The National Science Foundation (NSF) has published a revised version of the Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide which will become effective on January 18, 2011. All proposals forwarded to Research Administration and Finance (RA&F) for submission to NSF on or after January 5 must follow the guidelines contained in the Grant Proposal Guide (GPG) section of this manual. It is important that all proposals conform to the instructions provided in the GPG as NSF may return proposals without review that are not consistent with these instructions. The only exceptions to deviate from standard proposal preparation guidelines are specific requirements in an NSF program solicitation or written approval by the appropriate NSF official.

The complete copy of the manual can be found on the NSF website at NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide. Prior to submitting a proposal to NSF, please thoroughly review the GPG and if you have any questions consult your NSF program manager. In order to assist you in preparing proposals for submission to NSF, outlined below are the recent significant changes to this guide:

Grant Proposal Guide

Significant Changes to the Grant Proposal Guide, effective January 2011

Chapter II.C.2.a, Cover Sheet, has been revised for consistency with the requirements of the Federal Funding & Accountability Act, to replace the Performing/Research Organization information with Project/Performance Site Primary Location information. This change already has been made on a government-wide basis in the SF 424 family of forms. If the project will be performed at a location other than the awardee, additional geographic information must be provided.

Chapter II.C.2.j, Special Information and Supplementary Documentation, contains a clarification of NSF’s long standing data policy. All proposals must describe plans for data management and sharing of the products of research, or assert the absence of the need for such plans. Fastlane will not permit submission of a proposal that is missing a Data Management Plan. Cross-references are included in the Project Description section (II.C.2.d), the Results from Prior NSF Support (II.C.2.d(iii)), Proposals for Conferences, Symposia and Workshops (II.D.8), and the Proposal Preparation Checklist (Exhibit II-1). The Data Management Plan will be reviewed as part of the intellectual merit or broader impacts of the proposal or both.

Chapter II.C.2.g(xi), Cost Sharing, has been revised to implement the National Science Board’s recommendations regarding cost sharing. Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited, Awardees are informed, however, that they remain subject to the OMB A-21 Clarification memo regarding committing and tracking faculty effort (see footnote 22). 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 (II.C.2.i). The description should be narrative in nature and must not include any quantifiable financial information. Mandatory cost sharing will only be required when explicitly authorized by the NSF Director.

Clarifications and Other Changes to the Grant Proposal Guide, effective January 2011

Chapter I.E.2, Who May Submit Proposals, has been clarified to state that non-profit, non-academic organizations must be located in the U.S., which is consistent with the eligibility guidance for universities and colleges.

Chapter I.G.3, Requirements Relating to Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Numbers and Registration in the Central Contractor Registration (CCR), has been updated to reflect the requirements specified in the recent Office of Management and Budget (OMB) policy directive (September 14, 2010, 75 FR 22706) on these topics. Each proposer must have a DUNS number and be registered in the CCR database prior to submission of a proposal to NSF. The CCR registration must be kept active and current at all times when an organization has an active award or a proposal under consideration by NSF.
Chapter II.C.2, Sections of the Proposal, has been supplemented to make it clear that failure to submit all required sections of the proposal may result in the proposal being returned without review.

Chapter II.C.2.b, Project Summary, has been updated to encourage use of separate headings for the merit review criteria in the one page Project Summary.

Chapter II.C.2.j, Special Information and Supplementary Documentation, has been clarified via a footnote to show that a mentoring plan is not required for postdoctoral researchers who are listed as Senior Personnel on the NSF Budget.

Chapter II.D.4.b, Collaborative Proposals, has been supplemented to reinforce that all components of a collaborative proposal must meet any established deadline or risk being returned without review.

Chapter III.C, Proposal File Updates, has been revised to explain that the Proposal File Update Module can no longer be used to submit revised budgets. They must now be submitted via the FastLane Revised Proposal Budget Module.

Chapter III.F, Review Information Provided to PI, has been supplemented to state that PIs are provided copies of their reviews to improve research methods and future submissions and are not intended for any other purpose.

Chapter V, Renewal Proposals, has been supplemented with a reminder that renewal proposals must be developed as if the applicant is applying for the first time. Also that the National Science Board (NSB) endorses the principle that all expiring awards should be recompeted; a link is included to the related NSB Resolution.

Award & Administration Guide Summary of Changes

Chapter II.B.1.a, Changes in Objectives or Scope, has been supplemented with language clarifying that prior NSF approval is required for any change to the Facilities, Equipment, and Other Resources section of the approved proposal that would constitute a change in objective or scope.

Chapter II.D, Cost Sharing, has been revised to implement the National Science Board’s recommendations regarding cost sharing. Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited. When mandatory cost sharing is included 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. Language also has been added to clarify when notifications are considered due and overdue.

Chapter II.D.3, Project Outcomes Report for the General Public, has been updated to specify that the Project Outcomes Report for the General Public will be posted in the Research Spending and Results section of the Research.gov website.