



National Estuarine Research Reserve System Science Collaborative

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2021 Request for Collaborative Research Pre-Proposals

Q&A Record

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Focal Topics

Q: We are planning a project that addresses an emerging issue that was not listed in the current summary of reserve management needs. Will this be an issue?

A: You can submit a proposal about a topic that doesn't align with a particular reserve management need, but we recommend including a letter of support from a reserve that explains the project's relevance and potential application for the reserve system. Some multi-reserve projects may also have trouble showing alignment with current reserve management need statements, and in these cases, it could be helpful to provide a single letter of support that several reserves sign as intended users of the work.

Q: I noticed that many of your projects have significant field components, is this typical of projects funded through this program?

A: Many do, but it's certainly not a requirement or expectation. We welcome proposals that use a variety of different research approaches and methods. For example, one of our five focus areas is about supporting projects that synthesize existing monitoring data for new applications. We also encourage social science research projects, and we've supported a number of projects that emphasize the use of modeling, analysis of satellite data, and GIS.

Q: I'm planning to work with a reserve that has several discrete component areas. Is it better to focus our research on specific component sites or the greater estuarine/river system?

A: Your research questions and the reserve's management need should dictate the research approach and the appropriate geographic focus. From our perspective, there is no advantage to focusing more narrowly or broadly, but your reserve partners may have suggestions on this question.

Q: Do you recommend that a proposal cover only one of the Science Collaborative focus areas or if the project naturally overlaps with more than one focus area, is it better to highlight the project's connection to multiple focus areas?

A: There is no advantage or disadvantage to covering multiple focus areas. You should clearly reference the relevant focus areas in your proposal narrative. We recognize that some reserve management needs naturally cut across multiple focus areas.

Q: The reserve management needs summary includes a topic that builds on a recently funded project, but I wanted to double check - would you fund two projects in consecutive years to the same reserve to work on complementary issues? Would this be discouraged in any way?

A: Proposals submitted to each RFP are evaluated independently of funding decisions from prior years or other RFPs open in the same year. If the topic and the angle proposed are still a current need for the reserve partner, and projects are complementary and not duplicative, then the proposal would be eligible for consideration this year and it would not be at a disadvantage.

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).

Eligibility

Q: Could we propose a collaborative research project with a 2.5 year project period?

A: Yes. Applicants can propose a project timeline that makes sense for their topic, but project periods can't exceed 3 years for this RFP. Keep in mind that budgets should not exceed \$200,000 per year, so for a 2.5 year project the overall budget should be under \$250,000 and each year's budget should not exceed \$200,000.

Q: Can one person be a team member on multiple proposals, for example working to address separate management needs of different NERR sites??

A: Yes. There is no restriction on how many proposals one person can be a part of.

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: 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.

Collaboration and End User Engagement

Q: Can an end user be a state agency rather than a reserve partner?

A: Yes. An end user is an individual or organization that would use the proposed research in decisions affecting the management issue. For example, a regulatory agency that could use the research to amend a regulatory approach would be a very appropriate end user for a project. Applicants should be sure to collaborate closely with the reserve to make sure the proposal accurately explains the relevance to the reserve. Your reserve partners may have additional ideas for how to identify and connect with appropriate users for a particular project.

Q: In prior proposals, reviewers seemed to have a lot of different questions about our engagement with end users. What sort of details do you recommend we include in our proposal given the space limitations?

A: Because we recruit proposal reviewers with diverse backgrounds and expertise, it's always good to assume your reviewers may know nothing about your particular issue, location and prior work. Reviewers seem to appreciate specific information about: (1) how you've engaged your end users prior to and during proposal development; (2) how specifically you'll interact and communicate during the project and what project decisions will be influenced by those interactions; and (3) how project results will or could be used in decisions. Even though some project details will evolve over the course of the project, you could include hypothetical examples of the type of input you might get from end users and how that could influence a research decision. Similarly, you could offer an example of the type of information that could emerge from your project, how it will be shared and potentially integrated with other information, who could use that information, and what specific decisions or management actions could be impacted. Those details, even if they are just hypothetical, demonstrate that you understand the management context and have thought through the steps required to inform decisions.

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 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 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, resource managers, regulators, land use planners, community leaders and educators at all levels.

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. End user representatives can be incorporated into the project team if they will be contributing significant time, expertise, or other resources to project activities. You are not required to include end users in your project team.

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](#).

Letters of Support

Q: Do we need a letter of support from a reserve to be eligible or competitive?

A: Pre-proposals are required to provide at least one and no more than three letters of support from the project’s primary intended users. At the pre-proposal stage, applicants should highlight just the 1-3 users that are most engaged and best positioned to use project results. If the reserves are a primary end user for a project then it is appropriate for them to provide a letter, but a *letter of support from a reserve not required nor expected*. Applicants are expected to work with their reserve partners to explain the project’s relevance to the reserve in the proposal narrative and make sure the reserve is fully supportive of their role in the project.

Q: If multiple reserves are involved, plus university and state and local partners, who should provide letters of support?

A: At the pre-proposal, only letters of support from primary end users should be included. Applicants should think about which entities or partners are best positioned to use project results in decisions that will ultimately impact the management issue. Letters from these users will help demonstrate that you have initiated the necessary collaborations and the project is likely to be impactful. You do not need a letter of support from a reserve.

Q: Can you include more reserves without getting a letter from all?

A: You can name reserves as partners on a proposal without having a letter of support from each one or any of them. Be sure to demonstrate relevance to the reserve system in other ways, such as through the proposal narrative and references to the summary of reserve management, and reach out to the manager of each reserve directly to confirm their support. You can also have multiple end user entities sign a single letter of support if they are a primary intended user of the work and their perspectives are similar.

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. It is always helpful to double check that the research coordinator has connected with the manager about the proposed work and received any input he/she may have. This will help ensure everyone is on the same page, particularly around reserve staff contributions to the project.

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. Capacity and ability to accommodate these kinds of requests will vary from reserve to reserve.

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; 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. Managers of all the reserves listed on the title page will have an opportunity to share any concerns through a proposal assessment form, or confirm that they don't have any concerns related to the two expectations outlined on page 6 of the RFP.

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.

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

A: 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. Beyond this, there are no predetermined roles or responsibilities for the lead reserve.

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 on developing and articulating the most appropriate approach for the project and end users. The number of reserves who are engaged and the extent to which they are engaged should be dictated by the goals and approach of the project. Each proposal will be reviewed according to what it is attempting to achieve. Within the proposal review process, there is no advantage or “extra credit” given to multi-reserve projects.

Project Roles

Q: Is it possible to designate two people to the Project Lead position (i.e. both researchers being PIs on the proposal)?

A: The project lead, collaborative lead and technical lead are required roles within a collaborative research team, and you can establish co-lead responsibilities for each role if that makes sense for your project and team. We will need a single point of contact for the grant once a project is selected for funding, but at the pre-proposal stage you have some flexibility. Explaining roles and responsibilities for appropriate team members is important for showing reviewers that the project will be well managed.

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

A: Project teams should include a collaborative lead who has the appropriate skills and experience to lead the collaborative process. 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. The proposal should clearly demonstrate that the collaborative lead has the skills to facilitate the collaborative aspects of the project. This person may also play a technical or other role on the team, if appropriate. This collaborative lead may, but does not have to be, the project lead.

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.

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.

Review & Selection Process

Q: On page 16 of the RFP it says, "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." Does this mean a reserve can only support one single-reserve proposal submission?

A: 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 secondary selection factor 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, with an expectation for proposals involving three or more reserves.

Q: 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 secondary selection factors (such as distribution of funds across regions or reserves) in their review and ranking process. While we do not expect reserves to choose one proposal over the other, managers can provide a letter of support to be included as an appendix to the proposal or share any concerns directly with the Science Collaborative via a proposal assessment form.

Q: Page 16 of the RFP outlines secondary selection factors for proposals. How does this selection process relate to other Science Collaborative funding opportunities?

A: Both the 2021 Science and the 2020 Collaborative Research RFPs include very similar secondary selection factors, and the factors will be applied to the proposals submitted to that RFP independent of other funding opportunities. For example, a single reserve may

serve as lead reserve on both a science transfer and collaborative research grant award in 2021.

Q: Is there any advantage or disadvantage to reserves that 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.

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

A: Not necessarily. Proposals based on prior work likely have a good team infrastructure and other elements to build on, but that does not guarantee that the team's most recent proposal will outcompete other good proposals.

Proposal Format and Appendices

Q: Can we include someone in our list of suggested reviewers if they also provided a letter of support for the pre-proposal?

A: You can; however, we wouldn't use that person as a reviewer because they are likely too close to the proposed project. That person's name is still valuable to share because it gives us insight into the type of person and the type of expertise we should look for when identifying expert reviewers for the full proposal stage.

Q: A couple of our team members are from a community that has been particularly hard hit by the pandemic and it is unlikely that they will be able to provide resumes before the submission deadline. Should I include them as team members?

A: If they are key to the project with an important team or end user role, including them as part of your project team at this stage will be important. While you may not have resumes, you can describe their expertise and role in the narrative and indicate why their resumes are not included in the appendices.

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: 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 follow the order of the five major headings in the preproposal narrative. Within each section, applicants can sequence content as they choose.

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.

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. If the fiduciary institution does not have a federally negotiated indirect cost rate, they may apply a "de minimis" 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 fiduciary institution 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, a fiscal letter of commitment from the fiduciary institution will be required at the full proposal stage.

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 budget limits are lower than used for the 2015, 2016 and 2017 collaborative research RFPs.

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: 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. The lead institution should be able to manage the grant award and any subcontracts.

Other

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: 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 6 collaborative research projects in 2021

