



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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NSF 21-077

Dear Colleague Letter: Update on NSF's Efforts to Improve the Inclusion of Local and Indigenous Voices in Arctic Research

May 4, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

NSF Programs supporting Arctic Research greatly appreciate the formal and informal feedback recently provided by local and Indigenous communities and Arctic researchers on how NSF can improve inclusion of local and Indigenous voices, as well as Indigenous Knowledge (IK), in Arctic research. We take this feedback seriously. Here, we describe some of the actions we have and are actively taking to support Indigenous individuals and organizations to become more engaged in NSF's funding process; to improve the relationship among the agency, NSF-funded Principal Investigators (PIs), and local and Indigenous peoples living in the Arctic; and to improve the ability for NSF-funded investigators to incorporate IK into their projects.

Immediate Clarifications, Revisions, and Improvements to Arctic Programs: We have revised and clarified the [Arctic Research Opportunities](#) (NSF 21-526) and [Navigating the New Arctic](#) (NNA; NSF 21-524) solicitations to highlight ethical conduct of research in the Arctic and to provide guidance on how to build true collaborations with local and Indigenous peoples in NSF-funded research and education. These programs continue to welcome proposals from organizations that have not previously received NSF funding and proposals that include Indigenous Knowledge in planned research. Further, we accelerated the release of our NNA solicitation this year to provide more time for proposal preparation and thoughtful collaboration with Arctic communities. We have also recently funded a [Community Office for the Navigating the New Arctic Program](#), a major focus of which is supporting the continued collaboration of Arctic scientists with local and Indigenous organizations and individuals. Our aim with these efforts is to clarify expectations for appropriate and ethical behavior of NSF-funded researchers working in the Arctic, as well as encourage meaningful incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge in research proposals.

Ongoing Outreach and Communication: NSF representatives continue to communicate frequently with local and Indigenous individuals and organizations to better understand their specific needs and potential ways to support more inclusive NSF-funded activities in the Arctic. These conversations have been accompanied by extensive outreach and communication with NSF proposers about appropriate behavior when developing projects that involve collaborations with local and Indigenous collaborators, as well as guidance on what the co-production of knowledge entails in NSF-funded research. These conversations have taken place with individual PIs, as well as larger audiences, including dedicated sessions at Arctic-focused and international science conferences.

NSF-wide Efforts: Our commitment to improvement in this space is aligned with one of the three pillars of Director Dr. Sethuraman Panchanathan's [vision for NSF](#), 'ensuring inclusivity.' That commitment can be seen through several different initiatives. For example, the Foundation is in the process of gathering feedback from Tribal Nations regarding how NSF can enhance its Tribal consultation efforts and will incorporate that feedback in its response to the Biden Administration's January 26, 2021, Presidential [Memorandum on Tribal Consultation](#) and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships. In addition, the Office of Polar Programs has created a new subcommittee of its Advisory Committee dedicated to Diversity and Inclusion (https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp/opp_advisory/div_subcomm_members.jsp), which is engaged with the NSF [Committee on Equal Opportunities in Science and Engineering \(CEOSE\)](#). The goal of these activities is to better understand the ongoing opportunities, challenges, and needs to continue to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion for NSF programs. These are just some examples of the many official efforts undertaken by programs supporting Arctic research at NSF and the Foundation as a whole.

Resources for PIs and Arctic Communities: One of the Foundation's most powerful tools to address these issues is to fund projects that continue to expand the inclusion of new and diverse voices in Arctic research. We acknowledge that at times it can be difficult to stay informed of all the relevant funding opportunities and resources provided by NSF. To increase the visibility and accessibility of these opportunities to a broader community, NSF has launched a landing page (<https://www.nsf.gov/ace>). This new website highlights numerous solicitations and resources that welcome and encourage the inclusion of local Arctic communities and Indigenous Knowledge in NSF-funded projects, as well as encourage the development of proposals to build capacity to better support this work in the Arctic (e.g., [Dear Colleague Letter: Potential Support for Community Hubs for Collaborations Between NSF-funded Arctic Researchers and Arctic Residents](#)).

We encourage the research community and those living in the Arctic to explore these resources and contact the cognizant program officers with their proposal ideas. The website also provides access to a number of NSF-funded resources that make information about NSF projects and data more accessible so researchers and Arctic communities can stay up to date on the status of NSF projects.

Finally, we realize that the feedback that has been provided thus far is much broader than what we can hope to accomplish directly at NSF, given the scope of our role in funding fundamental scientific efforts by non-federal scientists. NSF representatives contribute to other ongoing conversations regarding Arctic research and continue to strive for improved relationships between the federal government and those living in the Arctic by serving in key roles as members of various interagency efforts, including the Interagency Arctic Research and Policy Committee (IARPC), chaired by the NSF Director. This effort has included critical roles in the development of the [IARPC Principles for Conducting Research in the Arctic](#) and the development of the [2022-2026 Arctic Research Plan](#), both of which aim to expand the inclusion of Indigenous voices in Arctic research and policy.

We emphasize that these efforts are not the endpoint but indicate momentum toward increasing inclusion and equitable participation in research. We plan to continue to evolve our procedures to ensure broadened support for equitable local and Indigenous participation in Arctic research projects. Please reach out to ACE@nsf.gov to submit feedback or provide input.

We look forward to continuing a dialogue, both formally and informally, to ensure NSF continues to improve the process to include diverse perspectives in NSF-supported Arctic research.

Signed,

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