Dear Colleague Letter: A Broader Impacts Framework for Proposals Submitted to NSF's Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate

March 16, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

The National Science Foundation (NSF) supports fundamental research in the social, behavioral, and economic (SBE) sciences. This research empowers researchers to answer questions in social sciences, behavioral sciences, and economics that are of great importance to society. For decades, NSF has sought to support research that has broad societal impacts. By thoughtfully describing a project’s potential broader impacts more effectively, researchers can help more citizens and stakeholders see the relevance of the research to their lives. As more SBE researchers do this, even with grants that were funded long ago, more people will be able to make better use of newly-available data, conducting a citizen-science project, and many more. They can also include development of innovative new technology, new tabloids, new scientific curricula, new technology for business, and any other activities that can articulate further exploration and training.

Research also produces communicative products. The most common communicative products from fundamental research include conference papers, presentations, posters, journal articles, books, syllabi and related educational materials, lectures, videos, podcasts, and in many cases, research data and materials.

Research often creates broader impacts by generating new scientific opportunities. These opportunities for exploration, learning, and broadening participation can take the form of forming a Student Research Fellowship for high school students, creating a new course (based on the project), bringing it in industry or nonprofit partners, bridging participation in scientific activities for previously underrepresented communities, helping schools make better use of ready-available data, creating a citizen-science project, and many more. They can also include development of innovative new technology, new tabloids, new scientific curricula, new technology for business, and any other activities that can articulate further exploration and training.

1. Why Can the Scientific and Communicative Opportunities and Products Empower?

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2. Where Can the Scientific Opportunities and Communicative Products Empower?

This criterion encompasses the potential to advance scientific knowledge. This criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society.

3. Can the Empowerment Be Externalized?

This criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society.

What Actions Make These Broader Impacts More Likely?

Additionally, we ask researchers to consider concrete steps that they can take to make their broader impacts more likely and to make their research more broadly beneficial. This “broader impacts framework” in its current form does not impose any fundamental requirements on researchers. The National Science Foundation’s existing criteria remain in place.

Sincerely,

Arthur Lupis, Assistant Director
Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences

Broader Impacts Framework

The National Science Foundation’s (NSF) Broader Impacts Framework encourages researchers to consider the potential broader impacts of their proposed work and to articulate those impacts in the proposals they submit. To support that goal, NSF has produced a Broader Impacts Guide (PAPPG) that provides guidance on how to best articulate the potential for research to have broader impacts.

The “Broader Impacts Framework” asks you to think about how your research can have broader impacts. This asks you to consider questions such as “Who can your research empower?” “How will it benefit society?” or “What other outcomes can your project achieve?” The answers to these questions can guide the research you are proposing and inform decisions you make about how to design and conduct it.

The framework is designed to help researchers articulate the potential broader impacts of their work in a way that is meaningful and measurable, providing a way for NSF to evaluate proposals that consider and describe potential broader impacts. NSF encourages all researchers to consider and articulate potential broader impacts, not just those who are required to do so by proposal guidelines or guidance documents.

The Broader Impacts Framework asks researchers to consider the potential for their research to have broader impacts and to articulate those impacts in their proposals. This is intended to help researchers think about how their work can be used by others in ways that are meaningful and measurable.

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