



**National Science Foundation  
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Arlington, Virginia 22230**

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## **Dear Colleague Letter: Proposal Solicitation and Evaluation Changes for the Geography and Spatial Sciences (GSS) Program**

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As has been true for many other parts of the National Science Foundation, the number of proposals submitted to the Geography and Spatial Sciences (GSS) Program has grown at a much faster rate than the number of proposals that GSS can fund. As a result, the percentage of regular research projects funded by GSS relative to the number of proposals the program considered for funding dropped from the 20 percent to 24 percent range in the early 1990s to the 16 percent to 18 percent range for much of the first decade of the 2000s. During the last two fiscal years, that percentage dropped to the 12 percent to 15 percent range. The increase in proposals, many of which are revised and resubmitted without significant improvement within weeks after they have been declined, have created a significant burden on members of the research community who are serving as principal investigators, reviewers, and advisory panel members.

To address these problems, the Geography and Spatial Sciences Program has implemented a new schedule for the submission and evaluation of proposals, and it is adopting special merit review criteria in order to better identify potentially transformative research that has larger-scale, longer-term significance. These changes are outlined in a new GSS program solicitation. [NSF 12-570](#). That solicitation also provides more specific guidance regarding the preparation of proposals.

Effective immediately, **GSS will conduct one annual competition for new research proposals submitted to the program. The next deadline for submission of these proposals is September 13, 2012. Starting in 2013, the proposal-submission deadline will be the first Thursday in September.** In addition to regular research proposals, proposals for conferences, workshops, group-travel, and other community-development activities as well as research coordination network (RCN) proposals must be submitted by this deadline. Based on merit review, all proposals will be recommended for funding or for declination. Some investigators whose proposals are declined will have an opportunity to submit a revised proposal for consideration by NSF prior to the next annual deadline, but that opportunity will be limited to investigators who receive explicit invitations to resubmit from the GSS program officers because of the potential larger-scale, longer-term significance of their projects.

The changes in the schedule for submitting and evaluating regular research proposals should yield a number of benefits. Because GSS no longer will have to reserve roughly one-half of its available funds for a second competition each year, it will be able to commit a much larger share of its funds for this annual competition. The success rate for proposals should increase, because the number of proposals that will be evaluated annually is expected to be reduced. The reduction in proposals should help maintain the highest possible quality in merit evaluation based on peer review while reducing the burden on investigators and those reviewing proposals. The changes also will help reduce costs associated with travel and government operation in accordance with U.S. government guidelines.

Investigators considering submission of proposals to the Geography and Spatial Sciences Program should be sure to carefully review the new GSS Program solicitation and to adhere to its guidelines and requirements.

GSS will continue to conduct two competitions annually for doctoral dissertation research improvement (DDR1) proposals, although the proposal-submission deadlines have changed slightly to the 2nd Thursday of February and the 2nd Thursday of October each year.

GSS also will continue to review Faculty Early-Career Development (CAREER) proposals submitted in accordance with the NSF-wide CAREER proposal-submission deadlines. PIs planning to submit a CAREER proposal should follow specifications and requirements in the CAREER solicitation ([NSF 11-690](#)).

More information is available from the [GSS website](#), from the [GSS solicitation](#), and from GSS program officers listed on the website.

Sincerely,

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