Dear Colleague Letter: Planning Proposals for Centers of Research Excellence in Science and Technology (CREST Centers) in Chemistry Research

December 4, 2023

Dear Colleagues:

Consistent with the National Science Foundation's (NSF) efforts to increase diversity in the STEM workforce, the Division of Equity for Excellence in STEM (EES) and the Division of Chemistry (CHE) jointly encourage the submission of planning proposals for a future CREST center proposal with a focus on chemistry research.

The CREST Program supports the creation of research centers that will lead to strong societal impacts through 5-year awards. The projects focus on the enhancement of the research capabilities of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) through the establishment of centers that effectively integrate education and research. CREST Center awards promote the development of new knowledge, the increase in the research productivity of individual faculty, and the expanded engagement of students from backgrounds historically underrepresented in STEM disciplines.

A CREST award is expected to catalyze institutional transformation through the development of research capabilities aligned with the institution’s mission and long-term goals. Demonstrated leadership in the involvement of groups traditionally underrepresented in STEM is expected at all levels – students, postdoctoral researchers when applicable, and faculty. The research activities supported by CREST are expected to enable the full participation of faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates in a nationally competitive research enterprise.

A competitive CREST proposal will include a meaningful, coherent plan for building sustainable research capability. Formulation of such a plan requires time and resources, which may not otherwise be available to some and thus could constitute a barrier to preparing a CREST proposal. Through this Dear Colleague Letter (DCL), EDU/EES and MPS/CHE jointly encourage the submission of planning proposals for CREST centers with a focus on
chemistry research (CREST-CHE), to help mitigate potential barriers to the preparation of competitive CREST proposals for the proposing institutions and PIs.

A CREST center proposal planning award could be used to support initial conceptualization and design of collaborative activities to facilitate the formulation of new and coherent plans for future submission of a CREST center proposal. Anticipated planning activities could include but are not limited to planning visits/meetings within the institution and with partnering institutions to discuss potential collaborations, exchanges to launch/initiate scientific collaboration, strategic planning (including the development of a collaborative research plan), training efforts and infrastructure needs to enable coordination of collaborative efforts, and development of evaluation strategies.

PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION

Proposals must be prepared in accordance with the guidance for Planning Proposals specified in Chapter II.F.1 of the NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG) and submitted through Research.gov. Proposers should select the current PAPPG as the funding opportunity and direct proposals to EDU/EES/Centers for Rsch Excell in S&T.

Interested proposers should follow this guidance closely:

1. The proposal must include a clear statement as to why this project is appropriate for a planning proposal, including how the funds will be used to formulate a sound approach for future submission of a CREST center proposal.
2. The proposal must explain how a competitive research center will be created and sustained.
3. The proposed research should be aligned with research supported by the Division of Chemistry. The PIs are encouraged to outline a vision that simultaneously promotes inclusiveness and research excellence in Chemistry.
4. The Principal Investigator (PI) must hold a faculty appointment at an eligible MSI that awards degrees in chemistry and must be eligible to submit a future CREST center proposal as defined in the recent CREST Centers solicitation.
5. The budget may be up to $100,000/year (including indirect costs) and up to two years in duration.

Prospective PIs must send an initial concept outline (no more than one page) by email no later than March 1, 2024, to one of the Program Officers listed below to verify that the proposal topic fits with the research areas of the Division of Chemistry. An invitation from at least one NSF Program Officer to submit a full planning proposal must be uploaded by the PI in the “Program Officer Concurrence Email” section in Research.gov. Planning proposals submitted in response to this DCL for consideration in FY 2024 are welcome through May 1, 2024, but earlier submission is strongly encouraged.
Please contact the following Program Officers for concept outline submission or any questions regarding this DCL:

- Samy El- Shall (MPS-CHE), selshall@nsf.gov
- Anne-Marie Schmoltner (MPS-CHE), aschmolt@nsf.gov
- Luis Cubano (EDU-EES), lcubano@nsf.gov
- Sonal Dekhane (EDU-EES), sdekhane@nsf.gov

Sincerely,

James L. Moore III  
Assistant Director  
Directorate for STEM Education (EDU)

Denise C. Caldwell  
Acting Assistant Director  
Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences (MPS)