U.S. NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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Dear Colleague Letter: Planning Proposals for the NSF Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) Research Incubators for STEM Excellence (E-RISE) and Collaborations for Optimizing Research Ecosystems (E-CORE) Research Infrastructure Improvement (RII) Programs

June 7, 2024

Dear Colleagues:

With this Dear Colleague Letter (DCL), NSF EPSCoR announces its intent to accept planning proposals to support planning of future submissions to the E-RISE RII or E-CORE RII programs. E-RISE RII focuses on the development and sustainability of an EPSCoR-eligible jurisdiction's research capacity and competitiveness in a scientific topic area by supporting the incubation of research teams and products in a scientific topical area. E-CORE RII supports jurisdictions in building capacity in one or more targeted research infrastructure cores that underlie the jurisdiction's research ecosystem. Both E-RISE RII and E-CORE RII projects are expected to align with research priorities identified in the approved Science and Technology (S&T) plan of the jurisdiction.

PLANNING PROPOSAL PURPOSE

NSF EPSCoR is utilizing the planning type of proposal to engage institutions and organizations that may be interested in submitting proposals to future E-RISE RII or E-CORE RII competitions. NSF EPSCoR is especially interested in planning activities that would catalyze new collaborations and partnerships in EPSCoR-eligible jurisdictions and that broaden the participation of individuals or organizations underrepresented in the NSF EPSCoR award portfolio.

The planning proposal will allow up to one year of support to provide, as applicable, the PI, collaborating institutions(s), and planning team with the time and resources needed for submission of a meritorious project to E-RISE RII or E-CORE RII programs.

EPSCoR RII planning proposals are not intended to provide seed funding for research activities. Planning proposals for the collection of research data will be returned without review. Rather, for EPSCoR RII, the planning type of proposal is appropriate for the development of a complex, jurisdiction-wide, four-year, capacity-building research infrastructure or research and education proposal that is aligned with the Science & Technology (S&T) plan of the jurisdiction.

In preparation for a future submission to the E-RISE RII program, the planning proposal should include:

- a review of the selected research focus area, including the rationale and justification for enhancing research capacity in that topic area within the jurisdiction;
- an assessment of the jurisdiction's existing research capacity and infrastructure (including cyberinfrastructure and research personnel) for enabling research in the chosen topic area;
- the initial coordination and planning of future jurisdiction-wide research and capacity-building efforts; and
- an analysis of the workforce development efforts needed to support the jurisdiction's future expertise in the research topic area(s).

In preparation for a future submission to the E-CORE RII program, the planning proposal should include:

- the integration of multi-disciplinary approaches, expertise, and organizations within the jurisdiction in order to develop a management plan for a future E-CORE project that optimizes research and capacity-building efforts while acknowledging and minimizing risks;
- identification of additional infrastructure that may be needed to support research efforts of relevance to the jurisdictional S&T plan;
- the initial coordination and planning of future jurisdiction-wide research and capacity-building efforts; and
- an analysis of the workforce development efforts needed to support the jurisdiction's S&T plan.

For examples of possible EPSCoR RII planning activities, see the Examples of Appropriate Planning Activities section below.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for submission of a planning proposal or receipt of a planning award, the submitting institution or organization must be in an EPSCoR-eligible jurisdiction and must not be a funded collaborator on a pending or active E-RISE RII or E-CORE RII award.

Institutions or collaborators with a lead or collaborating role in a current EPSCoR RII Track-1 award are also eligible to submit a planning proposal.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Before preparing and submitting a planning proposal, the PI must contact an NSF EPSCoR RII Program Director to provide a one-page concept outline of the project and to discuss the types of activities for which funding would be requested in the proposal. If approved, the NSF Program Director will invite submission of the planning proposal by email. The email confirming approval to submit a planning proposal must be uploaded as a document entitled "EPSCoR RII Planning - Program Director Concurrence Email" in the Program Officer Concurrence Email(s) section of Research.gov.

PREPARATION INSTRUCTIONS

Planning proposals must be prepared and submitted in Research.gov in accordance with the guidance for Planning Proposals specified in Chapter II.F.1 of the *NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG)* and the additional guidance below.

1. Select the Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide as the Funding Opportunity;
2. In the "Where to Apply" section, select "Office of the Director" as the Directorate, "Office of Integrative Activities" as the Division and either "EPSCoR CORE RII" or “EPSCoR RISE RII” as the Program;
3. On the Select Proposal Type screen, select "Planning" as the proposal type.

The Project Description must not exceed eight pages in length and must include the following:

- A brief paragraph on the purpose of the planning proposal, specifying whether the proposal is in preparation for submission to the E-RISE RII program or to the E-CORE RII program.
- A description of goals and activities for the project, including the basis for their inclusion and their relevance for a future E-RISE RII or E-CORE RII proposal submission. The narrative should include activities that would be expected to culminate in one or more jurisdiction-wide, in-person, hybrid, or virtual gathering(s) of key participants. Preliminary consultation with an EPSCoR RII Program Director may help identify the optimal activities for a particular project and at what points would best help the jurisdiction in the planning process.

When preparing the budget and budget justification, 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 E-CORE or E-RISE RII project. This meeting may engage an external facilitator to direct participants toward a product that can be developed into an E-CORE or E-RISE RII proposal. If included, 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 proposal. Note that the funds are not intended to be used for research activities, such as preliminary data collection, or for proposal writing.

EXAMPLES OF APPROPRIATE PLANNING ACTIVITIES

Examples of activities appropriate during an EPSCoR RII planning award are provided below. Proposals may include activities like those described below or different activities more suitable for the submitting jurisdiction's specific needs.

- Developing a plan for structuring the administrative core of a planned E-CORE RII project to allow for the transitioning of an EPSCoR State Office to the administrative core.
- Reviewing the existing research infrastructure in the jurisdiction that is needed to address the chosen focus area of the planning proposal, including an analysis of the personnel and equipment already available in the jurisdiction, or what personnel and equipment would need to be acquired 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.
- Developing a detailed schematic illustrating how the future project would involve a coordinated, collaborative 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.
- Analyzing the potential sustainability of efforts, particularly in terms of commitments from the jurisdiction to sustain infrastructure after completion of the E-RISE RII or E-CORE RII award.
- 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 four-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 of science, technology, education, and mathematics (STEM) participation in the jurisdiction and planning for increasing the participation from the full spectrum of diverse talent that society has to offer, which includes underrepresented and underserved communities, in the future project.

POINTS OF CONTACT

Questions about this DCL may be directed to:

- Casonya M. Johnson (casjohns@nsf.gov), Program Director
- Jeanne Small (jsmall@nsf.gov), Program Director
- Chinonye Nnakwe Whitley (cwhitley@nsf.gov), Program Director

Sincerely,

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