



**National Estuarine  
Research Reserve System  
Science Collaborative**

## **National Estuarine Research Reserve System Science Collaborative**

### **2025 Request for Collaborative Research Pre-Proposals**

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

**RFP Release: October 16, 2024**

**Pre-Proposals Due: December 11, 2024**

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## Overview

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

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 impacts such as changes in decision making, policy, and behavior. These long term impacts stem from more near 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 outcomes 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
- Request up to \$250,000 per year for four years for a total of \$1,000,000.

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<sup>1</sup> 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, including Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities, landowners, regulators, resource managers, land use planners, leaders of impacted communities, and educators at all levels.

<sup>2</sup> 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](#).

<sup>3</sup>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.



## Eligibility for Funding

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<sup>4</sup> 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

Applicants should review the process outlined in this RFP and follow directions to submit a pre-proposal by December 11, 2024.

The pre-proposal is **mandatory** and will be used to determine which applicants are invited to submit full proposals. Pre-proposals include a five-page maximum narrative that describes the problem being addressed, user needs, outputs and outcomes, general approach, team members, budget estimate (number only), and appendices.

Applicants must submit their pre-proposal through an online submission form accessible via the Science Collaborative website. All applicants will receive pre-proposal feedback when notified whether they are invited to submit a full proposal.

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<sup>4</sup> 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
<b>November 13, 2024 at 2pm EST</b>	Webinar: RFP Overview and Question & Answer; <a href="#">Register here</a>
<b>December 11, 2024 by 11:59pm EST</b>	Pre-proposals due
<b>March 3, 2025</b>	Invitations to full proposal
<b>April 18, 2025 by 11:59pm EDT</b>	Proposals due
<b>July 2025</b>	Funding notifications
<b>October 1, 2025</b>	Anticipated project start date

## Supporting Documents

All supporting documents and access to the online application form can be found at <https://nerrsciencecollaborative.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 expected impacts of the project process and outputs. They are likely a collection of connected near and longer term impacts. Near term impacts, such as those related to capacity building, relationship building, and product development, are essential to achieve longer term impacts such as changes in behavior or decision making. At the pre-proposal stage, the focus should be on longer term impacts anticipated at and beyond project completion. Examples of longer term impacts, i.e., project 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.



## 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 Inclusive Science***

The NERRS Science Collaborative is committed to practicing and supporting responsive and inclusive 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 elements of our program encourage project teams to examine the unique diversity and complexity of the socio-ecological systems in which they work. Doing the best work possible in these environments requires authentic collaboration grounded in reciprocal, equitable, and inclusive relationships. This includes awareness of and 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 of how our program activities support diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility:

- **Requests for proposals** - Value and elevate multiple systems of knowledge, such as Indigenous 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 include language defining Indigenous Knowledge, acknowledge differences in the ownership of data across knowledge systems, 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 Pre-Proposal Requirements

Pre-proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on December 11, 2024.

All of the pre-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) Budget Estimate
- 3) Appendices A-D: These include up to three letters of support, resumes, suggested reviewers, and references.

## How to Submit Your Pre-Proposal

Pre-proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on December 11, 2024.

You will need a U-M Friend Account to start an application and submit your pre-proposal. Information on how to create an account can be found [here](#). You will be prompted to login when you access the [application page](#).

Once you have logged in, you will need to complete an online form, upload a PDF of your pre-proposal, and “save” your application. The form mirrors some of the same content in the pre-proposal.

You will receive a single confirmation email when you have successfully saved your pre-proposal for the first time. **Save this email; it will include a link you may use to return to your application and make edits until the deadline.** Your saved application will be automatically submitted at 11:59pm EST on December 11, 2024 and you will not receive another confirmation email.

If you do not receive a confirmation email after the first time you have saved your application, it was not saved properly and you should resave or contact us directly at [nerrs-info@umich.edu](mailto: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

If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you will be asked by NOAA to provide a detailed description of all field sampling methods, any permits, along with a map showing the location of each field site and a table of the latitude and longitude coordinates of each sampling location in your proposal; you do NOT need to include these items in your pre-proposal.

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://nerrsciencecollaborative.org/collaborative-research>.

**Overview and Q&A Webinar:** On November 13, 2024 at 2 pm EST, the Science Collaborative will host a webinar that provides an overview of the opportunity and time for Q&A with participants.

To register, go to:

[https://umich.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_go7Vff5KTICFDwpp6H5CLQ](https://umich.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_go7Vff5KTICFDwpp6H5CLQ)

This webinar will be recorded. After the webinar, questions and responses will be incorporated into the online Q&A Record and the recording will be posted to the funding opportunity page.

**Email:** The Science Collaborative will reply to written questions regarding this request for proposals. Questions should be submitted to [nerrs-info@umich.edu](mailto: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](mailto: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.<sup>5</sup>

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 A of the pre-proposal.

Relevant reserve managers and staff must be engaged in the development of project plans and given an opportunity to offer feedback on the pre-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 pre-proposal title page must identify a lead reserve as well as any additional reserves that will be participating in the proposed work. For each pre-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 initial plans for how the reserve would contribute to the work (e.g., staff roles in the project) and any anticipated 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 pre-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***

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<sup>5</sup> 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 pre-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.<sup>6</sup> 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<sup>7</sup> with users. The collaborative approach 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 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.

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<sup>6</sup> Users are 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, including Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities, landowners, regulators, resource managers, land use planners, leaders of impacted communities, and educators at all levels.

<sup>7</sup> 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](#).



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 pre-proposals must include at least one and no more than three letters of support from intended user(s));
- Identify an individual who will be responsible for leading the collaborative process—the collaborative lead<sup>8</sup>—and describe their relevant experience and skills; and
- Plan for the time, personnel, and costs associated with supporting a collaborative user engagement process throughout the project. (Note: Teams invited to submit full proposals will need to demonstrate that they have thought critically about the resources required to fully operationalize the collaborative elements of the project. Pre-proposal budget requests should incorporate the resources needed for these efforts.)

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. It should be 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.

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<sup>8</sup> 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 partnering with Indigenous communities and who may be accessing Indigenous Knowledge in their projects should be aware of requirements regarding their use.***

The [NOAA Consultation Handbook](#), defines Indigenous Knowledge as "a cumulative body of knowledge, practice and belief evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment."

Communication about Indigenous Knowledge and/or data use should include ways in which knowledge will not be used as well as any applicable procedures in place to protect sensitive data and the identity of individual communities or informants. It is important to communicate precisely about the ways in which data will be secured and protected, and the circumstances in which data may or may not be used, including being made publicly available. It is important to attain informed consent with any potential partners and help them understand that data collected as part of the project, generally, may nonetheless be subject to release under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or other legal requirements. For more information, see:

<https://www.legislative.noaa.gov/docs/19-065933-Traditional-Knowledge-in-Decision-Making-Document-Signed.pdf>.

If invited to submit a full proposal, applicants that propose the collection of new data will be required to develop and include a Data Sharing Plan as a part of their full proposal package. This plan must address elements such as methods and protocols for data collection, data quality control/quality assurance procedures, metadata, data access, and data archival. If the proposed research involves human subjects, the plan must also address Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols. A valid Data Sharing Plan may include only the statement that no detailed plan is needed, as long as the statement is accompanied by a clear justification, e.g., no new data are being collected.

At the pre-proposal stage, applicants must account for the costs associated with implementing a Data Sharing Plan in their budget estimate.<sup>9</sup> Additional guidance and details for support in developing a Data Sharing Plan will be provided to those teams invited to submit full proposals.

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<sup>9</sup> 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.



## Appendix B: Pre-Proposal Requirements

**Pre-proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on December 11, 2024.**

Pre-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. Pre-proposals must include a title page, five-page maximum narrative, and appendices as outlined below. **Pre-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. **Note: 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<sup>10</sup> for the project. If relevant, identify any additional reserves that are directly engaged in the project.<sup>11</sup> 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.

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.

If invited to submit a full proposal, a detailed budget and budget narrative will be required. **The total request in the detailed full proposal budget may not exceed the pre-proposal budget estimate.**

- 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 (5 page maximum)

The pre-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. Applicants are also encouraged to consult an online resource - [Tips for Collaborative Research Pre-Proposals](#) - which is based on reviewer comments during prior RFPs.

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.



**At the pre-proposal stage, applicants are encouraged to focus on the management relevance, collaborative approach, and potential application of the work, while providing enough methodological details to demonstrate the proposed outputs are sound and feasible.** At the full proposal stage, the review process will focus more heavily on the details of the proposed technical and collaborative methods.

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

- 2) 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 pre-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](#).<sup>12</sup> 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),<sup>13</sup> their current information needs, and their connection to the proposal topic. Describe how the user’s input and involvement 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.
  - If relevant, in a sentence or two, share what resources and relationships may be brought to bear in support of the project.

- 3) 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 to other

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<sup>12</sup> 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 A.

<sup>13</sup> Primary 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.



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 pre-proposal topic.

- List the core research question(s).
  - Describe the collaborative process you will use to ensure iterative engagement and contribute to building reciprocal relationships with the users to advance the research. Include an explanation for why the chosen approach is appropriate (e.g., tightly linking to an existing working group because relationships already exist and it is an efficient way to engage the identified users, or integrating individuals into a project team because those users have a skill or expertise directly relevant to completing the project).
  - Generally describe the technical approach, including examples of research decisions that will be shaped through user input.
- 4) **Outputs and Outcomes** – Provide a list of the planned outputs and anticipated outcomes, clearly distinguishing between the two. 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 anticipated outcomes. Provide a short statement that describes what success would look like at the end of the project.
- 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. See [example outcomes](#) provided above. For the purposes of the pre-proposal, applicants are encouraged to focus on longer term impacts anticipated at and beyond project completion.
- 5) **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 B.



**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.
- 6) Budget Estimate – Provide an estimated **total budget request** for the project.<sup>14</sup> If invited to submit a full proposal, a detailed budget and budget narrative will be required. **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.

When developing the budget estimate, think about the funding and resources required to fully operationalize both the collaborative and technical elements of the project. Be sure to take into consideration all potential project costs, such as

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<sup>14</sup> Pre-proposals with total budgets that exceed the maximum totals allowed will be disqualified from the competition.



data management,<sup>15</sup> personnel, fringe benefits, equipment, supplies, travel, convening and engaging with team members and users, contractual costs, and indirect costs.

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.

## Appendices

- A. User Letters of Support - **All proposals must include at least one and no more than three letters of support from project user(s).**<sup>16</sup> Letters should be from primary users who will be engaged in proposal development if invited to submit a full proposal, and who anticipate being engaged throughout the project. In their letters of support, users should describe in their own words: (i) their connection to the project's focal topic, (ii) how the project would inform and benefit their work, and (iii) how they anticipate using project outputs. Reviewers will be looking for personalized, signed letters on an organization's letterhead to understand the potential application and impact of the proposed work.
- B. 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.
- C. Reviewers – Identify 3-4 qualified technical reviewers who could review your project if invited to submit a full proposal. You may also list up to four people you would prefer not to review your project if invited to submit a full proposal and indicate why. Whether or not these suggestions will be used is at the discretion of the Science Collaborative.
- D. References – Up to 2 pages of references may be included.

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<sup>15</sup> For budget allocation guidance, it is anticipated that at least 10% to 15% of the overall budget should go to support data management activities.

<sup>16</sup> More than one organization may sign a single letter if their views are similar. If more than three letters are submitted, the subsequent letters will be removed from the proposal before the review process.



## Appendix C: Evaluation Criteria, Review and Selection Process

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

At the pre-proposal stage, applicants are encouraged to focus on the management relevance, collaborative approach, and potential application of the work, while providing enough methodological details to demonstrate the proposed outputs are sound and feasible. At the full proposal stage, the review process will focus more heavily on the details of the proposed technical and collaborative methods.

### Pre-Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Pre-proposals will be evaluated based on the equally weighted criteria listed below.

- 1) Management Need: The pre-proposal clearly identifies and explains how it will inform management related to at least one [reserve management need](#).
- 2) Responsiveness to User(s): The pre-proposal identifies specific users, their needs, and articulates how planned outputs will meet those needs. The pre-proposal provides evidence of user interest in the project as corroborated in letters of support.
- 3) Approach: The approach includes a specific research question and a collaborative research process that meaningfully integrates the users and is likely to produce the planned outputs.
- 4) Team: The team has the appropriate expertise, experience, and well-defined roles needed to implement the proposed collaborative process and technical methods.
- 5) Potential Impact: The proposed process and outputs are feasible and likely to lead to the identified outcomes.

### Review Process

The review process for collaborative research proposals is as follows. A more detailed summary of the review process, including decision points, inputs to each decision, and a summary of participants in the process can be found [here](#).

- 1) **Minimum requirements assessment** – Pre and full proposals must be submitted by the stated deadlines. Science Collaborative staff will review all applications to confirm that they meet the requirements as described in this RFP and the pre/full proposal guidelines, including adherence to proposal specifications (e.g., font size, page limit, title page, budget limit), and inclusion of proposal elements, specified headers, and appendices. Proposals not meeting these requirements will be removed from the competition without further review.



- 2) **Pre-proposal review** – Pre-proposals will be reviewed by a panel with diverse disciplinary expertise, practical experience with collaborative science, and broad geographic representation. This panel participates in the review process for both the pre-proposals and full proposals.
  - a) *Pre-proposal written review* – Each pre-proposal will be matched to three non-conflicted panel members who will conduct written reviews according to the evaluation criteria outlined above. Panelists will be asked to provide comments to explain their rating and, where possible, suggestions for improvement.
  - b) *Pre-proposal panel review* – Panelists will convene for a virtual meeting to discuss the outcomes of the written reviews. Panelists will discuss strengths and weaknesses and any discrepancies among the written reviews and identify the top pre-proposals to advance in the competition.
  - c) *Invitations to submit a full proposal* – Panel recommendations will serve as input to the pre-proposal [selection process](#), and a subset of pre-proposals will be invited to submit full proposals.
- 3) **Review of invited full proposals** – Full proposals will be 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 will also review full proposals.
  - a) *Written technical review* - Review panel members from the pre-proposal stage and additional topical experts will conduct written technical reviews of full proposals. Reviewers will rate each proposal according to the evaluation criteria provided in the full proposal requirements. Reviewers will also be asked to provide comments to explain their ratings and, where possible, suggestions for improvement.
  - b) *Applicant response to reviews (optional)* – Applicants will receive their technical reviews and be given the option to provide a written response (two page maximum).
  - c) *Full proposal panel review* – The review panel will convene virtually for a final discussion of proposals. The panel will consist of pre-proposal panelists plus a non-conflicted NERRS representative. Panelists will consider the applicant’s response to reviews and discuss strengths, 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 final [selection process](#).





## Selection Process

Invitations to submit a full proposal and final funding recommendations will be based on the panel's recommendations of supportable projects in rank order. In consultation with the NOAA Program Manager, the NERRS Science Collaborative shall invite pre-proposals and 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;<sup>17</sup>
- 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.<sup>18</sup>

Funding notifications are expected in July 2025.

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<sup>17</sup> See section on [Reserve Engagement](#) for additional details. Managers of participating reserves will have an opportunity to share any concerns about a proposal directly with the program. If concerns are not easily addressed, they could affect the selection process for pre-proposals and full proposals.

<sup>18</sup> A reserve may lead as many collaborative research pre- and full 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 criterion will be applied to proposals submitted to this RFP independent of other Science Collaborative funding opportunities.

