NSF Tech Accelerators Informational RFI FAQ

The U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) Tech Accelerators initiative was launched in 2026 to transform research outputs from basic research into scalable, market-ready technologies that strengthens the U.S. economy and national security in deep technology areas. Responsive to Sec. 10389 of the "CHIPS and Science Act of 2022" and aligned with NSF Directorate for Technology Innovation and Partnerships (NSF TIP) priorities, NSF Tech Accelerators are delivering a new innovation model that unites government, industry, academia and others to fill a critical gap in the U.S. innovation enterprise.

The below questions were collected during the Informational Webinar for the NSF Tech Accelerators Request for Information (RFI) on June 5, 2026. Questions were submitted by webinar attendees.

Similar or duplicate questions have been consolidated and responses standardized for clarity and ease of reference.

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Stay Connected

1. How do I stay up to date on the NSF Tech Accelerators?

To receive the latest initiative updates, subscribe to the NSF Tech Accelerators email list and visit the initiative's website.

2. Who should I contact if I have more questions?

Questions about the NSF Tech Accelerator initiative and recent RFI should be emailed to tech-accelerators@nsf.gov.

NSF Tech Accelerators: Initiative Overview

3. Why are NSF Tech Accelerators necessary given the many accelerators across the country?

The NSF Tech Accelerators initiative is responsive to Sec. 10389 of the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, delivering a new innovation model that unites government, industry, academia and others to fill critical gaps in the U.S. innovation enterprise. Notably, traditional research often experiences challenges traversing from the lab to market; the so-called "valley of death," leaving promising ideas and technologies too risky for private capital investments or otherwise stranded before entering the market. The NSF Tech Accelerators' program model supports the full lab-to-market pathway and is focused on under-invested deep-tech topic areas that requires the ability to identify and address commercialization barriers, ecosystem gaps and de-risk deep-tech innovations to the point of market uptake and ultimate impact.

4. Can NSF explain how the NSF Tech Accelerators framework is different than industry directly submitting pitches/responding to research topics for traditional funding programs?

The NSF Tech Accelerator initiative is not a traditional funding program. Instead, it is focused on under-invested deep-tech topic areas at the pre-seed, seed and Series A stages and they demonstrate viability for these areas by, in part, "crowding in" investment from venture and other funders over time (note that a requirement of successful NSF Tech Accelerators will be significant cost-sharing on the part of the proposing teams especially in the later stages of technology development and commercialization). Each NSF Tech Accelerator is a strategic NSF partner, working to identify and address commercialization barriers, ecosystem gaps and de-risk deep-tech innovations to the point of market uptake and ultimate impact. NSF Tech Accelerators will be required to increase industry engagement (e.g., potential customers, suppliers and/or investors) to generate "market demand/pull" to accelerate the deep-tech ecosystem and NSF-funded technologies to the market.

5. Is the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative designed to be nationally focused? Will each awarded NSF Tech Accelerator be regionally focused or will they expand across the U.S.?

The NSF Tech Accelerators initiative will be implemented nationwide. Each awarded NSF Tech Accelerator is expected to engage their deep-tech community across the U.S. and should be prepared to support research and innovation teams from any U.S. states and/or territories.

6. Will NSF fund one NSF Tech Accelerator per deep-tech topic area in totality or will there be multiple NSF Tech Accelerators across each deep-tech topic area across the country?

The NSF Tech Accelerators initiative will be implemented nationwide. In its inaugural year, it is expected that there will be one NSF Tech Accelerator per deep-tech topic area—one agriculture technology (NSF AgTech Accelerator), one materials technology (NSF MaterialsTech Accelerator), one ocean technology (NSF OceanTech Accelerator) and one scientific instrumentation (NSF SciTech Accelerator)—who will operate nationwide. Refer to Section 4.c Period of Performance of the RFI for period of performance expectations. Once established, each awarded NSF Tech Accelerator will release nationwide research funding opportunities to the innovation community.

7. Does the NSF Tech Accelerator initiative only support academic and non-profit organizations?

As noted in the Informational RFI Webinar, the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative is open to interested organizations from academia, industry, investment and non-profit/philanthropic. Interested organizations will need to determine whether they intend to serve as an NSF Tech Accelerator or participate as a research team to apply for funding.

8. Does NSF want a license or rights in patents related to subject inventions made under this initiative?

The usual NSF rules related to license or rights in patents under Bayh-Dole apply to this initiative.

Timeline: NSF Tech Accelerator & Research Team Investment

9. When are the NSF Tech Accelerators expected to launch and when can research teams expect to apply for research funding opportunities?

The NSF Tech Accelerators initiative expects to award one NSF Tech Accelerator per deep-tech topic area—one agriculture technology (NSF AgTech Accelerator), one materials technology (NSF MaterialsTech Accelerator), one ocean technology (NSF OceanTech Accelerator) and one scientific instrumentation (NSF SciTech Accelerator)—by the end of 2026. Nationwide funding opportunities are expected to be released from each of these NSF Tech Accelerators in Q1 of 2027.

10. If an organization is selected to lead an NSF Tech Accelerator and is successful, does NSF see this being a long-term partnership between NSF and the organization?

Refer to Section 4.c Period of Performance of the RFI.

11. What are the approximate timelines for Steps 2-4 of the multi-step OT contract process?

The approximate timeline for Steps 2-4 of the multi-step Other Transaction (OT) Agreement contract process are as follows:

- **Step 1 RFI Response:** Due at 4 p.m. ET on July 14, 2026.
- **Step 2 Invite NSF Tech Accelerator Proposals:** Invites to selected applicants will be sent out mid-August 2026 with proposals due mid-September 2026. To be considered for Step 2, interested applicants must submit their RFI short-form response outlined in Step 1.

- **Step 3 Negotiate OT Contract:** The estimated timeframe for contract negotiations is between October-November 2026.
- **Step 4 Award NSF Tech Accelerators:** NSF anticipates awarding the first four NSF Tech Accelerators by the end of 2026.

RFI

12. When are RFI responses due?

RFI responses, using the RFI response form, must be submitted via the Other Transaction Agreement submission system no later than 4 p.m. ET on July 14, 2026.

13. Where do I submit a response to the RFI?

RFI responses, using the RFI response form, must be submitted via the Other Transaction Agreement submission system no later than 4 p.m. ET on July 14, 2026.

14. What would strengthen a response to the RFI?

Organizations interested in becoming an NSF Tech Accelerator are encouraged to fill out the RFI response form in its entirety. NSF will assess the capabilities, qualifications and expertise, including technical and commercial expertise, aligned to the NSF Tech Accelerator deep-tech topic area and other information presented by the prospective applicant in the RFI response form. Based on that assessment, NSF will invite identified organizations to submit formal proposals to an Other Transaction Agreement Solutions Offering. Refer to the RFI, Section 4: NSF Tech Accelerator: Funding Mechanism, Approach, Duration and Eligibility for additional information.

Organizations only interested in providing feedback on the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative are encouraged to respond to Sections 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 of the RFI response form.

15. Does this RFI allow/support suggestions of new deep-tech topic areas?

NSF plans to use the information from the RFI process to help inform the establishment of future NSF Tech Accelerators. The deep-tech topic areas that these future NSF Tech Accelerators will cover have not been determined. If an organization/individual has deep-tech topic area suggestions for our future NSF Tech Accelerators, please include them in an RFI response form submission.

16. Will there be four awarded organizations, one for each deep-tech topic area? If so, why do organizations need to respond to all four deep-tech topic areas in the RFI?

NSF intends to award one lead organization for each of the four initial deep-tech topic areas—agricultural technology (NSF AgTech Accelerator), materials technology (NSF MaterialsTech Accelerator), ocean technology (NSF OceanTech Accelerator) and scientific instrumentation (NSF SciTech Accelerator). Organizations are not required to address all four deep-tech topic areas in their RFI response. Please refer to Section 4.b Approach of the RFI.

17. What should an organization do if it is interested in multiple NSF Tech Accelerator topic areas (e.g., AgTech, SciTech)?

An organization can only apply to be the NSF Tech Accelerator for one of the initial four NSF Tech Accelerator topic areas. Please refer to Section 4.b Approach of the RFI.

18. The RFI limits responses to just one per organization. Does this apply if submitting "feedback only" responses?

No, an organization may submit multiple RFI response for "feedback only" responses.

When responding to the RFI as a potential NSF Tech Accelerator applicant, eligible applicants may only submit one RFI response form per organization and are encouraged to identify which of the four deep-tech topic areas they consider their organization to be most qualified. Refer to Section 4.d Eligibility of the RFI for additional information.

19. If an organization is interested in applying for the NSF Tech Accelerator role, should they respond to the RFI?

Using the RFI, NSF is seeking feedback on the NSF Tech Accelerator's framework (e.g. program model, organizational structure, proposed deep-tech topic areas), as well as aims to identify prospective organizations interested in leading an NSF Tech Accelerator.

Organizations interested in becoming an NSF Tech Accelerator are encouraged to fill out the RFI response form in its entirety. Organizations that do not submit a response to the RFI will not be eligible to submit a proposal to the four initial topics specified outlined. A response to the RFI is not required to be eligible to submit proposals to future research funding opportunities issued by NSF Tech Accelerators. Please refer to Section 4.b. Approach of the RFI to review the Other Transaction Agreement contract formulation process.

20. Is an RFI response required to be eligible to submit proposals to research funding opportunities issued by awarded NSF Tech Accelerators?

A response to the RFI is not required to be eligible to submit proposals to future research funding opportunities issued by NSF Tech Accelerators

21. Can an organization be named as a sub-award/partner on NSF Tech Accelerator RFI submissions?

Generally, yes, subject to conflict-of-interest (COI) and Other Transaction Agreement Solutions Offering (OTASO) specific limits. Partners appearing across multiple proposals must disclose relationships and ensure strict separation from team selection/management if also part of a proposed NSF Tech Accelerator's team operation. Details will be set in the NSF Tech Accelerator OTASO.

22. If we are interested in being a partner/sub-contractor to a lead organization applying to the NSF Tech Accelerator role, should we still respond to the RFI?

You are still allowed to respond to the RFI, but it is not required. Only organizations interested in leading an NSF Tech Accelerator need to complete Section 5 of the RFI Response form. Organizations interested in partnering with a lead are not required to respond to the RFI. They are encouraged to provide feedback but should not complete Section 5 unless they intend to be considered as the lead. Please refer to Section 4.d Eligibility of the RFI.

23. If an organization applies to become an NSF Tech Accelerator, but is not selected for that role, could the organization apply for research funding opportunities issued by an NSF Tech Accelerators later?

Yes, an organization that applies for the NSF Tech Accelerator role, but is not selected, can apply for NSF Tech Accelerator-issued research funding opportunities.

24. Can an organization respond to the RFI in a way that both provides technical feedback and demonstrates its qualifications as a potential NSF Tech Accelerator? For organizations serving multiple roles in the innovation ecosystem, how should they distinguish these perspectives while preserving their ability to participate later as a researcher or innovation team?

The RFI response form is structured to seek feedback on the NSF Tech Accelerator's framework (e.g. program model, organizational structure, proposed deep-tech topic areas), as well as give organizations interested in the NSF Tech Accelerator role the opportunity to feature their organization's key capabilities and expertise. The RFI response form is designed to capture both potential applicant interest and feedback. Please refer to Section 4.b Approach of the RFI.

Interested NSF Tech Accelerator applicants will need to determine whether they intend to serve as an NSF Tech Accelerator or participate as a research team to apply for funding. Organizations may not serve in both roles. Each NSF Tech Accelerator is expected to operate independently of the research teams they support and will not be permitted to apply for or hold an interest in any Stage 1: Design, Stage 2: Build or Stage 3: Scale research awards issued through any NSF Tech Accelerators, due to conflicts-of-interest.

25. Is an active Unique Entity ID and Sam.gov registration required for an RFI submission for those organizations interested in being considered to lead an NSF Tech Accelerator?

No, an active Unique Entity ID (UEI) and Sam.gov registration is not required for an RFI submission.

NSF Tech Accelerator applicants invited to Step 2 must be registered in the Federal Government's System for Award Management (SAM; sam.gov) prior to submitting a formal proposal. Refer to Section 4.d Eligibility of the RFI.

26. For NSF Tech Accelerator applicants, which include multiple organizations, are sub-contracts required to be in place at the time of RFI submission?

No, the NSF Tech Accelerator lead applicant is not required to have sub-contracts in place at the time of RFI submission.

Program Model

27. Can NSF elaborate on their vision for how the NSF Tech Accelerators will announce funding opportunities, evaluate applications, select awardees and monitor research team progress?

Once awarded, each NSF Tech Accelerator will be expected to assess their technology landscape to determine research topic areas to invest in for potential research innovation teams. In collaboration with NSF, each NSF Tech Accelerator will issue research funding opportunities under a selected research topic and manage the proposal review process to strategically invest in a portfolio of innovation teams. Additionally, the NSF Tech Accelerators will be responsible for providing oversight of funded research team performance and progress, including project deliverables, milestones and payment schedules of awarded teams. NSF anticipates providing NSF Tech Accelerators with programmatic guidance, templates and tools for implementing the program model and ensuring consistency across NSF Tech Accelerators. NSF does expect the NSF Tech Accelerator to coordinate external reviews to assist the NSF Tech Accelerator in funding the best research ideas and technologies.

28. Will NSF prescribe a standardized suite of NSF Tech Accelerator tools, especially training like they do for NSF Innovation Corps (NSF I-Corps?)

The NSF Tech Accelerators will have entrepreneurial services beyond the training that is available for NSF I-Corps. For more information visit our Entrepreneurial Services webpage.

29. Is NSF anticipating 18 total awards across Stage 1: Design, Stage 2: Build and Stage 3: Scale?

Using the program model, each NSF Tech Accelerator will assess the maturity of a given research topic and align it to the appropriate program model stage, e.g. Stage 1: Design, Stage 2: Build and/or Stage 3: Scale. For each selected research topic, an NSF Tech Accelerator may run Stage 1: Design (up to 10 teams awarded) and/or Stage 2: Build (up to five teams awarded) and/or Stage 3: Scale (up to three teams awarded), for a maximum of ~18 awards in a single research topic area. Progression between stages is not automatic, meaning that if a research topic is funded under Stage 1: Design, it does not automatically mean a Stage 2: Build will follow nor does it mean a funded research team will automatically progress from one stage to the next. Teams must apply and compete for funding under each stage as it becomes available. The final mix depends on community feedback via the RFI, NSF Tech Accelerator priorities and available funds.

30. Can a research team start at Stage 3: Scale award? Or do they have to start at Stage 1: Design to be eligible for Stage 2: Build?

Research teams are not required to have completed a prior stage in order to apply for any stage. Teams can apply directly for open Stage 2: Build and Stage 3: Scale funding opportunities without having completed prior stages, providing they meet the eligibility and capability requirements outlined in the funding opportunity released by an awarded NSF Tech Accelerator. For more information, refer to the NSF Tech Accelerators program model webpage.

31. What is an example of cost-share investment? Is the NSF Tech Accelerator expected to raise cost-share for its own operations, or only for Stage 3: Scale teams?

The NSF program team is still determining cost-share requirements, including funding amount, type and when the investment is required to be raised by the NSF Tech Accelerator for Stage 3: Scale awards. The CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 requires a 25% cost-share from non-federal entities.

NSF Tech Accelerators should expect to facilitate cost-share for Stage 3: Scale research teams, with specifics to be addressed in the Other Transaction Agreement Solutions Offering and Other Transaction Agreement. NSF encourages feedback via the RFI on cost-share approaches (e.g., cash, in-kind, purchase orders, venture commitments), timing (before award vs. during execution) and amount.

32. Would the NSF be open to the NSF Tech Accelerator providing specialized technical or research support to funded teams in addition to commercialization support/coaching. For example, technical review, systems engineering guidance, prototyping or validation support, access to labs/testbeds, manufacturing-readiness support, standards/interoperability expertise or AI/data support?

Each awarded NSF Tech Accelerator will be required to provide a baseline level of capabilities and support (aligned to the program model stages) to assist funded research teams to overcome commercialization barriers and advance technologies toward the market. The NSF Tech Accelerator is not prohibited from providing additional complementary services. Please refer to Section 3 NSF Tech Accelerator Qualifications and Performance Expectations of the RFI for more information.

33. Can NSF clarify the role of technical research and development within the Stage 1: Design, Stage 2: Build and Stage 3: Scale awards? Are teams expected to conduct substantive research and development to overcome technical barriers, or are these stages primarily focused on commercialization and market adoption?

The NSF Tech Accelerators' dynamic and flexible program model is designed to support the full lab-to-market life cycle. Technical research and development (R&D) are anticipated to occur in Stage 1: Design and some in Stage 2: Build. R&D is not anticipated in Stage 3: Scale, as this stage focuses on strengthening long-term commercialization strategies and building the operational capacity necessary for broad market adoption. For more information, refer to the NSF Tech Accelerators program model webpage.

34. How will support organizations for functions such as mentoring be evaluated and selected?

Each awarded NSF Tech Accelerator is expected to provide a range of entrepreneurial services, including mentorship to research teams. The NSF Tech Accelerator organization is responsible for providing these services, using internal capabilities and sub-contracting with other organizations and experts to fulfill these services.

35. Is there a sustainability business model expectation for NSF Tech Accelerators beyond the original NSF award? Does that need to be articulated in the proposal?

NSF Tech Accelerators are not required to become self-sustaining beyond the Other Transaction Agreement award period of performance.

36. The NSF Tech Accelerators seem to be focused on money raised to evaluate the stage level of a company/applicant. Why does NSF not use the NASA TRL system instead?

The initiative uses approximate Technology Readiness Level (TRL) ranges aligned to its program model stages (Stage 1: Design TRL 2–4; Stage 2: Build TRL 3–5; Stage 3: Scale TRL 4–7) to reflect deep-tech variability across topics. Ranges set a consistent baseline while allowing NSF Tech Accelerators to tailor maturity expectations to research topics.

37. Is there an expectation of standardization or streamlining/creating efficiencies in the selection process and entrepreneurial support programming among the four inaugural NSF Tech Accelerators and the subsequent NSF Tech Accelerators?

Yes. NSF Tech Accelerators operate under a common framework to include: program model (Stage 1: Design, Stage 2: Build, Stage 3: Scale), standardized milestone expectations, review and selection criteria and deliverable requirements that apply across all technology topics. NSF has also developed a unified entrepreneurial service (coaching and mentorship, customer discovery, commercialization resources) that funded teams will receive regardless of which NSF Tech Accelerator they belong to.

Technology Portfolio

38. Does each awarded NSF Tech Accelerator need to leverage advances in all of the listed technology areas (e.g., biotechnology, AI, robotics) or can they invest in one research topic, such as robotics, defense, space, healthcare, etc.?

There are no pre-determined technology/research focus areas that an awarded NSF Tech Accelerator must invest in. Future research topic investments will be determined based on a number of factors in collaboration between each awarded NSF Tech Accelerator and NSF. The RFI asks proposers to suggest deep-tech topic areas within their focus area of interest. It is up to the proposer to describe topics for which they can make compelling arguments.

39. Have or will NSF Tech Accelerators coordinate with other federal agencies that support the identified deep-tech topic areas?

Yes, NSF and each of the NSF Tech Accelerators will engage federal agencies as well as their broader deep-tech community.

NSF Tech Accelerator Topics and Research Topics

40. How many NSF Tech Accelerators will be set up*?*

In its inaugural year, NSF plans to establish four NSF Tech Accelerators (one per deep-tech topic area)—agricultural technology (NSF AgTech Accelerator), materials technology (NSF MaterialsTech Accelerator), ocean technology (NSF OceanTech Accelerator) and scientific instrumentation (NSF SciTech Accelerator).

NSF plans to use the information from the RFI process to help inform the establishment of future NSF Tech Accelerators. The deep-tech topic area that these future NSF Tech Accelerators will cover have not been determined. If an organization/individual has deep-tech topic area suggestions, ripe for the NSF Tech Accelerators' framework, please include them in an RFI response form submission.

41. What are the plans for adding new deep-tech topic areas in the future (if any)?

The NSF Tech Accelerators initiative plans to expand into other deep-tech topic areas ripe for the initiative's framework. These future deep-tech topic areas will be determined based on RFI responses received, selection criteria and alignment to NSF, NSF Directorate for Technology Innovation and Partnerships and administration priorities. If an organization/individual has deep-tech topic area suggestions that they would like to share with the NSF Tech Accelerators team, please submit a response to the RFI, using the RFI response form.

42. When NSF says "NSF Tech Accelerator topic" does "topic" refer to the four proposed deep-tech topic areas or is NSF sometimes referring to research topics that funding opportunities will be released?

In the context of the RFI, "NSF Tech Accelerator topic" (also known as deep-tech topic area) refers to the four proposed NSF Tech Accelerator deep-tech topic areas: AgTech, MaterialsTech, OceanTech and SciTech.

Awarded NSF Tech Accelerators will issue research funding opportunities aligned to research topics within their NSF Tech Accelerator deep-tech topic area.

43. Can a proposal focus on a research topic within the broader deep-tech topic area?

Yes, a proposal submitted in response to an NSF Tech Accelerator research funding opportunity could focus on one of the research topics identified by the NSF Tech Accelerator.

44. Is an NSF Tech Accelerator expected to focus on the entirety of a deep-tech topic area, or could an NSF Tech Accelerator focus on only specific aspects of the topic (for example only some aspects of OceanTech)?

Awarded NSF Tech Accelerators will issue research funding opportunities aligned to research topics within their deep-tech topic area. Research topics are based on the NSF Tech Accelerators' technology landscape analysis, including market need and saturation, projected technological growth, current industry investment and NSF, NSF Directorate for Technology Innovation and Partnerships and administration priorities. It would be impossible for an NSF Tech Accelerator to address the entirety of a deep-tech topic area. That is why NSF is seeking agile, capable organizations with the expertise and capabilities in each deep-tech topic area to help NSF identify, prioritize and invest in research topics ripe for this framework.

NSF Tech Accelerator Role: General

45. Should organizations interested in serving as an NSF Tech Accelerator anticipate an X-Labs-style 'Autonomy Factor Test' for the lead organization, or is NSF approaching lead independence differently here?

The NSF Tech Accelerators and NSF X-Labs are distinct initiatives. NSF Tech Accelerators must demonstrate independence in team selection and award management, with strict separation from funded teams and robust conflict-of-interest controls. The specific independence requirements are documented through the Other Transaction Agreement Solutions Offering and Other Transaction Agreement, rather than an NSF X-Labs autonomy test per se. However, awarded NSF Tech Accelerators are strategic partners with NSF to assist in advancing specific deep-tech topic areas and ensuring technologies enter the market. NSF is responsible for the oversight of the NSF Tech Accelerators by providing guidance and making key decisions.

46. How much flexibility exists in allocating responsibilities among NSF Tech Accelerator team members? Can roles and work packages be adjusted as the project evolves, or are they expected to remain largely fixed once the grant is awarded?

Each NSF Tech Accelerator will be awarded using an Other Transaction (OT) Agreement, not a grant. Under OTs, NSF can structure agreements with greater operational flexibility than standard grants. Prospective NSF Tech Accelerator applicants may propose team members with defined roles (e.g., portfolio management, recruiting, entrepreneurial services delivery, marketing and communications, partnerships, project management, contracting, legal, finance, compliance, evaluation and technical and commercialization expertise) and can request modifications as the program evolves, subject to NSF approval, research security checks and conflict-of-interest controls. This flexibility is intended to help NSF Tech Accelerators fill capability gaps and respond to market realities without compromising governance or integrity.

47. Are there preferred management/organizational models for the NSF Tech Accelerators?

NSF seeks agile, capable organizations that collectively cover commercialization, portfolio management, entrepreneurial services delivery, marketing and communications, partnerships, project management, contracting, legal, finance, compliance, evaluation and technical and

commercialization expertise in the topic. Strong applications show: (1) more than 51% of capabilities in-house as the lead, (2) a clear stage plan with milestones and deliverables, (3) partners for lab-to-market steps and (4) research security and conflicts-of-interest frameworks to preserve independence.

48. Is the lead organization of each NSF Tech Accelerator expected to manage the research funding as passthrough funding, or will NSF be providing those awards themselves?

Each awarded NSF Tech Accelerator will manage the funding as passthrough and will be responsible for the subcontracting and management of research teams under each research topic. There is no estimated operational budget, but rather we ask that interested NSF Tech Accelerator applicants tell NSF what they believe it will take to provide the day-to-day management and support the funded research teams. Budgets are not required in the response to the RFI. NSF will fund the operations of each NSF Tech Accelerator and the research funding to be issued via sub-contracts.

49. Can NSF confirm that the primary target beneficiary of NSF Tech Accelerator are startups, not researchers at academia), since the goal is to de-risk the pre-seed to Series A journey?

The primary target beneficiary of NSF Tech Accelerators is not just startups. We expect teams to have the right composition to deliver the expected deliverables, depending on whether it is a Stage 1: Design, Stage 2: Build or Stage 3: Scale research topic. That awarded team composition might include a startup, but it can also include academic, non-profit, industry and other partners.

Awards are open to startups, academics, nonprofits, industry or a team mix of all types, provided eligibility and conflict-of-interest safeguards are met. A company commercializing university intellectual property can apply to the appropriate program model stage under a research topic funding opportunity.

50. Over the six-year base period, does NSF expect each NSF Tech Accelerator to run one topic through Stage 1: Design, Stage 2: Build and Stage 3: Scale once, or should prospective NSF Tech Accelerator applicants plan for multiple research topics, cohorts, solicitations or concurrent funding cycles under the broader NSF Tech Accelerator deep-tech topic area?

The flexibility of the NSF Tech Accelerators' program model allows several of the scenarios described in the question. It could be a linear Stage 1: Design, Stage 2: Build and Stage 3: Scale execution, or it could be only Stage 1: Design, or only Stage 2: Build or only Stage 3: Scale. The research topics and their corresponding program model stage will be determined by each awarded NSF Tech Accelerator in partnership with NSF. Once a research topic has been recommended and approved by NSF, the NSF Tech Accelerator is expected to manage the research funding opportunities, proposal review, research awards and post-award management. It is expected the NSF Tech Accelerator will manage this process multiple times throughout its period of performance.

NSF Tech Accelerator Role: Eligibility

51. What kinds of organizations would be a good fit to serve as NSF Tech Accelerators?

NSF seeks agile, capable organizations with characteristics, outlined in Section 3 NSF Tech Accelerator Qualifications and Performance Expectations of the RFI, to operate an NSF Tech Accelerator. Mature

organizations, such as accelerators, incubators and others from venture capital involved in early-to-late-stage tech transfer, commercialization, portfolio management and investment—coupled with operational, project management, entrepreneurial services, including coaching expertise, communication and outreach, partnership development—are encouraged to apply.

52. Can a non-domestic entity submit a response to the RFI?

No, RFI responses are limited to domestic entities only. Refer to Section 4.d Eligibility of the RFI.

53. Can a non-domestic entity participate, lead, become partner or subcontractor for an NSF Tech Accelerator application?

No, RFI responses are limited to domestic entities only. Refer to Section 4.d Eligibility of the RFI.

54. Are there any citizenship restrictions on NSF Tech Accelerator key personnel, including dual citizenship?

Key personnel will be required to conform to NSF Research Security requirements.

55. Can only nonprofits and academic institutions serve as an NSF Tech Accelerator, or can a company stand up an NSF Tech Accelerator?

NSF seeks agile, capable organizations with characteristics, outlined in Section 3 NSF Tech Accelerator Qualifications and Performance Expectations of the RFI, to operate an NSF Tech Accelerator. Mature organizations involved in early-to-late-stage tech transfer, commercialization, portfolio management and investment—coupled with operational, project management, entrepreneurial services, including coaching expertise, communication and outreach, partnership development—are encouraged to apply.

Please note that interested NSF Tech Accelerator applicants will need to determine whether they intend to serve as an NSF Tech Accelerator or participate as a research team to apply for funding. Organizations may not serve in both roles.

56. Can National Labs serve as an NSF Tech Accelerator or as a partnering organization?

Federally funded research and development centers need to review their sponsorship agreement and speak to its Sponsoring Agency Contracting Officer to determine whether they are allowed to submit an RFI response to be considered an NSF Tech Accelerator (lead, sub-contractor or partner).

57. Are small organizations just getting started likely to have a chance over large universities to be an NSF Tech Accelerator?

NSF seeks agile, capable organizations with characteristics, outlined in Section 3 NSF Tech Accelerator Qualifications and Performance Expectations of the RFI, to operate an NSF Tech Accelerator. Mature organizations involved in early-to-late-stage tech transfer, commercialization, portfolio management and investment—coupled with operational, project management, entrepreneurial services, including coaching expertise, communication and outreach, partnership development—are encouraged to apply.

Please note that interested NSF Tech Accelerator applicants will need to determine whether they intend to serve as an NSF Tech Accelerator or participate as a research team to apply for funding. Organizations may not serve in both roles.

58. Would a government agency qualify to run an NSF Tech Accelerator? (An entity with a longstanding track record of investing and innovation with several accelerators and venture studios in the core areas of focus)

Eligibility is limited to responsible domestic sources and excludes foreign entities; the lead must be able to provide more than 51% of the required capabilities. The RFI does not specifically address government agencies as leads. Whether a particular governmental or quasi-governmental entity (federal, state, etc.) can serve as lead raises entity-specific legal questions—including inter-agency funding and appropriations constraints for federal entities—that must be resolved with NSF program staff and the Contracting Officer as well as with the entity's legal counsel.

59. Regarding the "more than 51%" of resources the NSF Tech Accelerator is expected to have, does that include having in-house labs, testing and prototyping resources?

The lead organization of the NSF Tech Accelerator must provide the majority (more than 51%) of the required capabilities (e.g., portfolio management, recruiting, entrepreneurial services delivery, marketing and communications, partnerships, project management, contracting, legal, finance, compliance, evaluation and technical and commercialization expertise.)

60. Is a company that is a U.S. company but has international locations eligible?

Yes, as long as the performers are physically located in U.S., they are eligible.

61. How do you think about individual vs. organizational capabilities? Suppose for example that a brand-new organization applies to this program, but its leadership team is composed of experienced individuals. Would that proposal be dismissed out of hand because it (the organization) has not existed for very long, or would you consider the experience brought by the leadership team?

A new organization will have to describe the experiences of its leadership team and more importantly, how it will provide all of the services outlined in the RFI.

62. If I submit a proposal as a university faculty member, what options are available to the proposed organization? Is the organization generally expected to be the university itself, or can proposals be submitted through a college, department, center or an independently formed organization?

The expected proposed organization would be the university itself. If there is an independently formed organization it could be considered as the proposed organization, but the RFI response would have to describe the relationship between the university and the independently formed organization and how they will deal with conflicts-of-interest between the two organizations.

NSF Tech Accelerator Role: Contract & Budget

63. Please clarify the amount of funding that NSF anticipates providing to each NSF Tech Accelerator.

NSF will fund each NSF Tech Accelerator's operational costs and provide the research and development investment for the research awards issued and managed by the NSF Tech Accelerator. If invited to Step 2 of the multi-step Other Transaction Agreement contract process, applicants will need to determine the operational costs to implement the program model and day-to-day engagement for the period of performance outlined in Section 4.c Period of Performance of the RFI.

64. What is the expected contract/grant mechanism?

NSF will use its Other Transaction Authority to issue an Other Transaction (OT) Agreement contract per 42 U.S.C. § 19116(1). An OT is neither a FAR-based procurement nor financial assistance, but another contracting mechanism available to NSF. For more information on the OT Agreement and award process refer to Section 4.a Other Transaction and Section b. Approach of the RFI.

65. Are NSF Tech Accelerator management, staffing, marketing, mentorship, legal, finance and evaluation costs allowable under the OT contract?

Yes, these are allowable NSF Tech Accelerator costs under the Other Transaction (OT) Agreement and are recognized as essential capabilities, expertise and components of a functioning NSF Tech Accelerator (e.g., portfolio management, recruiting, entrepreneurial services delivery, marketing and communications, partnerships, contracting, legal, finance, compliance, evaluation and technical and commercialization expertise). If invited to Step 2 of the multi-step OT contract process, NSF expects NSF Tech Accelerators to budget appropriately and justify these costs relative to the requirements and deliverables to be outlined in the Other Transaction Agreement Solutions Offering and OT Agreement.

66. Can NSF please confirm if any of these NSF Tech Accelerators have U.S. Government Distribution Statement (such as A, B, C or D) requirements?

The RFI and Other Transaction (OT) Agreement materials do not specify U.S. Department of War style distribution statements. Publication, data sharing and dissemination expectations will be defined in the OT Agreement consistent with NSF policy and the NSF Tech Accelerator's needs to recruit teams, share learnings and protect sensitive information (including proprietary submissions).

Conflict-of-Interest

67. What conflict-of-interest concerns does an NSF Tech Accelerator need to worry about? Since they will be selecting teams for award, will this make a given NSF Tech Accelerator ineligible for receiving awards from other NSF Tech Accelerators?

For a given topic, organizations must choose whether to serve as an NSF Tech Accelerator or to participate as a research team seeking funding; they may not do both.

If an organization is awarded an NSF Tech Accelerator, any personnel involved in the operation of that NSF Tech Accelerator may not apply for or receive research awards through any NSF Tech

Accelerator. Researchers elsewhere in that organization who have no role in the NSF Tech Accelerator remain eligible to apply for research funding through other NSF Tech Accelerators provided that no Organizational Conflicts-of-Interest (OCI) exist in those cases. Typical examples of OCIs and related safeguards are outlined in the NSF Other Arrangements/Transactions Guide, specifically in Section L: The OA/T Framework's Integrity & Anti-Corruption Safeguards.

68. Will research teams from an organization operating an NSF Tech Accelerator, including in a supporting role as a partner or subcontractor, be eligible for funding and support through the NSF Tech Accelerator?

NSF places strong emphasis on avoiding Organizational Conflicts-of-Interest (OCI). Therefore, any entities or individuals affiliated with an NSF Tech Accelerator awardee are not eligible to receive funding or support from the same NSF Tech Accelerator. However, those same entities or individuals may apply to other NSF Tech Accelerators, provided that no OCI exists in those cases. Typical examples of OCIs and related safeguards are outlined in the NSF Other Arrangements/Transactions Guide, specifically in Section L: The Other Arrangements/Transactions (OA/T) Framework's Integrity & Anti-Corruption Safeguards.

69. Can early-stage companies that have already received venture capital or other private investment apply to research funding opportunities issued by an NSF Tech Accelerator?

Organizations that have received other investments or funding can apply to NSF Tech Accelerator funding opportunities, provided that the NSF Tech Accelerator does not hold an interest in the applicant. Note that NSF Research Security and conflict-of-interest requirements must be enforced.

70. Are Institutions of Higher Education eligible to apply to serve as an NSF Tech Accelerator, or to participate as a partner or sub-contractor in operating an NSF Tech Accelerator?

Yes.

71. Would there be a prohibition on teams awarded through an NSF Tech Accelerator licensing technologies from an organization involved in operation of that NSF Tech Accelerator?

A research team, funded by an NSF Tech Accelerator, licensing a technology owned by that NSF Tech Accelerator would likely trigger a conflict-of-interest.

72. Can the NSF Tech Accelerator team take equity ownership in a research team? Will they be allowed to invest in companies or technologies that go through the NSF Tech Accelerator from their internal funds? Can NSF funds be used to invest in an investment portfolio, or any related activities?

No, each NSF Tech Accelerator is expected to operate independently of the research teams they support and will not be permitted to apply for or hold an interest in any research awards issued through any NSF Tech Accelerator. This is due to potential conflicts-of-interest in the research team award selection and the post-award phase.

may not use NSF funds, NSF-funded personnel time or any other resources provided under the Other Transaction Agreement to fund, capitalize, guarantee or otherwise support investment activities conducted for the benefit of the NSF Tech Accelerator's or any affiliated entity's proprietary investment portfolio.

73. Is the restriction against investing in teams that have received NSF Tech Accelerator research funding opportunity awards for the OT award period or indefinitely?

The timeframe will be clarified in the Other Transaction Agreement.

74. Can an organization operating an NSF Tech Accelerator, either as a lead or as a supporting partner/subcontractor, receive other research funding from NSF more broadly?

Yes, outside the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative, NSF Tech Accelerator awardees may receive other NSF/federal awards provided strict separation and conflict-of-interest (COI) are maintained. Acceptance of other agency awards is subject to each agency's rules and the NSF Tech Accelerator's COI framework.

75. For an organization that is selected to be an NSF Tech Accelerator, can they still run other accelerator programs they usually do or is that considered conflict-of-interest?

They may continue other programs if they maintain strict separation from NSF Tech Accelerator team selection and management and adhere to research security and conflict-of-interest policies.

76. Can you better define "strict separation"?

Strict separation refers to the organizational and personal safeguards to keep an NSF Tech Accelerator's selection and management of funded teams' objective and free of bias and unfair advantage. It addresses both Organizational Conflicts-of-Interest (OCI)—where an organization's other interests could impair its objectivity, skew selection criteria or create unequal access to information—and personal conflict-of-interest (COI) affecting individual staff or reviewers. At minimum, strict separation includes: 1) organizational firewalls between NSF Tech Accelerator staff and funded or affiliated teams; (2) prohibitions on financial or ownership interests in teams funded by the NSF Tech Accelerator; (3) independent, documented review/selection processes; (4) controlled information flows to prevent unequal access and (5) codified OCI/COI policies enforceable through the Other Transaction Agreement.

77. Can a business development person at an organization operating an NSF Tech Accelerator, either as a lead or as a supporting partner/subcontractor, split their time between supporting the NSF Tech Accelerator and supporting their other businesses, or do you require fully dedicated staff on an NSF Tech Accelerator?

Split roles may be acceptable if conflict-of-interest safeguards and information firewalls are robust and documented in the Other Transaction Agreement. Each NSF Tech Accelerator must demonstrate that staff with outside responsibilities cannot influence team selection/management.

78. Can you clarify how independently NSF Tech Accelerators must operate from the lead org? Can they entirely exist within the lead organization, with a dedicated operational team, or do they have to some additional level of independence?

NSF Tech Accelerators may operate within the lead organization with a dedicated operational team, provided strict separation and conflict-of-interest safeguards are enforced and codified in the Other Transaction Agreement.

Partnerships

79. Are NSF Tech Accelerator awards specific to companies with new technology in which NSF will support their commercialization? If so, are there any opportunities for existing accelerators to collaborate or be a partner with the NSF Tech Accelerator?

The RFI is not limited to companies with new technology. Existing accelerators are, in principle, eligible to serve as, or partner with, an NSF Tech Accelerator, as appropriate, provided conflicts-of-interest and other eligibility restrictions are met.

80. Will it be up to each NSF Tech Accelerator to find their own support organizations, or will it be done on a more centralized basis for all the accelerators?

Organizations interested in the NSF Tech Accelerator role are responsible for identifying and partnering to fill qualifications, capabilities and expertise, as outlined in the RFI. The lead organization must be able to provide more than 51% of the required capabilities, expertise and services. For additional information refer to Section 4.d Eligibility of the RFI.

81. What does NSF mean by external "partners?" Are partners allowed from academia and/or industry/private sector? What are the parameters of external partner involvement?

External partners can support either the NSF Tech Accelerator role (e.g., filling capability gaps) or the funded teams (e.g., specialized services/testbeds). Partnerships are encouraged but must pass research security and conflict-of-interest requirements. Organizations interested in the NSF Tech Accelerator role should define roles, responsibilities and controls in the proposals if invited to Step 2 of the multi-step Other Transaction Agreement contract process.

82. What other federally funded organizations are allowed to participate?

NSF and each of the NSF Tech Accelerators will engage federal agencies as well as their broader deep-tech community in their implementation efforts as appropriate. Federally funded research and development centers should consult their sponsoring agreements and Contracting Officers to determine eligibility as lead/partner/sub awardee. NSF will evaluate such roles for research security and conflicts-of-interest in the NSF Tech Accelerator Other Transaction Agreement Solutions Offering.

Research & Innovation Teams: General

83. How will the research teams be able to find NSF Tech Accelerators across the U.S.?

Each NSF Tech Accelerator will announce available research funding opportunities, which will also be posted on the NSF Tech Accelerator website. Once each NSF Tech Accelerator has been awarded

more research funding information will be provided. To receive the latest initiative updates, subscribe to the NSF Tech Accelerators email list and visit the initiative's website.

84. Will research teams need to have NSF and/or SBIR/STTR lineage?

There is no requirement for NSF and/or Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) lineage to be an NSF Tech Accelerator or to be a research team within the deep-tech topic areas.

85. What is the TRL needed for the research team to apply for funding from NSF Tech Accelerators?

The approximate Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) for each stage of the NSF Tech Accelerators program model are:

- Stage 1: Design – TRL 2-4
- Stage 2: Build – TRL 3-5
- Stage 3: Scale – TRL 4-7

86. Research teams are talked about, but also companies. To receive funding at any stage of the program model, do they need to be a legal entity?

In Stage 2: Build, funded research teams will be expected to create an entity. To be selected for Stage 3: Scale, interested applicants will need to have a legal entity formed.

Relationship between NSF Tech Accelerators & Other NSF TIP programs

87. How is the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative different from the NSF X-Labs Initiative?

The NSF Tech Accelerator initiative is focused on transforming basic research outputs, in deep-tech topic areas, into market-ready technologies. The NSF Tech Accelerators initiative invests in deep-tech NSF Tech Accelerators, who will then invest in innovation teams.

The NSF X-Labs is about accelerating research and development (R&D) to produce transformative platform technologies through dedicated, independent teams that can change entire technology sectors — but is not necessarily expected to take those technologies to market themselves.

NSF X-Labs will typically involve more resource-intensive R&D over a sustained period of time, whereas NSF Tech Accelerators are working to translate R&D outputs into market-ready technologies in typically a shorter time period than an X-Lab.

88. Will NSF Tech Accelerators work with NSF X-Labs?

We have been actively involved in the NSF X-Labs development as we have been developing the NSF Tech Accelerators. We are working to document and identify on-ramps and off-ramps with different programs within the NSF Directorate for Technology Innovation and Partnerships (NSF TIP) and potentially across NSF, and how they might fit with the NSF Tech Accelerators.

89. How do the NSF Tech Accelerators differ from the NSF Convergence Accelerator? Particularly the regional expansion, which feels quite similar to the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative.

NSF has sunsetted the NSF Convergence Accelerator program.

90. How is the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative different from the NSF Regional Engines program?

The NSF Regional Innovation Engines (NSF Engines) program is building and scaling regional innovation ecosystems nationwide. Each NSF Engine is powered by a broad coalition of private sector, regional and scientific leaders and organizations to accelerate breakthrough emerging technology research and development that drives growth and ultimately bolsters U.S. economic competitiveness and national security.

91. How is the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative different from the NSF SBIR/STTR program?

The NSF Small Business Innovation Research/Small Business Technology Transfer (NSF SBIR/STTR) program funds startups across a wide range of technical areas at the earliest stage of development. By contrast, in addition to small businesses, the NSF Tech Accelerators will also support academic and non-profit teams in specific deep-tech topic areas. For more mature technologies, the NSF Tech Accelerators will also provide larger amounts of funding for teams to scale their impact

92. How is the NSF Tech Accelerator model different from SBIR/STTR? Is the NSF Tech Accelerator model replacing the SBIR research model?

Different from the NSF Tech Accelerator initiative, the NSF Small Business Innovation Research/Small Business Technology Transfer (NSF SBIR/STTR) program funds startups across a wide range of technical areas. In addition to small businesses, the NSF Tech Accelerators will support academic and non-profit teams in specific deep-tech topic areas. For more mature technologies, the NSF Tech Accelerators will also provide larger amounts of funding for teams to scale their impact.

No, NSF Tech Accelerator is not replacing SBIR. NSF Tech Accelerators are complementary to SBIR/STTR and focus on stage-based translational funding in specific deep-tech topics.

93. Can NSF Tech Accelerators be utilized or considered as a source for Phase 3 funding for a previous NSF SBIR Phase 1 or 2 awardee?

Yes, potentially. NSF Tech Accelerators are not formally designated as NSF Small Business Innovation Research (NSF SBIR) Phase 3, but an NSF SBIR Phase 1 or 2 awardee whose technology aligns with one of the four inaugural deep-tech topic areas (AgTech, MaterialsTech, OceanTech, SciTech) could be well-positioned to compete as a funded team within an NSF Tech Accelerator.

94. How is the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative different from the NSF I-Corps program?

The NSF Innovation Corps (NSF I-Corps) program is an immersive, seven-week entrepreneurial education program that supports scientists and engineers to explore the commercial potential of technologies developed in university laboratories.

95. Can an NSF Tech Accelerator be a prerequisite for NSF I-Corps, or is this a complementary/parallel effort more focused on tech development as opposed to customer discovery?

NSF Tech Accelerators are not a prerequisite for the NSF Innovation Corps (NSF I-Corps) program. Teams may participate in NSF I-Corps before or during NSF Tech Accelerator engagement as appropriate.

96. How is the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative different from the NSF Tech Access: AI-Ready America program?

The NSF Tech Access: AI-Ready America (NSF AI-Ready America) is a nationwide effort specifically focus on boosting artificial intelligence readiness in every U.S. state and territory. NSF AI-Ready America will support activities to enable all Americans to be AI-ready: to understand, apply and create with artificial intelligence.

97. How does the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative fit in with the broader NSF TIP program ecosystem of NSF Regional Innovation Engines, NSF X-Labs, etc.? Is this for taking tech at a higher TRL to commercialization with the other programs as feeders?

NSF Tech Accelerators can select teams previously supported by NSF Regional Innovation Engines or NSF X-Labs and progress them to market via staged FOAs and commercialization services, while NSF Engines build regional ecosystems and NSF X-Labs push platform technology research and development.

External Efforts

98. How is the NSF Tech Accelerators initiative different from a more traditional incubator or accelerator?

Compared to traditional incubators and accelerators, the NSF Tech Accelerators offers a non-dilutive investment, longer development timelines and a wider range of flexible technology outcomes (including establishing non-profits). It also spans a wider Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs)/Application Readiness Levels (ARLs) range, reaching further back into the academic innovation pipeline and extending beyond the "valley of death" to the market. This allows the NSF Tech Accelerators to engage more organizations and innovators in the U.S. technology innovation enterprise.

99. Has NSF considered leveraging existing accelerator networks already established by federal agencies or stakeholders as opposed to creating new, potentially duplicative efforts?

NSF seeks to complement, not duplicate, existing networks and ecosystems by focusing on deep-tech translation with stage-gated NSF Tech Accelerators.