

Dear Colleague:

Are you interested (even slightly) in being a Rotating Program Officer/Program Director (aka Rotator) in SBE?

First things first:

What is a rotator? It's a temporary position as an NSF Program Officer (PO). Rotators typically serve terms of 2-3 years and work alongside permanent POs, doing pretty much everything the permanent POs do. Rotators in SBE work on an equal footing with permanent POs in making all programmatic decisions, and NSF does not distinguish between the two types of POs on its web pages or solicitations. For all practical purposes, rotators are all-in.

What do rotators do? As a rotator, you'd help manage the proposal review process. This involves lining up ad hoc reviewers for proposals, recruiting panelists, checking for conflicts of interest, assigning panelists to proposals, leading panel discussions, deciding (with lots of help) which proposals to fund, and working with NSF staff to make award recommendations. Those recommendations directly influence the trajectory of research nationwide. Additionally, rotators have frequent opportunities for outreach, to develop new solicitations, and to run "special" programs, which could be programs/solicitations that cross established programs in SBE or across multiple Directorates at NSF.

What do we look for in a rotator? We seek individuals who have relevant topical expertise, are open-minded, enjoy working in a collaborative setting, are comfortable learning new systems (both government bureaucracy and government technology), and would like to serve the community of Principal Investigators (PIs) and help shape future directions in our sciences. It helps to have experience as an NSF panelist or PI, but that's not required. Experience as a journal editor is also helpful, though not required. Note that we don't really care if you're famous or from an R-1 institution with a large, well-funded lab. In fact, we value POs who bring diverse perspectives, both personal (gender identity, race, ethnicity, disability, career stage) and institutional (EPSCoR state or territory, small college, primarily undergraduate institution, HBCU or other minority-serving institution, NGO).

Would I need to give up my current lab and research? No, but you will need to scale back to provide sufficient time for your new duties at NSF as the PO position at NSF is a full-time 12-month job. POs are permitted to spend about 13% of their time to pursue "Independent Research and Development" (IR/D), to maintain scholarly activity and continue advising current students. There's a lot of flexibility in how to take that time but note that NSF work is year-round and summers are busy due to fiscal year close-out. In addition, funds are available for trips to your home institution, to attend conferences, and other professional development.

What would I get out of it? You'd have the opportunity to impact the direction of science, serve your community in a new way, learn about and help develop new funding initiatives, gain a broader perspective of your own discipline and other sciences, and gain first-hand experience in how compelling proposals are crafted. The NSF also offers opportunities for professional development/leadership training.

Why would my institution agree to this? All institutions have different interests but in general they view a rotation at NSF as professional development. You'll return with all kinds of new insights about funding opportunities, improved skills in proposal writing, and the ability to help your colleagues secure NSF funding. As a practical matter, NSF has multiple appointment types to cover most of your salary and benefits, which could allow your institution to hire someone else to do part of your job while you are at NSF (e.g., teach).

What about timing? Although most rotators start in the late summer, start time is negotiable. But it's nice to start with a cohort.

Do I need to be a US citizen? No, but you must be a permanent resident (green card holder) or refugee and demonstrate that you are seeking US citizenship. If you are not a U.S. citizen, please be sure to submit the signed [affidavit](#) with your application.

Do I need to move to the DC-area? In BCS, all program officer positions are "telework eligible" (not fully remote). Under NSF's current maximum telework policy, you need to be onsite four days per two-week pay period; 5 days per two-week pay period if you want to have a dedicated office. While some rotator POs choose to re-locate to the DC area, others choose to travel to Alexandria to meet the telework requirements.

The ad lists three types of appointments (Intergovernmental Personnel Act; Temporary Excepted Service; and Visiting Scientist, Engineer, and Educator). What's the difference? This isn't easy to answer in a sentence or two. There is some explanation of this (and other common questions) at the NSF webpage for [Rotator Programs](#). We also encourage you to ask questions about the different possible appointment types during your interview.

If I'm interested in being a rotator, what's the first step? Contact the Program Officer listed in the ad. Or contact ANY PO at NSF if you know someone else. It's always good to get multiple viewpoints. If you and NSF decide to proceed, the interview process is straightforward and carried out over Zoom.

What's the difference between a Program Officer and a Program Director? Nothing really. They are usually used interchangeably at NSF.