

# Scholarships in STEM Network (S-STEM-Net)

## S-STEM Research Hubs

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### PROGRAM SOLICITATION

NSF 23-536

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### REPLACES DOCUMENT(S):

NSF 22-544

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National Science Foundation

Directorate for STEM Education  
Division of Undergraduate Education

#### Full Proposal Deadline(s) (due by 5 p.m. submitter's local time):

March 29, 2023

March 27, 2024

Fourth Wednesday in March, Annually Thereafter

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND REVISION NOTES

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The S-STEM Resource and Evaluation Center (S-STEM-REC) category of proposals has been eliminated.

Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation must be prepared and submitted via Research.gov or Grants.gov and may not be prepared or submitted via FastLane.

Any proposal submitted in response to this solicitation should be submitted in accordance with the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) that is in effect for the relevant due date to which the proposal is being submitted. The NSF PAPPG is regularly revised and it is the responsibility of the proposer to ensure that the proposal meets the requirements specified in this solicitation and the applicable version of the PAPPG. Submitting a proposal prior to a specified deadline does not negate this requirement.

### SUMMARY OF PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

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#### General Information

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##### Program Title:

Scholarships in STEM Network (S-STEM-Net)  
S-STEM Research Hubs

##### Synopsis of Program:

Through this solicitation, NSF seeks to foster a network of S-STEM stakeholders and further develop the infrastructure needed to generate and disseminate new knowledge, successful practices and effective design principles arising from NSF S-STEM projects nationwide. The ultimate vision of the legislation governing the S-STEM parent program<sup>[1]</sup> (and of the current S-STEM-Net solicitation) is that all Americans, regardless of economic status, should be able to contribute to the American innovation economy if they so desire.

To support collaboration within the S-STEM network, NSF will fund several S-STEM Research Hubs (S-STEM-Hub). The S-STEM Network (S-STEM-Net) will collaborate to create synergies and sustain a robust national ecosystem consisting of multi-sector partners supporting domestic low-income STEM students in achieving their career goals, while also ensuring access, inclusion, and adaptability to changing learning needs. The Hubs will investigate evolving barriers to the success of this student population. It will also disseminate the context and circumstances by which interventions and practices that support graduation of domestic low-income students (both undergraduate and graduate) pursuing careers in STEM are successful.

The target audience for this dissemination effort is the community of higher education institutions, faculty, scholars, researchers and evaluators, local and regional organizations, industry, and other nonprofit, federal, state, and local agencies concerned with the success of domestic low-income STEM students in the United States.

[1] [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=nsf22527](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=nsf22527)

**Cognizant Program Officer(s):**

Please note that the following information is current at the time of publishing. See program website for any updates to the points of contact.

- Alexandra Medina-Borja, Lead, telephone: (703) 292-7557, email: [amedinab@nsf.gov](mailto:amedinab@nsf.gov)
- Mindy Capaldi, telephone: (703) 292-2994, email: [mcapaldi@nsf.gov](mailto:mcapaldi@nsf.gov)
- Thomas D. Kim, Co-Lead, telephone: (703) 292-4458, email: [tkim@nsf.gov](mailto:tkim@nsf.gov)
- Michael J. Ferrara, Co-Lead, telephone: (703) 292-2635, email: [mferrara@nsf.gov](mailto:mferrara@nsf.gov)

**Applicable Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number(s):**

- 47.076 --- STEM Education

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## Award Information

**Anticipated Type of Award:** Standard Grant

**Estimated Number of Awards:** 1 to 5

S-STEM-Hub – up to 5 awards, as standard grants.

**Anticipated Funding Amount:** \$15,000,000

Estimated program budget, number of awards and average award size/duration are subject to the availability of funds.

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## Eligibility Information

**Who May Submit Proposals:**

Proposals may only be submitted by the following:

- Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) - Two- and four-year IHEs (including community colleges) accredited in, and having a campus located in the US, acting on behalf of their faculty members. Special Instructions for International Branch Campuses of US IHEs: If the proposal includes funding to be provided to an international branch campus of a US institution of higher education (including through use of subawards and consultant arrangements), the proposer must explain the benefit(s) to the project of performance at the international branch campus, and justify why the project activities cannot be performed at the US campus.
- Non-profit, non-academic organizations: Independent museums, observatories, research labs, professional societies and similar organizations in the U.S. associated with educational or research activities.

**Who May Serve as PI:**

There are no restrictions or limits.

**Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:**

An organization may submit at most one S-STEM-Hub proposal (as a single institution, a subawardee, or a member of a collaborative research project).

**Limit on Number of Proposals per PI or co-PI:**

An individual may only serve as PI or Co-PI of one S-STEM-Hub proposal.

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## Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions

**A. Proposal Preparation Instructions**

- **Letters of Intent:** Not required
- **Preliminary Proposal Submission:** Not required
- **Full Proposals:**
  - Full Proposals submitted via Research.gov: *NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG)* guidelines apply. The complete text of the PAPPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).
  - Full Proposals submitted via Grants.gov: *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for the Preparation and Submission of NSF Applications via Grants.gov* guidelines apply (Note: The *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide* is available on the Grants.gov website and on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=grantsgovguide](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=grantsgovguide)).

**B. Budgetary Information**

- **Cost Sharing Requirements:**

Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited.

- **Indirect Cost (F&A) Limitations:**

Not Applicable

- **Other Budgetary Limitations:**

Other budgetary limitations apply. Please see the full text of this solicitation for further information.

### **C. Due Dates**

- **Full Proposal Deadline(s)** (due by 5 p.m. submitter's local time):

March 29, 2023

March 27, 2024

Fourth Wednesday in March, Annually Thereafter

## **Proposal Review Information Criteria**

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### **Merit Review Criteria:**

National Science Board approved criteria apply.

## **Award Administration Information**

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### **Award Conditions:**

Additional award conditions apply. Please see the full text of this solicitation for further information.

### **Reporting Requirements:**

Standard NSF reporting requirements apply.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

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Through this solicitation, NSF seeks to foster a community for S-STEM stakeholders and further develop the infrastructure needed to generate and disseminate new knowledge, successful practices and effective design principles arising from NSF S-STEM projects nationwide. To support collaboration within the S-STEM network, NSF will fund several S-STEM Research Hubs (S-STEM-Hub).

The S-STEM Network (S-STEM-Net) will collaborate to create synergies and sustain a robust national ecosystem consisting of multi-sector partners supporting

domestic low-income STEM students in achieving their career goals, while also ensuring access, inclusion, and adaptability to changing learning needs. The Hubs will investigate evolving barriers to the success of this student population. It will also disseminate the context and circumstances by which interventions and practices that support graduation of domestic low-income students pursuing careers in STEM are successful.

The target audience for this dissemination effort is the community of higher education institutions, faculty, scholars, researchers and evaluators, local and regional organizations, industry, and nonprofit, federal, state, and local agencies concerned with the success of domestic low-income STEM students in the United States.

## II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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### S-STEM-Net investments:

- S-STEM Research Hubs (S-STEM-Hubs): A maximum of \$3 million (up to \$3 million over a period of up to five years per S-STEM-Hub) will be awarded to support up to five (5) S-STEM-Hubs for a total investment of \$15 million.

#### *Requirements for S-STEM Hubs:*

*Lead Organization:* The lead organization must demonstrate significant experience with the S-STEM program or with research about or services to support domestic low-income students in STEM.

*Evaluation:* Proposals must include formative and summative assessments of the quality and success of the S-STEM-Hub activities as appropriate. This evaluation must be conducted by an independent experienced evaluator who is external to the project and to the institution.

*Letters of Collaboration:* All institutional collaborations must be ratified by a corresponding letter of collaboration signed by an administrator (dean or above) following the PAPPG requirements for these letters, confirming that the institution is aware of the proposed work and willing to support the project in full if awarded.

*Participation in S-STEM PI meeting:* PI and Co-PIs should plan to participate in the S-STEM PI meeting that occurs every other year. Budgets should include travel for the leadership team for the 3-day event in years 1, 3 and 5 of the execution.

### Number, Funding Level and Goal

The primary goal of each S-STEM Research Hub is to support and carry out high-quality, innovative research on the factors, structures or interventions involved in supporting and promoting the success of domestic low-income undergraduate and graduate STEM students, regardless of other demographic factors. Proposers who wish to focus on specific underrepresented demographic groups regardless of income status might consider applying for an NSF INCLUDES Alliance, or other NSF funding opportunities. Collaborations between S-STEM-Hubs and other NSF-funded initiatives, such as NSF INCLUDES, could be appropriate as long as the S-STEM Research Hub focuses their research activities on the success of low-income students. In addition, proposals aiming to investigate other STEM-related questions or issues but not focused on low-income student success, including those focused on the development of new STEM curriculum or academic programs, or specific research opportunities for undergraduates in some STEM-related topic, are not appropriate for the S-STEM-Hub funding opportunity and will be returned without review.

S-STEM Research Hubs are primarily formed to organize groups of researchers to conduct and disseminate rigorous qualitative and quantitative research on topics related to the S-STEM program and low-income student success. Each Research Hub should have a central focus that intersects a clear group of current and prospective S-STEM institutions. For example, a Research Hub might be organized around research on specific interventions (e.g., impact of math Summer bridge programs) or desirable outcomes (e.g., development of STEM identity) for S-STEM scholars. Other thematic topics that Research Hubs might focus on include research on issues affecting a specific discipline or academic context (e.g., low-income undergraduates in computer science; access to doctoral programs for domestic low-income students in strategic disciplines such as quantum science, robotics, or AI; first-generation S-STEM scholars at two-year colleges; low-income veterans pursuing STEM careers). Any other common interests that exist among active S-STEM projects might also be appropriate for development of a Research Hub, including geographic regions with common cultural and other socio-economic factors affecting scholars (e.g., S-STEM Research Hub of the Midwest) or type of institution (e.g., S-STEM Hub for Rural-serving Institutions) or about a pervasive issue experienced by low-income scholars across certain types of institutions (e.g., S-STEM Research Hub about Strategies to Overcome Impostor Syndrome at Highly Competitive Institutions).

Research Hubs coordinate groups of researchers engaged with S-STEM projects to explore methodologies, data streams, and opportunities for new research directions. Consequently, the Research Hub must conduct activities that will foster new and innovative collaborative research activities involving researchers from beyond the host institution. It is anticipated that the activities in which the hub engages may evolve. Thus, it is important that a Research Hub leverages its interinstitutional nature and builds a flexible structure that could facilitate such changes over its lifespan.

### Activities required of all S-STEM-Hub projects:

Regardless of focus, all Research Hubs must propose and budget for activities to:

- identify, develop, and support promising innovative research ideas that generate valuable new knowledge on the US higher education enterprise in general and the S-STEM community in particular;
- gather, analyze, and utilize the data and insights resulting from the experiences of those participating in S-STEM projects to share information about what works and what does not under given circumstances, regarding low-income STEM student achievement;
- share and leverage effective practices on a national scale to improve the achievement and success of domestic low-income students pursuing careers in STEM (including veterans, graduate students, and students in rural areas, if appropriate);
- provide intellectual infrastructure for collaborations with potential to expand the knowledge base about support for domestic low-income, high-achieving STEM students;
- develop mechanisms for dissemination of successful practices, the context in which they work and research results; and,
- ensure that the Research Hub's activities are inclusive of the broad collection of institutions with S-STEM projects in the research focus of interest including, but not limited to, 2-year colleges, PUIs, minority-serving institutions, and/or research-intensive universities, as appropriate.

Regardless of the focus, all proposals for a Research Hub must describe a plan to include and leverage the diversity of constituents, approaches, disciplines, and ideas that may exist within a thematic topic, and a strategy to explore new knowledge and generate best practices that will be transferable to other locations.

While the exact structure of a Research Hub may take many different forms, a successful S-STEM-Hub proposal must:

- present the rationale for the creation of a Research Hub as opposed to a regular research grant. Research questions grounded in the literature that constitute the starting point for the Hub should also be included;
- justify the research work that otherwise could not be advanced without the funded collaboration (why a large award with multiple PIs is needed);
- identify the relevant stakeholders for the proposed Research Hub focus;
- involve multiple S-STEM constituencies and institutions and present a clear plan to recruit researchers and solicit perspectives and expertise from institutions including, but not limited to, 2-year colleges, PUIs, minority-serving institutions, and/or research-intensive universities, as appropriate;
- demonstrate that the proposed S-STEM-Hub's leadership and advisory structures are reflective of the institution types that most significantly intersect their focus area;
- describe how the S-STEM-Hub will leverage diverse institutional data streams and/or tackle challenges that cannot be accomplished by a single institution or a team of PIs; and
- describe a project management plan and a mechanism to encourage and enable interaction between S-STEM-Hub stakeholders.
- present an external evaluation plan for the Hub's activities.

### III. AWARD INFORMATION

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**Anticipated Type of Award:** Standard Grant

**Estimated Number of Awards:** 1 to 5

S-STEM-Hub – up to 5 awards, as standard grants.

**Anticipated Funding Amount:** \$15,000,000

Estimated program budget, number of awards and average award size/duration are subject to the availability of funds.

### IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

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#### Who May Submit Proposals:

Proposals may only be submitted by the following:

- Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) - Two- and four-year IHEs (including community colleges) accredited in, and having a campus located in the US, acting on behalf of their faculty members. Special Instructions for International Branch Campuses of US IHEs: If the proposal includes funding to be provided to an international branch campus of a US institution of higher education (including through use of subawards and consultant arrangements), the proposer must explain the benefit(s) to the project of performance at the international branch campus, and justify why the project activities cannot be performed at the US campus.
- Non-profit, non-academic organizations: Independent museums, observatories, research labs, professional societies and similar organizations in the U.S. associated with educational or research activities.

#### Who May Serve as PI:

There are no restrictions or limits.

#### Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:

An organization may submit at most one S-STEM-Hub proposal (as a single institution, a subawardee, or a member of a collaborative research project).

#### Limit on Number of Proposals per PI or co-PI:

An individual may only serve as PI or Co-PI of one S-STEM-Hub proposal.

### V. PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

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#### A. Proposal Preparation Instructions

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**Full Proposal Preparation Instructions:** Proposers may opt to submit proposals in response to this Program Solicitation via Research.gov or Grants.gov.

- Full Proposals submitted via Research.gov: Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation should be prepared and submitted in accordance with the general guidelines contained in the *NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide* (PAPPG). The complete text of the PAPPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=papppg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=papppg). Paper copies of the PAPPG may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-8134 or by e-mail from [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov). The Prepare New Proposal setup will prompt you for the program solicitation number.

Full proposals submitted via Grants.gov: Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation via Grants.gov should be prepared and submitted in accordance with the *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for the Preparation and Submission of NSF Applications via Grants.gov*. The complete text of the *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide* is available on the Grants.gov website and on the NSF website at: ([https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=grantsgovguide](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=grantsgovguide)). To obtain copies of the Application Guide and Application Forms Package, click on the Apply tab on the Grants.gov site, then click on the Apply Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package and Application Instructions link and enter the funding opportunity number, (the program solicitation number without the NSF prefix) and press the Download Package button. Paper copies of the Grants.gov Application Guide also may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-8134 or by e-mail from [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov).

In determining which method to utilize in the electronic preparation and submission of the proposal, please note the following:

**Collaborative Proposals.** All collaborative proposals submitted as separate submissions from multiple organizations must be submitted via Research.gov. PAPPG Chapter II.E.3 provides additional information on collaborative proposals.

See PAPPG Chapter II.D.2 for guidance on the required sections of a full research proposal submitted to NSF. Please note that the proposal preparation instructions provided in this program solicitation may deviate from the PAPPG instructions.

Please see Section II of this solicitation for details on all the expected critical activities of S-STEM-Hub and the corresponding requirements for proposals.

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## B. Budgetary Information

### Cost Sharing:

Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited.

### Other Budgetary Limitations:

For S-STEM-Hub proposals, limit of \$3 million total over a maximum of 5 years.

### Budget Preparation Instructions:

S-STEM-Hub proposers should budget for an external evaluator to evaluate the project and provide reports of at least 2 formative evaluation exercises during the life of the award and one summative evaluation report at the end of the award.

All proposers should also include their travel funds for the entire leadership team to attend the 3-day S-STEM PI Meeting every other year.

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## C. Due Dates

- **Full Proposal Deadline(s)** (due by 5 p.m. submitter's local time):

March 29, 2023

March 27, 2024

Fourth Wednesday in March, Annually Thereafter

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## D. Research.gov/Grants.gov Requirements

### For Proposals Submitted Via Research.gov:

To prepare and submit a proposal via Research.gov, see detailed technical instructions available at: [https://www.research.gov/research-portal/appmanager/base/desktop?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=research\\_node\\_display&\\_nodePath=/researchGov/Service/Desktop/ProposalPreparationandSubmission.html](https://www.research.gov/research-portal/appmanager/base/desktop?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=research_node_display&_nodePath=/researchGov/Service/Desktop/ProposalPreparationandSubmission.html). For Research.gov user support, call the Research.gov Help Desk at 1-800-673-6188 or e-mail [rgov@nsf.gov](mailto:rgov@nsf.gov). The Research.gov Help Desk answers general technical questions related to the use of the Research.gov system. Specific questions related to this program solicitation should be referred to the NSF program staff contact(s) listed in Section VIII of this funding opportunity.

### For Proposals Submitted Via Grants.gov:

Before using Grants.gov for the first time, each organization must register to create an institutional profile. Once registered, the applicant's organization can then apply for any federal grant on the Grants.gov website. Comprehensive information about using Grants.gov is available on the Grants.gov Applicant Resources webpage: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants.html>. In addition, the NSF Grants.gov Application Guide (see link in Section V.A) provides instructions regarding the technical preparation of proposals via Grants.gov. For Grants.gov user support, contact the Grants.gov Contact Center at 1-800-518-4726 or by email: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov). The Grants.gov Contact Center answers general technical questions related to the use of Grants.gov. Specific questions related to this program solicitation should be referred to the NSF program staff contact(s) listed in Section VIII of this solicitation.

**Submitting the Proposal:** Once all documents have been completed, the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) must submit the application to Grants.gov and verify the desired funding opportunity and agency to which the application is submitted. The AOR must then sign and submit the application to Grants.gov. The completed application will be transferred to Research.gov for further processing.

Proposers that submitted via Research.gov may use Research.gov to verify the status of their submission to NSF. For proposers that submitted via Grants.gov, until an application has been received and validated by NSF, the Authorized Organizational Representative may check the status of an application on Grants.gov. After proposers have received an e-mail notification from NSF, Research.gov should be used to check the status of an application.

## VI. NSF PROPOSAL PROCESSING AND REVIEW PROCEDURES

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Proposals received by NSF are assigned to the appropriate NSF program for acknowledgement and, if they meet NSF requirements, for review. All proposals are carefully reviewed by a scientist, engineer, or educator serving as an NSF Program Officer, and usually by three to ten other persons outside NSF either as *ad hoc* reviewers, panelists, or both, who are experts in the particular fields represented by the proposal. These reviewers are selected by Program Officers charged with oversight of the review process. Proposers are invited to suggest names of persons they believe are especially well qualified to review the proposal and/or persons they would prefer not review the proposal. These suggestions may serve as one source in the reviewer selection process at the Program Officer's discretion. Submission of such names, however, is optional. Care is taken to ensure that reviewers have no conflicts of interest with the proposal. In addition, Program Officers may obtain comments from site visits before recommending final action on proposals. Senior NSF staff further review recommendations for awards. A flowchart that depicts the entire NSF proposal and award process (and associated timeline) is included in PAPPG Exhibit III-1.

A comprehensive description of the Foundation's merit review process is available on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit\\_review/](https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit_review/).

Proposers should also be aware of core strategies that are essential to the fulfillment of NSF's mission, as articulated in *Leading the World in Discovery and Innovation, STEM Talent Development and the Delivery of Benefits from Research - NSF Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years (FY) 2022 - 2026*. These strategies are integrated in the program planning and implementation process, of which proposal review is one part. NSF's mission is particularly well-implemented through the integration of research and education and broadening participation in NSF programs, projects, and activities.

One of the strategic objectives in support of NSF's mission is to foster integration of research and education through the programs, projects, and activities it supports at academic and research institutions. These institutions must recruit, train, and prepare a diverse STEM workforce to advance the frontiers of science and participate in the U.S. technology-based economy. NSF's contribution to the national innovation ecosystem is to provide cutting-edge research under the guidance of the Nation's most creative scientists and engineers. NSF also supports development of a strong science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce by investing in building the knowledge that informs improvements in STEM teaching and learning.

NSF's mission calls for the broadening of opportunities and expanding participation of groups, institutions, and geographic regions that are underrepresented in STEM disciplines, which is essential to the health and vitality of science and engineering. NSF is committed to this principle of diversity and deems it central to the programs, projects, and activities it considers and supports.

### A. Merit Review Principles and Criteria

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The National Science Foundation strives to invest in a robust and diverse portfolio of projects that creates new knowledge and enables breakthroughs in understanding across all areas of science and engineering research and education. To identify which projects to support, NSF relies on a merit review process that incorporates consideration of both the technical aspects of a proposed project and its potential to contribute more broadly to advancing NSF's mission "to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense; and for other purposes." NSF makes every effort to conduct a fair, competitive, transparent merit review process for the selection of projects.

#### 1. Merit Review Principles

These principles are to be given due diligence by PIs and organizations when preparing proposals and managing projects, by reviewers when reading and evaluating proposals, and by NSF program staff when determining whether or not to recommend proposals for funding and while overseeing awards. Given that NSF is the primary federal agency charged with nurturing and supporting excellence in basic research and education, the following three principles apply:

- All NSF projects should be of the highest quality and have the potential to advance, if not transform, the frontiers of knowledge.
- NSF projects, in the aggregate, should contribute more broadly to achieving societal goals. These "Broader Impacts" may be accomplished through the research itself, through activities that are directly related to specific research projects, or through activities that are supported by, but are complementary to, the project. The project activities may be based on previously established and/or innovative methods and approaches, but in either case must be well justified.
- Meaningful assessment and evaluation of NSF funded projects should be based on appropriate metrics, keeping in mind the likely correlation between the effect of broader impacts and the resources provided to implement projects. If the size of the activity is limited, evaluation of that activity in isolation is not likely to be meaningful. Thus, assessing the effectiveness of these activities may best be done at a higher, more aggregated, level than the individual project.

With respect to the third principle, even if assessment of Broader Impacts outcomes for particular projects is done at an aggregated level, PIs are expected to be accountable for carrying out the activities described in the funded project. Thus, individual projects should include clearly stated goals, specific descriptions of the activities that the PI intends to do, and a plan in place to document the outputs of those activities.

These three merit review principles provide the basis for the merit review criteria, as well as a context within which the users of the criteria can better understand their intent.

#### 2. Merit Review Criteria

All NSF proposals are evaluated through use of the two National Science Board approved merit review criteria. In some instances, however, NSF will employ additional criteria as required to highlight the specific objectives of certain programs and activities.

The two merit review criteria are listed below. **Both** criteria are to be given **full consideration** during the review and decision-making processes; each criterion is necessary but neither, by itself, is sufficient. Therefore, proposers must fully address both criteria. (PAPPG Chapter II.D.2.d(i) contains additional information for use by proposers in development of the Project Description section of the proposal). Reviewers are strongly encouraged to review the criteria, including PAPPG Chapter II.D.2.d(i), prior to the review of a proposal.

When evaluating NSF proposals, reviewers will be asked to consider what the proposers want to do, why they want to do it, how they plan to do it, how they will know if they succeed, and what benefits could accrue if the project is successful. These issues apply both to the technical aspects of the proposal and the way in which the project may make broader contributions. To that end, reviewers will be asked to evaluate all proposals against two criteria:

- **Intellectual Merit:** The Intellectual Merit criterion encompasses the potential to advance knowledge; and
- **Broader Impacts:** The Broader Impacts criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired

societal outcomes.

The following elements should be considered in the review for both criteria:

1. What is the potential for the proposed activity to
  - a. Advance knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields (Intellectual Merit); and
  - b. Benefit society or advance desired societal outcomes (Broader Impacts)?
2. To what extent do the proposed activities suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts?
3. Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities well-reasoned, well-organized, and based on a sound rationale? Does the plan incorporate a mechanism to assess success?
4. How well qualified is the individual, team, or organization to conduct the proposed activities?
5. Are there adequate resources available to the PI (either at the home organization or through collaborations) to carry out the proposed activities?

Broader impacts may be accomplished through the research itself, through the activities that are directly related to specific research projects, or through activities that are supported by, but are complementary to, the project. NSF values the advancement of scientific knowledge and activities that contribute to achievement of societally relevant outcomes. Such outcomes include, but are not limited to: full participation of women, persons with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); improved STEM education and educator development at any level; increased public scientific literacy and public engagement with science and technology; improved well-being of individuals in society; development of a diverse, globally competitive STEM workforce; increased partnerships between academia, industry, and others; improved national security; increased economic competitiveness of the United States; and enhanced infrastructure for research and education.

Proposers are reminded that reviewers will also be asked to review the Data Management Plan and the Postdoctoral Researcher Mentoring Plan, as appropriate.

## B. Review and Selection Process

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Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation will be reviewed by Ad hoc Review and/or Panel Review.

Reviewers will be asked to evaluate proposals using two National Science Board approved merit review criteria and, if applicable, additional program specific criteria. A summary rating and accompanying narrative will generally be completed and submitted by each reviewer and/or panel. The Program Officer assigned to manage the proposal's review will consider the advice of reviewers and will formulate a recommendation.

After scientific, technical and programmatic review and consideration of appropriate factors, the NSF Program Officer recommends to the cognizant Division Director whether the proposal should be declined or recommended for award. NSF strives to be able to tell applicants whether their proposals have been declined or recommended for funding within six months. Large or particularly complex proposals or proposals from new awardees may require additional review and processing time. The time interval begins on the deadline or target date, or receipt date, whichever is later. The interval ends when the Division Director acts upon the Program Officer's recommendation.

After programmatic approval has been obtained, the proposals recommended for funding will be forwarded to the Division of Grants and Agreements or the Division of Acquisition and Cooperative Support for review of business, financial, and policy implications. After an administrative review has occurred, Grants and Agreements Officers perform the processing and issuance of a grant or other agreement. Proposers are cautioned that only a Grants and Agreements Officer may make commitments, obligations or awards on behalf of NSF or authorize the expenditure of funds. No commitment on the part of NSF should be inferred from technical or budgetary discussions with a NSF Program Officer. A Principal Investigator or organization that makes financial or personnel commitments in the absence of a grant or cooperative agreement signed by the NSF Grants and Agreements Officer does so at their own risk.

Once an award or declination decision has been made, Principal Investigators are provided feedback about their proposals. In all cases, reviews are treated as confidential documents. Verbatim copies of reviews, excluding the names of the reviewers or any reviewer-identifying information, are sent to the Principal Investigator/Project Director by the Program Officer. In addition, the proposer will receive an explanation of the decision to award or decline funding.

## VII. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

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### A. Notification of the Award

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Notification of the award is made to *the submitting organization* by an NSF Grants and Agreements Officer. Organizations whose proposals are declined will be advised as promptly as possible by the cognizant NSF Program administering the program. Verbatim copies of reviews, not including the identity of the reviewer, will be provided automatically to the Principal Investigator. (See Section VI.B. for additional information on the review process.)

### B. Award Conditions

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An NSF award consists of: (1) the award notice, which includes any special provisions applicable to the award and any numbered amendments thereto; (2) the budget, which indicates the amounts, by categories of expense, on which NSF has based its support (or otherwise communicates any specific approvals or disapprovals of proposed expenditures); (3) the proposal referenced in the award notice; (4) the applicable award conditions, such as Grant General Conditions (GC-1)\*; or Research Terms and Conditions\* and (5) any announcement or other NSF issuance that may be incorporated by reference in the award notice. Cooperative agreements also are administered in accordance with NSF Cooperative Agreement Financial and Administrative Terms and Conditions (CA-FATC) and the applicable Programmatic Terms and Conditions. NSF awards are electronically signed by an NSF Grants and Agreements Officer and transmitted electronically to the organization via e-mail.

\*These documents may be accessed electronically on NSF's Website at [https://www.nsf.gov/awards/managing/award\\_conditions.jsp?org=NSF](https://www.nsf.gov/awards/managing/award_conditions.jsp?org=NSF). Paper copies may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-8134 or by e-mail from [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov).



More comprehensive information on NSF Award Conditions and other important information on the administration of NSF awards is contained in the NSF *Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) Chapter VII, available electronically on the NSF Website at [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).

## Administrative and National Policy Requirements

### Build America, Buy America

As expressed in Executive Order 14005, *Ensuring the Future is Made in All of America by All of America's Workers* (86 FR 7475), it is the policy of the executive branch to use terms and conditions of Federal financial assistance awards to maximize, consistent with law, the use of goods, products, and materials produced in, and services offered in, the United States.

Consistent with the requirements of the Build America, Buy America Act (Pub. L. 117-58, Division G, Title IX, Subtitle A, November 15, 2021), no funding made available through this funding opportunity may be obligated for an award unless all iron, steel, manufactured products, and construction materials used in the project are produced in the United States. For additional information, visit NSF's [Build America, Buy America](#) webpage.

### Special Award Conditions:

**S-STEM-Hub** awardees should plan for a reverse site visit every other year. Reverse site visits will generally occur at the beginning of years 3 and 5 of the award during the PI meeting in Washington D.C. These reviews will focus on accomplishments, challenges, changes in the project, and lessons learned. PIs will be provided with expectations and requirements at least 3 months in advance of the review.

## C. Reporting Requirements

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For all multi-year grants (including both standard and continuing grants), the Principal Investigator must submit an annual project report to the cognizant Program Officer no later than 90 days prior to the end of the current budget period. (Some programs or awards require submission of more frequent project reports). No later than 120 days following expiration of a grant, the PI also is required to submit a final project report, and a project outcomes report for the general public.

Failure to provide the required annual or final project reports, or the project outcomes report, will delay NSF review and processing of any future funding increments as well as any pending proposals for all identified PIs and co-PIs on a given award. PIs should examine the formats of the required reports in advance to assure availability of required data.

PIs are required to use NSF's electronic project-reporting system, available through Research.gov, for preparation and submission of annual and final project reports. Such reports provide information on accomplishments, project participants (individual and organizational), publications, and other specific products and impacts of the project. Submission of the report via Research.gov constitutes certification by the PI that the contents of the report are accurate and complete. The project outcomes report also must be prepared and submitted using Research.gov. This report serves as a brief summary, prepared specifically for the public, of the nature and outcomes of the project. This report will be posted on the NSF website exactly as it is submitted by the PI.

More comprehensive information on NSF Reporting Requirements and other important information on the administration of NSF awards is contained in the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) Chapter VII, available electronically on the NSF Website at [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).

## VIII. AGENCY CONTACTS

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*Please note that the program contact information is current at the time of publishing. See program website for any updates to the points of contact.*

General inquiries regarding this program should be made to:

- Alexandra Medina-Borja, Lead, telephone: (703) 292-7557, email: [amedinab@nsf.gov](mailto:amedinab@nsf.gov)
- Mindy Capaldi, telephone: (703) 292-2994, email: [mcapaldi@nsf.gov](mailto:mcapaldi@nsf.gov)
- Thomas D. Kim, Co-Lead, telephone: (703) 292-4458, email: [tkim@nsf.gov](mailto:tkim@nsf.gov)
- Michael J. Ferrara, Co-Lead, telephone: (703) 292-2635, email: [mferrara@nsf.gov](mailto:mferrara@nsf.gov)

For questions related to the use of NSF systems contact, contact:

- NSF Help Desk: 1-800-673-6188
- Research.gov Help Desk e-mail: [rgov@nsf.gov](mailto:rgov@nsf.gov)

For questions relating to Grants.gov contact:

- Grants.gov Contact Center: If the Authorized Organizational Representatives (AOR) has not received a confirmation message from Grants.gov within 48 hours of submission of application, please contact via telephone: 1-800-518-4726; e-mail: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov).

## IX. OTHER INFORMATION

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The NSF website provides the most comprehensive source of information on NSF Directorates (including contact information), programs and funding

opportunities. Use of this website by potential proposers is strongly encouraged. In addition, "NSF Update" is an information-delivery system designed to keep potential proposers and other interested parties apprised of new NSF funding opportunities and publications, important changes in proposal and award policies and procedures, and upcoming NSF [Grants Conferences](#). Subscribers are informed through e-mail or the user's Web browser each time new publications are issued that match their identified interests. "NSF Update" also is available on [NSF's website](#).

Grants.gov provides an additional electronic capability to search for Federal government-wide grant opportunities. NSF funding opportunities may be accessed via this mechanism. Further information on Grants.gov may be obtained at <https://www.grants.gov>.

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

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The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent Federal agency created by the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended (42 USC 1861-75). The Act states the purpose of the NSF is "to promote the progress of science; [and] to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare by supporting research and education in all fields of science and engineering."

NSF funds research and education in most fields of science and engineering. It does this through grants and cooperative agreements to more than 2,000 colleges, universities, K-12 school systems, businesses, informal science organizations and other research organizations throughout the US. The Foundation accounts for about one-fourth of Federal support to academic institutions for basic research.

NSF receives approximately 55,000 proposals each year for research, education and training projects, of which approximately 11,000 are funded. In addition, the Foundation receives several thousand applications for graduate and postdoctoral fellowships. The agency operates no laboratories itself but does support National Research Centers, user facilities, certain oceanographic vessels and Arctic and Antarctic research stations. The Foundation also supports cooperative research between universities and industry, US participation in international scientific and engineering efforts, and educational activities at every academic level.

*Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASSED)* provide funding for special assistance or equipment to enable persons with disabilities to work on NSF-supported projects. See the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* Chapter II.F.7 for instructions regarding preparation of these types of proposals.

The National Science Foundation has Telephonic Device for the Deaf (TDD) and Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) capabilities that enable individuals with hearing impairments to communicate with the Foundation about NSF programs, employment or general information. TDD may be accessed at (703) 292-5090 and (800) 281-8749, FIRS at (800) 877-8339.

The National Science Foundation Information Center may be reached at (703) 292-5111.

The National Science Foundation promotes and advances scientific progress in the United States by competitively awarding grants and cooperative agreements for research and education in the sciences, mathematics, and engineering.

To get the latest information about program deadlines, to download copies of NSF publications, and to access abstracts of awards, visit the NSF Website at <https://www.nsf.gov>

- **Location:** 2415 Eisenhower Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22314
- **For General Information** (NSF Information Center): (703) 292-5111
- **TDD (for the hearing-impaired):** (703) 292-5090
- **To Order Publications or Forms:**
  - Send an e-mail to: [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov)
  - or telephone: (703) 292-8143
- **To Locate NSF Employees:** (703) 292-5111


## PRIVACY ACT AND PUBLIC BURDEN STATEMENTS

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The information requested on proposal forms and project reports is solicited under the authority of the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended. The information on proposal forms will be used in connection with the selection of qualified proposals; and project reports submitted by awardees will be used for program evaluation and reporting within the Executive Branch and to Congress. The information requested may be disclosed to qualified reviewers and staff assistants as part of the proposal review process; to proposer institutions/grantees to provide or obtain data regarding the proposal review process, award decisions, or the administration of awards; to government contractors, experts, volunteers and researchers and educators as necessary to complete assigned work; to other government agencies or other entities needing information regarding applicants or nominees as part of a joint application review process, or in order to coordinate programs or policy; and to another Federal agency, court, or party in a court or Federal administrative proceeding if the government is a party. Information about Principal Investigators may be added to the Reviewer file and used to select potential candidates to serve as peer reviewers or advisory committee members. See [System of Record Notices](#), NSF-50, "Principal Investigator/Proposal File and Associated Records," and NSF-51, "Reviewer/Proposal File and Associated Records." Submission of the information is voluntary. Failure to provide full and complete information, however, may reduce the possibility of receiving an award.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, an information collection unless it displays a valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 3145-0058. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 120 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions. Send comments regarding the burden estimate and any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to:

Suzanne H. Plimpton  
Reports Clearance Officer  
Policy Office, Division of Institution and Award Support  
Office of Budget, Finance, and Award Management  
National Science Foundation  
Alexandria, VA 22314

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	National Science Foundation, 2415 Eisenhower Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia 22314, USA Tel: (703) 292-5111, FIRS: (800) 877-8339   TDD: (703) 292-5090 or (800) 281-8749					<a href="#">Text Only</a>