

# Discovery Research PreK-12 (DRK-12)

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## PROGRAM SOLICITATION

NSF 17-584

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## REPLACES DOCUMENT(S):

NSF 15-592

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**National Science Foundation**

Directorate for Education & Human Resources  
Research on Learning in Formal and Informal Settings

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

November 14, 2017

November 14, 2018

Second Wednesday in November, Annually Thereafter

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND REVISION NOTES

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### Revisions to this Solicitation:

1. A call for a Resource Center has been added for FY 2018 only.
2. The description of the Assessment Strand has been clarified.
3. The description of Supplementary Documents was revised to align with the current NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide

Any proposal submitted in response to this solicitation should be submitted in accordance with the revised *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) ([NSF 17-1](#)), which is effective for proposals submitted, or due, on or after January 30, 2017.

## SUMMARY OF PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

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### General Information

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#### Program Title:

Discovery Research PreK-12 (DRK-12)

#### Synopsis of Program:

The Discovery Research PreK-12 program (DRK-12) seeks to significantly enhance the learning and teaching of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and computer science (STEM) by preK-12 students and teachers, through research and development of STEM education innovations and approaches. Projects in the DRK-12 program build on fundamental research in STEM education and prior research and development efforts that provide theoretical and empirical justification for proposed projects. Projects should result in research-informed and field-tested outcomes and products that inform teaching and learning. Teachers and students who participate in DRK-12 studies are expected to enhance their understanding and use of STEM content, practices and skills.

The DRK-12 program invites proposals that address immediate challenges that are facing preK-12 STEM education as well as those that anticipate radically different structures and functions of preK-12 teaching and learning. The DRK-12 program has three major research and development strands: (1) Assessment; (2) Learning; and (3) Teaching. The program recognizes the synergy among the three strands and that there is some overlap and interdependence among them. However, proposals should identify a clear focus of the proposed research efforts (i.e., assessment, learning, or teaching) consistent with the proposal's main objectives and research questions. The program supports five types of projects: (1) Exploratory, (2) Design and Development, (3) Impact, (4) Implementation and Improvement, and (5) Conferences and Syntheses. All five types of projects apply to each of the three DRK-12 program strands.

#### 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.

- Inquiries can be made to, telephone: (703) 292-8620, email: [DRLDRK12@nsf.gov](mailto:DRLDRK12@nsf.gov)
- David B. Campbell, telephone: (703) 292-5093, email: [dcampbel@nsf.gov](mailto:dcampbel@nsf.gov)
- Julia V. Clark, telephone: (703) 292-5119, email: [jclark@nsf.gov](mailto:jclark@nsf.gov)
- Catherine Eberbach, telephone: (703) 292-4960, email: [ceberbac@nsf.gov](mailto:ceberbac@nsf.gov)
- Michael Ford, telephone: (703) 292-5153, email: [miford@nsf.gov](mailto:miford@nsf.gov)
- David L. Haury, telephone: (703) 292-8614, email: [dhaury@nsf.gov](mailto:dhaury@nsf.gov)
- Margret Hjalmarson, telephone: (703) 292-4313, email: [mhjalmar@nsf.gov](mailto:mhjalmar@nsf.gov)
- Karen King, telephone: (703) 292-5124, email: [kking@nsf.gov](mailto:kking@nsf.gov)
- Rebecca Kruse, telephone: (703) 292-4211, email: [rkruse@nsf.gov](mailto:rkruse@nsf.gov)
- Julio E. Lopez-Ferrao, telephone: (703) 292-5183, email: [jlopezfe@nsf.gov](mailto:jlopezfe@nsf.gov)
- Robert Ochsendorf, telephone: (703) 292-2760, email: [rochsend@nsf.gov](mailto:rochsend@nsf.gov)
- Joseph Reed, telephone: (703) 292-5187, email: [jreed@nsf.gov](mailto:jreed@nsf.gov)
- Ferdinand D. Rivera, telephone: (703) 292-8620, email: [frivera@nsf.gov](mailto:frivera@nsf.gov)
- Robert Ronau, telephone: (703) 292-5089, email: [rronau@nsf.gov](mailto:rronau@nsf.gov)
- Monya A. Ruffin, telephone: (703) 292-4635, email: [mruffin@nsf.gov](mailto:mruffin@nsf.gov)
- Robert Russell, telephone: (703) 292-2995, email: [rrussel@nsf.gov](mailto:rrussel@nsf.gov)
- Joan M. Walker, telephone: (703) 292-7016, email: [jwalker@nsf.gov](mailto:jwalker@nsf.gov)

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

- 47.076 --- Education and Human Resources

## Award Information

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**Anticipated Type of Award:**

Standard Grant or Continuing Grant

**Estimated Number of Awards:** 20 to 31

It is anticipated that about 8-13 Level I awards, 5-8 Level II awards, 1-4 Level III awards, and 5 Conference/Synthesis awards will be made in FY 2018, pending availability of funds. One Resource Center with a budget of up to \$3,500,000 will be supported for a duration of 3 years in the 2018 fiscal year.

**Anticipated Funding Amount:** \$57,000,000

Pending availability of funds, NSF anticipates approximately \$57,000,000 will be available for the FY2018 competition.

Normal limits for funding requests of DRK -12 proposals are as follows: (1) Level I projects up to \$450,000 with duration up to three years; (2) Level II projects up to \$3,000,000 with duration up to four years; and (3) Level III projects up to \$5,000,000 with duration up to five years. Synthesis proposals are up to \$300,000 and two years duration. Conference proposals are up to \$100,000 and one year duration. The level of funding for the proposal should align with the maturity of the proposed work, the size and scope of the empirical effort, as well as the capacity of the interdisciplinary team to conduct the proposed research.

## Eligibility Information

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**Who May Submit Proposals:**

The categories of proposers eligible to submit proposals to the National Science Foundation are identified in the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG)*, Chapter I.E.

**Who May Serve as PI:**

There are no restrictions or limits.

**Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:**

There are no restrictions or limits.

**Limit on Number of Proposals per PI or Co-PI:**

There are no restrictions or limits.

## Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions

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**A. Proposal Preparation Instructions**

- **Letters of Intent:** Not required
- **Preliminary Proposal Submission:** Not required
- **Full Proposals:**
  - Full Proposals submitted via FastLane: *NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG)* guidelines

apply. The complete text of the PAPPG is available electronically on the NSF website at:

[https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).

- o 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: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=grantsgovguide](https://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:**

Other budgetary limitations apply. Please see the full text of this solicitation for further information.

## C. Due Dates

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

November 14, 2017

November 14, 2018

Second Wednesday in November, Annually Thereafter

## Proposal Review Information Criteria

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### Merit Review Criteria:

National Science Board approved criteria apply.

## 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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The goal of the Discovery Research PreK-12 program (DRK-12) is to catalyze research and development of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and computer science (STEM) education innovations or approaches that can serve as models for use within the nation's formal preK-12 STEM education (e.g., states, districts, schools, and teachers). The intent of the DRK-12 program is to: (1) catalyze new approaches to STEM learning, teaching, and assessment; (2) build knowledge about how to develop preK-12 students' STEM knowledge and skills; and (3) provide multiple pathways and resources in a variety of learning environments to study the learning process itself. The DRK-12 program is committed to research and development that informs strategies to attract and retain a diverse population of students in STEM fields of study. The program encourages proposals from a range of institution types and categories including minority-serving institutions (e.g., HBCUs, Tribal Colleges, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Alaska Native-Serving Institutions, and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions), primarily undergraduate institutions and other organizations focused on preK-12 STEM Education. The DRK-12 Program especially welcomes proposals that are consistent with the goal of developing STEM talent and workforce from all sectors and groups in our society (e.g., NSF INCLUDES). Collaborations are encouraged between DRK-12 proposals and existing NSF INCLUDES projects, provided the collaboration strengthens both projects.

Projects in the DRK-12 program build on fundamental research in STEM education and prior research and development efforts that provide theoretical and empirical justification for proposed projects. School leaders, teachers, and students who participate in DRK-12 studies are expected to enhance their understanding and use of STEM content, practices, and skills. The DRK-12 program invites proposals that address immediate challenges that are facing PreK-12 STEM education, as well as those that anticipate radically different structures and functions of preK-12 teaching, learning, and assessment. The projects funded by the program should reflect the needs of the increasingly diverse population and national, state, or district priorities. Projects should contribute to the research base in STEM education by studying how students and teachers learn through well-articulated STEM education innovations with clear theories of action. DRK-12 projects are expected to contribute to both theory and to practice. Therefore, projects are expected to result in innovations or approaches that can be shared with and feasibly implemented by other organizations and research shared in peer-reviewed research and practice publications.

# II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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For DRK-12 proposals, a wide range of potential STEM education innovations or approaches are possible. These include but are not limited to policies, instructional or professional development programs, interventions, practices, curriculum, professional development models, formative or summative assessment systems, technologies, and combinations of approaches that improve STEM learning and learning environments for students in preK-12 formal education. As a research and development program, DRK-12 contributes to knowledge of how STEM education innovations or approaches are designed, engineered and tested. The emphasis is on what works, for whom, and under what conditions. In addition, the DRK-12 program also contributes to the generation of new knowledge about the nature of STEM learning and learning environments. Research and development plans are integral to every project description.

STEM is an acronym for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and includes computer science. The term is used as shorthand for referring to these domains. The DRK-12 program is receptive to proposals that focus on any of the domains. Proposals are not required to address all domains. However, proposals that have an interdisciplinary focus on two or more of these domains are welcome.

The DRK-12 program is primarily concerned with the goals and effectiveness of formal education, but recognizes that learning is not limited to formal school environments. PreK-12 schools also serve many populations and have varying schedules. The program encourages proposals to draw from knowledge and practice of learning in out-of-school and informal settings to enhance learning and teaching in formal settings. Also, the DRK-12 program includes education in Prekindergarten (PreK) through the end of high school, but the connection to college and career-readiness standards ties the work of many projects to post-secondary or adult basic education.

The DRK-12 program seeks to maintain a balanced portfolio by supporting projects ranging from those with immediate applicability to those that anticipate and provide the foundation for preK-12 STEM education as it could be in future decades. The DRK-12 program is interested in ideas, concepts, theories, practices, and research and development that can challenge existing assumptions and offer promising new approaches in STEM learning, teaching, and assessment. Such proposals could, for example, offer the promise of being more effective with the increasing diversity of learners that are represented in our nation. Proposals that address immediate and pressing challenges typically develop and study STEM education innovations or approaches that could be implemented and used by educators in the relatively near term, albeit in highly innovative ways.

Each DRK-12 proposal should select a strand which describes the focus of the research and development and a project type which describes the type of research study appropriate for the goals and objectives of the project. The DRK-12 program has three research and development strands: (1) Assessment; (2) Learning; and (3) Teaching. For each project, the strand selected should be aligned with the focus of the research and development proposed. The DRK-12 program recognizes that there is some overlap and interdependence among the strands in project activities, but there should be a clear focus on one strand. Collectively, the three strands foster the creation of a new generation of STEM education innovations or approaches. These innovations or approaches take full advantage of the rich research base on STEM learning, the capabilities of modern technologies to enhance the education of PreK-12 learners and teachers, and emerging scientific and mathematical discoveries.

The program supports five project types: (1) Exploratory, (2) Design and Development, (3) Impact, (4) Implementation and Improvement, and (5) Conferences and Syntheses. The project types describe the nature of the research and development to be completed in the project in support of innovation in the strand defined by the project. The level of funding proposed should be appropriate to the work described. Information on current DRK-12 projects can be found at <http://www.cadrek12.org> and at NSF Award Search (<https://nsf.gov/awardsearch/>).

## **DRK-12 Program Strands**

There are three strands that guide the focus of DRK-12 projects: (1) Assessment; (2) Learning; and (3) Teaching. All DRK-12 proposals should be well grounded in the findings of STEM education research and be supported by a well-articulated framework that is based on a specific theory of assessment, learning or teaching. Proposals must be guided by specific research question(s) or hypotheses, use appropriate and rigorous research and development designs, include a data collection plan with appropriate descriptions of instruments and measures to be used, include a detailed description of the sample of participants involved in the project, and fully describe the data analytic methods.

### **(1) Assessment Strand**

Innovation in STEM education cannot occur without a rich and growing knowledge base. Research and development in assessment plays a critical and dynamic role in growing this knowledge base because such research and development efforts provide important evidence about changes in teaching and learning. For assessment to be a driving knowledge engine that moves STEM education forward it must be integrated with systems of learning and teaching.

The DRK-12 program seeks proposals that address the development of innovations or new approaches with respect to (1) assessment of STEM learning that generates evidence of participants' knowledge or understanding or (2) assessment for STEM learning that is an integrated part of the ongoing learning process. Proposals in the Strand must integrate development with the investigation of validity through field-testing new forms of assessment, including technology-enhanced assessments, which have promise for use in classrooms. This promise should be investigated with attention to coherent systems of teaching and learning.

Acknowledging broad range definitions of validity, quality proposals must thoughtfully describe and justify how the project will allow for valid and reliable inferences regarding the constructs being assessed. STEM assessment innovations or approaches must be fair, equitable, as well as culturally and linguistically sensitive in addressing the needs of the learners under study.

Quality proposals in the assessment strand should carefully specify the STEM constructs being assessed, those being assessed (students, teachers, etc.), and which stakeholders the assessment results can validly inform (e.g., districts, parents, policy makers, schools, students, or teachers). The manner and process of assessing should be carefully designed and justified. Proposals should address the potential benefits and weaknesses of the chosen strategy or strategies, including a careful articulation in the context of the system of learning, instruction and assessment under study. When multiple strategies are suggested, demonstration of their additional value should be provided.

Proposals to this strand should explicitly recognize and address the role the proposed research and development effort plays in furthering an aligned system of assessment, learning and teaching. Proposals in the Assessment strand may focus on one grade level or across levels. STEM content and practice foci may be within a discipline or across disciplines. Assessments may be of individuals or groups. Assessment research and development efforts in the attitudinal and affective domains should align with a chosen disciplinary domain.

The DRK-12 program encourages proposals that address STEM assessment questions facing the field including, but not limited to, the following:

- a. How does assessment information move across levels of the educational system and with what degree of validity?
- b. How are assessment frameworks related to theories of learning, and in what ways do the resulting assessment innovations or approaches inform and advance the field conceptually?
- c. How do users of STEM assessments (e.g., students, teachers, administrators, districts, parents) interact with, perceive, respond to, and make sense of assessment information?
- d. How are disciplinary learning progressions and trajectories informing and being informed by and through assessment?
- e. What are effective ways to build capacity in the field for the design, development, implementation, interpretation, and use of assessment in STEM learning settings?
- f. What roles and opportunities do emergent technologies have related to assessment?

### **(2) Learning Strand**

Well-designed STEM education innovations or approaches that enhance student learning of STEM are crucial to excellent preK-12 STEM education. Well-grounded STEM education innovations or approaches are needed for effective implementation of the new college- and career-readiness standards that provide all students with opportunities to learn recommended concepts and practices. At the same time, new and exciting discoveries are being made in the STEM disciplines and large amounts of scientific data are increasingly available for use by the public and learners of all ages. The DRK12 program is interested in STEM education innovations or approaches that assist preK-12 students in accessing and understanding new data sources and discoveries while leveraging their potential to support learning of important STEM content in the classroom.

The DRK-12 program seeks proposals that consider the ways in which STEM innovations or approaches could be designed and implemented in a range of learning environments that enhance student learning. The DRK-12 program encourages proposals that research and develop STEM education innovations or approaches to student learning that can be implemented in current classrooms, schools, and other learning environments for preK-12 students. Proposals submitted to the Learning Strand should describe how the proposed STEM education innovation or approach aligns with current curriculum frameworks and demonstrate how it would be an improvement relative to current practice. In doing so, proposals should provide a compelling argument for why the innovation or approach would lead to improved student learning outcomes. The DRK-12 program encourages proposals that address important questions facing the learning of STEM including, but not limited to, the following:

- a. How does the innovation or approach challenge and improve upon current practices and standards?
- b. How does the innovation or approach focus on emerging STEM concepts and practices that re imagine or transform existing

- school curricula?
- c. How is the innovation or approach likely to be transformative for STEM teaching and learning?
- d. How does the innovation or approach increase broader participation in STEM by targeting underserved or disadvantaged groups of learners, such as English language learners, underrepresented minorities, or students with disabilities?

### **(3) Teaching Strand**

The DRK-12 program recognizes that a well-prepared and well-supported teacher workforce is crucial to preK-12 STEM education. The availability of high-quality resources to address challenges faced by STEM teachers is critically important. Teachers need support to learn about new discoveries in the STEM disciplines and innovative pedagogical techniques to enhance student learning of STEM content and practices. Technology offers opportunities for teachers to collaborate with others, obtain and use data for teaching purposes, and provide students with innovative learning tools. Because the student population is becoming increasingly diverse, pre- and in-service teachers need support to teach in ways that make learning accessible and available to all students.

The DRK-12 program seeks proposals to research and develop STEM education innovations or approaches to teacher pre- and in-service education. These innovations or approaches should support career-long learning by preK-12 teachers with the potential for effective implementation, successful diffusion, and future scaling. Proposals submitted to the Teaching Strand should describe how the proposed STEM education innovation or approach aligns with current frameworks and demonstrate how it would be an improvement relative to current practice. In doing so, proposals should provide a compelling argument for why the innovation or approach would lead to improved teaching outcomes and practice. The DRK-12 program encourages proposals that address important questions facing STEM teaching including, but not limited to, the following:

- a. How does the innovation or approach improve instructional practices and increase students' learning and outcomes?
- b. How does the innovation or approach recruit, certify, induct, and prepare STEM teachers better than existing practice?
- c. How do pre- or in-service teachers develop STEM content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge in ways that improve their instructional practice?
- d. How can teaching expertise and teacher leadership be developed within schools, districts, and across the broader national teacher community?
- e. How can we assist teachers in making data-driven instructional decisions to meet the needs of all learners?
- f. How can teachers' capacity and willingness to customize instructional approaches be developed to meet standards and the needs of diverse student populations?
- g. What are effective methods for developing, applying, and testing effective models of professional development that improve STEM teaching and learning?

### **DRK-12 Project Types**

The DRK-12 program invites proposals for five project types: (1) Exploratory Studies; (2) Design and Development Studies; (3) Impact Studies; (4) Implementation and Improvement Studies and, (5) Conferences and Synthesis. The project type describes the type of research and development study that is going to be used to achieve the goals and objectives of the project. The project types are aligned with the Common Guidelines for Educational Research ([https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=nsf13126](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=nsf13126)).

#### **(1) Exploratory Studies**

Exploratory Studies provide investigators with opportunities to investigate approaches to STEM education problems that establish the basis for design and development of STEM education innovations or approaches. Exploratory Studies allow researchers to establish initial connections to or among the outcomes of interest related to STEM assessment, learning or teaching. Exploratory Studies must provide evidence of the factors associated with STEM education or learning outcomes to establish the basis for design and development of STEM education innovations or approaches (including potentially moderating or mediating factors). Studies must also provide a well-specified, empirically supported, conceptual framework or theory of action that describes the innovation or approaches assumptions, central design features, anticipated effects these features elicit, and explanations that relate features to effects. A theory of action may include factors associated with STEM learning outcomes or with moderating or mediating features of the innovation or approach. The theory of action should also provide a basis derived from the empirical evidence for pursuing a Design and Development, Impact, or Implementation and Improvement Study, or the need for further research.

DRK-12 Exploratory Study proposals are consistent with the Early Stages and Exploratory types of research and development in the Common Guidelines for Educational Research and Development.

#### **(2) Design and Development Studies**

The goal of Design and Development Studies is to research and develop new or improved STEM education innovations or approaches to achieve specific goals related to learning, teaching or assessment. Design and Development proposals build on evidence from prior research and development studies.

##### **Early Stage Design and Development Studies**

Early Stage Design and Development Studies seek to research and develop a proof of concept that one can create STEM education innovations or approaches based on a well-specified theory of action. Goals of Early Stage Design and Development Studies must include providing: a prototype or early version of the proposed STEM education innovation or approach, a clearly articulated theory of action that describes the innovation or approaches assumptions, central design features, anticipated effects these features elicit, and explanations that relate features to effects. Anticipated effects can include specific learning outcomes, but may also include other factors that mediate aspects of learning environments such as patterns of discourse or participation evidence related to the theory of action underlying the STEM education innovation or approach.

##### **Late Stage Design and Development Studies**

Late Stage Design and Development Studies proposals begin with STEM education innovations or approaches that have already demonstrated promise in small sets of classrooms, schools, or other learning settings. Goals of Late Stage Design and Development studies must include providing fully developed STEM education innovations or approaches that have evidence of feasibility and utility for practice completed products, ready for implementation by others who request them; and evidence of promise from field studies.

DRK-12 Design and Development Study proposals are consistent with the Design and Development type of research and development in the Common Guidelines for Educational Research and Development.

### **(3) Impact Studies**

Impact Studies expand the evidence of promise from previous studies to provide more rigorous evidence of the strength of the STEM education innovation or approach to achieve its intended outcomes through efficacy or effectiveness studies. An efficacy study examines the impact of a STEM education innovation or approach under ideal conditions; while an effectiveness study examines that impact under normal educational contexts and settings. Proposals for Impact Studies should provide a clear description of the STEM education innovation or approach to be tested and a compelling rationale for examining its impact including: the problem the STEM education innovation or approach is attempting to address; how the STEM education innovation or approach is an improvement over other approaches to the problem; and why the STEM education innovation or approach is appropriate and well-suited for an efficacy or effectiveness study.

Potential findings of Impact Studies must include reliable estimates of the average treatment effect of the STEM education innovation or approach through reporting that is consistent with expectations of making causal claims. Such estimates should include appropriate standard errors and confidence intervals. Proposals must include plans for detailed documentation of implementation of both the STEM education innovation or approach and the control or comparison condition in sufficient detail for readers to judge the applicability of the study findings to other contexts. Impact Study proposals should include detailed descriptions of: the innovation or approach to be implemented, data collection measures to be employed, the study samples involved, plans to account for multi-level or nested data structures in the sampling and analysis plans, and adequate justifications for the sample sizes proposed.

DRK-12 Impact Studies proposals are consistent with the Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies type of research and development in the Common Guidelines for Educational Research and Development.

### **(4) Implementation and Improvement Studies**

Implementation and Improvement Research aims to strengthen the capacity of an organization to reliably produce valued STEM education outcomes for diverse groups of students, educated by different teachers from varied organizational contexts. The focus is more broadly on making STEM education innovations or approaches succeed when implemented at scale. These studies have less prescriptive research designs and methods, with research occurring in rapid, iterative, and context-expanding cycles. Implementation and Improvement Studies require deep engagement of researchers and practitioners during the collaborative research on problems of practice that are co-defined and of value to researchers and education agencies, for example, a school district or community of schools. Implementation and Improvement Research seeks to: study implementation in the local context; employ rapid changes in implementation with short-cycle methods; capitalize on variation in educational contexts to address the sources of variability in outcomes to understand what works, for whom, and under what conditions; address organizational structures and processes and their relation to innovation; employ measurement of change ideas, key drivers, and outcomes to continuously test working theories and to learn whether specific changes actually produce improvement; and reform the system in which the approach is being implemented as opposed to overlaying a specific approach on an existing system.

Implementation and Improvement Studies must include strategies for improvement or implementation that address the shared goal of the researcher/practitioner collaborators; conceptual frameworks that address issues of scale, human capacity, and technical support for implementation and improvement in educational systems; measures of organizational learning that assess the progress of implementation and improvement; sustainable communities that can support implementation and improvement in the targeted educational system; and documented practices with an ongoing forum for continued engagement of collaborators from various levels of the educational system.

### **(5) Syntheses**

Synthesis proposals can be funded for up to \$300,000 and are two years in duration. Investigators are strongly encouraged to contact a program officer prior to submission to discuss your idea(s). DRK-12 supports capacity building through literature reviews, syntheses, and meta-analyses directly related to the goals of the DRK-12 program. Applicants should be clear about which type of proposal they are submitting. A proposal should focus on a question, issue, or topic of critical importance to the DRK-12 program.

Proposals should demonstrate a command of the literature on the question, issue, or topic, both breadth and depth. This background should be used to make a case for the amount, type, and relevance of available literature to conduct the synthesis. Literature selection processes (methods, search criteria, etc.) and quality and inclusion criteria (peer review, conference work, reports, evaluations, other) should be discussed.

### **(6) Conferences**

Conference proposals can be funded for up to \$100,000 and are usually one year in duration. Investigators are strongly encouraged to contact a program officer prior to submission to discuss your idea(s). For general guidance about conferences, follow the PAPPG guidance under for preparing Conference Proposals (PAPPG II.E.7), in addition to the DRK-12-specific guidance below. **The Project Description section of these proposals is limited to 15 pages.**

Conference proposals should demonstrate a command of the literature and/or practice of the question, issue, or topic. Participant expertise and selection should be discussed. Conference proposals should include a conceptual framework for the conference, draft agenda, possible participant list, and the outcomes or products that will result.

All proposals in this category should address the need for the work, why it is timely, and the expected contributions to understanding or advancing the question, issue, or topic. All projects should generate a product usable by researchers and/or practitioners and indicate how these product(s) serve the DRK-12 program priorities described earlier in this document.

### **DRK-12 Resource Center Proposal**

The DRK-12 program intends to fund one Resource Center to provide technical support for all DRK-12 projects, to organize meetings and topical webinars, to facilitate national dissemination of project outcomes, and to further develop the expertise in the preK-12 STEM education research and development community to enhance the learning and teaching of preK-12 STEM. The Resource Center should engage the multiple communities that both carry out the STEM education research funded in the DRK-12 program and that benefit from

products and outcomes of DRK-12 projects.

The primary goal of the Resource Center is to advance research and development activities that have the potential to improve the rigor and quality of research in STEM education. These activities include but are not limited to promoting innovations in STEM teaching and learning, knowledge building and dissemination, and networking within the STEM education research community.

- **Lead institution:** It is anticipated that the lead institution for the DRK-12 Resource Center will be a service-oriented educational organization or institution with demonstrated capacity to plan, develop, and manage a national center that provides technical support for a diverse portfolio of projects nationwide. It should have demonstrated expertise in targeting STEM disciplines, rigorous education research methodologies including measurement, and STEM teacher professional development.
- **Capacity Building:** The DRK-12 Resource Center is expected to facilitate discussions and professional connections across the network of DRK-12 projects through Principal Investigator convenings, topically-focused meetings, webinars, and other appropriate means to advance capacity for high-quality STEM research and development activities. The Center is also expected to collaborate with other resource centers supported by EHR for a) broadening awareness of the diverse funding programs in STEM education and their resources, b) promoting synergistic efforts among resource centers to advance the knowledge base and broader participation in STEM education, and c) identifying common areas of interest with respect to research methods, measurement, and data analysis techniques.
- **Broadening Participation:** The DRK-12 Resource Center is expected to facilitate broadening participation in STEM education through expansion of the DRK-12 portfolio by targeting outreach and capacity building activities to geographic regions, community types (rural, suburban, or urban), and institutions (such as community colleges, school districts, and minority serving institutions) that are less well represented in the DRK-12 portfolio.
- **Technical Support:** The DRK-12 Resource Center is expected to monitor DRK-12 projects during the various stages of project implementation and provide technical research assistance appropriate to projects. Support may include, but is not limited to, facilitating the emergence and development of communities of practice, identifying promising practices and resources (both print and electronic) that may be of help to projects in meeting their goals, or providing prospective Principal Investigators with access to information about DRK-12 program projects, outcomes, and resources.
- **Dissemination:** The DRK-12 Resource Center is expected to facilitate the broad dissemination of project outcomes, findings, and evidence of promising practices to the various STEM education communities. In addition to providing comprehensive reports of DRK-12 program activities and outcomes to NSF, the Center is expected to implement a dissemination plan that will inform STEM education professionals, industry and policy stakeholders, and STEM education research communities of program resources, outcomes, and projects. This implementation plan should include topically oriented synthesis reports that summarize findings from funded or completed DRK-12 projects (e.g., early science learning, early numeracy instruction, or algebra).

The DRK-12 Resource Center project will be supported for 3 years with total funding not to exceed \$3,500,000. The size of the request should be appropriate to the scope of work proposed. The "Center/Research Infrastructure" type of proposal should be selected in the proposal preparation module in FastLane or Grants.gov.

#### Selected Resources

DRK-12 and other programs (described below) fund resource and infrastructure centers to provide technical assistance to their current and prospective PIs.

The Community for Advancing Discovery Research in Education (CADRE) has as its mission to support and connect researchers and developers in K-12 STEM education. It is the resource network for the DRK -12 program. To explore the resources of CADRE see <http://cadrek12.org/>.

The resources on the CADRE website may be most pertinent to proposal preparation for DRK -12. However, these additional centers may also be useful:

The Center for Advancement of Informal Science Education (CAISE) works in collaboration with the NSF AISL program to strengthen and advance the field of informal STEM education and its infrastructure by providing resources for NSF principal investigators, ISE professionals, and STEM researchers. See <http://www.informalscience.org/> for more information.

The STEM Learning and Research Center (STELAR) is supported by the ITEST program. STELAR's mission is to build capacity and magnify the results of ITEST projects in order to deepen the impact of the ITEST program. For more information see <http://stelar.edc.org/>.

DRK -12 is one of six programs in the Division of Research on Learning in Formal and Informal Settings (DRL) in the Directorate for Education and Human Resources (EHR). The other five programs in EHR/DRL are: Advanced Technological Education (ATE); Advancing Informal STEM Learning (AISL); Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST); EHR Core Research (ECR); and, STEM + Computing Partnerships (STEM+C). Each program can be accessed from the DRL Web Page <https://www.nsf.gov/div/index.jsp?div=DRL>.

Investments by EHR/DRL contribute to the three categories that together form the foundation for EHR's strategic framework toward the fulfillment of the EHR mission. Within each of these categories, EHR/DRL will continue to build and emphasize its research and development activities.

- **Learning and learning environments:** Investments in this category seek to develop understanding of the cognitive, affective, and non-cognitive foundations of STEM learning; to study emerging contexts and tools for learning STEM concepts and skills; and to build environments that promote new, high-impact learning opportunities for tomorrow's scientists and engineers, as well as the public (publics) and students living in an increasingly technology-oriented society.
- **Broadening participation in STEM:** Programs in this category capitalize on the Nation's diversity in order to increase the scientific workforce by engaging and building capacity in all people in STEM learning and professional training, particularly those from groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields.
- **STEM workforce:** Workforce investments are intended to improve the education and preparation of a STEM workforce that will be ready to capitalize on unprecedented advances in technology and science, and to address future global, social, and economic challenges.



This framework positions the directorate to respond to emerging opportunities created by new technologies, improvements in the STEM education evidence base, administration priorities, and other national or societal needs. For more information on EHR see: <https://www.nsf.gov/dir/index.jsp?org=EHR>.

The programs listed below may also be of interest; see individual solicitations for due dates:

Inclusion across the Nation of Communities of Learners of Underrepresented Discoverers in Engineering and Science (NSF INCLUDES) [https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=505289](https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=505289)

Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) [https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=503214](https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=503214)

Cyberlearning and Future Learning Technologies (Cyberlearning) [https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=504984](https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=504984)

Improving Undergraduate STEM Education (IUSE) [https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=505082](https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=505082)

Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program (Noyce) [https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=5733](https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5733)

### III. AWARD INFORMATION

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It is anticipated that about 8-13 Level I awards, 5-8 Level II awards, 1-4 Level III awards, and 5 Conference/Synthesis awards will be made in FY 2018, pending availability of funds. One Resource Center with a budget of up to \$3,500,000 will be supported for a duration of 3 years in the 2018 fiscal year.

Pending availability of funds, NSF anticipates approximately \$57,000,000 will be available for the FY2018 competition.

Normal limits for funding requests of DRK -12 proposals are as follows: (1) Level I projects up to \$450,000 with duration up to three years; (2) Level II projects up to \$3,000,000 with duration up to four years; and (3) Level III projects up to \$5,000,000 with duration up to five years. The level of funding for the proposal should align with the maturity of the proposed work, the size and scope of the empirical effort, as well as the capacity of the interdisciplinary team to conduct the proposed research.

### IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

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#### Who May Submit Proposals:

The categories of proposers eligible to submit proposals to the National Science Foundation are identified in the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG), Chapter I.E.

#### Who May Serve as PI:

There are no restrictions or limits.

#### Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:

There are no restrictions or limits.

#### Limit on Number of Proposals per PI or Co-PI:

There are no restrictions or limits.

### V. PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

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#### A. Proposal Preparation Instructions

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**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 Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG). The complete text of the PAPPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg). Paper copies of the PAPPG 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: ([https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=grantsgovguide](https://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. PAPPG Chapter II.D.3 provides additional information on collaborative proposals.

See PAPPG Chapter II.C.2 for guidance on the required sections of a full research proposal submitted to NSF. Please note that the proposal preparation instructions provided in this program solicitation may deviate from the PAPPG instructions.

The following instructions supplement guidelines in the PAPPG and NSF Grants.gov Application Guide:

#### COVER SHEET PAGE

1. **Mark the Human Subjects box** as pending, approved, or exempted (with exemption subsection 2 indicated). This box should not be left blank. The Human Subjects box should be marked as pending if an IRB is either (1) reviewing the project plan and has not yet determined a ruling of "approved" or "exempt", or (2) the project plan has not yet been submitted to an IRB for review.
2. **To avoid delays in processing award recommendations**, it is strongly recommended that PIs begin the process of obtaining appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals or exemptions as needed for projects involving human subjects. No awards will be made without such approvals or exemptions.
3. Select the **DRK-12 solicitation number**.

**Project Summary.** The first sentence of the Project Summary should specify the type of proposal (e.g., Exploratory; Design and Development; Impact Studies; Implementation or Improvement Studies; or Workshop/Synthesis) and the Strand (Assessment, Learning or Teaching) addressed. The second sentence should state the discipline or disciplines being addressed and grade level(s), if appropriate.

**Proposals that do not contain the Project Summary, including an overview and separate statements on intellectual merit and broader impacts will not be accepted or will be returned without review as outlined in the PAPPG II.C.2.b.**

**Project Description.** The Project Description is limited to 15 pages and must comply with all formatting requirements of the most current PAPPG II.C.2.d. Proposals funded under this solicitation must focus on research questions or hypotheses about PreK-12 STEM assessment, learning or teaching.

Proposals must address the following elements in the 15 -page project description, in any order:

#### 1. Importance

The proposal must clearly show how the proposed project addresses critical STEM educational needs, and has the potential for broad impact. The proposal should provide a rationale for how the project will improve STEM education for students and advance knowledge, and it should explain how products or findings might ultimately be implemented in schools, even if in the long term. The proposal should address how the proposed STEM education innovations or approaches differ from existing practice and why the proposed project has the potential to improve learning or education outcomes beyond what current practice provides.

#### 2. Results from prior NSF support

The proposal must describe results of prior NSF support for related educational projects in which the PI or co-PI have been involved, as outlined in the [PAPPG](#).

#### 3. Research and Development Design

The design of any DRK -12 proposal begins with hypotheses or research questions about how some aspect of STEM education can be improved based on theories of learning, teaching and development and prior empirical work. The proposal should articulate a plan of work that describes research and development strategies appropriate for attaining its goals consistent with the type of study proposed. Proposals must demonstrate how the work is related to similar research and development. The proposal should address how the major design iterations and resulting evidence will be developed to support or question key assumptions underlying the research and development plan. The proposal should identify all measures to be developed or employed in generating evidence of the project's success and provide evidence of or plans to establish the technical quality (e.g., validity and reliability) of each measure. The proposal should include detailed descriptions of the study goals, design and implementation processes, data collection and quality, and analysis and methods for producing findings.

#### 4. Mechanisms to Assess Success of the Project

All DRL projects are subject to a series of external, critical reviews of their designs and activities (including their theoretical frameworks, any data collection plans, analysis plans, and reporting plans). Peer review of the proposed project and ongoing post-award monitoring by NSF staff are two types of external critical review that apply to all DRL projects. A proposal must describe appropriate mechanisms to assess success through project-specific external review and feedback processes. These might include an external review panel or advisory board proposed by the project or a third-party evaluator. The external critical review should be sufficiently independent and rigorous to influence the project's activities and improve the quality of its findings. Successful proposals will (1) describe the expertise of the external reviewer(s); (2) explain how that expertise relates to the goals and objectives of the proposal; and (3) specify how the PI will report and use results of the project's external, critical review process.

## 5. Dissemination

A proposal must include a creative communication strategy for reaching a broad audience for the findings of the project, including, where appropriate, scholars, practitioners, policymakers and public audiences. While the potential results of the proposed research are expected to be of sufficient significance to merit peer-reviewed and broader publication, approaches that reach broader audiences are strongly encouraged. Proposals should identify the key elements of a communication plan (e.g., target audiences and identification of the channels/media/technologies appropriate for reaching specific audiences).

## 6. Expertise

DRK-12 proposals generally involve interdisciplinary teams. Projects typically include STEM education researchers, development experts, school district personnel, experienced teachers, STEM researchers, statisticians, psychometricians, learning scientists and informal learning experts, and policy researchers, as appropriate. When feasible, proposals should include new researchers and developers (e.g., beginning scholars, postdoctoral associates, and graduate students) as part of the project team as a means of building a more diverse community of researchers, designers, and developers. The proposal should include a brief narrative describing the expertise of personnel and their contributions to the proposed work, including those responsible for the external review.

## 7. Broader Impacts

Please note that per guidance in the PAPPG, the Project Description must contain, as a separate section within the narrative, a section labeled "Broader Impacts". This section should provide a discussion of the broader impacts of the proposed activities. Proposers can decide where to include this section within the Project Description.

### Special Information/Supplementary Documentation:

Supplementary documents should include **Letters of Collaboration** from project partners, the **Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan** (*if applicable*) and the **Data Management Plan as described in the PAPPG**. Letters of support from persons endorsing the project but not making a substantial commitment to the project are not allowed. Inclusion of any other information in the supplementary documents or as an appendix will result in the proposal being returned without review.

**Appendix: Not permitted.** The 15 pages of the Project Description should contain all of the information needed to describe the project. Proposals submitted with an Appendix will be returned without review.

In addition to guidance provided in the PAPPG ([NSF 17-1](#)) on required Special Information and Supplementary Documents, *please provide* current, accurate information for all personnel and institutions involved in the project. NSF staff will use this information in the merit review process to manage reviewer selection. The list should include all PIs, co-PIs, senior personnel, paid/unpaid consultants or collaborators, subawardees, postdoctoral researchers (if known), project evaluators and project-level advisory committee members. This list should be numbered and include (in this order) Full name, Organization(s), and Role in the project, with each item separated by a semi-colon. Each person listed should start a new numbered line. For example:

1. Mary Smith; XYZ University; PI
2. John Jones; University of PQR; Senior Personnel

### Collaborators and Other Affiliations Information:

Collaborators & Other Affiliations (COA) information specified in the PAPPG should be submitted using the instructions and spreadsheet template found at <https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/coa.jsp>.

## B. Budgetary Information

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### Cost Sharing:

Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited.

### Other Budgetary Limitations:

### Budget Preparation Instructions:

DRK -12 generally does not fund equipment that is normally found in schools, universities, and research and development organizations, such as computers. Requests for equipment must be accompanied by justification for its importance to the operation of the project.

The budget should include a request for funds to cover the cost of attendance of the Principal Investigator at a biannual awardees meeting in the Washington, DC area.

DRK -12 does not provide scholarships for undergraduate, pre-service, or other students.

## C. Due Dates

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- **Full Proposal Deadline(s)** (due by 5 p.m. submitter's local time):
  - November 14, 2017
  - November 14, 2018
  - Second Wednesday in November, Annually Thereafter

## D. FastLane/Grants.gov Requirements

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### For Proposals Submitted Via FastLane:

To prepare and submit a proposal via FastLane, see detailed technical instructions 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.

### 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://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants.html>. In addition, the NSF Grants.gov Application Guide (see link in Section V.A) provides instructions regarding the technical 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.

Proposers that submitted via FastLane are strongly encouraged to use FastLane to verify the status of their submission to NSF. For proposers that submitted via Grants.gov, until an application has been received and validated by NSF, the Authorized Organizational Representative may check the status of an application on Grants.gov. After proposers have received an e-mail notification from NSF, Research.gov should be used to check the status of an application.

## VI. NSF PROPOSAL PROCESSING AND REVIEW PROCEDURES

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Proposals received by NSF are assigned to the appropriate NSF program for acknowledgment 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 PAPPG Exhibit III-1.

A comprehensive description of the Foundation's merit review process is available on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit\\_review/](https://www.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 *Investing in Science, Engineering, and Education for the Nation's Future: NSF Strategic Plan for 2014-2018*. 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 strategic objectives 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 must recruit, train, and prepare a diverse STEM workforce to advance the frontiers of science and participate in the U.S. technology-based economy. NSF's contribution to the national innovation ecosystem is to provide cutting-edge research under the guidance of the Nation's most creative scientists and engineers. NSF also supports development of a strong science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce by investing in building the knowledge that informs improvements in STEM teaching and learning.

NSF's mission calls for the broadening of 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. (PAPPG 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 PAPPG 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.

## 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.

Reviewers will be asked to evaluate proposals using two National Science Board approved merit review criteria and, if applicable, additional program specific criteria. A summary rating and accompanying narrative will generally be completed and submitted by each reviewer and/or panel. 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 strives to be able to tell applicants whether their proposals have been declined or recommended for funding within six months. Large or particularly complex proposals or proposals from new awardees may require additional review and processing time. The time interval begins on the deadline or target date, or receipt date, whichever is later. The interval ends when the Division Director acts upon the Program Officer's recommendation.

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. After an administrative review has occurred, Grants and Agreements Officers perform 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.

Once an award or declination decision has been made, Principal Investigators are provided feedback about their proposals. In all cases, reviews are treated as confidential documents. Verbatim copies of reviews, excluding the names of the reviewers or any reviewer-identifying information, 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.

## 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 notice, 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 notice; (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 notice. 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 [https://www.nsf.gov/awards/managing/award\\_conditions.jsp?org=NSF](https://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 *Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) Chapter VII, available electronically on the NSF Website at [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=papppg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=papppg).

### 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 no later than 90 days prior to the end of the current budget period. (Some programs or awards require submission of more frequent project reports). No later than 120 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 Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) Chapter VII, available electronically on the NSF Website at [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).

## 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:

- Inquiries can be made to, telephone: (703) 292-8620, email: [DRLDRK12@nsf.gov](mailto:DRLDRK12@nsf.gov)
- David B. Campbell, telephone: (703) 292-5093, email: [dcampbel@nsf.gov](mailto:dcampbel@nsf.gov)
- Julia V. Clark, telephone: (703) 292-5119, email: [jclark@nsf.gov](mailto:jclark@nsf.gov)
- Catherine Eberbach, telephone: (703) 292-4960, email: [ceberbac@nsf.gov](mailto:ceberbac@nsf.gov)
- Michael Ford, telephone: (703) 292-5153, email: [miford@nsf.gov](mailto:miford@nsf.gov)
- David L. Haury, telephone: (703) 292-8614, email: [dhaury@nsf.gov](mailto:dhaury@nsf.gov)
- Margret Hjalmarson, telephone: (703) 292-4313, email: [mhjalmar@nsf.gov](mailto:mhjalmar@nsf.gov)
- Karen King, telephone: (703) 292-5124, email: [kking@nsf.gov](mailto:kking@nsf.gov)
- Rebecca Kruse, telephone: (703) 292-4211, email: [rkruse@nsf.gov](mailto:rkruse@nsf.gov)
- Julio E. Lopez-Ferrao, telephone: (703) 292-5183, email: [jlopezfe@nsf.gov](mailto:jlopezfe@nsf.gov)
- Robert Ochsendorf, telephone: (703) 292-2760, email: [rochsend@nsf.gov](mailto:rochsend@nsf.gov)
- Joseph Reed, telephone: (703) 292-5187, email: [jreed@nsf.gov](mailto:jreed@nsf.gov)
- Ferdinand D. Rivera, telephone: (703) 292-8620, email: [frivera@nsf.gov](mailto:frivera@nsf.gov)
- Robert Ronau, telephone: (703) 292-5089, email: [rronau@nsf.gov](mailto:rronau@nsf.gov)
- Monya A. Ruffin, telephone: (703) 292-4635, email: [mruffin@nsf.gov](mailto:mruffin@nsf.gov)
- Robert Russell, telephone: (703) 292-2995, email: [rrussel@nsf.gov](mailto:rrussel@nsf.gov)
- Joan M. Walker, telephone: (703) 292-7016, email: [jwalker@nsf.gov](mailto:jwalker@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, "NSF Update" 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. "NSF Update" also is available on [NSF's website](#).

Grants.gov provides an additional electronic capability to search for Federal government-wide grant opportunities. NSF funding opportunities may be accessed via this 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 (FASSED)* provide funding for special assistance or equipment to enable persons with disabilities to work on NSF-supported projects. See the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* Chapter II.E.6 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 <https://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: [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@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  
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