

This solicitation has been archived and replaced by NSF 20-512.

## Understanding the Rules of Life: Epigenetics

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### PROGRAM SOLICITATION

NSF 18-600

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National Science Foundation

**Full Proposal Deadline(s)** (due by 5 p.m. submitter's local time):

February 01, 2019

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND REVISION NOTES

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Understanding the Rules of Life: Epigenetics is a new NSF-wide program.

Any proposal submitted in response to this solicitation should be submitted in accordance with the revised *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) (NSF 18-1), which is effective for proposals submitted, or due, on or after January 29, 2018.

### SUMMARY OF PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

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#### General Information

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**Program Title:**

Understanding the Rules of Life: Epigenetics

**Synopsis of Program:**

In 2016, the National Science Foundation (NSF) unveiled a set of "Big Ideas," 10 bold, long-term research and process ideas that identify areas for future investment at the frontiers of science and engineering (see [https://www.nsf.gov/news/special\\_reports/big\\_ideas/index.jsp](https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/big_ideas/index.jsp)). The Big Ideas represent unique opportunities to position our Nation at the cutting edge of global science and engineering leadership by bringing together diverse disciplinary perspectives to support convergence research. As such, when responding to this solicitation, even though proposals must be submitted to the Division of Emerging Frontiers in the Directorate for Biological Sciences (BIO/EF), once received, the proposals will be managed by a cross-disciplinary team of NSF Program Directors.

The purpose of the Understanding the Rules of Life: Epigenetics (URoL:Epigenetics) program is to enable innovative research and to promote multidisciplinary education and workforce training in the broad area of epigenetics. The URoL:Epigenetics program is a wide collaboration across Directorates/Offices within the National Science Foundation with a focus on understanding the relationship between epigenetic mechanisms associated with environmental change, the resultant phenotypes of organisms, and how these mechanisms lead to robustness and adaptability of organisms and populations.

*Understanding the Rules of Life (URoL): Predicting Phenotype* is one of NSF's 10 Big Ideas and is focused on predicting the set of observable characteristics (phenotype) from the genetic makeup of the individual and the nature of its environment. The development of new research tools has revolutionized our ability to manipulate and investigate the genome and to measure multiple aspects of biological, physical, and social environments. The opportunity now is to assimilate this new information into causal, mechanistic, and/or predictive relationships between the genomic and epigenetic makeup, the environmental experience, and the phenotypic characteristics of biological systems. These relationships are the basis for the Rules of Life – the theoretical constructs that explain and predict the characteristics of living systems, from molecular and sub-cellular components, to cells, whole organisms, communities and biomes.

The recognition that heritable phenotypic properties can occur without modification of an organism's genome sequence is changing the understanding of the way heritable traits come about and manifest themselves as observable phenotypes within a particular static or changing environmental context. The impact of epigenetic inheritance occurs at the molecular, cellular, and organismal scales, and may have profound consequences for the higher-order organization of living systems, such as populations, communities, and ecosystems.

Successful projects of the URoL:Epigenetics Program are anticipated to use complementary, interdisciplinary approaches to investigate how epigenetic phenomena lead to emergent properties that explain the fundamental behavior of living systems. Ultimately, successful projects should identify general principles ("rules") that underlie a wide spectrum of biological phenomena across size, complexity (e.g., molecular, cellular, organismal, population) and temporal scales (from sub-second to geologic) in taxa from anywhere within the tree of life. **URoL:Epigenetics**

projects must integrate perspectives and research approaches from more than one research discipline (e.g., biology, chemistry, computer science, engineering, geology, mathematics, physics, social and behavioral sciences). The interdisciplinary scope of URoL:Epigenetics projects also provides unique training and outreach possibilities to train the next generation of scientists in a diversity of approaches and to engage society more generally.

The URoL:Epigenetics Program offers two submission tracks: Track 1 - for projects with a total budget of up to \$500,000 and an award duration of up to 3 years, and Track 2 - for projects with a total budget of up to \$3,000,000 and award duration of up to 5 years.

**Cognizant Program Officer(s):**

*Please note that the following information is current at the time of publishing. See program website for any updates to the points of contact.*

- Mitra Basu, telephone: 703-292-8649, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Rebecca Ferrell, telephone: 703-292-7850, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Louise R. Howe, telephone: 703-292-2548, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Simon Malcomber, telephone: 703-292-8227, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- John-David Swanson, telephone: 703-292-2898, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Junping Wang, telephone: 703-292-4488, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Clytrice Watson, telephone: 703-292-4775, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Boris Wawrik, telephone: 703-292-2117, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)

**Applicable Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number(s):**

- 47.041 --- Engineering
- 47.049 --- Mathematical and Physical Sciences
- 47.050 --- Geosciences
- 47.070 --- Computer and Information Science and Engineering
- 47.074 --- Biological Sciences
- 47.075 --- Social Behavioral and Economic Sciences
- 47.076 --- Education and Human Resources
- 47.079 --- Office of International Science and Engineering
- 47.083 --- Office of Integrative Activities (OIA)

## Award Information

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**Anticipated Type of Award:** Standard Grant or Continuing Grant

**Estimated Number of Awards:** 6 to 12

**Anticipated Funding Amount:** \$15,000,000 to \$18,000,000

Subject to the availability of funds

## Eligibility Information

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**Who May Submit Proposals:**

Proposals may only be submitted by the following:

- Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) - Two- and four-year IHEs (including community colleges) accredited in, and having a campus located in the US, acting on behalf of their faculty members. Special Instructions for International Branch Campuses of US IHEs: If the proposal includes funding to be provided to an international branch campus of a US institution of higher education (including through use of subawards and consultant arrangements), the proposer must explain the benefit(s) to the project of performance at the international branch campus, and justify why the project activities cannot be performed at the US campus.
- Non-profit, non-academic organizations: Independent museums, observatories, research labs, professional societies and similar organizations in the U.S. associated with educational or research activities.

**Who May Serve as PI:**

There are no restrictions or limits.

**Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:**

There are no restrictions or limits.

**Limit on Number of Proposals per PI or Co-PI:** 1

An individual may appear as Principal Investigator (PI) or co-PI on only one proposal per annual cycle submitted in response to either submission track in this solicitation.

**If an individual is listed as PI or co-PI on more than one proposal to this solicitation, all proposals in excess of the limit for any person will be returned without review in the reverse order received.**

## Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions

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### A. Proposal Preparation Instructions

- **Letters of Intent:** Not required
- **Preliminary Proposal Submission:** Not required
- **Full Proposals:**
  - Full Proposals submitted via FastLane: *NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) guidelines apply. The complete text of the PAPPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).
  - Full Proposals submitted via Grants.gov: *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for the Preparation and Submission of NSF Applications via Grants.gov* guidelines apply (Note: The *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide* is available on the Grants.gov website and on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=grantsgovguide](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=grantsgovguide)).

### B. Budgetary Information

- **Cost Sharing Requirements:**

Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited.
- **Indirect Cost (F&A) Limitations:**

Not Applicable
- **Other Budgetary Limitations:**

Other budgetary limitations apply. Please see the full text of this solicitation for further information.

### C. Due Dates

- **Full Proposal Deadline(s)** (due by 5 p.m. submitter's local time):

February 01, 2019

## Proposal Review Information Criteria

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### Merit Review Criteria:

National Science Board approved criteria. Additional merit review considerations apply. Please see the full text of this solicitation for further information.

## Award Administration Information

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### Award Conditions:

Additional award conditions apply. Please see the full text of this solicitation for further information.

### Reporting Requirements:

Standard NSF reporting requirements apply.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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Science is on the cusp of solving one of the greatest challenges in understanding the living world – namely predicting the set of observable characteristics (phenotype) from the genetic makeup of the individual and the influence of the environment. Understanding the genetic and environmental mechanisms that regulate phenotypes will create significant benefits to society, ranging from increased agricultural production and bio-economic advances, to improved human health and well-being, to strong national security. The development of new research tools and ideas has revolutionized our ability to manipulate and investigate the genome and to measure multiple aspects of biological, physical, and social environments. The opportunity now is to assimilate this new information into causal, mechanistic, and/or predictive relationships between the genomic and epigenetic makeup, environmental context, and the phenotypic characteristics of biological systems. These relationships are the basis for the Rules of Life – the theoretical constructs and general principles that explain and predict the characteristics of living systems, from the genome, proteome, metabolome and sub-cellular components, to cells, whole organisms, populations, communities and biomes.

URoL:Epigenetics is a cross-directorate program of the National Science Foundation that aims to understand the mechanistic relationship whereby environmentally associated epigenetic changes result in heritable organism-level phenotypic characteristics leading to robustness and adaptability of organisms and populations. The URoL:Epigenetics program supports projects that take interdisciplinary approaches to better understand epigenetic mechanisms within organisms, emphasizing projects that cross levels of complexity (e.g., molecular, cellular, organismal, population) and temporal scales (from sub-second to geologic) in taxa from anywhere within the tree of life. The program's required interdisciplinary focus presents excellent opportunities for the exploration of novel experimental and comparative approaches, predictive modeling, new mathematical, computational and data science approaches, and for integrated multi-disciplinary education and outreach activities.

Investigators wishing to inquire about the suitability of potential projects for URoL:Epigenetics are encouraged to email a one page summary to [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov).

## II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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The URoL:Epigenetics Program defines epigenetics broadly as any heritable biological or chemical mechanism that produces a phenotypic effect without alteration of the DNA sequence. Examples of epigenetic processes include nucleic acid methylation, post-translational modification of histones, and RNA-based regulatory mechanisms.

The URoL:Epigenetics Program is focused on understanding the relationships between epigenetic mechanisms as they relate to the resultant phenotypes of organisms, and the way that these mechanisms lead to robustness and adaptability of organisms and populations. Successful projects are expected to have a cohesive set of goals. Proposals should articulate a convincing plan to potentially increase our understanding of how epigenetic mechanisms lead to emergent properties at varying scales, including the genome, proteome and metabolome, cells, physiology and whole organism, and within populations, species, ecological communities and ecosystems. **The URoL:Epigenetics Program strongly encourages proposals aimed at developing a predictive framework and/or a comparative and manipulative experimental approach. Proposed research should model and test hypotheses for understanding the causal relationships between environment, genome, epigenome and phenotypic characteristics, and investigate how these relationships affect the robustness and adaptability of organisms and populations.**

The URoL:Epigenetics Program includes participation from the Directorates for Biological Sciences (BIO), Computer and Information Science and Engineering (CISE), Education and Human Resources (EHR), Engineering (ENG), Geosciences (GEO), Mathematical and Physical Sciences (MPS), Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE), and the Office of Integrative Activities (OIA) at the National Science Foundation. As such, **the goals of the program are to foster crosscutting, interdisciplinary research on the epigenetic regulation of organismal phenotypes that integrates perspectives and research approaches from more than one of these directorates. This program aims to support projects that would not traditionally be supported through regular core programs of the participating directorates and offices.**

Appropriate approaches for URoL:Epigenetics projects include, but are not limited to: the use of cellular engineering and physical-chemical approaches to manipulate molecular and cellular components to understand cellular and organismal responses to environmental change; investigation of physical, and chemical interactions that underlie epigenetic changes in the structure, packing, function, and dynamics of DNA, RNA and proteins; application of artificial intelligence to identify patterns that reveal the underlying principles to explain how environmental influences on the epigenome lead to phenotypic outcomes; and use of interdisciplinary biological, mathematical, computational, social and behavioral science methods to predict relationships between epigenetic mechanisms, physical, physiological and behavioral phenotypes, physical, social and built environments, and emergent properties at organismal and supra-organismal levels. Projects may be laboratory, field, and/or computer based and may include a focus on terrestrial, aquatic, marine or polar organisms and ecosystems. Projects must extend laboratory and experimental approaches beyond well-established model systems and/or controlled environments to demonstrate how generally the epigenetic mechanism under study explains and predicts the characteristics of living systems.

The rapid pace of advancement in the theories, models and tools used to characterize, measure, and analyze epigenetic data will require substantial investment in training for current and future generations of a diverse scientific workforce. Epigenetic discoveries are also likely to have high visibility with the public and present an opportunity to generate new and innovative science outreach activities for K-12 and public audiences. The URoL:Epigenetics Program encourages research projects that integrate training and outreach activities in their research plan, provide interdisciplinary training opportunities for researchers and students, develop novel teaching modules, and/or provide explicit plans to integrate primarily undergraduate institutions and broaden participation of under-represented groups in science.

#### Research Proposals

**Research projects must use an interdisciplinary approach that integrates perspectives and approaches from more than one research discipline (e.g., biology, chemistry, computer science, engineering, mathematics, physics, social and behavioral sciences, etc.) to understand epigenetic mechanisms associated with environmental change, the resultant phenotypic characteristics of organisms, and the resultant robustness and adaptability of organisms and populations.** Studies that cross multiple levels of organizational complexity (molecular, cellular, physiological, organismal, population) and temporal (including evolutionary) scales, and taxa within the tree of life – both unicellular and multicellular organisms, including humans – are particularly encouraged. Projects are expected to extend beyond model systems and controlled environments to demonstrate how broadly the epigenetic mechanism under study is conserved in living systems.

Both single investigator and collaborative efforts are acceptable. Investigators are encouraged to develop collaborations with researchers with complementary expertise where necessary to facilitate an interdisciplinary approach to address the overarching research question(s).

URoL:Epigenetics provides two tracks that support projects of different scale and scope:

**URoL:Epigenetics Track 1 (Epigenetics 1):** This track provides support for projects with a total budget (including indirect costs) of up to \$500,000 and award duration of up to 3 years.

**URoL:Epigenetics Track 2 (Epigenetics 2):** This track provides support for projects with a total budget (including indirect costs) of up to \$3,000,000 and award duration of up to 5 years.

International collaborators are encouraged to seek support from their respective funding organizations. Funding guidelines for involving international collaborators allow the following expenses to be included in the NSF budget:

- Travel expenses for US scientists and students participating in exchange visits integral to the project.
- Project-related expenses for international partners to engage in research activities while in the U.S. as project participants.
- Project-related expenses for US participants to engage in research activities while abroad.

### III. AWARD INFORMATION

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The Program estimates an FY2019 budget of \$15,000,000 to \$18,000,000 and expects to make 6-12 awards, subject to the availability of funds.

### IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

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#### Who May Submit Proposals:

Proposals may only be submitted by the following:

- Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) - Two- and four-year IHEs (including community colleges) accredited in, and having a campus located in the US, acting on behalf of their faculty members. Special Instructions for International Branch Campuses of US IHEs: If the proposal includes funding to be provided to an international branch campus of a US institution of higher education (including through use of subawards and consultant arrangements), the proposer must explain the benefit(s) to the project of performance at the international branch campus, and justify why the project activities cannot be performed at the US campus.
- Non-profit, non-academic organizations: Independent museums, observatories, research labs, professional societies and similar organizations in the U.S. associated with educational or research activities.

#### Who May Serve as PI:

There are no restrictions or limits.

**Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:**

There are no restrictions or limits.

**Limit on Number of Proposals per PI or Co-PI: 1**

An individual may appear as Principal Investigator (PI) or co-PI on only one proposal per annual cycle submitted in response to either submission track in this solicitation.

**If an individual is listed as PI or co-PI on more than one proposal to this solicitation, all proposals in excess of the limit for any person will be returned without review in the reverse order received.**

## V. PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

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### A. Proposal Preparation Instructions

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**Full Proposal Preparation Instructions:** Proposers may opt to submit proposals in response to this Program Solicitation via Grants.gov or via the NSF FastLane system.

- Full proposals submitted via FastLane: Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation should be prepared and submitted in accordance with the general guidelines contained in the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG). The complete text of the PAPPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg). Paper copies of the PAPPG may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-7827 or by e-mail from [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov). Proposers are reminded to identify this program solicitation number in the program solicitation block on the NSF Cover Sheet For Proposal to the National Science Foundation. Compliance with this requirement is critical to determining the relevant proposal processing guidelines. Failure to submit this information may delay processing.
- Full proposals submitted via Grants.gov: Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation via Grants.gov should be prepared and submitted in accordance with the *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for the Preparation and Submission of NSF Applications via Grants.gov*. The complete text of the *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide* is available on the Grants.gov website and on the NSF website at: ([https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=grantsgovguide](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=grantsgovguide)). To obtain copies of the Application Guide and Application Forms Package, click on the Apply tab on the Grants.gov site, then click on the Apply Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package and Application Instructions link and enter the funding opportunity number, (the program solicitation number without the NSF prefix) and press the Download Package button. Paper copies of the Grants.gov Application Guide also may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-7827 or by e-mail from [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov).

In determining which method to utilize in the electronic preparation and submission of the proposal, please note the following:

**Collaborative Proposals.** All collaborative proposals submitted as separate submissions from multiple organizations must be submitted via the NSF FastLane system. PAPPG Chapter II.D.3 provides additional information on collaborative proposals.

See PAPPG Chapter II.C.2 for guidance on the required sections of a full research proposal submitted to NSF. Please note that the proposal preparation instructions provided in this program solicitation may deviate from the PAPPG instructions.

**Special instructions for submitting to this Big Idea solicitation**

**FastLane Users:** Proposers are reminded to identify the program solicitation number (located on the first page of this document) in the first block on the NSF Cover Sheet. Compliance with this requirement is critical to determining the relevant proposal processing guidelines. Please note that even though proposals must be submitted to BIO/EF, once received the proposals will be managed by a cross-disciplinary team of NSF Program Directors.

**Research.gov Users:** The Prepare New Proposal setup will prompt you for the program solicitation number (located on the first page of this document). Compliance with this requirement is critical to determining the relevant proposal processing guidelines. As stated previously, even though proposals must be submitted to BIO/EF, once received the proposals will be managed by a cross-disciplinary team of NSF Program Directors.

**Grants.gov Users:** The program solicitation number will be pre-populated by Grants.gov on the NSF Grant Application Cover Page, however you will need to locate the Division Code, Program Code, Division Name, and Program Name for the specific solicitation you are applying to by visiting <https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/pgmannounce.jsp>. As stated previously, even though proposals must be submitted to BIO/EF, once received the proposals will be managed by a cross-disciplinary team of NSF Program Directors.

**Proposal Preparation Instructions**

**Proposal Title:** Titles of Track 1 proposals submitted to the URoL:Epigenetics should begin with "URoL: Epigenetics 1:" followed by a substantive title. Titles of Track 2 proposals should begin with "URoL: Epigenetics 2:" followed by a substantive title.

**Project Summary – Research proposals:** The one-page Project Summary must separately address Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts. Descriptions of Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts must be entered into the appropriate text boxes if the proposal is created in FastLane. This information must also be included in the Project Summary of proposals submitted through Grants.gov,

although the interface lacks separate text boxes.

**Project Description** (up to 15 pages): For all proposals, the project description must include:

- A description of how the project integrates diverse and complementary (i.e. interdisciplinary) research and analytical approaches to identify general epigenetic principles associated with environmental change, the resultant phenotypes of organisms, and how these mechanisms lead to robustness and adaptability of organisms and populations.
- Results from Prior NSF Support: Follow the standard NSF format, as described in the PAPPG.

Please note that per guidance in the PAPPG, the Project Description must contain, as separate sections within the narrative, a section labeled "Intellectual Merit" and a section labeled "Broader Impacts." PIs can decide where to include these sections within the Project Description.

**Budget:** Proposals Requiring Research Facilities: Budgets should include all costs charged to the project for platforms and facilities supporting the proposed research, except those facilities separately supported by NSF (e.g., research aircraft or field equipment). PIs are responsible for filing the appropriate requests for major research platforms; a copy of the request must be attached as an appendix to the proposal.

**Special Information and Supplementary Documentation:** Provide information such as letters of collaboration and other allowed items as noted in the current issuance of the PAPPG. For Grants.gov users, Supplementary Documents should be attached in Field 12 of the R&R Other Project Information Form.

**Supplementary Document – Project Management Plan and Role of Project Personnel** (up to three pages, if applicable): For Track 2 proposals, provide a detailed description and management plan describing the role and expertise of each investigator, what each person brings to the project leadership team, reporting relationships, means of communication and interaction among the members of the project team, oversight and accountability mechanisms, and metrics to evaluate the success of the project.

**Supplementary Document – Student Training Plan** (up to two pages, if applicable): The Understanding the Rules of Life: Epigenetics Program seeks to build a diverse, interdisciplinary, globally engaged, scientific workforce capable of transforming and communicating our understanding of the epigenetic and other general principles regulating life on Earth. The future of science is highly interdisciplinary and as such, URoL:Epigenetics proposals require student training in broad research competencies. Training should promote intellectual and methodological cross-fertilization and encourage a systems/integrative perspective towards understanding epigenetic mechanisms.

Each proposal that requests funding to support undergraduate and/or graduate students should include, as a Supplementary Document, a description of the training activities that will be provided for such individuals. The goal of the Student Training Plan is to prepare students to develop broad hypotheses and to become well versed in all aspects of interdisciplinary epigenetic research. This may be accomplished, for example, through lab rotations among PI institutions, cross-training plans, and/or integrative training conferences. NSF believes that student research experiences have their greatest impact in situations that lead the participants from a relatively dependent status to an independent status as their competence warrants. A training plan should be included that explains the approach, depth and breadth of instruction. The training plan must not exceed two pages. Proposers should describe specifically how the proposed training plan will enhance the future workforce for the field of interdisciplinary epigenetics research and how trainees will be better able to engage in emerging research areas employing newly developing methods and tools. Only one Student Training Plan should be submitted for each project, even if it is a collaborative project.

**Supplementary Document – Post-Doctoral Mentoring Plan** (one page, if applicable): Each proposal that requests funding to support postdoctoral researchers must include a Supplementary Document describing the mentoring activities that will be provided for such individuals. The mentoring plan must not exceed one page. Only one Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan should be submitted for each project, even if it is a collaborative project. Proposals that do not comply with this requirement will not be accepted or will be returned without review.

**Supplementary Document – Data Management Plan** (up to two pages): Each proposal must include, as a Supplementary Document, a data management section with the specific details of data standards, accessibility, electronic dissemination, and preservation. Of particular importance (where applicable) are: plans for data collection and analysis; plans for dissemination of data and archiving; details of collaborative efforts; information about necessary permits; and information about access to resources that are not immediately under the investigator's control (e.g., museum collections, research sites, computing facilities). The data management plan must not exceed two pages. Further information about Data Management Plans can be found in the PAPPG ([https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappg17\\_1/pappg\\_2.jsp#11C2j](https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappg17_1/pappg_2.jsp#11C2j)). Proposals that do not comply with this requirement will not be accepted or will be returned without review.

**Letters of Collaboration:** If the project involves collaborative arrangements of significance, these arrangements should be documented through letters of collaboration. Letters of collaboration should be limited to stating the intent to collaborate and should not contain endorsements or evaluation of the proposed project. Letters of collaboration should follow the single-sentence format:

"If the proposal submitted by Dr. [insert the full name of the Principal Investigator] entitled [insert the proposal title] is selected for funding by the NSF, it is my intent to collaborate and/or commit resources as detailed in the Project Description or the Facilities, Equipment or Other Resources section of the proposal."

Requests for letters of collaboration should be made by the PI well in advance of the proposal submission deadline, because they must be included at the time of submission. **Please note that letters of recommendation for the PI or other letters of support for the project are not permitted.**

## B. Budgetary Information

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### Cost Sharing:

Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited.

#### Other Budgetary Limitations:

URoL: Epigenetics provides two tracks that support projects of different scale and scope:

**URoL: Epigenetics Track 1 (Epigenetics 1):** This track provides support for projects with a total budget (including indirect costs) of up to \$500,000 and award duration of up to 3 years.

**URoL: Epigenetics Track 2 (Epigenetics 2):** This track provides support for projects with a total budget (including indirect costs) of up to \$3,000,000 and award duration of up to 5 years.

### C. Due Dates

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- **Full Proposal Deadline(s)** (due by 5 p.m. submitter's local time):

February 01, 2019

### D. FastLane/Grants.gov Requirements

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#### For Proposals Submitted Via FastLane:

To prepare and submit a proposal via FastLane, see detailed technical instructions available at: <https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/a1/newstan.htm>. For FastLane user support, call the FastLane Help Desk at 1-800-673-6188 or e-mail [fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto:fastlane@nsf.gov). The FastLane Help Desk answers general technical questions related to the use of the FastLane system. Specific questions related to this program solicitation should be referred to the NSF program staff contact(s) listed in Section VIII of this funding opportunity.

#### For Proposals Submitted Via Grants.gov:

Before using Grants.gov for the first time, each organization must register to create an institutional profile. Once registered, the applicant's organization can then apply for any federal grant on the Grants.gov website. Comprehensive information about using Grants.gov is available on the Grants.gov Applicant Resources webpage: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants.html>. In addition, the NSF Grants.gov Application Guide (see link in Section V.A) provides instructions regarding the technical preparation of proposals via Grants.gov. For Grants.gov user support, contact the Grants.gov Contact Center at 1-800-518-4726 or by email: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov). The Grants.gov Contact Center answers general technical questions related to the use of Grants.gov. Specific questions related to this program solicitation should be referred to the NSF program staff contact(s) listed in Section VIII of this solicitation.

**Submitting the Proposal:** Once all documents have been completed, the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) must submit the application to Grants.gov and verify the desired funding opportunity and agency to which the application is submitted. The AOR must then sign and submit the application to Grants.gov. The completed application will be transferred to the NSF FastLane system for further processing.

Proposers that submitted via FastLane are strongly encouraged to use FastLane to verify the status of their submission to NSF. For proposers that submitted via Grants.gov, until an application has been received and validated by NSF, the Authorized Organizational Representative may check the status of an application on Grants.gov. After proposers have received an e-mail notification from NSF, Research.gov should be used to check the status of an application.

## VI. NSF PROPOSAL PROCESSING AND REVIEW PROCEDURES

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Proposals received by NSF are assigned to the appropriate NSF program for acknowledgement and, if they meet NSF requirements, for review. All proposals are carefully reviewed by a scientist, engineer, or educator serving as an NSF Program Officer, and usually by three to ten other persons outside NSF either as *ad hoc* reviewers, panelists, or both, who are experts in the particular fields represented by the proposal. These reviewers are selected by Program Officers charged with oversight of the review process. Proposers are invited to suggest names of persons they believe are especially well qualified to review the proposal and/or persons they would prefer not review the proposal. These suggestions may serve as one source in the reviewer selection process at the Program Officer's discretion. Submission of such names, however, is optional. Care is taken to ensure that reviewers have no conflicts of interest with the proposal. In addition, Program Officers may obtain comments from site visits before recommending final action on proposals. Senior NSF staff further review recommendations for awards. A flowchart that depicts the entire NSF proposal and award process (and associated timeline) is included in PAPPG Exhibit III-1.

A comprehensive description of the Foundation's merit review process is available on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit\\_review/](https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit_review/).

Proposers should also be aware of core strategies that are essential to the fulfillment of NSF's mission, as articulated in *Building the Future: Investing in Discovery and Innovation - NSF Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years (FY) 2018 – 2022*. These strategies are integrated in the program planning and implementation process, of which proposal review is one part. NSF's mission is particularly well-implemented through the integration of research and education and broadening participation in NSF programs, projects, and activities.

One of the strategic objectives in support of NSF's mission is to foster integration of research and education through the programs, projects, and activities it supports at academic and research institutions. These institutions must recruit, train, and prepare a diverse



STEM workforce to advance the frontiers of science and participate in the U.S. technology-based economy. NSF's contribution to the national innovation ecosystem is to provide cutting-edge research under the guidance of the Nation's most creative scientists and engineers. NSF also supports development of a strong science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce by investing in building the knowledge that informs improvements in STEM teaching and learning.

NSF's mission calls for the broadening of opportunities and expanding participation of groups, institutions, and geographic regions that are underrepresented in STEM disciplines, which is essential to the health and vitality of science and engineering. NSF is committed to this principle of diversity and deems it central to the programs, projects, and activities it considers and supports.

## A. Merit Review Principles and Criteria

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The National Science Foundation strives to invest in a robust and diverse portfolio of projects that creates new knowledge and enables breakthroughs in understanding across all areas of science and engineering research and education. To identify which projects to support, NSF relies on a merit review process that incorporates consideration of both the technical aspects of a proposed project and its potential to contribute more broadly to advancing NSF's mission "to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense; and for other purposes." NSF makes every effort to conduct a fair, competitive, transparent merit review process for the selection of projects.

### 1. Merit Review Principles

These principles are to be given due diligence by PIs and organizations when preparing proposals and managing projects, by reviewers when reading and evaluating proposals, and by NSF program staff when determining whether or not to recommend proposals for funding and while overseeing awards. Given that NSF is the primary federal agency charged with nurturing and supporting excellence in basic research and education, the following three principles apply:

- All NSF projects should be of the highest quality and have the potential to advance, if not transform, the frontiers of knowledge.
- NSF projects, in the aggregate, should contribute more broadly to achieving societal goals. These "Broader Impacts" may be accomplished through the research itself, through activities that are directly related to specific research projects, or through activities that are supported by, but are complementary to, the project. The project activities may be based on previously established and/or innovative methods and approaches, but in either case must be well justified.
- Meaningful assessment and evaluation of NSF funded projects should be based on appropriate metrics, keeping in mind the likely correlation between the effect of broader impacts and the resources provided to implement projects. If the size of the activity is limited, evaluation of that activity in isolation is not likely to be meaningful. Thus, assessing the effectiveness of these activities may best be done at a higher, more aggregated, level than the individual project.

With respect to the third principle, even if assessment of Broader Impacts outcomes for particular projects is done at an aggregated level, PIs are expected to be accountable for carrying out the activities described in the funded project. Thus, individual projects should include clearly stated goals, specific descriptions of the activities that the PI intends to do, and a plan in place to document the outputs of those activities.

These three merit review principles provide the basis for the merit review criteria, as well as a context within which the users of the criteria can better understand their intent.

### 2. Merit Review Criteria

All NSF proposals are evaluated through use of the two National Science Board approved merit review criteria. In some instances, however, NSF will employ additional criteria as required to highlight the specific objectives of certain programs and activities.

The two merit review criteria are listed below. **Both** criteria are to be given **full consideration** during the review and decision-making processes; each criterion is necessary but neither, by itself, is sufficient. Therefore, proposers must fully address both criteria. (PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.d(i). contains additional information for use by proposers in development of the Project Description section of the proposal). Reviewers are strongly encouraged to review the criteria, including PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.d(i), prior to the review of a proposal.

When evaluating NSF proposals, reviewers will be asked to consider what the proposers want to do, why they want to do it, how they plan to do it, how they will know if they succeed, and what benefits could accrue if the project is successful. These issues apply both to the technical aspects of the proposal and the way in which the project may make broader contributions. To that end, reviewers will be asked to evaluate all proposals against two criteria:

- **Intellectual Merit:** The Intellectual Merit criterion encompasses the potential to advance knowledge; and
- **Broader Impacts:** The Broader Impacts criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes.

The following elements should be considered in the review for both criteria:

1. What is the potential for the proposed activity to
  - a. Advance knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields (Intellectual Merit); and
  - b. Benefit society or advance desired societal outcomes (Broader Impacts)?
2. To what extent do the proposed activities suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts?
3. Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities well-reasoned, well-organized, and based on a sound rationale? Does the plan incorporate a mechanism to assess success?
4. How well qualified is the individual, team, or organization to conduct the proposed activities?
5. Are there adequate resources available to the PI (either at the home organization or through collaborations) to carry out the proposed activities?

Broader impacts may be accomplished through the research itself, through the activities that are directly related to specific research projects, or through activities that are supported by, but are complementary to, the project. NSF values the advancement of scientific

knowledge and activities that contribute to achievement of societally relevant outcomes. Such outcomes include, but are not limited to: full participation of women, persons with disabilities, and underrepresented minorities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); improved STEM education and educator development at any level; increased public scientific literacy and public engagement with science and technology; improved well-being of individuals in society; development of a diverse, globally competitive STEM workforce; increased partnerships between academia, industry, and others; improved national security; increased economic competitiveness of the United States; and enhanced infrastructure for research and education.

Proposers are reminded that reviewers will also be asked to review the Data Management Plan and the Postdoctoral Researcher Mentoring Plan, as appropriate.

#### **Additional Solicitation Specific Review Criteria**

Proposals must convincingly articulate the approaches from more than one research discipline (e.g., biology, chemistry, computer science, engineering, geology, mathematics, physics, social sciences) employed to understand relationships between epigenetic mechanisms associated with environmental change, the resultant phenotypic characteristics of organisms, and how that leads to robustness and adaptability of organisms and populations.

## **B. Review and Selection Process**

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Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation will be reviewed by Ad hoc Review and/or Panel Review.

Reviewers will be asked to evaluate proposals using two National Science Board approved merit review criteria and, if applicable, additional program specific criteria. A summary rating and accompanying narrative will generally be completed and submitted by each reviewer and/or panel. The Program Officer assigned to manage the proposal's review will consider the advice of reviewers and will formulate a recommendation.

After scientific, technical and programmatic review and consideration of appropriate factors, the NSF Program Officer recommends to the cognizant Division Director whether the proposal should be declined or recommended for award. NSF strives to be able to tell applicants whether their proposals have been declined or recommended for funding within six months. Large or particularly complex proposals or proposals from new awardees may require additional review and processing time. The time interval begins on the deadline or target date, or receipt date, whichever is later. The interval ends when the Division Director acts upon the Program Officer's recommendation.

After programmatic approval has been obtained, the proposals recommended for funding will be forwarded to the Division of Grants and Agreements for review of business, financial, and policy implications. After an administrative review has occurred, Grants and Agreements Officers perform the processing and issuance of a grant or other agreement. Proposers are cautioned that only a Grants and Agreements Officer may make commitments, obligations or awards on behalf of NSF or authorize the expenditure of funds. No commitment on the part of NSF should be inferred from technical or budgetary discussions with a NSF Program Officer. A Principal Investigator or organization that makes financial or personnel commitments in the absence of a grant or cooperative agreement signed by the NSF Grants and Agreements Officer does so at their own risk.

Once an award or declination decision has been made, Principal Investigators are provided feedback about their proposals. In all cases, reviews are treated as confidential documents. Verbatim copies of reviews, excluding the names of the reviewers or any reviewer-identifying information, are sent to the Principal Investigator/Project Director by the Program Officer. In addition, the proposer will receive an explanation of the decision to award or decline funding.

## **VII. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION**

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### **A. Notification of the Award**

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Notification of the award is made to *the submitting organization* by a Grants Officer in the Division of Grants and Agreements. Organizations whose proposals are declined will be advised as promptly as possible by the cognizant NSF Program administering the program. Verbatim copies of reviews, not including the identity of the reviewer, will be provided automatically to the Principal Investigator. (See Section VI.B. for additional information on the review process.)

### **B. Award Conditions**

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An NSF award consists of: (1) the award notice, which includes any special provisions applicable to the award and any numbered amendments thereto; (2) the budget, which indicates the amounts, by categories of expense, on which NSF has based its support (or otherwise communicates any specific approvals or disapprovals of proposed expenditures); (3) the proposal referenced in the award notice; (4) the applicable award conditions, such as Grant General Conditions (GC-1)\*; or Research Terms and Conditions\* and (5) any announcement or other NSF issuance that may be incorporated by reference in the award notice. Cooperative agreements also are administered in accordance with NSF Cooperative Agreement Financial and Administrative Terms and Conditions (CA-FATC) and the applicable Programmatic Terms and Conditions. NSF awards are electronically signed by an NSF Grants and Agreements Officer and transmitted electronically to the organization via e-mail.

\*These documents may be accessed electronically on NSF's Website at [https://www.nsf.gov/awards/managing/award\\_conditions.jsp?org=NSF](https://www.nsf.gov/awards/managing/award_conditions.jsp?org=NSF). Paper copies may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-7827 or by e-mail from [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov).

More comprehensive information on NSF Award Conditions and other important information on the administration of NSF awards is contained in the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) Chapter VII, available electronically on the NSF Website at [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).

#### **Special Award Conditions:**

Grantees will be required to include appropriate acknowledgment of NSF support under the Understanding the Rules of Life in any publication (including World Wide Web pages) of any material based on or developed under the project, in the following terms:

"This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation Understanding the Rules of Life Big Idea under Grant No. (Grantee enters NSF grant number.)"

Grantees also will be required to orally acknowledge NSF support using the language specified above during all news media interviews, including popular media such as radio, television and news magazines.

## **C. Reporting Requirements**

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For all multi-year grants (including both standard and continuing grants), the Principal Investigator must submit an annual project report to the cognizant Program Officer no later than 90 days prior to the end of the current budget period. (Some programs or awards require submission of more frequent project reports). No later than 120 days following expiration of a grant, the PI also is required to submit a final project report, and a project outcomes report for the general public.

Failure to provide the required annual or final project reports, or the project outcomes report, will delay NSF review and processing of any future funding increments as well as any pending proposals for all identified PIs and co-PIs on a given award. PIs should examine the formats of the required reports in advance to assure availability of required data.

PIs are required to use NSF's electronic project-reporting system, available through Research.gov, for preparation and submission of annual and final project reports. Such reports provide information on accomplishments, project participants (individual and organizational), publications, and other specific products and impacts of the project. Submission of the report via Research.gov constitutes certification by the PI that the contents of the report are accurate and complete. The project outcomes report also must be prepared and submitted using Research.gov. This report serves as a brief summary, prepared specifically for the public, of the nature and outcomes of the project. This report will be posted on the NSF website exactly as it is submitted by the PI.

More comprehensive information on NSF Reporting Requirements and other important information on the administration of NSF awards is contained in the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) Chapter VII, available electronically on the NSF Website at [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).

## **VIII. AGENCY CONTACTS**

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*Please note that the program contact information is current at the time of publishing. See program website for any updates to the points of contact.*

General inquiries regarding this program should be made to:

- Mitra Basu, telephone: 703-292-8649, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Rebecca Ferrell, telephone: 703-292-7850, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Louise R. Howe, telephone: 703-292-2548, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Simon Malcomber, telephone: 703-292-8227, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- John-David Swanson, telephone: 703-292-2898, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Junping Wang, telephone: 703-292-4488, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Clytrice Watson, telephone: 703-292-4775, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)
- Boris Wawrik, telephone: 703-292-2117, email: [epigen@nsf.gov](mailto:epigen@nsf.gov)

For questions related to the use of FastLane, contact:

- FastLane Help Desk, telephone: 1-800-673-6188; e-mail: [fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto:fastlane@nsf.gov).

For questions relating to Grants.gov contact:

- Grants.gov Contact Center: If the Authorized Organizational Representatives (AOR) has not received a confirmation message from Grants.gov within 48 hours of submission of application, please contact via telephone: 1-800-518-4726; e-mail: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov).

## IX. OTHER INFORMATION

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The NSF website provides the most comprehensive source of information on NSF Directorates (including contact information), programs and funding opportunities. Use of this website by potential proposers is strongly encouraged. In addition, "NSF Update" is an information-delivery system designed to keep potential proposers and other interested parties apprised of new NSF funding opportunities and publications, important changes in proposal and award policies and procedures, and upcoming NSF [Grants Conferences](#). Subscribers are informed through e-mail or the user's Web browser each time new publications are issued that match their identified interests. "NSF Update" also is available on [NSF's website](#).

Grants.gov provides an additional electronic capability to search for Federal government-wide grant opportunities. NSF funding opportunities may be accessed via this mechanism. Further information on Grants.gov may be obtained at <http://www.grants.gov>.

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

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The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent Federal agency created by the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended (42 USC 1861-75). The Act states the purpose of the NSF is "to promote the progress of science; [and] to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare by supporting research and education in all fields of science and engineering."

NSF funds research and education in most fields of science and engineering. It does this through grants and cooperative agreements to more than 2,000 colleges, universities, K-12 school systems, businesses, informal science organizations and other research organizations throughout the US. The Foundation accounts for about one-fourth of Federal support to academic institutions for basic research.

NSF receives approximately 55,000 proposals each year for research, education and training projects, of which approximately 11,000 are funded. In addition, the Foundation receives several thousand applications for graduate and postdoctoral fellowships. The agency operates no laboratories itself but does support National Research Centers, user facilities, certain oceanographic vessels and Arctic and Antarctic research stations. The Foundation also supports cooperative research between universities and industry, US participation in international scientific and engineering efforts, and educational activities at every academic level.

*Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASSED)* provide funding for special assistance or equipment to enable persons with disabilities to work on NSF-supported projects. See the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* Chapter II.E.6 for instructions regarding preparation of these types of proposals.

The National Science Foundation has Telephonic Device for the Deaf (TDD) and Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) capabilities that enable individuals with hearing impairments to communicate with the Foundation about NSF programs, employment or general information. TDD may be accessed at (703) 292-5090 and (800) 281-8749, FIRS at (800) 877-8339.

The National Science Foundation Information Center may be reached at (703) 292-5111.

The National Science Foundation promotes and advances scientific progress in the United States by competitively awarding grants and cooperative agreements for research and education in the sciences, mathematics, and engineering.

To get the latest information about program deadlines, to download copies of NSF publications, and to access abstracts of awards, visit the NSF Website at <https://www.nsf.gov>

- **Location:** 2415 Eisenhower Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22314
- **For General Information** (NSF Information Center): (703) 292-5111
- **TDD (for the hearing-impaired):** (703) 292-5090
- **To Order Publications or Forms:**
  - Send an e-mail to: [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov)
  - or telephone: (703) 292-7827
- **To Locate NSF Employees:** (703) 292-5111

## PRIVACY ACT AND PUBLIC BURDEN STATEMENTS

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The information requested on proposal forms and project reports is solicited under the authority of the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended. The information on proposal forms will be used in connection with the selection of qualified proposals; and project reports submitted by awardees will be used for program evaluation and reporting within the Executive Branch and to Congress. The information requested may be disclosed to qualified reviewers and staff assistants as part of the proposal review process; to proposer institutions/grantees to provide or obtain data regarding the proposal review process, award decisions, or the administration of

awards; to government contractors, experts, volunteers and researchers and educators as necessary to complete assigned work; to other government agencies or other entities needing information regarding applicants or nominees as part of a joint application review process, or in order to coordinate programs or policy; and to another Federal agency, court, or party in a court or Federal administrative proceeding if the government is a party. Information about Principal Investigators may be added to the Reviewer file and used to select potential candidates to serve as peer reviewers or advisory committee members. See Systems of Records, [NSF-50](#), "Principal Investigator/Proposal File and Associated Records," 69 Federal Register 26410 (May 12, 2004), and [NSF-51](#), "Reviewer/Proposal File and Associated Records," 69 Federal Register 26410 (May 12, 2004). Submission of the information is voluntary. Failure to provide full and complete information, however, may reduce the possibility of receiving an award.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, an information collection unless it displays a valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 3145-0058. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 120 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions. Send comments regarding the burden estimate and any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to:

Suzanne H. Plimpton  
Reports Clearance Officer  
Office of the General Counsel  
National Science Foundation  
Alexandria, VA 22314

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