



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
2415 EISENHOWER AVENUE
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

NSF 21-110

Dear Colleague Letter: Persons with Disabilities – STEM Engagement and Access (PWD-SEA)

August 5, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

With this Dear Colleague Letter, the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Directorate for Education and Human Resources (EHR), with leadership from the Division of Human Resource Development (HRD), seeks to increase the engagement of persons with disabilities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields and STEM education. Educating, preparing, and supporting persons with all types of disabilities, and of all ages, improves the skills of our nation's current and future STEM workforce, as well as improves the prospects for all Americans to learn, work, and contribute to U.S. leadership in science and engineering discovery and innovation. A wide range of disability types are recognized in this Dear Colleague Letter including, but not limited to, deafness or hearing loss; blindness or visual impairment; physical, mental health, medical or other health-related disabilities; and neurodiverse conditions such as dyslexia, autism spectrum disorders, and learning disabilities.

This Dear Colleague Letter particularly encourages submission of new proposals, or requests for supplemental funding to existing awards, to support existing or new access to and engagement in STEM learning, research, and workforce development at proposing or awardee organizations for students, postdoctoral scholars, or faculty and staff with disabilities. New proposals or supplemental funding requests to existing awards may also request support for the inclusion of persons with disabilities as participants. New proposals and supplemental funding requests are not intended for research subjects. This notification identifies opportunities for engagement and access through the following programs:

- [ADVANCE: Organizational Change for Gender Equity in STEM Academic Professions \(ADVANCE\)](#)
- [Advanced Technological Education \(ATE\)](#)
- [Advancing Informal STEM Learning \(AISL\)](#)
- [Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate \(AGEP\)](#)

- Computer Science for All (CSforAll: Research and RPPs)
- Centers of Research Excellence in Science and Technology (CREST) and HBCU Research Infrastructure for Science and Engineering (RISE)
- CyberCorps(R) Scholarship for Service (SFS)
- Discovery Research PreK-12 (DRK-12)
- EHR Core Research (ECR:Core)
- EHR Core Research (ECR): Building Capacity in STEM Education Research (ECR: BCSER)
- Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP)
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities Undergraduate Program (HBCU-UP)
- Improving Undergraduate STEM Education: Education and Human Resources (IUSE: EHR)
- Improving Undergraduate STEM Education: Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI Program)
- Inclusion across the Nation of Communities of Learners of Underrepresented Discoverers in Engineering and Science (NSF INCLUDES)
- Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST)
- Innovations in Graduate Education (IGE) Program
- Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation
- National Science Foundation Research Traineeship (NRT) Program
- NSF Scholarships in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (S-STEM)
- Racial Equity in STEM Education (EHR Racial Equity)
- Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program
- Tribal Colleges and Universities Program (TCUP)

Proposers are encouraged to discuss new proposals, that will support access and engagement for persons with disabilities in STEM, with the relevant program before submission. Prior to submitting a supplemental funding request, approval must be obtained from the cognizant NSF program director for the original award. New proposals and supplemental funding requests must adhere to the guidance of the program solicitation, announcement, or program description to which the proposal will be submitted. New proposals and supplemental funding requests should be prepared and submitted following the guidance in the [NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide](#) (PAPPG) and also must adhere to the due dates and guidance specified in the program solicitation, announcement, or program description to which the proposal will be submitted.

Proposers are encouraged to explore a wide range of actions to support access to and engagement in STEM learning, research, and employment activities of persons with disabilities, such as, but not limited to:

- Stipends for K-12 students and teachers, undergraduate students and/or graduate students with disabilities to provide greater access to and engagement in EHR-funded

STEM education and research project activities, and/or STEM education and research training.

- Funding to increase time and effort for undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral research scholars, staff, faculty and/or senior personnel with disabilities to work on EHR-funded STEM education and research project activities.
- Support for technology, tools, equipment and instrumentation, and the physical modifications necessary to access them (e.g., elevated or lowered lab table), in research labs, libraries, informal science settings, field-based environments and/or classrooms that ensure students, postdoctoral research scholars, K-12 teachers, staff and faculty with disabilities will have greater access to and engagement in STEM research, teaching, training and learning.

Organizations submitting new proposals are encouraged to highlight the request for funds to support STEM access and engagement for persons with disabilities in the Project Summary, the Project Description and the Budget Justification. The receiving program will determine whether and at what level to fund new proposals or supplement requests.

Additional, existing funding opportunities at NSF also serve persons with disabilities:

- Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASSED) requests are made in conjunction with the submission of regular competitive proposals, or as a supplemental funding request to an existing NSF award. The goals of NSF's FASSED funding are to reduce or remove barriers to participation in research and training by persons with physical disabilities by providing special equipment and assistance under awards made by NSF; and to encourage persons with disabilities to pursue careers in science and engineering by stimulating the development and demonstration of special equipment that facilitates their work performance. Details about how to request FASSED funding are provided in Chapter II.E of the [PAPPG](#).
- Several engineering programs at NSF support research related to rehabilitation [<https://www.nsf.gov/eng/rehab.jsp>]. Most notable is the [Disability and Rehabilitation Engineering \(DARE\) program](#). DARE supports fundamental engineering research that will improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities through the development of new technologies, devices, or software. These developments must also advance knowledge regarding a specific human disability (sensory, cognitive, movement-related, or others), pathological motion, or injury mechanism. Investigators and trainees with disabilities are encouraged to apply to the DARE program.
- For proposers interested in submitting proposals to support fundamental and applied research on STEM teaching, learning, and workforce development for persons with disabilities, please see the related Dear Colleague Letter: Research to Improve STEM Teaching, Learning, and Workforce Development for Persons with Disabilities ([NSF 21-114](#)).

For more information, please contact Dr. Mark Leddy, EHR Division of Human Resource Development, PWDSEA@nsf.gov.

Sincerely,

Sylvia M. Butterfield

Acting Assistant Director, Directorate for Education and Human Resources