

Guidelines for submitting collaborative proposals under the US NSF/SBE–UKRI Lead Agency Opportunity

The Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE) of the National Science Foundation (NSF) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) are pleased to announce their continued support of international collaboration under the US NSF/SBE – UKRI Lead Agency Opportunity. The goal of this agreement is to promote transatlantic collaborative research by reducing some of the barriers to conducting international research that researchers may encounter. The US NSF/SBE – UKRI Lead Agency Opportunity allows US and UK researchers to submit a single collaborative proposal that will undergo a single review process.

Under the US NSF/SBE – UKRI Lead Agency Opportunity, proposals may be accepted for collaborative research in areas at the intersection of NSF/SBE and UKRI's remits. The UK Research Councils participating in this activity are the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).

Proposers should review the programs supported through NSF/SBE and through the relevant UK Research Council(s) for further information on what areas of research are eligible for support through this activity. Proposals are expected to adhere to typical proposal sizes and durations for the relevant UK Research Council(s) and SBE program(s) from which funding is sought. Proposals will be accepted for both interdisciplinary and disciplinary research projects.

A list of participating [SBE programs](#) is available on our website. Please note that this agreement only includes core programs within the SBE divisions. No cross-cutting or agency-wide special programs are eligible.

This document provides guidelines for the preparation, submission, review, and award of SBE-UKRI collaborative proposals.

Proposers are advised that all documents submitted to NSF or UKRI may be shared by secure electronic means with other agencies participating in the US NSF/SBE–UKRI Lead Agency Opportunity.

For proposals submitted to the UK Research Councils, please ensure you have read and understood the following text.

Proposal preparation and submission

All proposals must fall within the remits and funding parameters of both NSF/SBE and at least one of the participating Research Councils. Proposals which do not fall within the remits of both funding organisations will not be considered.

Before submitting a proposal, researchers should identify a prospective lead agency (either NSF or one of the UK Research Councils) based on where the largest proportion of research lies.

Proposers must then email a PDF expression of interest (EOI), following the template provided, including:

- a brief description of the proposed research
- the main objectives and research challenges of the proposed research
- the methodologies to be used
- the outputs, impact and beneficiaries
- the names and qualifications of the researchers, and
- bottom line estimates of funding to be requested from NSF and the relevant UK Research Council(s) *(at 100% Full Economic Cost (fEC), including indirect and estate costs, for the UK, and including all research-related and institutional administrative costs for the US)*

The EOI template should not exceed either 1,000 words or 2 pages in length. If NSF is the lead agency email to sbe-ukri@nsf.gov, and if a UK Research Council is the lead agency email to sbeleadagency@ukri.org.

It is the proposer's responsibility to ensure they have the permission to supply any names and qualifications of researchers detailed in their initial proposal.

Upon confirmation from the lead agency that the proposed collaborative research is appropriate for the US NSF/SBE – UKRI Lead Agency Opportunity, researchers may submit a full research proposal to the lead agency via the appropriate channel.

If EOI approval has not taken place prior to a proposal submission, the proposal will be returned without review.

If NSF is the lead agency, proposers must comply with the proposal preparation requirements outlined in NSF's Proposal & Award Policies and Procedures Guide ([PAPPG](#)). The proposal must be submitted via NSF's [FastLane system](#), [Grants.gov](#), or [Research.gov](#) to the appropriate standing program within SBE.

If a UK Research Council is the lead agency, proposers must comply with the proposal preparation requirements outlined in the Research Funding Guide (or equivalent document) of the appropriate lead Research Council, and proposals should be submitted via the Research Council's [Je-S system](#) using the appropriate Research Council's responsive mode research grants scheme.

For full proposals submitted to AHRC please follow the 'Specific Guidance for AHRC led Projects' document provide.

The proposal should indicate the proposal is to be considered under this Lead Agency Agreement by prefacing the title with 'SBE-UKRI:'.

Budget preparation

If NSF is the lead agency, the proposal should only indicate the US expenses on the NSF budget form. A detailed breakdown of funding requested from the UK Research Council(s), using the supplied UK Budget Resources Summary form, should be added to the proposal as a Supplementary Document. Please see [additional guidance](#) for more details. The Budget Justification section of the proposal should provide justification for the full project budget (that is, both the US and UK funding items).

If a UK Research Council is the lead agency, the proposal should only indicate the UK expenses on the primary Research Council's budget forms. A detailed breakdown of funding requested from NSF should be uploaded to the proposal as an additional attachment using the NSF budget form template provided. The Justification of Resources section of the proposal should provide justification for the full project budget (that is, both the UK and US funding items).

The costs of the US and UK organisations must be clearly differentiated in the proposal; proposals that request duplicate funding may be subject to office rejection.

Funding available:

- For AHRC-led proposals the UK costs must be between £50k and £1m.
- For BBSRC-led proposals the UK costs may not exceed £1m (there is no minimum).
- For ESRC-led proposals the UK costs must be between £350k and £1m.
- For NSF-led proposals where AHRC is the UK funder, a maximum of £350k can be requested for UK costs.
- For NSF-led proposals where ESRC/BBSRC is the UK funder, a maximum of £1m can be requested for UK costs.
- For NSF-led proposals, please consult with the relevant program(s) for budgetary norms.
- There is no minimum amount for UK contributions where NSF is the lead agency.

Please note: full proposal budgets should not vary from those specified in the approved EOI by more than 10% and any such changes should be fully justified.

Peer review

SBE-UKRI collaborative proposals will be reviewed alongside all other unsolicited or research grant proposals received in the same funding round or programme and will not undergo a separate review process.

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

Funding decisions

The lead agency will follow the usual internal procedures to determine whether a proposal will be awarded or declined. Funding decisions may be subject to budget limits.

All 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 reviewers'

comments and, where applicable, a panel summary.

Once a proposer has been notified of a pending award, the collaborating colleague associated with the project (i.e. the lead researcher based in the country of the non-lead agency) must submit a copy of the proposal to the non-lead agency(ies) so that each agency has complete documentation of the overall proposed research project. Further guidance will be provided at this stage.

Participating organisations will coordinate award timing as much as possible. However, because the participating organisations have different funding cycles, it is possible that some projects will have delayed start dates in order to wait until funds become available or until all pre-award requirements are met. Wherever possible agencies will endeavour to uphold standard turnaround times for each participating agency, but in exceptional circumstances outcomes could be delayed.

Grant holder considerations

Grant holders will be expected to comply with the grant conditions and reporting requirements of the agencies they receive funding from.

Grant holders will be required to acknowledge both NSF and the relevant UK Research Council in any reports or publications arising from the grant.

Requests for extensions should be submitted to the lead agency and will be considered using the lead agency's standard procedures. The lead agency will discuss requests for changes with all other involved funding agencies before a mutual decision is reached.

When extensions are granted, each funding agency will directly advise the relevant PI of the proper procedure for processing these. Please note that due to UKRI constraints, extensions over 12 months will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. Please see [UKRI's website](#) for more details.

What we will do with your information

Data is shared between UKRI and SBE to enable the secure and efficient processing of expressions of interest (EOIs) and full proposals for the US NSF/SBE – UKRI Lead Agency Opportunity. Data shared includes expressions of interest, proposal attachments, anonymised peer reviews and panel comments. Data will be shared via a secure extranet where appropriate.

UKRI and SBE are committed to maintaining data confidentiality and privacy and intend to fully abide by applicable laws and policies concerning the sharing of data in our collaborative activities. All personal data provided will be processed by both parties in accordance with current data protection legislation.

Further information on how UKRI processes personal data can be found in the [UKRI privacy notice](#)

NSF policy on research involving human subjects and vertebrate

animals

For information regarding proposals involving human subjects, see Chapter II.D.5 of the [Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide \(PAPPG\)](#), and the NSF [Human Subjects](#) web site. For information regarding proposals involving vertebrate animals, see Chapter II.D.4 of the [PAPPG](#).

For additional information on the administration of awards involving human subjects, see Chapter XI.B.1 of the [PAPPG](#) and for information on the administration of awards involving vertebrate animals see Chapter XI.B.3 of the [PAPPG](#).

UKRI research ethics policies concerning human participants and animal research

The research organisation is responsible for ensuring that ethical issues relating to the research project are identified and brought to the attention of the relevant approval or regulatory body. Approval to undertake the research must be granted before any work requiring approval begins. Ethical issues should be interpreted broadly and may encompass, among other things, relevant codes of practice, the involvement of human participants, tissue or data in research, the use of animals, research that may result in damage to the environment, and the use of sensitive economic, social or personal data.

Human participants

Research involving human participants must comply with all relevant legislation. All UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding is granted on the absolute condition that researchers ensure that all relevant ethics committee approvals and regulatory requirements are met. For further information available: ([RGC 2 Research Governance, Research Ethics, Use of Animals in Research etc](#)).

Animal research

The expectations of the research councils when using [animals in research](#) are detailed here:, and additional details with respect to conducting research with [animals overseas](#) are here:. The relevant section of the [Grants Guide](#) is section 4.13 onwards, which provides all details and procedures regarding applications that involve the use of animals.

The use of the [Experimental Design Assistant](#) designed by the National Center for the 3Rs is a useful tool which may assist applicants to consider the full implications of their experimental design.

Please note that, whilst proposals which involve animal research will be considered, the AHRC and the ESRC are unable to fund these elements.