

## **NERRS Science Collaborative 2016 RFP Feedback and Response Summary**

The NERRS Science Collaborative is an adaptive program and we work to continually refine and adjust our approach to better meet our goal of delivering highly relevant, usable science that addresses coastal management problems important to the reserves. Our adaptive approach is driven by feedback from program participants and the NERRS, and direction provided by NOAA.

This document summarizes a few key items related to our 2016 requests for proposals (RFP) feedback process:

1. What the 2016 RFP feedback process entailed;
2. A feedback and response table that summarizes what we heard and how we propose to adapt the 2017 RFPs in response; and
3. A summary of the review and decision making process for the research and integrated assessment RFP, to further clarify some of the details of this process.

### **2016 RFP Feedback Process**

We invited feedback on the 2016 Science Collaborative RFPs using three different avenues:

1. Reserve sector reports to the Science Collaborative Advisory Board;
2. Written responses via an anonymous, web-based feedback form; and
3. Comments and questions via a feedback webinar for RFP participants and all NERRS sectors.

#### **NERRS sector reports to the Advisory Board**

NERRS sector representatives were invited to share a summary of the feedback they collected from their sector colleagues with the Science Collaborative Advisory Board at the Board's September 2016 annual meeting.

#### **Web-based feedback form**

Participants in the 2016 Research and Integrated Assessment and the Science Transfer competitions, along with all of the reserve sectors were invited by email to provide feedback using an anonymous, web-based form. We received 39 responses; of those that self-identified, approximately half were reserve staff and most had participated in at least one Science Collaborative competition during the past two years.

#### **Feedback webinar**

The same group that received the feedback form was also invited to participate in a webinar, held October 3, 2016. On the webinar, the 12 attendees (largely reserve staff) were invited to elaborate on the feedback we had received so far and share additional input and feedback.



## Feedback

Overall, the responses indicated that the proposal application purpose, requirements, and submission processes were clear and that the adaptations made to the competitions based on last year's feedback were helpful. Most of the proposal development resources were rated as being useful, though as the comments we received pointed out, there are still opportunities for further refinement to increase utility to applicants.

The feedback also made clear that there are other opportunities for improvement. For example, there is a need for better clarity on how the Science Collaborative focus areas were identified by NOAA, how and why reserve management needs are collected, and how the focus areas and management needs inform the research and integrated assessment RFP and proposal review process. The research and integrated assessment review and decision making process is an area where we received especially significant feedback. As a result, we have developed the review summary attached at the end of this document to share these details in a new format with the hope that it will provide additional clarity.

## Proposed Adaptations

The table that follows summarizes the commonly reported feedback we received and our proposed adaptations for both the 2017 Research and Integrated Assessment and the Science Transfer competitions.

We will be sharing and discussing these proposed adaptations with each of the sectors at the 2016 NERRS Annual Meeting. You are also invited to provide additional input by email ([nerrs-info@umich.edu](mailto:nerrs-info@umich.edu)) or phone (Melissa Zaksek: 734.474.3302, Maeghan Brass: 734.763.0727).



## 2016 NERRS Science Collaborative Research/Integrated Assessment RFP Feedback and Response

Observation/Feedback	Proposed Response
<p><u>Proposal requirements—Science Collaborative focus areas:</u> It is unclear how the Science Collaborative focus areas were identified.</p>	<p>The focus areas are determined by NOAA and are based on the reserve system’s strategic plan. We will explain this more clearly in the 2017 request for proposals.</p>
<p><u>Proposal requirements—reserve management needs:</u> It is unclear how the reserve management needs are identified.</p>	<p>Each reserve manager provides these to NOAA after consulting with their reserve staff. We will explain this more clearly in the 2017 request for proposals.</p>
<p><u>Proposal requirements:</u> The request for proposals does not indicate whether social science research proposals are weighted equally to natural science proposals.</p>	<p>We will add language to the 2017 request for proposals that explicitly states the relevance and equal weighting of social science research and ensure that this is clear in guidance to proposal writers, reviewers, and the review panel.</p>
<p><u>Proposal requirements:</u> The pre-proposal development process was extensive and time-consuming.</p>	<p>We believe that the pre-proposal development process is as streamlined as it can be to also have sufficient detail for reviewers to make good decisions about which subset will advance in the competition. We will, however, revisit the requirements with an eye to further potential streamlining.</p>
<p><u>Proposal requirements—end user engagement:</u> It would be helpful to have more specific guidance on how to demonstrate end user engagement and support at the pre- and full proposal stages.</p>	<p>We will provide more detailed guidance in the 2017 request for proposals about how to demonstrate end user engagement in a proposal. This same information will be shared with panelists and reviewers to ensure congruence between the two processes – writing and proposal review.</p>
<p><u>Proposal requirements:</u> The request for proposals could do a better job of defining what constitutes a valid research question.</p>	<p>We will provide more detail in the 2017 request for proposals about what a research question must entail.</p>

<p><u>Proposal requirements—reserve manager assessment:</u> It seems unnecessary for all managers to submit an assessment for proposals that are large initiatives across many reserves.</p>	<p>We will consult managers to identify a clear approach for receiving their input on proposals that engage many reserves.</p>
<p><u>Proposal development support:</u> While the research/IA decision tree was somewhat helpful in determining project type, it can still be challenging to identify the best project type for an idea.</p>	<p>We encourage all applicants to give us a call to get clarification on questions about project type. We will be even more explicit in the 2017 request for proposals about encouraging applicants to give us a call to help determine the best project type for a project idea.</p>
<p><u>Review process—more detail and clarity:</u> The review process is not sufficiently detailed and understood. More specifically, there is a lack of clarity about how exactly the reserve manager proposal assessment comes into play; who makes decisions and when; how each piece of the review process counts towards overall scores/ranking; and if/what other factors come into play. It would also be helpful to know how many proposals were received and how many advanced to each stage and, generally, who comprised the panels.</p>	<p>As in the past, we will continue to provide an overview of the review process in the RFP guidelines, including the link to a document summarizing this information in another format, similar to that shared at the end of this document.</p>
<p><u>Review process—panel summaries:</u> While the 2016 panel review summaries were largely an improvement over those provided in 2015, some lacked sufficient detail.</p>	<p>We will continue to work with panelists to provide applicants with more detailed summaries of the panel’s discussion of their proposal.</p>

<p><u>Review process—presentation to the panel:</u> While the presentation format has improved since 2015, there is room for further improvement, particularly to avoid overburdening end users and maximizing the intent of this step of the review process.</p>	<p>The goal of the team presentations to the panel is to confirm strong end-user engagement in proposal development and project implementation, in addition to allowing the panel to ask clarifying questions of proposing teams. We agree that we could improve this step. We will reevaluate this requirement, thinking more about its purpose and possible adjustments to ensure we achieve our goal while being conscious of everyone’s time and project teams’ relationships with their end users.</p>
<p><u>Review process—projects recommended for funding:</u> The Science Collaborative should consider including additional proposal evaluation criteria to ensure that funding is distributed more diversely across regions, reserves, and topical areas.</p>	<p>To date, proposal evaluation criteria have focused on the following: relevance to and support from at least one reserve; quality of collaboration; and quality of science. In rare cases where two or more proposals are ranked equally, we consider regional representation, topical diversity, or a reserve’s Science Collaborative funding history. We consulted the Science Collaborative Advisory Board regarding whether to consider other factors such as regional, reserve, or topical diversity in future competitions. The Board encouraged a continued emphasis on supporting development of the best science/ collaboration, i.e., maintain the status quo, but recommended that the Science Collaborative provide more detail about the review process and panel composition to the System.</p>

## 2016 NERRS Science Collaborative Science Transfer RFP Feedback and Response

Observation/Feedback	Proposed Response
<p><u>Proposal requirements:</u> Consider thinking outside of the box a bit more about the types of projects eligible for Science Transfer funding.</p>	<p>We are considering how to expand the Science Transfer opportunity and will be discussing this with the sectors at the NERRS annual meeting.</p>
<p><u>Awareness of the opportunity:</u> Greater awareness of this opportunity in advance would increase the likelihood of response.</p>	<p>We will continue to make an effort to give the reserves a “heads-up” regarding the timing of this opportunity through program updates and other communications. We will also remind the reserves of this opportunity at the NERRS annual meeting and also plan to send a reminder to the reserves ahead of the proposal deadline.</p>
<p><u>Review process—panel summaries:</u> Feedback from the review panel could be more informative.</p>	<p>As we indicated we will do for the Research and Integrated Assessment competition, we will continue to work with panelists to provide applicants with more detailed summaries of the panel’s discussion of their proposal.</p>

## Research and Integrated Assessment Proposal Review Process

*Proposals are considered independently and reviewed based on their own merit. Only in the case where two or more proposals are ranked equally are regional representation, topical diversity, or a reserve's funding history considered.*

Decision Point & Emphasis	Inputs	Who Approves
<b>1. Pre-proposal is Accepted</b> <i>Does the pre-proposal comply with the RFP requirements?</i>	RFP requirements	<a href="#">Science Collaborative Team</a>
<b>2. Invitation to Submit a Full Proposal</b> <i>How well does the pre-proposal respond to the evaluation criteria in the RFP?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-proposal evaluation criteria</li> <li>• Reserve manager assessments</li> <li>• <a href="#">Review Panel</a> written reviews</li> <li>• <a href="#">Review Panel</a> discussion &amp; ranking</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Science Collaborative Team</a>  NOAA Program Officer
<b>3. Full Proposal is Accepted</b> <i>Does the proposal comply with the full proposal requirements?</i>	Full Proposal Requirements	<a href="#">Science Collaborative Team</a>
<b>4. Invitation to Present Full Proposal</b> <i>How well does the full proposal respond to the evaluation criteria in the full proposal requirements?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposal evaluation criteria</li> <li>• Reserve manager assessments</li> <li>• <a href="#">Technical expert</a> written reviews</li> <li>• <a href="#">Review Panel</a> discussion of written technical reviews</li> <li>• <a href="#">Review Panel</a> recommendations</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Science Collaborative Team</a>  NOAA Program Officer
<b>5. Proposal is Recommended for Funding</b> <i>What proposals best respond to the evaluation criteria in the full proposal requirements?</i>	Inputs from step 4, plus the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team presentations to the panel</li> <li>• <a href="#">Review Panel</a> discussion of proposals &amp; presentations</li> <li>• <a href="#">Review Panel</a> ranking and recommendations</li> <li>• Available funds</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Science Collaborative Team</a>  NOAA Program Officer

## Research and Integrated Assessment Proposal Review Process: Summary of Participants

The following table summarizes the roles of each of the major groups contributing to the review process:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>NERRS Science Collaborative Team</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>In consultation with the NOAA Program Officer, the NERRS Science Collaborative Team accepts pre- and full proposals, manages the review process, and makes funding recommendations to NOAA.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Review Panel</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The review panel is engaged throughout the entire review process, including both the pre- and full proposal stages. The review panel conducts written reviews at the pre-proposal stage. At both stages of the competition, the panel convenes to discuss and rank proposals, and develops summaries of their discussion of each proposal.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Technical Experts</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Technical experts complete written reviews of the full proposals which inform the panel review process. These technical experts do not include any of the review panel members.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>NOAA Program Officer</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The NOAA Program Officer actively advises the Science Collaborative Team on the review process, observes all panel meetings and discussions to ensure a fair and impartial process is maintained, and facilitates NOAA approval of funding.</i></p>

### Who are the panelists and technical experts? What are their qualifications?

The Science Collaborative invites a balanced set of estuarine and collaboration experts, including scientists, program leaders, practitioners, and consultants to participate in the panel and technical expert review processes. Prior to participating in the review process, panelists participate in a panel preparation webinar, during which the unique qualities and characteristics of the NERRS and the goals and objectives of the NERRS Science Collaborative are shared and discussed. Panelists with conflicts of interest in a specific proposal do not participate in the review, discussion, or ranking process for that proposal.

In order to preserve their impartiality, we do not disclose the names of individual panelists or reviewers. Generally, panelists and technical experts are:

- Credentialed practitioners from partner organizations and agencies, typically with experience conducting collaborative research, e.g., NEP, Sea Grant, IOOS, NOAA, USGS, USFWS, The Nature Conservancy, etc.
- Academic experts in estuarine science and/or collaboration, typically from applied research programs and institutes
- Geographically diverse, e.g., all reserve regions are represented on the review panel



## Science Collaborative Proposals: 2010-2016

