The National Science Foundation has made significant changes to its Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG). This guide governs the application process and requirements as well as financial management and reporting of NSF awards. The highlights of these changes are summarized below.

Effective date of the changes: January 29, 2018

**CHANGES TO THE PROPOSAL PREPARATION PROCESS**
*(Information relevant to PIs and Research Administrators)*

**Collaborators and Other Affiliations (COA) Template**

NSF uses collaborator and other affiliation information during the merit review process to help manage reviewer selection. COA information must be provided through use of a standard NSF COA template. Footnotes also have been added to address frequently asked questions relating to the new COA template *(Chapter II.C.1.e)* (1)

COA information must be provided separately for each individual identified as senior project personnel. The guidance provides specific instructions on the types of collaborations that must be identified in the template. (2)

The template is searchable for NSF personnel to identify conflicts of interest more easily (3)

**Project Description New Header Requirement**

The PAPPG now specifies that the Project Description for proposals submitted to NSF must include a separate section within the narrative labeled “Intellectual Merit.” This mirrors the current requirement to have a separate section labeled “Broader Impacts.” (2) *Chapter II.C.2.d, Project Description*

**Budget Justification and Budget**

The *Budget Justification* section has been revised to increase the number of pages allowed for the budget justification to no more than five pages per proposal. This change applies to budget justifications for both proposers and subawardees (1) (i.e, sub awards have an additional 5 pages) (3) *Chapter II.C.2.g*

**New Single Copy Document Required: Proposal Submission by Former NSF Staff**

The PAPPG contains new coverage that addresses proposal submission by former NSF staff. It is important to note that for one year following separation from the Foundation, any communication with NSF by a former employee must be done via a “substitute negotiator.” Information about the substitute negotiator must be provided as part of the proposal via a single copy document. (2)

**Submission of Proposals by Former NSF Staff** incorporates new coverage to address submission of proposals from former NSF staff and the procedures that must be followed in such circumstances. *Chapter II.C.1.f* (1)
Results from Prior NSF Support Clarification

NSF clarified the language in the Results from Prior NSF Support section of the PAPPG to indicate that if any PI or co-PI identified on the proposal has received an NSF award with an end date in the past five years or in the future (including any current funding and no cost extensions), information on the award is required for each PI and co-PI. This applies regardless of whether the support was directly related to the proposal or not. (2)

Results from Prior NSF Support clarifies the timeframe during which any PI or co-PI that has received NSF support must report on such funding. Chapter II.E.7 on conference proposals, II.E.8 on equipment proposals, II.E.9 on travel proposals and Exhibit II-1, the Proposal Preparation Checklist, also have been updated with this guidance. Chapter II.C.2.d(iii) (1)

Senior Personnel Salaries & Wages Policy

NSF’s senior personnel salary policy states that “NSF limits the salary compensation requested in the proposal budget for senior personnel to no more than two months of their regular salary in any one year.” (2)

Chapter II.C.2.g(i)(a), Senior Personnel Salaries & Wages Policy, has been supplemented with guidance that reflects it is the proposing organization’s responsibility to define and apply the term "year" and include the definition in the budget justification. (1)

Boise State defines a “year” as the University’s fiscal year: July 1- June 30. Note that the 2 months salary limit across all NSF awards still applies unless the applicant organization obtains prior approval to exceed the limit. (3)

Indirect costs

Chapter II.C.2.g(viii), Indirect Costs, has been updated to state that amounts for indirect costs should be specified in the budget justification. (1)

Data Management Plans

Chapter II.C.2.j, Special Information and Supplementary Documentation, includes additional guidance on the content for data management plans that involve collaborative activities. (1)

Vertebrate Animals

The PAPPG adds language that reflects a new award-specific condition regarding an organization’s responsibilities for projects involving vertebrate animals. More specifically, the award condition states that it is the grantee’s responsibility to ensure that the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) approval remains valid at all times that animal work is conducted under the award. It further states that additional IACUC approval must be obtained if the protocols have changed substantively from those originally proposed and approved. (2)
Chapter II.D.4, Proposals Involving Vertebrate Animals, has been revised to enhance the clarity of guidance on the use of vertebrate animals for research or education on NSF supported projects. For projects at an international organization that involve the use of vertebrate animals, a statement from the international organization will need to be provided. (1)

Note that Supplements do not require a separate IACUC approval letter unless the scope of the project has substantively changed, in which case a new signed IACUC approval letter is required. (4)

Human Subjects

Chapter II.D.5, Proposals Involving Human Subjects, has been supplemented with additional language regarding international projects. (1) The PAPPG adds language on post-award responsibilities stating that “IRB approval must be obtained if the protocols for the use of human subjects have been changed substantively from those original proposed and approved.” (4)

The PAPPG also adds language regarding Supplemental funding. Such requests do not require a separate IRB approval letter. However, if the scope of the project has been substantively changed, a new signed IRB letter is required. (4)

Renewal Proposals

Chapter V, Renewal Proposals, has been modified to update reference information regarding recorpetition of expiring awards. Section B on Accomplishment-Based Renewals has been updated to provide greater clarity regarding the submission of reprints.

Unfunded Collaborations

Proposers should include a description of the nature of the collaboration in the Facilities, Equipment & Other Resources section of the proposal. Each unfunded collaboration outlined in the proposal should also be accompanied by a letter of collaboration from each collaborator. Those letters should be brief, limited to stating the intent to collaborate and should not contain endorsements or evaluation of the proposed project. Detailed information about unfunded collaborators is available in the PAPPG, Chapter II.C.2.d(iv). (1)

Changes to Proposal Submission Platform

In April, 2018 NSF is making major changes to the way the research community maintains account and user profile information in FastLane and Research.gov. A centralized and streamlined account registration process for the external research community will provide each user with a single profile and unique identifier (i.e., NSF ID) to be used across all NSF systems. (2)

Once the new functionality is implemented, individuals will use a centralized login in Research.gov with new role request features and dashboards for managing accounts (for more information see the NSF Proposal and Award Policy Newsletter, November/December 2017, p. 2)
In FY 2018 NSF will begin the use of Research.gov to prepare and submit proposals (only for noncollaborative research, full proposals).

A video demonstration is available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbU5agcTe1o&feature=youtu.be (4)

CHANGES TO THE POST-AWARD PROCESS
(Information relevant to Research Administrators and Central OSP Offices)

Chapter VII.A.2, Grantee Notifications to NSF, has been restructured to remove information on requests for NSF approval. In addition, Exhibit VII-1 has been deleted, as coverage on grantee requests for approval from NSF is contained in the Research Terms and Conditions Appendix A and Chapter X.A.3.(1)

Chapter X.A.3, Prior Written Approvals, has been updated to reference the Research Terms and Conditions Appendix A, which is the authoritative source of NSF prior approval requirements. (1)

Section D, Definitions & NSF-Grantee Relationships, provides additional guidance on the types of cooperative agreements awarded by NSF. (1)

Chapter VIII.E.6, Award Financial Reporting Requirements and Final Disbursements, has been supplemented to clarify the intent of NSF notifications regarding canceling appropriations. (1)

Exhibit VII-I, Grantee Notifications and Requests for Approval have been removed from the PAPPG. Grantee Notifications are in Chapter VII. Requests for Approval are in the Research Terms and Conditions, Appendix A. Streamlines Allowability of Costs Chapter to remove sections that simply restate the Uniform Guidance. (1)

Chapter VII.D.2, Final Project Report, has been updated to reflect that when PIs submit the report, they are indicating that the scope of work is complete and no further administrative actions are anticipated on the grant.

Chapter XI.D.1.d, Intellectual Property, has been updated to specify that grantees are required to use iEdison to disclose NSF subject inventions. In addition, NSF now reserves the option to request an Annual Utilization Report or a Final Invention Statement and Certification.

Chapter XI.M.4, Executive Order 13788, Buy American and Hire American, is a new section which serves as NSF’s implementation of Executive Order 13788.

Sources:

1. NSF PAPPG: https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappg18_1/sigchanges.jsp