

CAREER Heads-Up: Don't let this happen to you

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In recent months, we have been hearing many heartbreaking stories of proposals to NSF being returned without review because of compliance issues. While there have always been some such incidences, based on anecdotal evidence, there recently seems to be a notable increase in the number of returned proposals. Part of this problem seems to be changes in recent revisions of the [Grant Proposal Guide](#), of which many PIs are still unaware. Another contributor may be an increased alacrity in enforcement (perhaps influenced by relatively inflexible computer programs being used to check for compliance) and NSF's decreased willingness to let non-compliant proposals go through.

With thousands of CAREER proposals being submitted in July, many of which are from first-time NSF PIs or PIs who have not submitted to NSF in the last year, there is a danger of even more sad stories of proposals being returned without review. Don't let this happen to you! Here are several commonly overlooked changes of which you should be aware:

- **New collaboration letter requirements for CAREER:** This year, CAREER letters of collaboration may only be *one sentence long*. The wording, provided in this year's CAREER solicitation, is:
"If the proposal submitted by Dr. [insert the full name of the Principal Investigator] entitled [insert the proposal title] is selected for funding by the NSF, it is my intent to collaborate and/or commit resources as detailed in the Project Description."
Ask your collaborator to fill in these blanks, print this out on her/his letterhead and sign it. This letter (*with no additional wording*) should then be submitted in Supplementary Documents. You will need to describe the details of the collaboration in the text of your Project Description. Note that this applies only to the Letters of Collaboration *not* the Departmental Letter, which is still 2 pages long with requirements listed in the solicitation.
- **Results of Prior NSF Support:** If you have been supported by NSF funding in the last 5 years in any capacity (not just as PI or co-PI), you must include "Results of Prior NSF Support" as part of your 15-page Project Description. If you've been involved in more than one project, you may choose the one that is most relevant to your CAREER proposal. When describing those results, individually label "*Intellectual Merit*" and "*Broader Impacts.*" We heard the story of a well-funded PI who recently had his proposal returned without review because he used the headings, "IM" and "BI" to save space. You also need to be sure to cite all publications and products that came out of that project. There are a number of other requirements, so check the [Prior NSF Support](#) guidance in the most recent Grant Proposal Guide and be sure to follow these instructions *to the letter!* If you haven't had prior NSF funding, it's safest to include a short statement to that effect in your Project Description.
- **Broader Impacts of Proposed Work:** You must include a separate, titled section called "Broader Impacts of Proposed Work." We recently heard of a PI who had problems because he titled his section "Broader Impacts of Proposed Activities" in compliance with the

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wording in a previous version of the GPG, so it's safest to ***use those exact words***. Some CAREER PIs put that heading over the entire Education section, but we think it's a better idea to include a separate labeled "Broader Impacts of Proposed Work" section that summarizes the broader impacts of both the research plan and the education plan. This will provide a helpful and easy-to-locate summary for your reviewers.

- **Include Unfunded Collaborations and Other Resources in "Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources"**: This includes collaborations for which you included a Letter of Collaboration as well as other resources that aren't included in the budget, for example, a student who will work on your project who is supported by a departmental fellowship.
- **References Cited Instructions**: In recent years, NSF has become stricter about what must be included in your cited references. Remember that this section is not included in your 15 pages, and there is not a page limit for references in the CAREER. You must include all authors in the sequence in which they appear in the publication, the article and journal title, book title volume number, page numbers (beginning and ending) and year of publication. If the publication is available electronically, include the website address.
- **Don't include urls in the Project Description**: You may cite a website just as you would a journal article and include the url in the References Cited section, but **don't** include the url within the 15-page Project Description.
- **Follow biosketch formatting requirements exactly**: We heard of a PI who had his proposal returned without review because he accidentally included eleven publications instead of the specified ten. Follow all of the [requirements](#) to the letter!

If you're unclear about any of the proposal requirements, remember that the CAREER solicitation is your first guide, and then anything not addressed in the solicitation is covered by the Dec. 2014 Grant Proposal Guide. If you're still not sure about an issue, contact your pre-award office. If you still need clarification, you can contact NSF directly.