



**NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION**  
2415 EISENHOWER AVENUE  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

**NSF 23-128**

## Dear Colleague Letter: U.S.-UK Research Collaboration under the NSF-UKRI/Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council Lead Agency Opportunity

---

June 30, 2023

Dear Colleague:

The U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Research Cooperation. The MOU provides an overarching framework to encourage collaboration between U.S. and UK research communities and sets out the principles by which jointly supported activities might be developed. The MOU allows for a lead agency opportunity whereby a single international collaborative proposal may be submitted to either NSF or UKRI.

NSF and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) of UKRI are pleased to announce their continued and expanded support of international collaboration under this NSF-EPSRC Lead Agency Opportunity. The goal of this activity is to promote transatlantic collaborative research by reducing some of the barriers to conducting international research that researchers may encounter. The NSF-EPSRC Lead Agency Opportunity allows U.S. and UK researchers to submit a single collaborative proposal that will undergo a single review process. This document provides guidelines for the preparation, submission, review, and award of joint NSF-EPSRC proposals.

Under the NSF-EPSRC Lead Agency Opportunity, proposals may be accepted for collaborative research in areas at the intersection of participating NSF units and EPSRC:

### **NSF**

---

- Directorate for Engineering
  - Division of Chemical, Bioengineering, Environmental and Transport Systems
  - Division of Civil, Mechanical and Manufacturing Innovation
  - Division of Electrical, Communications and Cyber Systems
  - Office of Emerging Frontiers and Multidisciplinary Activities

- Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences
  - Division of Mathematical Sciences
  - Division of Physics
  - Division of Chemistry
- Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering
  - Division of Computing and Communication Foundations
  - Division of Computer and Network Systems
  - Division of Information and Intelligent Systems
  - Office of Advanced Cyberinfrastructure

## UKRI EPSRC

---

- All EPSRC Themes – through the responsive mode funding route

A list of specific participating NSF programs can be found on the NSF Office of International Science and Engineering (OISE) website at

<https://www.nsf.gov/od/oise/IntlCollaborations/UK.jsp>.

Information on NSF-UKRI collaborations for the NSF Directorates of Geosciences, Biological Sciences, and Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences can also be found at

<https://www.nsf.gov/od/oise/IntlCollaborations/UK.jsp>.

Proposers should review the NSF and EPSRC programs for further information on what areas of research are eligible for support through this activity. Proposals are expected to adhere to typical proposal sizes and durations for the relevant NSF and EPSRC programs from which funding is sought. Proposers submitting to NSF are strongly encouraged to contact cognizant Program Director(s) to ensure the proposal aligns with the goals and requirements of the program prior to submission. Proposals will be accepted for both interdisciplinary and disciplinary research projects.

*Proposers are advised that all documents submitted to NSF or EPSRC may be shared by other secure electronic means among the participating NSF and EPSRC units.*

## PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION

---

Proposers submitting to the NSF Directorate for Engineering must follow the instructions provided in the NSF Engineering–UKRI Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council Lead Agency Opportunity solicitation instead of the instructions provided in this DCL. Solicitation information is located at <https://www.nsf.gov/od/oise/IntlCollaborations/UK.jsp>.

All proposals must fall within the mission and funding parameters of NSF and EPSRC. Proposals that do not fall within the missions of both funding organizations will not be considered.

There is a two-stage application process, as described below. Stage 1 must be completed prior to Stage 2.

### **STAGE 1: EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)**

1. Before submitting a proposal, proposers should identify a prospective lead agency (either NSF or EPSRC) based on where the largest proportion of research lies (typically from which agency the greater amount of funding is to be requested).
2. At least 3 months in advance of the date the applicants expect to submit a formal proposal, proposers must submit an EOI containing the information below to their prospective lead agency. Proposers must use the EOI form available at <https://www.nsf.gov/od/oise/IntlCollaborations/UK.jsp> to submit the required information. If this communication does not take place, the formally submitted proposal will be returned without review. Proposers are strongly encouraged to make note of any program deadlines and submit the Expression of Interest to allow sufficient time for response from the lead agency and submission of the full proposal.
  - o Project Title
  - o Clear indication of the target NSF Directorate, Division and Program and the target UKRI-EPSRC Theme and Research Area for the proposed topic. This may not be the only NSF program or EPSRC Theme that will consider the topic, but it allows for faster review of the topic.
  - o Summary of the proposed research outlining specific objectives, methods, approaches, main research challenges, and anticipated outputs, impacts, and beneficiaries. A clear breakdown of the individual UK and U.S. contributions for each objective must be included.
  - o Names, email addresses, and departmental and institutional affiliations of the researchers.
  - o Bottom line estimates of total funding (including indirect costs) and duration to be requested from NSF and EPSRC. Although a detailed budget is not required at this time, we strongly encourage proposers to submit as accurate a bottom-line funding estimate as possible. It is advisable for proposers to consult with their institution's Office of Sponsored Research for budget advice prior to finalizing a bottom-line estimate.
  - o Full proposal budgets should not vary from those specified in the EOI by more than 10% and any such changes should be fully justified. It is recommended that proposers speak with the cognizant program director regarding any changes.
  - o For the U.S. contribution only, an estimate of the number of U.S. graduate students and/or postdoctoral researchers supported by the project budget (if any) and the number of summer months' salary support to be requested per U.S. investigator per year. Each NSF program may negotiate the level of U.S. postdoctoral researcher engagement in the project.

The EOI summary of research should not exceed 5000 characters, including spaces. In some cases, a PDF fillable form format will be used to request this information. In such cases, the individual announcement to the community for the participating programs will indicate this format.

If NSF is the lead agency, proposers should email the EOI to the appropriate email below based on the NSF Directorate and Division under which the program is housed, with copy to the cognizant program director:

- Directorate for Engineering: [engukri@nsf.gov](mailto:engukri@nsf.gov)
- Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences
  - Division of Mathematical Sciences: [DMS-EPSRC@nsf.gov](mailto:DMS-EPSRC@nsf.gov)
  - Division of Physics: [acronin@nsf.gov](mailto:acronin@nsf.gov)
  - Division of Chemistry: [che-epsrc@nsf.gov](mailto:che-epsrc@nsf.gov)
- Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering: [CISE\\_UKRI@nsf.gov](mailto:CISE_UKRI@nsf.gov)

If EPSRC is the lead agency, EPSRC requires proposers to submit the EOI using the Smart Survey found at <https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/about/partner/international/agreements/nsf/>.

The Lead Agency will share all EOIs with the non-Lead Agency to check eligibility, i.e., whether the proposed research is within both agencies' missions, whether the proposing organizations meet agency eligibility requirements, and whether the proposed research budgets are appropriate for the respective agencies. Upon confirmation from NSF and EPSRC that the proposed research as described in the EOI is appropriate for the Lead Agency Opportunity, NSF and EPSRC will decide which agency will act as lead. The Lead Agency will aim to contact the proposers within 30 days of receipt of the EOI to inform them whether the proposed research as described in the EOI is appropriate for the Lead Agency Opportunity. Full research proposals are expected to be received at the Lead Agency within 3 months of this notification, or NSF and EPSRC may require a new EOI.

## **STAGE 2: FULL PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

If NSF is the lead agency:

- Proposals must be submitted to a participating NSF program or program solicitation using Research.gov (<https://www.research.gov>), or Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>). Proposals must be submitted in accordance with the standard requirements described in the NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG) and comply with requirements in the relevant programs' solicitation. Where programs have a solicitation, the requirements in the solicitation take precedence over those listed in the PAPPG.

- NSF requires proposers to comply with program submission deadlines/target dates.
- The proposal should indicate it is to be considered under this Lead Agency Opportunity by prefacing the title with "[NSF Directorate/Division]-EPSRC" after any solicitation specific title requirements, if applicable.
- The proposal should only indicate the U.S. expenses on the NSF Budget Form. A detailed breakdown of funding requested from EPSRC, using the EPSRC cost form, should be added to the proposal as a Supplementary Document. This document is to be shared with EPSRC to verify eligibility of costs requested. The Budget Justification section of the proposal should address the full project budget (that is, both the U.S. and UK funding items).
- For proposals submitted to NSF, UK personnel should be listed as "non-NSF funded collaborators." This listing is for administrative purposes and is not intended to characterize the level or value of the contribution of UK personnel to the project. Guidance specific to "non-NSF funded collaborators" is as follows:
  - Biographical Sketch – Required. The biographical information must be clearly identified as "non-NSF funded collaborators" biographical information and uploaded as a single PDF file in the Other Supplementary Documents section of the proposal. Use of a specific format is not required except in specific cases when the individual announcement to the community for the participating programs will indicate a required NSF format.
  - Collaborators and Other Affiliations (COA) Information – Optional but requested. The COA information should be provided through the use of the COA template, identified as "non-NSF funded collaborators" COA information, and uploaded as a PDF file in the Single Copy Documents section of the proposal. In some specific cases, the individual announcement to the community for the participating programs will indicate that the COA information will be required for UK personnel, rather than just optional.
  - Current and Pending Support – Not required.
  - Results of Prior Research – Not required.

If EPSRC is the lead agency:

- Proposers are expected to comply with the proposal preparation requirements outlined in EPSRC's guidance for applicants and proposals should be submitted via the Funding Service (through EPSRC responsive mode working with overseas scientists call).
- The proposal should indicate it is to be considered under this Lead Agency Opportunity- by prefacing the title with "[NSF Directorate/Division]-EPSRC".
- The proposal should only request the UK expenses in the cost table. The U.S. collaborating research organizations should be included as project partners in the application, and the funding totals for the US research organization should be included as project partner contributions. The resources and cost justification should include a

clear summary and justification of the U.S. costs sought from NSF as well as the funding sought from EPSRC. In addition, a detailed breakdown of funding requested from NSF should be submitted to EPSRC as an additional Attachment. The latter document will be shared with NSF to verify eligibility of costs requested.

Proposals that request duplicative funding from NSF and EPSRC may be returned without review.

## **PEER REVIEW**

---

Collaborative proposals under this Lead Agency Opportunity will be reviewed alongside all other unsolicited or standard research grant proposals received in the same funding round or call and will not undergo a special or separate review process.

Proposals will be reviewed in accordance with the lead agency's review criteria. While not identical, NSF and UKRI ask reviewers to evaluate research on both its scientific or intellectual merit as well as its broader or societal impacts.

## **FUNDING DECISIONS**

---

The lead agency will use its usual internal procedures to determine whether a proposal will be awarded or declined. Funding decisions may be subject to budget limits.

All proposers will be advised whether their proposal has been recommended for funding or will be declined by the Lead Agency. Proposers will receive copies of the reviewers' unattributed comments and, where applicable, a panel summary.

Once a proposer has been notified of a pending award, the non-lead researcher(s) associated with the project must submit a copy of the proposal to the non-lead agency so that each agency has complete documentation of the overall proposed research project. Further guidance will be provided to successful proposers at this stage.

NSF and EPSRC will coordinate award timing as much as possible, but because of different funding cycles, it is possible that some projects will have delayed start dates to wait until funds become available or until all pre-award requirements are met. Wherever possible, NSF and EPSRC will endeavor to hold standard turnaround times for each participating agency. In exceptional circumstances outcomes could be delayed.

## **POST AWARD CONSIDERATIONS**

---

Awardees are expected to comply with the award conditions and reporting requirements of the agency from which they receive funding.

Awardees are required to acknowledge NSF and EPSRC in any reports or publications

arising from the grant.

NSF and EPSRC will consider requests for extensions using standard procedures.

All NSF and EPSRC requirements for data storage are applicable to investigators funded by their respective agencies.

For projects involving human subjects/participants or animals, proposers will be required to adhere to the published policies and guidelines concerning research ethics and must have requisite institutional approvals or exemptions in place prior to any potential award.

## **RESUBMISSIONS**

---

Should a proposal be declined for funding, proposers should follow these guidelines on resubmission:

- Applicants wishing to resubmit should refer to both NSF and EPSRC resubmission guidelines.
- Proposers should submit a new EOI at least 3 months in advance of resubmitting a full proposal. The EOI should clearly indicate that it is a resubmission and describe the changes made. NSF and EPSRC reserve the right to reject an EOI that does not meet their resubmission criteria.
- If applicants wish to change the Lead Agency role for the resubmission, they must provide a strong justification for doing so in the EOI. NSF and EPSRC will decide which agency should lead when inviting a full proposal.
- Resubmissions that do not follow this process will be rejected.

## **RAPID REPOSE PROPOSALS**

---

The NSF Directorate for Engineering and relevant units of EPSRC plan to accept joint proposals for which there is 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. These mechanisms include NSF Grants for Rapid Response Research (RAPID) and EPSRC Urgency Funding.

The opportunity to submit RAPID/Urgency Funding proposals will not be advertised in standard calls to the community under this Lead Agency Opportunity but may be referenced in special calls, should the need arise.

Sincerely,

Sean Jones

Assistant Director, Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences

Susan Margulies  
Assistant Director, Directorate for Engineering

Margaret Martonosi  
Assistant Director, Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering

Kendra Sharp  
Office Head, Office of International Science and Engineering