**Virtual Office Hour: Introduction to DEB**

**Q&A**

**10/16/23**

**Are there any downsides in the proposal submission process for proposals that undergo for co-review? Are there limits to co-review (i.e., could an evolution proposal be co-reviewed by a cell/molecular program)?**

A: There are no downsides to your proposal being co-reviewed. NSF strives to maintain a merit review process that ensures each proposal is reviewed fairly.  When proposals are submitted with research questions that span more than one discipline, we work to make sure that proposal is co-reviewed with the necessary expertise by reaching out to programs across the foundation to find the best reviewers. See the DEB blog for our post on [co-review](https://debblog.nsfbio.com/2022/05/09/whos-afraid-of-co-reviews-2/) for more information.

**Are the reviews double-blind or do the reviewers know the proposers’ names?**

A: Reviewers know the identity of the PIs and thus reviews are not double blind. NSF staff informs reviewers ahead of time about the possibility of implicit bias and provide instructions about how to avoid or mitigate implicit bias during panels.

**For budgets, if we plan to have international collaborators and we would like to send them a sample kit for supplies for data collection, would we just include this in our supplies budget? Do we need to do anything else because of the international destination?**

A: Yes, you can include the cost of materials and international shipping of supplies in your budget. Make sure to talk with your program officer if you have questions about structuring budgets.

**Do you have provision for support for retired faculty who no longer maintain a lab with grad students/postdocs, but that still have PI status?**

A: If the institution allows for emeritus faculty to submit a proposal as a PI, retired faculty can submit proposals for many of the solicitations in DEB and across NSF. Some programs do have criteria tied to specific career stages, so be sure to check the eligibility information in the solicitation.

**Can marine-focused proposals be submitted to the Evolutionary Processes (EP) and Systematics and Biodiversity Sciences (SBS) clusters? If not, which programs would these proposals go to?**

A: Yes, these types of proposals are accepted by EP and SBS. However, read the program descriptions for Population and Community Ecology and Ecosystem Sciences clusters carefully for guidance about marine-focused proposals in those topical areas.

**For the Population and Community Ecology (PCE) cluster, how are ‘applied’ projects (e.g., conservation) weighed vs. ‘pure’ or ‘basic’ science projects?**

A: The PCE cluster program synopsis is available [here](https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/population-community-ecology-cluster), but in short, PCE funds basic science. You’ll notice a focus on conceptual and theoretical understanding, rather than overt local management, conservation, or restoration goals.  A useful guide might be to consider your aims – if the aim is to understand an ecological mechanism or process that is occurring in your study system, that may be basic research; if the aim is to enact changes to the outcomes (i.e. conserve a species, manage a landscape, prevent invasive species establishment), that may be applied research and thus outside of the scope of what PCE funds. However, the boundaries between basic science in an applied context (e.g., conservation, restoration) and applied science can be fuzzy; often times, an existing conservation or restoration effort may be leveraged to ask/answer important basic ecological questions.  If in doubt, reach out to a PCE Program Director to ask about programmatic fit!

**Multiple stressors are often at play in shaping populations, communities, and ecosystems – for example, climate change and chemical pollution may be simultaneously stressing some habitats. Some NSF programs discourage ecotoxicology studies. How can I look at both sets of stressors without it being something that would fall outside of the NSF domain?**

A: A singular focus is not required; it is important that research questions are clear, and reviewers will be able to see how those questions help improve understanding of overarching goals and how you plan to answer those questions.

**Should research on the Laurentian Great Lakes be submitted to Biological Oceanography rather than Ecosystems?**

A: Research on the Laurentian Great Lakes is supported by NSF/GEO/OCE (Oceanography). This is because the work on these large lakes typically involves oceanographic-style boats, and this type of infrastructure is incorporated into the Oceanography budget at NSF.

**If a project uses an ecosystem restoration as an experiment to understand fundamental ecosystem function is that appropriate for DEB? At the ecosystem scale there is a lot of physical science to integrate for water movements, chemistry, sediment dynamics — is that problematic to have many physical variables in core project sampling?**

A: Since ecosystem sciences involves studying structure, function, and flux of materials, it is expected that multiple variables will be measured, as appropriate, to answer the questions being posed in the proposal.

**For ORCC, one example that is provided as potential research is developing the next generation of species distribution models, but there is a strong emphasis on the mechanistic underpinnings. Just wondering how these two aspects are considered.**

A: The ORCC program has three solicitation specific criteria that must be followed: mechanism, integrating mechanism approach, and implementing mechanism. Reach out to a program officer to determine if your project meets the criteria for the ORCC solicitation. See the [ORCC (23-622)](https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/organismal-response-climate-change-orcc) solicitation for more information.

**How much preliminary data is required for a proposal? For the ORCC solicitation, how much preliminary data should be available for things like connections between phenotypes and genotypes or environment?**

A: For most NSF solicitations, preliminary data isn’t strictly required, but clearly helps demonstrate that a project plan is feasible and likely to succeed at the level of methodology. If you are proposing methods that are challenging and for which you have little experience, reviewers might naturally question your ability to do that work – and preliminary data can assuage those fears.  However, remember that citing other people’s work, including specific data, can also help establish the plausibility of what you propose.

**Are R2 institutions really considered/competitive for the BRC-BIO program? The solicitation indicates R2 institutions are eligible to apply, but some people read the solicitation as really intended for much smaller undergraduate-focused institutions, small liberal arts colleges, etc.**

A:  R2 institutions are allowed (and encouraged!) to apply to the BRC-BIO solicitation. PIs at eligible institutions are asked in the Impact Statement to describe their current capacity for research and the increase in capacity that a BRC-BIO award would allow.  Regardless of your institution type, you as the PI need to make your case for why an investment in your research would lead to sustainable increases in capacity and benefits to undergraduate students. See the [BRC-BIO (22-500)](https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/building-research-capacity-new-faculty-biology-brc) solicitation for more information.

There is also a core program in the Division of Biological Infrastructure named Infrastructure Innovation for Biological Research (<https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/infrastructure-innovation-biological-research>) with the objective to “Support research to design or improve research tools and methods with a focus on research infrastructure in three program areas: bioinformatics, instrumentation and research methods.” The website has three email aliases to which you can direct inquiries about funding for your ideas. Collaboration with NEON is encouraged and NEON scientists can participate in research projects in any capacity if NEON management approves the work.