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NSF 24-056

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Civic Innovation Challenge (CIVIC) Program Solicitation

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PROCESS

1. What is the difference between Stage 1 and Stage 2?

The Civic Innovation Challenge (CIVIC) solicitation ([NSF 24-534](#)) comprises two stages. In Stage 1, awarded teams will be funded for up to \$75,000 over six months to undertake planning and team development activities to refine their vision for a research-centered pilot project. Stage 1 teams will focus on, for example, solidifying and

potentially growing their team, maturing their pilot project plans, and preparing a well-developed full proposal for submission to Stage 2. Stage 1 projects will be selected through an open proposal submission, while only Stage 1 recipients will be allowed to submit proposals for Stage 2. In Stage 2, awarded teams will be funded for up to \$1,000,000 over a 12-month timeframe to execute and evaluate their research-centered pilot projects.

2. Can my team submit to both Track A and Track B?

In Stage 1, yes, teams or individuals (PI or co-PI) may participate in a proposal submitted to each track. In Stage 2, teams or individuals (PI or co-PI) may participate in only one proposal submission.

3. How will the proposal review and selection process work? What factors will be taken into consideration by review panels in assessing the proposals?

Proposals will be assessed in NSF-led merit review panels, comprised of civic leaders and researchers, with expertise reflective of the interdisciplinary character of the proposals. Details regarding NSF's merit review process are described in the solicitation in Section VI; additional details are available through the following link: https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit_review/. Teams are encouraged to pay close attention to the additional solicitation specific review criteria provided in Section VI of the solicitation. The final selection of recipients will be made by the CIVIC working group—comprised of program officers from NSF and the partnering federal agencies, Department of Energy and Department of Homeland Security.

4. What is the expected start date for Stage 1?

Projects are expected to begin on October 1, 2024.

5. What does the collaboration between teams look like during the communities-of-practice activities? Will events for CIVIC be held remotely or in-person?

MetroLab Network will foster communities-of-practice through in-person and web-based activities aimed at enhancing the teams' collaborative networks. These collaborative networks will enable idea sharing to promote greater impact in each team's community and empower teams to make their projects more scalable and transferable. Required activities are listed in Section II.C of the solicitation. In-person activities will be held if public health guidance allows; teams should budget for travel as indicated in Section II.C of the solicitation. Teams will be able to make changes to their budget if all events are virtual.

6. Does my team need to submit a proposal to Stage 1 (Planning Grant) in order to be eligible for Stage 2 (Full Award)?

Yes, only Stage 1 recipients will be eligible to submit a proposal to Stage 2.

7. Are teams expected to publish in academic journals?

CIVIC aims to achieve concrete impacts in communities that will also be scalable, sustainable, and transferable. At the same time, NSF supports fundamental research, and thus encourages dissemination of research findings from Stage 2 in academic journals, conferences, or through other means. In keeping with NSF's commitment to expand public access to the results of its funded research, as outlined in the 2015 Public Access Plan, PIs are encouraged to publish findings in publicly accessible formats.

PROPOSALS

8. Can my organization submit multiple proposals?

Yes, there are no restrictions regarding the number of proposals that may be submitted by an organization. However, there are restrictions regarding the number of proposals submitted by individuals (PI or co-PI). For Stage 1, individuals may participate as a PI or Co-PI in up to two proposals. For Stage 2, an individual may participate as a PI or Co-PI in only one proposal.

9. For the Stage 1 proposals, are you looking for a description of Research Questions and Activities that will be conducted specifically in the six-month planning grant period, or that also carry over to the Stage 2 period?

Stage 1 proposals should describe questions that will be answered by the end of Stage 2. Stage 1 proposals should additionally describe what gaps or deficiencies the team needs to address before it can answer those questions and define a plan and set of activities for how Stage 1 will address those gaps.

10. The solicitation mentions Broader Impacts. What does that mean?

The Broader Impact criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes. For additional detail, refer to Section VI in the CIVIC solicitation, the [NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide](#) (PAPPG) and a recent [Dear Colleague Letter](#) on this topic.

11. What are examples of outcomes expected from Stage 1? For example, should teams have collected any initial data sets on issues/problems, or should teams have conducted any pilots? Or are outcomes strictly planning related?

Those are all potential outcomes of Stage 1, but NSF's priority is to identify proposals that have a clear vision for their project, demonstrated capability to address likely

challenges, and cohesion between partners to follow through with the plan in Stage 2.

12. Is there preference towards teams with "Results from Prior NSF Support"?

Every NSF proposal requires a sub-section in the Project Description called "Results from Prior NSF Support" to assist reviewers in assessing the quality of work conducted with prior or current NSF funding. This section can aid proposers in demonstrating the team's capability to execute their vision. If your team does not have prior NSF research to demonstrate this capability, teams are encouraged to offer elsewhere in the proposal evidence that they can successfully deploy the proposed project.

13. What type of patent or intellectual property protection will be provided to the participants if any?

NSF allows teams to define the intellectual property they want to preserve. Proposals are strengthened, however, by the availability of research artifacts that could be made available to the research community at-large.

14. Can we build our proposal on an existing grant from NSF or elsewhere?

Yes.

15. My organization has never submitted a proposal to NSF and/or received an NSF award. What should we do to prepare for submitting a CIVIC proposal as the lead organization?

The information below is only relevant to organizations submitting to NSF as the lead.

Teams are encouraged to become acquainted with the NSF proposal submission process through Research.gov or Grants.gov and should refer to the PAPPG and Section V.A in the solicitation for more guidance.

This proposal submission process for a lead organization that has not proposed to NSF previously can take time and teams are strongly encouraged to initiate it early in the proposal submission window.

Included below is additional information and several links that new lead proposing organizations to NSF may find useful as they prepare to submit their CIVIC proposal.

Lead organizations must be registered with NSF to submit proposals. Before a new lead organization can register with NSF, it must first be registered in the [System for Award Management \(SAM\)](#), which requires a [Unique Entity Identifier \(UEI\) Number](#). **It is recommended that new lead organizations begin this process at least two months prior to the proposal submission deadline.**

Additional account management information, including an [Account Management Guide](#) with step-by-step instructions and screenshots, [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#), and video tutorials, is available on the Research.gov [About Account Management webpage](#).

Information on preparing your organization to receive federal funds through an NSF award can be found in the Prospective New Awardee Guide found here: https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=nsf20032.

16. If civic partners are included as Senior Personnel, is the proposal required to include the content listed in the PAPPG, such as a Biographical Sketch, for the civic partners?

Proposals must include the required documents listed in the [NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide](#) (PAPPG) for any individuals designated as Senior Personnel. Proposers are strongly encouraged to also include, as a Supplementary Document, Biographical Sketches for all other civic partners not designated as Senior Personnel but listed in the Project Personnel and Partner Institutions Supplementary Document. Teams should refer to section V.A of the solicitation for more information.

TEAM COMPOSITION

17. Who can submit a proposal?

CIVIC requires that teams include researchers and civic partners, but only certain types of organizations may submit proposals and receive funds directly from NSF. These are:

- Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) - Two and four-year IHEs (including community colleges) accredited in, and having a campus located in the US.
- Non-profit, non-academic organizations: Independent museums, observatories, research labs, professional societies and similar organizations in the US associated with educational or research activities.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 proposals must be submitted by a single organization, from which partnering organizations may receive funding via subawards. For additional information about collaborative proposals with subawards, refer to Chapter II.E.3.a of the [NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide](#) (PAPPG).

18. Who are civic partners for the purposes of this solicitation?

Civic partner(s) may include local, state, or tribal government officials; non-profit representatives; community organizers or advocates; community service providers; and/or others working to improve their communities, which may include the private sector.

19. How can civic partners and other collaborators receive funding?

Although only Institutions of Higher Education and non-profit organizations are eligible to receive funds directly from NSF, other civic partners and organizations (including local, state, and tribal governments) may receive funding via subawards from the recipient organization. Although NSF will not dictate how teams allocate their budgets, teams are encouraged to consider how to fairly distribute funds to or on behalf of all team members.

Teams who do choose to include civic partners or other collaborators as subawardees during Stage 1 are encouraged to ensure funds will flow in a timely manner to support the teams during the funded period, which may include setting up partner organizations as subawardees within their institutions as soon as possible. For Stage 2, it is strongly encouraged for civic partner(s) and other partners to receive an appropriate distribution of funds as subawards in the project budget. For additional information about collaborative proposals with subawards, refer to Chapter II.E.3.a of the [NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide](#) (PAPPG).

20. Can teams partner with a private company? What are potential roles for private companies?

Yes, teams may choose to engage with industry partners, and those partners may participate as subawardees to an eligible lead organization.

Private sector partners can be valuable team members in a number of different roles, and their presence could help transition an idea from research to implementation by providing expertise, technology, or additional capacity. Whatever their role, it is important for teams with private sector partners to describe the roles of each partner and how they will manage the collaboration.

21. Can we have a team with an international component?

For this solicitation, academic and civic partners and the associated civic engagement activities and project deployment must be based in the US or its protectorates. The only exception is the following: If the proposal includes funding to be provided to an international branch campus of a US institution of higher education (including through use of subawards and consultant arrangements), the proposer must explain the benefit(s) to the project of performance at the international branch campus and justify why the project activities cannot be performed at the US campus.

Although subawards are not permitted for international entities, teams are encouraged to engage international partners and collaborators where these activities will advance the project and research directions. Teams may especially want to leverage their

existing international partnerships.

22. How does the accelerated timeline affect the composition and funding of teams?

Because the project timeline is shorter than many other NSF solicitations, the teams must be prepared to assemble and undertake projects quickly. The Stage 1 activities are designed to give teams time to refine their projects and gather additional partners that will help with rapid implementation. Because the Stage 2 timeline is 12 months with awards up to \$1 million, teams may find that they have the resources to offer substantial support to civic partners and research teams across disciplines. CIVIC is designed to be more of a sprint than a marathon - and project teams and plans should reflect that.

23. Can we add new partners in Phase 2 if we are asked to move forward?

Yes.

24. Do we need to have community partners committed (e.g. letter of collaboration from partner) by the time of proposal submission in order to be considered for funding?

If you have a community partnership, provide clear evidence to show why it is a strong and cohesive partnership. Letters of collaboration are strongly encouraged and can help provide the evidence of a strong partnership.

25. Can a non-profit 501-C3 qualify as the lead institution and have partners in the private sector?

Yes. In addition to Institutions of Higher Education, the solicitation states that Non-profit, non-academic organizations: Independent museums, observatories, research labs, professional societies and similar organizations in the U.S. associated with educational or research activities are eligible to submit proposals.

26. Can an FFRDC submit a proposal as the lead organization?

FFRDC's cannot submit as the lead organization on CIVIC proposals. They (including DOE National Labs) may participate as subawardees to an eligible lead organization.

27. Can a private sector company apply as the lead organization on the proposal?

No. The solicitation states that proposals can only be submitted by IHEs and non-profit, non-academic organizations. The entity in question would not be able to submit the proposal. It would have to partner with an organization that is eligible to serve as the lead.

28. Are civic partners required to receive funding as subawardees?

No, civic partners are not required to receive funding. However, NSF is looking for strong relationships between research and civic partners, and civic partners should hold an important role on the core team. Teams must demonstrate the strength of their relationship irrespective of whether the civic partner is receiving funds or not.