

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
NSF's Response to Hurricane Katrina

Updated!!

These FAQs have been updated to ensure consistency with the NSF implementation of the October 5th OMB/OSTP Joint Announcement entitled, *Hurricane Relief on Federal Research Awards*, and cover areas not *specifically* addressed in that issuance.

General

In general, NSF accepts proposals from, and makes awards to institutions, rather than to individuals. Most of the questions below will ultimately be answered on a case-by-case basis depending on the extent of the impact of hurricane Katrina on both individuals and institutions.

Where the impact of Hurricane Katrina is extensive, including, for example, closure of an institution for an entire term, the answers to the questions will require knowledge of your institution's capabilities. When you contact your program officer or grants officer, please be prepared to answer questions related to your institution's ability to manage financial activities, to include payment of salaries for faculty and graduate students, administration of awards, submission of proposals via FastLane, etc., and when the institution expects to restore such abilities, if not presently available. We can then work with you to determine the best solution to your particular situation.

Preaward

Question: Are there special NSF funding opportunities that have been made available as a result of hurricane Katrina?

Answer: Some NSF programs have instituted special Small Grant for Exploratory Research (SGER) competitions, such as:

Small Grants for Exploratory Research: Hurricane Katrina
<<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2005/nsf05053/nsf05053.jsp>>

Human and Social Dynamics
<http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=nsf05049>
(Note: this competition is now closed.)

PIs should consult the hurricane Katrina page on the NSF website for a listing of Katrina-related funding opportunities at:
<<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/issuances/in129.jsp>>

Otherwise, regular NSF policies and procedures for preparation and submission of a SGER proposal apply and may be found in the NSF Grant Proposal Guide at:
<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/gpg/nsf04_23/2.jsp#IID1>. SGER proposals are for small-scale, exploratory, high-risk research in the fields of science, engineering and education normally supported by NSF may be submitted to individual programs. Such research is characterized as:

- ◆ preliminary work on untested and novel ideas;
- ◆ ventures into emerging and potentially transformative research ideas;
- ◆ application of new expertise or new approaches to "established" research topics;
- ◆ having a severe urgency with regard to availability of, or access to data, facilities or specialized equipment, including quick-response research on natural or anthropogenic disasters and similar unanticipated events; or
- ◆ efforts of similar character likely to catalyze rapid and innovative advances.

Investigators are *strongly encouraged* to contact the NSF program(s) most germane to the proposal topic before submitting an SGER proposal. This will facilitate determining whether the proposed work meets the guidelines described above and availability and appropriateness for SGER funding, or whether the work is more appropriate for submission as a fully reviewed proposal.

Question: Can another institution submit it for me and then transfer it back to my home institution when we are up and running?

Answer:

A researcher's sponsoring institution (current or new host) must submit the proposal in FastLane. You should prepare your proposal in FastLane so that it is ready for submission by the sponsored research office and contact the NSF program office if your institution is unable to submit the proposal by the stated solicitation deadline date.

If you have relocated to another institution that has accepted you as a temporary employee, that institution can submit your proposal. If you were to receive an award at the new institution, it would be up to that institution to decide whether or not to transfer the award at a future date.

Please be reminded that legally the award is made to the institution and not the individual Principal Investigator (PI).

Award and Administration

Question: Is NSF still processing awards to institutions in the affected areas?

Answer: Yes. NSF is continuing to process awards to institutions affected by the Hurricane. However, later start date can be requested by contacting the NSF Program Officer managing your proposal.

Question: My host institution wants to reimburse me for my grant-related travel at this time, with the expectation that my home institution will later make the funds up using the grant money they have received from NSF. This is, in essence, a loan. What do I need to do to make this happen?

Answer: NSF strongly recommends that a PI obtain, in advance, a commitment from their home institution to honor the arrangement (e.g. repay the loan). Without such a commitment, the PI may be held personally liable by the host institution for the loan amount. At minimum, it is recommended that a PI obtain a letter of intent from an

appropriate authority at the home institution. This should be followed up with a formal subcontract agreement between host and home institutions once the situation stabilizes.

Question: Will researchers and institutions in the affected areas have access to their NSF funds while their institutions are closed?

Answer: NSF's Division of Financial Management will work with the affected institution's administrative staff on a case-by-case basis to expedite payments. Possible actions may include adding new institutional administrative staff as financial functions users as well as the transfer of NSF awards to new institutions. The Foundation is not able to directly pay researchers on NSF awards.

Question: Will NSF consider making supplements to institutions that are serving as hosts to faculty from institutions affected by the hurricane?

Answer: Yes, NSF will consider requests for small amounts of supplemental funding to existing awards from institutions that are serving as hosts to displaced faculty. Such funding requests however, will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Factors to be considered by NSF include the viability and benefit of the work to be performed by the guest faculty member as it relates to the award to be supplemented and the availability of funds. The program officer for the host institution's award and the affected scientists all should be involved in the discussions. Such supplemental funding requests must be submitted electronically via the NSF Fastlane system at <http://fastlane.nsf.gov>

Contact your cognizant program officer to discuss the details.

Question: I am a PI at an institution affected by hurricane Katrina. I will be unable to conduct my NSF research grant at my home institution for an indefinite period. A colleague at another institution conducting similar research has offered to allow me use of their lab and facilities. Use of this lab space, however, will require that I relocate. What types of costs involved in making the transition would be considered allowable charges to my NSF grant?

Answer: All costs charged to the NSF award must continue to meet the OMB regulatory and NSF agency specific grant terms and conditions and comply with the awardee institutional policies. The circumstances, however, also must be considered in light of NSF's commitment to ensure the continuity of the research and education projects we support. Therefore, in addition to the costs normally considered allowable, NSF would consider:

- 1) Travel costs for the PI and Graduate students to travel to the new institution;
- 2) Transportation of samples, materials and supplies, equipment, and other items necessary to conduct the research; and,
- 3) A temporary housing or lodging allowance until they are relocated.

Where possible, PIs should attempt to have their home organization transfer the award to the new institution for administrative purposes before charging any of these costs to the award and NSF will expedite such transfers. If there are concerns with PI's and faculty tenure, fringe benefits, etc., the host institution can subcontract for their effort with the previous organization. All costs incurred are subject to the limitation of funds provided.

Question: Can supplements be used to relocate students to other labs? What about coordination with the National Labs, such as Argonne?

Answer: Requests for supplements should be discussed with the NSF program officer and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The program officer may be aware of institutions and laboratories with available lab equipment and space that have indicated a willingness to serve as "hosts" during this period. The DOE website (www.doe.gov) has information on DOE activities to assist researchers impacted by Katrina including a visiting scientist activity at National Labs.

Question: It is not yet clear when it will be possible for faculty to return to institutions located in New Orleans. Does NSF expect us to get back to the program officer within some specific amount of time?

Answer: Each investigator should contact his or her program officer as soon as feasible to discuss how each NSF-supported project has been impacted. No specific timeframe has been established.

Students

Graduate students and postdoctoral researchers may also contact NSF program officers regarding their situations. They should make every attempt to contact the principal investigator of the award from which they are funded. The institutional contact information provided above may be useful to such individuals, as many are collecting contact information for faculty and students. The following questions and answers provide basic information for graduate students and postdocs.

Question: Some graduate students at an institution affected by the Hurricane are funded as part of an NSF grant. Are the students able to transfer their NSF funds to another institution?

Answer: No, the funds remain with the institution that received the NSF award. However, upon request NSF will grant a no-cost extension to help defer the research activity until the institution is able to reopen or is capable of making operating decisions for their sponsored activities.

If a researcher's project is transferred to another institution, the researcher is encouraged to bring their graduate students with them to the new institution so that they can continue to participate in the activity. Support for those graduate students can then be included in the institutional transfer or subaward arrangement supporting the research.

Question: I have an NSF fellowship award and my institution is now closed as a result of the hurricane? What do I need to do?

Answer: If the fellowship award was made to your institution, you should contact both the Coordinating Official at your institution (if possible) and the NSF Program Officer to discuss the parameters of the fellowship program. If the fellowship was awarded to you as an individual, you should contact your NSF Program Officer to determine what is possible if you are accepted into a new institution.

Question: Can I transfer my NSF fellowship award to a new institution since my institution is closed for a semester?

Answer: Fellowship funds awarded to a university on behalf of the student cannot be transferred to a new institution since the award is made to the institution. NSF, however, will certainly consider no cost extensions to help defer sponsored activities.

If the fellowship was awarded to you as an individual, please contact your NSF Program Officer to determine what is possible if you are accepted into a new institution.

Program Specific

Question: Should the state Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) offices be used as the way to coordinate information and researcher concerns in each affected state?

Answer: Because of their designated role in assessing and enhancing infrastructure for their state's research enterprise, the EPSCoR Offices in the three affected jurisdictions (Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama) are well positioned to perform the coordination effort. The decision to engage in this state-wide coordination activity rests with the EPSCoR Office in each state and ultimately depends on the availability of necessary human and financial resources. Recent discussions between the NSF EPSCoR Office and the EPSCoR leadership in these three states have revealed that they are already embarked on an effective and timely evaluation of damages to research infrastructure, both human and physical. Furthermore, each of these state EPSCoR Offices has already established a strong collaborative network that includes universities, colleges, private sector partners, relevant local/state governmental officials, and the NSF EPSCoR Office
<<http://www.nsf.gov/div/index.jsp?div=EPSCOR>>.>

This network could now be used by the state EPSCoR Offices to collect the relevant information, to establish investment priorities, to work with the NSF EPSCoR Office in determining the subset of infrastructure needs that are linked to NSF-related projects and people, and to distribute potential infrastructure rebuilding support via a coordinated and efficient process. Utilization of the state EPSCoR Offices would ensure that those research communities most affected by Hurricane Katrina have a defined pathway for participating in the concomitant discussions, assessments, and decisions.

Question: How will NSF handle existing REU site awards to institutions affected by the hurricane? These sites may need to be moved or extended for a year until everyone can get organized.

Answer: PIs should contact the NSF program officer to discuss the specific situation. Both of the alternatives mentioned above may be acceptable.