National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22230

Dear Colleagues:

The Cultural Anthropology Program calls your attention to issues in the processing and review of Doctoral Dissertation Improvement (DDI) proposals, in order to ensure that wide awareness of the relevant guidelines.

The annual target dates are January 1 and August 1, or the first federal business day thereafter if the date falls on a weekend or a federal holiday. The January 1 date is “hard”; proposals are not normally accepted after January 2. The August 1 date is “soft”; proposals may usually be accepted until August 15. We anticipate that the panels will meet around April and November of each year, and PIs will be notified shortly thereafter.

Project Duration: Maximum 12 Months
Project Budget: Maximum $12,000 *

> * Note: Students doing international research, having a formal affiliation with a foreign research institution, may be eligible for additional funding. Please contact the appropriate program in NSF's Office of International Science and Engineering (INT) (http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/int/)

Proposal preparation guidelines *(when these guidelines differ from those in the Grant Proposal Guide [http://www.nsf.gov/pubsys/ods/getpub.cfm?gpg] applicants should follow these program-specific instructions):*

- Select "**NSF 04007**" under "Program Announcement / Solicitation Number Selection" on the Cover Page;
- **Spacing** should be single-spaced, no less than 6 lines per 2.5 cm;
- **Length** should be 10 pages for the project description (not 15 as specified in the GPG);
- **Margins** should be 2.5 cm on all four sides
- **Font size** should be no smaller than 15 characters per 2.5 cm. Since font size may change when printed out, applicants are strongly advised to print out their proposal before formally submitting it through Fastlane to verify fonts and margins.
- **Biographical sketches** or CVs or should be no more than two pages;
- **Proposal summary** should be no more than one page and no less than 200 words. The summary must address, in separate statements, the "intellectual merit" and the "broader impacts".
- The **project title** should begin with the words, "Dissertation Research:"
- The Principal Investigator should be the student's dissertation advisor, and the student should be the Co-Principal Investigator.

Proposals that violate regulations in an attempt to squeeze in more information antagonize reviewers and will be returned without consideration.

Dissertation Panel Advice to Students
The panel reviews 50-90 proposals each meeting, and usually ranks less than 20% in the "must fund" category. While the proposals span the breadth of diversity in cultural anthropology, the top-ranked proposals share some strength that more proposals could display.

On the most general level, the panel notes that projects that advance our theoretical understanding are more scientifically meritorious than descriptive projects that add a case study of some (albeit fascinating and topical) situation. Outstanding proposals specify how the knowledge to be created advances our theoretical understanding of the study situation, so that

people interested in similar situations in different contexts will learn from the project's outcome. The key is to be **explicit in showing how the general theory explains the local situation, and in showing how the new knowledge from the local situation will advance the theory.**

Reviewers will include anthropologists from a variety of specialty areas in cultural anthropology. It is possible that no specialist from any particular area of research will be on the panel. Writing in a clear and concise style, defining key terms, and keeping the proposal free of jargon will ensure that all reviewers will be able to understand the proposal and evaluate it on its merits.

One of the areas in which the proposal will be evaluated is the "Research Competence of the Student." Relevant information should be provided for reviewers in the body of the proposal as well as in the CV. Language skills and proficiency, training or experience with the data collection or analysis techniques proposed, and any other information should be included which can help reviewers evaluate how well prepared the student is to conduct the research. Only references cited rather than a complete or general bibliography for the problem area should be included. Applicants are advised to include examples of interview schedules, questionnaires or task protocols, etc. in appendices, but **do not attach any appendix before receiving permission from the NSF program director.** Proposals without explicit permission for appendices may be held up or returned. Remember that reviewers are not obligated to read appendices, so critically important information should be in the body of the proposal. Letters testifying to local institutional sponsorship need not be appended but definitely should be cited in the proposal.

The following are suggested page limits for the Project Description. These are not hard-and-fast rules, but indicate reviewers' interests:

- Statement of the research problem, specific aims, expectations, propositions or hypotheses 1 p
- Review of the literature and significance 2 p
- Preliminary studies by the student, if any 1 p
- Research Plan, 5 p, Including:
    - Research Design
    - Research Site or source of data (References and citations are as important in your methods as in your theory section)
    - Data analysis plans
- Research Schedule 1 page

The research plan should begin with an overview of the research design, relating it to the theory. This should be followed by a brief description of the research site. Data collection and analysis methods follow. Theories, setting and methods should be tightly linked. Readers should learn what the researcher is going to do and how the specific activities to be engaged in relate to both theory and setting. Note that a mere listing of a method is not enough to tell a reader what the researcher plans and why. The term "participant observation," for example, is extraordinarily general and should be unpacked into its specific components, each related to the information outcome, which is then related to the research design and theory.

Sampling should be explicitly justified by discussing how data will generalize to a relevant population or theory. "Snowball sampling," which has various limitations, is not appropriate for some projects and if proposed should be explicitly justified with respect to alternatives. Each method, whether it generates qualitative or quantitative data, should be justified in terms of the research aims. The key issue is to impress reviewers that the new knowledge from your project will generalize to significant populations and theories.

Proposals also should include an analysis plan, although readers recognize that plans change in the process of fieldwork. Describe how you will use your data to answer your research questions and test your hypotheses. A mere listing of software programs will not demonstrate to reviewers that you have seriously considered all phases of the research process in designing your proposal. It should be possible for a reviewer to look back to your specific aims and understand why each kind of data is being collected, and why a particular analytic technique is planned.

Reviewers are well aware that there are no perfect strategies for conducting research, but will be looking for evidence that you understand the strengths and weaknesses of the approach selected. In a competitive review process where only a

subset of excellent proposals can be funded, reviewers need to be told how the new knowledge to be gained from your particular study will yield generalizations that advance our theoretical understanding of the problem.

As always, please feel free to contact Stuart Plattner, Ph.D, Program Director, Cultural Anthropology (splattne@nsf.gov; 703-292-7315) if you have any questions.

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Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASED) provide funding for special assistance or equipment to enable persons with disabilities (investigators and other staff, including student research assistants) to work on NSF-supported projects. See the GPG Chapter II, Section D.2 for instructions regarding preparation of these types of proposals.

The National Science Foundation promotes and advances scientific progress in the United States by competitively awarding grants and cooperative agreements for research and education in the sciences, mathematics, and engineering.

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