

NSF Career-Life Balance Initiative
Private-Sector Announcements Factsheet
September 26, 2011

The National Science Foundation's (NSF) Career-Life Balance Initiative is a 10-year strategy to promote greater workplace flexibility for its grant recipients in an effort to reduce the dropout rate of women researchers. As a part of this effort, NSF will expand a number of successful policies, including ones that will allow researchers to delay or suspend their grants to care for newborn or newly-adopted children or fulfill other family obligations.

Though significant, these efforts represent only one step in the pathway towards ensuring that the Nation's science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) workforce benefits from the full range and diversity of its talent. As First Lady Michelle Obama has noted, further breaking down the barriers to this goal will require an "all-hands on deck" approach.

In response to the First Lady's call, and in addition to NSF's new initiative, the Administration is announcing two additional initiatives and several private partners have also come forth to signal their commitment to ensuring that America's women and girls are engaged, supported, and retained along their path to becoming the Nation's future innovators.

Additional Administration Efforts Announced in Conjunction with the NSF Career-Life Balance Initiative

Recognizing Exceptional Early-Career Science and Engineers

The White House today announced the latest winners of the Presidential Early Career Awards for Scientists and Engineers to 94 researchers. The award is the highest honor bestowed upon science and engineering professionals in the early stages of their independent research careers. The awards, established by President Clinton in 1996, are given to those early-career researchers who have demonstrated their pursuit of innovative research at the frontiers of science and technology and their commitment to public service as demonstrated through scientific leadership, public education, or community outreach. Winning scientists and engineers have received research grants for up to five years to further their studies in support of critical government missions.

Providing Women and Girls with Talented STEM Role Models

Designed to spark the interest of girls in grades 6-12 through engagement with women-scientist role models at the top of their fields, the Women in STEM Speakers Bureau deploys top Administration female STEM specialists to roundtable discussions with students across the country. This initiative capitalizes on the existing travel schedules of high-level Federal scientists and works closely with non-profit and community-based partners to reach a wide variety of students in diverse communities across the nation. Initial participants in the bureau include some of the amazing women role models of the Obama Administration: EPA Administrator, Lisa Jackson; DARPA Director, Regina Dugan; NSF Deputy Director, Cora Marrett; Department of Defense CIO, Teri Tekai; NASA Deputy Administrator, Lori Garver; and USDA Undersecretary for Research, Economics, and Education, Catherine Woteki.

Private Commitments to Engage and Support Women and Girls in STEM Disciplines

Complementing the NSF initiative and the programs cited above, many private-sector institutions are supporting or launching related efforts to increase workplace flexibility and encourage women in STEM fields.

Answering the First Lady's Call to Improve Workplace Flexibility for America's Scientists and Engineers

Academic institutions are invaluable incubators of scientific discovery and innovation. In response to First Lady Michelle Obama's call to action, the many universities represented by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities and the Association of American Universities have submitted a letter, agreeing to work with NSF to look for ways that their institutions can do more to develop, support, and promote more flexible work and learning environments for those in the STEM fields.

Private/Public Partners Expand Program to Support Women Early along the Path to STEM Careers

Training teachers in the methods and strategies proven to engage women and girls in the sciences and assist them through early transitions in their path to becoming a STEM professional is an important step in diversifying the STEM workforce. The National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity is announcing the expansion of The STEM Equity Pipeline™ to include new STEM Equity Teacher and Counselor Training. The programs serve secondary education instructors, administrators, counselors and community college faculty and staff. The professional development and resources are designed to build the capacity of educators to increase the participation, retention, and transition of women and girls in STEM-related programs of study at the high school and community college level with the ultimate goal of their entering a STEM career. The STEM Equity Pipeline™ secured over \$1.4 million through the National Science Foundation Advanced Technology Education program, Texas Instruments Foundation, Motorola Solutions Foundation, the Boone Family Foundation, and the Women of TI Fund (called High Tech High Heels Fund); this is a true public/private partnership. The program is being conducted in the Dallas/Fort Worth area at Richardson Independent School District; Berkner STEM Academy; Plano School District; Dallas Independent School District; Chicago, IL-area at U-46 School District in Elgin; and in Baltimore, MD, with Baltimore County Community College.

National Organization for Women in Science to Identify and Promote Ideal Characteristics of the STEM Workplace

The Association for Women in Science (AWIS) is launching a new initiative to identify and promote characteristics of the ideal STEM workplace. By comparing the successes and challenges across government, industry, and academia, AWIS will work with the scientific community and government agencies to implement practical, lasting changes that promote gender parity and stop persistent leaks in the STEM pipeline. In particular, this effort will bring together members of each community to focus on barriers to retention, re-entry, and re-training of women STEM professionals.

Connecting Local STEM Women Professionals with STEM Organizations Serving Girls

Responding to national data concerning the lack of women in science and engineering, the National Girls Collaborative Project is leveraging their collaborative network of girl-serving STEM programs, industry partners, professional organizations, and institutions of higher education to implement the FabFems Project, an online participatory platform designed to facilitate the important connection between young women and STEM female professionals during critical transition points in the career pathway. Funded by the Motorola Solutions Foundation and NSF, the FabFems Project creates a national directory of accessible female STEM professionals to be connected with young women and girl-serving STEM organizations. These FabFems will exemplify the pathway to STEM and interact with students and educators through STEM activities, speaker engagements, field trips, and more. A participatory cyberlearning platform will help facilitate role model interactions where teams of girls, educators, and FabFems can collectively build and use STEM curriculum together. This inquiry-based learning approach creates a symbiotic learning relationship between all participants.

Through positive role model interaction and increased interest in collaborative STEM projects, the FabFems Project intends to broaden the participation of females in the STEM pipeline and to increase the retention of female professionals in STEM fields and careers.

Expanding Opportunities for Hands-on Engagement in STEM

Introducing girls to STEM through interactive activities is a critical first step in securing and supporting our nation's supply of women in the STEM pipeline. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) will be expanding its commitment and building on its innovative grassroots STEM programming by expanding local efforts on a national scale. Over the next year, AAUW will be replicating successful local programs developed and facilitated by branches across the country. These include Tech Savvy — hands on workshops that allow 6th to 9th grade girls to explore STEM careers — and Tech Trek, a science and math overnight camp designed to develop interest, excitement, and self-confidence in young women going into 8th grade. These efforts expand upon AAUW's recent announcement of \$1.3 million in grants to support STEM scholars and community-based projects for the coming fiscal years and an upcoming report on the role of America's community colleges in educating America's future innovators.