



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

**NSF 14-021**

**Dear Colleague Letter: Research on Privacy in Today's Networked World**

December 20, 2013

Dear Colleague:

Privacy is a major issue of the information age. Organizations are increasingly acquiring and storing vast quantities of information about individuals. In addition, advances in big data analytics enable organizations to combine previously distinct information sources and to examine these data to uncover hidden patterns, correlations, and other revealing information. Research on privacy is needed to address how technological change and societal trends are combining to reshape privacy and the implications of such reshaping.

The directorates for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) and Computer and Information Science and Engineering (CISE) invite investigators to submit proposals that address the need to develop new and deeper understandings of privacy in today's networked world. Our interest spans both disciplinary and interdisciplinary research in an array of SBE sciences. Proposals for workshops to explore novel and interdisciplinary SBE and SBE/CISE approaches to privacy are also welcome.

Below are some examples of the types of topics that SBE scientists or teams of SBE and CISE scientists could conceivably propose under this Dear Colleague Letter. The list is not exhaustive and is meant to suggest the broad spectrum of possibilities for research in this area. Topics might include, but are by no means limited to the following:

- The social and psychological functions of privacy
- The relationship between technical and psychological conceptualizations of privacy and trust
- Factors encouraging attention or inattention to privacy, including the role of technology
- The psychological or social consequences of privacy violations, especially those involving technology
- Institutional engagement with privacy-invading technologies, including adaptation to, utilization and avoidance
- The contextual nature of privacy and understanding what constitutes privacy or privacy violations in different social, political, cultural or technical contexts
- Privacy issues and impacts across different levels of analysis (e.g., the individual, dyad, group, organization, sector, or societal level) and with different kinds of technologies

Successful proposals will be based on a theoretically driven research design incorporating appropriate methods to: (1) address foundational SBE research questions or issues related to privacy, or specific challenges therein; (2) implement the collection and analysis of data; (3) make clear contributions to synthesizing, expanding, or building the base of research knowledge and evidence related to privacy; and (4) facilitate the development of rigorous SBE science research and theory in the field of privacy.

The privacy-related research areas described above align with several NSF programs, including: (1) standing SBE programs (<http://www.nsf.gov/div/index.jsp?div=SES>), (<http://www.nsf.gov/div/index.jsp?div=BCS>), and (<http://www.nsf.gov/div/index.jsp?div=SMA>), (2) the SBE Interdisciplinary Behavioral and

Social Science (IBSS) Research program ([http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=504832](http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=504832)), and (3) the Secure and Trustworthy Cyberspace (SaTC) program ([http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=504709&org=CISE](http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=504709&org=CISE)).

This is not a special competition or new program. Proposals in response to this Dear Colleague Letter must meet the requirements and deadlines of the program to which they are submitted. Interested investigators are encouraged to contact Program Officer Dr. Heng Xu ([hxu@nsf.gov](mailto:hxu@nsf.gov)) with up to a two-page statement explaining the core idea of their projects. Dr. Xu will assist investigators in identifying the most appropriate program(s) to which to submit their proposals.

Sincerely,

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