



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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NSF 22-015

Dear Colleague Letter: NSF-DFG Lead Agency Opportunity in Molecular and Cellular Biology

November 15, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

SCOPE

Recognizing the importance of international collaborations in promoting scientific discoveries, the US National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on research cooperation. The MOU provides an overarching framework to encourage collaboration between US and German research communities and sets out the principles by which jointly supported activities might be developed. The MOU provides for a Lead Agency Opportunity whereby proposals may be submitted to either NSF or DFG.

To facilitate the support of collaborative work between US researchers and their German counterparts, the *Division of Molecular and Cellular Bioscience (BIO/MCB)* at NSF and the Division of Molecular and Organismal Biology and Agriculture (MOBA) at DFG are pleased to announce a Lead Agency Opportunity in the area of Molecular and Cell Biology (NSF-DFG MolCellBio). The goal of this Opportunity is to help reduce some of the current barriers to working internationally.

This Lead Agency Opportunity allows US and German researchers to develop and submit a single proposal to either NSF or DFG describing a project involving US and German researchers that will undergo a single review process by the designated Lead Agency.

US and German collaborators are invited to submit joint proposals in the areas covered by NSF's BIO/MCB and DFG's review board 201 "Basic Research in Biology and Medicine." The proposals should focus on basic research at a molecular, subcellular or cellular level, including theoretical approaches. Proposals encompassing tissues, organs or whole animals will not be considered. Research in the areas of plant sciences, microbiology, immunology, and neurosciences is also excluded. Proposals must provide a clear rationale for the need for

a US-German collaboration, including the unique expertise and synergy that the collaborating researchers will bring to the project. Proposers should note that this Lead Agency Opportunity does not represent new or ring-fenced funding. Researchers in Germany are invited to read the Information for Researchers to be posted under [Funding Opportunities with Individual Countries](#) for more information.

SUBMISSION AND REVIEW

The prospective investigators should discuss within their research team where they believe the largest portion of the research lies and agree on a Lead Agency (either NSF or DFG). The proposers identify the Lead Agency, develop a joint proposal in accordance with the chosen Lead Agency's standard rules and submit it to the Lead Agency following its submission procedures. When applying to NSF as the Lead Agency, investigators should be aware that DFG allows a maximum funding period of 36 months. Both US and German investigators should consider this constraint when structuring their proposals and considering programmatic alignment of projects. Lead Agency proposals are reviewed in accordance with the general rules of the Lead Agency's relevant funding program.

Proposals will be assessed in competition with all others submitted to the normal funding opportunity round, and outcomes will be subject to both success in peer review and the availability of funds from both *DFG/MOBA and NSF/BIO/MCB*. The Lead Agency will make reviews and assessments available to the non-Lead Agency as a basis for a joint discussion on the project's success. Regardless of which organization will serve as the Lead Agency for the proposal, German and US applicants are subject to DFG and NSF standard eligibility and program requirements, respectively.

NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Where NSF is the lead agency, notification of the award is made to the submitting organization by the cognizant NSF Grants and Agreements Officer in the Division of Grants and Agreements. Organizations whose proposals are declined will be advised as promptly as possible by the cognizant NSF Program Officer administering the program. Similarly, where DFG is the lead Agency, they will inform applicants from Germany of award and decline decisions. Verbatim copies of reviews, not including the identity of the reviewer, will be provided automatically to the Principal Investigator.

INFORMATION ON SUBMITTING PROPOSALS TO NSF:

1. Prior to submission of a full proposal, proposers will discuss within their research team where they feel the largest proportion of research lies and agree on a proposed Lead Agency (whether NSF or DFG). Where advice is required about Lead Agency, the proposer should contact the relevant Program Officers at the proposed Lead Agency

and the non-Lead Agency to discuss the research project (see contact information below).

2. Investigators submitting a research proposal to NSF will do so in accordance with the proposal preparation requirements in the NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide [PAPPG](#). Proposals may be submitted to 'Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences: Investigator-initiated research projects' solicitation (<https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/division-molecular-cellular-biosciences-core>) or 'Facilitating Research at Primarily Undergraduate Institutions: Research in Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) and Research Opportunity Awards (ROA)' solicitation (<https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/facilitating-research-primarily-undergraduate>). The Principal Investigator is encouraged to contact the appropriate Program Officer to discuss the suitability of their proposed research before submitting a full proposal.
3. For proposals submitted to NSF, German 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 German personnel to the project. Guidance on information to provide for "non-NSF funded collaborators" is below.
 - a. Biographical Sketch - Required. The biographical sketch 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. Current and Pending Support - Not required.
 - d. Results of Prior NSF Support - Not required.
4. Proposals should clearly describe the work that will be accomplished by the entire team, including the German partners and describe the total resources for the joint project (that is, the funds requested from both the NSF/BIO and DFG). However, the budget submitted to NSF should only indicate the amount requested from NSF. A copy of the requested budget from DFG should be included as part of the full proposal submitted to NSF (this should be added as a "Supplementary Document"). Proposals that request duplicative funding from NSF and DFG may be returned without review.
5. Letter(s) of Collaboration from participating US and German organization(s) should be included and should follow closely the text for such letters suggested [in the current Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide \(PAPPG\)](#).
6. The proposal should indicate that it is to be considered under this Lead Agency Opportunity by prefacing the title with 'NSF/BIO-DFG:'.
7. Proposals may be submitted at any time through [Research.gov](#) or [Grants.gov](#), but must be submitted by March 1st to be considered for funding during the same fiscal year.
8. When applying to NSF as the Lead Agency, a copy of the proposal must be submitted

to DFG within one week (or the proposal may otherwise be rejected for formal reasons). The NSF-DFG Lead Agency activity is administered at DFG similar to the WEAVE Program, therefore proposers should follow the instructions in DFG form 54.019 (under "Submitting proposals to international funding organizations as Lead Agency", including the submission of the project data form. Please refer to:

https://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/programmes/international_cooperation/joint_proposal_weave_process/index.html.

MERIT REVIEW

1. Proposals will be reviewed in competition with other unsolicited proposals or with proposals received in response to a specific call by the Lead funding Agency (that is, proposals submitted to this Lead Agency Opportunity will not undergo a special separate review process).
2. Proposals will be reviewed in accordance with the Lead Agency's review criteria. While not identical, the NSF/BIO and DFG ask reviewers to evaluate the proposed project on both its scientific and intellectual merit as well as its broader impacts. A description of the NSF merit review process is provided on the NSF merit review website at: https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit_review/index.jsp.

FUNDING DECISION

1. After the reviews are received, Program Officers from the Lead and non-Lead agencies will discuss the potential outcomes. Afterwards, the Lead Agency will use its usual internal procedures to determine whether a proposal will be awarded or declined. In the case of NSF, an award requires a formal recommendation by the cognizant Program Officer and then concurrence by the cognizant Division Director. NSF's Division of Grants and Agreements will review the proposal from a business and financial perspective. NSF funding decisions are subject to the availability of funds. Only an NSF Grants and Agreements Officer can make commitments on behalf of the Foundation or authorize the expenditure of funds.
2. Proposers will be advised whether their proposal has been recommended for funding or will be declined by the Lead funding Agency. Proposers will receive copies of the unattributed reviewers' comments and, where applicable, a panel summary.
3. If a proposal is recommended for funding, the US organization(s) will be supported by NSF/BIO and the German organization(s) will be supported by DFG/MOBA. NSF/BIO and DFG/MOBA staff will review budgets to ensure that there are no duplications in funding.
4. 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.

AWARD CONDITIONS AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

1. NSF/BIO and DFG will clearly state in award notices and any related documents that awards resulting from this activity were made possible by the NSF-DFG MolCellBio call.
2. Awardees will be expected to comply with the award conditions and reporting requirements of the agencies from which they receive funding.
3. Researchers will be required to acknowledge both NSF and DFG in any reports or publications arising from the grant.
4. Requests for extensions will be considered by the funding agency using standard procedures. Requests for changes to awards will be discussed with other involved funding agencies before a mutual decision is reached.

For information on submitting proposals to the DFG, please refer to the [Information for Researchers to be posted under Funding Opportunities with Individual Countries](#).

TIMELINE FOR SUBMISSIONS

Proposals can be submitted on a continuous basis. Please note that there is no deadline for submission to either agency.

CONTACTS

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Sincerely,

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