to non-experts.

Please ensure that you have provided all of the information requested above as this is the only information on which potential Ideas Lab attendees will be selected. Submission of the preliminary proposal will be considered an indication of commitment to attend and participate through the full course of the five-day residential Ideas Lab scheduled for December 3-7, 2012, should the proposer be invited. The decisions of the funding agencies about whom to invite will be final and binding.

**Stage 2:** Applicants selected by the NSF and BBSRC Program Officers will participate in the Ideas Lab workshop, building collaborations and refining ideas. It is anticipated that proposals developed through the Ideas Lab would feature the following:

- Novel highly multidisciplinary research projects, clearly reflecting the distinctive opportunity for creating such projects that the Ideas Lab provides.
- Clear evidence that the team has the capability to deliver its project as a high quality multidisciplinary activity.

Clear relevance to, and the potential to make a distinctive and novel contribution to, addressing the research challenge of reducing inputs of nitrogen fertilizers to non-leguminous crops whilst maintaining or increasing yield.

**Stage 3:** Full proposals submitted directly to the program will be discussed by a panel. Proposals resulting from the Ideas Lab will be reviewed by the Directors and Mentors and funding recommendations will be made by NSF and BBSRC Program Officers. UK participants will submit proposals to BBSRC. Any collaborative project arising from the Ideas Lab and funded through this program must have a signed Collaboration Agreement between the partners that clarifies the contributions and rights of each partner before the start of any grant. The sponsors of the Program attach great importance to the dissemination of research findings and the publishing of information about the research they support in the public domain. However, all dissemination and publication must be carried out in the manner agreed in the project's Collaboration Agreement.

**Stage 4:** After scientific, technical and programmatic review and consideration of appropriate factors, the NSF Program Officers recommend to the cognizant Division Directors whether the proposal should be declined or recommended for award.

NSF is striving to be able to inform applicants whether their proposals have been declined or recommended for funding within six months. The time interval begins on the submission deadline for the full proposal and ends when the Division Director accepts the Program Officer's recommendation.

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

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### A. Notification of the Award

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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

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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](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](mailto: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](http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=aag).

### C. Reporting Requirements

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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](http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=aag).

## VIII. AGENCY CONTACTS

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*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:

- Diane Jofuku Okamura, telephone: (703) 292-4400, email: [bio-nitrogen@nsf.gov](mailto:bio-nitrogen@nsf.gov)
- Gregory W. Warr, telephone: (703) 292-8284, email: [bio-nitrogen@nsf.gov](mailto:bio-nitrogen@nsf.gov)

For questions related to the use of FastLane, contact:

- FastLane Help Desk, telephone: 1-800-673-6188; e-mail: [fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto: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](mailto:support@grants.gov).

## IX. OTHER INFORMATION

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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, "My NSF" is an information-delivery system 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 [Grants Conferences](#). Subscribers are informed through e-mail or the user's Web browser each time new publications are issued that match their identified interests. "My NSF" also is available on NSF's website at <http://www.nsf.gov/mynsf/>.

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

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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](mailto:nspubs@nsf.gov)
  - or telephone: (703) 292-7827
- To Locate NSF Employees: (703) 292-5111

## PRIVACY ACT AND PUBLIC BURDEN STATEMENTS

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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  
Office of the General Counsel  
National Science Foundation  
Arlington, VA 22230

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	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 <a href="#">Text Only</a>