Navigating the Fastlane: Avoiding the Potholes

Presented by:

Darneshia Blackmon

Christopher Davis

Tamara Adams

Objectives

- To gain or improve foundational knowledge about the NSF proposal submission process
- To gain a more thorough understanding of the process of submitting through NSF Fastlane
- To learn the basic compliance requirements of NSF Fastlane
- To learn about the latest updates to the NSF GPG

First Things First

- Complete NSF Fastlane registration process (if not already done)

- Determine the appropriate solicitation/division for your proposal

- Download and read your Program Solicitation

- Notify the Office of Sponsored Programs that you intend to submit a proposal

Preparing Your Proposal

- Start Early (3-6 months before deadline)
- Talk to your NSF Program Director
- Talk to your colleagues; have experienced colleagues review a draft and comment
- Recruit and describe university infrastructure support for your proposed project
- Address the merit review criteria
- Compliance checks (PAPP)

Cover Sheet

- Ensure you input the correct PA/solicitation number

- Use Institutional Data Sheet to complete the form

- Use program solicitation to determine requirements for project title

- List all PIs/Co-PIs (all must be registered)

- Ensure that requested funding and start date are correct and remain consistent throughout the application package

Project Summary

What Do You Want To Accomplish?

Project Summary

- Use text boxes in FastLane for:
  - Overview
  - Statement on Intellectual Merit
  - Statement on Broader Impacts
- Only 4,600 characters allowed
- For proposals with special characters you must upload the Project Summary as a PDF document. Do Not use this method to circumvent completing the text boxes.
- Text boxes must be filled out or NSF will not accept the proposal

General Formatting

- Arial, Courier New, or Palatino Linotype at a font size of 10 points or larger;

- Times New Roman at a font size of 11 points or larger; or

- Computer Modern family of fonts at a font size of 11 points or larger

- No more than six lines of text within a vertical space of one inch

- At least 1 inch margins on all sides

- All uploaded documents much include pagination

- No headers or footers

Project Description

What's the Plan?

What to Do?

- The purpose of the Project Description is described in the NSF Guidelines as follows: *"The Project Description should outline the general plan of work, including the broad design of activities to be undertaken, and, where appropriate, provide a clear description of experimental methods and procedures. Proposers should address what they want to do, why they want to do it, how they plan to do it, how they will know if they succeed, and what benefits could accrue if the project is successful. The project activities may be based on previously established and/or innovative methods and approaches, but in either case must be well justified. These issues apply to both the technical aspects of the proposal and the way in which the project may make broader contributions."*

Translation, please!

- It means that you have 15 pages to convince the NSF that there is a problem, or a gap in our knowledge, and that you and your work are the solution!

- Explain the need, but do not make this a Need Statement (Sponsors fund solutions, not problems)

- The Big Question of Every Reviewer: What am I supposed to take away from this?

Sell It!

- Think of this as your Sales Pitch to NSF!
- The Three Essentials of Making the Sale
  - The Goal: There is a problem, and you are the one to solve it
  - Credibility: Not only can you do this project, but you ALONE can do this project
  - Understanding: Consider the reviewers when you write

Know your audience!

There are two perceptions PIs have of the Reviewers:

The Sage

The Simpleton

Neither is the case!

The Reviewers

- Instead of experts or neophytes, the Reviewers should be seen in the same light as your students

- They may have some foundation in your area of study, but they may also need further explanation

- Focus on that foundation (explaining what we already know) and then follow with what you will add

NSF Requirements

- Along with a flowing narrative with the elements we have described, there are requirements (old and new) that need to be included
- May NOT exceed 15 pages unless stated in the RFP
- There must be a separate section in the narrative that addresses (and is labeled as) Broader Impacts.
- In the section addressing Prior NSF Support (if any has been received in the past 5 years), both Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts must be addressed in two distinct sections
- If more than one award has been received by NSF in the last 5 years, list the one most relevant to the current project

Prior Support Information

Prior Support information must include:

a) the NSF award number, amount and period of support;

(b) the title of the project;

(c) a summary of the results of the completed work, including accomplishments, supported by the award. The results must be separately described under two distinct headings: Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts;

(d) a listing of the publications resulting from the NSF award (a complete bibliographic citation for each publication must be provided either in this section or in the References Cited section of the proposal); if none, state "No publications were produced under this award."

(e) evidence of research products and their availability, including, but not limited to: data, publications, samples, physical collections, software, and models, as described in any Data Management Plan; and

(f) if the proposal is for renewed support, a description of the relation of the completed work to the proposed work

References

- No page limitation
- Bibliographic citations only
- Do not include web links (will count towards 15 page limit)
- No specified format: (IEEE, APA, MLA)

Biosketches

Your Life Told Their Way

How to Tell Your Story

- Your career can only take up 2 pages and must be paginated

- Leave out personal details, such as addresses, phone numbers, birthdays, etc.

- Your Professional Preparation must be listed as follows:

Undergraduate Institution(s)	Location	Major	Degree & Year
Graduate Institution(s)	Location	Major	Degree & Year
Postdoctoral Institution(s)	Location	Area	Inclusive Dates (years)

- Your academic appointments must be listed in reverse chronological order, starting with your current appointment

3 Lists of 5

- Products (or Publications)
  - You are allowed to list five products that are closely related to the project, as well as list five additional products which are significant, but not necessarily related to the project (these should be separately labeled within the Products section
  - Unacceptable Products include unpublished documents with have not been submitted yet for publication, invited lectures, or additional lists of products
  - *"Each product must include full citation information including (where applicable and practicable) names of all authors, date of publication or release, title, title of enclosing work such as journal or book, volume, issue, pages, website and Uniform Resource Locator (URL) or other Persistent Identifier."*
  - If publications are included, you may now use Publications as the header for this section

3 Lists of 5 Continued

- Synergistic Activities
  - *"A list of up to five examples that demonstrate the broader impact of the individual's professional and scholarly activities that focuses on the integration and transfer of knowledge as well as its creation. Examples could include, among others: innovations in teaching and training (e.g., development of curricular materials and pedagogical methods); contributions to the science of learning; development and/or refinement of research tools; computation methodologies, and algorithms for problem-solving; development of databases to support research and education; broadening the participation of groups underrepresented in science, mathematics, engineering and technology; and service to the scientific and engineering community outside of the individual's immediate organization."*

Collaborators and Other Affiliations

NEW THIS YEAR!!!: THIS SECTION IS NOW SEPARATE FROM THE BIOSKETCH!

- "Collaborators and Co-Editors. A list of all persons in alphabetical order (including their current organizational affiliations) who are currently, or who have been collaborators or co-authors with the individual on a project, book, article, report, abstract or paper during the 48 months preceding the submission of the proposal. Also include those individuals who are currently or have been co-editors of a journal, compendium, or conference proceedings during the 24 months preceding the submission of the proposal. If there are no collaborators or co-editors to report, this should be so indicated.
- Graduate Advisors and Postdoctoral Sponsors. A list of the names of the individual's own graduate advisor(s) and principal postdoctoral sponsor(s), and their current organizational affiliations.
- Thesis Advisor and Postgraduate-Scholar Sponsor. A list of all persons (including their organizational affiliations), with whom the individual has had an association as thesis advisor, or with whom the individual has had an association within the last five years as a postgraduate-scholar sponsor. The total number of graduate students advised and postdoctoral scholars sponsored also must be identified."

- **While this is only the case for the list of Collaborators, that list must be listed in alphabetical order of the people involved**

New Guidelines

- In FastLane, biographical sketches for senior personnel may no longer be grouped together and uploaded in a single PDF file associated with the PI. Each individual's biographical sketch must be uploaded as a single PDF file or inserted as text associated with that individual.

Current and Pending Support

Going Forward and Looking Back

What Goes Here?

- Required information for all ongoing proposals and projects, and any subsequent funding for continuing grants
- **THIS INCLUDES THE PROPOSAL YOU ARE CURRENTLY SUBMITTING**
- All funded projects, regardless of funding source, that are pending or in-progress must be listed
- If it is current or pending, and it requires a portion of PI time, include it
- *"The total award amount for the entire award period covered (including indirect costs) must be shown as well as the number of person-months per year to be devoted to the project, regardless of source of support. Similar information must be provided for all proposals already submitted or submitted concurrently to other possible sponsors, including NSF."*

New Guidelines

- If the project now being submitted has been funded previously by a source other than NSF, the information requested must be furnished for the last period of funding.

- In FastLane, current and pending support for all senior personnel may no longer be grouped together and uploaded in a single PDF file associated with the PI. Each individual's current and pending support must be uploaded as a single PDF file or inserted as text associated with that individual.

Fastlane Budget

What You Plan to Spend

Fastlane Budget

A. Senior Personnel
B. Other Personnel
C. Fringe Benefits
D. Equipment
E. Travel
F. Participant Support Costs
G. Other Direct Costs (Materials and Supplies, Publication Costs, etc.)
H. Total Direct Costs (A through G)
I. Indirect Costs
J. Total Direct and Indirect Costs (H+I)
K. Residual Funds
L. Amount of This Request (J) or (J-K)
M. Cost Sharing Proposed Level $

WHAT'S THE SMALLEST BUDGET YOU CAN MANAGE ON?

THE MOST YOU CAN GIVE ME!
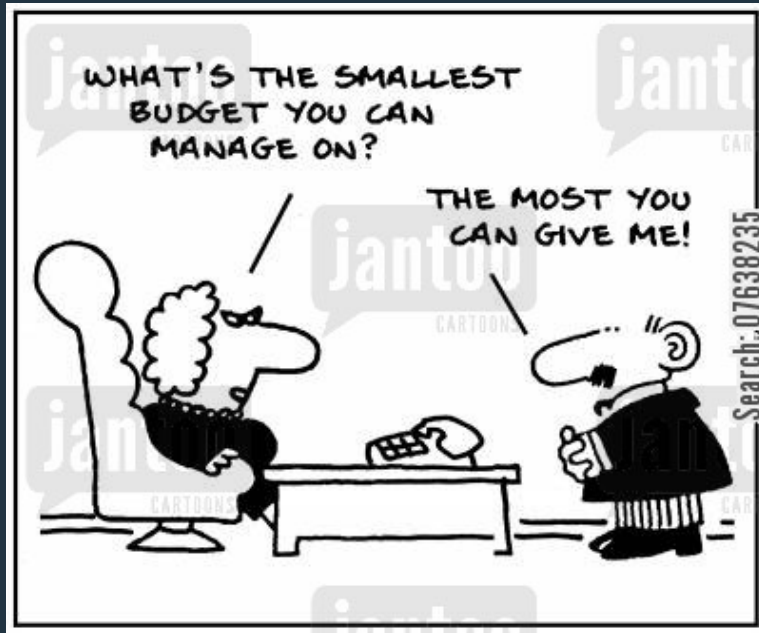
When we talk about a 'needs' led service.
The 'NEED' is to stay in budget!

A. Senior Personnel

FORM

PIs, faculty, and other senior personnel; estimated # of person months; total amount of salaries requested; detailed justification.

GUIDANCE/TIPS

- Person-months: 2 months rule.

- If no person months effort/salary are requested, remove from section A.

B. Other Personnel

FORM

- Salary info for Postdocs, Other Professionals, Graduate and Undergraduates, Secretarial, Other.

- Justification

GUIDANCE/TIPS

- Must indicate the # of persons expected to receive support.

C. Fringe Benefits

FORM

Total fringe benefit cost for all proposed personnel.

GUIDANCE/TIPS

Fringe Benefit	FY 16 Rates
EPA Composite Fringe	33%
SPA (or salary < 55K) Composite Fringe	37%
Student (enrolled)	1.0%
Temp/Student (non-enrolled)	8.65%

D. Equipment

FORM

List each equipment item and dollar amount separately.

GUIDANCE/TIPS

- >$5,000
- Expected service life of more than one year

E. Travel

FORM

Broken down by Domestic and Foreign.

GUIDANCE/TIPS

- Internal budget and Justification:
  - Who?
  - When?
  - Where?
  - Breakdown mileage (IRS vs Fleet), taxi, airfare, lodging, meals, etc.

F. Participant Support Costs

FORM

Enter costs of transportation, per diem, stipends and other related costs for participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with NSF-sponsored conferences, meetings, symposia, training activities and workshops.

GUIDANCE/TIPS

- Number of participants to be supported must be entered.

- Participant Support Costs ≠ Participant Incentives

- Indirect costs (F&A) are not allowed on participant support costs. Note that this is an NSF rule.

G. Other Direct Costs

1. Materials and Supplies (<$5,000)
2. Publication Costs/ Documentation/Dissemination
3. Consultant Services
   - Expertise, affiliation, compensation rate, # days, travel costs
4. Computer Services
   - Ex. Leasing computer equipment
5. Subawards **
6. Other
   - Ex. Tuition; participant incentives

G5. Subawards **

FORM(S)

- If UNCG is the prime, the total subaward amount (subcontract direct costs + F&A) is entered.

- A separate Fastlane budget should be provided for each subawardee, including a justification.

GUIDANCE/TIPS

- UNCG Justification: Include a brief description of the work to be performed and the basis for selection of the subawardee.

I. Indirect Costs

FORM

- Indirect Cost Item = Modified Total Direct Costs or MTDC
- Rate = On campus: 45.5%; Off campus: 26%
- Base = The calculated MTDC

GUIDANCE/TIPS

- Tuition and the amount of the subaward in excess of $25,000 is excluded from indirect cost calculations.

Example: MTDC Base

Personnel Costs	$90,000
Equipment	$10,000
Total	$100,000
MTDC	$90,000 (less equipment)
F&A rate (45.5% x MTDC)	$40,950
Total Request	$140,950

K. Residual Funds

FORM

- Only for incremental funding requests on continuing grants.
- Enter the amount estimated to be in excess of 20% at the amendment effective date. If less than 20%, enter "None."

GUIDANCE/TIPS

- Should not be reflected in any budget categories (A-I).
- Justification: narrative justifying carryover of funds in excess of 20%.

M. Cost Sharing Proposed Level

FORM

Cumulative cost sharing amount gets entered on Line M of the first year's budget. Includes in-kind contributions.

GUIDANCE/TIPS

- Voluntary committed cost share is prohibited by NSF. Line M will not even show up unless cost sharing is mandated by the announcement.

Misc. Guidance/Tips

- Non-allowable costs:
  - Entertainment (e.g., tickets to show or sporting events).
  - Meals and Coffee Breaks (e.g., for intramural meetings of an organization).
  - Alcoholic Beverages
- Justification Page Limit = 3 pages

Other Supplementary Documents

- Post Doc Mentoring Plan (if applicable)
- Data Management Plan
- Documentation of collaborative arrangements.
- Please do not include letters of support unless specified in the PA
- Any other supplementary documents as outlined in the PA

Post Doc Mentoring Plan

- Required for all proposals that request funds for Postdoctoral Researchers
- Must include detailed description of all mentoring activities
- Limited to one page
- Activities to be included: career counseling, training in prep of grant proposals, publications, presentations, guidance on building collaborations

Data Management Plan

- Required for all proposals, unless stated otherwise in the PA
- Can be no more than 2 pages in length
- Must include information on:
  - Types of data, samples, software
  - Standards for data formats
  - Policies on access and date sharing
  - Redistribution rights
  - Plans for archiving data

Facilities

- This section is used to assess the adequacy of the resources available to satisfy the stated intellectual merits and broader impacts of the project

- Provides an aggregated description of the internal and external resources (both Physical and Personnel) that the organization and its collaborators will provide to the project

- Should be narrative in nature, not including quantifiable financial information

- Such information should be provided in this section rather than in others (i.e. Biosketches, Project Description, etc.)

- If your department/school has its' own boilerplate, please use

Any Questions????

Overview Exercise

Scenario #1:

Dr. Bruce Banner is applying to NSF 16-549 with a collaborator (Co-PI) from Duke University, Dr. Jon Snow. The project will include both human and animal subjects. This is Dr. Banner's very first grant submission. The details from the PA are as listed:

Project Duration: No more than 3 years

Budget limit: $600,000 total

Due Date: May 16, 2016

Program Name: Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS)

Overview Exercise

Scenario #2:

Dr. Chris Davis has completed his current and pending support. He currently has two pending proposals in addition to this submission.

Proposal details:

Project title: How to Make Science, Science

Duration: 01/01/2017 – 12/31/2019

Amount Requested: $100,000

Person Months: 1 summer month

Game Time!

Are you smarter than a Grants Specialist?

Question

- Q: As general policy, what is the maximum level of compensation that senior project personnel are limited to?

- A: 2 person months or 2 months' worth of salary

Question

- Q: Name 2 of the 3 non-allowable costs highlighted by NSF.

- A: Entertainment, Meals and Coffee Breaks, Alcoholic Beverages

Question

- Q: True or false: Your budget includes 3 mega-microscopes, at a cost of $2000/scope, for a total expense of $6,000. These costs should be listed under Equipment on the Fastlane budget form.

- A: False. Because the itemized cost per microscope is less than $5,000, these would be listed under materials and supplies.

Question

- Q: True or false: The Travel section of the NSF Fastlane budget form should include travel of all project personnel including, Co-PIs, Graduate Research Assistants, and Consultants.

- A: False. Consultant travel is lumped with Consultant costs.

Question

- Q: PI Smith has decided to volunteer, as cost share, 10% of his faculty research time on an NSF proposal. True or false: the cumulative amount of this cost share should be reported to NSF via the Cost Share line (line M) on the Fast lane form in Year 1.

- A: False: Voluntary cost share is prohibited by NSF.

Question

- Q: True or False: When no person months are being requested for Senior Personnel on the project, the applicable senior personnel names should be removed from the Fastlane Budget form.

- A: True.

Question

- Q: What are two major components of the Project Summary?

- A: Broader Impacts and Intellectual Merit

Question

- Q: If a PI is planning to include Graduate Research Assistants on an NSF proposal and in addition to salary he/she would like to pay for some or all of the grad student's tuition, what category of costs would that fall under?

  a. Personnel (as part of the student's salary)

  b. Other

  c. Participant Support Costs

- A: B.

Question

- Q: True or False: The Office of Sponsored Programs initiates your Fastlane Registration.

- A: True.

Question

- Q: True or False: All Fastlane documents must be formatted with margins of .5 inches or more.

- A: False.

Question

- Q: Name three major requirements (documents) for the Other Supplementary Documents section?

- Post Doc Mentoring Plan, if applicable
- Data Management Plan
- Documentation of collaborative arrangements.
- Please do not include letters of support unless specified in the PA.
- Any other supplementary documents as outlined in the PA.

Question

- Q: True or False: A Post Doc Mentoring Plan is required for all proposals.

- A: False. Only if the project supports a Postdoctoral researcher.

Question

- Q: The Project Summary is limited to _____ characters with spaces.

  a. 3600

  b. 2700

  c. 4600

- A: C.

Question

- Q: True or False: References are limited to 7 pages.

- A: False.

Question

- Q: True or False: Letters of Support can be included in any NSF proposal.

- A: False.

Question

- Q: True or False: Collaborators on biosketches do not need to be listed in alphabetical order

- A: False.

Question

- Q: True or False: Broader Impacts should not be included in the Project Description.

- A: False.

Question

- Q: True or False: Appointments on the biosketch should be in reverse chronological order.

- A: True.

Question

- Q: True or False: All Co-PIs must be listed on the Cover Sheet.

- A: True.

Question

- Q: True or False: Up to 11 publications/products can be listed in the biosketch.

- A: False.

Question

- Q: True or False: The Project Description is the only document that requires pagination.

- A: False.

Question

- Q: True or False: Up to 10 synergistic activities can be listed in the biosketch.

- A: False.

Question

- Q: True or False: The Table of Contents is auto-generated via Fastlane.

- A: True.

Question

- Q: True or False. All footnotes should be formatted using 8 pt font or smaller.

- A: False.

Question

- Q: True or False. All references must be in APA format.

- A: False.

Question

- Q: NSF stands for the _____.

- A: National Science Foundation