

Pursuant to Executive Order 13985 (January 20, 2021) on "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

Equity Action Plan Summary

National Science Foundation

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1950. Its mission is to promote the progress of science; advance national health, prosperity, and welfare; and secure the national defense. NSF envisions a nation that capitalizes on new concepts in science and engineering and provides global leadership in advancing research and education.

Delivering equity through NSF

To promote the progress of science and maintain our Nation's scientific leadership and global competitiveness, the United States must educate, train, and retain more scientists, engineers, and computer scientists. Historically, underrepresented and underserved communities are the largest untapped Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) talent pools in the U.S. As such, NSF strives to encourage the full participation of all Americans and to remove barriers to their success. NSF will advance strategies to ensure all sectors of society have the opportunity to contribute to the scientific enterprise.

New strategies to advance equity

- **Enhance NSF's current harassment prevention efforts by extending them to research activities at field sites and on research vessels**

Sexual and other forms of harassment are barriers to full participation by underrepresented groups in the scientific endeavor. Fieldwork occurs in many STEM fields and presents unique challenges that can increase the likelihood of harassment, including but not limited to challenging physical conditions, social isolation, and limited communication methods. Work conducted out in the field or at sea on vessels has also been associated with higher risks of harassment, especially for minorities within the field team. To address these challenges, NSF will engage in monitoring, evaluation, and mitigation activities (where warranted) with its grantees to ensure compliance with harassment prevention efforts, including with respect to scientific activities that occur in field sites and on research vehicles.

- **Extend demographic data collection in support of equity assessments from a wider range of grantees, including undergraduate students, graduate students, post-docs, and research directors**

Without adequate data, NSF cannot assess equity in participation over time and adapt its programming as the context of implementation changes to promote equity. To address this barrier, demographic questions will display upon entry into Research.gov and NSF will identify additional efforts to improve data collection.

New strategies to advance equity

- **Increase participation of disadvantaged institutions, including those from Minority Serving Institutions, in solicitations and awards**

The complexity of federal contracting creates barriers for existing and new entrants to the federal acquisition process. Category management practices and best-in-class solutions can have unintended consequences and negatively impact the ability of disadvantaged entities and new entrants to position themselves to compete and secure awards. To address these barriers, NSF will launch a new suite of engagement activities to support underrepresented institutions effectively do business with NSF, introduce these institutions to program office staff, and improve communication with underrepresented institutions. By providing access to program offices while targeting diverse suppliers, the focused outreach will assist NSF in reducing barriers to equitable outcomes.

- **Remove barriers to enhanced participation of underserved Indigenous and Native American communities in the STEM enterprise**

The lack of robust connections based on trust between NSF and Indigenous and Native American communities impedes engagement in NSF's programs and activities. To address this barrier, NSF will enhance its engagement with Tribal Nations for meaningful government-to-government consultation and engagement, including by opening a virtual meeting room available to Tribal Nation representatives as an additional way to share feedback. Following this engagement, NSF will analyze the finding to inform the development of an action plan for engagement with Tribal Nations.

New strategies to advance equity

● **Invest in resources to help advance civil rights**

Advancing equity rests on the presumption of equal opportunities and protection under the law. As noted in the Executive Order, Government programs are designed to serve all eligible individuals. To meet this objective and to enhance compliance with existing civil rights laws, agencies were obligated to address the operational status and level of institutional resources available to offices or divisions within the agency that are responsible for advancing civil rights or whose mandates specifically include serving underrepresented or disadvantaged communities. To meet this mandate, NSF is reviewing ongoing efforts to advance equity across the agency; revisiting the composition and organizational structure of its Office of Equity and Civil Rights to amplify its effectiveness; conducting an organizational assessment in support of the Office of Equity and Civil Rights' goals; and acting on the findings of the Racial Equity Task Force report (which provided insights and recommendations in several areas, including employment and program delivery). NSF intends to incorporate, as applicable and appropriate, mitigating strategies to address potential barriers to equity identified in this plan.

Building on NSF's progress

This equity action plan builds on NSF's progress delivering on equity and racial justice in the first year of the Biden-Harris Administration.

- **Delivering community acknowledgements to Native Hawaiians**

NSF has included Indigenous community acknowledgments as part of its programmatic agreements (PA) for some of its astronomical facilities. For example, the PA for the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope (DKIST), which is located on the summit of Haleakala in Maui, HI, requires researchers who base their research on data collected in whole or in part from DKIST to include an acknowledgement of the use of this site of significant importance to Native Hawaiians in any publication resulting from DKIST related research. There are likewise research acknowledgments required by NSF funded researchers at Gemini North telescope, located within the Maunakea Science Reserve and adjacent to the summit of Maunakea, and for visiting astronomers at NSF's NOIRLab at Kitt Peak National Observatory. A more general land acknowledgment has been proposed and will be reviewed by stakeholders.

- **Designating Tribal organizations as eligible entities for funding submissions**

The Foundation is currently revising the next version of the NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide to specifically identify Tribal Governments as eligible organizations to submit proposals for funding to NSF. This specific enhanced eligibility is a key action intended to set the stage for increasing Native American STEM participation at NSF.

Building on NSF's progress

- **Creating a foundation to expand anti-harassment initiatives**

NSF recently focused on additional efforts to address sexual and other forms of harassment associated with NSF-funded programs, specifically those supporting travel. In the latest version of the NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (NSF 22-1) (effective on October 4, 2021), the Foundation included new requirements for NSF travel proposals. For such proposals, the Authorized Organizational Representative must now certify that prior to the proposer's participation in the meeting, the proposer will assure that the meeting organizer has a written policy or code-of-conduct that addresses sexual harassment, other forms of harassment, and sexual assault, and that includes clear and accessible means of reporting violations of the policy or code-of-conduct. The policy or code-of-conduct must address the method for making a complaint as well as how any complaints received during the meeting will be resolved.