



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
2415 EISENHOWER AVENUE  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

NSF 20-025

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for the Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) Program for Submission in Years 2020 - 2025

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### SUBMISSION DEADLINES

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Proposals must be submitted via FastLane, Research.gov or Grants.gov by 5:00 p.m., submitter's local time, to the applicable deadline date below:

July 27, 2020 and on the fourth Monday of July, annually thereafter

The following set of questions and answers refer to frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the CAREER Program Solicitation. They are not intended to be a modification of the Program Solicitation. If there are any inconsistencies between the CAREER Program Solicitation and these FAQs, the information in the Program Solicitation prevails.

Before preparing CAREER proposals please read the CAREER solicitation and refer to the general information about NSF proposal submission including the latest **Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG)** submission guidelines at:

[https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg); **FastLane FAQ's** can be found at:

[https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/NSFHelp/flashhelp/fastlane/FastLane\\_Help/fastlane\\_help.htm#fastlane\\_faqs\\_introduction.htm](https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/NSFHelp/flashhelp/fastlane/FastLane_Help/fastlane_help.htm#fastlane_faqs_introduction.htm); **Research.gov FAQ's** can be found at:

[https://www.research.gov/research-portal/appmanager/base/desktop?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=research\\_page\\_faq](https://www.research.gov/research-portal/appmanager/base/desktop?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=research_page_faq); **Grants.gov FAQ's** can be found at:

<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-faqs.html>; and the **NSF Guide to Programs** (for descriptions of NSF's research-supporting programs) at

[https://www.nsf.gov/funding/browse\\_all\\_funding.jsp](https://www.nsf.gov/funding/browse_all_funding.jsp). A helpful CAREER submission timeline can be found at:

[https://www.research.gov/common/attachment/Common/Career\\_deadline.pdf](https://www.research.gov/common/attachment/Common/Career_deadline.pdf).

This document is organized as follows:

### A. ELIGIBILITY

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1. Whom should I contact to discuss my ideas for a CAREER proposal to be sure NSF supports the topic area?
  2. The CAREER Program Solicitation states that a proposer must have the title of assistant professor or equivalent. I am non-tenured but hold the title of associate professor. May I apply?
  3. The CAREER Program Solicitation requires that I hold a doctoral degree by the proposal submission deadline. I have defended my thesis but will not have my diploma by the submission deadline. May I apply to the CAREER Program this year?
  4. I held a tenured position at my former organization, but I am not in a tenured position now. Am I eligible to apply?
  5. I received my Doctorate six years ago. Am I eligible to apply?
  6. I am not a U.S. Permanent Resident or U.S. Citizen or U.S. National. Can I apply to the CAREER Program?
  7. Am I eligible to apply if I work at a non-degree-granting organization such as a museum, observatory, or research lab?
  8. Am I eligible if I work at a 2-year college or a community college?
  9. I am a new faculty member at an institution that qualifies as an undergraduate institution under the provisions of the Research in Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) Program Solicitation. Is it possible to apply for the CAREER Program under the RUI provisions?
  10. If I have received funds from the Federal Government to perform research, may I still apply for a CAREER award?
  11. Since I can participate in at most three CAREER competitions, when is the best time to apply?

## **B. PROPOSAL PREPARATION, BUDGET PREPARATION, AND SUBMISSION**

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### **B.1 PROPOSAL PREPARATION**

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12. What are common reasons for which CAREER proposals are returned without review?
13. I have two possible projects. May I submit two CAREER proposals?
14. May I submit a CAREER proposal and a regular research proposal on a similar topic to NSF at the same time?
15. May I submit a CAREER proposal and another proposal on a different topic to NSF in the same year?

16. What are the expectations for the level of activities in the education component?
17. What documentation should I submit to show any collaborative efforts?
18. I have additional information posted on my website I would like the reviewers to see. May I refer readers to my web site within the Project Description?
19. I would like to be considered for a PECASE award. What is the process?
20. If I held an NSF postdoctoral fellowship, do I need to include a "Results from Prior Support" section?

## **B.2. BUDGET PREPARATION**

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21. What is an appropriate level of funding to request?
22. May I request academic year salary on a CAREER proposal?
23. May I request funds to support the education component of my CAREER proposal?

## **B.3 PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

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24. What if my proposal is submitted after the deadline?
25. My proposal seems to fit in two different programs. What should I do to indicate which Program(s) I want to consider my proposal?
26. I am having problems submitting my proposal and the CAREER deadline is almost here. Whom should I contact?
27. I just noticed a major problem with my CAREER proposal. The CAREER deadline has not passed so can I fix the problem?
28. Do I submit a proposal to just the CAREER program solicitation or to a particular program at NSF and how do I decide to which program I should submit my CAREER proposal?

## **C. ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAREER AWARDS**

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29. When will I be notified of the final decision on my CAREER proposal?

## **D. AWARD ADMINISTRATION**

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30. Are the reporting requirements for CAREER awards the same as for other NSF awards?
31. What types of supplemental funds are available for CAREER awards?
32. What happens to my CAREER award if I leave my academic appointment for a position

that is tenured, tenure-track, or tenure-track-equivalent at a CAREER-eligible institution?

33. What happens to my CAREER award if I leave my academic appointment for a position that is neither tenured, tenure-track, nor tenure-track-equivalent; or for a position at a new organization that is not CAREER- eligible?
34. What happens to my CAREER award if I am unable to continue the project due to health/ medical/ family or other issues?

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## A. ELIGIBILITY

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1. **Whom should I contact to discuss my ideas for a CAREER proposal to be sure NSF supports the topic area?**

Your primary contact is a Program Officer in a division or program that is closest to your area of research. The NSF website provides information about the NSF programs. Consult the Program Areas section of the NSF Find Funding web page (<https://www.nsf.gov/funding/>) and select the appropriate NSF Division/Office to review the associated Divisions, Programs, and Program Descriptions. The NSF staff directory (<https://www.nsf.gov/staff/>) provides contact information for Program Officers, by name and by organization. In addition, a list of CAREER Contacts is provided at: <https://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/career/contacts.jsp>.

2. **The CAREER Program Solicitation states that a proposer must have the title of assistant professor or equivalent. I am non-tenured but hold the title of associate professor. May I apply?**

No. An associate professor (with or without tenure) is not eligible to apply for a CAREER award.

3. **The CAREER Program Solicitation requires that I hold a doctoral degree by the proposal submission deadline. I have defended my thesis but will not have my diploma by the submission deadline. May I apply to the CAREER Program this year?**

No. You are not eligible unless you receive the official, dated diploma, by the proposal deadline.

4. **I held a tenured position at my former organization, but I am not in a tenured position now. Am I eligible to apply?**

Yes, if you satisfy all of the eligibility criteria. Previous employment in a tenured position does not affect eligibility.

**5. I received my Doctorate six years ago. Am I eligible to apply?**

Yes, if you satisfy all the eligibility criteria. CAREER eligibility is not limited by time from degree or years in a tenure track appointment.

**6. I am not a U.S. Permanent Resident or U.S. Citizen or U.S. National. Can I apply to the CAREER Program?**

Yes. You may apply if you are employed at an eligible U.S. organization and meet the other CAREER eligibility requirements.

**7. Am I eligible to apply if I work at a non-degree-granting organization such as a museum, observatory, or research lab?**

Yes, but you must hold at least a 50% tenure-track or tenure-track-equivalent appointment, substantial research and educational responsibilities as part of your employment, and meet all other CAREER eligibility requirements. The non-degree granting organization (museum, observatory or research lab) must be non-profit and located in the United States.

**8. Am I eligible if I work at a 2-year college or a community college?**

Yes, as long as your appointment meets the CAREER eligibility requirements.

**9. I am a new faculty member at an institution that qualifies as an undergraduate institution under the provisions of the Research in Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) Program Solicitation. Is it possible to apply for the CAREER Program under the RUI provisions?**

No. You must choose between submitting a proposal to the RUI or to the CAREER program solicitation. You may not include the additional Certificate of RUI Eligibility or the RUI Impact Statement on a CAREER proposal.

**10. If I have received funds from the Federal Government to perform research, may I still apply for a CAREER award?**

Yes. You may submit a CAREER proposal if you have NSF or other Federal awards. What you propose to do as part of your CAREER proposal should not overlap what you have been funded to do by NSF or any other agency. You may not submit a CAREER proposal if you already have received a CAREER award.

**11. Since I can participate in at most three CAREER competitions, when is the best**

## **time to apply?**

The most important consideration is whether you are ready to write a proposal with an innovative research idea, and an education plan, aligned with the mission of your department or organization. You might discuss your readiness and your career development to date with your Department Chair or an NSF Program Officer.

## **B. PROPOSAL PREPARATION, BUDGET PREPARATION, AND SUBMISSION**

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### **B.1 PROPOSAL PREPARATION**

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#### **12. What are common reasons for which CAREER proposals are returned without review?**

The following are common reasons why proposals are found to be non-compliant with the CAREER Solicitation:

- A co-principal investigator is listed on the cover page
- Departmental Letter is missing
- Proposal submission occurs after the deadline
- Proposal topic is not appropriate for NSF
- Project description is missing Results from Prior NSF Support Section, if applicable

All submitted CAREER proposals should follow the guidelines in the CAREER program solicitation and the NSF PAPPG.

#### **13. I have two possible projects. May I submit two CAREER proposals?**

No. You may submit only one CAREER proposal per year.

#### **14. May I submit a CAREER proposal and a regular research proposal on a similar topic to NSF at the same time?**

The NSF PAPPG states, "The same work/proposal cannot be funded twice. If the proposer envisions review by multiple programs, more than one program may be designated on the Cover Sheet. The submission of duplicate or substantially similar proposals concurrently for review by more than one program without prior NSF approval will result in the return of the redundant proposals."

If you are planning to submit a CAREER proposal and another proposal to the same NSF program, please contact the appropriate Program Officer to discuss your individual case.

#### **15. May I submit a CAREER proposal and another proposal on a different topic to**

## **NSF in the same year?**

Yes, but only if the research is substantially different. NSF may return without review a second proposal on a closely related research topic.

### **16. What are the expectations for the level of activities in the education component?**

Your plans should reflect your own disciplinary and educational interests and goals, as well as the interests and needs of your organization. While excellence in both research and education is expected, activity of an intensity that leads to an unreasonable workload is not. For instance, teaching additional courses or taking on additional duties is not expected. What is expected is a well-argued and specific proposal for activities over a 5-year period that will build a firm foundation for a lifetime of integrated contributions to research and education. The research and educational activities do not need to be addressed separately if the relationship between the two is such that the presentation of the integrated project is better served by interspersing the two throughout the Project Description.

### **17. What documentation should I submit to show any collaborative efforts?**

Specific details of any proposed collaborations should be described in the Project Description or in the Facilities, Equipment, and Other Resources sections of the proposal. In addition, you may submit letters of collaboration (limited to the single-sentence format provided in the program solicitation) that simply state intent to collaborate and/or commit resources as detailed in the proposal.

Scan the signed and dated letter(s) into the Supplementary Documents section and place them after the departmental letter. Do not submit any other documentation for the collaborators, such as biographical sketches, appendices, or other NSF forms. You will not be allowed to submit these letters after the submission deadline, so plan in advance.

Letters of recommendation or other statements of support for the project are not permitted.

### **18. I have additional information posted on my website I would like the reviewers to see. May I refer readers to my web site within the Project Description?**

PIs are cautioned that the Project Description must be self-contained and that URLs must not be used because: 1) the information could circumvent page limitations; 2) the reviewers are under no obligation to view the sites; and 3) the sites could be altered or deleted between the time of submission and the time of review. Brevity will assist reviewers and Foundation staff in dealing effectively with proposals. Therefore, the Project Description, including Results from Prior NSF Support, which is limited to five pages, may not exceed 15 pages. Visual materials, including charts, graphs, maps,

photographs, and other pictorial presentations are included in the 15-page limitation.

**19. I would like to be considered for a PECASE award. What is the process?**

Please note that individuals cannot apply for a Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE). Rather, these awards are initiated by participating federal agencies. At NSF, up to 20 nominees for this award are selected each year from among recent CAREER awardees deemed most likely to become the leaders of academic research and education for the twenty-first century. The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) makes the final selection and announcement of the awardees.

In addition to meeting the CAREER eligibility requirements, PECASE nominees must be U.S. citizens, U.S. Nationals, or U.S. Permanent Residents. During the nomination process, OSTP will request proof of citizenship or permanent residency status and other information necessary for a security clearance from a potential list of nominees. PECASE awards at NSF are honorary and carry no additional funding.

**20. If I held an NSF postdoctoral fellowship, do I need to include a "Results from Prior Support" section?**

You must include a "Results from Prior Support" section whenever you have served as a PI or co-PI on any NSF grant active in the past five years. This includes postdoctoral fellowships, conferences, EaGER or RAPID grants, and equipment grants such as Major Research Instrumentation (MRI). If you have received more than one prior award (excluding amendments), you need only report on the award that is most closely related to the CAREER proposal. (See the PAPPG for the required information.)

## **B.2. BUDGET PREPARATION**

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**21. What is an appropriate level of funding to request?**

The CAREER budget request should reflect the scope of the research and education plans, and the practices within your discipline. The **minimum** CAREER award size is expected to be \$400,000, including indirect cost or overhead, for a 5- year period, except in the Directorate for Biological Sciences (BIO), the Directorate for Engineering (ENG), and the Office of Polar Programs (OPP). CAREER awards in BIO, ENG, or OPP are expected to be a minimum of \$500,000 (approximately \$100,000 per year) for the 5- year duration. There is no maximum award size, but be realistic about your budget expectations and what has been funded before by the Program considering your proposal. The average CAREER award size varies across NSF. Some Directorates/Divisions/Programs usually fund CAREER awards closer to the minimum, while some others have a higher average award size. Before preparing the budget for



your CAREER proposal, you are strongly encouraged to contact your disciplinary Program Officer or your Division CAREER contact to discuss your planned request.

**22. May I request academic year salary on a CAREER proposal?**

A PI who has heavy teaching responsibilities or whose proposed activities may involve a limited period of fieldwork or other extraordinary career-development activity in research or education may be justified in requesting academic year salary support on their budgets. Before including any academic year salary support on your CAREER budget you should contact your disciplinary Program Officer to discuss your individual case.

**23. May I request funds to support the education component of my CAREER proposal?**

Yes. You may request adequate resources to carry out your proposed educational activities. If resources are required, the proposal budget should list these costs and the budget justification should indicate how the funds will be used in the project. If working with K-12 education, consult teachers or those working with local teachers regarding teacher stipends and substitute pay. You may also budget for appropriate materials, participant stipends and travel, and the like.

### **B.3 PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

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**24. What if my proposal is submitted after the deadline?**

A CAREER proposal must be submitted in FastLane, Research.gov or Grants.gov by your organization before 5:00 p.m. your local time on or before the CAREER deadline. NSF Program Officers are not authorized to grant extensions of the CAREER deadline. NSF strongly encourages early submission to allow time for file updates or corrections before the deadline. Slow response from the IT Help Desk is expected as the deadline approaches and cannot be used as an excuse for late submission. Please consult the [recommended submission timeline](#) for CAREER.

**25. My proposal seems to fit in two different programs. What should I do to indicate which Program(s) I want to consider my proposal?**

You may designate more than one program on the cover sheet if you think two or more programs should jointly review your proposal. It is very important that you select the most relevant program as the primary organization because that is the organization that is most likely to have primary responsibility for reviewing your proposal. Do not submit duplicate CAREER proposals to multiple disciplinary programs.

NSF encourages multidisciplinary proposals. You are strongly encouraged to contact the Program Officer(s) most closely related to the subject matter when preparing a

cross-disciplinary proposal. Proposals with a multidisciplinary focus are commonly reviewed by more than one NSF program.

**26. I am having problems submitting my proposal and the CAREER deadline is almost here. Whom should I contact?**

PIs are strongly encouraged to submit their CAREER proposals well in advance of the deadline to allow time to correct any problems that may occur in the submission process. Issues and questions related to the NSF FastLane system should be directed to the FastLane User Support desk at (800) 673-6188. You can also send an e-mail message to [fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto:fastlane@nsf.gov) but the response could be delayed on the deadline day. For information on the availability of the NSF FastLane system, phone (800) 437-7408 for a recorded message. For Research.gov user support, contact the Research.gov Help Desk at (800) 381-1532 or email [rgov@nsf.gov](mailto:rgov@nsf.gov). For Grants.gov user support, contact the Grants.gov contact center by phone at (800) 518- 4726 or by email at [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov). If FastLane, Research.gov or Grants.gov is unable to resolve the submission problem and you cannot submit your proposal by the deadline, please make sure to get documentation that you contacted the support center before your deadline. For NSF to consider a deadline extension you must provide supporting documentation from NSF that there was a problem at the time of submission that could not be resolved by the deadline. A possible slowdown of these systems due to volume is not a valid reason for an extension.

**27. I just noticed a major problem with my CAREER proposal. The CAREER deadline has not passed so can I fix the problem?**

Yes, if you see a problem **before the deadline**, you may use the FastLane or Research.gov proposal file updates capabilities to replace files or revise sections of a submitted proposal. A request for a proposal file update will be automatically accepted **only** if submitted prior to the CAREER deadline. On rare occasions, a proposal has technical problems due to PDF Conversion or printing problems. If your deadline has passed and you discover this problem, contact your disciplinary Program Officer to discuss whether NSF will approve a proposal file update. You should thoroughly review your proposal before it is submitted, including identifying any PDF conversion or printing problems. You are also encouraged to download a copy of the submitted version of your proposal to ensure that the submission contains all the proposal parts and that it is compliant.

**28. Do I submit a proposal to just the CAREER program solicitation or to a particular program at NSF and how do I decide to which program I should submit my CAREER proposal?**

CAREER proposals must be submitted to the CAREER program solicitation through

FastLane, Research.gov or Grants.gov. During the proposal submission process, you must select at least one specific NSF program that is related to the proposed work.

First, you should determine whether the proposed research project falls within the realm of research that NSF normally supports. If it does, then you will need to identify one or more disciplinary programs related to your research goals. One way to get a good overview of NSF is to look at the titles of the Directorates, Divisions, and Programs.

The [NSF Guide to Programs](#) and Directorate and Division web pages provide descriptions of the topic areas supported by NSF disciplinary programs.

You may also search on keywords in the NSF [Award Search](#) tool to find funded research projects in areas related to your project. The results indicate the NSF program(s) supporting those projects.

If NSF determines that your proposal is more appropriate for a different program than the primary one you selected, the proposal will be reassigned to the appropriate organizational unit. NSF will make the final determination of where your proposal will be assigned and considered.

## C. ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAREER AWARDS

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### 29. **When will I be notified of the final decision on my CAREER proposal?**

Most proposers will be notified within six months of submission. If you have not received notification of a decision on your proposal within six months of its submission, you can contact the program or division to which your proposal was assigned to inquire about the status of your proposal.

## D. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

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### 30. **Are the reporting requirements for CAREER awards the same as for other NSF awards?**

In addition to meeting all the requirements for annual and final reports that apply to other NSF awards, the reports for CAREER awards must summarize progress in both research and educational activities and indicate how well these activities are being integrated and assessed. Collaborative and international activities, if included, should also be described.

### 31. **What types of supplemental funds are available for CAREER awards?**

CAREER awards are eligible for supplemental funding as described in the PAPPG. Check the CAREER website or contact your cognizant Program Officer to ask about

possible supplemental funding opportunities for CAREER awards.

**32. What happens to my CAREER award if I leave my academic appointment for a position that is tenured, tenure-track, or tenure-track-equivalent at a CAREER-eligible institution?**

If the principal investigator transfers at any time prior to or during the award period to a position that is tenured, tenure-track, or tenure-track-equivalent at a CAREER-eligible institution, the CAREER award may be transferred to the new institution. Before such a transfer is approved by NSF, the PI's new organization must supply documentation, including a new Departmental Letter. The new Departmental Letter must document support for the project goals as described in the original proposal or in a revised scope, as well as provide a plan for the mentoring of the PI.

**If a CAREER award received EPSCoR co-funding, no portion of the EPSCoR funds may be transferred to a non-EPSCoR institution. We encourage CAREER awardees from institutions in [EPSCoR states](#) to check with their cognizant PO if they received EPSCoR co-funding on the CAREER award. If they want to transfer their awards from an institution in an EPSCoR state to an institution in a non-EPSCoR state, then they should contact their cognizant PO to discuss and plan accordingly. and plan accordingly.**

**33. What happens to my CAREER award if I leave my academic appointment for a position that is neither tenured, tenure-track, nor tenure-track-equivalent; or for a position at a new organization that is not CAREER-eligible?**

The CAREER award must be relinquished in such cases. This includes transfer to a university or college outside the U.S. or to a non-academic, non-CAREER-eligible institution. In these circumstances, transfer of the CAREER award to a substitute PI is not permissible. However, funding may be expended to allow the students or postdoctoral researchers to continue to be supported on the award for the remaining funded year. The award would then terminate at the end of that funded year. Contact the disciplinary Program Officer as soon as you know you will be leaving to inquire about this possibility.

**34. What happens to my CAREER award if I am unable to continue the project due to health/ medical/ family or other issues?**

In some very specific cases, where the PI is incapacitated, long-term continued support of the graduate and postdoctoral students supported under the CAREER project may still be possible. If the PI's institution provides evidence that other faculty members are willing and able to provide high-caliber mentoring of the students, then the cognizant Program Officer can request that the NSF Division of Grants and Agreements approve

the appointment of a substitute PI at the institution for the award with budget modified by elimination of PI salary. Support for students and postdoctoral associates (including travel to conferences and other items in the budget) would remain unchanged. Such action is most strongly supported when the students can pursue research in projects that are the same as those established by the original PI or in closely-allied areas.