



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Mid-Career Advancement (MCA) (NSF 22-603)

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1. What is the MCA?

The Mid-Career Advancement (MCA) ([NSF 22-603](#)) is a cross-directorate program that offers an opportunity for scientists and engineers at the Associate Professor rank, with at least three years at that rank, to substantively enhance and advance their research program and career trajectories through partnerships, typically at an institution other than their home institution. See also Point 6 below for details of a pilot for full professors at Primarily Undergraduate Institutions (PUI) submitting to programs in the Directorate for Biological Sciences and Directorate for Geological Sciences.

2. What are the goals of the MCA?

The major goals of MCA are broadening participation and workforce development through enhancement of research productivity. The MCA supports PIs in the pursuit of bold, innovative ideas and creative research by enabling them to communicate across scientific disciplines, learn new skills and expand their professional network. The focus on research productivity and creativity from mid-career scientists and engineers enables a more diverse STEM workforce. The mid-career stage is one where researchers typically have fewer institutional resources, higher service and teaching responsibilities, and face a need for retooling. Data show that women, persons with disabilities, and underrepresented minorities spend more time with service and teaching at the expense of research. This may lower the likelihood of their promotion to the highest academic and leadership ranks. The MCA provides a mechanism to broaden participation at this career stage and will thus foster a more diverse, world-class science and engineering workforce.

3. What key components of an MCA proposal differ from the PAPPG?

See the [NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide](#) (PAPPG) Chapter II.D.2 for guidance on the required sections of a full research proposal submitted to the NSF. The MCA solicitation ([NSF 22-603](#)) provides information specific to this new program. The title of the MCA proposal must begin with "MCA:". The Project Description for MCAs are limited to 12 pages (not the standard 15), but there is also a required 2-page MCA Impact Statement (see [#4](#) for additional information about the required MCA Impact Statement). In addition to requirements in the PAPPG (e.g., Broader Impacts; Results of Prior Support), the MCA proposal must include the following three sections in the Project Description: Section 1. Candidate's Past Research; Section 2. Candidate's Proposed Research Advancement and Training Plan; and Section 3. Candidate's Long-Term Career Plans. There are also three required Supplementary Documents: a) Letter of Collaboration by the Partner(s); b) Departmental Letter; and c) MCA Impact Statement.

4. What is the MCA Impact Statement?

In [NSF 22-603](#), the overall proposal length has been shorted. The Project Description is now limited to 12 pages, but PIs must include an additional 2-page Impact Statement as a Supplementary Document. This is required for all MCA proposals. Information on past and/or current constraints on the PI's time and resources available for research should be included. Thus the Impact Statement should provide clear evidence that the protected time and research/training opportunities of an MCA award will provide a substantial enhancement to the PI's research and career trajectory, enabling scientific and academic advancement not likely without such support.

5. Who is eligible?

Scientists and engineers whose current or proposed research falls within the purview of a participating program (see solicitation) and who have been at the Associate Professor rank (or equivalent or Full Professor for the pilot PUI track – see Question 6) for at least three years by the time of submission are eligible to apply. Five NSF directorates are currently accepting proposals [Biological Sciences (BIO), STEM Education (EDU), Technology, Innovation and Partnerships (TIP), Geological Sciences (GEO), and Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE)], but not all divisions or programs within each directorate are participating at this time. Contact MCA.info@nsf.gov for specific questions or peruse [MCA contacts](#) for cognizant Program Officers.

6. For the pilot PUI track, who is eligible?

The PUI track is a pilot that extends eligibility to Full Professors at Primarily Undergraduate Institutions (PUI) only. MCA proposals that come into this track must have proposed research that falls within the purview of a participating program within

the Directorate for Biological Sciences or Directorate for Geosciences.

7. Am I eligible if I work at a non-degree-granting organization such as a museum, observatory, or research lab?

Yes, but you must have an Associate Professor Equivalency appointment for at least 3 years. Equivalency is defined as meeting all of the following requirements: "(1) the employee has a continuing appointment that is expected to last for at least the duration of the grant; (2) the appointment has substantial research and educational and/or service responsibilities; and (3) the proposed project relates to the employee's career goals and job responsibilities as well as to the mission of the department or organization." The required Departmental Letter supplementary document must "affirm that the candidate's appointment is at a mid-career level equivalent to Associate status (with at least three years at that rank), and it must also clearly and convincingly demonstrate how the candidate's appointment satisfies all the above requirements of Associate Professor equivalency."

8. Am I eligible if I work at a 2-yr college or community college?

Yes, if your appointment meets the MCA eligibility requirements.

9. What if I am being considered for promotion to Full Professor but will be at the rank of Associate by the proposal submission date?

While you would not be ineligible to apply while being considered for promotion and still at the Associate Professor rank (or equivalent), your proposal and the Departmental Letter must provide a compelling argument about how the MCA would help to advance your research program and academic career in a way not likely without such support.

10. Can Research Associate Professors (non-tenure track) apply?

Yes, as long as the following criteria are met:

Associate Professor Equivalency - For a position to be considered an Associate Professor equivalent position, it must meet all of the following requirements: (1) the employee has a continuing appointment that is expected to last for at least the duration of the grant; (2) the appointment has substantial research and educational and/or service responsibilities; and (3) the proposed project relates to the employee's career goals and job responsibilities as well as to the mission of the department or organization. As stated in the Proposal Preparation Instructions, the Departmental Letter must affirm that the candidate's appointment is at a mid-career level equivalent to Associate status (with at least three years at that rank), and the Departmental Letter must clearly and convincingly demonstrate how the candidate's appointment satisfies all the above requirements of Associate Professor equivalency.

11. Is there a deadline?

The MCA has an annual submission window from February 1 to March 1. Proposals must be submitted within that window.

12. Is the required Partner the same thing as a collaborator?

No, not exactly. The MCA solicitation emphasizes that the collaboration between the candidate and the Partner(s) should be synergistic, mutually beneficial, and go beyond that which would typically occur through a normal collaborative grant, for example, by opening new avenues of research. The MCA seeks to enable quality networking and mentorship through these partnerships. The candidate and Partner must be engaged in a research project that addresses fundamental challenges in the scientific discipline to which the proposal is submitted, and that is likely to result in publications and a foundation for future competitive proposals. The Partner(s) must write a Letter of Collaboration and submit this as a supplementary document. Details on what should be included in this letter are in the MCA solicitation. The Partner(s) cannot be listed as a co-PI but should instead be designated as senior personnel or consultants.

13. Does the Partner have to be at a particular academic (or equivalent) rank?

No. Partners can be at any rank.

14. Can the Partner be outside of academia?

Yes. Partners can be at national labs, museums, or other facilities.

15. Does the Partner also submit a COA templates?

Yes, both the PI and each Partner must complete a Collaborative and Other Affiliations (COA) template and upload as a Single Copy Document.

16. Can there be co-PIs on the proposal?

No. Because MCA awards provide funds to support the mid-career researcher, co-PIs are not allowed. However, the mid-career researcher can request one month of summer support for the Partner (in lieu of summer support for the Partner, other reasonable collaborative costs may be considered). That support for the Partner(s) should be requested in the senior personnel or consultant services budget line items of the proposal, or as a subaward to the other institution.

17. Does the Partner need to be U.S. based?

While you may have a collaborative partner(s) who is not U.S based, as described in PAPPG Chapter I.E, funding is rarely provided for a foreign individual or organization's

involvement. In exceptional cases, funds may be considered if the following conditions are met: local U.S.-based support is not feasible, the foreign organization can carry out the activity more effectively, and the foreign organization contributes unique expertise or other resources essential to the project. Submitting institutions should make their own determinations about appropriateness of international partners with consideration of the proposed partner's fit with the intended topic area of research and goals of the MCA. The submitting institution is also encouraged to consult with their university counsel, or other appropriate professionals, as needed, to ensure compliance with all U.S. laws, including U.S. export-control, sanctions and like regimes.

18. Do I have to choose a Partner from a different institution?

Not necessarily, but the partnership is an important component of the MCA and should be well justified. The collaboration between the PI and the Partner(s) should be mutually beneficial and create "added value" beyond that which would occur through a typical collaboration (for example, by opening new avenues of inquiry).

19. Do I have to choose a Partner from a different field of science or engineering than my own?

No, although Partner(s) from outside the PI's own subdiscipline or discipline are encouraged to enhance interdisciplinary networking and convergence research across science and engineering fields.

20. What is a typical budget like for the MCA?

MCA awards provide funds to the PI and include a) a total of 6.5 months of salary support to be spent over the course of the entire award (3 years), and b) \$100,000.00 in direct costs in support of the research and training plan. In addition, a total of one month of summer support for each collaborative Partner can be requested (in lieu of summer support for the Partner, other reasonable costs may be considered). The aforementioned costs are not yearly allocations; they are total amounts. In addition, the \$100,000.00 should include funds to cover the costs of attendance of one in-person 2-day awardee networking meeting held at NSF headquarters in Alexandria, VA. (For proposals submitted to the Partnerships For Innovation (PFI) program in the Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships (TIP) no NFS funds can be used to support the industrial Partner.)

21. Are relocation costs an allowable expense in the budget?

Yes, part of the \$100,000.00 for direct costs in support of the research advancement and training plan of the MCA may be used to support temporary relocation costs.

22. What's a target submission window?

Proposals can be submitted only within the submission window. For NSF 22-603 you may submit your proposal during the submission window of February 1 – March 1. Per PAPPG Chapter I.F, It is NSF’s policy that the end date of a submission window converts to, and is subject to, the same policies as a deadline date.

23. Does the NSF Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships participate in the MCA?

The NSF Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships (TIP) participates in the MCA. TIP supports breakthrough technologies; meets societal and economic needs; leads to new, high-wage jobs; and empowers all Americans to participate in the U.S. research and innovation enterprise. Within the MCA, TIP offers an opportunity for scientists and engineers at the Associate Professor rank (or equivalent) to advance their career trajectory by engaging in use-inspired and translational research that will drive tomorrow’s technologies and solutions.

24. How do I submit my MCA project to the TIP Directorate?

TIP accepts and processes MCA proposals that align with the goals of the directorate (see question #23 above) through the Partnerships for Innovation, or PFI, program within the TIP Division of Translational Impacts (TI). To inquire whether your MCA project fits the goals of the TIP Directorate, please email a brief description to mca.info@nsf.gov.

25. How can I align my MCA project with the goals of the TIP Directorate?

The PFI program accepts and reviews MCA proposals on behalf of the TIP Directorate. However, MCA proposals submitted to TIP are expected to follow the guidance of the MCA solicitation, not those of the PFI solicitation, and should align with the goals for TIP described in question #23 above and below. Specifically, TIP supports MCA proposals that enable MCA-eligible scientists and engineers to substantively advance their career through:

- a. Use-inspired and translational research that will advance breakthrough technologies;
- b. Entrepreneurial education (including the NSF I-Corps™ Teams program) and leadership development, to accelerate the translation of their research towards societal impact and commercialization;
- c. Synergistic and mutually beneficial partnerships, that may include collaborations with industry; and
- d. Broadening participation of groups that have been historically underrepresented and/or underserved in the STEM innovation and entrepreneurial enterprise.

26. How does the new TIP Directorate contribute to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) through its participation in the MCA?

Innovation and entrepreneurship have historically played a limited role in the professional advancement of faculty. TIP endeavors to advance use-inspired and translational research in all fields of science and engineering and engage all Americans, regardless of background or location. Through its participation in the MCA program, TIP encourages all mid-career faculty to participate in the U.S. innovation enterprise.