National Estuarine
Research Reserve System
Science Collaborative

National Estuarine Research Reserve System Science Collaborative

2025 Collaborative Research Full Proposal Guidelines

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

Proposals Due: 11:59 pm EDT on April 18, 2025

Contents

National Estuarine Research Reserve System Science Collaborative

Overview

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Science Collaborative is soliciting full proposals from invited applicants for three or four-year collaborative research grants. Collaborative research projects conduct new applied science using a user-driven[1] approach that is grounded in reciprocal relationships[2] to produce data, tools, or other products that will inform decision making related to a reserve management need.[3] Applicants may draw on the natural, social, and/or physical sciences.

The collaborative science approach involves scientists, managers, communities, and others working together to advance understanding in a manner that none of them could accomplish alone. This approach is well-suited to producing longer term outcomes such as changes in decision making, policy, and behavior. These long term outcomes stem from nearer term impacts such as capacity building (at the individual, team, or reserve level), relationship building, and the development of resources and tools that effectively meet a need. These types of near term impacts are expected of collaborative science and how collaborative research projects lead to longer term impacts to coastal and estuarine health and resilience.

Funding Amount

Proposals involving less than five reserves have two options:

- Request up to $200,000 per year for three years for a total of $600,000 or
- Request up to $150,000 per year for four years for a total of $600,000.

Proposals involving five or more reserves have two options:

- Request up to $250,000 per year for three years for a total of $750,000 or

---

[1] 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 users include, but are not limited to: reserve staff; and public, private, or non-governmental decision/policy makers, e.g., regulators, resource managers, land use planners; Tribal Nations, Alaskan Natives, Hawaiian Islanders and local knowledge communities; and landowners, leaders of impacted communities, and educators at all levels.

[2] In collaborative science projects, reciprocal relationships are exemplified by being non-extractive and by participants receiving the resources they need to participate in the work. All parties (researchers, partners, intended users) collaboratively identify roles and commit to an approach to working together. The project team bears the responsibility of ensuring everyone has the resources they need to participate, ensuring everyone benefits, and avoiding potential harms. Learn more: Collaborative research to inform adaptive comanagement: a framework for the He'eia National Estuarine Research Reserve.

[3] At this site, you will find key words and full details about the current management and knowledge exchange needs of the NERRS. Needs are submitted by reserve managers to NOAA and are updated on an annual basis. There may be situations where an emerging need is identified with reserve partner(s) after the annual list is developed, and these can be accommodated by this RFP. See Reserve Engagement for more information.

- Request up to $250,000 per year for four years for a total of $1,000,000.

Eligibility for Funding

To be eligible for this funding opportunity, applicants must have submitted a pre-proposal and been invited by the Science Collaborative to submit a full proposal.

Projects funded under this RFP must be developed in collaboration with staff from at least one of NOAA's 30 National Estuarine Research Reserve sites and address current management needs of the reserve(s) involved in the project.

This funding opportunity is open to applicants from United States (U.S.) academic institutions, non-government organizations, and non-federal public sectors working in partnership with NERRS staff. Federal employees and agencies are not eligible to receive funding but may participate as unfunded project team members.

Each proposal must designate a fiduciary institution and a fiscal lead[4] that will receive and manage the award, if granted. Researchers from institutions outside the U.S. cannot serve as the fiscal lead, but may be included in the project and funded by sub-awards through an eligible U.S. entity.

Proposal Submission Process

Invited applicants should review the application process as outlined in these full proposal guidelines and follow directions to submit a proposal using the timeline outlined below. Proposals include a 15-page maximum narrative that describes the problem being addressed, user needs, approach, outputs and outcomes, and team members, as well as detailed budget and justification and appendices. All applicants will receive feedback on their proposals along with the funding notifications.

[4] In most cases, the project lead is also the fiscal lead. However, recognizing that reserves sometimes work with Friend 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.

Key Dates

Date	Activity
April 18, 2025 by 11:59 pm EDT	Proposals due
May 19 - June 2, 2025	Anticipated window for optional applicant response to written reviews. Reviews will be shared with applicants May 19 and responses will be due June 2.
July 2025	Anticipated funding notifications
October 1, 2025	Anticipated project start date

Supporting Documents

All supporting documents can be found at https://nerrssciencecollaborative.org/collaborative-research.

About Collaborative Research Projects

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

Outputs

Project outputs are specific products that are developed during or upon project completion. Outputs must address 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 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 system-wide webinar or a poster or session at a NERRS/NERRA Meeting.

Outcomes

Project outcomes are the way you see the work making a difference as a result of the project process and outputs. They are likely a collection of connected nearer term impacts and longer term outcomes related to a reserve management need. Near term impacts, such as those related to capacity building, relationship building, and product development, are essential to achieve longer term outcomes, such as changes in behavior or decision making.

At the pre-proposal stage, the focus was on longer term outcomes anticipated at and beyond project completion. Examples of longer outcomes include, but are not limited to the following:

- New or refined decision making;
- New science informing updates to management processes and a plan for future iterative evaluations of these processes;
- New or refined state or local policy addressing a reserve management need;

- Enhanced programs that can better address a current management need based on new data, analyses, or tools.

At the full proposal phase, nearer term impacts should be more apparent as you are developing your approach, and can help layout the logic toward longer term outcomes. Examples of nearer term impacts that connect to longer term outcomes include, but are not limited to the following:

- Deepened relationships that support trust building, greater transparency, and a shared understanding of what factors into decision making can help lead to new or refined decision making;
- Increased capacity of an individual or group to meaningfully engage with a key partner can also help support steps toward new or refined decision making, or support updates to management processes and their future iteration;
- Increased capacity of a reserve to provide essential data and information to all partners around a complex topic can support new or refined state or local policy addressing a reserve management need, or support development of a new analysis or tool.

Required Elements

All proposals must:

1) Directly involve at least one reserve and address a current management need for reserve(s) that will be engaged in the project;
2) Clearly identify, engage, and be responsive to the interests and needs of users; and
3) Plan for the costs associated with implementing a Data Sharing Plan.

See Appendix A: Required Elements which describes these elements in further detail and provides guidance to support the development of your proposal.

See Appendix C: Evaluation Criteria, Review and Selection Process to learn how proposals will be evaluated.

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. This knowledge addresses critical coastal management issues identified by the NERRS in order to improve coastal and estuarine health and resilience. 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.

Commitment to Responsive and Engaged Science

The NERRS Science Collaborative is committed to practicing and supporting responsive and engaged collaborative science. Our work is grounded in the Collaborative Science Mindset and Principles we co-developed alongside our NERRS partners and NOAA.

The NERRS strives to recognize and affirm the existence, value, and validity of different knowledge systems, and the complementary role that longstanding and evolving knowledge in all forms holds alongside institutional science. In building reciprocal relationships with partners, the NERRS and NSC acknowledge knowledge systems and ways of knowing that are different yet equivalent to institutional science.

All program elements encourage project teams to examine the unique complexity of the socio-ecological systems in which they work. Doing the best work possible in these environments requires authentic collaboration with those people most impacted by the issue that is grounded in reciprocal relationships. This includes awareness, integration, and elevation of different systems of knowledge so that all participants benefit and feel empowered to bring their experiences to solving coastal and estuarine issues.

Key program elements emphasize our commitment to improving how we practice and support collaborative science. Some examples include the following:

- **Requests for proposals** - Value and elevate multiple systems of knowledge, such as Traditional Ecological Knowledge, alongside institutional knowledge.
- **Proposal review** - Guidance documents recognize all knowledge systems as equally valid and explicitly instruct reviewers about what this might entail when conducting a review.
- **Data sharing** - Guidance documents acknowledge differences in the ownership of data, due to acknowledged sovereignty, and specify how these data must be handled.
- **Accessible resources** - Tools, advice, and case examples are publicly available in multiple formats via our Guide to Collaborative Science and Resource Library.

The Science Collaborative is managed through a cooperative agreement between the University of Michigan and NOAA.

Overview of Full Proposal Requirements

Full proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm EDT on April 18, 2025.

All of the full proposal requirements are detailed in Appendix B. Proposals not meeting these requirements, including budget and header requirements, will be removed from the competition without further review.

The proposal structure is as follows:

1) Title Page
2) Project Narrative
    a) Statement of Need and Response to User Needs
    b) Project Approach
    c) Outputs and Outcomes
    d) Team
    e) Data Accessibility
3) Appendices A-J: These include items such as timeline, references, budget table and narrative, letters of support, resumes, data sharing plan, etc.

How to Submit Your Proposal

Proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm EDT on April 18, 2025 at the unique application URL emailed to applicants when invited to submit a full proposal.

Please note that you will be required to log in using the same credentials as those used to submit your pre-proposal.

Your proposal must be uploaded to your original application (the one you started at the pre-proposal phase). To submit your proposal, follow your unique URL which will prompt you to log in to your account (using the same credentials as the pre-proposal phase). You can then edit your application.

Submitting your full proposal will consist of uploading a single PDF of your full proposal (including the budget in the appendices) and a separate Excel spreadsheet of your budget table to your online application. Once logged in, you will need to do the following:

1) Expand the “Project Information” section to access the full proposal upload field and then upload your proposal as a single PDF (including title page, narrative, and all appendices) the budget in the appendices);

2) Expand the “Budget as Excel spreadsheet” section to access the field to upload your budget spreadsheet. Please be sure to include the overall budget spreadsheet along with sheets for any subcontracts;

3) Review and update the other fields in the online application form as needed, including reserves and team members involved in the proposal; and

4) Click the "save" button.

You will receive a confirmation email the first time you successfully upload and save your proposal. The email will include the link you may use to return to your proposal submission and make edits until the deadline. Your saved application will be automatically submitted at 11:59pm EDT on April 18, 2025.

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

Environmental and Cultural Resources Review

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 completed 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 review 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.**

Guidance to Applicants

Due to required environmental and cultural review of all projects, **field activities that could potentially impact the environment and/or cultural resources should not be planned before January 1, 2026**.

NOAA's environmental and cultural resources review process will be initiated immediately after funding notifications. To conduct the environmental compliance review, NOAA will need a detailed description of field sampling methods along with a map showing the location of each field site, including each field site's latitude and longitude. Please note that **information for NOAA to conduct the environmental and cultural resources review is NOT a required element of your proposal.** However, if you do have detailed site maps, latitude/longitude information, and any compliance documents associated with sites, please include them in Appendix J. If you do not provide this

information in your proposal and it is recommended for funding, NOAA will contact you to obtain the information required for the environmental compliance review. If there are existing compliance documents, NOAA will request them at that time.

Questions regarding this requirement should be directed to the NOAA Program Manager, Doug George (510-637-3796, Email: 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 https://nerrssciencecollaborative.org/collaborative-research.

Email: The Science Collaborative will reply to written questions regarding this request for proposals. Questions should be submitted to nerrs-info@umich.edu.

Phone: The Science Collaborative team is also available to discuss questions over the phone. We suggest emailing us at nerrs-info@umich.edu to set up a time or leaving a voice message for Maeghan Brass (734-763-0727) or Arianna Stokes (734-763-0056).

Appendix A: Required Elements

1) Reserve Engagement

All proposals must be developed in collaboration with at least one of NOAA's 30 National Estuarine Research Reserve sites, address a current management need of the reserve(s) involved in the project and demonstrate a plan for collaboration with relevant reserve staff.[5]

Proposals must offer a clear and specific explanation of *how* the proposed work will inform and address a current management need for one or more reserves. Applicants should consult the Annual Summary of Reserve Management Needs that was 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 needs. There may be situations where a need is identified with reserve partner(s) after the annual list is developed, particularly for multi-reserve projects. These needs can be accommodated by this RFP. In such cases, the process used to identify the need should be clearly articulated in the proposal narrative, e.g., describe iterative conversations with a reserve, and confirmed by relevant reserve(s) in a letter of support in Appendix F of the proposal.

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

The proposal title page must identify a lead reserve as well as any additional reserves that will be participating in the proposed work. For each 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 plans for how the reserve would contribute to the work (e.g., staff roles in the project) and any resources allocated to support those contributions.

Reserve managers will have an opportunity to identify any concerns through a proposal assessment form that is submitted directly to the Science Collaborative, separate from the 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. ***It is the responsibility of the***

[5] 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 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.

applicant to ensure that the relevant reserve manager(s) is adequately consulted during project development and receives a copy of the final proposal.

2) Collaboration and User Integration

Proposals must clearly identify, engage, and be responsive to the interests and needs of the intended users of the project outputs.[6] Proposals should identify a set of primary users, including groups or individuals invested in the proposal topic that are in a position to apply the information or tools being developed through the project.

Because this grant program is meant to address reserve needs, it is appropriate to think of the reserves as one of the project's 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.

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

The collaborative process should be designed with specific users in mind and customized so that it contributes to building reciprocal relationships[7] with users. The collaborative approach and budget should provide the support necessary and accommodate the range of user abilities to participate in all aspects of the project where the team intends them to be involved. The approach should also ensure that all participants benefit from participating in the project. For example, a workshop might be designed to include a service component of significance to your user group to help strengthen relationships while also providing time for discussion about how to refine a

---

[6] 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 users include, but are not limited to: reserve staff; and public, private, or non-governmental decision/policy makers, e.g., regulators, resource managers, land use planners; Tribal Nations, Alaskan Natives, Hawaiian Islanders and local knowledge communities; and landowners, leaders of impacted communities, and educators at all levels.

[7] In collaborative science projects, reciprocal relationships are exemplified by being non-extractive and by participants receiving the resources they need to participate in the work. All parties (researchers, partners, intended users) collaboratively identify roles and commit to an approach to working together. The project team bears the responsibility of ensuring everyone has the resources they need to participate, ensuring everyone benefits, and avoiding potential harms. Learn more: Collaborative research to inform adaptive comanagement: a framework for the He'eia National Estuarine Research Reserve.

project's scope and provide feedback. There are a variety of mechanisms for engagement that can be tailored to meet your user community's unique perspectives and values.

Intended users 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. This should be explicitly stated in the project narrative.

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. With this in mind, all proposals must:

- Identify the primary user(s) and their needs;
- Describe how the user's input and involvement helped to shape the project;
- Describe a clear process that will ensure iterative engagement and contribute to reciprocal relationships with the users to advance the research. This should include anticipated timing and mechanisms for soliciting input during the project and specific research decisions that will be informed by user input;
- Provide evidence of the user's interest in the project, e.g., letter of support (all proposals must include at least one letter of support from intended user(s));
- Identify an individual who will be responsible for leading the collaborative process—the collaborative lead[8]—and describe their relevant experience and skills; and
- Demonstrate that sufficient time and resources are dedicated to support user engagement, and this is reflected in the budget, personnel, and timeline.

The Science Collaborative has developed the Guide to Collaborative Science with resources that can help you design your user engagement process, including key considerations for engaging 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, quality controlled, documented, and independently understandable to general users. Data should be made 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.

[8] The collaborative lead is responsible for the full engagement of 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 user input necessary to produce outputs that are responsive to their needs.

Applicants that propose the collection of new data, including receiving or incorporating sensitive data such as Traditional Ecological Knowledge, are required to develop and include a Data Sharing Plan as a part of their proposal package. This plan must address elements such as methods and protocols for data collection, data quality control/quality assurance procedures, metadata, data access (including limits to data access if appropriate), and data archival. If the proposed research involves human subjects, the plan must also address Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols. Applicants must account for the costs associated with implementing a Data Sharing Plan in their budget and project narrative.[9] See the Data Sharing Plan Requirements and Outline for more details.

Applicants partnering with Tribal Nations, Alaskan Native, Hawaiian Island and other local communities, and who may be accessing their knowledge in projects should also be aware of requirements and best practices regarding its use. The NOAA Consultation Handbook provides more information, including important definitions to help teams appropriately use and communicate knowledge gained from, or co-produced with, these communities. The Data Sharing Plan Requirements and Outline provides additional guidance that applies to any grant awarded under this RFP.

The NERRS Centralized Data Management Office (CDMO) is the coordinating entity for Science Collaborative data management activities. CDMO personnel will provide data management guidance during proposal development and technical support for projects. In addition, CDMO can help teams archive and make accessible their project datasets using CDMO's access and archival services and standard protocols.

Teams are encouraged to identify long term data archival portals that make sense for their type of data and potential users of that data. If teams would like to use the CDMO for data access and data archival, their standard process for making data accessible would be as follows:

- The Science Collaborative will create an entry about a project's datasets in the Science Collaborative online resource library, as well as in national data catalogs (InPort), outlining the scope of the datasets and making them discoverable; and
- Potential users of the data will have an option to complete a data request form. The form will generate an email response with a data download link connecting the user to the package or online folders of data and metadata files that have been archived with the CDMO.

If this archival/access process meets a project's needs, applicants may include it as part of their proposal's data sharing plan without consulting with CDMO in advance of

[9] 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.

proposal submission. More involved data or information sharing ideas, such as development of an interactive user interface for a database, are not part of CDMO's typical support for Science Collaborative projects. Project teams should plan for this kind of activity within their project scope and budget.

Additional guidance for developing a Data Sharing Plan can be found in the Data Sharing Plan Requirements and Outline, examples provided on the grant opportunity webpage, and details in **Appendix B: Full Proposal Requirements**.

Appendix B: Full Proposal Requirements

Full proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm EDT on April 18, 2025.

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. Proposals must include a title page, 15-page maximum narrative, and appendices as outlined below. Budget tables should be submitted as an Excel file and also included as an appendix within the proposal package PDF. **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 include the following information and headers:

1) Project Title
2) Project Lead / Fiscal Lead*
    a) Title / Position
    b) Institution
    c) Telephone Number
    d) Postal Mailing Address
    e) E-mail Address

    *In most cases, the project lead is also the fiscal lead. However, recognizing that reserves sometimes work with Friend 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, and should be listed here. The contract would be issued to the fiduciary organization under the responsibility/authority of this individual and they would have ultimate responsibility of ensuring that the proposed scope of work is completed. In these cases, the project lead should be listed under "Additional Team Members" below.
3) Additional Team Members (anyone receiving project resources or contributing significant resources to the project) – Name, institution, telephone, email, and role, e.g., project lead, collaborative lead, technical lead, user, team member, etc. **Project, fiscal, 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[10] for the project. If relevant, identify any additional reserves that are directly engaged in the project.[11] Multiple reserves may collaborate on a proposal but a *single lead* reserve must be identified here.

    a) Lead reserve

    b) Any additional reserves

6) Budget Request – Requested dollar amount. **The total request may not exceed the pre-proposal budget estimate**.

    Proposals involving less than five reserves have two options:

    - Request up to $200,000 per year for three years for a total of $600,000 or
    - Request up to $150,000 per year for four years for a total of $600,000.

    Proposals involving five or more reserves have two options:

    - Request up to $250,000 per year for three years for a total of $750,000 or
    - Request up to $250,000 per year for four years for a total of $1,000,000.

7) Project Duration – E.g., October 1, 2025 - September 30, 2028. Three-year projects should start October 1, 2025 and end September 30, 2028. Four-year projects should start October 1, 2025 and end September 30, 2029.

8) Project Summary – Provide a 200-word summary of the proposed project that is suitable for a non-technical audience. Include the project's objectives, responsiveness to user needs, planned outputs, and anticipated outcomes.

Project Narrative (15-page maximum)

The 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 and may not have expertise in all the disciplines of a specific project.

The project narrative **should not exceed 15 pages** and should be organized using the following five headers in this order.

---

[10] 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.

[11] See the Reserve Engagement section for additional guidance on reserve involvement. Managers of each listed reserve will have an opportunity to provide directly to the Science Collaborative program any concerns about the reserve's engagement in the proposal and their anticipated contribution to the project.

1) Problem Statement and Response to 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 proposal topic.

   - Introduce the issue(s) the project will address, discussing the importance and context.
   - Describe the project's relevance to the reserve(s) involved in the project and explain *how* the project will inform and advance management related to one or more current reserve management needs.[12] Make the link between the science you are proposing and the management need(s) that will be addressed very clear. You may find it helpful to include a logic model or flow chart to help convey these linkages.
   - Clearly identify the project's primary user(s),[13] their current information needs, and their connection to the proposal topic. Describe how the user's input helped to shape the project and how they anticipate applying project findings and using outputs in their work. You may find it helpful to organize this information in a table in order to convey individual users' specific interests in the project. This should be corroborated by letters of support from intended users in Appendix F.
   - If relevant, share what resources and relationships you are bringing to bear to support the project. Briefly, indicate to what extent the proposed work would forge new relationships within the team and with primary users, or to what extent the project builds on prior collaborations. Both new and existing partnerships are valued; this information is helpful for understanding the project approach and the kinds of outcomes that could follow.

2) Project Approach – The approach should describe *integrated* technical and collaborative processes that will address the research questions, provide opportunities for meaningful input from users, support effective coordination of project team members, and lead to outputs that meet user needs.

   Project leads should anticipate organizing a project team/partner meeting at the end of the project that will support meaningful wrap up and inform the final project report. (More detail will be provided at project kickoff.) For the team/partner meeting, anticipate a level of effort and associated resources similar

[12] There may be situations where an emerging need, i.e., not listed in the management needs document, is identified with reserve partner(s), particularly for multi-reserve projects. In such cases, the process for identifying the need should be clearly articulated here in the narrative, and confirmed by relevant reserve(s) in a letter of support in Appendix F.

[13] Primary intended 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.

to other meetings you plan to organize with these partners for a minimum of a half day and up to two days.

In describing the approach, be sure to include the following information, using an organizational structure that best suits the proposal topic.

- Clearly identify the project's core research question(s).
- Describe the collaborative process you will use to coordinate among team members and ensure iterative engagement and contribute to building reciprocal relationships with the users to advance the research. Key details include the following:
    - The type of insight primary users could provide and how their contributions will support and inform the research process.
    - Anticipated purpose, timing, and mechanisms for engaging users and being adaptive and responsive to their input. Be specific about the mechanism(s) for soliciting user input (e.g., questionnaires, individual consultations, workshops), why a chosen approach is appropriate[14], and how that information will be distilled and used to support the research process.
    - This process should also reflect an understanding of the support users may need to participate in the project as you intend them to be involved[15] and demonstrate how they will benefit from involvement in the project.
- Describe the technical approach that will be used to address the project's research questions, including specific natural, physical and/or social science data collection and analysis methods, specific tools, and/or datasets that will be used.[16] Make it clear why the proposed methods are appropriate and how they will lead to the planned outputs. Where relevant, indicate when and how collaboration with users connects to specific research tasks and informs the research process.

---

[14] For example, a project might plan to leverage an existing working group because relationships already exist and it is an efficient way to engage the identified users, or integrate individuals into a project team because those users have a skill or expertise directly relevant to completing the project. When and where meetings occur, how meeting notes and materials are shared, how input is collected, etc., should reflect an understanding of how users will be able to participate.

[15] For example, travel support, honoraria, compensation for child care to attend a meeting, provision of traditional food/gifts that have community significance when convening partners, etc. These types of expenses are permissible with grant funds. If they are necessary for user participation, you can reference them here and explain them in detail in the budget justification.

[16] Note: Due to required environmental and cultural review of all projects, field activities that could potentially impact the environment and/or cultural resources should not be planned before January 1, 2026.

3) Outputs and 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 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 related to a reserve management need. How you anticipate achieving your longer term outcomes can be explained by a collection of connected, nearer term impacts for which you are designing. In other words, the nearer term impacts are the result of deliberate steps within your project approach that help lead to longer term outcomes. See example outcomes provided above.

- Provide a list of the planned outputs and restate the outcomes identified in your pre-proposal. Describe these briefly, clearly stating how the outputs meet the user and reserve management needs discussed in the "problem statement" and how the outputs will help lead to the longer term outcomes.
    - Be sure to articulate anticipated nearer term impacts that will help lead to outcomes. This both helps build the logic for achieving your intended longer term outcome(s) and demonstrates to reviewers how you anticipate getting there. Near term impacts are likely to relate to elements such as capacity building (individual, team, or reserve level), relationship building, and/or product development, and are valuable and essential impacts of collaborative science projects.
- Explain how the usability of the outputs will be sustained beyond the project period, e.g., who will be responsible for disseminating products and how information products will be maintained or updated.
- Provide a short statement that describes what success would look like at the end of the project.

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, collaborative lead, technical lead, user, team member, etc. Two-page resumes for all team members must be included in Appendix G.

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 must serve as lead. The contract would be issued to this individual and they would have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the proposed scope of work is completed.
- 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 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) Data Accessibility – For projects using existing datasets, identify who owns them and how the project team will access them. Projects that propose using SWMP or Wetlands and Water Levels (WLWL) data must indicate which specific SWMP or WLWL data will be used. If a critical dataset is not publicly available, demonstrate permission for accessing the data by including letters of support in Appendix F. Projects that anticipate receiving or incorporating sensitive data, such as Traditional Ecological Knowledge, should indicate that their data sharing plan details how they will protect it.

Appendices

Appendices A, B, D-H are required; appendices C, I, and J are optional.

A. Timeline – Using the required timeline template found on the grant opportunity webpage, provide the following:
    a. Project start and end dates. Projects may be three or four years in duration. Three-year projects should start October 1, 2025 and end September 30, 2028. Four-year projects should start October 1, 2025 and end September 30, 2029.
    b. A schedule with key tasks and deliverables. This schedule must:

i. Identify significant tasks, including user engagement opportunities that are realistic for the planned users and partners and allow time for integrating input;

ii. Specifically cite and link directly to the outputs identified in the project narrative; and

iii. Indicate completion of all final project outputs.

Due to required environmental and cultural review of all projects, field activities that could potentially impact the environment and/or cultural resources should not be planned before January 1, 2026.

For projects working with students, please keep in mind that the project start date (Oct 1) follows the federal fiscal year, not the typical academic year. You may need to anticipate a winter term start date for the student or an alternative way to cover the first month or two of support.

In addition, please plan in advance to allocate time and any necessary resources to complete the following tasks:

Project leads are required to check-in with their Science Collaborative program officer and attend virtual workshops. Check-ins occur at project kickoff and quarterly over the course of the project via one-hour calls. Virtual workshops about collaborative science occur approximately quarterly (approximately 8 hours total) for the first year of the project.

Project leads should also anticipate organizing a project team/partner meeting at the end of the project that will support meaningful wrap up and inform the final project report. (More detail will be provided at project kickoff.) For the team/partner meeting, anticipate a level of effort and associated resources similar to other meetings you plan to organize with these partners for a minimum of a half day and up to two days.

B. References – Up to 2 pages of references may be included.

C. In-Kind Contributions (Optional) – There is no cost-share requirement for these projects. However, to help reviewers fully understand all contributions to the project, we recommend that applicants who have planned in-kind contributions detail them in this appendix as follows.

The in-kind contribution of personnel to specific project tasks should be explained in this appendix, and corroborated by a letter of support in Appendix F as described below. Be certain to confirm that the supporting letter has the same details, e.g., FTE estimate, as provided in this appendix. In particular, all reserve

staff time anticipated for the project must be accounted for, even if funds are not being requested to support that time. Other major in-kind contributions to the project should be explained here as well.

i. For all personnel time being contributed to the project but not receiving support directly through the grant, provide the following:

   a) Full-time equivalent (FTE) estimate;

   b) Explanation as to why the personnel time is not being requested through the grant; and

   c) Which of the funded team members will ensure accountability to the project. For example, if the Collaborative Lead is being supported by other funds: "The Project Lead will ensure that the Collaborative Lead (0.3 FTE of person Y provided by Reserve X) will be fully engaged in the project."

ii. Explain any other significant in-kind resources that will be brought to bear in support of the project, e.g., boat time, use of facilities, equipment, etc.

D. Budget, Budget Narrative & IDC Rate Agreement –

i. Budget Table(s) - Use the budget template found on the grant opportunity webpage to provide an itemized estimate of all project costs. **Budget tables should be submitted as an Excel file and also included as an appendix within the proposal package PDF.**

The total request in the full proposal detailed budget may not exceed the budget estimate in the pre-proposal.

Proposals involving less than five reserves have two options:

- Request up to $200,000 per year for three years for a total of $600,000 or
- Request up to $150,000 per year for four years for a total of $600,000.

Proposals involving five or more reserves have two options:

- Request up to $250,000 per year for three years for a total of $750,000 or
- Request up to $250,000 per year for four years for a total of $1,000,000.

The overall budget must include a separate budget for each subcontract, using the budget template, with a narrative explanation provided either as a separate section within the overall budget narrative or as a separate narrative document. Multi-institution and multi-reserve projects are complex

and require an efficient subcontracting process to ensure project teams are able to begin their work quickly. Applicants are encouraged to work closely with their fiscal point of contact to ensure they have mechanisms in place to facilitate the sub-award process effectively. There is no cost-share requirement for these projects.

ii. Indirect Rate Agreement - The Science Collaborative will reimburse overhead costs up to an institution's federally negotiated indirect cost (IDC) rate agreement. **Applicants should provide a copy of the IDC rate agreement for the fiduciary institution that would manage the grant, if they have one**. If the fiduciary institution or a subcontractor does not have a federally negotiated indirect rate, they should use the de minimis rate of 10%. Unless otherwise noted in the IDC rate agreement, indirect costs may only be applied to the first $25,000 of each subcontract. Subcontract budgets do not need to include IDC rate agreements.

iii. Budget Narrative – Provide a budget narrative to justify expenses in all budget categories. Please note the following:

   a) Personnel costs must be broken out by each team member, including number of months and percentage of time requested.

      As described in Timeline, project leads are required to check-in with their Science Collaborative program officer quarterly and attend virtual workshops. At project closeout, a project team/partner meeting and final written report are required, as well as a final call with the program officer. Please plan in advance to allocate time and resources to complete these tasks.

   b) Any unnamed personnel, e.g., reserve staff, graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, or technicians, must be identified by their job title, and their personnel costs explained as described above.

   c) Equipment costs must describe the equipment to be purchased and its contribution to the achievement of project goals.[17] If a piece of equipment costs more than $10,000, a cost analysis will be required before contracting. It does not need to be completed as part of the proposal. This analysis will compare the cost of purchasing a piece of equipment against the cost of leasing the same piece of equipment. The benefits of leasing or purchasing should be addressed in this analysis as well.

   d) Travel costs must be broken out by number of people traveling, destination, and purpose of travel, and projected costs per person. Conference fees required to attend the conference must be explicitly stated in the budget justification. Domestic and foreign

[17] Equipment is defined as tangible, durable property with a useful life of more than one year and a purchase price of $10,000 and above per unit.

travel should be itemized separately. Foreign travel must comply with the Fly America Act which limits the use of foreign flag carriers.

e) If collecting new data, proposals must include appropriate budgets to support required data management activities. It is anticipated that for projects proposing significant new data collection efforts, appropriate personnel time should be committed for data QA/QC and metadata development. For budget allocation guidance, it is anticipated that 10% to 15% of the overall budget should go to support data management activities.

f) Overhead may be charged up to the fiscal institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate. Applicants should include a copy of their indirect agreement, if they have one, as part of the proposal PDF.

The budget narrative should explain the project's IDC rate and which project expenses are used for calculating the total indirect amount.[18]

A separate budget narrative is required for each subcontract, including the same detail as is required for the overall budget. As noted above, unless otherwise noted in the indirect cost rate agreement, overhead may only be applied to the first $25,000 of each subcontract.

If a proposal includes an estimate for a subcontract, for example, for work that will be competitively bid after the project is awarded, the budget narrative should include a summary of and justification for the subcontract services. Project leads should provide budget details to their Science Collaborative program officer as any new subcontracts are established during the project period.

E. Subrecipient Statement of Collaborative Intent – The lead fiduciary institution must complete this Subrecipient Statement of Collaborative Intent form. Subcontractors do not need to complete the form.

F. Letters of Support – Provide letters from individuals and/or partners confirming contributions to and support for the project. Include letters from the following:

a. From primary users: Primary users who will be engaged throughout the project and will use the outputs. In their letters of support, users should describe in their own words: (i) how they have been engaged with the development of the proposal; (ii) how they see themselves continuing to inform the project if funded; and (iii) how they anticipate using project outputs. Reviewers will be looking for personalized, signed letters on an

[18] For example, applicants should indicate if the project will use their institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate, something lower, or a de minimus 10% rate. In addition, the budget narrative should indicate which project costs (e.g., salaries and travel but not tuition) the IDC rate is being applied to for the calculations of the total indirect amount.

organization's letterhead to confirm user engagement and understand how the work will meet their needs. **All proposals must include at least one letter of support from a primary user.**

b. From team members or partners providing in-kind contribution of personnel time (if applicable): Team members or partners included in the project approach but not funded in the budget. Be sure to specify an estimated full-time equivalent (FTE) for the individual's time (same as stated in Appendix C) and confirm that participation in the project would be part of their work commitment. FTE estimates aid the panel in assessing feasibility.

c. From individuals, groups, and/or institutions providing access to resources (if applicable): Individuals, groups, and/or institutions that have agreed to provide data/access to data or other resources necessary for the project not otherwise accounted for in the budget.

G. 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.

H. Data Sharing Plan – All Science Collaborative proposals must address data management requirements in one of two ways:

a. **For projects that propose the collection of new data or anticipate receiving or incorporating sensitive data, e.g., Traditional Ecological Knowledge:** Develop a Data Sharing Plan of two to five pages using the Data Sharing Plan Requirements and Outline.

b. **For projects that do not propose the collection of new data**: Provide a statement that "no detailed Data Sharing Plan is needed," accompanied by a clear justification as to why, e.g., no new data are being collected.

See the data management section for additional guidance.

I. Other Supporting Documents (optional; 5 pages maximum)

J. Field Site Information (optional; see Environmental and Cultural Resources Review for guidance on this appendix)

Appendix C: Evaluation Criteria, Review and Selection Process

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

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the equally weighted criteria listed below.

1) Engagement of Intended Users

    a) Does the proposal demonstrate engagement of primary intended users in the development of the research and project approach? E.g., is it clear how the intended user(s) helped to shape the project?

    b) Is there evidence of the intended user's commitment to continued involvement in the project? Is this corroborated in letters of support from the intended user(s)?

    c) Is there evidence that the outputs meet the identified user's needs? Is this corroborated in letters of support from the intended user(s)?

2) Collaborative Approach

    a) Does the proposal outline an appropriate plan for facilitating and managing a collaborative process involving the team and primary intended users?

    b) Are the purposes and methods for engaging intended users clear, appropriate, and contribute to reciprocal relationships?

        i) Is there evidence of accommodating the range of user abilities to participate in all aspects of the project where the team intends them to be involved? E.g., when and where meetings occur, how meeting notes and materials are shared, how input is collected, etc.

        ii) Does the approach demonstrate how all participants will benefit from involvement in the project?

    c) Is it clear how the intended user engagement activities will support the research process?

3) Technical Approach

    a) Are the methods sufficiently detailed, technically sound and appropriate for addressing the research questions?

    b) Will the research outputs be developed in a way that's responsive to input from intended users?

c) Does the proposal demonstrate access to and/or availability of necessary resources, including data?

   i) Where relevant, is this corroborated in letters of support?

   ii) Where relevant, is there evidence of sensitivity to ownership of privileged knowledge and demonstrated care to protect it? E.g., identified need for data sharing agreements or other means to protect data sovereignty.

4) Feasibility

   a) Does the team have adequate expertise, experience, and well-defined roles for the proposed technical methods and intended user engagement?

   b) Is the timeline realistic for the proposed work, and does it include sufficient time for integrating user input and completing proposed project outputs?

   c) Is the budget appropriate for the proposed work and does it include sufficient resources for integrating intended user input and completing proposed project outputs? Does it include resources to support participation of project partners? E.g., travel support, honoraria, compensation for child care to attend a meeting, provision of traditional food/gifts that have community significance when convening partners, etc.

5) Potential Impact

   a) Does the proposal reflect a comprehensive understanding of the issue, intended user's needs, and decision making context?

   b) Does the proposal demonstrate how the project will advance understanding and action related to at least one reserve management need?

   c) Are the proposed processes and outputs likely to lead to the desired outcomes?

Review Process

The review process for proposals 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** – Full proposals must be submitted by the stated deadline. Science Collaborative staff will review all applications to ensure that they meet the requirements as described in 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) **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 guidelines. Reviewers will also be asked to provide comments to explain their rating and, where possible, suggestions for improvement.

    b) *Applicant response to reviews* – Applicants will receive their written technical reviews and be given the option to provide a two-page response.

    c) *Full proposal panel review* – The 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 selection process.

Selection Process

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 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;[19]
- 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.[20]

Funding notifications are anticipated in July 2025.

[19] 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 full proposals.

[20] A reserve may serve as lead reserve for more than one collaborative research proposal, 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 project involves three or more reserves. This criterion will be applied to proposals submitted to this RFP independent of other Science Collaborative funding opportunities.