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2415 EISENHOWER AVENUE
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for the NSF Convergence Accelerator Pilot Phase II Solicitation NSF 20-555

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39. Is everybody pitching on both days?
40. Will you provide a room layout, technology, and table assignments for pitch day?
41. Will the day-one pitch panel know about the IDEO style pitch training we received and that we are encouraged to draw upon that for our Phase II pitches? We ask this given how different it is from what a traditional NSF panel might expect.
42. Will we be allowed to have different slide presentations for the different pitch days?
43. Will there be an expectation for an early submission of the slide deck? What if we want to update certain things based on day one reactions?
44. Can you explain more how day two pitch process will work?

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION AND REVIEW

1. **Which version of the PAPPG applies to the proposals that we are submitting?**

   PAPPG 19-1 applies to proposals submitted to NSF 20-555.

2. **Will there be just one review panel?**

   There will be separate review panels for each track. There will be an A review panel and a B review panel, for both proposals and pitches. The pitch review panel will not be the same as the proposal review panel. There may be some people who serve on the proposal review panel and the pitch review panel, but the panels will not be identical.

3. **Will there be industry representatives on the review panel?**

   Yes, there will be industry representatives present on the review panels and during the pitch.

4. **What is the composition of the review panels (academic, industry, entrepreneurs, etc.)?**

   We expect proposal review panel members and the pitch reviewers to have technical knowledge in either Track A or Track B. Ideally, the panels will have members with some business experience and an understanding of what it is needed to have a successful Phase II project.

5. **Can we include a URL in the main body of the proposal?**

   URLs can only be included in a supplementary document. URLs must not be used in the Project Description See PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.d(ii) for additional information.

6. **Does the current lead Principal Investigator (PI) have to be the Phase II lead PI? What about the lead proposing organization?**

   No, this is not required. At least one PI or Co-PI from the Pilot Phase I award must be included as a PI or Co-PI on a Pilot Phase II proposal. The same individual who served as PI for the Pilot Phase I award does not have to be PI on the Pilot Phase II proposal.

   Only one Phase II proposal is permitted from each Phase I team. The organization that received the Pilot Phase I award does not have to be the proposing (lead) organization for the Pilot Phase II proposal,

   Any change of proposing institution and/or PI/Co–PI should be fully explained in the proposal.

7. **What is the metric of measurement and the definition of success for the "contribution to track success" part of the review?**

The goal of the Convergence Accelerator is to create use–inspired deliverables for the American people. Some questions to consider related to both track success and the proposal generally include:

- Is it a truly convergent research team?
- Has the team described how the research and the team are convergent and how the proposal builds towards this bigger track related effort?
- Does the proposal form deep and diverse partnerships in support of use–inspired research?
- Is the proposed research moving towards deliverables that benefit the American people?

Your research should be a match to one of the tracks. Additionally, the proposal should include a plan for carrying out the proposed activities and a mechanism to assess success. We encourage proposals to convey what track success looks like and determine how the team fits in and contributes to the overall track. We want you to define what track success is and how your proposal fits in to that idea.

BUDGETS AND CROSS TEAM COLLABORATION

8. **If we plan to collaborate with another team in Phase II, how should our proposal reflect that? What about our budget?**

   Collaboration with other teams is encouraged and should be reflected in the body of your proposal, the budget, and the budget justification. Efforts that are essential to your success should be efforts that are documented and explained. In the event that both your project and the collaborating team's project are funded, we can modify budgets to remove any duplicative costs. The discussion of your proposal should explain how you will collaborate, including what kinds of data, information, resources, etc. that you are sharing, contributing, and/or receiving. In addition, you should provide letters of collaboration back and forth to each other.

9. **If we are collaborating with another team does each team need to set aside 5% - 10% of their budget for cross team collaboration and integration? What if we plan to work with more than one other team?**

   The total amount of money set aside for cross track collaboration and communication should be 5-10% for each proposal *regardless* of the number of teams or partners. You should describe in the proposal the activities that you envision to enable cross-team integration. That said, NSF may have additional or different activities to suggest when budgets are negotiated with the Phase II grantees. You may also set aside more than

10% for cross team integration if you are working very closely with one or more teams.

10. **Are the travel funds we set aside for the three trips per year to Washington, D.C. the same as the funds set aside for track integration?**

    No, these are different. Although some element of the in-person meetings may include track integration efforts, travel funds are separate from the track integration funds.

11. **We aren't sure of future travel costs in this uncertain environment. Given this, can we be vague in the budget justification as it pertains to travel costs?**

    While we understand that you may not know exactly what your travel expenses will entail, it is best to provide as much detail as possible in the budget justification to justify the travel costs listed in the budget. NSF allows significant re-budgeting flexibility, should that be necessary.

12. **Can we revise our current Phase I budgets to get reimbursed for June 2020 and possibly beyond?**

    No, we are not expecting you to revise your Phase I budgets. Please reference the no-cost extension email sent out on March 16th on behalf of the Convergence Accelerator team for additional details.

13. **Does the two–month summer salary limit for PIs, Co–PIs, or other Senior Personnel apply?**

    No, not necessarily. As you all know, a significant level of personnel effort is expected in order to achieve deliverables at an accelerated pace. PIs, Co–PIs, and other Senior Personnel as necessary are encouraged to request more than two months of summer salary support. Any compensation in excess of two months must be disclosed and justified in the proposal budget and budget justification. See PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.g(i)(a) for additional information.

14. **For situations with current working relationships between different teams, what is the best way to indicate that in the proposal? For example, is a sub–contract or sharing of Senior Personnel the best way to indicate cross team collaboration?**

    The mechanism used in this situation does not matter so long as it is accurately accounted for and explained in the project description of the proposal, the budget and budget justification (e.g. who is getting funds, what work they are doing, etc.).

15. **Is committed cost sharing permitted?**

    Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited in the proposal as described in PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.g (xii). Resources provided by partners should be described in the Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources section of the proposal (see PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.i).

16. **If two Phase I teams are collaborating, but would still like to submit two separate Phase II proposals, can they refer to the same body of work or are these two distinct, independent proposals?**

    The teams can decide to submit two separate proposals, however, the intellectual content and ideas in each proposal should be distinct and original. Referring to the same body of work should be treated as one would treat preliminary results or published work from a referred source.

    One obvious option would be to join together and submit a single proposal and allocate the other team(s) as sub-awardee(s). The solicitation states, "Proposers should describe the way(s) in which they plan to collaborate with other Phase I team(s). These collaborations may be supported via sub-awards or other mechanisms. However, simultaneous submission of proposals from different organizations, with each organization requesting a separate award, are NOT permitted. If teams choose to create a fully integrated, single effort, only one proposal may be submitted."

LETTERS OF COLLABORATION, EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST, AND LETTERS OF ENGAGEMENT

17. **We are currently working with a company on our proposal and thought about suggesting them as reviewers for the panel. Would those companies have a conflict of interest for the panel? What about the pitch?**

    Yes, companies you are currently working with would have a conflict of interest, so you cannot send those names as suggested reviewers for the proposal review panel or the day one pitch panel. That said, you can send those names as potential guests to come to the day two pitch.

    Note that if they are listed on your proposal as a funded partner or someone providing resources through a Letter of Collaboration, then they could not provide an Expression of Interest about your project to NSF at the pitch.

18. **Can you explain the different ways we would connect with industry or other entities that might be interested in our project?**

    There are a few ways that non-academic institutions and organizations can show interest in your project:

    - They can be part of the Phase II proposal that you submit. This would apply to the organizations that you're already working with – especially if they are providing

resources, intellectual content, tools, intellectual property, etc.
    - Suggest that these non-academic institutions and organizations be invited to the pitch. If there are groups you feel would be excited about your project, we want to invite them as soon as possible. If they like your proposal at the pitch, then they could submit an Expression of Interest.

19. **Do industry partners need to write a Letter of Collaboration?**

    Industry partners should write a Letter of Collaboration. These letters, "...should state the intent to collaborate and describe the nature of collaboration, which ideally will include listing the tasks the collaborator will undertake. The letters should not contain endorsements or evaluation of the proposed project or sections of the proposal. Letters should be succinct and in general should not exceed two pages each." Note that this guidance does differ from the guidance in the PAPPG regarding Letters of Collaboration.

20. **In addition to letters of collaboration, may we upload letters of support from outside organizations that might not commit data or resources, but support the ideas or concepts in the proposal?**

    No, as mentioned under the "Letters of Collaboration" portion of the solicitation, letters of support and letters of recommendation for the project, PI, or Co–PIs are not allowed. Letters of collaboration on the other hand are allowed. Letters of collaboration state both the intent to collaborate and describe the collaboration. Ideally, they would also include details as to what tasks each collaborator will undertake. These letters must not contain endorsements or evaluations of the project and should be no longer than two pages each. Note, there is no limit to the number of letters of collaboration.

21. **A company is interested in providing our project with matching funds or a grant. Should that be an "Expression of Interest"? How and where should that be described?**

    If an outside organization is interested in providing support – financial or otherwise – to your team, the appropriate place to describe that resource is in the Facilities, Equipment, and Other Resources section of the proposal. Per the guidance in PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.I, the description should be narrative in nature and must not include any quantifiable financial information. A Letter of Collaboration would also be appropriate to include.

22. **Can a dollar amount be included in a Letter of Collaboration from a company?**

    No, you should not include the dollar amount in the Letter of Collaboration or the proposal.

23. **An organization is working with us as a subcontractor that's contributing significant effort. Can they also provide an "Expression of Interest" as part of the day two pitch?**

    No, they cannot. If an organization is going to be a subcontractor on your award, then any contributions they are making should be described in the proposal.

24. **An organization wants to contribute staff time to our project as an "in kind" contribution. How should this be described and documented?**

    If an outside organization is interested in providing staff time and support to your team the appropriate place to describe that resource is in the Facilities, Equipment, and Other Resources section of the proposal. Per the guidance in PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.I, the description should be narrative in nature and must not include any quantifiable financial information.

25. **Do we need a certain number of Expressions of Interest to receive a Phase II award?**

    No, you do not have to have an Expression of Interest to get a Phase II award. That said, the goal of the Expression of Interest is to increase engagement with organizations that can help transition your team's research into practice.

    The Convergence Accelerator is trying to develop new ways to engage with other kinds of organizations that are part of the ecosystem of creating and delivering technologies, tools, and resources. With this said, with or without Expressions of Interest, it is crucial to the success of your proposal that you demonstrate a clear trajectory to deliverables that will benefit the American people.

26. **Is it more valuable to have an organization listed in your proposal or to have them provide an Expression of Interest?**

    If you have a commitment at the time of proposal submission with an organization that wants to partner with your team, that is likely to be stronger than getting an Expression of Interest from your pitch.

27. **If an organization is interested in contributing funds, do they use an Expression of Interest to commit to doing so?**

    An Expression of Interest is a non-binding form that a potential partner gives directly to NSF at, or immediately, after the day-two pitch. It indicates a potential partner's interest in your project and that they may want to contribute in some form or fashion.

    A Letter of Collaboration is a commitment from a partner and explains exactly what they will contribute to your project. This should not include financial information or dollar amounts. Letters of collaboration are part of your proposal; they are due when you submit your proposal.

In summary:

- Letter of Collaboration
    - Concrete commitment
    - Explains what will be contributed (without including financial information or dollar amounts)
    - Due with proposals
- Expression of Interest
    - Turned in directly to NSF by potential partner at or immediately after the day two pitch
    - Non-binding

28. **Do we have to use the PAPPG template for a Letter of Collaboration?**

    You do not have to use the PAPPG template. That said, be very careful to ensure that any letters comply with the spirit of the PAPPG. It is important that the letters do not appear to be an effort to circumvent proposal page limits to provide additional details. In addition, letters of collaboration may *not* be letters of support that endorse the team or the proposal. Letters should be succinct lists of what the collaborator intends to contribute to the proposed effort – often as brief bullet points. This should be done without including financial information or dollar amounts.

PUBLIC EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

29. **What is the Public Executive Summary? How should it be structured?**

    The Public Executive Summary is a two-page document that will be shared by NSF with people at the pitch in order to provide them information about your proposal. In general, the document will be available for public use. Note that, as per NSF guidelines, all other information submitted as part of your proposal (other than the Public Executive Summary) is protected by the Privacy Act and will be handled in accordance with applicable federal law, including the Freedom of Information Act. All project Public Executive Summaries will be posted online and will also be included in a document that will be provided during the pitch to all pitch attendees. The target audience for this document includes potential partners for your respective projects, from industry, non-profits, other government agencies, and other organizations.

    While the solicitation explicitly calls out six areas that you must address in the document, you are permitted to add other information and also include graphics. NSF will provide a template for this document that you are required to use, which will provide specific directions. You must adhere to the two-page limit for this document, as well as the page setup, format, font, and other requirements that will be provided. We suggest that you engage your coaches to assist you in preparing this document.

30. **If we include a video link in the Public Executive Summary, can we assume the review panel will watch the video?**

    No. The Public Executive Summary is primarily for the public and for the pitch. It's a supplementary document included with your proposal. Reviewers will have access to all supplementary documents and will read through all such documents. However, you cannot presume that all reviewers will click through all links in a document, nor that they will see videos to their completion. That is not a requirement for reviewers.

OTHER SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTS

31. **Will there be a supplementary document to describe results from prior work?**

    There is three-page supplementary document titled "Phase I Portfolio" where you can describe all of the prior work done in Phase I of the Accelerator effort. That can include the participation by your team in the in-person C-Accel meetings and webinars; discussion of if and how your Phase I efforts may have modified you project path, or otherwise impacted your project plans; , any creative products or preliminary results that were developed during Phase I; and other results from Phase I. Your main Project Description should still include a "Results from Prior NSF Support", which can include research results from other NSF Funding and can include a statement pointing to this supplementary document for results from Phase I.

32. **For Phase II proposals, how do we communicate and show the prototypes we've developed during Phase I?**

    Details about any Phase I prototyping effort that is already completed can be included in your Phase I Portfolio supplementary document. However, any on-going/continuing work, or new work on the prototype that will be undertaken in Phase II should be included in the Project Description. It will be important, and beneficial to you, to include sufficient information about the prototyping effort in the Project Description section of the proposal, so that reviewers are able to read that as part of the overall flow of the research work, while also providing details in the Phase I Portfolio document. For showing your prototypes, we think the poster session would be a great opportunity for people to see your demos.

33. **Do we need to provide a supplementary document with project personnel?**

    Yes. NSF will use this information in the merit review process to manage reviewer selection. Per the solicitation, "Each proposal must include a table that lists the PI, Co-PIs, and all Senior Personnel. This table should list the following information for each individual in separate columns: Last Name; First Name, Middle Initial; Organizational Affiliation. There is no limit on the number of Senior Personnel."

Note that participants from Letters of Collaboration should be included in this list.

34. **What should be included in the Broadening Participation Plan?**

    We would like to see a write-up of the ways in which your activities can impact and broaden participation. For instance, highlighting the work you might be doing with minority serving institutions, activities for reaching underrepresented students on your own campus, resources you are creating for underserved communities, etc. It can be on the order of individuals and very specific to a much broader, general effort. We are looking to see what innovative ideas you can undertake to broaden participation. Please reference the solicitation for specific wording.

35. **What exactly is the "Contribution to Track Success" document?**

    The "Contribution to Track Success" is a two-page supplemental document. It should include a description of 1) how the proposed project contributes to overall track success and 2) the activities that will foster track integration and/or cross-track activities. We want to know that you have a plan and a means to integrate your work with the other projects in the track.

    After awards are made, Phase II projects in each track will have the opportunity to interact and refine their plan for these integrating activities. This will be subject to approval by NSF. As mentioned in the budget section, no less than 5% and up to 10% of the overall budget amount should be set aside for track integration and potential cross-track activities.

    Please refer back to question 8 for more information on this.

PITCH

36. **When is the pitch date scheduled for?**

    We will update you as soon as we know more.

37. **Do we know how many people can participate in the pitch? Who should give the pitch?**

    You can send a maximum of five people to the pitch session. Ideally the presenter would be a person engaged with the project – PI, co–PI, or Senior Personnel. The presenter should have an intimate understanding of the project, have technical depth, and show passion for the project. While it technically does not have to be a PI, Co–PI, or Senior Personnel, we believe a key project member is likely to do a better, more authentic job than someone not associated with the project. The presenter should not be a person engaged just to make the pitch.

38. **How many people will be present for the pitch?**

    We are closely watching the ongoing COVID-19 situation and will update you as soon as possible with plans. We intend for as many as 500 to 750 people present for the day-two pitch. The day-one pitch will be in front of a review panel and NSF only.

39. **Is everybody pitching on both days?**

    Yes, everybody pitches both days. Note that each day has slightly different audiences though. Day one is a review panel and day two is a public audience with other potential stakeholders from industry, non-profits, other government agencies, etc. Day two is a good opportunity to meet people and get Expressions of Interest from folks who may want to be involved in your projects.

40. **Will you provide a room layout, technology, and table assignments for pitch day?**

    When we get that far we will give you as much information as possible pertaining to room logistics, technology, table assignments, etc.

41. **Will the day-one pitch panel know about the IDEO style pitch training we received and that we are encouraged to draw upon that for our Phase II pitches? We ask this given how different it is from what a traditional NSF panel might expect.**

    They will. We're going to be engaging a lot with the review panels to help them understand what we did in Phase I and what our goals are. That said, formally day one is a traditional NSF panel where your proposal will be looked at through the merit review criteria of intellectual merit and broader impacts.

42. **Will we be allowed to have different slide presentations for the different pitch days?**

    Yes, you may have two different slide decks. Your first one for the traditional NSF review process and then another for the public pitch on day two.

43. **Will there be an expectation for an early submission of the slide deck? What if we want to update certain things based on day one reactions?**

    The solicitation asks for everything a week in advance. We'll explore if and, if so, how we could allow you to update your day-two pitch based on your day one experience.

That said, you are the one presenting, so you could change what you emphasize or talk about on day two without necessarily changing the slide deck. Additionally, as mentioned, you can and probably should have two separate slide decks anyways for day one and day two given the different audiences each day.

44. **Can you explain more how day two pitch process will work?**

    Day two is an open pitch, divided by track, to a public audience. The people in the audience will be industry, possible investors, foundations, etc. We're asking them to provide to NSF an Expression of Interest in your project, where an expression equals possible co-funding, resources, etc.