



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

NSF 21-089

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Boosting Research Ideas for Transformative and Equitable Advances in Engineering (BRITE) solicitation [21-568](#)

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1. What is BRITE?

BRITE is designed to enable and create opportunities for experienced researchers (tenured or equivalent) to forge new directions or to enter new fields by capitalizing or branching out of their established knowledge domains or to revitalize research after a hiatus or to explore ambitious, bold, and expansive research ideas that cover wide intellectual spaces. There are four distinct funding tracks: Synergy, Pivot, Relaunch, and Fellow. Each track provides dedicated time and resources to the PI.

2. What are the goals of BRITE?

The guiding rationale of the CMMI BRITE solicitation is that leveraging prior science and engineering outcomes, harnessing talent from the broad scientific research community, enabling time for reflection and deliberation, including learning new skills and scientific immersion in new areas, are valuable and essential paths leading to scientific and technological innovation.

BRITE focuses on a career stage when constraints on time (increased service and teaching and other constraints) can diminish research productivity and when institutional resources are typically lower. We also know that the attrition and retention of women and underrepresented minorities occurs largely at this stage. BRITE seeks to promote innovation and discoveries by leveraging the experienced researcher cohort (who possess deep technical knowledge) and a diverse talent pool (by being broadly inclusive) at a career stage where they can take risks. BRITE seeks to invest in the STEM workforce so they are best equipped to keep up with the fast acceleration of research methods, analytical tools, and big data. BRITE seeks to enable researchers to tackle complex problems where one needs to cross disciplinary boundaries to develop a common language, and provides time and resources when one has research freedom.

BRITE seeks to broaden participation by focusing on a career stage where the 'leaky pipeline' can be supported to counter the lack of representation in research and leadership at the highest ranks in the academe.

3. What are the key components of a BRITE proposal and how does that differ from the PAPPG?

See PAPPG Chapter II.C.2 for guidance on the required sections of a full research

proposal submitted to the NSF. The BRITE solicitation (21-568) provides specific information for this program in addition to the PAPPG requirements. For example, the proposal must include in the title “BRITE” plus the track name. All BRITE proposals must include a Department Chair letter uploaded as a Supplementary Document using only the text specified in the solicitation. In addition to the requirements in the PAPPG, the Project Description must include the following sections: Section 1. Past Contributions; Section 2. Research Approach and Research Plan; Section 3. Track Relevance; Section 4. Outcomes; and Section 5. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan.

4. What are the eligibility criteria?

The PI must hold a tenured faculty appointment at the Associate/Full Professor rank or equivalent at an organization that is eligible to submit as described under "Who May Submit Proposals." Co-PIs are not allowed on any of the tracks. Separately submitted collaborative proposals are not allowed. There are additional criteria for the Fellow track.

5. Am I eligible if I work at a non-degree granting institution or organization that does not have a tenure structure?

Yes, however, you must have a continuing appointment that is expected to last for at least the duration of the grant, the appointment must include significant research and educational responsibilities, and the project should be in line with the mission or goals of the organization. The Department Chair’s letter is required and must affirm your eligibility i.e. that your appointment is that of a mid-career researcher equivalent to tenured (Associate or Full) status.

6. Am I eligible if I work at a 2-yr college or community college? Or if I am at a PUI or RUI?

Yes, if your appointment fulfills the tenured (Associate or Full) or equivalent eligibility.

7. Can Research Associate Professors (non-tenure track) or Professors of Practice apply?

Yes, as long as you have a continuing appointment that is expected to last for at least the duration of the grant, the appointment must include significant research and educational responsibilities, and the project should be in line with the mission or goals of the department. The Department Chair’s letter is required and must affirm your eligibility i.e. that your appointment is that of a mid-career researcher equivalent to tenured (Associate or Full) status.

8. Is there a deadline?

Yes, the proposal deadline is May 25, 2021.

9. Can I collaborate with someone outside of my institution or outside of academia such as industry as a part of my project?

Yes, as long as the primary effort of the project resides with the PI. You can collaborate with someone at a national lab, another university, industry, or other facilities. You can include a collaborator as senior personnel (use the senior personnel or consultant services budget line), an unfunded collaborator, or as a subcontractor (subaward to another institution). You cannot have a co-PI nor can you submit a collaborative proposal where there are separate submitting institutions. Your partners can provide a letter of collaboration following the PAPPG guidance uploaded as a supplementary document.

10. What is a typical budget like for BRITE?

BRITE provides funds to primarily support PI time and resources. This includes a) 2 or more months of summer salary or teaching release per year, b) funds to support research and training plans, c) student support and senior personnel support where applicable. For the Fellow track, a minimum of 2 months salary support per year (not more than 12 months over a 3 year period) is expected. Support for sabbaticals and visiting scholarships are expected and encouraged but not required. Postdoc support is allowable but strong justification is needed. All BRITE budgets should include funds to attend NSF organized convenings and activities throughout the year.

11. Can the proposal focus on a topical area not supported by CMMI?

No. The proposal must be within the purview of at least one of the research areas supported by CMMI, and can span more than one program area. Proposals outside the scope of CMMI will be returned without review. As the solicitation does encourage PIs to push the frontiers and engage in convergence enabling research, it is expected that some proposal ideas will not fit neatly within a single program and may even bring in new elements of research into CMMI.

12. How does the Pivot track differ from the Fellow track?

The Pivot track is of shorter duration and focused on a specific project idea. The Fellow track requires a substantial intellectual commitment to pursue an idea of much larger scope and over a much longer period of time (up to 5 years as opposed to 3 years for Pivot). BRITE Fellows will propose Blue Sky research plans that are not as well-defined, that are a bit risky, and that will cover much more ground than a typical 3 year project. The BRITE Fellow track is intended to support established tenured or equivalent researchers who have demonstrated impact beyond research output to request extended time and freedom to use their intellectual creativity in exploring divergent, bold, and ambitious research ideas where the expected research outcomes are highly

uncertain and, therefore, high-risk. In this solicitation, impact beyond research output includes a demonstrated legacy, community building, sustainable educational reform, or mentoring. The program objective is to lay the foundation for future research explorations and anticipate future needs of a given field. In contrast to traditional research proposals, the BRITE Fellow track is an investment in the individual researcher so that they can define their own high-risk vision with the potential for transformational impact by creating new fields, disrupting a field and challenging prevailing paradigms, presenting unconventional approaches to intractable problems, or mobilizing research communities. Research topics are expected to be more curiosity-driven as compared to the more traditional engineering use-inspired motivation and should push the boundaries of traditional CMMI disciplines, combining the benefits of synergy and convergence in the planned approach. Fellow track proposals involves a two-tiered review process including a pitch by the PI.

13. How is the BRITE Fellow track distinct from the other tracks?

BRITE Fellows will need to demonstrate that they are in a position to assess the field and envision an area ripe for innovation and exploration. BRITE Fellows will form a cohort that offers their perspectives on leading edge research at annual BRITE Fellow meetings. They may be encouraged to serve on advisory boards, panels, or groups. A list of BRITE Fellows will be shared publicly. The BRITE cohort will reflect the geographic and institutional diversity across the United States. BRITE Fellows may not currently hold or accept faculty fellow awards of equal caliber in addition to the BRITE Fellow award for the same period of time.

14. For the Pivot track, can I have a partner or mentor to learn new skills?

Yes. In fact, for any of the tracks one could propose working with or visiting a collaborator to develop a new skill or learn a new area.

15. For the Relaunch track, is a gap in funding required? How long would the hiatus need to be?

The PI must have had a demonstrated gap in productivity as evidenced by a gap in publication record or a gap in funding. PIs are discouraged from describing or disclosing details as to why they had a gap. The purpose of the proposal is for the PI to describe how their research activity will be relaunched and what their plans entail. CMMI does not have a predefined number for the duration of the gap. The gap would have had to be long enough to impact research productivity.

16. Is the 2 months of salary in addition to the salary from other NSF projects?

Yes. The salary support from this solicitation could be in addition to other NSF support.

17. Is it possible to apply to more than one track?

It is possible to apply to more than one BRITE track. However, if one receives a BRITE award this year, they will be ineligible to submit a future BRITE proposal whilst they have an active BRITE award. This does not apply to serving as senior personnel on a project or receiving a subaward. The limit applies to the PI.

18. Are relocation costs permissible in the budget?

Yes, temporary relocation costs in support of pursuing research activities described in the proposal are permissible under direct costs of the budget.