



**NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
2415 EISENHOWER AVENUE  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314**

**NSF 21-078**

## **Dear Colleague Letter: Supplements to Broaden Networks and Partnerships Between National Science Foundation's (NSF) Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) Research Infrastructure Improvement Program (RII) Track-2 Projects and Minority Serving Institutions**

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May 4, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

Through this DCL, NSF EPSCoR, in recognition of the importance of building diverse networks and the provision of support for individuals and institutions that are adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, announces a funding opportunity to build partnerships between active RII Track-2 awards and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). NSF EPSCoR has identified two separate supplemental funding opportunities for the RII-Track-2 described in paragraph B. below.

### **A. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

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The EPSCoR RII Track-2 Focused EPSCoR Collaborations (FEC) program is designed to build inter-jurisdictional collaborative teams of EPSCoR investigators in scientific focus areas consistent with NSF and EPSCoR priorities. Projects are investigator-driven and include researchers from at least two EPSCoR eligible jurisdictions with complementary expertise and resources necessary to address challenges, which neither party could address as well or rapidly independently. The STEM research and education activities supported by RII Track-2 seek to broaden participation through the strategic inclusion and integration of diverse individuals, institutions, and sectors throughout the project. NSF EPSCoR identifies the development of early-career faculty as a critical component in building sustainable STEM capacity. Cohorts of RII Track-2 FEC projects share themes selected to align with NSF and national research priorities. In recent years, topics have included: harnessing the data revolution to solve problems of national importance and understanding the relationship between genome and phenome. Through this program, NSF EPSCoR has supported

researchers in 26 U.S. jurisdictions with over 48 active awards. Current Awards may be found [here](#).

EPSCoR is designed to fulfill the mandate of NSF to promote scientific progress nationwide. Jurisdictions are eligible to participate in the EPSCoR RII Program based on their level of NSF research support averaged over five years. (For more details, see:

[https://www.nsf.gov/od/oia/programs/epscor/Eligibility\\_Tables/FY2021\\_Eligibility.pdf](https://www.nsf.gov/od/oia/programs/epscor/Eligibility_Tables/FY2021_Eligibility.pdf)).

Through this program, NSF facilitates the establishment of partnerships among government, higher education, and industry that are designed to effect sustainable improvements in a jurisdiction's research infrastructure, Research and Development (R&D) capacity, and hence, its R&D competitiveness.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research community faces challenges that that are disproportionately affecting some individuals and institutions. NSF plays a vital role in supporting undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and early career faculty in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in the U.S. Support for individuals in these groups, as well as institutions that serve members of historically underrepresented groups, remains essential as the nation seeks to recover from the pandemic. Through this DCL, NSF EPSCoR offers opportunities that can help bolster early-career researchers, students and others in the science and engineering enterprise in EPSCoR jurisdictions whose research and research training activities may have been impacted by the pandemic.

## **B. SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**

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The supplements described in this DCL are an opportunity coordinated by NSF EPSCoR specifically focused on further building RII Track-2 networks by providing support to broaden the engagement of researchers from MSIs with RII Track-2 projects housed within EPSCoR jurisdictions. This initiative provides two separate supplemental funding opportunities for additional and current MSIs to become more engaged with current EPSCoR RII Track-2 projects in the form of two separate mechanisms. They are: postdoctoral fellowships and MSI Partnership supplements, which are outlined below.

It is envisioned that these opportunities will:

- Broaden participation in RII Track-2 awards by creating opportunities for the development of partnerships that are bi-directional and mutually beneficial, to better integrate MSIs into the research networks that have been developed through the RII Track-2 program;
- Engage new perspectives and scientific talent into the current RII Track-2 projects;
- Provide faculty at MSIs with opportunities to become involved in these networks, with a special focus on early career faculty; and

Continue to support the EPSCoR mission of broadening the participation of diverse groups/institutions in STEM (<https://www.nsf.gov/od/oia/programs/epscor/>).

## DEFINITIONS

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- EPSCoR jurisdictions are listed in the current eligibility table: [https://www.nsf.gov/od/oia/programs/epscor/Eligibility\\_Tables/FY2021\\_Eligibility.pdf](https://www.nsf.gov/od/oia/programs/epscor/Eligibility_Tables/FY2021_Eligibility.pdf).
- For the purpose of this DCL, MSIs are defined to include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges or Universities (TCUs), and other institutions that enroll a significant percentage of underrepresented minority students as defined by the U.S. Department of Education. These other institutions include Alaska Native serving institutions, Native Hawaiian-serving institutions, Predominantly Black Institutions, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions, and Native American-serving non-tribal institutions. For more information, please see the U.S. Department of Education's definitions and lists of eligible postsecondary institutions (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/edlite-minorityinst.html>).

Additional information about the preparation and submission of supplemental funding requests is contained in Chapter VI.E.4 of the [NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide](#) (PAPPG).

## SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING REQUESTS FOR POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS

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Postdoctoral fellowship supplements may be requested for two different purposes and must directly contribute to the activities of the RII Track-2 award. Active RII Track-2 awards may be found [here](#). First, a new postdoctoral fellowship opportunity may be created at an MSI within an EPSCoR jurisdiction for a recent Ph.D. graduate or postdoctoral researcher currently supported by an active RII Track-2 award. The MSI may be new to the project or be part of the current RII Track-2 network. Secondly, a new postdoctoral opportunity may be created at any institution within the current RII Track-2 project that may be filled by an individual graduating with a Ph.D. from any MSI (as defined above) in the United States or its territories.

These fellowships will be subject to the following conditions:

- Fellowships must be linked directly to activities within the originating RII Track-2 award;
- Fellowships may be up to two years in duration;
- Fellowships may not exceed \$100,000 per year (up to \$200,000 total for two years of support) including salary and fringe benefits, and applicable indirect costs;
- If the fellowship is to be conducted at a site other than the awardee institution for the RII Track-2 award, then the Fellowship request will be submitted from the lead RII Track-2 awardees' Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) and administered through a

subaward mechanism to the MSI or partner institution.

- The duration of the fellowship cannot exceed the end date of the RII Track-2 award;
- A fellowship's focus may be on any aspect of the project (aligned with the original project scope) including, but not limited to, any combination of research, education/workforce development goals, and outreach activities;
- Fellowships that will be located at an MSI located within an EPSCoR jurisdiction may be combined with a MSI Partnership supplement (see below);
- Preferences will be given to requests that bring in MSIs that are new to the RII Track-2 award that is being supplemented;
- If a fellowship is requested for a new MSI partner to engage in the RII Track-2 award, they must be located in an EPSCoR jurisdiction as defined above; and,
- All funds must be spent within an EPSCoR Jurisdiction.

Supplemental funding requests for Postdoctoral Fellowships must contain the following components:

1. In the summary of work section in FastLane:
  - a. Summary of work the fellow would carry out demonstrating how it is integrated into the current RII Track-2 project (5 pages maximum).
2. In the Justification for Supplement section in FastLane:
  - a. A statement of impact that addresses the EPSCoR goal of broadening participation within the RII Track-2 network through the proposed partnership with MSIs or individuals that have experience within MSIs. (1 page maximum).
3. In the Budget and Budget Justification section in FastLane:
  - a. Budget and Budget Justification (as per PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.g)
4. In the Other Supplementary Documents section in FastLane (combined and uploaded as a single PDF document):
  - a. If a candidate has been identified, include a Biographical sketch of the potential postdoctoral researcher (prepared in accordance with the standard biographical sketch format described in PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.f).
  - b. Two Letters of Collaboration. First, one from the RII Track-2 awardee indicating that the fellow will be supported within the greater Track-2 network. A second letter from an administrator (Dean or Department Chair level) at the institution where the Fellow will be conducting the work. This second letter is required to indicate that the postdoctoral fellow will have the required support from the institution where they will be conducting the work (e.g., desk space, access to IT systems, research space within scope of the fellowship).
  - c. A postdoctoral mentoring plan (as per PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.j).

## **SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING REQUESTS FOR MSI PARTNERSHIPS**

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Tenured or tenure-track faculty at MSIs located in EPSCoR Jurisdictions are encouraged to identify potential collaborations with active [RII Track-2 awards](#). Likewise, investigators involved in current RII Track-2 projects are invited to identify potential new collaborators at MSIs located in EPSCoR jurisdictions. Once the partnership is identified, the RII Track-2 awardee may request a supplement of up to \$200,000 per year for up to two years (\$400,000 total including applicable indirect costs) to build a program at the MSI that engages MSI faculty and students in the RII Track-2 award. This can include MSI faculty and student salary support, travel for PIs and trainees between the MSI and the Track-2 partner institutions, supplies and equipment, and applicable indirect costs. The project should remain within the scope of the original award, but the MSI participant may engage in any aspect of the award including, but not limited to, research, education/workforce development, and outreach activities. NSF EPSCoR particularly encourages the engagement of early career faculty at MSIs new to the Track-2 award. These supplements are subject to the following conditions:

- Supplemental funding requests must be submitted by the grantees' Authorized Organization Representative (AOR).
- The supplement will support a subaward from the lead RII Track-2 awardee institution to the MSI.
- The MSI must be located within an EPSCoR jurisdiction.
- Supplements may request up to \$200,000 per year (including applicable indirect costs), \$400,000 total for up to two years of support.
- Supplements may be up to two years in duration and may include MSI faculty and student salary or stipend support, travel for PIs and trainees between the MSI and the other Track-2 partner institutions, supplies and equipment, and applicable indirect costs;
- The duration of the supplement cannot exceed the end date of the RII Track-2 award;
- A supplement's focus may be on any aspect of the project (within the scope of the original award) including, but not limited to, any combination of research, education/workforce development goals, and outreach activities;
- Besides the MSI Partnership supplement, the proposer may also combine this supplement with a request for a postdoctoral fellowship at the MSI (described above);
- Preference will be given to requests that bring in MSIs that are new to the RII Track-2 Award;
- Preference will be given to the engagement of early career faculty into the RII Track-2 Award; and
- All funds must be spent within an EPSCoR Jurisdiction.

Supplemental funding requests for MSI Partnerships must contain the following components:

1. In the summary of work section in FastLane:
  - a. Summary of work that the supplement would support, showing how it is integrated into the current RII Track-2 project (up to 6 pages). This will include a plan

indicating how the MSI will be integrated into the larger project network. This may include a logic model, or a figure indicating how this work will be integrated into the project.

2. In the Justification for Supplement section in FastLane (combined and uploaded as a single PDF document):
  - a. Justification of how the proposed work aligns with or will contribute to the research and education programs of the MSI and the faculty and students involved. (1 page maximum).
  - b. A statement of impact that addresses the goal of broadening participation within the RII Track-2 network through the partnership with the MSI. (1 page maximum).
  - c. A statement of how this supplement will help build the research capacity and/or infrastructure at the MSI (1 page maximum).
3. In the Budget and Budget Justification section in FastLane:
  - a. Budget and Budget Justification (as per PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.g)
4. In the Other Supplementary Documents section in FastLane (combined and uploaded as a single PDF document):
  - a. Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources information (as per PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.i).
  - b. A Biographical sketch for each of the new faculty member to be involved in the project (as per PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.f).
  - c. A postdoctoral mentoring plan (if applicable, see PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.j for information regarding postdoctoral mentoring plans).
  - d. A Letter of Commitment from the MSI administration (Chair/Dean) indicating how they will support the activities outlined in the supplement.

## **IMPORTANT GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

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While either single postdoctoral fellowships or a single MSI Partnership supplement within an individual RII Track-2 project are encouraged, with justification, a single RII Track-2 project may request multiple supplements. They may either request a postdoctoral fellowship in addition to a MSI Partnership supplement (total of \$600,000); or they may request a total of two postdoctoral fellowships (one to an institution within the current Track-2 network, and a second at a MSI partner institution) for a total supplement request of up to \$400,000 to a single RII Track-2 award. If this is the case, please submit separate supplemental funding requests for each opportunity and in the Statement of Work section for each submission, please indicate that the submissions are concurrent.

Supplemental funding requests must be submitted by the AOR of the RII Track-2 awardee institution in accordance with the guidance outlined in PAPPG Chapter VI.E.4.

Individuals interested in this opportunity are strongly encouraged to contact any of the cognizant EPSCoR NSF Program officers: JD Swanson ([jswanson@nsf.gov](mailto:jswanson@nsf.gov), 703-292-2898);

Jose Colom-Ustariz ([jcolom@nsf.gov](mailto:jcolom@nsf.gov), 703-292-7088); and Eric Lindquist ([elindqui@nsf.gov](mailto:elindqui@nsf.gov), 703-292-7127).

## **TIMEFRAME**

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Supplemental funding requests will be reviewed on a rolling basis from 45 days after the posting of this DCL.

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