

NSF Research.gov Proposal Submission System:

MODERN, AGILE & TAILORED

By Maria Koszalka and Stephanie Yee

Research.gov, the modernization of the soon-to-retire FastLane System, is providing the next generation of grant proposal capabilities for the research community and the National Science Foundation.

Proposal Submission Then and Now

Before the internet, a grant proposal traveled by plane, train, or automobile to ensure the 30 neatly stapled paper copies were hand delivered to a federal agency by 5 o'clock on the deadline day. In the mid 90's, the National Science Foundation (NSF) revolutionized the financial assistance process with the FastLane electronic proposal submission and grants management system.

Launched in 1994, FastLane was cutting-edge technology. Now, after more than a quarter century, new advances in technology and an ongoing focus on an improved user experience have enabled NSF to introduce modernized architecture to meet current and future requirements in tandem with a plan to decommission FastLane's technology, which has become inflexible and expensive to maintain. Research.gov is being developed incrementally, and features have expanded to support the transition of all proposal preparation and submission functionality from FastLane to Research.gov by a target date of December 31, 2022. A target date to fully transition all remaining FastLane functions to Research.gov has not yet been determined.

Today, working closely with the research community, NSF continues to innovate and bring current technology to grant proposal submission and award management. The Research.gov Proposal Submission System includes automated compliance checking and the structure needed to enable text and data mining. These and other advances support the Foundation's goals of improving the focus of funding opportunities, the quality of reviews, and the time from proposal submission to decision.

Modern, Agile and Tailored

Fast, accurate and secure business systems foster efficiency and reduce administrative burden for both the research community and NSF. NSF Director Dr. Sethuraman Panchanathan explained in Important Notice No. 147 (National Science Foundation, 2020), that NSF "has led the way with modern, agile systems tailored to meet the needs of the research community" in fulfilling its mission to promote the progress of science—systems that also include the Award Cash Management Service (ACM\$), Project Reporting, and Notifications & Requests. As mentioned in the Notice, FastLane is targeted to be removed as a submission option from all funding opportunities by December 31, 2022.

The Transition to Research.gov

The first iteration of the Research.gov Proposal Submission System was deployed in 2018 and only supported one submission type and one proposal type. Now, the Research.gov Proposal Submission System supports all submission types and 90% of the proposal types. A campaign is currently underway to migrate all NSF funding opportunities to Research.gov. As the final proposal types are developed and released, the solicitations related to them will also migrate.

Available Now in the Research.gov Proposal Submission System

Proposal Types

- Research Proposal, including Separately Submitted Collaborative Proposals from Multiple Organizations
- Center Proposal
- Research Infrastructure Proposal
- Equipment Proposal
- Travel Proposal
- Conference Proposal
- Planning Proposal
- Ideas Lab
- Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASED)
- Rapid Response Research (RAPID)
- EARly-concept Grants for Exploratory Research (EAGER)
- Research Advanced by Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering (RAISE)
- Grant Opportunities for Academic Liaison with Industry (GOALI)

Submission Types

- Letter of Intent
- Preliminary Proposal
- Full Proposal related to a Preliminary Proposal
- Renewal and Accomplishment-Based Renewal

In FastLane, Coming Soon to the Research.gov Proposal Submission System

Proposal Types

- Fellowship Proposals
- SBIR and STTR Phases I/II Proposals

NSF strongly encourages research administrators, faculty, and researchers to prepare themselves and their organizations for the transition by exploring the Research.gov Proposal Preparation Demo Site, Research.gov About Proposal Preparation and Submission page, and Electronic Research Administration (ERA) Forum website.

Alternative Routes to Grant Proposal Submission

Grants.gov, operated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides a centralized location for grant seekers to apply for federal funding opportunities. Grants.gov will remain a proposal submission option for most NSF funding opportunities after FastLane proposal submission is retired. As part of the transition, the Research.gov Proposal Submission System will take over Grants.gov application processing from FastLane. Similarly, system-to-system submissions will also transition to Research.gov. Post-submission updates to proposal documents or budgets will be done using Research.gov.

Proposal Innovations

The Research.gov Proposal Submission System embodies a new generation of grant proposal capabilities. A set-up wizard tailors a proposal with the required sections. An expanded number of advanced compliance checks means potential issues and errors are identified for resolution in real time. The system gives immediate notice of success, actionable warnings or errors when the Cover Sheet is saved, a document is uploaded, or a budget is edited. A side-by-side comparison exemplifies the magnitude of the innovations.

FastLane Proposal Submission	Research.gov Proposal Submission
55 compliance checks Compliance checks run at submission	100+ compliance checks Compliance checks run as documents are uploaded or form data is saved
Error messages are less specific	Error messages are more specific and actionable
Uploaded PDF files are distilled with lower image resolution	Uploaded PDF files and image resolutions remain intact
Linking separately submitted collaborative proposals requires creating and sharing a PIN	Link separately submitted collaborative proposals with no PIN required
	Enhanced automatic email notifications

Taken together, these innovations address many of the common causes of proposals being returned without review, allowing proposers and program officers alike to focus more fully on proposal content.

Until FastLane proposal preparation is fully migrated to Research.gov, proposal types that have not yet been released in Research.gov and solicitations awaiting the updates necessary for migration, will continue to be available in FastLane. Submitting a proposal in Research.gov versus FastLane confers no advantage during review. A reviewer cannot distinguish which system was used to submit a given proposal.

“...these innovations address many of the common causes of proposals being returned without review”

How-to Guides, Video Tutorials, and Other Help

The Research.gov About Proposal Preparation and Submission page, accessible through **About** at the top of all Research.gov webpages, offers links to helpful materials supporting proposal preparation and submission. Included are current system capabilities, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) organized by topic, video tutorials, and how-to guides. This centralized menu of training resources supplements helpful links included throughout the Proposal Submission System pages. The Proposal Preparation Demo Site, accessible from a My Desktop link, lets you assume the role of PI to initiate and edit proposals, or experience compliance checking as you upload a document such as a Biographical Sketch or edit a budget. The Demo Site is one more tool to help smooth the learning curve.

Add Your Voice

Share your thoughts and suggestions with NSF, anonymously if you like, using the Feedback button in the Research.gov page footer. NSF considers your feedback in evaluating changes and identifying future improvements. For immediate assistance or technical questions, contact the NSF Help Desk 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. eastern time, Monday through Friday (except for federal holidays) at 1-800-381-1532 or rgov@nsf.gov.

Webinars, Demonstrations, and More

For an added transition boost, NSF is offering a limited number of small, interactive virtual sessions with in-depth demonstrations of the Research.gov Proposal Submission System and its companion demo site. If you are interested in participating, please send a request to rgovbusinessoffice@nsf.gov and include the organization's name. If you have colleagues in your organization who are also interested in participating, please indicate the number of people when submitting your request.

To stay current on these and other impactful changes and innovations, NSF representatives will be presenting updates at many national and regional NCURA conferences in 2022. NSF also invites you to attend NSF ERA Forum webinars and NSF Grants Conferences. Details can be found at www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/era_forum.jsp and www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/outreach.jsp#regional. ■

Reference

National Science Foundation. (2020). *Important Notice No. 147, Research.gov Implementation Update*. www.nsf.gov/pubs/issuances/in147.jsp?org=NSF



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