



**National Science Foundation**  
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**NSF 13-009**

## **Frequently Asked Questions for NSF 13-506: IOS Core Programs Solicitation**

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## 1. What types of proposals in IOS require preliminary proposals?

All proposals submitted to IOS for the core programs (i.e., all regular research proposals previously submitted through the *Grant Proposal Guide* (GPG), or through the Research at Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) solicitations to any of the core programs in IOS) now require a preliminary proposal.

This preliminary proposal requirement **does not** include proposals to other solicitations (e.g., Research Coordination Networks, Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grants, CAREER, Plant Genome Research Program, Basic Research to Enable Agricultural Development), or special proposals described in the GPG (i.e., Grants for Rapid Response Research (RAPID), EARly Concept Grants for Exploratory Research (EAGER), Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASSED), conference and workshop proposals, and requests for supplemental funding).

## 2. Why did IOS change the submission guidelines from the previous twice yearly full proposal submission process?

One of the primary reasons for this new solicitation is to reduce the tremendous reviewing burden on the PI community and the tremendous investment of time and energy by the PI community in developing full proposals, which previously had a low success rate. From 2001 to 2010 full proposal success rates across IOS declined from an average of 28% to 17%, with rates in some programs as low as 10%. However, the overall amount of money available to fund IOS science has remained essentially unchanged over that same period of time. The decreasing success rate led to

a burden on PIs to write more proposals which simultaneously increased the reviewing burden on the community including those same PIs. This led to a decrease in the efficiency and quality of the reviewing system.

In 2011, the last year of the twice yearly deadline, IOS received just over 1,900 full proposals and requested more than 14,000 *ad hoc* (external) reviews in addition to panelists' reviews. Under the new preliminary proposal system, in 2012 we anticipate requesting about 2,500 *ad hoc* (external) reviews for the invited full proposals.

IOS is collecting data about this change to the submission, review, and award process and will make the analysis available at a later date.

### 3. **Are all BIO divisions switching to the new preliminary proposal solicitation?**

**No.** Only DEB and IOS programs have implemented the preliminary proposal solicitation format. Both MCB and DBI have their own solicitations, which have some differences in requirements. There are also separate solicitations or instructions for Research Coordination Networks, Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grants, CAREER awards, the Plant Genome Research Program, Basic Research to Enable Agricultural Development and special types of proposals described in the GPG such as Grants for Rapid Response Research (RAPID), EARly Concept Grants for Exploratory Research (EAGER), and Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASSED). Please review each solicitation or set of instructions in the *Grant Proposal Guide* (GPG) carefully for its specific requirements. If you have any questions, please ask a Program Director. We're here to help!

### 4. **My funding request is a competitive renewal application for a previously NSF-funded research project. Do I need to submit a preliminary proposal?**

**Yes.** All proposals to IOS are treated as new proposals, including projects based on findings resulting from previous NSF funding.

### 5. **Can I submit a preliminary proposal to NSF for a project that was submitted to or is under review at another agency?**

**Yes.** However, invited **full proposals** cannot be duplicates of proposals to any other Federal agency for simultaneous consideration, except for Beginning Investigators (see GPG Chapter I.G.2 [http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg\\_1.jsp#IG2](http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg_1.jsp#IG2) ).

### 6. **How many preliminary proposals may I submit?**

In a given year, an individual may participate as a **PI or co-PI** on **no more than two** preliminary proposals submitted to IOS core programs. Preliminary proposals in excess of the limit for any PI or co-PI will be returned without review in the reverse order received.

Participating in a proposal in any role other than PI or co-PI, such as the lead on a sub-award, any other senior personnel role or as a collaborator, **does not** count towards this limit, including investigators who contribute services for a fee (e.g., sequencing). *Thus, the number of projects an investigator may participate in is **unlimited**.* Changes in the team post-submission to meet the eligibility limits will **not** be allowed.

This limit **does not** include proposals submitted to other program solicitations or to core programs in other BIO Divisions. A PI may submit to as many other solicitations as he/she wishes in a single application cycle. However solicitations may have their own limit guidelines so be sure to review

each solicitation carefully for details.

Definitions of all Personnel roles can be found in the GPG:

[http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg\\_2.jsp#llex7](http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg_2.jsp#llex7) .

## 7. What is the definition of a PI/co-PI?

*From the GPG:* A Principal Investigator (PI) or co-PI is defined as "the individual(s) designated by the proposer, and approved by NSF, who will be responsible for the scientific or technical direction of the project. NSF does not infer any distinction in scientific stature among multiple PIs, whether referred to as PI or co-PI. If more than one, the first one listed will serve as the contact PI, with whom all communications between NSF program officials and the project relating to the scientific, technical, and budgetary aspects of the project should take place. The PI and any identified co-PIs, however, will be jointly responsible for submission of the requisite project reports".

All PIs and co-PIs are expected to have significant intellectual input to the project. In the event a PI must leave a project it is expected that the remaining co-PI(s) could continue to direct the project and submit the requisite reports.

Definitions of all Personnel roles can be found in the GPG:

[http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg\\_2.jsp#llex7](http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg_2.jsp#llex7) .

## 8. How many full proposals may I submit?

An individual may only submit as many full proposals as he/she is invited to submit. Uninvited full proposals will be returned without review.

## 9. What feedback will I receive on my preliminary proposal?

Preliminary proposals will be normally reviewed by a panel of scientists in the discipline, and you will receive a summary of their discussion (the panel summary), as well as individual reviews from three panelists. If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you will have this feedback to help you in preparing the full proposal. We strongly advise that you take this feedback into account, both in full proposal preparation and in any resubmission of the preliminary proposal.

## 10. What criteria will panelists use to evaluate preliminary proposals?

Each preliminary proposal will be assigned to three panelists for written reviews. All NSF rules for Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest will be followed. The rating scale for written reviews will be: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, and Poor. A panel summary describing the key points of the panel discussion and the rationale for the proposal's placement in one of the four panel ranking categories ("High Priority", "Medium Priority", "Low Priority", and "Not Competitive") will be provided for each proposal.

As with all NSF proposals, panelists/reviewers will be instructed to evaluate the *intellectual merit* and *broader impacts* of the proposed project. Preliminary proposals contain a shorter project description (1 personnel page plus 4 pages of text) and lack much of the documentation associated with a full proposal, including budget, budget justification, equipment and other resources, and current and pending support. Consequently, we expect the reviews of preliminary proposals to focus on the following critical aspects of the work: *the questions* driving the research, *the goals* expected to be accomplished, and *the approaches* employed in the experimental design.

While reviewing, panelists are asked to consider:

- Are the ideas innovative or potentially transformative?
- Are the ideas conceptually well grounded?
- Are the experimental approaches and experimental design feasible and logically linked to the central ideas?
- Are the PIs well qualified and experienced enough with the approaches to be able to conduct the research?
- What risks are involved? Can they be overcome?
- What is the potential impact of the science?
- Is there a convincing and significant effort made towards broader impacts?

***A strong preliminary proposal is one in which the logical flow and significance of the proposed line of investigation are articulated clearly and the broader impacts of the work are apparent.*** In other words, panelists are asked to identify preliminary proposals that address questions and/or ideas that are most likely to lead to large advances in the field.

***Panelists do NOT make specific Invite/Not Invite recommendations. These recommendations are made by the Program Directors after the conclusion of the panels.***

**11. What criteria will be used to make a decision to Invite or Not Invite a full proposal following the preliminary proposal stage?**

Program Directors will make Invite/Not Invite decisions based on the scientific merit and broader impacts as well as the balance of awards among sub-disciplines, geographic distribution, types of institutions, and the potential contribution of each award to broadening the participation of individuals from groups traditionally underrepresented in science. These latter considerations comprise the program's "portfolio balance".

**12. How soon will I learn whether a full proposal is invited?**

Invitations to submit full proposals will be issued in May each year.

**13. What is the expected invitation rate for preliminary proposals?**

Approximately 30% of preliminary proposals were invited for full proposals in 2012. We expect the invitation rate in 2013 to be similar, depending on the number of preliminary proposals submitted in January.

**14. What is the expected success rate of full proposals under the new core program solicitation?**

The success rate for invited full proposals is anticipated to be in the range of 25%-35% depending on the availability of funds.

**15. If I am not invited to submit a full proposal, may I resubmit the preliminary proposal?**

The preliminary proposal deadline is in January of each year, and there is no limit on the number of times you may resubmit a preliminary proposal. However, you are strongly advised to take comments from the reviews and panel summary into account when re-submitting, and you are encouraged to talk to your Program Director.

**16. How does the Project Description of the preliminary proposal differ from that of a full proposal?**

The first page of the preliminary proposal project description must list the PI, co-PI(s), collaborators (including leads for sub-awards), and other senior personnel (as defined in the GPG: [http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg\\_2.jsp#llex7](http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg_2.jsp#llex7)). Each name should be followed by a sentence describing that individual's role in the project. No other text should appear on this page.

The following 4 pages (pages 2-5) comprise the preliminary proposal narrative termed the Project Description. The general significance of the work, efficacy of the experimental plan, feasibility of technical approaches, and broader impacts plan should be clearly and concisely presented. The available space should be used wisely, with figures limited to essential data or diagrams. Duplication of text between the project summary and project description should be avoided.

For a preliminary proposal the references are limited to 3 pages. The reference section does not count towards the Project Description page limits.

**17. Are preliminary data required to be included in the preliminary proposal?**

**No**, preliminary data are not required. However, a PI may include preliminary data in support of the feasibility of the research approach at his/her discretion.

**18. Do results from prior support have to be included in a preliminary proposal?**

Although not required, results from previous support may be included in the preliminary proposal at the discretion of the PI.

**19. Is a Data Management Plan required for preliminary proposals?**

**No**, a Data Management Plan is not required for preliminary proposals.

**20. Is a Post-Doctoral Mentoring Plan required for preliminary proposals?**

**No**, a Post-Doctoral Mentoring Plan is not required for preliminary proposals.

**21. Does the preliminary proposal have to have a detailed budget?**

**No**, preliminary proposals should not include a detailed budget or budget justification; a value of \$2 should be entered to allow FastLane submission. The words "Not Applicable" should be entered in the Budget Justification.

**22. Do I need institutional approvals for regulated activities, such as recombinant DNA work, human subjects, vertebrate animal use, etc., for the preliminary proposal?**

Institutional approvals are **not** required for preliminary proposals.

However, institutional approvals are required for full proposals, as specified in the *Grant Proposal Guide* ([http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg\\_index.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg_index.jsp)).

**23. What supplementary documents are allowed for the preliminary proposal?**

**No** supplementary documents are allowed.

**24. What are Conflicts of Interest (COIs), why do you want to know about them, and how do I know if I have any?**



Program Directors are required to select reviewers who do not have any potentially biasing relationships (personal, professional, intellectual or financial) with either the PI/co-PI(s) or the submitting institution(s). Hence, PIs are required to submit an Excel Workbook that lists all Conflicts of Interest (COIs). The COI Workbook template and email address for its submission can be found in the solicitation. The Workbook will also allow you to indicate suggested and non-preferred reviewers. Please contact a Program Director if you have questions.

**25. Do the preliminary proposals and full proposals have deadlines or target dates?**

Both of these have **deadlines**. Preliminary proposals or invited full proposals received after the deadline or that are otherwise not compliant with the solicitation and the relevant guidelines in the *Grant Proposal Guide* (GPG) will be returned without review.

**26. My research idea falls between two programs within IOS or between two programs found in different divisions or directorates. How do I submit the preliminary proposal for consideration by both programs?**

In IOS, preliminary proposals will not be co-reviewed with other programs. Thus, you will need to choose a single IOS program for your preliminary proposal submission. If you have any questions regarding which IOS program would be best for your submission, please contact a Program Director.

**27. May I request that my invited full proposal be co-reviewed between a program in IOS and another program in BIO or NSF in general?**

You may alert the IOS Program Director(s) to other programs that might be relevant to your proposal. However, he/she cannot guarantee co-review will occur.

**28. Will reviewers for full proposals see the reviews I received for the preliminary proposal?**

**No.** All proposals to IOS are treated as new proposals.

**29. If a full proposal is invited but not funded, do I have to start over with a preliminary proposal?**

**Yes.** If your full proposal is declined, you must begin again with a preliminary proposal to one of the IOS core programs. It is strongly advised that you consider the comments from both preliminary and full proposal reviews and panel summaries when re-submitting and contact your Program Director if you have any questions or concerns.

**30. I was invited to submit a full proposal, but did not do so in this cycle. Do I need to start over with a preliminary proposal the following cycle?**

**Yes,** you would have to submit a preliminary proposal at the next January deadline. You may only submit a full proposal for the August full proposal deadline for which you were invited.

**31. What if my question is not addressed in this FAQ?**

Please ask us! Contact information for Program Directors and management in IOS can be found in the solicitation and at the Division website (<http://www.nsf.gov/ios>).