NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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NSF 19-023

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for NSF 19-503, Gen-4 Engineering Research Centers (ERC) Solicitation

GENERAL

1. Where can we access the ERC solicitation webinar materials?

2. Is it possible to schedule a consultation with one of the ERC program directors?

3. How do I sign up for ERC Program Director's office hours?

4. Must the Lead PI of a preliminary proposal eventually be the Lead PI of the ERC full proposal?

5. Are there any targeted research areas of interest to the NSF in this solicitation?

ELIGIBILITY

6. Can an Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) from a university submit a Letter of Intent (and subsequent preliminary proposal) from more than one PI at that university? Additionally, can a PI submit multiple Letters of Intent or preliminary proposals?

7. Can industry representatives serve as a Non-Lead PI?

8. Are there any limits on the number of preliminary proposals per PI and co-PI?

9. The solicitation states "Only U.S. universities that grant engineering degrees at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral engineering level may submit proposals as the lead university." Does this requirement apply to partner universities?

10. Are there restrictions on number of partners such as universities and industry members?

11. With regards to the requirement that each ERC core partner institution have at least three faculty participating in the ERC, are there any requirements on the type of faculty appointment, e.g., tenure track faculty?

AWARD INFORMATION

PROPOSALS AND PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

GENERAL

1. **Where can we access the ERC solicitation webinar materials?**

   The ERC solicitation webinar materials can be accessed from the landing page of the Gen-4 ERC solicitation (https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=505599).

2. **Is it possible to schedule a consultation with one of the ERC program directors?**

Yes, the ERC Program is offering the opportunity for a 30-minute teleconference to discuss any specific ideas and questions from individual Principal Investigators (PIs). You will be asked to provide in advance of the teleconference:

- An ERC 3-Plane Strategic Planning Chart for your proposed engineered system concept;
- A short description (likely less than two pages) of the proposed ERC in response to the solicitation requirements.

In order to be fair and consistent to all the potential ERC teams, we plan to offer the same opportunities to all prospective PIs. We will be happy to review your concept and give you feedback on how well it fits the ERC Program.

Please follow the office hours link on the landing page of the Gen-4 ERC solicitation (https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=505599) to schedule a 30-minute teleconference with one of the ERC Program Directors.

3. **How do I sign up for ERC Program Director's office hours?**

Please follow the link to sign up for ERC Program Director's office hours, which can be accessed from the landing page of the Gen-4 ERC solicitation (https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=505599).

4. **Must the Lead PI of a preliminary proposal eventually be the Lead PI of the ERC full proposal?**

Yes. The Lead PI cannot be changed during the ERC competition unless there are extenuating circumstances. In addition, the commitment of the lead university is binding throughout the ERC competition process and cannot be changed. Other partners may change during the competition.

5. **Are there any targeted research areas of interest to the NSF in this solicitation?**

No, there are no priority areas established for the Gen-4 ERC solicitation. However, the ERC program is placing greater emphasis on research that leads to societal impact, including convergent approaches, engaging stakeholder communities, and strengthening team formation, in response to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017 study recommendations.

ELIGIBILITY

6. **Can an Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) from a university submit a Letter of Intent (and subsequent preliminary proposal) from more than one PI at**

that university? Additionally, can a PI submit multiple Letters of Intent or preliminary proposals?

Yes, both universities and PIs can submit more than one Letter of Intent (LOI) or preliminary proposal.

7. **Can industry representatives serve as a Non-Lead PI?**

   Yes.

8. **Are there any limits on the number of preliminary proposals per PI and co-PI?**

   No. An individual may be listed as a PI or co-PI on multiple preliminary proposals.

9. **The solicitation states "Only U.S. universities that grant engineering degrees at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral engineering level may submit proposals as the lead university." Does this requirement apply to partner universities?**

   No. Lead institutions must grant engineering degrees at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral engineering level, but partner institutions are not required to grant engineering degrees.

10. **Are there restrictions on number of partners such as universities and industry members?**

    No. A proposed ERC must be multi-institutional, with a lead university and additional domestic university core partners. However, there is no limit on the number of partners.

11. **With regards to the requirement that each ERC core partner institution have at least three faculty participating in the ERC, are there any requirements on the type of faculty appointment, e.g., tenure track faculty?**

    Only core partner universities are required to have a minimum of three faculty participating in the ERC along with a minimum of three students. The solicitation does not specify the type of faculty appointment for the minimum three faculty members to qualify for a core partner institution.

12. **What qualifies as a minority-serving institution for the Gen-4 ERCs?**

    The ERC program encourages diverse institutional partners. In addition to other organizational requirements, the Gen-4 ERC solicitation NSF 19-503 requires that at least one ERC core partner institution must be a university that serves populations of traditionally underrepresented students interested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Underrepresented is defined as minority serving institutions

(institutions that serve historically underrepresented racial or ethnic minority populations), women's colleges, or institutions where the majority of the students are students with disabilities. The proposal should provide evidence that leads to a reasonable determination that an institution meets this requirement.

13. **How does the Gen-4 ERC distinguish between the role of the ERC Lead PI and the role of the ERC Center Director?**

It is up to each ERC to determine what model of leadership will best meet the goals of the Center. The ERC Lead PI and Center Director may be filled by the same person or split among personnel. In instances where more than one person will fill these roles, the ERC will determine the responsibilities of the Center Director.

The role of the ERC Lead PI is defined in the *Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) Introduction Section D.1:

"PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/PROJECT DIRECTOR (PI/PD) means the individual(s) designated by the proposer, and approved by NSF, who will be responsible for the scientific or technical direction of the project. NSF does not infer any distinction in scientific stature among multiple PIs, whether referred to as PI or co-PI. If more than one, the first one listed will serve as the contact PI, with whom all communications between NSF program officials and the project relating to the scientific, technical, and budgetary aspects of the project should take place. The PI and any identified co-PIs, however, will be jointly responsible for submission of the requisite project reports. The term "Principal Investigator" generally is used in research projects, while the term "Project Director" generally is used in centers, large facilities, and other projects. For purposes of this Guide, PI/co-PI is interchangeable with PD/co-PD."

14. **Can an institution with a current ERC apply for the Gen-4 ERC grant?**

Yes, a university that leads a single ERC from Classes 2010-2017 is eligible for a Gen-4 ERC. However, a university that leads two ERCs from Classes 2010-2017 and the Nanosystems ERC Classes of 2012 and 2015 may not submit a proposal in the lead role. Any university can participate as a partner in an ERC led by another eligible institution.

AWARD INFORMATION

15. **What is the duration of an ERC award?**

ERCs generally operate for ten years, with an initial award for the first five years and a second award based on performance and satisfactory review of a renewal proposal.

16. **What is the estimated number of awards?**

The ERC program plans to award 3-4 ERCs in the summer of 2020.

17. **Can the contribution of the core Universities be monetary and/or in-kind too?**

Yes. Cost share of lead and core partner institutions can be monetary or in-kind.

18. **Is cost-share required for Years 6-10 of the ERC life? It seems that the solicitation does not explicitly address that.**

Yes. Cost sharing is required for the entire duration of the ERC. It is understood that the availability of financial resources may present significant challenges for committing to ERC cost sharing for some smaller universities and colleges and universities that do not have a high level of research activity. Therefore, the ERC cost sharing requirements are graduated and vary by the basic classification categories of universities and colleges as defined in the "Carnegie Foundation's Classification of Institutions of Higher Education." The classification categories and ERC cost sharing requirements are as follows:

- RU/VH: Research Universities (very high research activity) - required cost sharing level is 20% of the allocation of the NSF budget to the lead or partner university;
- RU/H: Research Universities (high research activity) - required cost sharing level is 15% of the allocation of the NSF budget to the lead or partner university;
- DRU: Doctoral/Research Universities - cost sharing level is 10% of the allocation of the NSF budget to that partner university;
- Master's L: Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs) - cost sharing level is 10% of the allocation of the NSF budget to that partner university/college;
- Bac/Diverse: Baccalaureate Colleges - Diverse Fields - cost sharing level is 5% of the allocation of the NSF budget to that partner college.

If the university is classified in more than one Carnegie category, it must cost share at the highest cost sharing category as described above. In addition, the Carnegie classification that is to be used is the classification in place at the LOI submission deadline and **will remain throughout the duration** of the competition and a subsequent award.

Source: http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/

PROPOSALS AND PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

19. **What is the anticipated start date of the ERC?**

The anticipated start date of the ERC grants is September 1, 2020.

20. **Can I use either FastLane or Grants.gov for my proposal submission?**

The letter of intent and preliminary proposals should be submitted via FastLane. Full proposals can be submitted through either FastLane or Grants.gov. The policy and procedural guidance contained in the *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide* should be followed when preparing and submitting full proposals to NSF via Grants.gov.

21. **If companies and federal laboratories collaborate on the proposal, would their monetary contribution have to be included in the budget of the full proposal or should it be enumerated separately?**

   No, the ERC full proposal budget is only for the NSF funding.

22. **For preliminary proposals, where should the committed Senior Personnel be listed?**

   Committed Senior Personnel can be listed anywhere within the 10-page limit of the project description.

23. **Should the project description contain the Results from Prior NSF Support?**

   "Results from Prior Support" is NOT a required section of the preliminary proposal. It is a required section for the full proposal and should follow the formatting in the NSF PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.d.iii.

24. **What documentation is required to submit an ERC Preliminary proposal?**

   The following proposal sections are required by the PAPPG and FastLane but not allowed in ERC preliminary proposals. Please insert the text "Not Applicable" into each of these sections so that FastLane will allow submission of the preliminary proposal: Current and Pending Support; Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources; Data Management Plan; Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan; and Budget Justification. The Budget should include only the necessary $2 amount to allow proper FastLane processing.

   DO NOT SUBMIT other documents, including Letters of Commitment or Collaboration from the domestic partner universities, prospective industrial members, or other future partners. The only allowed supplementary document is the required letter from the Dean of Engineering at the Lead Institution.

25. **Will separately submitted collaborative proposals be accepted for this competition?**

   No, separately submitted collaborative proposals will not be accepted for this competition. For each proposed ERC, only one submission can be made by the lead institution.

26. **Is the submission deadline flexible?**

No.