

Notes from an “NSF DAY” - Submitting a Proposal to the NSF

About the NSF

The National Science Foundation distributes its funding to all 50 states through grants to nearly 2,000 colleges, universities, and other institutions. Each year the NSF:

- Receives over 48,000 competitive proposals for funding
- Makes about 12,000 new funding awards
- Has an award rate of 25%
- Has a budget of about \$7.5 billion
- Awards proposals averaging \$625,000 each, but which can range from several thousand dollars to several million dollars each.
- Funds 24% of all basic research in the United States.

SIUE’s Record with the NSF

In FY2017, six SIUE PIs received a total of \$1,537,329 in NSF funding for eight separate awards - ranging in value from \$6,600 to \$846,416. According to the NSF, 31% of new PIs received their first award on their first attempt and PIs submit on average about 2.3 proposals for every award they receive. At SIUE, one of the FY2017 awards was a resubmission and seven were in response to a new program solicitation. The FY2016 award record was very similar with eight SIUE PIs received a total of \$1,572,578, ranging in value from \$1,700 to \$374,093.

Submitting does pay off!

The External Funding Process

Have you ever applied for external funding? If you have an idea for a research proposal that you would like to find external funding for, but you are not sure how the proposal submission process works from start to finish, this series of articles will walk you through it.

Over the course of several editions of ORP News, we will offer resources, tips, and advice on the external funding process that come directly from the NSF program directors who led an “NSF Day” at Tennessee State University in February. The articles will cover:

- 1) How to find a funding opportunity that matches your research,
- 2) How to gather a team (if you would like collaborators) and the preliminary work needed when preparing a proposal,
- 3) Tips about writing your narrative,
- 4) How to work with the Office of Research & Projects (ORP) to develop your proposal and budget and complete SIUE’s internal routing process,
- 5) The documentation and steps needed to submit your proposal to a funding agency, and
- 6) What to do if your proposal is rejected.

Step 1. How to Find a Funding Opportunity that Matches Your Research

There are many resources available to locate potential external funding sources to support your research interests. These include GrantForward, Grants.gov, and the NSF website.

GrantForward (www.grantforward.com) is a funding search engine that gives results from government, corporate, and nonprofit funding sources and also allows for filtering, sorting, and saving your search results. SIUE has a subscription to GrantForward and you can register to use it and create your own researcher profile using your SIUE eID.

- GrantForward stores researcher profiles for other faculty to see – you and your fellow faculty members should create your own profiles and add keywords that are indicative of your research focus areas. Profiles allow all SIUE faculty to search the researcher database to identify potential collaborators from SIUE and any other university that subscribes to the search engine.
- GrantForward will send you **Recommendations** that match selected keywords and also lets you save viewed proposals as a **Favorite**.
- Registering in GrantForward and creating a profile is also a prerequisite for applying for the SIUE **New Faculty Incentive Program** (NFIP, <https://www.siu.edu/funding/internal-funding/new-faculty-incentive.shtml>).

A second resource for searching for grants from just the federal government is to use the **Grants.gov** website (www.grants.gov). Searching for grants on this site does not require you to register first and the search does allow you to filter by some areas such as eligibility, category, and agency.

Zeroing in on NSF Funding Opportunities

If you think you would like to pursue funding through the NSF, you can search for open solicitations on the NSF site at www.nsf.gov (scroll down to the bottom of the page to find the search bar for funding opportunities). The NSF site accommodates searches by keywords and by program area.

But what if you are unsure if your proposed research would fall under the Computer & Information Sciences & Engineering (CISE) directorate, or under the Engineering (ENG) directorate? Or maybe your research seems to touch both Education & Human Resources (EHR) and Social, Behavioral, & Economic Science (SBE) and you don't know which directorate's solicitations you should be focusing on? The program directorate heads at NSF Day offered this advice for narrowing down what directorate you should pursue funding from:

1. Search **Awarded** proposals on the NSF site to find successful proposals that relate to your research focus (<https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/>).
2. **Note which directorate** sponsored the solicitation the proposal was in response to.
3. Contact the Program Officer for that award (contact information is included in the award announcement) – the **preferred method is to email** the program officer.

4. **Explain the basis of your research to the PO** and ask them if they think the directorate is a good match for you.
5. Then **focus your solicitation search within the directorate that is recommended by the PO.**

Once you find a solicitation that matches your research focus, check the eligibility requirements and deadlines for LOIs and proposals. If you feel the deadline gives you enough time to put together an award-worthy proposal, then you can move on to the next step: Preliminary Proposal Development Work.

Next time in Notes from NSF Day - Preliminary Proposal Development Work