

## **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Electronic Signatures**

◆ **What is an Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR)?**

An Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) is the individual who is authorized to sign on behalf of the proposing organization. It is the organization's responsibility to determine – and identify within the FastLane system -- which individual(s) will have the authority to electronically sign the proposal and provide the required proposal certifications.

◆ **What if our organization has multiple individuals that we wish to designate as AORs?**

NSF has not imposed a limitation on the number of AORs that may be designated. An organization may assign the "Authorized Organizational Representative Functions" permission to as many individuals as they deem appropriate within the FastLane system.

◆ **How will PIs and co-PIs sign the proposal in the new electronic signature process?**

Effective June 1<sup>st</sup>, NSF requires only an Authorized Organizational Representative signature in submission of a proposal to NSF. The signature (paper or electronic) of the PI and any identified Co-PIs is no longer required.

◆ **Is the organization responsible for collecting PI signatures for proposals submitted to NSF?**

The signature (on paper or in electronic form) of the PI and any identified Co-PIs is no longer required on proposals submitted to NSF. This change in NSF policy does not negate, or in any way impact, requirements imposed by an organization's internal routing and approval process.

◆ **At what point does NSF consider a proposal to be submitted?**

A proposal is considered to be submitted and to have met a stated deadline when the "Submit" button is clicked in FastLane.

For those organizations where the submission and signature processes are separate, the AOR has five business days from the date of electronic

submission to electronically sign the proposal. A proposal may not be processed, however, until NSF has received the complete proposal (including the electronic certifications from the AOR).

◆ **How long after submission does the AOR have to electronically sign the proposal?**

For those organizations where the submission and certification processes are separate, the AOR has five business days from the date of electronic submission to electronically sign the proposal. For organizations where the person submitting the proposal also is an identified AOR, the submission process and the signature process will happen concurrently.

◆ **How will subawardee signatures be handled in the e-signature process?**

The new electronic signature policy eliminates the requirement for the proposing organization to provide a paper copy of the subaward budget signed by the AOR of the subawardee organization as part of its proposal submission to NSF.

◆ **If an organization determines that those authorized to submit proposals also are designated AORs, should both the “Submit Proposals to NSF” and “Authorized Organizational Representative Functions” be checked as part of their user permissions?**

Yes, both permissions must be checked in the FastLane user permission table. For those organizations where the certification process is separate from the submission function, AORs also can be given the permission to submit proposals to NSF. They must, however, be assigned the “Authorized Organizational Representative Functions” permission in order to have the ability to electronically sign the proposal Cover Sheet.

◆ **What if our organization has separate individuals designated to submit and sign the proposal?**

The system has been designed to accommodate this arrangement. Individuals who have the authority to submit proposals to NSF will submit the proposal electronically via FastLane as usual. The AOR will then use the “Authorized Organizational Representative Functions” function within Research Administration to electronically sign the proposal.

◆ **What if an existing program announcement or solicitation specifies that a paper proposal Cover Sheet should be submitted?**

Proposals submitted after June 1<sup>st</sup> that respond to standing or existing announcements or solicitations must comply with the electronic signature requirement, even if the announcement or solicitation specified that a signed paper Cover Sheet should be submitted.

◆ **How does the implementation of electronic signatures effect the distrbtion of e-mail award letters?**

The AOR e-mail address listed on page 2 of the cover sheet **is not being used for award letter distribution.** The information entered under FastLane - Research Administration for each organization is used. Individuals with access to Research Administration can check this by logging in to Research Administration and choosing "Review/Revise Organizational Information". About half-way down the screen, they will see text boxes for "Award Notification Addressee." The "Award Letter E-mail Address:" is the e-mail address used to distribute awards electronically.

◆ **Can an AOR electronically sign a proposal "in process" prior to submission of the proposal?**

No, FastLane will not permit the AOR to electronically sign the proposal prior to submission.

◆ **How and when will the AOR be notified if there is a proposal waiting to be electronically signed?**

The AOR will enter the Research Administration module in FastLane and then click on the "AOR Functions" module. They will see a list of all proposals waiting to be electronically signed. No e-mail notification will be generated regarding proposals waiting to be signed.

◆ **In terms of how the process will actually flow, will an e-mail be sent to both the AOR(s) and the institutional proposal submitters notifying them of when a proposal is ready to be submitted?**

The current procedure will remain in effect. That is, when "View/Edit/Submit Sponsored Research Office" access is allowed, an e-mail is automatically sent only to those person(s) who have the ability to submit proposals for the organization.

◆ **Are signed budgets still required when submitting supplemental funding requests?**

Supplemental funding requests must now be submitted completely electronically via FastLane and the same process of electronic signatures applies. With implementation of electronic signatures, a signed paper copy

of the supplemental funding request budget is no longer required to be submitted to NSF.

◆ **With implementation of the electronic signature process, are all pre- and post-award actions able to be done electronically?**

Yes, all pre- and post-award actions, including PI transfer, PI change and subawards, must be submitted electronically via the NSF FastLane system.

◆ **How does the new electronic signature policy effect the submission process for Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) proposals?**

SBIR proposals fall under the purview of the new electronic signature policy. Therefore, the small business that is submitting the proposal must be registered in FastLane and also must identify within the FastLane system which individual will have the authority to electronically sign the proposal and provide the required proposal certifications. Online instructions can be accessed at: <http://fastlane.nsf.gov>. SBIR proposals must comply with the electronic signature requirement, even though the SBIR solicitation (NSF 01-28) specifies otherwise. For example, a signed paper Cover Sheet is no longer required to be sent to NSF; all necessary certifications are provided when the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) electronically signs the proposal.

NSF also no longer requires signed subawardee budgets. Budgets signed by the AOR of the subawardee organization no longer need to be submitted to NSF.

◆ **How does the new electronic signature policy effect the submission process for Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) proposals?**

In recognition of NSF's recent implementation of a new electronic signature process, STTR proposers may select one of the following options in submission of the proposal Cover Sheet to NSF: proposers may choose to electronically sign the Cover Sheet **or** submit a signed paper copy of the Cover Sheet to the address identified below:

National Science Foundation  
SBIR/STTR Phase I  
SBIR Program Office  
4201 Wilson Boulevard, Room 550  
Arlington, VA 22230

If the electronic signature method is used, only the electronic signature of the small business Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) is needed; the signature of the research institution AOR does not need to be

submitted to NSF. If the paper method is chosen, the Cover Sheet should be signed by both the small business AOR and the research institution AOR.

Please note that NSF also no longer requires signed subawardee budgets. Budgets signed by the subawardee project director and an authorized subaward company representative no longer need to be submitted to NSF.