EPSRC-NSF Lead Agency Opportunity

1. Introduction

The US National Science Foundation (NSF) and UK Research Councils have a long history of collaboration in supporting research through both bilateral activities and multilateral arrangements. Both organisations recognize that as research becomes increasingly global in nature it is important for funding agencies to continue to identify and develop flexible mechanisms to foster and support collaborative international research. NSF and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) are pleased to announce their continued and expanded support of international collaboration under this NSF-EPSRC Lead Agency Opportunity.

i. The goal of this activity is to reduce current barriers to working internationally including: identifying appropriate funding agencies; dealing with the situation whereby one country's funding agency review process decides to fund the research but where the partner country's funding agency review process does not; and dealing with differing timetables for different funding agencies. The lead agency agreement model is expected to address these issues by:

    a. Allowing researchers to submit a single collaborative proposal with a joint funding decision, informed by a single lead agency review. This review process will follow the usual process for the lead agency.
    b. Being structured so that each country's researchers are supported by their funding agency. This will allow funding agencies to maintain budgetary control over their awards.
    c. Ensuring the funding agencies align decision-making points where possible.

2. Scope of the Collaboration

i. Under the NSF-EPSRC Lead Agency Opportunity, proposals may be accepted for collaborative research in areas at the intersection of participating NSF units and EPSRC:

NSF
- Directorate for Engineering
  - Division of Chemical, Bioengineering, Environmental and Transport Systems
  - Division of Civil, Mechanical and Manufacturing Innovation
  - Division of Electrical, Communications and Cyber Systems
- Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences
  - Division of Mathematical Sciences
  - Division of Physics
  - Division of Chemistry
- Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering
  - Division of Computing and Communication Foundations

- o Division of Information and Intelligent Systems
- o Office of Advanced Cyberinfrastructure

UKRI EPSRC
- All EPSRC Themes – through the responsive mode funding route

ii. Proposers are expected to review the Program Descriptions and the EPSRC website for information on which areas of research are eligible for support through this agreement.

iii. NSF and EPSRC acknowledge in principle to allow joint UK-US proposals to be submitted to and peer reviewed by whichever agency's investigators have the largest proportion of the research.

iv. Where proposals lie partly outside EPSRC's remit, input from other UK Research Councils will be sought on a case-by-case basis according to standard processes.

v. This opportunity covers research applications through EPSRC responsive mode standard research only; New Investigator Awards, Programme Grants and Fellowship Applications are excluded. Any joint managed/solicited calls will be agreed on a case-by-case basis by NSF and EPSRC and advertised separately.

vi. Each agency has its own funding parameters and principles that will be followed when reviewing proposals. Proposals are expected to adhere to typical proposal sizes and durations for the NSF and EPSRC program(s) from which funding is sought.

vii. Proposers should note that all documents submitted to NSF or EPSRC may be shared by secure electronic means to the non-lead agency.

3. Submission Process

A. Prior to formal proposal submission

i. Before submitting a proposal, proposers should identify a prospective lead agency (either NSF or EPSRC) based on where the largest proportion of research lies (typically from which agency the greater amount of funding is to be requested).

ii. If EPSRC is the lead agency, at least 3 months in advance of the date the applicants expect to submit a formal proposal, proposers must submit an Expression of Interest (EoI) using the Survey found at https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/about/partner/international/agreements/nsf/. If this communication does not take place, the formally submitted proposal will be rejected without review. The EoI should contain the following information:

- a. Project Title
- b. Clear indication of the target NSF Directorate, Division and Program and the target UKRI-EPSRC Theme and Research Area for the proposed topic. This may not be the only NSF program or EPSRC Theme that will consider the topic, but it allows for faster review of the topic.
- c. Summary of the proposed research outlining specific objectives, methods, approaches, main research challenges, and anticipated outputs, impacts, and beneficiaries. A clear breakdown of the individual UK and U.S. contributions for each objective must be included.
- d. The names, email addresses and departmental and institutional affiliations of the researchers.

e. Bottom line estimates of total funding (including indirect costs) and duration to be requested from NSF and EPSRC (a detailed budget is not required at this time).

f. For the U.S. contribution only, an estimate of the number of U.S. graduate students and/or postdoctoral researchers supported by the project budget (if any) and the number of summer months salary support to be requested per U.S. investigator per year. Each NSF program may negotiate the level of U.S. postdoctoral researcher engagement in the project.

- If NSF is the lead agency, guidance on applications and the EoI form can be found on their website: https://www.nsf.gov/od/oise/IntlCollaborations/UK.jsp. At least 3 months in advance of the date the applicants expect to submit a formal proposal proposers should email the EoI to the appropriate email below based on the NSF Directorate and Division under which the program is housed, with copy to the cognizant program director:
    - Directorate for Engineering: engukri@nsf.gov
    - Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences
        - Division of Mathematical Sciences: DMS-EPSRC@nsf.gov
        - Division of Physics: acronin@nsf.gov
        - Division of Chemistry: che-epsrc@nsf.gov
    - Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering: CISE_UKRI@NSF.GOV

If this communication does not take place, the formally submitted proposal will be rejected without review. The EoI summary of research should not exceed 5000 characters, including spaces. In some cases, a PDF fillable form format will be used to request this information. In such cases, the individual announcement to the community for the participating programs will indicate this format. The EoI should contain:

a. Project Title

b. Clear indication of the target NSF Directorate, Division and Program and the target UKRI-EPSRC Theme and Research Area for the proposed topic. This may not be the only NSF program or EPSRC Theme that will consider the topic, but it allows for faster review of the topic.

c. Summary of the proposed research outlining specific objectives, methods, approaches, main research challenges, and anticipated outputs, impacts, and beneficiaries. A clear breakdown of the individual UK and U.S. contributions for each objective must be included.

d. Names, email addresses, and departmental and institutional affiliations of the researchers.

e. Bottom line estimates of total funding (including indirect costs) and duration to be requested from NSF and EPSRC. Although a detailed budget is not required at this time, we strongly encourage proposers to submit as accurate a bottom-line funding estimate as possible. It is advisable for proposers to consult with their institution's Office of Sponsored Research for budget advice prior to finalizing a bottom-line estimate.

f. For the U.S. contribution only, an estimate of the number of U.S. graduate students and/or postdoctoral researchers supported by the project budget (if any) and the number of summer months salary support to be requested per U.S. investigator per year. Each NSF program may negotiate the level of U.S. postdoctoral researcher engagement in the project.

iii. The lead agency will share all EoIs received with the non-lead agency for both agencies to check eligibility (whether the proposed research is within the participating agencies' portfolio, and if the proposers and institutions meet agency eligibility requirements). A spreadsheet record will be kept for financial and demand monitoring purposes.

iv. Upon confirmation from both agencies that the collaborative research proposal is appropriate for the NSF-EPSRC Lead Agency Opportunity, the agencies will decide which agency will act as lead. The lead agency will then contact the researchers to inform them that they may submit a full research proposal to the lead agency. In some cases, an alteration of the NSF and/or the EPSRC budget request may be required in the full proposal submission.

v. Full research proposals are expected to be received at the lead agency within 3 months of this notification, or NSF and EPSRC may require a new EoI.

vi. Full proposal budgets should not vary from those specified in the EoI by more than 10% and any such changes should be fully justified. It is recommended that proposers speak with the cognizant program director or EPSRC contact regarding any changes.

B. Proposal format, budget information and formal submission

i. The proposal should indicate it is to be considered under this Lead Agency Opportunity by prefacing the title with "[Insert Name of NSF Directorate/Division]-EPSRC" depending on the NSF division and target program.

ii. If EPSRC is the lead agency:

- Proposers must comply with the proposal preparation requirements outlined in the EPSRC's Research Funding Guide and proposals should be submitted via the Funding Service through "EPSRC working with overseas scientists: responsive mode" call.

- The US collaborating research organizations should be included as project partners on the application, and the funding totals by research organization should be included as project partner contributions.

- An institutional statement in support of the joint submission must be provided by each non-lead country partner organization in the proposal submission, this should be included in your project partner letter of support. This statement should be in the form of a signed letter from an authorized institutional representative including the following text: "I confirm on behalf of [insert name or institution] that the US-UK Collaborative proposal between [insert name of lead agency Project Lead and institution] and [insert non-lead agency Project Lead and institution] is endorsed and has been submitted by [name of research office]."

- The resources and cost justification section should include a clear summary and justification of the US costs sought from NSF as well as the funding sought from EPSRC.

- The cost breakdown should only include UK expenses, costs for partners based in the UK which will be supported by EPSRC.

- A detailed breakdown of funding requested from NSF should be submitted to EPSRC as an attachment. This document will be shared with NSF to verify eligibility of costs requested.

   iii. If NSF is the lead agency:
- Proposals must be submitted to a participating NSF program or program solicitation using Research.gov (https://www.research.gov), or Grants.gov (https://www.grants.gov/). Proposals must be submitted in accordance with the standard requirements described in the NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG) and comply with requirements in the relevant programs' solicitation. Where programs have a solicitation, the requirements in the solicitation take precedence over those listed in the PAPPG.
- NSF requires proposers to comply with program submission deadlines/target dates.
- The proposal should indicate it is to be considered under this Lead Agency Opportunity by prefacing the title with "[Insert Name of NSF Directorate/Division]-EPSRC" after any solicitation specific title requirements, if applicable.
- The proposal should only indicate the U.S. expenses on the NSF Budget Form. A detailed breakdown of funding requested from EPSRC, using the EPSRC cost form, should be added to the proposal as a Supplementary Document. This document is to be shared with EPSRC to verify eligibility of costs requested. The Budget Justification section of the proposal should address the full project budget (that is, both the U.S. and UK funding items).
- For proposals submitted to NSF, UK personnel should be listed as "non-NSF funded collaborators." This listing is for administrative purposes and is not intended to characterize the level or value of the contribution of UK personnel to the project. Guidance specific to "non-NSF funded collaborators" is as follows:
  - Biographical Sketch – Required. The biographical information must be clearly identified as "non-NSF funded collaborators" biographical information and uploaded as a single PDF file in the Other Supplementary Documents section of the proposal. Use of a specific format is not required except in specific cases when the individual announcement to the community for the participating programs will indicate a required NSF format.
- Collaborators and Other Affiliations (COA) Information – Optional but requested. The COA information should be provided through the use of the COA template, identified as "non-NSF funded collaborators" COA information, and uploaded as a PDF file in the Single Copy Documents section of the proposal. In some specific cases, the individual announcement to the community for the participating programs will indicate that the COA information will be required for UK personnel, rather than just optional.
- Current and Pending Support – Not required.
- Results of Prior Research – Not required.

   iv. Proposals that request duplicative funding from NSF and EPSRC may be returned without review.

4. Peer review

i. NSF-EPSRC collaborative proposals will be reviewed alongside all other unsolicited or responsive mode standard research proposals received in the same funding round or call and will not undergo a separate or special review process.

ii. Proposals will be reviewed in accordance with the lead agency's review criteria. While not identical, NSF and EPSRC ask reviewers to evaluate research on both its scientific or intellectual merit, as well as its broader or societal impacts.

iii. The lead agency will share reviews with the non-lead agency in accordance with the lead agency's confidentiality regulations.

5. Funding decisions

i. The lead agency and the non-lead agency will use their standard internal procedures to make their funding decision. The non-lead agency's funding decision will be informed by the lead agency's panel recommendation and funding decision.

ii. Because the participating organizations have different funding cycles, it is possible that some projects will have delayed start dates in order to wait until funds become available.

iii. UK partners on a proposal to be funded following NSF-led peer review will be invited to submit a proposal to EPSRC to fund the UK portion of the project. This submission will not be subject to further peer review.

iv. Agreement by NSF and EPSRC to fund a proposal will be contingent upon sufficient funding being available on both sides.

6. Post-award considerations

i. Awardees must comply with the award conditions and reporting requirements of the agencies from which they receive funding.

ii. Requests for extensions will be considered by NSF and EPSRC using standard procedures. Requests for changes to awards will be discussed with other involved funding agencies before a mutual decision is reached.

Name	Date	Version	Change
Stephanie Williams	3.2.20	1	NSF-led process description updated to reflect recent changes
Joanne Humphries	23.5.23	2	Updates to reflect change of system from Je-S to TFS
Joanne Humphries	30.6.23	3	Updates to reflect expansion of opportunity