



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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Human-Environment and Geographical Sciences (HEGS) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. HEGS used to be called Geography and Spatial Sciences (GSS). Why did the name change to Human-Environment and Geographical Sciences (HEGS)?
2. I'm a geographer but my research doesn't appear to fit within the HEGS program. Where does it fit?
3. Does HEGS still fund Spatial Sciences?
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5. I'm a field-based geographer. Do you still fund case studies?
6. My work is international in scope. I would like to include foreign collaborators. Is this allowed? And if so, how should this be included in the proposal?
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9. Will HEGS continue to co-review with other Programs at NSF?

1. **HEGS used to be called Geography and Spatial Sciences (GSS). Why did the name change to Human-Environment and Geographical Sciences (HEGS)?**

Geography is a broad discipline, spanning multiple paradigms and topics ranging from purely process-oriented biophysical geography to post-modern, humanistic geography. However, not all geographic scholarship is a good fit at the National Science Foundation (NSF). The name change articulates more clearly the human, environmental, and geographical sciences that are appropriate for funding at NSF. This change reflects NSF's mission to "promote the progress of science; to advance the national health,

prosperity, and welfare; and to secure the national defense" and also HEGS's location in the Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences (BCS) in the Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE).

2. I'm a geographer but my research doesn't appear to fit within the HEGS program. Where does it fit?

In general, research that is predominantly post-modern, post-structural, humanistic etc., is not a good fit for NSF. As noted in the solicitation, "A proposal to the HEGS Program must explain how the research will contribute to geographic and spatial scientific theory and/or methods development, and how the results are generalizable beyond the case study." If research is more biophysical or process oriented, but aspatial and/or not well-connected to social or human dimensions, the proposal could be more appropriate for other programs at NSF. For example, bio-physical science is supported by the a [Division of Environmental Biology](#), and physical science is supported by the [Geomorphology and Land-use Dynamics Program](#). When considering the fit of research at NSF, it is useful to understand the overall institutional architecture of NSF.

To learn more about NSF's disciplinary and interdisciplinary research areas and their managing Directorates, visit here: https://www.nsf.gov/about/research_areas.jsp

Potential investigators are encouraged to contact a HEGS program officer with questions regarding the fit of their research in HEGS. Please send an email inquiry to hegs-info@nsf.gov with no more than a two page attachment that outlines the research question(s) or hypotheses, the intellectual merit and anticipated broader impacts of the project, as well as the methods and anticipated data and analysis.

Additional funding opportunities for the BCS-related research areas may be found at http://nsf.gov/funding/pgm_list.jsp?org=BCS.

3. Does HEGS still fund Spatial Sciences?

Yes. However, for projects that are focused on advancing knowledge in the spatial sciences, PIs are expected to articulate how the science is important for people and/or society.

4. What do you mean by generalizable knowledge?

The Common Rule (*Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects*, [45 CFR § 690](#)) defines research as "a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge."

Generalizable research seeks to build upon, test, and contribute to scientific theory.

With generalizable knowledge, findings, conclusions, or results can be applied elsewhere beyond the study population. The HEGS program is interested in supporting

research that is conceptualized broadly, that looks beyond the case study, and contributes to generalizable knowledge and theory building in human-environment and geographic sciences.

5. I'm a field-based geographer. Do you still fund case studies?

Yes, HEGS funds case studies. However, PIs should articulate how and why their specific case study contributes to generalizable knowledge and theory building. This can be achieved by properly framing the research, and instead of focusing on the case, focusing on the science of the project, the new knowledge it will generate, as well as its potential generalizability, theory building, and replicability.

6. My work is international in scope. I would like to include foreign collaborators. Is this allowed? And if so, how should this be included in the proposal?

Yes, HEGS funds research in foreign locations and projects that include foreign collaborators. However, it is critical for PIs to justify this foreign collaboration as necessary for the success of the proposed research (see [NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide \(PAPPG\) Chapter I.E.6](#)). This information should be included both within the project description and the budget justification (the former is required if there is any funding going to foreign collaborators, consultants, or organizations).

7. How does HEGS view Broader Impacts?

NSF views Broader Impacts as integral to all science it supports, including projects supported via HEGS. For more general guidance about Broader Impacts, PIs should review the most recent [PAPPG Chapter III.A](#). There is no specific formula for what merits strong Broader Impacts, however HEGS views broader impacts as compelling when they are well integrated with the Intellectual Merit, and vice versa.

8. I'm interested in serving as a reviewer for the program or on a HEGS panel, what should I do?

NSF relies on an extensive peer review process in order to recommend awards. If you are interested in learning more about the process and would like to serve as a potential ad hoc reviewer or panelist, we encourage you to fill out the following brief survey: [HEGS Reviewer Survey](#).

9. Will HEGS continue to co-review with other Programs at NSF?

Yes, where the project is relevant to both programs and advances the sciences of both programs. For further information contact a HEGS Program Officer hegs-info@nsf.gov.