Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Directorate of Biological Sciences (BIO) Core Programs Solicitations

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1. Why do the BIO divisions no-deadline solicitations have a cap on submission of proposals?
proposals?

Like every other program at NSF that has transitioned to a no-deadline proposal submission process, BIO has imposed a limitation on proposal submissions. The goal is to prevent the immediate resubmission of declined proposals and to encourage principal investigators (PIs) to focus on their best ideas.

2. How does the cap on submissions work?

Each BIO division solicitation for core programs has limited the number of proposals that an individual may submit as PI or co-PI to one per fiscal year, with the exception of the Division of Biological Infrastructure, which has two core program solicitations that allow two proposal submissions. The first two digits of an NSF proposal represents the fiscal year and provides a simple way to recognize whether a PI or co-PI is compliant with the limit of one proposal per year.

3. Is there any limitation on involvement in proposals other than as PI or co-PI?

No, the cap on submissions applies only to an individual’s role as PI or co-PI on proposals. There is no limit on the number of proposals in which an individual can be involved in other roles, e.g., as Other Senior Personnel, subaward PI, Postdoctoral Scholar, Other Personnel, or Consultant. This unrestricted involvement in non-PI/co-PI roles is being allowed in recognition of the value of scientific collaboration.

4. Does the cap on submissions apply to all proposals submitted to a BIO division core solicitation?

No. Each BIO division also allows for one submission per fiscal year as PI or co-PI of a Rules of Life track proposal. The Rules of Life (RoL) track is an additional funding opportunity. Although RoL proposals are submitted to a given BIO division, an individual can be a PI or co-PI on only one RoL submission to BIO, per fiscal year.

5. Does the cap on submissions apply to proposals submitted to BIO divisions through other NSF solicitations?

In general, each NSF solicitation explicitly describes any restrictions on submission. For example, the CAREER solicitation has an annual deadline and its own rules on submission eligibility. However, there are a few NSF-wide solicitations that direct proposers to those funding opportunities for information on submission rules. The most common of these are Research in Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) and Research Coordination Network (RCN). BIO programs will apply the following submission rules:

- Submission of an RUI proposal to a core division program in BIO WILL count towards the fiscal year submission limit of a PI or co-PI to that division.
• Submission of an RCN proposal to a core division program in BIO does NOT count towards the fiscal year submission limit. RCNs support community building activities, not primary research.
• Similarly, proposals submitted through the NSF Proposal & Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG), specifically: Early-concept Grants for Exploratory Research (EAGER), Rapid Response Research (RAPID), Research Advanced by Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering (RAISE), Travel or Conference proposals, do NOT count towards the fiscal year submission limit.

6. **If I submit a proposal and it is returned without review for a compliance reason, does that count toward my fiscal year submission as PI or co-PI?**

No, proposals that are returned without review, or withdrawn by the submitting organization prior to review, for whatever reasons other than exceeding the submission limit, do not count toward the submission caps.

7. **What is the objective of the separate track for Rules of Life (RoL) proposals?**

BIO seeks to support research that spans the traditional subdisciplines of biology to address broad, fundamental questions that advance discovery of general principles (aka Rules) operating across the hierarchy of biological organization from subcellular systems to ecosystems. The RoL track was established to encourage this type of integrative research, with a goal of fostering a re-unification of the biological sciences.

8. **What types of proposals are you looking for in the RoL track; should they be larger projects?**

Proposals appropriate for the RoL track should describe projects that apply integrative approaches to span levels of biological organization beyond the funding programs within a single BIO division (i.e., projects that require co-review by two or more of the four Divisions in BIO (Biological Infrastructure, Environmental Biology, Integrative Organismal Systems, Molecular and Cellular Biosciences). BIO has no preconceived expectations or restrictions on the scope of RoL projects. As with all NSF proposals, the requested budget and award duration should be what is justifiably necessary to complete the proposal objectives.

9. **Will the review process of BIO proposals change?**

No, the standard practice is to review proposals using panel and/or *ad hoc* review, and that will not change under the no-deadline review process.

10. **How will RoL proposals be reviewed?**

RoL proposals are required to identify two or more BIO divisions and programs to which
the proposal is appropriate for co-review. The first step in the review process will be for program officers in the specified divisions to confirm appropriateness of the project for co-review. Proposers who are uncertain of whether their research ideas are appropriate for RoL should talk with program officers in the relevant programs before submission. Inappropriate proposals will be returned without review. Review of RoL proposals will occur by ad hoc and/or panel(s) co-review as jointly determined by program officers in the multiple divisions.

11. **Will the community be told the dates of panels?**
   Consistent with NSF practice, panel dates will not be announced to PIs.

12. **When is the best time to submit?**
   Our best advice is to submit your proposal when you think it is ready. There is no time of the year that is better than others with respect to the review process or expected funding rate. Program officers will be recommending awards continuously throughout the year using a mix of standard and continuing grants that allow them to manage their program funds across multiple fiscal years.

13. **What will happen to proposals that come in at the end of the fiscal year?**
   Review of proposals is not tied to the timing of the fiscal year. Proposals that come in late in the fiscal year will be reviewed in the same way and with the same expected decision times as proposals that come in at the beginning of the fiscal year. Proposals recommended for awards late in the fiscal year will be funded at the start of the next fiscal year.

14. **How long will it take to receive a decision on my proposal?**
   No change in average time to award or decline decisions and release of reviews is expected with this transition to no-deadlines. All programs strive to meet the NSF performance goals of completing 75% of proposal recommendations within 6-months of the date of receipt.