NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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NSF 23-045

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for the Research and Mentoring for Post-Baccalaureates (RaMP) Program

GENERAL PROGRAM QUESTIONS

1. Will there be a webinar or some other type of information session about this program?

2. Will this solicitation be offered next year?

ELIGIBILITY TYPE

3. Are graduate degree-conferring universities (e.g., R1 Universities) eligible?

4. Are certain organizations (e.g., comprehensive universities or Historically Black Colleges and Universities) prioritized over others in assessing the mentoring and recruitment planning?

5. Are international partnerships allowed as part of the mentoring network?

PI ELIGIBILITY

6. Do proposals need to be led by an investigator who is currently funded?

7. Is a proposal with multiple co-PIs (e.g., single PI, plus 2-3 co-PIs) viewed unfavorably?

INTELLECTUAL MERIT AND BROADER IMPACTS

8. Are research objectives restricted to the Biological Sciences?

9. How unified or specific does the research theme need to be?

10. The solicitation mentions wanting a "cohesive theme" for research opportunities. Is NSF seeking a narrowly defined theme or something broader that could accommodate a range of research programs using different models and methods?

11. Is RaMP intended to increase research opportunities broadly, including increasing competitiveness for students with weaker undergraduate academic records, or is it intended to support highly promising students with more limited research experience?

12. Is RaMP focused primarily on expanding the pipeline of students headed for graduate study, or is it a broader workforce development effort? In other words, would increasing the number of students pursuing science employment after receiving a bachelor's degree be a desired outcome?

13. Is the scientific theme special criterion for RaMP judged based on its "transformative" basic science research questions or whether the transformative piece can be the development of the post-baccalaureate participants (post-baccalaureates) training network itself?

NETWORK STRUCTURE

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15. Is a new set of 8-12 mentors expected in each successive year of the award?

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MENTORS

17. Are mentors required to be full-time faculty members?

18. The solicitation mentions 8-12 mentees and 8-12 mentors per year. Does this imply an expectation of no more than one mentee per mentor per year?

19. Can you expand upon what the $10,000 dollars per year for mentors and co-mentors can be used for?

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20. Which undergraduate majors would be eligible for mentee stipends under this program?

21. Must the mentee be matched with a faculty mentor in the same discipline, or could they explore a new discipline?

22. Should there be a list of potential mentors available at the time of submission, and is there a minimum number?

23. Is there any opportunity to go beyond a 12-month training period for post-baccalaureates – i.e., will 2 years of engagement be allowed?

PROJECT COORDINATOR

24. What is the role of the coordinator?

25. Should the coordinator be a staff person or a faculty member?

26. Does the program allow a full-time or part-time Project Coordinator position to support research and training efforts?

27. Can multiple Project Coordinators be included in the grant budget?

BUDGET AND PROPOSAL TIMELINE

28. Are proposals limited to a maximum of a 3-year period?

29. Are collaborative proposals allowed to directly support network partners?

30. Are post-baccalaureate researchers to be hired as participants (thus not subject to overhead) or research technicians (thus subject to fringe & overhead)?

31. Can Health insurance be charged to the grant?

32. Can we use funds to pay for tuition for post-baccalaureate participants to take one or two courses?

RECRUITMENT PLAN

33. How broad does the recruitment plan need to be? Is local recruitment appropriate?

PROGRAM EVALUATION

34. How independent of the mentoring team should the evaluator be to be effective for the program?

35. Is there a certain percent of the budget that should go to the external evaluator?

REVIEW PROCESS

36. How will the RaMP proposals be reviewed?

37. How much weight is put on intellectual merit versus broader impacts?

GENERAL PROGRAM QUESTIONS

1. **Will there be a webinar or some other type of information session about this program?**

   Yes. Please monitor the program webpage for additional details (https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/research-and-mentoring-postbaccalaureates-biological-sciences-ramp).

2. **Will this solicitation be offered next year?**

   We expect the solicitation to continue next year pending availability of funds.

ELIGIBILITY TYPE

3. **Are graduate degree-conferring universities (e.g., R1 Universities) eligible?**

   Yes. As specified in the solicitation, proposals may be submitted by Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) and non-profit, non-academic organizations. Additional information about eligibility can be found in the current RaMP Solicitation (NSF 23-514) as well as the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG), Chapter I.E, Categories of Proposers. If your organization is not eligible, you can consider a partnership with other eligible organizations.

4. **Are certain organizations (e.g., comprehensive universities or Historically Black Colleges and Universities) prioritized over others in assessing the mentoring and recruitment planning?**

   No. A RaMP proposal may include a combination of organizational types to accomplish the expected outcomes.

5. **Are international partnerships allowed as part of the mentoring network?**

   Yes. Such relationships are encouraged if they augment the solicitation-specific outcomes described in the solicitation. Specific guidelines for international partnerships are provided in the PAPGG.

PI ELIGIBILITY

6. **Do proposals need to be led by an investigator who is currently funded?**

   No. Investigators who are new to NSF or are not currently funded by NSF are welcome to submit proposals.

7. **Is a proposal with multiple co-PIs (e.g., single PI, plus 2-3 co-PIs) viewed unfavorably?**

   No. The solicitation does not have limits on the number of PIs or organizations, but the involvement of all personnel must be well justified.

INTELLECTUAL MERIT AND BROADER IMPACTS

8. **Are research objectives restricted to the Biological Sciences?**

   Yes. However, the use of interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate ideas and methodologies of a variety of disciplines are allowed as long as the research theme and core objectives align with research areas supported in the National Science

Foundation's Directorate of Biological Sciences (BIO).

9. **How unified or specific does the research theme need to be?**

Projects should include a cohesive science theme that fits within or integrates among the core research areas of BIO. The RaMP networks are intended to advance novel and potentially transformative training and research in areas supported by BIO. Proposals should demonstrate the science theme will facilitate the development of cohort environments in which participants and mentors have similar science interests.

10. **The solicitation mentions wanting a "cohesive theme" for research opportunities. Is NSF seeking a narrowly defined theme or something broader that could accommodate a range of research programs using different models and methods?**

As described in the solicitation "The RaMP networks are intended to advance novel and potentially transformative research and training in areas supported by the Directorate of Biological Sciences." PIs have flexibility in developing the intellectual merit component of their proposals.

11. **Is RaMP intended to increase research opportunities broadly, including increasing competitiveness for students with weaker undergraduate academic records, or is it intended to support highly promising students with more limited research experience?**

As described in the solicitation: "The program goal is to offer opportunities to those who had little or no research experiences during college to facilitate entry into the STEM workforce." A recruitment, selection and retention plan must be included as part of the project description.

12. **Is RaMP focused primarily on expanding the pipeline of students headed for graduate study, or is it a broader workforce development effort? In other words, would increasing the number of students pursuing science employment after receiving a bachelor's degree be a desired outcome?**

Broadening training opportunities for diverse career paths in the biological sciences is appropriate for this program. The program seeks to fund networks that offer strong research, mentoring, technical skills, and professional development training opportunities in an inclusive, cohort environment for recent graduates with limited or no research opportunities during college, with the goal to increase their competitiveness in STEM graduate programs, industry, and research and teaching positions, among other career opportunities. (See also the Additional Solicitation Specific Review Criteria in the solicitation.)

13. **Is the scientific theme special criterion for RaMP judged based on its "transformative" basic science research questions or whether the transformative piece can be the development of the post-baccalaureate participants (post-baccalaureates) training network itself?**

    The proposals will be reviewed based on the NSF review criteria for Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts, in addition to the solicitation specific review criteria described in the solicitation. The RaMP networks are intended to advance novel and potentially transformative research and training in areas supported by BIO. Then, both the post-baccalaureate training and the possibility to advance the science are part of the review criteria.

NETWORK STRUCTURE

14. **What is meant by the network?**

    Refer to the specific details in the description of the Network Structure contained in the Program Description and Proposal Preparation Instructions sections in the solicitation.

15. **Is a new set of 8-12 mentors expected in each successive year of the award?**

    Repeat mentorships are not prohibited in the network design, but the proposal must outline strategies for the recruitment, training, and inclusion of new mentors for the new cohorts of mentees to support the inclusion of a diverse community of mentors and co-mentors within the network.

16. **What sort of networks are expected?**

    Detailed information about the networks can be found in the Introduction as well as in the Network Structure and Collaborative Framework section of the solicitation under Proposal Preparation Instructions. This section notes the following: "Networks may be regional or national or may have international components. It is expected that a proposed network will involve investigators (mentors and co-mentors) from diverse organizations, which can include a variety of institutions of higher education, industry, federal, tribal, and state agencies, and research and teaching centers." Additional commentary that is important to network characteristics can be found in the aforementioned section of the solicitation.

MENTORS

17. **Are mentors required to be full-time faculty members?**

    No. Mentors may include a diverse cohort of researchers who represent a variety of career paths. Collaborations among researchers, institutions, or organizations, including

universities, field stations, national laboratories, industry, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private sector institutions and teaching and research centers are welcome. Mentors may work with co-mentors, which may include postdoctoral scholars, collaborators, and/or advanced Ph.D. students.

18. **The solicitation mentions 8-12 mentees and 8-12 mentors per year. Does this imply an expectation of no more than one mentee per mentor per year?**

    Yes. However, there is flexibility in well-justified cases. The idea is to provide the opportunity to a broad range of mentors with the goal to facilitate training and collaborations among researchers, institutions, or organizations, including universities, field stations, national laboratories, industry, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private sector institutions and teaching and research centers.

19. **Can you expand upon what the $10,000 dollars per year for mentors and co-mentors can be used for?**

    This is to support mentors' and co-mentors' time commitment to mentees, training, and professional development activities. The network must ensure that mentors and co-mentors receive formal training prior to being assigned a mentee.

POST-BACCALAUREATES

20. **Which undergraduate majors would be eligible for mentee stipends under this program?**

    First, as described in the solicitation, mentees must have a baccalaureate degree before the start of the program and show a demonstrated need for additional training and mentorship. As stated in the solicitation the post-baccalaureates will be "recent college graduates who have had few or no research or training opportunities during college in research fields typically supported by the Directorate of Biological Sciences (BIO)"; you will need to justify the academic background of those individuals you recruit per this description.

21. **Must the mentee be matched with a faculty mentor in the same discipline, or could they explore a new discipline?**

    Proposals must include a description of mentor involvement and training and clearly demonstrate linkages with the science theme and BIO supported research areas, but diverse training and mentoring opportunities can be offered to the participants. Networks may include and facilitate collaborations among researchers, institutions, or organizations, including universities, field stations, national laboratories, industry, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private sector institutions and teaching and research centers.

22. **Should there be a list of potential mentors available at the time of submission, and is there a minimum number?**

    Yes. See the Proposal Preparation Instructions in the solicitation with the required information and submission form for the list of mentors. Information about potential projects may also be included as part of the project description.

23. **Is there any opportunity to go beyond a 12-month training period for post-baccalaureates – i.e., will 2 years of engagement be allowed?**

    Post-baccalaureates can only be supported for a year, but that doesn't mean that they cannot be part of the network or participate in network activities (in another role) for the complete funding period and beyond.

PROJECT COORDINATOR

24. **What is the role of the coordinator?**

    Per the solicitation (Section V.A): "The Coordinator is expected to coordinate communication for the project; to coordinate training and professional development opportunities for mentees; to coordinate mentor-training; to execute mentee recruitment, selection, and retention; and to ensure that continued project evaluation and assessments occur." This role is an essential one to the structure of the proposal and costs to support this position may be included in the proposed budget.

25. **Should the coordinator be a staff person or a faculty member?**

    While the solicitation does not restrict the role of the coordinator to a staff or faculty position, it is important to recognize that this position is central to the activities of the entire network. Accordingly, this individual should have intimate knowledge of the research and collaborative activities across the network.

26. **Does the program allow a full-time or part-time Project Coordinator position to support research and training efforts?**

    You may choose to make a coordinator either full-time or part-time, depending upon the circumstances, but it is important to recognize that the many responsibilities of the coordinator are time-consuming and intensive in nature.

27. **Can multiple Project Coordinators be included in the grant budget?**

    Yes. This will depend upon your network structure and ability to accommodate the responsibilities inherent in the coordinator role as outlined in the solicitation.

BUDGET AND PROPOSAL TIMELINE

28. **Are proposals limited to a maximum of a 3-year period?**

No. The program provides support for 3 cohorts of mentees over 36 months. However, awards of up to 48 months are allowed to facilitate network establishment, mentor training, mentee recruitment and selection, and plans for network assessment and evaluation.

29. **Are collaborative proposals allowed to directly support network partners?**

Although RaMP networks are expected to involve mentors from multiple sites and organizations, a single organization must serve as the submitting organization for each proposal. Of the two types of collaborative proposal formats described in the PAPPG, the RaMP solicitation allows only a single proposal submission. Types or organizations other than those listed in the "Who May Submit Proposals" section of the solicitation are allowed to receive subawards through an eligible organization. However, there are limitations on what can be supported by those subawards. Details about budget structure are listed under the Proposal Preparation Instructions section of the solicitation.

30. **Are post-baccalaureate researchers to be hired as participants (thus not subject to overhead) or research technicians (thus subject to fringe & overhead)?**

This information is listed under budget guidelines in the Proposal Preparation instructions section of the solicitation. All support costs for participants should be listed on Line F, "Participant Support," of the budget.

31. **Can Health insurance be charged to the grant?**

Stipend costs may include fringe benefits to cover individual or family health insurance.

32. **Can we use funds to pay for tuition for post-baccalaureate participants to take one or two courses?**

The solicitation is intended to provide specific-professional development and network training to the post-baccalaureates outside of regular undergraduate and graduate school courses. Therefore, tuition is not considered a budget line in the solicitation. PIs can include training opportunities in the format of a workshop or short-courses available to all network participants. Specific funds to support the workshops or training need to be well-justified in order to support the program goals described in the solicitation.

RECRUITMENT PLAN

33. **How broad does the recruitment plan need to be? Is local recruitment appropriate?**

A convincing and well-conceived mentee recruitment, selection and retention process grounded in best practices must be included. Recruitment plans must demonstrate national-level efforts to attract diverse, eligible applicants but local recruitment is appropriate as well. Networks are expected to provide opportunities to post-baccalaureate participants with limited prior training and research experience, including individuals from groups traditionally underrepresented in the biological sciences, first generation students, and college graduates of under-resourced institutions.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

34. **How independent of the mentoring team should the evaluator be to be effective for the program?**

The external evaluator should be trained formally in assessment and be demonstrably independent of the Senior Personnel; the evaluator may be employed at the same institution as Senior Personnel but should not have a direct interest in the project's success in order to ensure objectivity.

35. **Is there a certain percent of the budget that should go to the external evaluator?**

No. PIs should include the budget allocation appropriate to accomplish program goals.

REVIEW PROCESS

36. **How will the RaMP proposals be reviewed?**

Please see section VI.A of the RaMP solicitation. Each proposal will be reviewed in its entirety by multiple reviewers; a separate Panel Summary statement is produced after the panel meets and records the panel's collective opinion of the proposal and each section within it according to the "strengths" and "weaknesses" of each section (Intellectual Merit, Broader Impacts, and Solicitation Specific Review Criteria).

37. **How much weight is put on intellectual merit versus broader impacts?**

Please see section VI.A of the RaMP solicitation. A RaMP proposal will have multiple components that must be weighed by panel members in concert with one another, including elements relating to Solicitation Specific Review Criteria that may be unique to this program. Under-emphasizing solicitation criteria for any one section will make a proposal less competitive than it might otherwise be.