

NSF STEM K-12 Webinar —Q&A

NSF led a webinar that provided an overview of FY2026 funding opportunities available through the Division of Research on Learning in Formal and Informal Settings (EDU/DRL) and introduced the new NSF STEM K-12 Program. Following a formal presentation, DRL program officers fielded pre-submitted and live questions from the audience. Slides and a recording of the webinar will be posted; captioning was enabled during the webinar.

This document synthesizes attendee questions and responses captured in the webinar chat. Duplicates were consolidated. Items marked “answered live” reflect that no written detail appeared in the chat. Names and timestamps have been removed.

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Funding & Deadlines

Q: With rolling deadlines, when is funding typically exhausted, and does timing within the fiscal year matter?

A: Funding tends to be exhausted closer to the end of the fiscal year; proposals submitted in July/August may be considered in the subsequent fiscal year.

Q: Is funding tied to whether a federal budget passes or there are continuing resolutions?

A: All awards are subject to the availability of funds.

Q: Is there an advantage to submitting early? Will later proposals miss out if funds run down?

A: There is no advantage to submitting early.

Q: What is the expected timeline for decisions with rolling submissions?

A: The program aims to respond within approximately six months of submission.

Q: If a proposal is declined, when can a new or revised proposal be submitted?

A: Six months from the date of decline.

Q: Do submissions need to align with a particular fiscal-year cutoff (e.g., by December 31)?

A: No. There is no deadline.

Budgets & Indirect Costs

Q: Are budget limits per year or for the entire project? Is there an annual cap?

A: Limits apply to the entire project; there is no single-year cap. The overall project limit is \$750,000.

Q: Do the same limits apply to collaborative proposals?

A: Yes. The overall project limit of \$750,000 applies.

Q: Are the budget limits inclusive of indirect costs?

A: Yes, limits are inclusive of indirect costs.

Q: Is the indirect cost rate capped (e.g., 10–15%)?

A: Refer to NSF's 'Updates on Priorities' page for current IDC guidance; IDC questions were repeatedly directed there in the chat.

Q: Have rules on cost sharing changed?

A: No change; consult your sponsored research office.

Q: Will supplemental funding be considered at the end of a grant period?

A: Supplement requests will follow PAPPG guidelines.

Q: Have policies on no-cost extensions changed?

A: No change.

Proposal Scope & Requirements

Q: If a proposal is primarily development, must it still include research?

A: Yes. Research is required; for development efforts, design-based research is a common approach.

Q: Should K-12-focused research proposals go to STEM K-12 or ECR?

A: K-12-focused research should go to STEM K-12.

Q: Are out-of-school, after-school, or community-center projects appropriate?

A: Yes.

Q: Are projects serving pre-K students in scope?

A: Yes.

Q: Are conferences/workshops allowable under STEM K-12?

A: Yes; when not specifically called out by a solicitation, follow the PAPPG conference guidance.

Q: Are pilot studies allowable?

A: Yes. Provide a clear argument for their importance and viability.

Q: Is there any preference or weighting for proposals that include AI?

A: No. Standard NSF Merit Review Criteria apply.

Evaluation, Letters & Submission Logistics

Q: Is an external evaluator required for STEM K-12 proposals?

A: No. Separate evaluation plans are not required, but strategic, periodic feedback (e.g., via an advisory board) is encouraged.

Q: Are letters from school districts required?

A: Letters of collaboration are needed as appropriate; see the PAPPG.

Q: Where can I find page limits and formatting rules?

A: In the Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG).

Q: Can a PI submit multiple proposals or serve in multiple roles? Are there limits per organization?

A: Multiple submissions are allowed (not the same proposal), and there is no organization-level limit.

Q: Will proposals still be reviewed by panels? How are proposals grouped?

A: Yes. Reviews use panels and/or ad hoc reviewers; proposals are grouped thematically.

Q: Do reviewers see prior reviews for resubmissions?

A: No. Each submission is reviewed de novo; reviewers do not see prior reviews.

ITEST & RITEL

Q: When will the new ITEST solicitation be released and will it have deadlines?

A: To be announced. Updates will be posted and related webinars will run later.

Q: How does ITEST differ from RITEL?

A: ITEST does not require advances in computer science and emphasizes career/workforce; RITEL requires foundational advances (e.g., CS/engineering) and funds exploratory projects only.

Q: Can advances for RITEL be in engineering rather than computer science?

A: Yes, if the research includes foundational advances with findings generalizable beyond a specific tool/app/intervention.

Q: Do RITEL awards require an external evaluator?

A: No; it is an exploratory, early-stage program.

ECR & Other Programs

Q: Is ECR:Core still active and is the referenced October deadline valid?

A: Yes; go to the ECR update page for what can be submitted to that deadline.

Q: What is the status of CAREER proposals submitted to the most recent deadline?

A: They are being reviewed as usual.

Q: Is the NSF-wide CSforAll solicitation archived?

A: Yes; the CISE Computing Education Research opportunity is a related program.

Eligibility & Collaboration

Q: Must the PI have a PhD?

A: PI eligibility is determined by the submitting institution.

Q: Can a postdoc be a lead PI if not currently employed by the institution?

A: Awards are made to institutions, not individuals; the person must be paid by the submitting institution.

Q: Are there limits on how many active awards or under-review proposals a PI can have when submitting a new one?

A: No such limits were noted.

Q: Are for-profit/small businesses eligible to submit?

A: Yes. U.S. for-profit organizations, including small businesses, are eligible (see solicitation for details).

Q: Are international collaborators allowed?

A: NSF cannot fund foreign institutions directly. International expertise can be included through allowable mechanisms; consult a program officer for specifics.

Q: Is international travel for conferences allowable?

A: Yes.

Priorities, Guidance & Contacts

Q: Where can I find populations/priorities, IDC updates, and other policy information?

A: See NSF's 'Updates on Priorities' page; many IDC and priority questions in the chat were directed there.

Q: Where can I find budget categories and other preparation guidance?

A: In the PAPPG.

Q: Where should I send a one-page concept or who should I contact?

A: You may email the program inbox or contact a program officer directly. Avoid asking duplicate questions to multiple officers.

Q: Do archived programs affect currently active awards?

A: No.

EPSCoR, Territories & Special Contexts

Q: Are EPSCoR jurisdictions still prioritized?

A: Yes.

Q: Are proposals that take place in U.S. Territories, Commonwealths, and the Freely Associated States allowable?

A: Answered live (no written detail in the chat).

Miscellaneous

Q: What will the award rate (%) be under the merged program?

A: It depends on the number of proposals received and budget availability.

Q: Are industry partnerships prioritized? Do they make a proposal more competitive?

A: Partnerships with industry and other organizations are encouraged.

Q: Will there be updates to the PAPPG or graduate fellowships guidance?

A: Check the relevant NSF pages for announcements and updates.

Q: Are projects focused on teacher AI literacy/PD in scope?

A: Yes, for STEM preK-12 teachers.

Q: If a proposal to a now-archived program was declined, does the six-month waiting period apply before submitting to STEM K-12?

A: The chat indicated there are no such restrictions for submitting to STEM K-12; consider how the work aligns to the new solicitation.

Note: This document reflects only the information explicitly present in the chat transcript. Where the chat stated "answered live," no written details were available.