



**National Science Foundation**

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Arlington, Virginia 22230

**NSF 11-084**

**Frequently Asked Questions for the Dynamics of Coupled Natural and Human Systems  
Competition (CNH) Program ([NSF 10-612](#))**

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**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**1. What kinds of projects does the CNH program fund?**

We advise prospective PIs that to be successful in CNH they will need to take seriously every word in the program title - Dynamics of Coupled Natural and Human Systems - except for "of." "Dynamics" emphasizes that we are seeking a better understanding of system processes. While the specific systems to be studied will depend on the particular problem or question investigators are seeking to explore, "natural and human" means that relevant natural systems AND relevant human systems must be endogenous to the analysis, and "coupled" means that the full range of interactions and feedbacks within and among those core systems should be examined.

CNH projects should lead to generalizable theoretical advances. Analysis and synthesis are encouraged. Projects that are descriptive, normative or prescriptive are unlikely to be competitive in CNH.

2. **What is considered to be a human or natural system in CNH?**

CNH projects typically study human and natural systems that comprise many individuals, for example ecosystems or societies. Projects in which either of the systems is a single individual, component or organism are unlikely to be considered competitive for funding.

3. **Does my team need to include a natural/social scientist?**

There are no formal requirements regarding the disciplines of project personnel. Your project team should have the range and depth of expertise needed for the proposed project.

4. **How long should my project last?**

The duration of the award should match the proposed work but may not exceed five years. CNH Large Interdisciplinary Research Projects are highly integrative and collaborative, and so are typically funded for three to five years.

CNH Interdisciplinary Team Exploratory Projects are usually funded for one to two years.

CNH Research Coordination Networks are funded for five years only.

5. **Are the maximum budget amounts for each award type per year or for the full duration of the award?**

The maximum budget amounts are for the full duration of the award.

6. **Do the maximum budget amounts refer only to direct costs, or do they include indirect costs as well?**

The maximum budget amounts for each award type include direct and indirect costs.

7. **Do you accept multi-institutional collaborative proposals?**

No. The CNH program does not accept proposals in the form of separate submissions from multiple organizations. If more than one organization is involved in the project, one of those must submit the proposal. Activities at other organizations may be supported via subawards.

8. **Do I need to include subaward budgets and justifications?**

Yes. Your proposal must include budgets and budget justifications for any subawards.

9. **How many PIs and Co-PIs can my project have?**

You may identify one PI and up to four Co-PIs for the project.

10. **Do I need to include a Biographical Sketch and Current and Pending Support statements for the PI?**

Yes. The PI and all Co-PIs are considered to be Senior Personnel and therefore their Biographical Sketches and Current and Pending Support must be included.

11. **Should I attach letters of support from my collaborators? What should they say?**

You should include as supplementary documentation a letter of collaboration from every individual or organization that would

- be integral to the proposed project but would not receive funding through the award or a subaward, or
- provide access to sites, materials, data, research or other associated project activities.

Letters of collaboration must follow the template in the solicitation. The Project Description should document the activities to be undertaken by the collaborators. The sole purpose of a letter of collaboration is to confirm the participation of the collaborator, and therefore it must adhere to the template and must not include any additional text. Your proposal may be returned without review if it includes letters that deviate from the template.

**12. Does the CNH program fund studentships / doctoral dissertations / individual fellowships / undergraduate research?**

No. The CNH program makes awards to eligible institutions, not to individuals. In addition, the CNH program places a priority on funding collaborative teams of researchers to conduct interdisciplinary research at the interface of environmental and social systems. Therefore CNH is not an appropriate program for an individual investigator wishing to pursue independent research.

**13. Does the CNH program fund CAREER Awards?**

No. The CNH program seeks to build collaborative teams of researchers to tackle system-scale research in an integrative (advancing knowledge in both natural and social science) and comprehensive (including both theoretical and empirical activity) fashion. Most CNH projects also include broader impact activities that either involve stakeholders directly or translate outcomes of the research to policy makers. The goals of CNH are therefore more collaborative and of a larger scope than the goals of the CAREER program, which embraces as its central value the creativity of single investigator research.

**14. Does the CNH program fund supplements?**

No. All CNH funding is awarded in an annual competition, for the three types of project described in the program solicitation (Large CNH Interdisciplinary Project, Interdisciplinary Team Exploratory Project or Research Coordination Network).

**15. Can foreign organizations submit proposals to CNH?**

No. Proposals may only be submitted by eligible U.S. organizations.

**16. Can I request funding for a foreign partner?**

Yes, depending upon the circumstances. NSF funds are intended to support the U.S. side of a research and education collaboration. International collaborators should normally seek funding from their own funding sources. However, a foreign institution may receive limited funding through a subaward if this is the most effective way to accomplish the proposed research and if the foreign partner is making a substantive contribution to the project.

A subaward to a foreign organization may not include infrastructure or major equipment and, except under unusual and well-justified cases, CNH will not provide salary support for senior investigators based in other countries. Travel expenses for foreign partners should normally be requested in the form of participant support costs in the main award, rather than through a subaward.

Indirect costs are not normally payable to foreign organizations (except in cases where the foreign partner has a previously negotiated rate agreement with a U.S. Federal agency).

**17. The solicitation puts a limit of 20 pages on the Project Description. The GPG specifies a 15-page limit. Which is correct?**

The limit for Large Interdisciplinary Research proposals is 20 pages. The limits for Interdisciplinary Team Exploratory proposals and Research Coordination Networks are 15 pages.

**18. The general Research Coordination Networks solicitation asks for details of Current Activities for investigators and senior personnel. Should I provide this for my CNH Research Coordination Networks proposal?**

No. This information is not permitted in CNH Research Coordination Network proposals unless it is provided in the Project Description. It may not be included in the Supplementary Documents section. This restriction differs from the guidance provided in the general RCN solicitation.

**19. Which NSF Directorate/Division should I submit my proposal to?**

All proposals submitted in response to the CNH solicitation will be routed automatically to the CNH team. Therefore you can choose any of the listed directorates. Note that if you submit via the Biological Sciences Directorate (BIO) then you must also complete the proposal categorization form provided in FastLane.

**20. What should I include with my proposal? What will happen if I miss something?**

CNH proposals must comply fully with the Grant Proposal Guide (GPG) and special requirements in the solicitation in order to be considered for review. Proposals that do not meet these requirements will be returned without review.

Proposals must meet the font and margin requirements stated in the GPG and include the following:

- Project tiles prefixed with the identity of the type of proposal being submitted:
  - CNH: (for a Large CNH Interdisciplinary Project)
  - CNH-Ex: (for a CNH Interdisciplinary Team Exploratory Project)
  - CNH-RCN: (for a CNH Research Coordination Network)
- Page numbers on pages
- Project Summary no longer than one page that clearly addresses, in separate sections, the intellectual merits and broader impacts of the proposed activity
- For Research Coordination Networks, the steering committee members must be listed in project summary. Note: these individuals constitute senior personnel and therefore their Biographical Sketches and Current and Pending Support must be provided.
- Biographical Sketches (including specification of collaborators and advisors/advisees) for investigators and all senior personnel.
- Current and Pending Support for investigators and all senior personnel
- single, alphabetized conflict-of-interest spreadsheet in the Supplementary Documentation section
- Data Management and Access Plan (limited to two pages) in the Supplementary Documentation section
- Postdoctoral Researcher Mentoring Plan, if necessary, (limited to one page) in the Supplementary Documentation section
- Letters of collaboration, if necessary, that include only the information in the template provided in the program solicitation.

- For Large CNH Interdisciplinary projects, a Project Description 20 pages or fewer that contains separate sections for:
  - Results from Prior NSF support (for PIs and Co-PIs only)
  - Education Plan
  - Management Plan
  - Expected Project Significance
- For CNH Interdisciplinary Team Exploratory Projects, a Project Description 15 pages or fewer that contains separate sections for:
  - Results from Prior NSF support (for PIs and Co-PIs only)
  - Expected Project Significance
- For CNH Research Coordination Networks, a Project Description 15 pages or fewer that contains separate sections for:
  - Results from Prior NSF support (for PIs and Co-PIs only)
  - Management Plan
  - Coordination Plan
  - Plans for Increasing Diversity
  - Expected Project Significance

**21. What will happen if my proposal is not compliant?**

Non-compliant proposals will be returned without review.