National Estuarine
Research Reserve System
Science Collaborative

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2021 Science Transfer RFP

Q&A Record

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Topics Covered

About the Science Transfer Program

Q: What is the schedule of transfer grant opportunities over the next five years? Will the RFP be offered every year?
A: Our goal is to offer a Science Transfer RFP four times over our current cooperative agreement (2019 - 2024). We plan to release the next ST RFP in fall of 2022.

Q: How much flexibility is there in the project start date?
A: It is unlikely to be approved for a start before September 1, but it may be possible to delay a month or so if there's a good reason; generally, we want teams to start September 1.

Eligibility and Appropriateness for this RFP

Q: Could the concept for a Science Transfer grant be based on a prior science transfer grant, but applied to a new reserve?
A: Yes, but there should be a novel aspect. For example, the geography could be the unique angle, and/or the approach may need to be customized for use in a new context/application.

Q: Is the transfer of social science equally eligible as the transfer of natural or physical science?
A: Yes. Science transfer grants are intended to support the transfer of existing information, approaches, and/or techniques to support NERRS activities and programs. The evaluation criteria do not focus on a particular type of science to be transferred.

Q: Can organizations outside of the NERRS submit an application for this RFP?
A: Yes, partners external to the reserve system can serve as project lead and manage the fiscal side of the project on behalf of a group. As noted in the RFP, all proposals must be developed in close collaboration with partners from at least one reserve to ensure it aligns with their programs and the manager endorses the proposed scope of work and budget allocation.

Q: For this RFP, is it appropriate to propose a transfer activity from an external partner to members of the reserve system?
A: Yes, as long as the benefit and use of the work is clearly articulated and aligned with reserve needs.

Q: Regarding data collection - would developing and employing a survey to other NERRS to collect informational data be supported by this RFP?
A: It depends on the intended use of the information. For example, actions such as surveying reserves to scope a tool or develop a product would be appropriate. Collecting data toward a research question would not be appropriate for this opportunity; those types of research efforts are better suited for a Collaborative Research proposal.

Q: We want to transfer a new tool to other reserves. Can preparing a peer-reviewed publication be supported under this RFP? What about a manual to help others apply a new tool?
A: This grant opportunity is intended to promote the use and application of science, so developing a new manual to help transfer a methodology or tool could be an important part of a science transfer effort. It's possible some science transfer projects will lead to a peer-reviewed publication, however, it would be hard to justify spending science transfer grant funds on the development of journal articles that are geared for other researchers rather than practitioners and users of the science.

Q: If a project has been transferred through a previous science transfer grant in the past, is it eligible to be funded again with transfer to a different reserve? Would this hurt chances of award? Thanks!
A: You can't do the exact same project again, however transferring that body of knowledge to a different reserve would qualify and not be penalized in any way. That proposal would be weighed against all the other proposals in the competition. The proposal may require explanation of any novel components or demonstrations of need in the area where the knowledge is being transferred.

Q: Would the transfer of a set of facilitation techniques that help collaborative science get done be eligible (since it is not technically transfering science, per se)?
A: Transferring a facilitation technique is eligible for funding under this RFP if based on a body of science/scientific evidence, or if the training enables reserves or their partners to better access or apply scientific information/tools. Applicants should explain the science that informed the training development or how the training will enable a more effective use/transfer of science in the future.

Q: Do technical syntheses align with Transfer Grant intent, or is it best to focus on outreach outputs?
A: Activities within a science transfer proposal can most certainly include the synthesis of existing scientific information. Keep in mind that you need to begin by clearly articulating what the project will accomplish and, specifically, what will be transferred. If you are proposing synthesis work as part of the project, it should logically support and contribute to the transfer objectives of the proposal.

End User Engagement, Collaboration and Letters of Support

Q: We are proposing to develop new content for our exhibits and educational programs based on our reserve research and monitoring programs. In this case, are the reserve educators considered the project end users, or the students, teachers and public that use our programs?
A: There are a variety of ways to frame any project, but you could certainly consider the reserve educators to be the immediate or initial users and the external audiences

(teachers, students, public) to be the ultimate users of the proposed project. If both groups are named as "users", you should also explain how they will be consulted and engaged in the project. For example, explain how reserve program staff will collaborate and how you will be responsive to the needs and preferences of external users.

Q: Can a science transfer project be led by a project user, such as a reserve education coordinator?
A: Yes, project leads can also be considered a primary end user. One advantage of this arrangement is that the project lead is well positioned to manage the project in a way that maximizes utility for their programs. In the proposal, be sure to articulate how the proposed transfer activities will be beneficial and used by specific individuals and programs.

Q: Do you require proposals to identify end users that are outside the Reserve system?
A: No, science transfer proposals can focus on primary users within the reserve, for example in cases where a project fosters a transfer and collaboration across reserve programs. Applicants should still be specific about their users within the reserve system and how those individuals and programs will use the planned outputs and how that will lead to desired outcomes..

Q: Can grant funds be used to support external partner participation?
A: Yes. External partners could be subcontractors on a proposal if they are conducting a specific part of the proposed work, or partners could receive honoraria or travel support to enable their participation. Federal employees and agencies are not eligible to receive funding from the Science Collaborative, but may participate as unfunded project team members.

Q: Does there need to be an identified secondary end user or is identification of reserve staff as primary end users sufficient? I am speaking as an external partner who would submit the proposal.
A: Identifying a primary end user is sufficient, and it's okay if the reserve staff are the primary end users.

Proposal Format

Q: Are figures and tables welcome, and do they have to be formatted any particular way? What about hyperlinks?
A: All figures and graphs should be included within the 7-page proposal narrative. Aside from the required appendices, we are not allowing any supplemental materials to be appended to the proposal.

Regarding hyperlinks, we don't have a formal policy prohibiting or encouraging links in proposal documents. However, we would discourage using hyperlinks to provide content critical to understanding your proposed project - reviewers may or may not take the time to follow the links, and they may print out the proposal before reading it.

Q: Is there a recommended length for each section of the project narrative?
A: No. It is up to the applicant to determine the right content for each of the sections of the project narrative. We only require that the project narrative include all five sections in the order and with the heading labels specified in the RFP. The full narrative must not exceed seven pages.

Q: Should an assessment and evaluation plan be included in the proposal?
A: An assessment is necessary. There may be an existing assessment that you can draw upon to demonstrate need. An evaluation plan, though not necessary, may strengthen the proposal.

Budget

Q: We are proposing a project where an academic institution would be the fiduciary institution. If our NERRs partners request a budget to support the salaries of reserve staff, do we consider them as subcontractors? If we go this route, do we need to include a separate budget narrative for them?
A: All subcontractors on a grant, including a reserve partner, need to provide a separate budget table and budget narrative as part of the proposal package.

We encourage you to talk to each of your reserve partners about what would work best for them; there are likely a few ways to leverage and share grant resources, and different reserves may prefer a different arrangement. For example, some projects use honoraria or direct payment of certain expenses, or two organizations may jointly supervise a new hire to conduct aspects of the project, and these arrangements may not require you to develop a subcontract for each reserve partner. The preferred approach will vary depending on the reserve and the nature of the work, and these plans should be spelled out in the budget narrative of the lead fiduciary institution.

Q: We plan to hire, via contract, a geospatial contractor that will be identified through a competitive bidding process. Do we need a separate budget and budget narrative for this subcontract?
A: You can include a line in your budget table for "contract with geospatial analyst" and you do not need a separate budget table for that subcontract. In your budget narrative you should also include a sentence or two explaining that part of the budget – i.e., how you will identify the subcontractor and the essence of the contracted work. This will also help reviewers see that you have a plan for filling that gap in your team.

Q: The budget guidance in the RFP indicates that we should explain the contribution of any personnel to the project even if not receiving support under this grant. Does this mean that we need to put a dollar amount on the time that each staff member

contributes (even when this is paid for on our operational budget) or only a percent time or hours contributed?
A: You do not need to put unfunded people in your budget table, but they should be acknowledged in your narrative. We suggest listing the names (or job titles) of the individuals that will be contributing work and providing a rough estimate of their time (hours, weeks, or percent of FTE over the course of project) and the scope of their contributions. You do not need to estimate this contribution in terms of dollars. This level of specificity will make it clear to reviewers that you do have the people power to complete the project and that everyone, including managers, are on the same page.

Q: I'm filling out a transmittal form to route the application for internal approvals, and have two questions: What is the name of the entity contracting out the awards? And what is the CFDA # in the cooperative agreement that NOAA used to fund the Science Collaborative, that's funding the Science Transfer grants?
A: The grant contracts would be between the "Regents of the University of Michigan" and the project lead's fiduciary intuition. Our CFDA number is 11.419. Our University is considered the direct sponsor (NOAA is the "prime sponsor") so these grants are not considered federal assistance or federal funding opportunities, technically.

Q: Should the Excel files (budget and timeline) be submitted as separate attachments or should they be joined together with the other application materials as a single file?
A: You should submit your budget as an excel document *and* include the budget tables and narrative as an appendix to your proposal. The proposal, including all appendices, should be submitted as a single PDF. Both the spreadsheet and proposal PDF should be uploaded through our online application form.

Q: Can all budget narrative details be included as a single appendix or must budget narratives be broken out individually for subcontracts?
A: You may include all budget narrative details in a single appendix, including budget narratives for each subcontract. If including a budget narrative for one or multiple subcontracts, please make this clear. E.g., organize the budget narrative for each subcontract as a separate paragraph or subsection.

Q: How should materials purchased for the project be listed in the budget template?
A: You should list any equipment that costs $5,000 or more in the "Equipment>$5k" category. All materials for your project that cost under $5,000 should be listed in the "Supplies" category.

Q: Does this RFP require matching funds?
A: No, the RFP has no matching fund requirement.

Q: Can you describe whether there is a timeline for selecting contractual personnel and efforts that go out for bid as a part of a grant proposal, and any expectations tied to awarding of funding for subcontracts?
A: Not on our part; however, your budget can't change. The proposal developer should have a strong sense for whether they need to budget for contractors, and demonstrate clearly in your proposal's budget narrative and approach, that you've budgeted sufficient funding for subcontractors.

Q: Do you have any other tips about developing budgets?
A: Figure out what you want to do first, and what it will take to do it; for example, how many people will be needed, how much, time, etc. Make sure you have enough people, time, and effort to make the work happen. Aside from that, we recommend applicants look at our budget template.

Appendices

Q: Is there a maximum number of resumes that may be included in Appendix E?
A: There is no set maximum number of resumes that may be included in *Appendix E – Resumes*. There should be a resume for each team member listed on the proposal title page.

Q: The proposal requirements state that fiscal letters of commitment are required for all subcontracts. Is a letter required if a subcontractor is a consultant?
A: Yes. Please include a letter of commitment from the fiscal agent's home unit and institution and *all* subcontractors that have been identified at the proposal stage, including consultants, in *Appendix C – Fiscal Letters of Commitment*.

Q: What should be included in the fiscal letters of commitment?
A: A letter of commitment from the fiscal agent's home unit and institution should demonstrate their support for the proposed budget and activities. Letters from each subcontractor should demonstrate that they are also in agreement with what is being proposed in their names. There is no standardized form for this letter.

Q: To whom should fiscal agents and subcontractors address fiscal letters of commitment?
A: The letter of commitment from the lead fiscal agent should be addressed to "Members of the Review Panel". Subcontractors may address their letter of commitment to either the Review Panel or to the project lead.

Q: Should fiscal letters of commitment be mailed separate from the application to the Science Collaborative?
A: No. Letters of support and fiscal letters of commitment should be submitted as a part of the project proposal PDF file.

Manager Proposal Assessments

Q: Where can managers find guidance and the form for Science Transfer Proposal Assessments?
A: Managers will be emailed the guidance and manager proposal assessment form ahead of the deadline, and it's also available on the NERRS Intranet. These assessments are submitted directly to the Science Collaborative shortly after the proposal submission deadline.

Q: If reserves are both end users and partners on a project, should they supply a letter of support, a manager assessment, or both?
A: Proposals are required to have a letter of support from at least one end user. If the reserve is a primary end user, then they can provide a letter of support to be submit along with the proposal PDF. For the 2021 RFPs, managers will have an option to submit a proposal assessment for all proposals that name their reserve as a partner, but the assessment form is intended to identify any concerns with a proposal not a reserve's endorsement of the project.

Review and Selection Process

Q: Are science transfer grants reviewed independently of the collaborative research proposals? I ask because we are exploring complementary ideas for two grant programs.
A: Proposals for each of the two grant programs are being reviewed independently, through a different process and different set of reviewers. We will look across both grant programs before making final decisions to ensure funds are maximized, e.g., through a combination of smaller- and larger-budget projects. Applicants should not submit the same idea to multiple grant programs, as each program is meant to support projects that differ in purpose and scope. Similarly, the relevance of one proposal shouldn't depend on the funding decisions for another proposal.

Q: How many proposals did you receive in the last round of Transfer grants? Any sense for how many you might get this time?
A: We typically receive about 12 – 15 proposals each year. We don't have a sense for how many we'll receive this time - each round is a bit different. We expect to fund 5-6 science transfer projects this year.

Q: Would it be a disadvantage to submit two unrelated proposals from one lead reserve? What are the rules for a reserve leading on more than one project?
A: Reserves are welcome to submit multiple proposals to this RFP, but it is unlikely that a single reserve will be funded to **lead** multiple projects, except in cases where the additional projects engage three or more reserves.

Q: Do you encourage people to re-submit proposals that did not receive funding?
A: Yes. Hopefully reviewer feedback can be used to strengthen the next proposal and we encourage applicants to re-submit. However, note that the composition of the review panel and suite of proposals changes every year, and we can't promise that proposals that address all prior feedback will emerge as a top ranking proposal this year.

Q: Do the written reviews come from the same group of panelists who are convened in the final stage of the process?
A: Yes.