

## **NSF/BIO-BBSRC LEAD AGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

*Developed as an activity under the NSF-RCUK Research Cooperation  
Memorandum of Understanding*

The US National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Research Councils UK (RCUK) have a long history of collaboration in supporting research through both bilateral activities and multilateral arrangements. Both organizations agree 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.

This Lead Agency Management Plan (Plan) is intended to provide guidance with respect to management and operational issues concerning the Lead Agency Agreement between the NSF's Directorate for Biological Sciences (BIO) and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. This is an activity covered by the NSF-RCUK Research Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The participating organizations are NSF's Directorate for Biological Sciences (Division of Biological Infrastructure and Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences) and the BBSRC.

This document is neither a fiscal nor a funds obligation document. Nothing in this document authorizes or is intended to obligate the participating organizations to expend, exchange, or reimburse funds, services, or supplies, or transfer or receive anything of value. Nothing in this document may be construed to obligate the NSF/BIO or BBSRC to any current or future expenditure of resources in advance of the availability of appropriations. Nor does this document obligate the NSF/BIO or BBSRC to spend funds on any particular project or purpose, even if funds are available. This document, like the MOU, is not intended to create binding obligations under either domestic or international law.

The goal of this Plan is to reduce some of the barriers to working internationally that researchers currently encounter. Some of these difficulties include: identifying appropriate funding agencies, dealing with the risk of "double jeopardy" wherein one country's funding agency decides to fund the research but where the partner country's funding agency does not, and dealing with differing time tables for different funding agencies. The Lead Agency Management Plan will address these issues by allowing researchers to submit a single collaborative proposal that will go through a single review process. The Lead Agency Management Plan will be structured so that each country's researchers are supported by his/her funding agency. This will allow funding agencies to maintain budgetary control over their awards.

The Plan outlines general principles and expectations that each participating funding agency should adhere to with respect to: 1) what information should be provided to proposers in terms of preparing and submitting proposals, 2) how the peer review process will be conducted, 3) how funding decisions will be made, and 4) what information will be provided to PIs on post-award conditions and reporting requirements.

The Plan covers the two-year pilot (Fall 2014 and Fall 2015 submissions) that will focus on the intersection of NSF/BIO and BBSRC as set out below.

## NSF/BIO Solicitations

- Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences Solicitation NSF 13-510
- Division of Biological Infrastructure Solicitation NSF 12-567

## BBSRC Strategic Research Priorities, Responsive Mode

- Data Driven Bioscience
- System Approaches to the Biosciences
- Synthetic Biology (Fall 2015 submissions only)

It is possible that other areas and mechanisms may be added to the pilot following mutual agreement by NSF/BIO and BBSRC.

## **Proposal Preparation and Submission**

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 (either NSF/BIO or BBSRC). The proposer should contact the relevant staff member at the proposed lead funding agency to discuss the research project. The staff member will then confirm that they will act as lead funding agency (and subsequently inform other participating agency) or will consult with the other agency to identify a new lead funding agency prior to returning a decision to the proposer (generally within ten working days).
2. Proposers will then be required to submit a PDF Intention to Submit (ITS) by email to the proposed lead agency that outlines the research proposed, research teams involved, and bottom line estimates of funding to be requested from the NSF/BIO and BBSRC. The ITS should not exceed 2 pages.
3. The ITS will be shared with the non-lead agency to check for eligibility (namely whether the proposed research fits within the participating agencies' portfolio, the scope of the pilot and whether the proposed researchers and institutions meet the agencies' funding eligibility requirements). The ITS will also be used to gauge proposal pressure by program and assist programs with budget planning.
4. Proposers who are invited to submit a research proposal will do so in accordance with the proposal preparation requirements of the lead agency, e.g. for NSF, the Grant Proposal Guide and for BBSRC the BBSRC Grants Guide.
5. The proposal should include a description of the full proposed research program and research team and describe the total resources for the joint project (that is, the funds requested from both the NSF/BIO and BBSRC). However, the budget forms submitted to the lead agency should only indicate the amount requested from that agency. A copy of the proposed requested budget of the non-lead agency should be included as part of the full proposal (in the case of NSF, this should be added as a "Supplementary Document"; in the case of BBSRC, this should be added as an attached document to the grant application).

6. For projects involving human subjects/participants or animals, proposers will be advised about both NSF/BIO and BBSRC policies and will be advised to consult with appropriate staff at NSF/BIO or BBSRC prior to submitting a proposal.
7. The proposal should indicate the proposal is to be considered under this Lead Agency Management Plan by prefacing the title with 'Bilateral BBSRC-NSF/BIO'.
8. The proposal will be submitted by established program deadlines or target dates determined by the lead agency.
9. Once submitted to the lead agency, the proposal will be shared with the non-lead agency via email and / or secure extranet.

### **Peer 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 the Plan will not undergo a special review process).
2. Proposals will be reviewed in accordance with the lead agency's review criteria. While not identical, the NSF/BIO and BBSRC ask reviewers to evaluate the proposed project on both its scientific or intellectual merit as well as its broader or societal impacts. A description of the NSF merit review process is provided on the NSF merit review website at: [http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit\\_review/index.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit_review/index.jsp). A description of the BBSRC assessment process is provided on the BBSRC website at: <http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/apply/apply-index.aspx>.
3. While the lead agency will bear the ultimate responsibility for obtaining written reviews, the non-lead agency will be responsible for providing names of qualified reviewers to the lead agency. The lead agency is expected to make good faith efforts to use these reviewers and will communicate with the non-lead agency in the event that these reviewers are non-responsive or fail to provide reviews.
4. The number of reviews required will be in accordance with the policies of the lead agency.
5. The conflict of interest and confidentiality policies of the lead agency will apply. The lead agency will be responsible for obtaining any necessary conflict of interest documentation and for resolving any conflicts in accordance with its standard rules and procedures.

### **Funding Decision**

1. After the reviews are received, program directors 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 Program Officer and then endorsement by senior management and NSF's Division of Grants and Agreements. NSF funding decisions may be subject to budget limits. In the case of the BBSRC, funding recommendations from Panels are received by Research Council Officers who, taking into account the availability of funds, will fund those proposals recommended for funding.
2. The lead agency will share reviews with the non-lead agency via email and / or secure extranet, according to the lead agency's confidentiality regulations. In the case

of NSF, only anonymous reviews can be shared. BBSRC will share the full content of reviews.

3. 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. Proposers will be encouraged to share the results of the review with other members of their team.
4. Once a proposer has been notified of a pending award, the non-lead researcher(s) associated with the project must submit a copy of the proposal to the non-lead agency so that each agency has complete documentation of the overall proposed research project.
5. If a proposal is recommended for funding, the US organization(s) will be supported by NSF/BIO and the UK organization(s) will be supported by BBSRC. NSF/BIO and BBSRC staff will review budgets to ensure that there is no duplication in funding.
6. 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 BBSRC will clearly state in award letters and any related documents that awards resulting from this activity were made possible by the NSF/BIO-BBSRC Lead Agency Management Plan.
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 BBSRC in any reports or publications arising from the grant.
4. Requests for extensions will be considered by participating agency using standard procedures. Requests for changes to awards will be discussed with other involved funding agencies before a mutual decision is reached.