



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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NSF 23-071

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Regarding Preparation and Submission of Plans for Safe and Inclusive (SAI) Working Environments under the BIO/GEO Pilot

WHAT IS A SAI PLAN AND WHAT'S OFF-CAMPUS/OFF-SITE?

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WHAT IS A SAI PLAN AND WHAT'S OFF-CAMPUS/OFF-SITE?

1. What is the Plan for Safe and Inclusive (SAI Plan) Working Environments?

Several NSF solicitations issued by the Directorates for Biological Sciences and Geosciences (BIO/GEO) are included in a pilot that will require submission of an SAI Plan for consideration as part of the merit review process *in lieu* of the organizational plan specified in the Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG),

Chapter II.E.9. The SAI Plan is a project-specific 2-page Supplementary Document that will be considered under the Broader Impacts review criterion for any proposal with off-campus or off-site research submitted to a solicitation participating in the BIO/GEO pilot.

2. What directorates and programs are participating in the pilot that require a SAI Plan for all off-campus or off-site research?

The Directorates for Biological Sciences and Geosciences are leading the pilot, and several solicitations in each directorate will require SAI Plans. Please read the "Revision Notes" and "Proposal Preparation" of each solicitation to see if the SAI Plan is required, and if it is, the date the requirement takes effect. For example, the core solicitations of the BIO Divisions of Environmental Biology, Integrative Organismal Systems, and Molecular and Cellular Biosciences are all a part of the pilot.

3. When does the requirement to submit the SAI Plan become effective?

The answer depends on the solicitation. If you are preparing a submission to a program that is participating in the pilot, and has a deadline, then the SAI Plan is required at the time of proposal submission. Alternatively, if the participating solicitation has no deadline then a date by which the submitted SAI Plan is required will be stipulated in the solicitation; please read the newest version to note when the 2-page project-specific Supplementary Document requirement starts (i.e., SAI Plan). For example, for proposals with off-campus or off-site research submitted to the core solicitation for the Division of Environmental Biology ([NSF 23-539](#)) which accepts proposals at any time, the SAI Plan must be submitted in those proposals *after* 18 April 2023, as noted in the solicitation. Submitted SAI Plans before this date will NOT be accepted. [Note that *all* proposals submitted to the NSF with off-campus or off-site research (as of 30 January 2023) must certify that they have a project-specific organizational plan (not to be confused with the SAI Plans in the BIO/GEO pilot, which are to be submitted for merit review) as explained in the Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide, Chapter II.E.9.]

4. Does the SAI Plan differ from the plan required by the organization as explained in the Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG), Chapter II.E.9?

All proposals submitted to the NSF with off-campus or off-site research (as of 30 January 2023) must certify that the organization has a project-specific plan in place for safe and inclusive research. The organizational plan that is certified by the AOR is not identical in content to that requested in the SAI Plans. SAI Plans are required only in specific solicitations participating in the BIO/GEO pilot. If a specific solicitation requires an SAI Plan, that SAI Plan is submitted *in lieu* of the organizational plan required by PAPPG Chapter II.E.9.

5. Does the SAI Plan replace the certification required by PAPPG Chapter II.E.9?

Yes. If you are submitting a proposal with off-campus or off-site research in response to a solicitation participating in the BIO/GEO pilot, you must submit the SAI Plan as a 2-page Supplementary Document, and that SAI Plan is in lieu of the organizational plan required by PAPPG Chapter II.E.9.

6. Must the box on the Cover Sheet entitled, "Off-Campus or Off-Site Research" be checked if there is any off-campus or off-site research involved in the proposal, regardless of whether the submission is to a solicitation included in the pilot?

Yes. All proposals that meet the definition of Off-Campus or Off-Site research must check the box on the Cover Sheet.

7. What are the required components of the SAI Plan?

The four components of the SAI plan are specified in each solicitation (please read them in their entirety), and include:

- a. a description of the field setting and unique challenges for the team;
- b. steps that will be taken to nurture an inclusive off-campus or off-site working environment;
- c. communication processes; and
- d. organizational mechanisms for reporting, responding to, and resolving issues of harassment, should they arise.

8. Is safety from snake bites, heat stroke, or similar physical safety issues a part of the SAI Plan?

The SAI Plan must focus on how to ensure harassment-free and inclusive working environments.

9. How is off-campus or off-site research defined?

Off-campus or off-site research is defined as data/information/samples being collected off-campus or off-site, such as fieldwork, and research activities on vessels and aircraft. Each proposing organization must determine whether the proposed work is considered off-campus or off-site. Please contact your organization's Sponsored Projects Office (or equivalent) for assistance in this determination.

10. What if off-campus or off-site research is being done for education or outreach as part of a proposal, but not research components of a proposal submitted to a solicitation participating in the BIO/GEO pilot?

At this time, the SAI Plan is only required if off-campus or off-site “research” is being proposed, which means "...data/information/samples" being collected off-campus or off-site.

11. Are university field stations considered off-campus or off-site?

The proposing organization is responsible for making the determination regarding whether the proposed work is considered off-campus or off-site.

12. Can funds be allocated to help offset costs with necessary training associated with a SAI Plan?

Yes, assuming the costs are allowed under Uniform Guidance.

WHO SUBMITS THE SAI PLAN?

13. If we submit a collaborative proposal to a solicitation that is participating in the pilot, but a non-lead PI is the only one conducting any off-campus or off-site research, who submits the plan?

If the proposal is a collaborative, then the lead Principal Investigator (PI) must be sure to upload the SAI Plan as a Supplementary Document as part of the submission and check the relevant box on the lead organization’s proposal Cover Sheet.

14. What if we are submitting a collaborative proposal, and PIs from the non-lead organizations are proposing to collect data from different field locations? Should only one SAI Plan be submitted for the entire collaborative project, or should each organization submit their own SAI Plan?

Only one SAI Plan that covers all off-campus or off-site research must be submitted.

15. Is the SAI Plan requirement applicable to contractors or vendors?

Yes, this plan applies to any vendor or contractor staff that are engaged in off-campus or off-site research in the project as proposed.

16. Is the SAI Plan requirement applicable to subawardees?

Yes, this plan applies to all participants engaged in off-campus or off-site research in the project as proposed.

17. If I submit a proposal and there are no other team members participating in the research, i.e., no students, no collaborators, no team, is an SAI Plan still required to be submitted?

If there is off-campus or off-site research proposed, a plan must be submitted.

18. What if the PIs submitting a proposal will not be collecting the data, only using the data? Does this still require a SAI Plan?

If no personnel associated with a submission is gathering data/information/samples from off-campus or off-site, then a SAI Plan is not required. Downloading previously collected data does not require an SAI Plan.

19. What if data are being collected as part of NEON Assignable Assets?

If off-campus or off-site data collection is part of the proposal via a contract or a subcontract, that means research off-campus or off-site is part of the project, so an SAI Plan is required. If there is no cost to the project associated with the collection, and no personnel supported by NSF funds are involved in the collection, then an SAI Plan is not required. You can always talk with your Program Officer to be sure.

20. What if my organization has developed policies on reporting, responding to, and resolving issues of harassment. Can we use hyper-links to those institutional policies and reporting mechanisms (or reference them) to satisfy the SAI Plan requirements?

Resource materials may be referenced; however, the SAI Plan must be a complete stand-alone document and must be specific to the project proposed. Please summarize the pieces of the organizational plans that are relevant to your project.

REVIEW OF THE SAI PLAN

21. How will the SAI Plan be reviewed?

The SAI Plan is considered as part of the Broader Impacts review criterion. Reviewers will also be asked to evaluate the following:

- Is there a compelling plan (including the procedures, trainings, and communication processes) to establish, nurture, and maintain inclusive off-campus or off-site working environment(s)?
- Does the proposed plan identify and adequately address the unique challenges for the team and the specific off-campus or off-site setting(s)?
- Are the organizational mechanisms to be used for reporting, responding to, and resolving issues of harassment, should they occur, clearly outlined?

22. Why is the SAI Plan considered as part of the Broader Impacts criterion?

The required submission and review of the SAI Plan is one more way that the NSF aims to broaden participation and ensure that all people engaged in science, wherever

science is conducted, are safe, and that the working environment is harassment free and inclusive for all.

23. Will the NSF be posting examples of promising SAI Plans?

No, however the NSF is willing to accept proposals, including workshop proposals, supporting the development and assessment of high-quality safe and inclusive plans and practices.