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NSF 23-061

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the Expanding AI Innovation through Capacity Building and Partnerships (ExpandAI) Program (NSF 23-506)

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GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. **Where can I find information about the ExpandAI program?**

   Information about this program can found on the Expand AI program webpage.

2. **Will there be webinars about the ExpandAI program?**

   Webinar information will be posted to the Expand AI program webpage. Please check the webpage for updates and additional information. Recordings of previous webinars will also be made available on the program webpage.

3. **What will the ExpandAI program webinars cover?**

   The webinars will explain and answer questions about the **ExpandAI** program, including the solicitation, concept outline/proposal structure, and helpful hints for proposal writing.

   Webinars are also designed to facilitate interaction between potential PIs and some AI Institutes points-of-contact. These sessions are opportunities to hear directly from the Institutes about their research and partnerships, and to engage directly in discussion with them.

4. **Can I discuss the ExpandAI program with the program contacts?**

   Yes, we encourage you to contact the program contacts at any time at the email address, ExpandAIProgram@nsf.gov. In addition, the program expects to hold monthly "office hours" events. These are open periods during which you can join a zoom call to interact with several NSF ExpandAI program officers about your questions and proposal plans. Webinar information will be posted to the Expand AI program webpage. Please check the webpage for updates and additional information. These sessions are not recorded.

5. **Where can I find information about proposal preparation and submission?**

   Proposal preparation and submission information is provided in the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG).

   Additionally, the **ExpandAI** program solicitation NSF 23-506 contains program-specific guidance. Be sure to read the entire solicitation and pay particular attention to the motivation of the program in the *Introduction*, the goals and requirements in the *Program Description*, and the detailed submission instructions for both Concept Outlines and Full Proposals in the *Proposal Preparation Instructions*. Most answers about program requirements can be found there.

6. **Who do I contact for help with the submission process?**

   For help with Research.gov, please call 1-800-381-1532 or email rgov@nsf.gov
   For help with Grants.gov, please call 1-800-518-4726 or email support@grants.gov

ELIGIBILITY

7. **Is my institution an eligible MSI under the eligibility criteria of the solicitation?**

   We recommend you first consult the authorized organizational representative (AOR) in your institution about eligibility. If the AOR has additional questions, NSF can help with interpreting the eligibility guidelines in the solicitation.

NSF will verify eligibility on review of the Concept Outline. See the requirements in the solicitation and be sure to provide details of your institution's MSI status, addressing the relevant requirements for Eligible Institutions of Higher Education in the solicitation.

8. **Can a PARTNER submission include enhancement of collaborations or partnerships that already exist between my institution and the AI Institute(s)?**

The solicitation has no strict limitations about this. However, we call your attention to the solicitation's overall emphasis on building new capacity in MSIs that do not have such programs in place and on growing new collaborations. We also call your attention to the emphasis in the program description for the PARTNER track on *new* collaborations with AI Institutes.

CONCEPT OUTLINES (COs)

9. **Is there a limit on the number of concept outlines (COs) that can be submitted by an institution?**

The solicitation does not have any restrictions on the number of COs that an organization can submit.

10. **If multiple concept outlines (COs) are submitted by my organization, how will those COs and related proposals be handled?**

There are no limits on the number of CO submissions by organization in order to limit the effort an organization might otherwise undertake to conduct an internal selection process. To maximize the value of COs as a feedback mechanism to your proposal plans, NSF intends to provide responses to them expeditiously (see next question). If NSF receives a CO from an organization that already has submitted COs or that has a proposal already under review in the program, we may seek clarification from submitters accordingly regarding the institution's vision for capacity building or about prospective partnerships before providing feedback on the new CO.

Regardless of the COs submitted and reviewed, the proposal submission limits apply. **We encourage institutions to assess needs and plans for AI capacity building or partnership development and coordinate proposal plans as appropriate to your institution** to achieve better responsiveness and higher impact.

11. **When will my Concept Outline (CO) be reviewed?**

The review process for a CO takes approximately three weeks from the date of submission. The goal is to ensure that every CO receives a prompt, appropriate and equitable review.

12. **Can personnel from other institutions and collaborative arrangements with other organizations be included in a Capacity Building Pilot (CAP) Concept Outline (CO) and later a CAP proposal?**

    The solicitation does not forbid this. However, it is important to emphasize that the primary goal of a CAP proposal is the **development of AI capacity** at the submitting institution. Any such collaborations should be explicitly justified in the concept outline in terms of how the arrangement adds to the capacity building at the submitting institution.

13. **If multiple MSIs wish to work together on capacity building at their respective institutions, can this concept be submitted in a collaborative Concept Outline (CO) and later the proposal?**

    The primary goal of a CAP proposal is the **development of AI capacity** at the submitting institution. Consider the budget limitations of a CAP proposal when considering such an arrangement. If you choose to propose such a collaboration, the CO should clearly justify how the capacity building at one or more of the institutions is more effective in the collaborative arrangement, and the anticipated cost realism of doing this in a single collaborative proposal.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

14. **How do I know if my ideas are appropriate for an ExpandAI Concept Outline?**

    Questions about ideas for possible concept outlines to the ExpandAI program may be addressed to program officers affiliated with the program. Proposers are invited to contact a program officer about the suitability of a proposed project. Program officers are identified on the ExpandAI program website (Expand AI program). Advice/guidance from the program officer may be accessed via email or through a scheduled telephone/video call.

15. **How do I determine what track to submit to?**

    The solicitation is specific about the goals and requirements for each track. We recommend that you review the *Program Description* in the solicitation to determine if your institution is in need of AI capacity building as described in Capacity Building Pilots, or ExpandAI Partnerships are appropriate based on the level of AI capacity present. Note that the preparation of your Concept Outline will help both you and NSF make determinations about this. If you have questions about the requirements for either track prior to submitting a concept outline, you may contact the program officers affiliated with the program via email or through a scheduled telephone/video call. Program officers are identified on the ExpandAI program website (Expand AI program).

PROPOSAL REVIEW PROCESS

16. **When will my proposal be reviewed?**

    From the date of submission, the review process can be expected to take two to three months for a CAP proposal, and three and six months for a PARTNER proposal. If a proposal is recommended for funding, additional time may be necessary to negotiate and approve the terms of the award.

17. **Where do I find my reviews?**

    When PIs receive a determination notice from NSF, reviews will be accessible on Research.gov. Proposers will need to log in to their Research.gov accounts and access their proposals to view their reviews. Proposers may also receive written comments from a program officer.

PROJECT SCOPE

18. **What types of AI projects and research topics fall within the scope of the ExpandAI program's research focus?**

    The ExpandAI program requires that the proposed capacity building and partnerships be related to increased diversification of participation in AI research, education, and workforce development. Questions about the scope of AI for this program should be addressed to the program contacts at ExpandAIProgram@nsf.gov.

    a. CAP projects are planning, and growth efforts focused on the establishment of AI activities at the funded MSI and the early exploration of future potential ExpandAI Partnerships. It is important to emphasize that a compelling CAP project differs from an ordinary research grant. While research projects may be an important component or basis for a CAP proposal, the purpose and outcome of a CAP grant should be toward building new capacity for AI research or education at the institution, as described in the solicitation. Concepts focused narrowly on funding a specific research project rather than on institutional growth are not likely to review well in the program.

    b. PARTNER track proposals provide opportunities for MSIs to scale up already-established AI research and/or education programs and to initiate/leverage new collaborations with AI Institutes. These projects should represent a mutually beneficial collaboration between the MSI and AI Institute, while also continuing to build the AI capacity at the lead MSI institution.

19. **What kind of measurable outcomes are considered appropriate as capacity building activities?**

    Please see the description provided in the solicitation of suitable activities for the

"capacity building plan" that is required in a CAP proposal. These are provided as examples of appropriate capacity building goals. Note that this is not intended to be a prescriptive list—it is not required that a capacity building plan address every one of these potential activities. Note also that this is not an exhaustive list—please feel free to propose other kinds of activities that are suitable for your institution's goals for AI capacity building. Email the program contacts at ExpandAIProgram@nsf.gov with any specific questions you have about this.

20. **Is my existing or prospective research project suitable for an ExpandAI proposal?**

Please note that ExpandAI funding tracks differ from standard research grants, which focus mainly on a specific topic typically pursued by single investigators or individual collaborations. ExpandAI seeks instead to build lasting new capacity in AI at minority-serving institutions, and enduring new partnerships between MSIs and AI Institutes. We encourage you to include research projects in your plans to the extent that they establish significant research programs and output for the proposing institution as part of a broader institutional AI strategy. Prospective PIs might discuss this strategy with departmental or college leadership.

POST-AWARD

21. **What are NSF's expectations of the PI after the ExpandAI award is made?**

The PI/grantee has full responsibility for the conduct of the project or activity supported under the ExpandAI grant and for the results achieved. The PI should monitor the performance of the project to assure adherence to performance goals, time schedules and/or other requirements as appropriate to the project or the terms and conditions of the grant. The PI must submit annual and final project reports when due.

22. **Can one institution qualify for multiple concurrent grants? For instance, if a PI submits a proposal in one project period that is ultimately funded, can another be submitted in a subsequent submission window by the same institution?**

The solicitation does not place any explicit limits on the number of active grants. The specific answer to such questions will depend greatly on the situation, i.e., the scope and the merit review of proposed plans. However, some general guidelines can be useful in thinking about this.

Institutions should consider applying to the track that is most appropriate to their situation. The CAP track is designed for institutions to consider when their current AI capacity is not sufficient to engage immediately in the PARTNER track. The PARTNER track is an appropriate route to **continue to develop AI capacity** at your institution as an effect of otherwise mutually beneficial collaborative efforts, as described in the

solicitation.

Institutions with an active CAP grant might consider applying again to the CAP track to continue capacity building if PARTNER activities are not yet suitable. Under this circumstance, it is expected that this would be justified as a compelling continuation of effective CAP efforts that are focused on lasting, institution-wide effects. The program does not expect to fund multiple independent CAP grants at the same institution.

Institutions with an active CAP grant may propose to the PARTNER track while a capacity-building CAP grant is still active. These circumstances will vary from case to case. Concept outlines and proposals for subsequent PARTNER engagements should describe clearly how the new AI capacity creates favorable conditions for the new PARTNER activities.

Prospective proposers are encouraged to discuss specific scenarios with the program contacts at ExpandAIProgram@nsf.gov.