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NSF 22-014

Dear Colleague Letter: Planning Grants for the NSF Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) Research Infrastructure Improvement (RII) Program Track-1 Projects

November 12, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

With this Dear Colleague Letter (DCL), NSF EPSCoR announces its intent to support [eligible jurisdictions](#) planning on submitting full proposals to a future [EPSCoR RII Track-1](#) competition.

PLANNING GRANT PURPOSE

An RII Track-1 Planning Grant is designed to provide for up to one year of support to an EPSCoR-eligible jurisdiction that is anticipating submitting a full RII Track-1 proposal in the future. A Planning Grant provides a jurisdiction with the time and resources needed to formulate a meritorious project for the RII Track-1 program, which is unique in its jurisdiction-wide scope and complexity; in its integration of individual researchers, institutions, and organizations; and in its role in developing the diverse, well-prepared, STEM-enabled workforce necessary to sustain research competitiveness and catalyze economic development and growth in the jurisdiction. RII Track-1 Planning Grants will support the discussions among project participants needed to achieve a five-year vision for the science or engineering topic(s) selected by the jurisdiction's steering committee and enable one or more meetings during which NSF EPSCoR personnel can provide guidance to the jurisdiction on the qualities of a successful RII Track-1 project.

EPSCoR RII Track-1 Planning Grant awards are not intended to provide seed funding for research activities. Planning Grant proposals for the collection of research data will be returned without review. Rather, the RII Track-1 Planning Grant proposal is appropriate for the development of a complex, jurisdiction-wide, five-year, capacity-building research and education proposal aligned with the jurisdiction's Science & Technology (S&T) plan. Planning Grant activities should include:

- an assessment of the jurisdiction's existing research infrastructure (including cyberinfrastructure and research personnel) in the chosen topic area(s);
- the initial coordination and planning of future jurisdiction-wide research and capacity-building efforts, and the identification of additional infrastructure that may be needed to support those research efforts; and
- an appraisal of the workforce development efforts needed to support the jurisdiction's future expertise in the research topic area(s)

Planning Grant activities should address the integration of multi-disciplinary approaches, expertise, and organizations within the jurisdiction in order to develop a management plan for a future RII Track-1 project that optimizes research and capacity-building efforts while acknowledging and minimizing risks. Please see the Examples of Appropriate Planning Grant Activities section of this document below for examples of Planning Grant activities. NSF EPSCoR is especially interested in activities that would catalyze new collaborations and partnerships and that broaden the participation of individuals or organizations underrepresented in NSF's award portfolio.

ELIGIBILITY

The RII Track-1 Planning Grant option is currently available to eligible jurisdictions with active RII Track-1 awards that are in their fourth year or later and that do not have an RII Track-1 proposal currently under consideration. Any **EPSCoR-eligible jurisdiction** that does not have a current RII Track-1 award may also submit a RII Track-1 Planning Grant proposal. A jurisdiction applying for an RII Track-1 Planning Grant may not also submit a full RII Track-1 proposal at any point from the date of the Planning Grant proposal submission to the date six months after the starting date of the Planning Grant award. This restriction is designed to ensure that the Planning Grant awardee has adequate time to develop the key concepts of a future full proposal, and to allow NSF EPSCoR to provide adequate input to the planning process prior to the submission of a full proposal. Similarly, a jurisdiction may not submit an RII Track-1 Planning Grant proposal within five months after the submission of a RII Track-1 full proposal, unless a final determination on the outcome for that full proposal has been made. In addition, a jurisdiction may receive only one RII Track-1 Planning Grant award in any 12-month period.

In order to submit an RII Track-1 Planning Grant proposal, the jurisdiction must have in place a jurisdictional steering committee and either have in place or be developing a jurisdictional Science and Technology (S&T) plan. This organizational infrastructure will be necessary in order for a jurisdiction to execute a complex RII Track-1 award in the future. Additionally, the jurisdiction's steering committee must have approved the scientific topic(s) of the Planning Grant proposal and its Principal Investigator (PI). A letter from the jurisdiction's steering committee documenting the choice of topic(s) and the PI must accompany the Planning Grant proposal (see below, Additional Instructions). Because a jurisdiction may submit only one RII

Track-1 Planning Grant proposal in any 12-month period, it is the responsibility of the jurisdiction to have selected the topic(s) it intends to support for both the Planning Grant and a future RII Track-1 proposal submission. If the Planning Grant PI has an active role in a current RII Track-1 project, the letter from the jurisdiction's steering committee should document how the two roles are appropriate in terms of personnel commitment of time and effort.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Before preparing and submitting a Planning Grant proposal, the PI must contact [EPSCoR RII Track-1 staff](#) to discuss the types of activities for which funding would be requested in the proposal, and the duration of those activities. Based on the agreed-upon scope and length of the proposed activities, a budget can then be drafted. Failure to consult with EPSCoR RII Track-1 staff prior to the submission of a Planning Grant proposal will lead to the proposal's return without review.

In accordance with [PAPPG guidance](#),¹ all requested activities and costs are subject to the proposal's merit and availability of funds. For EPSCoR RII Track-1 Planning Grant proposals, requests may be for up to \$100,000 for up to one year in duration. The award size, however, will be consistent with the scope of the proposed planning activities.

Only internal merit review is required for planning proposals. In some instances, EPSCoR staff may elect to obtain external reviews to inform their decision. If external review is to be obtained, the PI will be informed in the interest of maintaining the transparency of the review and recommendation process. The two standard National Science Board (NSB)-approved merit review criteria will apply.

Planning proposals do not constitute any commitment on behalf of the PI/co-PI(s) or their organizations to submit a future proposal or carry out a research, education, or infrastructure project, nor do they imply any commitment on the part of NSF to support a future proposed project beyond the Planning Grant.

Planning proposals are not eligible for reconsideration, if declined. See PAPPG Chapter IV.D.2.b.

No-cost extensions and requests for supplemental funding will be processed in accordance with standard NSF policies and procedures.

¹PAPPG [22-1](#) took effect on October 4, 2021 and contains specific guidance on Planning Grants (Chapter II.E.1).

PREPARATION INSTRUCTIONS

RII Track-1 Planning Grant proposals must be prepared and submitted in Research.gov. In Research.gov:

1. Select the Proposal & Award Policies and Procedures Guide as the Funding Opportunity;
2. In the "Where to Apply" section, select "Office of the Director" as the Directorate, "EPSCoR Section (OIA)" as the Division and "EPSCoR Research Infrastructure Improvement" as the Program;
3. On the Select Proposal Type screen, select "Planning" as the proposal type.

The narrative of the planning proposal must not exceed eight pages in length, and should include the following:

- A brief paragraph on the purpose of the Planning Grant.
- A description of goals and activities for the Planning Grant, including the basis for their inclusion and their relevance for a future RII Track-1 proposal submission. The proposal narrative should include activities that would be expected to culminate in one or more jurisdiction-wide, in-person or virtual gathering(s) of key participants and that would benefit from the participation of NSF EPSCoR staff. Preliminary consultation with the EPSCoR RII Track-1 staff may help identify the optimal activities for a particular project and at what points facilitated discussions would best help the jurisdiction in the planning process.

When preparing the budget and budget justification for the Planning Grant, some considerations are:

- The budget may not exceed \$100,000 for a period of up to one year.
- The budget should allow for at least one meeting for key participants to work together toward envisioning a future RII Track-1 project. This meeting should engage a facilitator to direct participants toward a product that can be developed into an RII Track-1 proposal. The facilitator must be listed in Section G (Consultant Services).
- The budget justification should explain how the budget allocation supports the overall goal of the Planning Grant. Note that the award funds are not meant to be used for research activities, such as preliminary data collection, or for proposal writing.

Additional Instructions

Email documentation from EPSCoR RII Track-1 staff confirming approval to submit a planning proposal must be uploaded by the PI as a document entitled "Planning – Program Officer Concurrence Email" in the Supplementary Documentation section of Fastlane or Research.gov.

Additionally, an email or signed letter from the jurisdiction's EPSCoR steering committee confirming the selected topic(s) and PI must be uploaded by the PI as a document entitled "Planning – Jurisdiction Steering Committee Concurrence" in the Supplementary Documentation section of Fastlane or Research.gov.

EXAMPLES OF APPROPRIATE PLANNING GRANT ACTIVITIES

Examples of activities appropriate during a Planning Grant award are provided below. This is not intended as a comprehensive list. Proposals may include activities like those described here, or different activities more suitable for the submitting jurisdictions specific needs.

- Critically reviewing the existing research infrastructure in the jurisdiction that is needed to address the chosen research topic(s), including an analysis of the personnel and equipment already available in the jurisdiction, and what personnel and equipment would need to be acquired in order to do the future work.
- Determining the future work's critical path and the timeline for when the needed infrastructure would be in place to ensure the overall success of the future project.
- Analyzing how much of the future work would be research (with the needed infrastructure in place) and how much would be research infrastructure improvement (effort toward establishing the equipment and human resources needed for research excellence in the chosen topical area).
- Developing a detailed schematic illustrating how the future project would involve a coordinated, collaborative, team-science approach to the proposed problem, including using multiple investigators and organizations.
- Creating a logic model to describe the shared relationships among the resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the future project.
- Developing the details of multiple research projects that would be undertaken in the future project, with specific notation of the current state-of-the-art for each project and a synopsis of how the project would further knowledge in the topic area(s).
- Analyzing the potential sustainability of efforts in the chosen topic(s), particularly in terms of commitments from the jurisdiction to sustain infrastructure once the future five-year project ends
- Adapting and integrating the best practices of "team science" within the Planning Grant personnel and preparing to extend those practices to the larger team of the future project.
- Developing a management plan for the future project that includes human resource management, particularly in showing how potential new faculty hires would be included in the project plan, and a risk analysis of how the project would succeed if the required new faculty could not be hired for any reason.
- Ascertaining resources available at institutions across the jurisdiction, including research-intensive universities, primarily undergraduate institutions, community

colleges, minority-serving institutions, and tribal colleges and universities, indicating how the chosen institutions could best fit into a five-year project as full-time, part-time, or seasonal research partners and/or sites of workforce development in the topic area of the project.

- Determining the baseline demographics (gender, race, ethnicity, disability, etc.) of science, technology, education and mathematics (STEM) participation in the jurisdiction, characterizing the underserved groups in the jurisdiction (e.g., economically disadvantaged persons, groups traditionally underrepresented in STEM, etc.), and planning for increasing the participation of those individuals in STEM in the future project.

POINTS OF CONTACT

Questions about this DCL may be directed to:

1. Jeanne Small, (jsmall@nsf.gov), Program Director, EPSCoR
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Sincerely,

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