**4/11/22 Virtual Office Hours Recap- Research at Primarily Undergraduate Institutions**

Related links:

[Facilitating Research at Primarily Undergraduate Institutions (NSF 14-579)](https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/facilitating-research-primarily-undergraduate-institutions)

[Building Research Capacity for New Faculty in Biology (BRC-BIO; NSF 22-500)](https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/building-research-capacity-new-faculty-biology-brc-bio) and [related blog post](https://debblog.nsfbio.com/2022/01/31/recap-of-building-research-capacity-of-new-faculty-in-biology-brc-bio-webinars/)

If you were unable to attend, here are some of the questions asked during the Q & A section:

**Q: How much collaboration with other (non-PUI) institutions is allowed under a PUI grant? For example, if I wanted to take advantage of resources that I don’t have at my PUI, can I propose to accomplish some work in conjunction with a lab at a bigger institution?**

A: Yes, such collaborations are accepted. There are several approaches to structuring a research project that involves PIs at different institutions, including a single award with sub-award(s) to collaborators’ institutions or an officially designated “Collaborative Research” proposal for multi-institutional collaboration with separate budgets and awards. If the PI for either proposal type is at a primarily undergraduate institution, they can add the “RUI” designation to their proposal. See the RUI solicitation for instructions on how to submit collaborative proposals that mix PUI and non-PUI institutions.

**Q: Are there opportunities for smaller-scale awards that might fit the workload and institutional contexts of primarily undergraduate institutions?**

A: DEB does have a Small Grant designation, which you can read about in the core solicitation. These are proposals with budgets up to $200,000. You would designate your proposal with the prefix “SG:” in the title. Reviewers and panelists are given instructions about evaluating Small Grant proposals. The same merit review criteria are used (i.e., highest quality intellectual merit and broader impacts), but the scope and scale of Small Grants are more modest.

**Q: Are the budgets for proposals from PUIs expected to be smaller?**

A: For any proposal to any program, the main expectation is that the budget should align with the scope of work.

**Q: What is a Research Opportunity Award (ROA)?**

A: ROAs are part of the same solicitation as RUI (14-579) Facilitating Research at Primarily Undergraduate Institutions. RUI proposals support PUI faculty in research that engages them in their professional field(s), builds capacity for research at their home institution, and supports the integration of research and undergraduate education. ROAs similarly support PUI faculty research, but these awards typically allow faculty to work as visiting scientists at research-intensive organizations where they collaborate with other NSF-supported investigators. ROAs are reviewed internally by NSF program officers.

**Q: How do we find out each directorate's deadline dates for RUI? Does DEB post these on a webpage typically?**

A: Our core programs in DEB do not have deadlines. For any NSF program, check the solicitation to find information on deadlines.

**Q: Can non-tenure track faculty at PUIs submit proposals?**

A: Yes, if the school’s sponsored research office allows non-tenure track faculty to have principal investigator status.

**Q: Can a PI on a grant with an ROA ask for another supplement?**

A: Yes, it is possible to request additional supplements, whether those are Research Opportunity Awards, REUs, RAHSS, RET, etc. If you are worried that a second supplement might not be competitive, reach out first to the program officer managing your award.

**Q: If an ROA is often a supplement to an existing NSF grant, do you submit after you're awarded the other NSF grant?**

A: Supplements (including REU, RET, RAHSS, ROA) can be included in an initial proposal submission or can be requested after an award has been made. Typically, ROAs provide support for a faculty at a PUI to collaborate with an existing awardee (regardless of the awardee institution type). The ROA proposal is submitted by the primary award principal investigator, on behalf of the putative ROA recipient.

**Q: What opportunities are there for faculty at community colleges?**

A: Community colleges/faculties are eligible to apply for almost all funding opportunities in the Biological Sciences Directorate. There are also other opportunities through the Division of Undergraduate Education in the Education and Human Resources Directorate. An example of one of these opportunities is the [Advancing Innovation and Impact in Undergraduate STEM Education at Two-year Institutions of Higher Education](https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/advancing-innovation-and-impact-undergraduate-stem-education-two-year).

**Q: Do most grant opportunities intended for PUIs require preliminary data? Or is it recommended?**

A: Preliminary data are not required for any grant opportunity, but preliminary data and prior work strengthen a proposal and the viability of the work proposed. Note that the BRC-BIO program acknowledges that early-career investigators at institutions other than the most research intensive may have little capacity to collect preliminary data and the program seeks to help build and support that capacity.

**Q: My teaching load is quite high. Is it possible to fund course releases during the academic year to allow more time for research?**

A: NSF cannot directly pay for a course release for a PI or co-PI. However, salary support during the summer or academic months can be requested and provided as long as it is clearly described in your budget justification as reallocation of your time/responsibilities. We suggest that you work with your institution’s sponsored research officer, and if needed a program officer, to design and justify your budget.

**Q: I’m wondering about the special proposal designations, like “SG” for small grant, “RUI” for research at primarily undergraduate institutions, “MCA” for Mid-Career Advancement. Is it possible for a proposal to have more than one designation?**

A: Yes, a single proposal may have more than one designation. When deciding whether to apply a special designation, consider the criteria for that program and how well your proposal matches those criteria.

**Q: Are proposals from PUIs as successful as those from other institutions, and what are the general success rates for proposals in DEB?**

A: NSF has a new public award dashboard called [NSF by the Numbers](https://beta.nsf.gov/about/about-nsf-by-the-numbers). You can use this dashboard to search and filter award data by directorate, institution type, and more.

**Q: Can there be too high of a focus on broader impacts? We are (primarily) educators! It’s hard to squeeze that focus down to a small section of a grant. Do you have advice on the amount of space we devote to broader impacts vs. intellectual merit? Projects from PUIs have exceptional opportunities to generate broader impacts, particularly around student training and broadening participation. Is it possible for a proposal to be too heavily weighted toward broader impacts? How much of the proposal narrative should be devoted to broader impacts?**

A: All NSF proposals are evaluated with the merit review criteria of Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts, and successful proposals need to be strong in both domains. Projects from PUIs have exceptional opportunities to generate broader impacts, particularly through student training and broadening participation. How a proposal (and a PI team and their institutional context) realize those merits may look very different. However, if your proposal carries the “RUI” designation, you have five pages for the RUI impact statement that allow you to explain the larger context of research and training and their integration.

**Q: I'm a new sponsored research administrator at a PUI. Do you have advice on how I might be able to help faculty identify the right subprogram for their research projects?**

A: There are a number of strategies that you might try, either before meeting with faculty or in concert with them. There are some opportunities that are focused on specific career stages (CAREER, MCA, OPUS), and these are available for proposals on any research topic with a large domain. Making faculty broadly aware of those programs is a good start. Because biological research doesn’t often fit into a single discipline, it may be hard to scout topically focused funding opportunities for faculty because different ideas may fit in different programs. Thus, developing a one-page synopsis of their research ideas might help them (and you) search for topically appropriate opportunities. Such one-page synopses can also be shared with NSF program directors who can also suggest appropriate programmatic fit. Searching for current and past awards on the NSF award search webpage that are similar in topic and scope can also help faculty identify opportunities.

**Q: You can only ask for two months or less per year of personnel support for PIs. Any programs used for sabbatical supplement or support longer than two months?**

A: Mid-career advancement can provide multiple months of support for a sabbatical-like experience. BRC-BIO can also provide more academic year support. Opportunities for Promoting Understanding through Synthesis ([OPUS](https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/opportunities-promoting-understanding-through-synthesis-opus)) is another option for longer-term support.

**Q: Could you share the official NSF definition of Primarily Undergraduate Institutions?**

A: Eligible PUIs are accredited colleges and universities (including two-year community colleges) that award Associate's degrees, Bachelor's degrees, and/or Master's degrees in NSF-supported fields but have awarded 20 or fewer Ph.D./D.Sci. degrees in all NSF-supported fields during the combined previous two academic years.