



**National Science Foundation**  
**4201 Wilson Boulevard**  
**Arlington, Virginia 22230**

**NSF 11-078**

## **Dear Colleague Letter: BIO Proposal Processing Changes**

August 15, 2011

Dear Colleagues:

As you are no doubt aware, the proposal workload across the Foundation has increased dramatically over the past decade. For example in IOS, the number of unsolicited proposals received into the core programs during this time period has increased 43% while the number of awards made has decreased by 11 percentage points, from 28% to 17%. Clearly, this is a burden on the Program Directors and administrative staff at NSF as well as on the community, who, in addition to submitting proposals are also called upon to serve as ad hoc and panel reviewers.

Effective immediately, the Directorate for Biological Sciences (BIO) of the National Science Foundation (NSF) has initiated new procedures for the submission and review of regular research proposals to the core programs within the Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences (MCB), Division of Environmental Biology (DEB), and Division of Integrative Organismal Systems (IOS). One goal of these new procedures is to reduce the burdens on the PI and reviewer communities associated with intensifying competition for limited funds<sup>1</sup>. A second is to better manage proposal processing in the face of growing proposal submission numbers while maintaining the high quality of the merit review process and resulting funding selections<sup>1</sup>. In response to these challenges, three BIO Divisions are revising their procedures for submission and review of research proposals. The changes for MCB were previously announced in a new solicitation ([NSF-11-545](#)).

DEB and IOS will both implement an **annual cycle of preliminary and full proposals** beginning in January 2012. Preliminary proposals will be accepted in January. Following review by a panel of outside experts, each applicant will be notified of a binding decision to Invite or Not Invite submission of a full proposal. Please note that each investigator is limited to submitting two preliminary proposals a year to either Division, whether as a PI, co-PI or lead senior investigator of a subaward.

All proposals submitted to DEB or IOS in response to the core program solicitations, and to the Research at Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) and Long-term Research in Environmental Biology (LTREB) solicitations, must pass the preliminary proposal stage. The only exceptions are LTREB Renewals.

RAPIDs, EAGERs, conferences/workshops and supplemental funding requests will continue to be accepted at any time by IOS and DEB programs. Proposals submitted in response to special solicitations (e.g. BREAD, CAREER, CNH, EEID) will remain unaffected by these new review procedures. However, OPUS and RCN proposals will only be accepted by the core programs in DEB and IOS once a year at the August deadline for full proposals.

Full details can be found in a **new Program Solicitation** that will be posted on each Division's website ([DEB](#)) and ([IOS](#)). A single set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about these changes also can be found at [http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=nsf11079](http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=nsf11079) and linked from each Division website. In addition, both IOS and DEB will be hosting webinars to provide further information, please see the Division websites for details and contact information if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joann Roskoski  
Assistant Director (Acting)  
Directorate for Biological Sciences

<sup>1</sup> As noted in the 2007 IPAMM Report, both the number of proposals submitted to NSF per year and the number of research proposals submitted per PI to obtain an award have increased substantially. A significant number of NSF reviewers surveyed for the IPAMM Report indicated that overall reviewer workload had increased in the preceding three years. Impact of Proposal and Award Management Mechanisms (IPAMM) Final Report (August 1, 2007; <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2007/nsf0745/nsf0745.pdf>); National Science Foundation