



National Estuarine Research Reserve System Science Collaborative

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2021 Request for Collaborative Research Pre-Proposals

~ *Collaborative Research Grants: Generating New Science to Inform Decisions* ~

RFP Release: October 6, 2020

Pre-Proposals Due: December 8, 2020

About the NERRS Science Collaborative

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Science Collaborative's primary goal is to support the co-development and application of relevant and usable knowledge to address critical coastal management issues identified by the NERRS in order to improve the long-term stewardship of the nation's estuaries. The Science Collaborative works to achieve this goal through regular funding opportunities, project support and management, and an adaptive approach to program implementation that fosters ongoing learning and improvement.

Consistent with the NERRS strategic plan, NOAA has identified the following focus areas for Science Collaborative funding opportunities in 2019 - 2023:

- Research and monitoring related to biophysical, social, economic, and behavioral impacts of habitat change resulting from **climate change** and/or **coastal development**.
- Understanding how an **ecosystem service approach** can be utilized to support the protection and restoration of estuarine systems.
- Understanding the impacts of **land use change, eutrophication, and contamination** in estuarine ecosystems and the options for management and mitigation.
- Investigating options for improving estuarine **habitat resilience**; processes for identifying, prioritizing, and restoring sites; and monitoring and evaluating success.
- **Syntheses of long-term monitoring data** and information, originating from programs such as the NERRS System-wide Monitoring Program and associated monitoring efforts, to develop regional and national data products that address coastal management priorities for the NERRS and NOAA.

The Science Collaborative is managed through a cooperative agreement between the University of Michigan and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

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Overview

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Science Collaborative is soliciting pre-proposals for up to three-year collaborative research grants. Collaborative research projects conduct new applied science using an end user,¹ driven, collaborative process that results in research, data, tools, or other products that will inform decision making related to a [reserve management need](#).² Applicants may draw on the natural, social and physical sciences to meet the goals of this request for proposals (RFP).

Funding Amount

Proposals may request a maximum of \$200,000 per year, for up to three years. The total budget may not exceed \$600,000 for a three-year project.

Eligibility for Funding

Projects funded under this RFP must be developed in collaboration with staff from at least one of the 29 reserve sites within [NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System \(NERRS\)](#), address current management needs of the reserves involved in the project, and have the full support of the relevant reserve manager(s).

This funding opportunity is open to applicants from United States (U.S.) academic, non-government organizations, and non-federal public sectors working in partnership with NERRS staff.

Each proposal must designate a fiduciary institution and a fiscal lead,³ that will receive and manage the award, if granted. Researchers from institutions outside the U.S. cannot serve as the fiscal lead, but can be included in the project and may be funded by sub-awards through an eligible U.S. entity. Federal employees and agencies are not eligible to receive funding from the Science Collaborative but may participate as unfunded project team members.

Proposal Submission Process

Potential applicants should review the application process as outlined in this RFP and follow directions to submit a pre-proposal using the timeline outlined below. The pre-proposal is **mandatory** and will be used to determine which applicants are invited to submit full proposals. Pre-proposals include a five-page maximum narrative that describes

¹ End users are defined as individuals or groups 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, regulators, resource managers, land use planners, leaders of impacted communities, and educators at all levels.

² This document is a compilation of the current management needs within NOAA's reserve system. Management needs are submitted by reserve managers to NOAA and are updated on an annual basis.

³ In most cases, the project lead is also the fiscal lead. In cases where the project lead is not employed by the institution that will receive and manage the grant, a project team member from the fiduciary institution may serve as fiscal lead and will have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the proposed scope of work is completed.



the problem being addressed, end user needs, outputs and outcomes, general approach, team members, budget estimate (number only), and appendices. All applicants will receive feedback on their pre-proposals when notified whether they are invited to submit a full proposal.

Key Dates

Date	Activity
November 9, 2020 at 3:30pm EST	Webinar: RFP Question & Answer
December 8, 2020 by 11:59pm EST	Pre-proposals due
December 18, 2019	Reserve manager pre-proposal assessments due
February 26, 2021	Invitations to full proposal
April 14, 2021 by 11:59pm EDT	Proposals due
April 26, 2021	Reserve manager proposal assessments due
July 2021	Funding notifications
October 1, 2021	Anticipated project start date

Supporting Documents

All RFP supporting documents and access to the online application form can be found at: <http://nerssciencecollaborative.org/research>



About Collaborative Research Projects

Collaborative research projects conduct new applied science through an end user-driven, collaborative process that results in research, data, tools, or other products that will inform decision making related to a reserve management need. Collaborative research projects can use social and/or natural science research approaches and must have a well-defined research question that the project is designed to answer.

Required Elements

In order for proposals to achieve the purpose of this RFP, they must include three elements, all of which are critical to collaborative science with the Reserve System. All proposals must:

- 1) Directly involve at least one National Estuarine Research Reserve site, address current management needs for reserve(s) that will be engaged in the project, and have the full support of the relevant reserve manager(s).
- 2) Clearly identify, engage, and be responsive to the interests and needs of end users; and
- 3) Plan for the costs associated with implementing a Data Sharing Plan.

1) Reserve Engagement

All collaborative research proposals must be developed in collaboration with at least one of the 29 reserve sites within [NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System \(NERRS\)](#), address current management needs of the reserves involved in the project, demonstrate a plan for collaboration with relevant reserve staff ⁴, and have the full support of the relevant reserve manager(s).

Proposals must offer a clear and specific explanation of *how* the proposed work will inform and advance management related to a current management need for one or more reserves. Applicants should consult the [Annual Summary of Reserve Management Needs](#) that were generated by each reserve and compiled by NOAA as a reference for this RFP. Each reserve has designated a point of contact to field inquiries and offer more background on the reserve's current management needs. There may also be situations where an emerging management need is identified with reserve partner(s), particularly for multi-reserve projects. In such cases, the process for identifying the need should be clearly articulated and confirmed by relevant reserve(s) in a letter of support.

Relevant reserve managers and staff must be engaged in the development of project plans and given an opportunity to offer feedback on the pre-proposal, particularly sections that explain the project's relevance to reserve programs, local management needs, proposed project roles for reserve staff (whether serving as end users, project advisors or team members), and any reserve resources to be provided to the project.

⁴ 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 end users and project advisors. 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.



The pre-proposal title page must identify a lead reserve as well as any additional reserves that will be participating in the proposed work. For each pre-proposal that engages their reserve, managers will be asked to confirm that:

- 1) The proposing team engaged reserve staff sufficiently during the proposal development process; and
- 2) The reserve manager agrees with initial plans for how the reserve would contribute to the work (e.g., staff roles in the project) and any anticipated resources allocated to support those contributions.

Reserve managers will have an opportunity to identify any related concerns through a proposal assessment form that is submitted directly to the Science Collaborative, separate from the pre-proposal. 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 reserve manager will not complete a proposal assessment. ***It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the relevant reserve manager(s) is adequately consulted during project development and receives a copy of the final pre-proposal.***

2) Collaboration and End User Integration

Proposals must clearly identify, engage, and be responsive to the interests and needs of end users—the intended users of the project outputs. Project teams should identify a set of primary end users for their project, including groups actively involved in the particular coastal management issue that are in a position to apply the information or tools being developed through a Science Collaborative project in a way that is of direct consequence to the ecological, social, or economic integrity of a reserve(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, regulators, land use planners, leaders of impacted communities, and educators at all levels.

Because this grant program is meant to address reserve management needs, it is appropriate to think of the reserves as one of the project's end users, even if the project is led by reserve staff. Applicants should be explicit about which aspects of the reserve program will benefit from the project (i.e., land stewardship, training, education, monitoring, etc.) and will use project outputs.

A collaborative process that engages end users in project development and implementation is important to producing usable outputs and achieving desired outcomes. This includes specific mechanism(s) for soliciting end users' input and feedback *during* the project in order to enhance the team's ability to confirm and/or adapt their outputs. Examples of these mechanisms include questionnaires, individual consultations, workshops to refine scope and provide feedback, or structured processes for end user review of draft products. Pre-proposals should indicate when feedback will be solicited and what research decisions will be impacted by that input.

End user representatives can be incorporated into the project team if they will be contributing significant time, expertise, or other resources to project activities. In these

cases, input can be solicited through regular team meetings and collaborative development of project products.

The goals and type of work proposed should dictate the approach to engagement as well as the breadth and depth of engagement planned during the project. All pre-proposals must:

- Identify the primary end user(s) and their needs;
- Describe how the end user's input helped to shape the project;
- Describe a clear process that will accommodate iterative engagement with the end user(s) to advance the research, including anticipated timing and mechanisms for soliciting input during the project and specific research decisions that will be informed by end user input;
- Provide evidence of the end user's interest in the project, e.g., letter of support (all proposals must include at least one and no more than three letters of support from an end user);
- Identify an individual who will be responsible for leading the collaborative process—the collaborative lead⁵—and describe their relevant experience and skills; and
- Plan for the time and costs associated with supporting a collaborative, end user engagement process throughout the project. (Note: Teams invited to submit full proposals will need to demonstrate that sufficient time and resources are dedicated to supporting a collaborative, end user engagement process throughout their projects. Pre-proposal total budget requests should take into account the resources needed for these efforts.)

The Science Collaborative has [resources online](#) that can help you design your end user engagement process, including key considerations for engaging end users effectively and efficiently.

3) Data Management

NOAA requires that environmental and social science data collected and/or created under NOAA grants and cooperative agreements be made visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users. It should be available free of charge or at minimal cost, and made available in a timely manner (typically no later than two years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy, or security requirements.

If invited to submit a full proposal, applicants that propose the collection of new data will be required to develop and include a Data Sharing Plan as a part of their full proposal package. This plan must address elements such as methods and protocols for data

⁵ The collaborative lead is responsible for the full engagement of end users by helping to develop and manage a process that ensures meaningful user input, 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.

collection, data quality control/quality assurance procedures, metadata, data access, and data archival. A valid Data Sharing Plan may include only the statement that no detailed plan is needed, as long as the statement is accompanied by a clear justification, e.g., no new data are being collected.

At the pre-proposal stage, applicants must account for the costs associated with implementing a Data Sharing Plan in their budget estimate.⁶ Additional guidance and details for support in developing a Data Sharing Plan will be provided to those teams invited to submit full proposals.

Outputs

Project outputs are specific products that are developed during or upon project completion. Outputs must address end user and reserve management needs. Examples of project outputs include, but are not limited to the following:

- Specific, scientifically produced datasets and analyses;
- A synthesis of research findings;
- Specific product(s) that translate and/or apply the research findings in a way that addresses the identified end user's needs, e.g., decision support tools, implementation guides, management recommendations, training curricula, and technical or non-technical reports; and/or
- Evaluation of existing decision making information needs.

At least one output must include an activity that shares the project approach and results with the broader NERRS community, such as a poster or session at a meeting, such as the NERRS/NERRA Annual Meeting, a system-wide webinar, or a NERRS sector meeting.

Outcomes

Project outcomes are the expected impacts of the project process and outputs. Examples of project outcomes include, but are not limited to the following:

- New or refined decision making and/or management processes and a plan for future iterative evaluations of these processes;
- Enhanced programs that can better address a current management need based on new data, analyses, or tools;
- Stronger collaborative relationship among reserve staff, partners, and end users; and/or
- Better understanding among researchers and end users of how their respective fields can inform each other's efforts.

⁶ As a general rule of thumb, approximately 10% to 15% of a project's budget should be allocated to data management activities, including processing and quality checking data and preparing datasets for archival and public access.

Pre-Proposal Requirements

Pre-proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on Tuesday, December 8, 2020.

Pre-proposals must be provided as a single PDF file using 12-point Times New Roman font, no less than single spaced, with one-inch margins, and be organized using the headers below. Pre-proposals must include a title page, 5-page maximum narrative, and appendices as outlined below. **Pre-proposals not meeting these requirements, including budget and header requirements, will be removed from the competition without further review.**

Title Page

The title page should be organized using the following headers:

- 1) Project Title
- 2) Project Lead / Fiscal Lead⁷ (primary contact for the project) –
 - a) Title / Position
 - b) Institution
 - c) Telephone Number
 - d) Postal Mailing Address
 - e) E-mail Address
- 3) Additional Team Members (anyone receiving project resources or contributing significant resources to the project) – Name, institution, telephone, e-mail, and role, e.g., project lead, collaboration lead, technical lead, end user, team member, etc. **Note: Project, collaborative, and technical leads are required.** One person can serve multiple roles. See [team section](#) for definitions of these roles.
- 4) Fiduciary Information – Indicate the institution that would receive and manage the grant contract. Please provide a point of contact, including email address, to receive fiscal questions. The fiduciary institution is responsible for managing any project subcontracts, tracking grant-related spending, and submitting invoices to the University of Michigan for reimbursement on behalf of the grant.
- 5) Name of Reserve(s) – Identify a lead reserve for the project. If relevant, identify any additional reserves that are directly engaged in the project.⁸ Multiple reserves may collaborate on a proposal but a *single, lead* reserve must be identified here.
 - a) Lead reserve⁹

⁷ In most cases, the project lead is also the fiscal lead. In rare cases where the project lead is not employed by the institution that will receive and manage the grant, a project team member from the fiduciary institution may serve as fiscal lead and will have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the proposed scope of work is completed.

⁸ See the [reserve engagement section](#) for additional guidance on reserve involvement. Managers of each listed reserve will have an opportunity to complete a proposal assessment and provide directly to the Science Collaborative program any concerns about the reserve's engagement in the proposal and their anticipated contribution to the project.



- b) Any additional reserves
- 6) **Budget Request** – Requested dollar amount. Proposals may request up to \$200,000 per year, for up to three years. The total budget may not exceed \$600,000 for a three-year project. Note: If invited to submit a full proposal, a detailed budget and budget narrative will be required; the total request in the detailed full proposal budget may not exceed the pre-proposal budget estimate.
 - 7) **Project Duration** – Projects should start October 1, 2021 and end no later than September 30, 2024.
 - 8) **Project Summary** – Provide a 200-word summary of the proposed project that is suitable for a non-technical audience. Please include the project’s objectives, responsiveness to end user needs, planned outputs, and anticipated outcomes.

Project Narrative (5 page maximum)

The pre-proposal narrative should be written in a way that will be compelling to a diverse set of reviewers, including individuals with expertise in natural and social sciences, collaborative processes, and coastal management. Reviewers may not be familiar with reserve programs. Applicants are also encouraged to consult an online resource - [Tips for Collaborative Research Pre-proposals](#) - which is based on reviewer comments during prior RFPs.

At the pre-proposal stage, applicants are encouraged to focus on the management relevance, collaborative approach, and potential application of the work, while providing enough methodological details to demonstrate the proposed outputs are sound and feasible. At the full proposal stage, the review process will focus more heavily on the details of the proposed technical and collaborative methods and the potential impact of the work.

The project narrative **should not exceed five pages** and should be organized using the following five headers in this order.

- 1) **Problem Statement and Response to End User Needs** – It is particularly important that project partners from participating reserves are consulted in the development of this section. Be sure to include the following information, using an organizational structure that best suits the pre-proposal topic.
 - Introduce the issue(s) the project will address, discussing the importance and context.
 - Describe the project’s relevance to the National Estuarine Research Reserve site(s) involved in the project and explain *how* the project will inform and advance management related to one or more current [reserve management needs](#). There may also be situations where an emerging management need is identified with reserve partner(s), particularly for multi-reserve projects. In such cases, the process for identifying the need should be clearly articulated

⁹ The lead reserve is the reserve most engaged in project planning and execution. If a proposal is led by a non-reserve entity, the lead reserve may serve as an additional point of contact for reserve and NOAA partners.



here in the narrative, and confirmed by relevant reserve(s) in a letter of support.

- Clearly identify the project’s primary end user(s),¹⁰ their connection to the proposal topic, and their current information needs. Describe how the end user’s input helped to shape the project and how they anticipate applying project findings and using outputs in their work.
- 2) Project Approach – The approach should describe an *integrated* technical and collaborative process that will address the research questions and lead to outputs that meet end user needs. Be sure to include the following information, using an organizational structure that best suits the pre-proposal topic.
- List the core research question(s).
 - Describe the collaborative process that will be followed to ensure iterative engagement with end users to advance the research, including an explanation for why the chosen approach is appropriate (e.g., tightly linking to an existing working group because it is an efficient way to engage the identified end users, or integrating individuals into a project team because those end users have a skill or expertise directly relevant to completing the project).
 - Generally describe the technical approach, including examples of research decisions that will be shaped through end user input.
- 3) Outputs and Outcomes – Clearly distinguishing between the two, provide a list of the planned outputs and anticipated outcomes. Describe these briefly, clearly stating how the outputs meet the end user and reserve management needs discussed in the “problem statement” and how the outputs will help lead to the anticipated outcomes.
- *Output* – A specific product that is developed during or upon project completion; there may be several outputs associated with a project. See [example outputs](#) provided above. Outputs must address end user and reserve management needs and include an activity that shares the project approach and results with the broader NERRS community.
 - *Outcome* – An expected impact of the project process and outputs; there may be several outcomes associated with a project. See [example outcomes](#) provided above.
- 4) Team – Identify each team member and explain how the team and its expertise are well qualified to implement the project, including the collaborative approach. Describe the role(s) of the various team members, e.g., project lead, collaboration lead, technical lead, end user, team member, etc. Two-page resumes for all team members must be included in Appendix B.

¹⁰ Primary end users are those most instrumental in developing the project, most directly engaged in the project, and who stand to benefit the most from the outputs.



Note: Project lead, fiscal lead, collaborative lead, and technical lead must be specified. One person can serve multiple roles. Team member roles are defined as follows:

- The **project lead** is the primary contact for the project, coordinates the project team, and ensures all elements of the project are implemented. In most situations, the project lead is also the fiscal lead.
- The **fiscal lead** manages the grant award and will have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the proposed scope of work is completed. The fiscal lead must be employed at the fiduciary institution that will receive the grant contract. In rare cases where the project lead is not employed by the fiduciary institution, a project team member from the fiduciary institution may serve as fiscal lead.
- The **technical lead** serves as a content area expert within the team, coordinates technical aspects of the project, and ensures the quality of the science.
- The **collaborative lead** 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.

- 5) **Budget Estimate** – Provide an estimated total budget request for the project. Proposals may request no more than \$200,000 per year, for up to three years. The total budget may not exceed \$600,000 for a three-year project.¹¹ **Please provide only the total budget figure in the pre-proposal.**

When developing the budget estimate, be sure to take into consideration all potential project costs, such as data management¹², personnel, fringe benefits, equipment, supplies, travel, convening and engaging with team members and end users, contractual costs, and indirect costs. If invited to submit a full proposal, a detailed budget and budget narrative will be required. **The total request in the full proposal detailed budget may not exceed the budget estimate in the pre-proposal.**

Appendices:

- A. **End User Letters of Support** - **All proposals must include at least one and no more than three letters of support from project end user(s).**¹³ Letters should be from primary end users who will be engaged in proposal development, if invited to submit a full proposal, and anticipate being engaged throughout the project. In their letters of support, end users should describe in their own words: (i) their connection to the project's focal topic, (ii) how the project would inform and benefit

¹¹ Full proposals with total budgets that exceed \$600,000 or request more than \$200,000 in any year will be disqualified from the competition.

¹² For budget allocation guidance, it is anticipated that at least 10% to 15% of the overall budget should go to support data management activities.

¹³ More than one organization may sign a single letter if their views are similar. If more than three letters are submitted, the subsequent letters will be removed from the proposal before the review process.



their work, and (iii) how they anticipate using project outputs. Reviewers will be looking for personalized, signed letters on an organization's letterhead to understand the potential application and impact of the proposed work.

- B. Resumes – Two-page resumes for each team member are required. 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.
- C. Reviewers – Identify 3-4 qualified technical reviewers who could review your project if invited to submit a full proposal. You may also list up to four people you would prefer not review your project if invited to submit a full proposal and indicate why. Whether or not these suggestions will be used is at the discretion of the Science Collaborative.
- D. References – Up to 2 pages of references may be included.

How to Submit Your Pre-Proposal

Pre-proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on Tuesday, December 8, 2020.

Access the application page by clicking the “Begin your application” button at <http://nerrsciencecollaborative.org/research>.

You will need a U-M Friend Account to start an application and submit your proposal. You will be prompted to login or create an account when you access the application page.

Once you have logged in, you will need to complete an online application form, upload your pre-proposal, and “save” your application. The application form mirrors some of the same content in the pre-proposal title page.

You will receive a single confirmation email when you have successfully saved your pre-proposal for the first time. The email will include a link you may use to return to your pre-proposal application page and make edits until the deadline. Your saved application will be automatically submitted at 11:59pm EST on December 8, 2020 and you will not receive another confirmation email.

If you do not receive a confirmation email after the first time you've saved your application, your pre-proposal was not saved properly and you should resave or contact us directly at nerrs-info@umich.edu.



Proposal Review and Selection Process

Pre-Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Pre-proposals must comply with all submission instructions and guidelines to be considered for funding. Pre-proposals not meeting these requirements will be removed from the competition without further review.

At the pre-proposal stage, applicants are encouraged to focus on the management relevance, collaborative approach and potential application of the work, while providing enough methodological details to demonstrate the proposed outputs are sound and feasible. At the full proposal stage, the review process will focus more heavily on the details of the proposed technical and collaborative methods, and the potential impact of the work.

Each compliant pre-proposal will be evaluated based on the equally weighted criteria listed below. Pre-proposal review will also be informed by reserve manager assessments to determine the extent to which projects were developed collaboratively with the relevant reserve(s).

- 1) Management Need: The pre-proposal clearly identifies and explains how it will inform management related to at least one [reserve management need](#).
- 2) Responsiveness to End User(s): The pre-proposal identifies specific end users, their needs, and articulates how planned outputs will meet those needs. The pre-proposal provides evidence of end user interest in the project as corroborated in letters of support.
- 3) Approach: The approach includes a specific research question and a collaborative research process that meaningfully integrates the end users and is likely to produce the planned outputs.
- 4) Team: The team has the appropriate expertise, experience, and well-defined roles needed to implement the proposed collaborative process and technical methods.
- 5) Potential Impact: The proposed process and outputs are feasible and likely to lead to the identified outcomes.

Review Process

The review process for collaborative research projects is as follows. A more detailed summary of the review process, including decision points, inputs to each decision, and a summary of process participants can be found [here](#).

- 1) **Minimum requirements assessment** – Pre and full proposals must be submitted by the stated deadlines. Science Collaborative staff will review all submittals to ensure that they meet the requirements as described in this RFP and the full proposal guidelines, including all proposal elements, the budget request, and adherence to header requirements. Proposals not meeting these requirements will be removed from the competition without further review.



- 2) **Pre-proposal review** – Pre-proposals will be reviewed by a panel with diverse disciplinary expertise, practical experience with collaborative science, and broad geographic representation. This panel participates in both the review process for pre-proposals and full proposals.
 - a) *Pre-proposal written review* – Each pre-proposal will be matched to non-conflicted panel members who will conduct written reviews. In the written review, reviewers will be asked to rate and provide comments according to the pre-proposal evaluation criteria, above. Applicants will receive a copy of their written reviews.
 - b) *Pre-proposal panel review* – Panelists will convene for a virtual meeting to discuss the outcomes of the written reviews. Panelists will discuss strengths and weaknesses and any discrepancies among the written reviews and identify top pre-proposals to advance in the competition.
 - c) *Invitations to submit a full proposal* – Panel recommendations will serve as input to the pre-proposal selection process as outlined in the section below, and a subset of pre-proposals will be invited to submit full proposals.
- 3) **Review of invited full proposals** – Full proposals are reviewed by panel members from the pre-proposal stage. Additional topical experts, including technical experts from the specific content area of the proposed work and collaboration practitioners with experience working on natural resource issues also review full proposals.
 - a) *Written technical review* - Review panel members from the pre-proposal stage as well as additional topical experts will conduct written technical reviews of full proposals. Reviewers will be asked to rate each proposal according to the evaluation criteria provided in the full proposal requirements. Reviewers will also be asked to provide comments to explain their rating and, where possible, suggestions for improvement.
 - b) *Applicant response to reviews (optional)* – Applicants will receive their written technical reviews and be given the option to provide a response (two page maximum).
 - c) *Full proposal panel review* – The review panel will convene virtually for a final discussion of proposals. The panel will consist of pre-proposal panelists plus a non-conflicted NERRS representative. For each proposal, panelists will consider the applicant’s response to reviews and discuss strengths and weaknesses and any discrepancies among the written reviews. Applicants will receive a summary of the panel’s discussion of their proposal.
 - d) *Recommendations for funding* - Panelists will identify projects that are supportable in rank order as input to the final selection process as outlined in the following section.

Selection Process

Invitations to submit a full proposal and final funding recommendations will be based on the panel recommendations of supportable projects in rank order. In consultation with the



NOAA Program Manager, the NERRS Science Collaborative shall invite pre-proposals and award projects based on available funds in rank order unless a proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following secondary selection factors:

- Concerns identified by reserve managers related to their level of engagement during proposal development or the anticipated scope and level of support for reserve contributions to the project;¹⁴
- Availability of funding;
- Balance/distribution of funds geographically by NERRS regions; and
- No reserve will serve as the lead reserve on more than one collaborative research project, except in cases where a reserve is leading a project that involves three or more reserves.¹⁵

Funding notifications are expected in July 2021.

Environmental Compliance Review

Applicants should be aware of the following environmental compliance requirements:

NOAA requires that, prior to award, every Science Collaborative project recommended for funding undergo review for potential impacts to the environment and/or cultural resources. This initial review process by NOAA takes a minimum of 30 days.

Projects that are identified by NOAA as potentially impacting the environment and/or cultural resources, e.g., involve field work, and/or are conducted in areas where historic or archeological artifacts might be present, will require further review by the agency. NOAA will be reviewing for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act related to essential fish habitat (EFH). If the proposed project is placing fixed structures in the environment, consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may also be required. NHPA, ESA, MMPA, and EFH reviews take a minimum of 30 days to complete, but can often take 60 to 90 days.

¹⁴ See section on [Reserve Engagement](#) for additional details. Managers of participating reserves will have an opportunity to share any concerns via a proposal assessment form. If concerns are not easily addressed, they could affect the selection process for pre-proposals and full proposals.

¹⁵ A reserve may lead as many collaborative research proposals as desired, but they are unlikely to receive funding for more than one collaborative research project that they are leading if those proposals involve fewer than three reserves. A reserve may be the lead reserve on more than one collaborative research award this year if the additional projects involve three or more reserves. This criterion will be applied to proposals submitted to this RFP independent of other Science Collaborative funding opportunities.



Guidance to Applicants

If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you will be asked by NOAA to provide a detailed description of all field sampling methods, along with a map showing the location of each field site and a table of the latitude and longitude coordinates of each sampling location in your proposal; you do NOT need to include these items in your pre-proposal.

Questions regarding this requirement should be directed to Doug George (510-637-3796, douglas.george@noaa.gov).

Proprietary Information & Intellectual Property

Applicants should be aware that the disclosure of patentable ideas, trade secrets, and privileged, confidential, commercial, or financial information can hinder an applicant's chances to secure patents, trademarks, or copyrights.

Proprietary information of this kind should only be included in proposals when it is necessary to convey an understanding of the proposed project. Applicants must mark proprietary information clearly in the proposal with appropriate labels, such as, "The following is (proprietary or confidential) information that (proposing entity) requests not be released to persons outside the NERRS Science Collaborative, except for purposes of review and evaluation."

Please protect your intellectual property rights at the proposal preparation stage as appropriate. This will allow you to speak freely about ideas and avoid the inadvertent loss of intellectual property rights. You should contact your institution's technology transfer or intellectual property office to determine the best way to protect your intellectual property.

Questions Regarding this Request for Proposals

Question and Answer Record: Responses to all questions, without reference to project specifics, will be posted on a rolling basis for all interested applicants to view online at <http://nerrsciencecollaborative.org/research>.

Q&A Webinar: The Science Collaborative will host a question and answer webinar on **November 9 at 3:30pm EDT**.

To register, go to: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4371799379508933392>

After the webinar, questions and responses will be incorporated into the online Q&A Record and webinar slides and the recording will be posted online at <http://nerrsciencecollaborative.org/research>.

Email: The Science Collaborative will accept and reply to written questions regarding this request for proposals through December 8, 2020. Questions should be submitted to nerrs-info@umich.edu.



Phone: The Science Collaborative will also accept questions via phone regarding this request for proposals. Questions should be directed to Lynn Vaccaro (734-763-0056) or Jennifer Read (734-769-8898).

Website: More information about the NERRS Science Collaborative can be found at <http://nerrsciencecollaborative.org>.

