

National Estuarine Research Reserve System Science Collaborative

2020 Request for Collaborative Research Pre-Proposals Q&A Record

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Contents

Eligibility	2
Collaboration and End User Engagement.....	2
Reserve Engagement.....	4
Review & Selection Process.....	5
Budget	7
Other	8

Eligibility

Q: Can Science Collaborative project funds be used to support federal employees and/or their travel?

A: NERRS Science Collaborative funds may **not** be used to support salary or travel for federal employees; however, federal employees may participate as unfunded project team members.

Q: Are for-profit entities eligible recipients for Science Collaborative funding? Can they serve as the fiduciary institution?

A: Yes, private and for-profit firms are eligible recipients for Science Collaborative funding, so long as they are working in partnership with one or more reserves as described in the RFP. They may serve as the fiduciary institution. See [team roles reference](#) for how we define fiduciary institution and other project roles.

Q: Is funding restricted to work performed on reserves?

A: NERRS Science Collaborative projects are not required to be located within the physical boundaries of a National Estuarine Research Reserve, or necessarily within a reserve's watershed. However, projects must be directly related to at least one reserve, address at least one or more reserve management need, and must have the full support of the relevant reserve manager(s), as demonstrated in the reserve manager proposal assessment(s).

Collaboration and End User Engagement

Q: Are the National Estuarine Research Reserves themselves appropriate end users?

Q: If our reserve is involved as a collaborator and lead reserve, are we also an end-user?

A: Reserve staff have played a variety of roles in Science Collaborative projects, including serving as project, technical or collaborative lead, providing critical contributions to the technical work, and participating as an end user representative and project advisor. Roles should match the expertise and interests of the individuals involved and the scope of a particular project, and be clearly explained in the proposal.

All Science Collaborative projects must address a reserve management need and it's appropriate to consider the relevant reserve(s) to be an end user for a project, even for projects led by reserve staff and engaging additional end user groups. Applicants should consider which staff and which reserve programs are in a position to use the results/products and benefit from the project, and proposals should explain how the project will enhance the work of end users, including reserve staff.

As outlined in the RFP, end user is defined as a person or group in a position to apply the information or tools being produced, evaluated, or transferred through a Science Collaborative project in a way that is of direct consequence to the ecological, social, or economic integrity of a reserve(s) and/or surrounding watershed(s). Examples of end users include, but are not limited to, reserve staff, and public, private, or non-governmental

decision/policy makers, including landowners, resource managers, land use planners, and educators at all levels.

Q: Can researchers and scientists be end users?

A: Yes; researchers and scientists may be end users if the research will ultimately address a reserve management need. In this case, the proposal must make clear why the research is needed to address an identified reserve management need.

Q: Can NOAA be an end user?

A: Yes, NOAA may be an end user if they will use the results to benefit their work.

Q: Are end users required to be team members?

A: No; while you may choose to include an end user on your project team, you are not required to do so.

Q: Can you provide more information on the collaborative lead? Is this someone separate from the project lead?

A: The collaborative lead is someone who is responsible for the full engagement of end users by helping to develop and manage a process that ensures iteration with them, including mechanisms for being adaptive and responsive to their input. This person should have the appropriate experience and skills to design and implement a collaborative process that provides the team with the end user input necessary to produce outputs that are responsive to their needs. This collaborative lead may, but does not have to be, the project lead.

Q: Who can serve as the collaborative lead?

A: Project teams should include a collaborative lead who has the appropriate skills and experience to lead the collaborative process. The proposal should clearly demonstrate how the collaborative lead has the appropriate skills to successfully facilitate the collaborative aspects of the project. This person may also play a technical or other role on the team, if appropriate.

Q: We have a long list of end users. Do you have suggestions for how we might go about identifying a smaller group of primary end users?

A: There are a few resources on the Science Collaborative funding page that should help in identifying primary end users. See the “Characterizing end users” and “Reflections on engaging end users” resources on the [Collaborative Research grants page](#).

Q: Is it appropriate to include letters of support at the pre-proposal stage?

A: We do not accept letters of support for collaborative research pre-proposals. If invited to full proposal, you may include them then.

Reserve Engagement

Q: If I am working with a reserve research coordinator to develop a proposal, is this sufficient for the reserve engagement requirement, or should I also reach out to the reserve manager directly?

A: As the applicant, it is your job to ensure that the relevant manager(s) are fully aware of and sufficiently engaged in your proposal as it is developed in order to provide a positive assessment. In this case, it would be good to double check that the research coordinator has connected with the manager about the proposed work to receive any input he/she may have and to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Q: Is it acceptable to ask reserve managers for the use of reserve equipment and/or personnel time?

A: You should feel free to reach out to reserve managers with these types of questions; however, it is up to them to decide how to respond. You should be aware that capacity and ability to accommodate these kinds of requests will vary from reserve to reserve.

Q: Will the reserves be given the opportunity to update their management needs annually?

A: Yes, reserves are asked annually, prior to the release of Science Collaborative request for proposals, to review and update, if necessary, their reserve management needs.

Q: The list of reserve management needs shows a lot of overlap in the general issues (e.g. climate, water quality), but if you read the specifics for each reserve, they are rather divergent. Can you recommend strategies for determining a project that would be applicable to multiple reserves?

A: This is largely the job of the applicant. Start by having a conversation with the reserve with which you have a close relationship and see where that leads you.

Q: The fact that many reserves are participating in our project makes it challenging to explain how the proposed work will meet their needs within the five-page pre-proposal narrative limit. Can we write about this generally in the narrative and then include an appendix that lists the management priorities in full?

A: For the sake of applicants and reviewers, the pre-proposals are meant to be relatively brief. The RFP allows a limited number of appendices and provides specific guidance about what they may entail. It may feel like a lot to include, especially if many partners are involved, but please do use the narrative space (rather than another appendix) to convey the connection of the project to reserve management priorities. You will likely need to take an approach that summarizes rather than lists every need the project addresses. You might consider using a table or two and/or find a way to strike a balance of summarizing but also providing some specifics to demonstrate that you have thought through the details.

Q: If you are submitting a proposal involving the entire NERR System, would this require a manager assessment from every manager?

A: Relevant managers are those whose reserves will be directly engaged in project implementation and, as a result, should be able to answer each of the three manager assessment criteria listed on page 7 of the RFP definitively. If a reserve is not directly engaged in the proposed work, that reserve should not be listed as a partner on the project title page and the manager will not be expected to submit a proposal assessment.

Q: What is expected in terms of reserve engagement for conducting SWMP syntheses with the potential for regional and/or national application?

A: You could approach this in a number of ways. You could engage and work directly with a number of reserves in a particular region or across the country for a national perspective. You could also work on a project with a single reserve as long as you demonstrate how the output can be applied to more than that single reserve. In all cases, you should reach out to and directly engage the reserve(s) that will be participating in project implementation. Other reserves who stand to benefit from the work but are not directly participating can vouch for the importance of the work by submitting letters of support.

Q: Are there added roles and responsibilities assigned to the “lead reserve”?

A: There are no added roles or responsibilities for the lead reserve.

Q: Is it advantageous to work with multiple reserves, as opposed to just one?

A: Each proposal will be reviewed according to what it is attempting to achieve. The number of reserves who are engaged and the extent to which they are engaged should be dictated by the work. If a proposed project would benefit from working with multiple reserves, then it could be considered an advantage. However, engaging more than one reserve is not a requirement.

Q: If an application lists multiple reserves, will it be viewed more favorably than an application that lists one or two reserves? Or is the level of engagement with those reserves more important?

A: The quality of the work and level of engagement are key to a successful project. Proposals should focus more on developing and articulating the most appropriate approach for the project and end users regardless of how many reserves are involved.

Q: Can a reserve manager serve as the project lead?

A: Yes, reserve managers may serve as project lead, or play any other role on a project team if it is appropriate for the proposed work.

Review & Selection Process

Q: On page 15 of the RFP it says, “No reserve will serve as the lead reserve on more than one collaborative research project.” Does this mean a reserve can only support one proposal submission or does this mean multiple proposals can be submitted

with the same lead reserve but, in the selection process, only one of those multiple proposal could be awarded?

A: A reserve may be named as lead reserve on more than one proposal submission but the selection process allows the program to fund no more than one of the collaborative research proposals the reserve is leading. This secondary selection criterion allows the Science Collaborative, in consultation with the NOAA Program Officer, to make small deviations for the rank ordering of proposals provided by the review panel to ensure that a single reserve is not the lead reserve for more than one award through this funding opportunity.

Q: The RFP states that “No reserve will serve as the lead reserve on more than one collaborative research project.” How will this affect the proposal review process, i.e., will proposals be reviewed independently? Will the Science Collaborative be looking to the reserves to indicate their preference if there are multiple proposals involving their reserves?

A: All proposals will be reviewed independently; technical reviewers and panelists will not consider this criterion in their review and ranking process. While we do not expect reserves to choose one proposal over the other, we encourage managers to provide their perspective about the value of each proposal involving their reserve in their manager assessments.

Q: Page 15 of the RFP states that, “No reserve will serve as the lead reserve on more than one collaborative research project.” How does this criterion relate to other Science Collaborative funding opportunities?

A: Both the 2020 Catalyst and the 2020 Collaborative Research RFPs include this same selection criterion, and the criterion will be applied to the proposals submitted to that RFP independent of other funding opportunities. This means that a single reserve may serve as lead reserve on both a catalyst and collaborative research grant award in 2020.

Q: Is there any advantage or disadvantage to reserves that have/have had previous Science Collaborative projects?

A: There is no advantage or disadvantage to reserves that have had previous projects. Each proposal is reviewed for its own internal logic. Whether a reserve has led a prior project or not is never part of the conversation; it always comes down the particular slate of projects proposed for that year.

Q: Is there a disadvantage to submitting multiple proposals for each type of grant?

A: No. However, we discourage applicants from submitting the same idea to multiple grant opportunities. Instead, we want applicants to submit proposals to the grant type to which the idea is best suited.

Q: Does a collaborative research project have an advantage if it started as a catalyst project?

A: Not necessarily. Projects that have successfully made it through a review process are likely viewed as good proposals with a good team infrastructure in place, but that does not guarantee that the new proposal will outcompete other good proposals.

Budget

Q: Should the pre-proposal budget be detailed, i.e. provide more than the total request?

A: No. The pre-proposal should not include a detailed budget, only the total requested. If invited to submit a full proposal, you will be asked to provide a detailed budget.

Q: If invited to submit a full proposal, can the budget request in the full proposal be different than the pre-proposal budget estimate?

A: Yes; however, the total budget request in the full proposal may not exceed the budget estimate in the pre-proposal.

Q: What are the requirements for Science Collaborative projects regarding indirect cost rates?

A: The Science Collaborative recognizes federally negotiated indirect cost rates, i.e., there is no cap on indirect costs. Lower indirect cost rates are acceptable, if the proposing organization or institution approves it. Reserves should use the negotiated indirect cost rate for their hosting organization. If the fiscal agent does not have a federally negotiated indirect cost rate, they may apply a rate of 10%. Please note that for any subcontracts, unless otherwise noted in the indirect cost rate agreement, indirect costs may only be applied to the first \$25,000 of each subcontract.

Q: How will budgets be handled for multi-institutional teams?

A: The University of Michigan will subcontract to the lead fiscal agent which will then subcontract to all partners. If invited to full proposal, you will need to provide a detailed budget and justification for your institution and all subcontracts.

Q: Is there a cost match requirement on any of the collaborative research projects?

A: We do not require matching funds for any Science Collaborative opportunities.

Q: Do you encourage in-kind matching funds from outside of the reserves?

A: This is not a requirement but is one way to demonstrate commitment and engagement from your partners.

Q: At the pre-proposal stage, are we required to include a signature or letter of support from the fiscal agent?

A: No. However, letter of support from the fiscal agent will be required at the full proposal stage.

Q: What added language may be necessary to justify an honorarium for an end user?

A: At the pre-proposal stage, you are required to provide a total budget estimate only. You should include this expense in your total estimate but you will not be submitting a budget justification or detailed budget. At the full proposal stage, you should make it clear in the budget justification that some of the end users with which the team proposes to engage require additional support to be part of the project because of where they are from, e.g., a community member who is working on their own time, or a member of a non-profit with a limited budget. There would also need to be a separate line item in the budget indicating how much is being allocated for the person and that it is an honorarium for participating in the project.

Q: Would it be a disadvantage to submit a proposal with a relatively smaller budget compared to the maximum? What are the average grant award values from past years?

A: No, proposals should have appropriate budgets for the proposed work. It is worth noting that some of the budget limits are a bit less than previous years.

Other

Q: How many proposals do you anticipate funding?

A: While this depends on how many high quality proposals we receive and their budgets, we anticipate funding 5-6 collaborative research projects.

What is the major difference in collaborative science and catalyst proposals?

A: There are a few key differences:

Catalyst – Scope out new project ideas	Collaborative Research – Generate science that informs decisions
\$75,000-\$200,000 total	Up to \$200,000/yr
1 year	1-3 years
Purpose is to kick start a collaborative science idea, or take some existing work to the next level and make it more applicable to a management need.	Meant to support the generation of new science or projects that go deeper into a single topic.

Q: Is it ok to submit the same project idea to both the collaborative research and the catalyst requests for proposals?

A: Please do NOT submit your idea to more than one Science Collaborative RFP opportunity; apply to the opportunity that best fits your project idea and objectives.

Q: Should the pre-proposal be submitted through a reserve as the lead institution, or should it be submitted through the collaborator? Does it matter?

A: It does not matter who submits the proposal from a review perspective. The proposal should be submitted by whomever makes the most sense for that project team and approach.

Q: Can there be more than one technical lead? We are working with a number of researchers from the university, each with different skillsets they bring to the project. Would they all classify as Technical leads?

A: We suggest limiting the number of "leads" on a proposal to project lead, technical lead and collaborative lead, but you can have as many other co-investigators or team members as you would like, with roles that you might define yourself. Part of the technical lead role is to oversee and help coordinate and integrate the technical elements, which is probably best done by a single individual.

Q: Is it common to have one person be the project, fiscal, and the technical lead?

A: In most cases, the project lead and fiscal lead should be the same person - the person with ultimate responsibility for completing work. You can list a fiscal officer/admin person as your "fiscal point of contact". Some projects do list the same person as project lead and technical lead. Just be sure to explain who will help manage the overall project process. For example, different project management tasks might fall to the project lead, collaborative lead or another designated project manager, and some brief explanation of this is helpful so reviewers understand how the team will ensure good management and completion of the proposed work.

Q: If we have an existing research partnership with University of Michigan researchers, would we be allowed to include them in our proposal?

A: In short, yes, as long they are not a researcher named on the Science Collaborative's program team.

Q: Does the order of the subheadings in the project narrative of my pre-proposal have to be the same as in the RFP guidelines?

A: Yes, applicants should following the order of the subheadings in the project narrative.

Q: Do you expect that the person listed as the Fiscal Lead will also be the "point of contact" that we identify under 4) Fiduciary Information on the pre-proposal's Title Page (page 9 in RFP pre-proposal requirements)?

A: In most cases, the project lead and fiscal lead will be the same person. You can also identify a fiscal point of contact, which is typically a grant administrator that will help manage the grant contracting process. By defining these roles, we hope to accommodate the rare cases where a grant cannot easily be received and managed by the project lead's institution and a separate fiscal lead must be identified.

Q: Other than a limit of two pages, is there a particular format or style you would like to see in the resumes of team members? For example, should we aim for a more formal academic style (with lists of publications) or are you looking for a more condensed display of project summaries (perhaps those that highlight examples of collaborative work)?

A: We do not specify a format for the resumes, other than to limit them to two pages. You are welcome to use whatever style you think best conveys the person's expertise that is most relevant to the proposal and their specific role in the project. You are also welcome to use different formats for different types of team members.

Q: Are we required to include the resumes of end users in Appendix A?

A: Resumes are required for team members listed on the pre-proposal title page. Resumes will be used by reviewers to determine whether the team has the requisite technical and collaborative skills and experience to undertake the project successfully. If end users are on your team and will be contributing to the work, you should include their resumes.

Q: Do we need resumes from each team member listed, or just the leads?

A: Resumes should be included for all the team members, but not necessarily "advisors".

Q: In Appendix B, where you ask for us to recommend reviewers, or request that we do not use certain reviewers, does it make sense for us to ask you not to use end users who provided input to develop the proposal (and list them) as it might be a conflict of interest?

A: We would not intentionally invite any of your end users to review your proposal so, if they are listed elsewhere, we will be sure to avoid them. Sometimes applicants have reasons to request that we avoid someone but, if no one comes to mind, no need to include any names here.

Q: Is there a repository of previous successful collaborative research projects?

A: The Science Collaborative [project catalog](#) allows you to select "collaborative research" projects from the three years we funded these - 2015, 2016 and 2017, and you can read the 2-page fact sheets about each project as a starting point. Also, check out our [new pre-proposal tips tool](#) that reflects feedback from reviewers in prior competitions.

Q: Can we have a table or a conceptual figure in the project narrative?

A: Yes, as long as you do not exceed the 5-page limit for the project narrative.