NSF Proposal Preparation FAQs

In August 2020, the National Science Foundation issued a set of [Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on proposal preparation and award administration](#) related to [NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG) (NSF 20-1)](#). The following FAQs address additional common questions as a supplement to that document.

Can I submit my proposal to multiple programs within NSF for simultaneous review?

Only one submission should be provided to NSF even if review by multiple programs is envisioned. Proposers may indicate on the Cover Sheet which NSF organizational unit(s) they believe would be most appropriate for proposal review. However, NSF will determine which program will evaluate each proposal. The submission of duplicate or substantially similar proposals concurrently for review by more than one program without prior NSF approval may result in the return of the redundant proposal(s).

Can I submit my proposal to other potential funders while it is under review at NSF?

Generally, proposals may be submitted to other agencies for simultaneous review; however, there are exceptions (e.g., research proposals to the Biological Science Directorate).

Should my Broader Impacts sections in my Project Description match the Broader Impacts section in my one-page Project Summary?

The Broader Impacts section in your Project Description should thoroughly address the merit review criteria. It should not be a cut-and-paste from the Project Summary. Note that successful proposals often combine several different Broader Impacts approaches and target several different outcomes. For example, a researcher might describe the potential impact of the research itself on a particular industry but also involve undergraduates from underrepresented backgrounds in the research through a Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program and run educational workshops on their research topic for high-school women. However, if in doubt, focus on one or two areas to do well rather than trying to touch on all or multiple areas.

Can I include Letters of Collaboration in my proposal? What about Letters of Support? What's the difference?

Letters of Collaboration should use template language (see [NSF Standard Grant Proposal Outline](#)) and must not recommend or endorse the PI or project. All relevant collaborative activities (e.g., intellectual contributions to the project, permission to access a site or use an instrument, offer to furnish samples /materials for research, logistical support, mentoring U.S. students at a foreign site) should be described in the Project Description or in the Facilities statement.

Letters of Support are endorsement and are not allowed.

In the Budget Justification, how much detail for travel costs is required? NSF guidance says "itemized, specified, and justified." Does this mean breakdowns including airfare, hotel, per diem, etc.?

Reviewers pay attention to the budget, so being specific is important; however, be realistic. For instance, it is likely reasonable to calculate and itemize airfare, hotel, and per diem for next-year travel and generalize similar travel planned for three years from now. Also, discipline matters: If you are proposing project costs that are unusual in a certain area (e.g., fieldwork in an Engineering proposal), be especially clear and specific.

Should I include the optional List of Suggested Reviewers or Reviewers Not to Include form in my application?

A list of suggested reviewers (along with their contact information) is optional but important and helpful, especially for multidisciplinary proposals. Consider including a list of eight or more eligible suggested reviewers. Be sure that none of them have conflicts of interest with your proposal (e.g., spouse or relative, collaborators and co-editors, thesis advisor, institutional conflicts). Think about including newer faculty members and experienced post-doctoral scholars who have a deep and current understanding of the topic; Program Directors probably know the "household names" in the field, but may not be aware of those individuals. And don't put this task off to the end of proposal preparation when you may be pushing to meet the submission deadline. Think of suggesting reviewers as part of the process of preparing the best proposal you can. If you take advantage of this opportunity to help yourself you will also assist NSF Program Directors in their role of providing the highest quality merit review of your proposal.

References

[NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide](#)

[NSF Grants Conference, Fall 2019](#)