National Science Foundation
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NSF 11-055

Frequently Asked Questions related to Advancing Digitization of Biological Collections (ADBC) solicitation (NSF 10-603)

1. **What is the purpose of the ADBC solicitation?**
   This is a new program designed to digitize and mobilize biological collections data and provide a national resource for research that will integrate all information associated with these collections. As noted in the solicitation, this program resulted from a series of reports and is designed to support part of the ten-year project outlined by the collections community. NSF is seeking *innovative* proposals for the establishment of the HUB and the TCNs. Careful reading of the solicitation is critical to understand the aspects supported by this program. If there are questions, please e-mail biodigit@nsf.gov.

2. **What is the definition of a "Thematic Collections Network"?**
   Thematic Collections Networks are collaborations among collections that are organized and justified by a scientific question (i.e., not region, clade or preservation type). The ADBC solicitation is focusing ONLY on larger collaborations that fully encompass the collections related to the research areas required to address the scientific issue. This year's ADBC solicitation is therefore

narrower in definition than the community plan.

3. **How does ADBC differ from the Improvements to Biological Research Collections Program?**
The ADBC program supports innovative, collaborative proposals to digitize collections that are organized around a research question (theme, i.e., not region, clade or preservation type). There is *no* support for improvements to physical collections. The BRC program, however, supports improvements that secure, organize and improve accessibility of *physical* collections. The BRC program may also support collaborations to digitize collections representing local regions or clades.

4. **May proposals to ADBC include research activities?**
No, research proposals should be submitted to the appropriate program for conducting the actual research, for example, the Dimensions of Biodiversity Program in the Division of Environmental Biology.

5. **Is the HUB expected to deploy and run a data repository for digitized collections data?**
The solicitation does not require that the HUB actually develop or deploy hardware or software for the project, but it should have a plan to assess existing tools and data resources (whether developed within the community, in academia, or in the public/private sectors) and a strategy that addresses identified needs of the biological collections community and downstream users of those resources. We expect the HUB and its collaborators to be eligible to apply for other awards across NSF to innovate and further develop resources for the community. Also, future solicitations from the ADBC program may address identified community needs, if there is not another resource for such infrastructure.

6. **Will ADBC support the development of technology or informatics needed for digitization?**
Not for this year's solicitation, although once the HUB has analyzed the informatics issues, there may be some support for needed activities. The Division of Biological Infrastructure Program on Advances in Biological Informatics (ABI) supports innovative research in informatics and the development of tools, software and other informatics infrastructure that supports research across biology, including research relating to biological collections.

7. **Are reserved, unallocated funds allowed in a HUB budget?**
Subawardees must be identified when the main award is given. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to set aside an amount of money that will be given to contractors selected later than the actual award. (Check the Grant Proposal Guide http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=gpg for information on subawards.)

8. **Which link will take me to the community strategic plan?**
There are three hot links in the text of the solicitation – one to the federal report on scientific collections which includes recommendations for the federal collections, one to the NSF survey on the state of collections that have received NSF awards, and one to the basic strategic plan developed by the community. The link that will take you to the illustrated strategic plan developed by the collections community is http://digbiocol.wordpress.com/brochure/. This NSF solicitation is emphasizing only a portion of that larger effort.

9. **What types of collections are supported by this solicitation?**
Digitization of *existing* biological collections/specimens that are vouchered, curated and owned by U.S. institutions is supported, as described in the solicitation. Paleontological collections may be included if relevant to research themes. Biomedical/medical collections, federally owned collections, and international collections are not eligible for direct digitization funding but their value to certain research themes is recognized and partnerships for interoperability of data are encouraged. This solicitation will not support any new collecting efforts.

10. **Is the due date a target date or a deadline?**
The date is a deadline. We must receive full proposals that are in complete compliance with all NSF guidelines as described in both the Grant Proposal Guide (http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=gpg) and the ADBC solicitation (http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=503559&org=EF&from=home) by Dec. 10, 2010 or they will be returned without review. No changes or updates can be made to the proposal after this deadline. Please read the instructions carefully and consult with a program director (biodigit@nsf.gov) if you have any questions.

11. **Does ADBC provide support for postdoctoral researchers?**

When appropriate, postdoctoral researchers are allowed under the solicitation. Please note that a postdoctoral mentoring plan is required as a supplementary document for proposals. Only one single-page postdoctoral mentoring plan should be submitted that includes all postdoctoral personnel supported on the project, including the collaborative proposals, subawardees or any other organization that is a partner on the project. Different institutions may not submit separate mentoring plans. See the Grant Proposal Guide http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=gpg for further explanation. Any proposal lacking the postdoctoral mentoring plan will be returned without review.

12. **Can a single institution submit proposals to both the HUB and the TCN categories?**
The limit is on the 'lead' institution. Any single institution cannot be a 'lead' institution on more than a single proposal to this competition. Since the projects for this solicitation may be large collaborative efforts, an institution with varied expertise present among the staff might be submitting as a partner on more than a single proposal.

13. **Would each campus of a multi-campus university be able to submit an application for this opportunity if they meet the requirements (1 per campus) or will it be the case that such a university may only submit 1 application as a whole (1 per University)?**
Individual university/college/institution campuses of large university systems (such as University of California) are treated as independent universities for this competition. Since this solicitation encourages collaborations among institutions which house natural history collections, each campus might be a part of different collaborative proposals for a TCN, or a HUB and a TCN, depending upon the taxonomic expertise at different campuses.

14. **What types of partnerships with federal collections are encouraged?**
This program does not support actual digitization of federally owned collections, but recognizes that specimens owned by federal institutions may reside within non-federal collections. In these cases, partnership with the federal agency owning the specimens is encouraged in order to digitize all pertinent specimens for a theme. Also, some specimens relating to a research question may be housed in federal collections. Partnerships with these agencies would be appropriate so that the data are interoperable for querying.

15. **Can the PI include references from work accomplished under previous NSF awards in the "literature cited" section?**
No, as per the NSF Grant Proposal Guide http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=gpg, only references that are cited in the project text can be included in the literature cited. Publications resulting from previous NSF support should be cited within the project description under Results from Previous NSF Support or, if actually cited in the proposal, can be identified in the literature cited by asterisks or bold lettering.

16. **Can letters of support be included in supplementary documents?**
No, letters of support cannot be included in any submission; only letters that explicitly describe the contribution/collaboration to the project are allowed in supplementary documents. These letters should be succinct and only contain language that relates to the collaborative activities. Endorsement of the PI's, the institution, or the importance of the project is not appropriate, as discussed in the Grant Proposal Guide (http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=gpg), and proposals that do not adhere to these guidelines are subject to being returned without review.