

# NSF EPSCoR Mid-Career Advancement (MCA) Funding Opportunity

## MCA Frequently Asked Questions *(ordered by popularity)*

1. The MCA has a "Target Date" of 7 Feb vs a Deadline. Can you explain this in more detail? (13)  
**A: A target date is not a strict deadline. It allows a bit of flexibility around that date. Contact a cognizant program officer for more information.**
2. Would a promotion to "Professor" during the project period influence the PI's ability to accept or continue an MCA award? (15)  
**A: No. If you applied while an associate professor and met eligibility requirements at the time of submission, then that is okay. Congratulations on your promotion!**
3. Could an Associate Professor apply in their 2nd year post-tenure for support in year 3?  
**A: No. The eligibility requirements state that you must be at the Associate rank for at least 3 years before applying. This is a solicitation-specific requirement and not flexible.**
4. What are the expectations for broader impacts in this solicitation? Should there be significant outreach as seems often expected in a CAREER or 'normal' NSF proposal? (7)  
**A: Broader impacts for the MCA may be more narrowly circumscribed in comparison to a normal core program proposal because the MCA is an award that will provide protected time so that you can concentrate on research and training. This is a program created to help scientists and engineers who have had constraints on their time or resources due to extensive service, teaching, administrative duties, or other activities.**
5. In the budget information in the proposal guidelines, it seems like the direct costs of \$100,000 in the budget are separate from a couple things including: (a) the financial/summer salary for the PI, (b) the 1-month support for the person or people who are mentoring the PI, and (c) travel support for the in-person meeting for the PI and one mentor. Is that correct that (a), (b), and (c) are all separate from the \$100,000 budget? And that indirect costs to the university are not included at all in the budget? (7)  
**A: Yes. You can ask for \$100K in direct costs. The indirect costs will be added on top by your institution. The one-month summer support for the partner, travel support for an in-person meeting, and 6.5-months of salary support are in addition to the \$100K direct costs allotment. Note these costs are for the entire 3 year award (not yearly amounts).**
6. Can the MCA budget include student/postdoc support? (8)  
**A: Yes. This would be included in the \$100K direct costs allotment.**
7. With a Feb 7 deadline on MCA proposals, is a start date for the proposed work of August 2022 too early or possible? (4)  
**A: NSF proposals are typically reviewed and returned within 6 months. Start dates can be discussed with the cognizant program officer should the proposal be recommended for an award.**
8. Do MCA proposals go through the typical peer review process or are they reviewed by program officers? (4)  
**A: MCA proposals are reviewed by the participating program to which they were submitted. The exact review process may differ slightly depending on the program/division/directorate. They are typically reviewed by a panel alongside other MCA proposals and may have ad hoc reviews for disciplinary expertise as needed.**

9. Are international institutions allowed to be partners? Are there any restrictions on specific countries we can collaborate with? (4)  
**A: International partners are allowed. Please read the [FAQ document](#) for more information on international partners.**
10. It seems preferable that your partner is at a different institution—how would it be viewed if your partner is at your home institution? (5)  
**A: It is not a requirement that the partner be at a different institution. In all cases you should justify your choice of partner and the mutually-beneficial synergistic relationship.**
11. Is it a positive/negative/neutral for this grant to support a sabbatical? (4)  
**A: An MCA award can result in a sabbatical-like experience (given the protected time made possible from the salary allotment), depending on how you structure that 6.5-months of support. In other words you could take a semester off (~4.5 months) plus 2 months of the summer (6.5 total months salary) in one year, or you could use 2 months of summer support for each of three years for a total of 6-months of support. It is up to you and your department how you structure your protected time.**
12. I know it's hard to predict the future, but do you expect that this proposal opportunity will run for the next couple of years? It sounds like you're expecting it to exist for a while but if the opportunity might "go away" then I might apply earlier. (4)  
**A: The MCA is a unique solicitation that targets a critical career stage and thus complements other NSF cross-directorate programs like GRFP and CAREER. Our hope is that the MCA becomes a long-standing NSF solicitation with all directorates participating, similar to those aforementioned programs. Until that happens, always keep your eyes open for revised/updated versions of the MCA to make sure your [research area is participating](#).**
13. How does previous and/or current NSF support impact the likelihood of an award? After a very long interval of writing unsuccessful NSF grants, I recently received a couple of awards. Does this recent success decrease the competitiveness of my proposal?  
**A: Whether you have current funds or not, the key is for you to demonstrate that *there will be substantial enhancement to your research and career trajectory, enabling scientific and academic advancement not likely without the MCA support.***
14. In choosing a partner, how would a senior or junior partner with similar expertise be viewed in terms of intellectual merit? How about a partner who has expertise of the same discipline as the PI?  
**A: When you choose a partner, it doesn't matter if they are senior or junior. It matters if the partnership is mutually beneficial and how that partnership will benefit you in terms of training, networking, etc. You should seek a partner who will be most beneficial for your future and then justify that choice.**
15. Is it a positive or a negative to have previously worked with the proposed partner?  
**A: We want to enable partnerships with people who would positively and significantly change the trajectory of your career. If you could put in a normal collaborative proposal to a core program (not the MCA) then you should do that; the MCA is a special solicitation, and the proposal should demonstrate how the award will enable scientific and academic advancement not likely to occur without MCA support.**
16. Can I apply for an MCA if I have an active CAREER award?  
**A: Yes, as long as you meet the eligibility requirements.**
17. Community college professors have less opportunities to do research. Can they apply with not many publications?  
**A: Yes, please do.**

18. If my proposed project is interdisciplinary and could fall in the Bio and Geo directorate, should we be reaching out to multiple program officers to find the best fit?  
**A: It's a good idea to reach out to program officers to find the best home for your proposal, especially if it is interdisciplinary.**
19. Who do we contact for questions?  
**A: All inquiries should be directed to [mca.info@nsf.gov](mailto:mca.info@nsf.gov). Visit [https://www.nsf.gov/bio/MCA\\_contacts.jsp](https://www.nsf.gov/bio/MCA_contacts.jsp) for a list of program officers who are members of the MCA Cross-Directorate Interest Group.**
20. I was not able to find the Civil, Mechanical and Manufacturing Innovation (CMMI) division in the participating programs in the NSF MCA website. So, other programs not listed on the website do not participate in this solicitation? (3)  
**A: The list of participating programs is found [here](#). It will be updated each year to include, we hope, more programs across all directorates of the NSF.**
21. What are the topics emphasized within engineering research? Are there any restrictions?  
**A: The Division of Industrial Innovation and Partnerships (IIP) in the Directorate for Engineering (ENG) is the only participating program in that directorate this year. IIP is seeking to support career advancement through projects that are aligned with the [Partnerships for Innovation \(PFI\)](#) program. The expectation is that projects will involve use-inspired applied research, technology development towards commercialization, and a significant industrial partnership component. Innovation and entrepreneurship have classically played a very small or no role in the professional development of mid-career faculty; the problem is further compounded by the lack of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in innovation, entrepreneurship, and access to capital markets. This is the overall challenge IIP is trying to address through its focused participation in the MCA program. For additional questions please contact a [cognizant program officer](#).**
22. The solicitation refers to "equivalent to professor" but I am not clear what that means. What about national labs, museums, or non-profits?  
**A: These may qualify, but *you* must have had an Associate Professor Equivalency appointment for at least 3 years. Equivalency is defined as meeting all of the following requirements: "(1) the employee has a continuing appointment that is expected to last for at least the duration of the grant; (2) the appointment has substantial research and educational and/or service responsibilities; and (3) the proposed project relates to the employee's career goals and job responsibilities as well as to the mission of the department or organization." The required Departmental Letter supplementary document must "affirm that the candidate's appointment is at a mid-career level equivalent to Associate status (with at least three years at that rank), and it must also clearly and convincingly demonstrate how the candidate's appointment satisfies all the above requirements of Associate Professor equivalency."**