



**National Science Foundation**  
4201 Wilson Boulevard  
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**NSF 13-012**

## **Frequently Asked Questions for Solicitation **NSF 13-510** Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences: Investigator-initiated research projects**

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The Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences (MCB) accepts research proposals from all researchers in response to this solicitation. The revised solicitation provides up-to-date information about the Division's programs and priorities.

### **CHANGES IN THE SOLICITATION**

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#### **1. What are the major changes in this revision?**

MCB has made changes in its solicitation for receiving investigator-initiated regular research proposals to clarify the description of research programs and to streamline review of interdisciplinary proposals.

- The Division Description is modified to emphasize interdisciplinary, quantitative, and predictive research and the development of resources and methods for such research.
- Names of three clusters and descriptions of all clusters are revised to clarify the cluster scope for accepting proposals and priorities for funding.
- Starting in November 2013, the Division will have one deadline per year for accepting proposals in response to this solicitation.
- The limit on the number of proposals that can be submitted per investigator (as PI or

Co-PI) is removed.

## **2. How can I communicate my comments about the changes in this solicitation?**

Please email your comments to Parag R. Chitnis, Division Director, MCB at [pchitnis@nsf.gov](mailto:pchitnis@nsf.gov). MCB wants to hear about your experiences, opinions, suggestions for improvements, and other comments about the changes in this solicitation.

## **3. What is the timeline for the new process?**

These changes in MCB practices are effective at the time of publication of the new solicitation.

## **4. When is the next submission date?**

January 30, 2013

## **5. Why is the frequency of submission deadlines changed to once per year?**

There are several reasons.

- An annual deadline will provide sufficient time for substantial revision of declined proposals. Prior to 2011, MCB used to accept proposals every six months. However, community feedback and analysis of data showed that most researchers submitted proposals only once per year, mainly because there was not sufficient time to revise a proposal after declination. When the researchers did submit a proposal immediately for the next deadline, its chances of funding were low. In 2011, MCB introduced the practice of accepting unsolicited proposals every eight months to give an additional two months for revising the proposals. However, analysis of awards made in FY12 showed that this change did not significantly improve the funding success of resubmitted proposals, likely because the declined proposals often required additional experiments or a complete rethinking of the research problem. Of awards made in FY12, over 70% were made for proposals in their first submission.
- Accepting proposals after every eight months hampered review of the proposals at the interface of biology and the physical sciences and engineering because other Divisions that interact with MCB in co-reviewing proposals have a single deadline (or a submission window) in the fall. Supporting interdisciplinary research is a priority for the Division. MCB frequently organizes joint panels with other Directorates to review proposals at these interfaces. A single annual deadline will facilitate the co-review and co-funding of interdisciplinary research at the intersections of biology and other disciplines.
- Many PIs communicated that they prefer having the same deadlines every year, which is not achievable with an eight-month cycle. In addition, the eight-month cycle does not match the start dates for 3- or 5- year grants that are renewing.

## **6. If I miss an annual deadline, do I have other opportunities to obtain funding from MCB?**

Yes. The deadline change only affects proposals, including RCN and RUI, submitted in response to this solicitation. There are additional mechanisms and deadlines for submitting research proposals to MCB. CAREER proposals can be submitted at the July deadlines as stated in the CAREER solicitation. EAGER, RAPID, SAVI and CREATIV proposals can be submitted at any time during the year, following discussion with a Program Director.

**7. Now that MCB has annual deadlines, how does that impact submission of proposals for partial support of conferences and workshops?**

Conference and workshop proposals can be submitted any time in the year, preferably at least six months before the conference. These proposals are submitted to the Division in response to the Grant Proposal Guide, not in response to the solicitation for investigator-initiated research. See the Division website for additional information about conference and workshop proposals (<http://www.nsf.gov/bio/mcb/confworkshopguidance.jsp>).

**8. What was the reason for removing the restriction on the number of proposals per PI?**

Funding interdisciplinary research at the intersection between biology and other disciplines is a priority for MCB. Removing the limit on the number of proposals a researcher can submit as a Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator should facilitate submission of collaborative research proposals from teams of investigators from different disciplines. Researchers who submit more than one single-investigator proposal should be aware that proposals on related topics are typically reviewed in the same panel, which means the proposals compete with each other; our experience shows that this is rarely a successful strategy for either proposal. Therefore, **researchers are strongly encouraged to submit only one proposal as the lead principal investigator, but can be co-principal investigators on other proposals.**

**9. I am unsure about the cluster to which I should submit my proposal. What should I do?**

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>.

**10. With new cluster names, I am not sure where my revised proposal will be appropriate?**

If your previous proposal was reviewed by the Biomolecular Dynamics, Structure, and Function cluster in the past, you should revise your proposal considering the description of the Molecular Biophysics cluster. This cluster reviews proposals in molecular biophysics, molecular biochemistry, and structural biochemistry areas.

If your previous proposal was reviewed by the Networks and Regulation cluster in the past, you should revise the proposal considering the description of the Systems and Synthetic Biology cluster. This cluster reviews proposals in the areas of systems biology, synthetic biology, and metabolism and signaling in plants and microbes.

If your previous proposal was reviewed by the Cellular Processes cluster, you should revise the proposal considering the description of the Cellular Dynamics and Function cluster. This cluster considers proposals in the areas of membrane architecture and function, cellular compartmentalization, cellular dynamics and integrative analysis of cellular function.

## **FUNDING RATES**

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**11. How will the change to a twelve-month cycle impact the funding rates and the number of proposals funded by MCB?**

The change to annual deadlines is not expected to change the funding rate. The total number of awards made by MCB in a year will be approximately the same as in the past, provided the

Division's budget remains unchanged.

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

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

## **PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

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

This solicitation is limited to MCB; please check the websites of other Divisions in the Directorate for information about their proposal submission process.

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

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 EAGER, RAPID, SAV and CREATIV awards, CREATIVs and for limited support of special meetings and workshops will still be accepted by the clusters at any time during the year.

**15. If I have a research proposal pending with the Division, can I submit a CAREER proposal?**

You can submit a CAREER proposal as long as the research proposed in the CAREER proposal is different than the one in the pending proposal. If your research proposal submitted for the MCB solicitation is declined, you can use the reviews to revise the proposal in a substantive manner and submit it as a CAREER proposal.

**16. Will proposals be accepted with disease-related goals?**

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 and health, 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 MCB or if you are uncertain, you are strongly encouraged to call one of the MCB Program Directors to discuss the appropriateness of the research before submission.

**17. I plan to submit a proposal that would normally be submitted to another Division. Can I submit it in response to this solicitation?**

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 research areas that are not included in the MCB description in

the solicitation may be returned without review.

**18. Can I submit the same proposal to MCB and another BIO division?**

You cannot submit the same proposal simultaneously to different divisions at NSF (see information in the GPG at:

[http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg\\_1.jsp#IG2](http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf13001/gpg_1.jsp#IG2)).

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

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

## **COMPLIANCE AND APPROPRIATENESS**

**20. What are the reasons for a proposal not being accepted or returned without review?**

If a proposal is not in compliance with the guidelines given in the Grant Proposal Guide Chapter IV B. and in the solicitation [NSF 13-510](#), it may not be accepted or returned without review. Here are some common reasons why a proposal may not be accepted or returned without review.

- The topic of the 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.
- On the Proposal Cover Sheet "[NSF 13-510](#)" does not appear in the Program Announcement/Solicitation No. /Closing Date box.
- The Project Summary does not include an overview and separate statements on intellectual merit and broader impacts.
- The Project Description does not include a separate section addressing broader impacts.
- The proposal is not formatted correctly. The name and affiliation of each PI and 5 key words must be indicated on the Project Summary page. Formatting requirements for the remainder of the proposal, e.g., font size, line spacing, margin requirements, format of the references, and format of the biographical sketch, should comply with the specifications in the Grant Proposal Guide. In particular, the reference format must indicate the names of all authors.
- The proposal was submitted after the deadline date.
- Supplementary documents other than those listed as permitted in the solicitation [NSF 13-510](#) have been included.
- The consolidated Conflict of Interest List is not included in Single-Copy Documents
- Results from Prior Support, which are required if the PI or Co-PI has received NSF support in the last 5 years, are not included
- Postdoctoral mentoring plan (if required, and not to exceed one page) or data management plan (required of all proposals, no more than two pages) are not provided.

**21. What are my options if my proposal is returned without review from MCB?**

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.

## REVIEW AND FUNDING DECISIONS

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**22. Since the cycle time has been extended from eight months to twelve months, when will I be notified of the funding decision for my proposal?**

Every attempt will be made to handle proposals as expeditiously as possible and to notify PIs in the same time frame (within six months) as before.

**23. Since the cycle time for proposal submissions has been extended, should I request support for longer periods of time?**

The issues are unrelated. The length of time requested should always be geared to the time it takes to successfully complete the proposed project.

**24. Can I resubmit a proposal to MCB if it is declined?**

**Yes.** If your proposal was declined by MCB, there are three options- First, you will have six months to revise the proposal substantially and resubmit it at the next deadline. 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. The Division recommends that you consult with a Program Director before you begin the revision/resubmission process. All proposals, irrespective of prior submissions of related projects, are considered as new proposals by NSF. Second, you can submit a revised proposal to MCB for a different solicitation, such as CAREER, if you are eligible. Lastly, if appropriate, you might consider submitting a high-risk, high-impact idea as an EAGER proposal to MCB. You must contact a program director if you are considering submission of an EAGER proposal.

If your proposal or preliminary proposal was reviewed and declined by another division, it is unlikely that the same project will be appropriate for MCB. In this case, please contact a relevant program director before submitting a proposal to MCB.

**25. How often can I resubmit my proposal to MCB?**

There is no limit on the number of times a PI can submit a proposal to NSF. However, less than 30% of MCB awards are made to proposals revised and resubmitted once; very few if any awards are made for proposals that are revised and resubmitted more than twice. Therefore, if your proposal is declined two or more times, your chances of obtaining MCB funds for the same project are very low.

## OTHER

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**26. Will there be bridging supplements available to current awardees?**

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.

**27. Can I receive a no-cost extension on an award?**

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

no-cost extension.

**28. Will this solicitation be implemented on a more long-term basis?**

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