

Over the past year, the National Science Board's (NSB) Task Force on Merit Review did a careful review of the National Science Foundation's two merit review criteria (Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts). The Task Force recently proposed maintaining the two criteria, but revising the text to clarify the intent of the criteria and how they are to be used during the review process.

The NSF and NSB are now interested in getting feedback on the revised criteria and the underlying principles upon which they are based, and have issued a joint Dear Colleague Letter (http://www.nsf.gov/nsb/publications/2011/06_mrtf.jsp) requesting input from the external community. You are invited to send your comments to meritreview@nsf.gov; comments are no longer accepted on line; please note that all comments should be submitted by **July 14**.

From the Dear Colleague Letter (11-42):

The two draft revised criteria, and the principles upon which they are based, are below. Comments are being collected through **July 14**—we invite you to send comments to meritreview@nsf.gov.

Merit Review Principles and Criteria

The identification and description of the merit review criteria are firmly grounded in the following principles:

1. All NSF projects should be of the highest intellectual merit with the potential to advance the frontiers of knowledge.
2. Collectively, NSF projects should help to advance a broad set of important national goals, including:
 - Increased economic competitiveness of the United States.
 - Development of a globally competitive STEM workforce.
 - Increased participation of women, persons with disabilities, and underrepresented minorities in STEM.
 - Increased partnerships between academia and industry.
 - Improved pre-K–12 STEM education and teacher development.
 - Improved undergraduate STEM education.
 - Increased public scientific literacy and public engagement with science and technology.
 - Increased national security.
 - Enhanced infrastructure for research and education, including facilities, instrumentation, networks and partnerships.
3. Broader impacts may be achieved through the research itself, through activities that are directly related to specific research projects, or through activities that are supported by the project but ancillary to the research. All are valuable approaches for advancing important national goals.
4. Ongoing application of these criteria should be subject to appropriate assessment developed using reasonable metrics over a period of time.

Intellectual merit of the proposed activity

The goal of this review criterion is to assess the degree to which the proposed activities will advance the frontiers of knowledge. Elements to consider in the review are:

1. What role does the proposed activity play in advancing knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields?
2. To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts?
3. How well conceived and organized is the proposed activity?
4. How well qualified is the individual or team to conduct the proposed research?
5. Is there sufficient access to resources?

Broader impacts of the proposed activity

The purpose of this review criterion is to ensure the consideration of how the proposed project advances a national goal(s). Elements to consider in the review are:

1. Which national goal (or goals) is (or are) addressed in this proposal? Has the PI presented a compelling description of how the project or the PI will advance that goal(s)?
2. Is there a well-reasoned plan for the proposed activities, including, if appropriate, department-level or institutional engagement?
3. Is the rationale for choosing the approach well-justified? Have any innovations been incorporated?
4. How well qualified is the individual, team, or institution to carry out the proposed broader impacts activities?
5. Are there adequate resources available to the PI or institution to carry out the proposed activities?