2015 NERRS Science Collaborative RFP Feedback and Response

A critical component of the NERRS Science Collaborative is *adaptive program management*. We work to refine our program approach iteratively based on feedback from program participants and our own observations. This adaptive approach is critical to our goal of delivering highly relevant science that addresses coastal management problems important to the reserves.

We solicited feedback from participants in the 2015 competitions through a webinar and a web form. In the July 29, 2015 webinar, participants were invited to provide feedback on the past year's competition processes and offer suggestions for improvement for the 2016 competitions. A total of 30 people participated in the webinar. We also provided an anonymous online form as another means of collecting the same kind of information. A total of 8 people completed and submitted this form. In addition to these formal mechanisms, we received and considered several email and verbal comments from members of the NERRS networks and gained insight from questions received while the competitions were underway.

We greatly value the input provided to date and are using this feedback to build stronger competition processes in 2016. The following table summarizes the major observations/feedback we heard over the past year and our proposed responses that would be reflected in the 2016 competitions. However, we invite you to provide additional feedback on these issues through this feedback form: http://graham.umich.edu/water/form/2015-nerrs-science-collaborative-feedback. The feedback form will close November 6, 2015.

Additional opportunities to provide input on the Science Collaborative competitions include in-person at the 2015 NERRS Annual Meeting and through the NERRS sector representatives on the NERRS Science Collaborative Advisory Board; this group will be meeting the second week in November.

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Observation/Feedback	**Proposed Response**
RFP timeline: The pre-proposal deadline was too soon after the release of the funding announcement; there was not enough time for proposal development.	The 2016 RFP timelines will allow at least 2 more weeks at each of the pre and full proposal development stages for research and integrated assessment proposals.
RFP timeline: Some RFP-related deadlines coincided with other major NERRS-related events/meetings.	The 2016 RFP timelines will take into consideration other major NERRS-related events/meetings.
Proposal requirements—timeline template: The timeline template was unwieldy and did not easily fit within the required proposal format.	The timeline template has been revised to be more user-friendly and the 2016 proposal guidelines will exclude the timeline from the proposal page limit.
Proposal requirements—team profiles: Team members' profiles took up too much space in the proposal.	The 2016 proposal guidelines exclude team members' profiles from the proposal page limit and will provide guidance regarding the level of detail required in the profiles.
Proposal requirements: The proposal development process was extensive and very time-consuming.	We will consider all suggestions to further streamline the 2016 proposal development process that do not appear to materially affect the programmatic goal to support the projects best able to produce usable science through a strong collaborative process.
Proposal development support: Applicants would like to have the option to call and talk with a member of the NERRS Science Collaborative team during the proposal development period.	In addition to continuing the opportunity for Q&A via email, we will be available to applicants to the 2016 competitions by phone.

<u>Proposal development support:</u> The RFP webinars were largely redundant of what was in the RFP. The Q&A session was the most helpful aspect of these webinars.	We will provide a shorter overview of the RFPs during these webinars and emphasize them as opportunities for Q&A.
<u>Proposal development support:</u> It would have been helpful to have more guidance in the RFP about how to determine which type of project—research or IA—to pursue.	In addition to being available over the phone for discussion about how to determine the right project type for your project idea, we will develop a decision tool to assist applicants in making this determination.
<u>Proposal development support—Integrated Assessments (IA):</u> The IA component of the RFP was difficult to understand; it was difficult to align the recommended IA steps with the required project narrative format.	The 2016 proposal guidelines will more clearly describe the purpose of an integrated assessment, including a decision tree to help teams decide when an IA is the more appropriate project type, and better incorporate Integrated Assessment guidelines.
<u>Review process:</u> The review process was not clearly communicated / understood.	Summaries of the 2015 proposal review processes are available at http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding.
<u>Review process:</u> Conflicting reviews suggest that panelists were not adequately familiar with the funding program and competition.	We will make additional effort to highlight the unique nuances of the funding program to reviewers and will provide a more detailed overview of panel discussions where discrepancies among reviewers are discussed and resolved.
<u>Review process:</u> Panel proposal review summaries did not include sufficient detail.	We will work with panelists to provide teams with more detailed summaries of the panel's discussion of their proposal.

Review process: Due to the considerable effort required to develop a full proposal, it may make sense to invite fewer pre-proposals to full proposal.	Panelists will be encouraged to take into consideration the amount of effort required to develop a full proposal as they provide their recommendations for pre-proposals to invite to full proposal. However we also want to ensure that the best ideas are given the opportunity to advance in the competition, and in some years, that means inviting additional proposals when review results indicate that multiple projects merit advancement.
Review process: The full proposal panel process did not allow teams enough time to adequately present their team and proposal and address questions from the panel.	We were also not satisfied with the short time each team had with the review panel but feel the exchange between the project teams and review panel were very useful. We will ensure that there is considerably more time during the 2016 panel process.
Capacity building funds: The reserves would benefit from having the capacity building funding opportunity extended for another year.	The application window for capacity building funding will be extended through at least January 2017.
*End user engagement: The pre- and full- proposal development and application processes were too demanding of end users' time. The level of end user engagement expected prior to funding awards was too high.	Early and continued engagement with end users is critical for successful collaborative science, and this includes engaging end users in project design during proposal development. Recognizing the potential for this process to be demanding of end users' time, we have developed strategies to help reserves focus on the key end users and hopefully minimize the burden placed on them.

*Reserve manager proposal assessments: It was difficult for reserve managers to demonstrate objectivity / minimize conflict of interest when assessing proposals that were in direct competition with a reserve-led project.	Reserve input is an important component of the proposal review process; projects that have not appropriately engaged reserve staff and do not meet reserve management needs are not eligible for funding. We understand that there are challenges with the current approach and are open to considering other ways to gather the necessary information for the review process.
*Capacity building funds: Some reserves are interested in using the capacity building funds but are unclear how to best use this resource.	If necessary, we will revise the capacity building funding guidance based on input from the reserves. We also recommend contacting Science Collaborative staff to discuss your ideas for using these funds at your reserve.

*As described above, we have developed a web-based form to collect additional feedback on these topics. Please go to this online form to share your feedback and suggestions by November 6, 2015.