



National Science Foundation
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NSF 11-055

**Frequently Asked Questions for Division of Molecular and Cellular
Biosciences: Investigator-initiated research projects Solicitation [NSF 11-545](#)**

1. [What are the major changes? Why are they being made?](#)
2. [Will there be additional funds for proposals submitted in response to this solicitation?](#)
3. [Are the processes for submitting proposals to other Divisions in the Directorate for Biological Sciences changing with this new process?](#)
4. [Can proposals be sent directly to the clusters in MCB in response to the Grant Proposal Guide, instead of responding to this solicitation?](#)
5. [Can a person be a co-PI or a collaborator on more than one proposal?](#)
6. [What happens if I submit more than one proposal as the lead PI or co-PI?](#)
7. [If I submit a research proposal as a lead PI or as a co-PI, can I submit a conference proposal or a proposal for EAGER?](#)
8. [If I have a research proposal pending with the Division, can I submit a CAREER proposal?](#)
9. [Will proposals be accepted with disease-related goals?](#)
10. [I plan to submit a proposal that would normally be submitted to another division. Can I submit it in response to this solicitation?](#)
11. [I'm unsure about the cluster to which I should submit my proposal. What should I do?](#)
12. [Since the cycle time has been extended from six to eight months, will a PI be notified about his/her proposal two months later?](#)
13. [Since the cycle time for proposal submissions has been extended, should PIs request support for longer periods of time?](#)
14. [My currently funded project is coming up for renewal. Will there be a funding gap since the deadline has been postponed?](#)
15. [Can I submit the same proposal to MCB and another BIO division?](#)
16. [Will this process affect proposals submitted for conferences, symposia or workshops?](#)
17. [What are the reasons a proposal may be returned without review?](#)
18. [How often can I resubmit my proposal to a program?](#)
19. [Will interdisciplinary proposals continue to be accepted? Is there a better chance of funding if my research is interdisciplinary?](#)
20. [Will there be bridging supplements available to current awardees?](#)
21. [What should I do if I was planning to apply in July but now I can't apply until September?](#)

22. [Can I receive a no-cost extension on an award?](#)
 23. [What is the timeline for the new process?](#)
 24. [Is this new process a pilot or will it be implemented on a more long-term scale?](#)
 25. [What are my options if my proposal is returned without review from MCB?](#)
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1. **Question: What are the major changes? Why are they being made?**

Answer: There are several changes in receiving investigator initiated regular research proposals in the Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences (MCB).

- The Division will be moving from a six month cycle to an eight month cycle. MCB had the practice of accepting unsolicited proposals every six months. Because the six-month cycle did not give PIs sufficient time for thoughtful revision of declined proposals, the Division is implementing an eight month cycle for proposal submission. The PIs of declined proposals will thus get two extra months to submit revised proposals, if they wish.
- The Division will accept investigator-initiated research proposals only in response to this solicitation. In the past, the division accepted unsolicited regular research proposals in response to the Grant Proposal Guide or in response to the program descriptions for each of the four clusters. A Division-wide solicitation allows the Division to provide up-to-date information about the Division's programs.
- This solicitation also puts a limit on the number of proposals submitted to MCB per cycle by a researcher to one proposal as a PI or co-PI.
- Information about additional reporting requirements is provided in this solicitation.

2. **Question: Will there be additional funds for proposals submitted in response to this solicitation?**

Answer: No. The same funds used in the past for unsolicited proposals will be available for proposals submitted in response to this solicitation.

3. **Question: Are the processes for submitting proposals to other Divisions in the Directorate for Biological Sciences changing with this new process?**

Answer: This solicitation is limited to MCB; please check the websites of other Divisions in the Directorate for the information about submitting proposals to them.

4. **Question: Can proposals be sent directly to the clusters in MCB in response to the Grant Proposal Guide, instead of responding to this solicitation?**

Answer: Yes and no. Regular investigator-initiated research proposals cannot be submitted directly to the clusters in response to the Grant Proposal Guide (GPG), they must be submitted in response to this solicitation by the specified deadlines. However, proposals for RAPIDs and EAGERS, and for limited support of special meetings and workshops, will still be accepted by the clusters at any time during the year.

5. **Question: Can a person be a co-PI or a collaborator on more than one proposal?**

Answer: A PI may be the lead PI or a co-PI on only one (single) investigator-initiated research proposal during each cycle. A person can be a collaborator on multiple proposals. There is no specified number of times you can be a collaborator on a proposal.

6. **Question: What happens if I submit more than one proposal as the lead PI or co-PI?**

Answer: In the event that an individual exceeds this limit (more than one investigator-initiated research proposal as a PI or co-PI,) the first proposal received will be accepted and the later proposals will be returned without review. **No exceptions will be made.**

7. **Question: If I submit a research proposal as a lead PI or as a co-PI, can I submit a conference proposal or a proposal for EAGER?**

Answer: The limit on the number of proposals per PI or co-PI applies only to the regular

research proposals submitted to the Division in response to this *solicitation*. This limit does not apply to submission of CAREER proposals or the following types of proposals: (1) Grants for Rapid Response Research (RAPID); (2) EARly-concept Grants for Exploratory Research (EAGER); (3) Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASED); (4) Conferences, Symposia and Workshops; (5) Proposals to Support International Travel; (6) Research Coordination Networks; (7) Research in Undergraduate Institutions.

8. **Question: If I have a research proposal pending with the Division, can I submit a CAREER proposal?**
Answer: You can submit a CAREER proposal as long as the research project in the CAREER proposal is different than the one in the pending proposal.
9. **Question: Will proposals be accepted with disease-related goals?**
Answer: Proposals with disease-related goals, including work on the etiology, diagnosis or treatment of physical or mental disease, abnormality, or malfunction in human beings or animals, are not supported by the Division. Animal models of such conditions or the development or testing of drugs or other procedures for their treatment also are not eligible for support. While it is understood that research of fundamental biological significance may often have broader impacts to medicine, applications determined to have a clear biomedical focus will be returned without review. If your proposal mentions human disease, you should discuss its appropriateness with a Program Director in the cluster relevant to your proposal's research before submission. When making funding decisions, priority is given to research areas where the Division plays a unique or special role among NSF programs and total Federal funding. If your research is in an area of biology not primarily funded by BIO or if you are uncertain, you are strongly encouraged to call one of the BIO Program Directors to discuss the appropriateness of the research.
10. **Question: I plan to submit a proposal that would normally be submitted to another division. Can I submit it in response to this solicitation?**
Answer: Please read the scientific scope of the research areas described in this solicitation. If you are not sure about the appropriateness of your research, contact a program director in the relevant cluster. Proposals in the research areas that are not included in the MCB description in the solicitation may be returned without review.
11. **Question: I'm unsure about the cluster to which I should submit my proposal. What should I do?**
Answer: First, review the cluster descriptions included in this solicitation. If you are still unsure, it is highly recommended that you contact one of the MCB Program Directors to discuss which cluster is most appropriate. Contact information for the MCB Program Directors is found at: <http://www.nsf.gov/div/index.jsp?div=MCB>.
12. **Question: Since the cycle time has been extended from six to eight months, will a PI be notified about his/her proposal two months later?**
Answer: No, every attempt will be made to handle proposals as expeditiously as possible and to notify PIs in the same time frame (six months) as before.
13. **Question: Since the cycle time for proposal submissions has been extended, should PIs request support for longer periods of time?**
Answer: The issues are unrelated. The length of time requested should always be geared to the time it takes to successfully complete the proposed project.
14. **Question: My currently funded project is coming up for renewal. Will there be a funding gap since the deadline has been postponed?**
Answer: If you were planning to submit a renewal proposal in July 2011, additional time for submission will mean that the earliest start date for a project will be March 1, 2012. MCB will pay special attention to renewal proposals in this cycle to minimize gaps in funding by processing the proposals as quickly as possible after the panel meetings. If you were planning to submit a renewal proposal in January 2012, we recommend that you submit the proposal for the September 2011 deadline to avoid a possible gap in funding. A similar strategy should be used in subsequent cycles.
15. **Question: Can I submit the same proposal to MCB and another BIO division?**
Answer: You cannot submit the same proposal to different divisions at NSF (see information in the GPG at: http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf11001/gpg_1.jsp#IG2).

16. **Question: Will this process affect proposals submitted for conferences, symposia or workshops?**

Answer: No. These proposals are submitted to clusters directly in response to the GPG. They must be submitted at least six months prior to the conference. Insufficient time for processing could be a reason for returning a proposal without review.

17. **Question: What are the reasons a proposal may be returned without review?**

Answer: There are many reasons a proposal may get returned without review. See the Grant Proposal Guide Chapter IV B. for additional information. Here are some major reasons why a proposal could be returned without review.

- The topic of research is not appropriate for the Division or for the Foundation. These proposals cannot be resubmitted to MCB.
- Proposals directly relevant to or motivated by relevance to human diseases and health. These proposals cannot be resubmitted to the Division.
- No intellectual merit or broader impacts section included in the project summary.
- Formatting non-compliance
- Submitted after the deadline date
- Supplementary documents other than those listed in the solicitation included
- COI list not included
- Results from prior support, if required, are not included

18. **Question: How often can I resubmit my proposal to a program?**

Answer: There is no limit on the number of times a PI can submit a proposal to NSF. However, every submission must be substantively different than a previously declined proposal. According to NSF policies, the program should return a proposal without review if the proposal was previously declined and has not been substantially revised. Therefore, it is important that you resubmit the proposal only after a thoughtful revision. Consequently, all proposals, irrespective of prior submissions of related projects, are considered as new proposals by NSF.

19. **Question: Will interdisciplinary proposals continue to be accepted? Is there a better chance of funding if my research is interdisciplinary?**

Answer: The Division encourages submission of interdisciplinary research proposals. The research at the interface between molecular and cellular biology and other disciplines (mathematics, computer sciences, physical sciences, engineering) receives high priority for funding.

20. **Question: Will there be bridging supplements available to current awardees?**

Answer: No. Bridging supplements will not be available. PIs are encouraged to submit renewal proposals to a deadline that is at least six months in advance of the expiration date of their grant. This avoids any need for bridging supplements for current awardees.

21. **Question: What should I do if I was planning to apply in July but now I can't apply until September?**

Answer: PIs have two additional months to develop their proposals further. The additional time should allow PIs to prepare fully compliant and competitive proposals.

22. **Question: Can I receive a no-cost extension on an award?**

Answer: The policies for no-cost extensions for the existing awards have not changed. If the project requires additional time for completion and there are still funds available, a PI can request a no-cost extension.

23. **Question: What is the timeline for the new process?**

Answer: The changes in MCB practices are effective at the time of publication of the Division solicitation.

24. **Question: Is this new process a pilot or will it be implemented on a more long-term scale?**

Answer: The new mechanism will be assessed continuously and adjusted based on PI feedback and analysis of internal processing workload.

25. **Question: What are my options if my proposal is returned without review from MCB?**

Answer: If the research area is not appropriate for MCB, it should not be re-submitted to the Division. If the research is appropriate, it can be revised to correct the deficiency for which it was returned and submitted to MCB for the next deadline.