# NSF General Guidelines

## About

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent Federal agency created by Congress in 1950 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 encourages institutions of higher education (IHEs) that enroll, educate, graduate, and employ individuals who are members of groups underrepresented and/or underserved in STEM education programs and careers to lead, partner, and contribute to NSF opportunities, including leading and designing STEM research and education proposals for funding.

Learn more: [Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG)](#)

## Helpful Links

- [Research.gov](#)
- [Preparing Your Proposal Budget](#)
- [Allowability of Costs](#)
- [SciENcv](#)
- [Documents Required for Senior Personnel](#)
- [Preparing Your Data Management Plan](#)
- [Research Involving Vertebrate Animals](#)
- [Research Involving Human Subjects](#)

## General Information

*Some NSF programs have program solicitations that modify the general provisions of the PAPPG, and, in such cases, the guidelines provided in the solicitation must be followed. A full research proposal must contain the following sections. Note that the NSF Grants.gov Application Guide may use different naming conventions, and sections may appear in a different order than in Research.gov, however, the content is the same.*

| Types of Submissions | |
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| *Concept Outlines* | Some NSF proposal types, or funding opportunities, may require submission of a concept outline prior to submission of a full proposal. A concept outline is a concise summary of a project idea that contains information about the prospective PI(s), potentially germane NSF organizational unit(s), project title, keywords, and brief narrative |

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| | | descriptions of the idea and fit to any special criteria required for the proposal type or funding opportunity.<br><br>The primary purposes of requiring a concept outline are to ensure that the concept being proposed by the prospective PI is appropriate for the proposal type/funding opportunity, and to help reduce the administrative burden associated with submission of a full proposal. Concept outlines are considered by cognizant NSF program officers to determine the appropriateness of the work to the proposal type/funding opportunity. |
| | *Letters of Intent (LOI)* | Some NSF program solicitations require or request submission of an LOI in advance of submission of a full proposal. An LOI is not a binding document. The predominant reason for its use is to help NSF program staff gauge the size and range of the competition, enabling earlier selection and better management of reviewers and panelists.<br><br>An LOI normally contains the PI's names, a proposed title, a list of possible participating organizations (if applicable), and a synopsis of one page that describes the work in sufficient detail to permit an appropriate selection of reviewers. |
| | *Preliminary Proposals* | Some NSF program solicitations require or request submission of a preliminary proposal in advance of submission of a full proposal.<br><br>The NSF program solicitation will specify content and submission requirements when preliminary proposals are to be used. |
| | *Full Proposals* | The full proposal should present the (1) objectives and scientific, engineering, or educational significance of the proposed work; (2) suitability of the methods to be employed; (3) qualifications of the investigator and the recipient organization; (4) effect of the activity on the infrastructure of science, engineering, and education, if applicable; and (5) amount of funding required. It should present the intellectual merit and broader impacts of the proposed project clearly and should be prepared with the care and thoroughness of a paper submitted for publication. |

| When to Submit Proposals | |
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| *Target Dates* | Dates after which proposals will still be accepted, although they may miss a particular panel or committee meeting. |
| *Deadline Dates* | Dates after which proposals will not be accepted or will be returned without review by NSF. |

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| *Submission Windows* | Designated periods of time during which proposals will be accepted for review by NSF. It is NSF's policy that the end date of a submission window converts to, and is subject to, the same policies as a deadline date. |

## Uploaded Documents

*\*Some NSF programs have program solicitations that modify the general provisions of the PAPPG, and, in such cases, the guidelines provided in the solicitation must be followed. A full research proposal must contain the following sections. Note that the NSF Grants.gov Application Guide may use different naming conventions, and sections may appear in a different order than in Research.gov, however, the content is the same.*

| Project Information | | |
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| *Cover Sheet* | The Cover Sheet data elements are as follows: | |
| | Requested Start Date | Required |
| | Proposal Duration | Required |
| | Related LOI ID # | As applicable |
| | Related Preliminary Proposal | As applicable |
| | Prime Organization | Required |
| | Primary Place of Performance | Required |
| | Other Federal Agencies | As applicable |
| | Other Information | As applicable |
| *Project Summary* | 4,600-character limit | Required |
| *Table of Contents* | A table of contents is automatically generated for the proposal and cannot be edited. | Required |
| *Project Description* | 15-page maximum | Required |
| *References Cited* | No page restriction | Required |
| *Budget and Budget Justification* | 5-page maximum for Budget Justification | Required |
| *Facilities, Equipment, and Other Resources* | No page restriction | Required |
| *Data Management Plan* | 2-page maximum | Required |
| *Special Information and Supplementary Documentation* | No page restriction | As applicable |

| Senior/Key Personnel |
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| As part of the proposal preparation and submission process, all senior personnel identified on a proposal are required to submit the following information to assist reviewers and program staff in making informed recommendations and funding decisions. |

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| *Biographical Sketch* | 3-page maximum | [Required to use SciENcv Template](#) |
| *Current & Pending Support* | No page restriction | [Required to use SciENcv Template](#) |
| *Collaborators and Other Affiliations (COA)* | No page restriction | [Required to use NSF COA Excel Template](#) |