

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the

MATH AND SCIENCE PARTNERSHIP (MSP) – NSF 02-061

The new MSP program has generated much enthusiasm around the country. The official guidelines for submission of MSP proposals can be found in the Program Solicitation NSF 02-061 (<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02061/nsf02061.html>). Step-by-step submission instructions are also available at this site. The following questions and answers are intended to be helpful supplements to the program guidelines, and have been generated at recent workshops and through communications with the MSP Cognizant Program Officers.

As additional questions are raised, please continue to review these FAQs as they will be updated on a regular basis.

Question – Can my institution be the lead organization on proposals for both a Comprehensive and a Targeted Award?

Answer – A single institution can be the lead on only one proposal. The *lead* is defined as the institution that submits the proposal, acts as the fiscal agent and is responsible for overall management of the proposed project. An institution may participate in more than one partnership proposal. The important exception is that, other than rare instances, a school district can participate in only one partnership proposal.

Examples –

- *An institution of higher education in which two departments in a college want to participate in separate proposals with different partners.* This is allowed, but the college can be the lead organization on only one of the proposals; the departments must negotiate with each other on which proposal would have their college as the lead. For the other proposal, the department and college would be a partner with some other organization acting as the lead. *A cautionary note:* Institutional change within colleges and universities participating in the MSP is one of the expected outcomes. When there are competing efforts involving different portions of an institution of higher education, this often results in conflicts that affect the capacity to support other partners and result in demonstrable change.
- *A school district would like to work on a mathematics proposal with one set of partners and a science one with other partners.* This is not permitted, as a school district must commit to only one proposal. It does not matter if one proposal is for a comprehensive award and the other is for a targeted award, or if both proposals are for targeted awards. NSF has not defined those potential “rare instances” in which a school district participates in two proposals – the onus of demonstrating such an instance is on the proposers. *An important point.* If

NSF receives two proposals involving one district, the district will be contacted and asked to select in which one proposal it wishes to act as a partner with their participation in the other proposal being withdrawn prior to the review process. Depending on which entities are members in the second partnership, this may result in their proposal being withdrawn or declared ineligible for the competition.

- *A state educational agency submits a proposal involving school districts and institutions of higher education.* This is allowable and there should be testimony from the partners that they are fully involved and committed in the project. For the school district partners, this proposal would be their single involvement in the MSP program except in very rare situations.

Question – Our partnership will have many partners. Should we provide information within the body of the proposal on all partners?

Answer – You should provide information on each entity that will share in the goals, the responsibility, and the accountability, with the identified intended institutional change for each partner.

Question – Will there be opportunities to submit proposals in two competitions during the 2002 calendar year?

Answer – It is anticipated that there will be a Fall 2002 acceptance of new proposals, pending the availability of funds. However, the date may change to a Fall date later than October 15th (the date indicated on Solicitation NSF 02-061). Depending on the availability of funds, it is expected that there will be additional competitions in each Fall through 2006. An important point: The optional Letter of Intent that is due by March 15, 2002 is only for the proposals that will be submitted for the first MSP competition that requires full proposals, received through FastLane, by April 30th. Requirements for future Letters of Intent or Preproposals will be announced with future Program Announcements.

Question – Are partnerships required to connect with Centers for Learning and Teaching?

Answer – No, there is no absolute requirement but partnerships are encouraged to collaborate with Centers that have areas of common interest, and to be attentive to the knowledge base being developed in these Centers and the future Science of Learning Centers. MSP projects also are strongly encouraged to align their work with other relevant NSF programs that are active in their regions.

Question – What is the relationship of NSF’s MSP program and a similarly named program of the U.S. Department of Education (ED)?

Answer – While both agencies received separate appropriations for MSP programs in this year’s federal budget, ED and NSF are collaborating to develop a single MSP community. The guidelines for all MSP proposals are within the Program Solicitation NSF 02-061. In the Solicitation, ED has indicated four areas of emphasis that it anticipates supporting in the first round of targeted awards. The legislation governing the MSP program in the Department has a few requirements that are different from those of NSF. The partnerships supported with ED funds must include a state department of education, a high need school district, and an engineering, mathematics, or science department in an institution of higher education.

Proposers should not submit separate proposals to ED or identify that they wish for their proposal to be funded by ED or NSF funds. All proposals will be reviewed through the NSF review process. Proposals that are found to be highly competitive through the peer review process, and that match ED’s legislative requirements, will be considered for funding by ED. Post award, all of the grant recipients, both from NSF and ED, will form the MSP community and will participate in all of the grantee meetings, studies, evaluation efforts, etc.

Question – In a proposal for a Comprehensive award, do we have to work on issues of both mathematics and science education?

Answer – Yes, the work of Comprehensive awards will, over time, deal with both disciplines, preK through 12th grade. However, at any given portion of the award’s lifespan, activities may focus on a subset of the issues related to one or the other discipline. The issues are defined by the needs identified by the partnership. Proposals for Comprehensive awards must provide a view of how year-to-year work will impact learning in both disciplines within the partnership school districts and institutions of higher education.

Question – How does the MSP differ from NSF programs of the past decade?

Answer – The MSP requires that partners, especially mathematicians, scientists and engineers from institutions of higher education, participate fully in the solution to preK-12 issues in mathematics and science education. Therefore, in all cases, MSP proposals must demonstrate commitments among school districts, institutions of higher education, and other partners. Partnership models will be extensively studied to learn how partners’ commitments result in institutional changes that will lead to scalability and sustainability of their efforts. The MSP program expects to learn and share how the partnerships contribute to a national capacity for success in educational reform.

Question – What are the “challenging curricula,” discussed in the Program Solicitation, which MSP programs should utilize? What is the expectation for inclusion of NSF-funded curricula in MSP projects?

Answer –There is absolutely no intent on the part of NSF to designate or proscribe a specific curriculum in schools as curricular decisions are viewed by NSF as a local or state decision-making process. Therefore, the MSP is not prescriptive on the concept of “challenging curriculum.” Partnerships should evaluate the relevant literature on high expectations for all preK-16 students and match this to local and/or state standards. MSP projects must start with disaggregated data indicating which students are in which courses and develop benchmarks indicating how partnership activities will lead to all students being engaged in challenging curricula. Students’ curricular options and assessments should parallel these benchmarks as should support of the teacher workforce. Curricula that have been developed over the past decade through NSF funding, as well as implementation and dissemination centers that offer support of these curricula, are resources that MSP projects may draw upon. Ultimately, partnerships must utilize evidence for preK-12 student achievement in their selection of curricula for use in schools as well as in teacher training and professional development programs.

Question – Must all of the proposed work be new development and design or can the work be centered on existing proven initiatives?

Answer – The MSP is not meant to replace, continue or supplement previous efforts funded under other NSF programs. A proposal for funding through the MSP may be based on prior work that demonstrates credible evidence of success. Beyond simply building on effective programs that have been funded in the past, the MSP seeks to support strong partnerships that will result in increased student achievement while also stimulating new, innovative solutions to issues in mathematics and science education.

Question – Does the 25:1 dollar-to-student ratio described under Comprehensive awards also apply to Targeted awards?

Answer – The budget ratio identified under the Comprehensive awards are offered as guidelines only and indicate that the scale of the partnership, i.e., the number of students and/or teachers impacted by the project, is one factor in the strength of a proposal. As noted in the Solicitation, however, this ratio is not meant to stifle creativity or limit activities. All costs must be well-justified in the Budget Justification. Similar issues are true for Targeted awards although the ratio was not explicitly listed in this portion of the Program Solicitation as the Targeted category strongly encourages innovative and complex activities that may be costly.

Question – What is a cooperative agreement (indicated in the Solicitation under the description for Comprehensive awards)?

Answer – A cooperative agreement is very similar to a contract and includes explicit benchmarks and deliverables on a yearly basis throughout the lifespan of an award. Cooperative agreements will be negotiated with each partnership that receives a Comprehensive award. This step follows the review process and commitment to accept the award by a partnership.