National Science Foundation

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about the
Integrative Graduate Education and Research Training (IGERT) Program
Receipt Deadline for Preproposals: April 15, 1999
Receipt Deadline for Full Proposals: September 7, 1999

The official guidelines for submission of proposals can be found in the publication Integrative Graduate Education and Research Training (IGERT) Program (NSF 98-96). The following question and answer sections are intended to be useful supplements to that document.

Please note that the IGERT home page that you accessed to find this document contains other information on the IGERT program, including instructions for the use of FastLane. Future items on this home page will include a list of awards.

1. Multidisciplinary Research Theme

Question 1.a: What is meant by a "multidisciplinary research theme?"

Answer: A multidisciplinary research theme spans disciplinary areas that may be housed in one or more departments, recognizing that some departments may incorporate a range of clearly distinguishable and recognized disciplines. The multidisciplinary research theme should bring together disciplines that provide the framework for a comprehensive and cohesive research theme to broadly prepare a new cadre of Ph.D.s through an integrated multidisciplinary research and training program.

Question 1.b: Does the thesis topic for the students need to be multidisciplinary or does the student just need to be mentored by faculty from multiple disciplines?

Answer: Because the goal of the IGERT program is to meet the need for a cadre of broadly prepared Ph.D.s with multidisciplinary backgrounds, it is envisioned that all facets of the student's research, thesis, and graduate education and training experience will engage the student in multidisciplinary activities.

Question 1.c: Are multidisciplinary research areas, such as social sciences, transportation, and architecture, eligible to submit to this program?

Answer: All areas of the sciences and engineering that are supported by the Directorates of Biological Sciences (BIO); Computer and Information Science and Engineering (CISE); Education and Human Resources (EHR); Engineering (ENG); Geosciences (GEO); Mathematical and Physical Sciences (MPS); Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE); and the Office of Polar Programs (OPP), are eligible to submit to the IGERT program. If you are not sure that the areas addressed in your IGERT preproposal are supported by NSF, please contact the program director in the NSF directorate listed under "Other Information" in the IGERT Program Announcement before preparing your IGERT preproposal. You may also wish

to consult the NSF Guide to Programs (NSF 99-4) for a complete description of areas funded by the National Science Foundation.

Question 1.d: Does the multidisciplinary research theme need to address a new area of research for the proposing team or can it be in an area where the faculty already have a core group, demonstrated success, and resources? Do we need to propose new Ph.D. programs or extensively revise existing programs to provide the multidisciplinary research and training environment?

Answer: The theme can either build upon existing research or it can be a new multidisciplinary research area. The theme may be built around existing, revised, or new Ph.D. programs. Key in all cases is the value added from the IGERT investment.

Question 1.e: Will this program support students to work at national laboratories, industrial laboratories, or international locations?

Answer: Yes. However, the utility of students' research education or training in such locations should be justified in the preproposal and full proposal.

2. Eligibility

Question 2.a: My academic institution only grants M.S. degrees in each of the disciplines contributing to the proposed multidisciplinary research theme; however, other departments at my academic institution are Ph.D.-granting departments. Can the IGERT program be used to train only M.S. students in a multidisciplinary research theme?

Answer: No. The primary focus of the proposed IGERT project is to train doctoral students.

Question 2.b: Are foreign institutions eligible to submit to the IGERT program?

Answer: No. The lead institution must be from the United States or its territories. However, an institution from a country other than the U.S. and its territories may be a partner with the lead institution to enhance the multidisciplinary graduate education and research program for IGERT trainees, for example, by providing internship experiences. A foreign institution can be an academic institution, industrial entity, or a research institute.

Question 2.c: My institution itself does not confer a Ph.D. degree in the proposed multidisciplinary research area or participating disciplines, but participates in relevant, joint Ph.D. programs conferred by a Ph.D.-granting institution. Am I able to submit an IGERT preproposal as a single institution?

Answer: No. However, a multi-institution preproposal could be submitted with the Ph.D.-granting institution as the lead and any participating institutions in the joint Ph.D. degree program included as partner institutions.

3. Preparation of a Diverse Science and Engineering Workforce

Question 3.a: Please explain what is meant by the statement that the preproposal should "...indicate how the training activities ensure full diversity as an integral component..."

Answer: This statement asks the proposer to address one of the required features of an IGERT project listed under the "Program Description" section of the IGERT Program Announcement. That is, the preproposal and proposal should describe the institutional strategy and operational plan for student recruitment, with special consideration to preparing a diverse workforce in science and engineering. The diverse workforce refers to the inclusion of members of groups underrepresented in science and engineering, i.e., women, racial and ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities.

4. Requested Budgets

Question 4.a: Are preproposals that submit annual budgets considerably less than $500,000 per year at a disadvantage?

Answer: No. The requested budget should be consistent with the planned activities to meet the goals of the IGERT program and key features of an IGERT project.

Question 4.b: Can we include a salary for adminstrative assistance such as a secretary or program coordinator?

Answer: Yes. IGERT projects are likely to require significant administrative support; for example, at the beginning as new recruitment materials, new courses and/or other education or training activities are developed, and later as efforts directed at evaluation of progress, student tracking, etc. become more prominent. This assistance is meant to relieve faculty of some administrative burdens connected with the IGERT project, but not of their responsibility to organize and lead the project and to play active roles in recruitment, teaching, and mentoring of students.

Question 4.c: In preparing my budget, where do I put the funds requested for student stipends and the cost of education (COE) allowance on the form?

Answer: Funds requested for graduate student trainee stipends should be listed with Participant Support Costs in F.1, cost-of-education allowances listed in F.3, and trainee travel listed in F.2.

Question 4.d: What is the purpose of the cost of education (COE) allowance?

Answer: The COE is provided in lieu of tuition and normal fees (i.e., any fees graduate students are normally required to pay, including registration fees and, if required, health insurance). Graduate students receiving a stipend from an IGERT award are exempted from payment of tuition and fees. Please note that the COE is fixed at the amount specified in the program announcement during the life of the award.

Question 4.e: The COE is greater than tuition and required fees that students are normally assessed at my institution. Do I have to request the full COE anyway?

Answer: Yes. Any excess over the cost of tuition and required fees must be used for purposes that are consistent with the scope of the IGERT project and that would normally be eligible for support through the IGERT award. For example, the excess cannot be used to help pay faculty salaries, and it could not be used for support of postdocs unless the involvement of postdocs was proposed and was approved as part of the original award. The use does not have to be of direct benefit to those students receiving stipends from the award. For example, the excess could be used for travel to meetings, etc. of a graduate student who does not receive a stipend from the award, but is otherwise a full participant in the training program. Please note that because these funds are provided as part of the COE, they are not subject to indirect cost, irrespective of their actual use.

5. *Preparation and Submission of Preproposals*

Question 5.a: Do I have to submit my preproposal and, if invited, full proposal, via FastLane?

Answer: Yes.

Question 5.b: I have never used FastLane before. How do I get started?

Answer: If you are new user to FastLane, you should first consult with the Sponsored Research Office (SRO) at your institution well in advance of the preproposal deadline to obtain the support you will need during the submission process. Some SROs are experienced in electronic submission and others are not. The NSF home page contains more details about using FastLane. Specific instructions for IGERT preproposal preparation are also available: "Instructions for Preparing and Submitting an Integrative Graduate Education and Research Training (IGERT) Preproposal via FastLane."

Question 5.c: What if my preproposal arrives on FastLane after the deadline?

Answer: Only preproposals sent to NSF via FastLane by 5 p.m. (your local time) on the deadline dates will be accepted. Any IGERT preproposal received after the deadline will be returned to the proposer without review. Please note that the NSF program officers and staff are not authorized to grant extensions to the published deadlines for the IGERT program.

6. *Number of IGERT Full Proposals from an Institution*

Question 6.a: Can more than two proposing groups from one institution be invited to submit single-institution full proposals and, if so, does NSF or the institution choose the two groups?

Answer: NSF will not accept more than two single-institution full proposals from one institution. If more than two preproposals from an institution are judged highly promising by the reviewers, the institution, rather than NSF, will decide which two full proposals will be submitted.

Question 6.b: Given that an institution may submit only one multi-institution full proposal per competition, what happens if my institution is the lead on several multi-institution preproposals and partner institution on several other multi-institution preproposals invited for full proposal submission?

Answer: More than one multi-institution preproposal submitted by an institution may result in invitations to submit a full proposal. The institution, rather than NSF, will decide which one of the invited multi-institution full proposals it will submit. Although it may submit only one multi-institution full proposal, there is no limit on the number of multi-institution proposals in which it may participate. The same institution that submitted a successful multi-institution preproposal must submit the invited full proposal. No changes in lead (submitting) or in other participating institutions are permitted when the full proposal is prepared and submitted.

7. Education and Training

Question 7.a: I use the terms education and training interchangeably. Is there a real difference in the meaning of the two?

Answer: Broadly speaking, education usually refers to courses and similar didactic activities that equip students with an understanding of basic facts and concepts, and with facility in use of basic methods such as those provided by mathematics. Training generally refers to activities that prepare students to use the methodology and technology needed for original research in particular areas. Obviously, instruction can play a significant role in both education and training activities. Thus, and especially at the graduate level, it can be difficult at times to categorize a particular activity as either education or training.

Question 7.b: The announcement indicates that in addition to graduate students, IGERT projects can include undergraduate and postdoctoral students if such participation clearly strengthens the proposed training program. What does this mean?

Answer: The major focus of IGERT is graduate education. However, because of the potential value of programs that bridge educational levels, NSF will consider proposals that combine training at several levels. Proposals that request support for postdocs and/or undergraduates should discuss what training will be provided, how their inclusion benefits the group as a whole, and should also be specific about what the value-added is for the (non-graduate) trainees themselves. For example, how will the training experience of an IGERT-supported postdoc differ from that of a postdoc supported through other types of awards?

8. Research Ethics

Question 8.a: What is expected for the training in the responsible conduct of research.

Answer: A brief plan of instruction in the responsible conduct of research must be provided. The NSF Ethics and Value Studies Program has a web page on the Social Dimensions in Engineering, Science, and Technology (SDEST) program, containing information and links

which may be helpful. There are no specific curriculum or format requirements. Plans meeting approval for the National Institutes of Health would be appropriate for IGERT.

9. Assessment

Question 9.a: What information does NSF need from each funded IGERT project?

Answer: This information is still being defined. It is very likely that, at minimum, projects will be requested to provide tracking (e.g., funded student and project personnel names) and demographic information (e.g., participant characteristics such as gender) on an annual basis.