



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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NSF 20-100

Dear Colleague Letter: Supporting Research on Pandemics within the Civic Innovation Challenge and Broadened NSF Support for the Challenge

June 22, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

With this Dear Colleague Letter (DCL), the National Science Foundation (NSF) wishes to notify the community that research projects focused on pandemics are considered appropriate for the [Civic Innovation Challenge \(CIVIC; NSF 20-562\)](#), a research and action competition in the smart and connected communities (S&CC) domain.

Additionally, NSF wishes to notify the community of broadened NSF support for CIVIC. Together with the NSF directorates and federal partners listed in the solicitation – NSF's directorates for Computer and Information Science and Engineering (CISE) and Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE), the U.S. Department of Energy's Vehicles Technologies Program, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate – NSF's division of Civil, Mechanical and Manufacturing Innovation (CMMI) within its directorate for Engineering (ENG) is now also supporting CIVIC.

NSF launched CIVIC earlier this spring with the goals of (i) flipping the community-university dynamic, with communities identifying civic priorities ripe for innovation and then partnering with researchers to address those priorities; (ii) accelerating the impact of S&CC research; and (iii) deepening cooperation and information sharing across sectors and regions.

CIVIC is organized as a two-stage competition with two tracks. One track is centered on resilience to natural disasters and calls for research that equips communities with greater preparedness and resilience to natural disasters. The other track is centered on communities and mobility and calls for research that addresses better mobility options to solve the spatial mismatch between housing affordability and jobs, as well as associated mobility solutions that can increase access to critical services and amenities that foster healthy and thriving communities.

While CIVIC was planned long in advance of the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, today the world is focused on this pandemic. Given this reality, NSF is notifying the community of its interest in pandemics as an *example* of a disaster pursuant to the resilience track or as a possible consideration in framing the focus of the mobility track.

The resilience track within CIVIC encompasses the broad elements of society that experience disruptions due to natural disasters – including healthcare, economic, and social systems, as well as transportation, education, service delivery, food supply chains, and housing, among others. The resilience track has been expanded to include pandemics due to global experiences with COVID-19 that have highlighted the similarities in societal disruptions caused by pandemics and natural disasters, and the associated needs for resilience planning.

Importantly, pandemic-related topics are not a requirement for either track, but communities and researchers may wish to leverage the challenges introduced by COVID-19 to pursue associated community-level changes, either in resilience to pandemics or mobility in the face of pandemics. Specifically, proposing teams may choose to focus on resilience planning related to the continuing COVID-19 crisis, resilience planning for future pandemics, the compound problem of other disasters occurring in the context of pandemic – *or they may focus on resilience planning for other forms of natural disasters*. Similarly, projects focused on mobility may choose to consider how pandemics shape possible solutions responsive to this track, *but this is not a requirement for the track*.

Although the collective energy and effort of communities must largely focus on the immediate needs related to the pandemic, CIVIC provides an opportunity for community members, researchers, and leaders to consider ways in which civic services and systems could be rebuilt to be stronger, more resilient to, and more effective in the context of long-term obstacles related to natural disasters as well as pandemics, or to other challenges faced by communities.

If you have questions about this DCL or CIVIC more generally, please contact the cognizant NSF program officers listed in the CIVIC solicitation.

Sincerely,

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