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**Request for Pre-proposals
for Nebraska EPSCoR
FIRST AWARDS**

April 15, 2026

TO: Deans and Research Administrators (**please notify appropriate faculty**)

FROM: Matthew T. Andrews, Director, Nebraska EPSCoR

RE: Call for pre-proposals for Nebraska EPSCoR FIRST Award grant program
Deadline: 5:00 p.m. CDT, Friday, June 12, 2026

Nebraska EPSCoR is offering a competitive FIRST Award grant program to help Nebraska early career faculty members at colleges/universities that do not have Carnegie R1 status compete successfully for an NSF CAREER award. Therefore, faculty at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) are not eligible to apply. This program is funded by an NSF research infrastructure improvement grant to Nebraska EPSCoR. The FIRST Award grant is limited to \$40,000 for the funding period with a 25% matching requirement for a maximum \$50,000 award. Nebraska EPSCoR anticipates awarding approximately four grants. Each grantee is required to submit a CAREER grant proposal to the National Science Foundation (NSF) during or immediately after the end of the award period. Submission to another early faculty federal research grant program, in lieu of the NSF CAREER, requires permission from the Nebraska EPSCoR Director.

NSF states:

The CAREER program embodies NSF's commitment to encourage faculty and academic institutions to value and support the integration of research and education. Successful Principal Investigators will propose creative, effective research and education plans, developed within the context of the mission, goals and resources of their organizations, while building a firm foundation for a lifetime of contributions to research, education, and their integration.

All CAREER proposals should describe an integrated path that will lead to a successful career as an outstanding researcher and educator. NSF recognizes that there is no single approach to an integrated research and education plan but encourages all applicants to think creatively about the reciprocal relationship between the proposed research and education activities and how they may inform each other in their career development as both outstanding researchers and educators. These plans should reflect the proposer's own disciplinary and educational interests and goals, as well as the needs and context of his or her organization. Because there may be different expectations within different

disciplinary fields and/or different organizations, a wide range of research and education activities may be appropriate for the CAREER program.

Who may apply: Assistant Professors in a tenure-leading position in any college/university in Nebraska who are: a) in the first four years of their current appointment; b) *not* UNL or UNMC faculty; and c) eligible to apply for an NSF CAREER grant during the award period can apply.

Type of eligible project: Any project that could qualify for support by a National Science Foundation standard research grant is eligible for a FIRST Award.

Match requirement: An award amount is limited to \$40,000 and requires a 25%, non-federal match. The match can be provided as cash, such as start-up funds or departmental support, and/or *documented* in-kind release from teaching. **Exactly how the match is being provided should be clearly stated in the department chair's letter of endorsement and in the budget justification.** *No Indirect Costs are allowed.*

Duration: FIRST Awards will be granted for a period starting December 1, 2026, and ending November 30, 2027.

Selection process: Selection is a two-step process.

In the first step, all pre-proposals will be reviewed by a grant subcommittee. The grant subcommittee will be composed of members of Nebraska's scientific community but not necessarily experts in the field of each proposal; therefore, use language that is understandable to those with general knowledge of the area. Based on the merit review of the pre-proposal, a group of finalists will be invited to prepare a CAREER-like proposal. It is anticipated that approximately ten finalists will be invited to prepare an NSF CAREER-like proposal to be submitted in early September.

In the second step, the received CAREER-like proposals will be reviewed using NSF proposal review criteria by three external experts in the field. The Nebraska EPSCoR Committee will select FIRST Award recipients by considering the external merit reviews.

Pre-proposal content: The pre-proposal must be prepared using font size 11 or greater with one-inch margins. The pre-proposal should consist of the following:

1. Budget:

Attach a completed *Nebraska EPSCoR Budget and Approval Form* available from our web site at <https://epscor.nebraska.edu/programs/forms> (the form has been recently updated, so please check the web site to ensure that you are using the most current version). This form will serve as your cover sheet. *The pre-proposal budget will provide an expenditure plan for the twelve-month budget (EPSCoR funds plus match) of the FIRST Award.* Faculty salary cannot be part of the FIRST Award budget; however, no more than one month summer salary will be allowed for Nebraska's small universities or colleges whose main focus is teaching and who have an annual institutional research expenditure of less than \$8 million. Be sure that **ALL** signatures (PI, Dept. Chair, match approval, institutional

approval) and match account numbers appear on the form. No indirect costs or foreign travel costs are allowed.

2. Body of the Pre-proposal:

- a. Main body.** The main body, including references, may not exceed **six pages**. It should contain the following:
 - i) a section describing the research,
 - ii) a section stating its significance and intellectual merit,
 - iii) a section describing the educational plan and how research and education will be integrated,
 - iv) a section addressing the planned FIRST Award activities and a description of how these activities will better position the applicant to develop the CAREER proposal,
 - v) a budget justification section for the FIRST Award activities. Other sections may be included as necessary. Any citations should be included in the six-page limit.
- b. Biographical sketch:** A **biographical sketch** that has been prepared according to NSF layout specifications but with a three-page maximum must be included. It should also list the PI's current grants.
- c. Letter of endorsement:** A letter from the appropriate department chair or dean must be included. The letter should include the following:
 - i) attest that the PI meets the necessary qualifications for the FIRST Award,
 - ii) describe how this grant would enhance the competitiveness of the PI,
 - iii) demonstrate an understanding of, and a commitment to, the PI's plan for the effective integration of research and education, and
 - iv) **clearly describe** how the 25% matching requirement is being provided.

Submission:

1. The pre-proposal must be submitted electronically no later than **5 p.m. CDT, Friday, June 12, 2026**. Pre-proposals will be submitted through a link on the Nebraska EPSCoR web site (<https://epscor.nebraska.edu/proposals>) for the FIRST Award application. This link will take you to a web site for our proposal collection provider (Cvent). **Please note: Your budget, pre-proposal, bio sketch, letter of endorsement, and budget justification must be submitted as one PDF file not exceeding a maximum of 10 MB. Contact the EPSCoR Office (epscor@nebraska.edu or 402-472-8946) if you have any problems or questions. All electronic or copied signatures submitted on the application form will be treated as original signatures.**

Faculty selected to develop a CAREER-like proposal will be notified by mid-July. Full CAREER-like proposals will be due to Nebraska EPSCoR in early September. More detailed instructions will be provided to those faculty selected as finalists.