

## **Basic Requirements for NSF Proposals**

**Electronic Requirements** – All proposals to NSF must be submitted electronically via the NSF FastLane System. Rensselaer is registered and has authorized the appropriate RA&F staff to submit proposals utilizing this system. In order to submit a proposal through the FastLane, the PI and Co-PIs must be registered users. The PI is responsible for initiating the proposal in the FastLane and must provide access to RA&F in order to complete the administrative portions and submit the proposal to NSF. If you need to have an NSF FastLane account set up or need help utilizing the system, please contact Pat Gray ([grayp@rpi.edu](mailto:grayp@rpi.edu)) for assistance.

**Format of the Proposal** – FastLane does not automatically paginate a proposal; each section of the proposal that is uploaded as a file must be individually paginated prior to upload to the electronic system. The proposal must be clear, readily legible, and conform to the following four requirements: (1) an Arial, Courier New or Palatino Linotype at a font size of 10 points or larger, Times New Roman at a font size of 11 points or larger; or Computer Modern family of fonts at a font size of 11 points or larger must be used; (2) the margins must be at least one inch on all sides; (3) no more than 6 lines of type within a vertical space of 1 inch. (4) A font size of less than 10 points may be used for mathematical formulas or equations, figure, table or diagram captions and when using a Symbol font to insert Greek letters or special characters. PIs are cautioned, however, that the text must still be readable. A standard, single-column format should be used in the body of the proposal. **Failure to submit all required sections of the proposal may result in the proposal being returned without review. In addition, for collaborative proposals all components must meet established deadline or risk being returned without review.**

**Information About Principal Investigators/Project Directors and Co-Principal Investigators** – this form gathers information relative to gender, race, ethnicity and disability status of individuals named as PIs/co-PIs. Submission of this information is voluntary and if you do not wish to provide the personal information, you should check the box(es) provided for that purpose. The information requested about current or previous Federal research support and the names of the PIs/Co-PIs is required.

**Cover Sheet** – In order to be sure that your proposal is reviewed by the proper NSF program, the applicable program announcement/solicitation and the program(s) you wish to have the proposal directed to must be selected on the cover page.

**Project Summary** – This portion of the proposal should be a summary of the proposed activity suitable for publication and not more than one page in length. The Project Summary must clearly address (within the one page limit) the intellectual merit of and the broader impacts resulting from the proposal activity. Proposals that do not separately address both merit review criteria within the one-page Project Summary will be returned without review. **The use of separate headings for both the intellectual merit and broader impacts in the one page Project Summary is encouraged.**

**Project Description** – The Project Description (including the Results from Prior NSF Support, which is limited to five pages) may not exceed 15 pages. Visual materials, including

charts, graphs, maps, photographs and other pictorial presentations are included in the 15-page limitation. **Conformance to the 15 page limit will be strictly enforced and may not be exceeded unless a deviation has been specifically authorized in writing by NSF.** The Project Description must be self contained and URLs that provide information related to the proposal should not be used because 1) the information could circumvent the page limitations; 2) the reviewers are under no obligation to view the sites; and 3) the sites could be altered or abolished between the time of submission and the time of review.

References Cited – Reference information is required and must include the names of all authors (in the same sequence in which they appear in the publication), the article and journal title, book title, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication. Also, the use of et. al. is not allowed. There is no established page limitation for the references, however, this section must include bibliographic citations only and must not be used to provide parenthetical information outside of the 15-page project description.

Biographical Sketches – A biographical sketch is limited to two pages and is required for each individual identified as senior project personnel. The bio should not include personal information such as home address or telephone, date of birth, citizenship, marital status, hobbies, etc. The following information must be provided in the order specified: (a) Professional Preparation (undergraduate and graduate education); (b) Appointments; (c) Publications (up to five closely related and 5 other significant publications); (d) Synergistic Activities (up to 5); and (e) Collaborators and Other Affiliations.

Budget and Budget Justification – Each proposal must contain a budget for each year of support requested and the amounts for each budget line item should be documented and justified in the budget justification. The budget justification should be no more than three pages and should provide detail for each of the items requested on the budget.

Cost Sharing - NSF will only require cost sharing on several major programs. **The inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing on all other solicited and unsolicited proposals is prohibited.** In order to assess the scope of the project, all organizational resources necessary for the project must be described in the Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources section. The description should be narrative in nature **and must not include any quantifiable financial information.** This section should include a comprehensive description of all resources (both physical and personnel) necessary for, and available to a project, without reference to cost, date of acquisition, and whether the resources are currently available or would be provided upon receipt of the grant. No other sections of the proposal, including the budget justification, should include cost sharing information. The NSF Fastlane system will not allow data to be entered on Line M of the proposal budget.

Mandatory cost sharing will only be allowed when explicitly authorized by the NSF Director. When mandatory cost sharing is included in the proposal budget on Line M and accepted by NSF, the commitment of funds becomes legally binding and is subject to audit. Failure to provide the level of cost sharing required by the NSF solicitation, and reflected in the approved award budget may result in termination of the NSF award, disallowance of award costs and/or refund of award funds to NSF by the awardee. Additional information on

the NSF revised cost sharing policy can be found on the NSF website:  
<http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/index.jsp>.

Current and Pending Support – Information about current projects and pending support for ongoing projects and proposals is required for each individual identified as senior project personnel. The proposal being submitted should be included as pending support.

Special Information and Supplementary Documentation –

**Postdoctoral Research Mentoring Plan** – Each proposal that requests funding to support postdoctoral researchers must include, as a supplementary document, a description of the mentoring activities that will be provided for such individuals. This plan is limited to one page and should describe the mentoring that will be provided to all postdoctoral research supported by the project. The mentoring plan cannot be used to circumvent the 15-page project description limitation.

Any other special information and supplementary documentation must be included as part of the project description if it is relevant to determining the quality of the project work. This section is not considered an appendix and, in fact, appendices may not be included unless a deviation has been authorized in writing by the appropriate NSF official. Unless required by a specific program solicitation, letters of support should not be submitted as supplementary documentation as they are not a standard component of the NSF Proposal and, if included, a reviewer is under no obligation to review these materials. Letters of support submitted in response to a program solicitation requirement must be unique to the specific proposal submitted and cannot be altered without the author's explicit prior approval. NSF may return without review proposals that are not consistent with these instructions. A mentoring plan is not required for postdoctoral researchers who are listed as Senior Personnel on the NSF budget.

**Data Management and Sharing Plan** – As part of the Special Information and Supplementary Documentation, **all proposals must include plans for data management and sharing of the products of research, or assert the absence of the need for such plans.** The Data Management Plan will be reviewed as part of the intellectual merit or broader impacts of the proposal or both.

This plan should describe how the proposal will conform to the NSF policy on the dissemination and sharing of research results and may include: (i) types of data, samples, etc. to be produced in the course of the project; (ii) standards to be used for data and metadata format and content; (iii) policies for access and sharing, including provisions for appropriate protection of privacy, confidentiality, security, intellectual property, or other rights or requirements; (iv) policies and provisions for re-use, re-distribution, and the production of derivatives; and (v) plans for archiving data, samples, and other research products, and for preservation of access to them.

A valid Data Management Plan may include only the statement that no detailed plan is needed, as long as the statement is accompanied by a clear justification. **Fastlane will not permit submission of a proposal that is missing a Data Management Plan.** Proposals for

supplementary support to an existing award are not required to include a Data Management Plan.

**Letters of support** should not be submitted unless required by the solicitation.

### Additional Information

In addition to the items above, there are several other components to the proposal that are not required. These components are single copy documents and a summary of each is below:

#### List of Suggested Reviewers or Reviewers Not to Include

Authorization to Deviate from NSF Proposal Preparation Requirements – Conformance to the instructions in the GPG is required for all proposals submitted to NSF. Any deviation from the standard proposal preparation requires advance authorization which is provided in two ways: through specification in the program solicitation or written approval of the cognizant NSF Assistant Director/Office Head or designee. Proposals must include this authorization by identifying the solicitation on the Cover Sheet or providing the name, date and title of the NSF official authorizing the deviation.

Proprietary or Privileged Information – Any proprietary or confidential information contained in the proposal must be clearly marked in the proposal and be appropriately labeled with a legend. The box for “Proprietary or Privileged Information” must be checked on the Cover Sheet when the proposal contains such information.

Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources – This section should describe the organizational resources available to perform the effort proposed and should include only those resources that are directly applicable. The description should be narrative in nature and **must not** include any quantifiable financial information.