National Estuarine
Research Reserve System
Science Collaborative

2022 Request for Collaborative Research Pre-Proposals
Q&A Record

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Topics Covered

Focal Topics

Q: Some potential collaborators who are interested in applying have ideas that broadly address aspects of multiple management needs for our reserve, but do not align with any one management need in its entirety. Would such a proposal be competitive, or should proposals be developed to address a particular management need?
A: Science Collaborative opportunities are meant to support reserve management needs so the answer, in a sense, lies with your reserve. Would the proposed project and anticipated outputs best serve your reserve? If yes, you are able to write a letter of support as a primary end user that would explain how the proposed work meets aspects of multiple needs and indicate that the reserve supports the work. If not, you could encourage the team to focus on the aspects of the work they described that will most benefit your reserve and meet a specific management need or needs really well. It's really up to you. Either way, in the proposal, the team will need to make a strong case about how the science they are proposing will produce outputs that meet management need(s), and your letter of support should state clearly how you see the work benefitting the reserve.

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 as a primary end user, explaining 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 primary users of the work.

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.

Eligibility

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).

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: 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: 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: 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, and 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.

Q: With what level of detail should we describe how end users will use project deliverables? Can you provide an example of a good description?
A: Reviewers really want to understand how a project's results will be used to inform decision making. That can sometimes be challenging to specify in much detail before a project is underway and you have had a chance to work iteratively with end users to fully imagine and develop the products. One strategy at the pre-proposal phase might be to offer specific, but hypothetical examples in the narrative of how your approach could lead to specific products and how those products could be used in specific management contexts. This demonstrates that you understand the current policy and management context, but leaves some flexibility for iterating with your end users. Letters of support are also a great place for end users to get specific about potential uses of the products.

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 include at least one and no more than three letters of support from the project's primary end 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 a reserve is a primary end user for a project, then it is appropriate for the reserve to provide a letter. However, *if a reserve is not a primary end user, a letter of support from a reserve is 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.

Q: Can you include more reserves without getting a letter from all?
A: Remember that, at the pre-proposal phase, letters of support are only permitted from up to three primary end users. It is up to the applicant to determine which set of letters best convey the most compelling case for the work. If the reserve(s) you are engaging is a primary end user, it likely makes sense for them to provide a letter of support. Keep in mind that multiple end user entities can sign a single letter of support if they are a primary intended user of the work and their perspectives are similar. If one or several reserves are being named as partners but not primary end users, then they would not provide letters at the pre-proposal phase. 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 needs, and reach out to the manager of each reserve directly to confirm their support.

Q: What is the right approach to coordinating combined letters of support? I am thinking about helping to coordinate a combined letter by reaching out to one member of a group of primary end users to see if they are willing to take the lead in drafting the letter. I assume, then, the letter would be on the letterhead of that organization and members of other agreeing organizations would add their signatures?
A: That sounds like an appropriate approach for coordinating a combined letter of support. We do mention letterhead in the RFP but, if it is a combined letter of support from several groups/individuals, no need to worry about the letterhead if that complicates it; do what makes sense for the voices represented in the letter. On that note, we encourage you to find ways to ensure that the voices of the individuals/groups signing the letter come through in the letter, e.g., share their specific examples of use/interest. Even in a group letter, the more specificity, the better.

Q: Are you looking for a separate letter of support from the reserve manager, or would it be appropriate if the reserve manager either authors or signs a group letter?
If the reserve is a primary end user of the work, then a letter of support is absolutely a great idea. You could do it individually or as part of a group letter but make sure the reserve's voice comes through very clearly and with specificity.

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 they 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 that 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 if the 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 managed well.

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. The 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 a university, each with different skill sets that 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 is also the fiscal lead. However, recognizing that reserves sometimes work with Friends Groups who serve as fiduciary organizations, there may be instances where the project lead is not employed by the institution that will receive and manage the grant. In these cases, a project team member from the fiduciary institution must serve as lead. The contract will be issued to the fiduciary organization under the responsibility/authority of this individual and they will have ultimate responsibility of ensuring that the proposed scope of work is completed.

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 19 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 Manager, 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 exception 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 19 of the RFP outlines secondary selection factors for proposals. How does this selection process relate to other Science Collaborative funding opportunities?
A: Both the 2022 Science Transfer and the 2022 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 2022.

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: 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.

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 B?
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".

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. 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 **must** 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 submit a 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.

Q: Can you provide an outline of the responsibilities of the fiscal agent from the Science Collaborative's perspective?
A: This resource includes an explanation of the role of the fiduciary institution.

Q: How much of the budget should be dedicated to data management? Should it account for time or other components such as software?
A: Our rough rule of thumb is that you should assume that 10 -15 % of your overall budget should be dedicated to data management and data sharing activities. This portion of the budget should focus on everything you need to meet data sharing and archiving requirements, e.g., personnel time for cleaning up and preparing data and metadata for archival, software licenses, etc.

Q: Is it better to have an end user submit the proposal, rather than the institution or reserve?
A: Not necessarily. The applicant should be the project lead and the person best suited to serve that role for the project, regardless of where they sit. 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 cases, the project lead is also the fiscal lead. As far as the review panel is concerned, they will want to see that the individual leading the project is the right person for the role. In some cases, that individual may be an end user and/or a reserve staff member but that is not a requirement or expectation.

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 to get a full list of current and prior projects.

Q: Is it appropriate to mention the intent to apply for a science transfer grant as an approach for further applying research results?
A: The review panel will be looking at how the proposed project itself will accomplish the goal of applying the research results and products. Focusing on the internal aspects of the proposed project, rather than referencing a future effort, will be more effective at demonstrating application.

Q: If a project is based on a catalyst project, how much should the proposal reference this other project?
A: Referencing existing/prior work like a catalyst project is a good idea to help provide context and provide the rationale for the work that is being proposed. A likely location for this is in the narrative when you introduce the issue and provide the context.If appropriate, in the team section, you might also reference the prior work to demonstrate that the team has a history of working together.

Q: Do you have any tips about team management or proposals that set themselves up for successful project management?
A: Previous teams have been successful with charters as a way to clarify roles and responsibilities early on, along with expectations and accountability. Here's an example of a charter a team prepared for working with their advisory committee. Charters can also be developed for project teams.