National Estuarine
Research Reserve System
Science Collaborative

2025 Request for Collaborative Research Pre-Proposals
Question & Answer Record

Last updated: November 21, 2024

Topics Covered

Eligibility

Q: Is funding restricted to work performed on reserves?
A: NERRS Science Collaborative projects are not required to be located within the physical boundaries of a National Estuarine Research Reserve, or necessarily within a reserve's watershed. However, projects must be directly related to at least one reserve, address at least one or more reserve management need, and must have the full support of the relevant reserve manager(s).

Q: Are social science proposals eligible? What about proposals focused on socio-ecological topics?
A: Yes. Just make sure that the work is directly responsive to a management need articulated by a reserve.

Q: Can Science Collaborative project funds be used to support federal employees and/or their travel?
A: NERRS Science Collaborative funds may **not** be used to support salary or travel for federal employees; however, federal employees may participate as unfunded project team members.

Q: Are for-profit entities eligible recipients for Science Collaborative funding? Can they serve as the fiduciary institution?
A: Yes, private and for-profit firms are eligible recipients for Science Collaborative funding, so long as they are working in partnership with one or more reserves as described in the RFP. They may serve as the fiduciary institution.

Q: Can international collaborators participate as contractors?
A: Yes. Researchers from institutions outside the U.S. may be included on the project but cannot serve as the fiscal agent. Foreign researchers may also be funded by sub-awards through an eligible U.S. entity.

Q: Can one person be a team member on multiple proposals, for example working to address separate management needs of different NERR sites?
A: Yes. There is no restriction on how many proposals one person can be a part of.

My institution is part of a Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit, which is a partnership of federal agencies (including NOAA) and universities. Can NERRS Science Collaborative Grants be awarded to a CESU?
A: No, we are currently unable to award grants to a CESU.

Reserve Engagement

Q: Can a need that has been identified *after* the annual reserve needs document was prepared be addressed under this RFP?
A: Yes but it will require some explanation in your proposal and a reserve letter of support. More specifically, make sure that your process for identifying the need is clearly articulated in the proposal narrative and confirmed by the relevant reserves through a

letter of support. If you are a non-reserve applicant, this process would need to happen in close partnership with a reserve.

Q: Is it appropriate for reserve staff themselves to be users? Can reserve staff be users and also lead the project?
A: Yes to both. If reserve staff and/or programs are in a position to use the results or products and benefit from the project, they are likely a user. The proposal should explain how the project will enhance the work of the users. In some instances, a proposal is led by a reserve that is also a user, and that is ok.

Q: If I am working with a reserve research coordinator to develop a proposal, is this sufficient for the reserve engagement requirement, or should I also reach out to the reserve manager directly?
A: As the applicant, it is your job to ensure that the relevant reserve manager(s) are fully aware of and sufficiently engaged in your proposal as it is developed. It is always helpful to double check that the research coordinator has connected with the manager about the proposed work and received any input they may have. This will help ensure everyone is on the same page, particularly around reserve staff contributions to the project. Keep in mind that reserve managers have the opportunity to identify any concerns through a proposal assessment form that is submitted directly to the Science Collaborative, separate from the pre-proposal.

Q: If I am a staff member at a reserve and am leading a proposal, is this sufficient for the reserve engagement requirement?
A: You should ensure that your reserve manager and any other relevant reserve managers are fully aware of and sufficiently engaged in your proposal as it is developed. This will help ensure everyone is on the same page. Keep in mind that reserve managers have the opportunity to identify any concerns through a proposal assessment form that is submitted directly to the Science Collaborative, separate from the pre-proposal.

Q: Is it acceptable to ask reserves for the use of reserve equipment and/or personnel time?
A: You should feel free to reach out to reserve staff with these types of questions; however, it is up to them to decide how to respond. Capacity and ability to accommodate these kinds of requests will vary from reserve to reserve.

Q: Are there added roles and responsibilities assigned to the "lead reserve"?
A: The lead reserve is the reserve most engaged in project planning and execution. If a proposal is led by a non-reserve entity, the lead reserve may serve as an additional point of contact for reserve and NOAA partners. Beyond this, there are no predetermined roles or responsibilities for the lead reserve. The lead reserve doesn't necessarily lead the project.

Q: Is the lead reserve dependent on the location of the project lead/fiscal lead?
A: No, the designation of the lead reserve is not dependent on the location of the individual serving as the project lead / fiscal lead. The lead reserve is the reserve most

engaged in project planning and execution. The reserve that is listed as the lead reserve should make sense for the proposed work and is at the discretion of the applicant and participating reserve(s). If more than one reserve fits this definition, e.g., a few reserves are participating at similar levels, then you have some flexibility to choose among them.

Q: If the project is intended to address a regional management need, how many reserves should be engaged?
A: A proposal that addresses a regional management need is likely to be stronger when it engages with all or at least multiple reserves from the relevant region(s).

Can a project take a system-level approach?
A: Yes, the Science Collaborative has funded projects that engage all reserves across the NERRS.

Q: We would like to submit a proposal for a project that involves 5 or more reserves but we are unsure if we will be able to secure all reserve commitments prior to the pre-proposal deadline. Can we still apply for the larger funding amount (up to $250,000 / year)? Or do we have to apply for the smaller amount (up to $200,000 / year)?
A: In order to request the larger funding amount (up to $250,000 / year), your pre-proposal must identify at least five reserves that will be involved in the project. Without that level of reserve participation clearly demonstrated in the pre-proposal (e.g., narrative describing shared needs, how each reserve will contribute, etc), reviewers are unlikely to be convinced that the project is ready and likely to succeed. Also, keep in mind that reserve managers from the reserves that are named in the pre-proposal will have the opportunity to identify any concerns through a proposal assessment form that is submitted directly to the Science Collaborative, separate from the pre-proposal. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the relevant reserve staff and/or managers are adequately consulted during project development and receive a copy of the final pre-proposal to enable them to provide feedback to the Science Collaborative.

Q: Proposals involving five or more reserves can request up to $250,000 per year. What counts as reserve involvement?
A: To qualify as "involved" in a proposal, the reserve must have a management need that would be addressed by the project. The reserve must also contribute to the development of the proposal and be directly engaged in the proposed work. Being involved in the proposal may, but does not have to, mean that the reserve receives funds from the project if awarded.

Q: Can a reserve serve as the lead reserve for more than one Collaborative Research proposal?
A: A reserve may be the lead reserve for as many collaborative research proposals as desired but they are unlikely to receive funding for more than one of those proposals, except in cases where the additional project(s) engage three or more reserves. In other words, a reserve may be the lead reserve on more than one collaborative research award this year if the additional project(s) involve three or more reserves. This secondary

selection factor allows the Science Collaborative, in consultation with the NOAA Program Manager, to make small deviations for the rank ordering of proposals provided by the review panel to ensure that a single reserve is not the lead reserve for more than one award through this funding opportunity, with an exception for proposals involving three or more reserves.

Collaboration and User Engagement

Q: Are the National Estuarine Research Reserves themselves appropriate users?
Q: If our reserve is involved as a collaborator and lead reserve, are we also an end user?
A: Reserve staff have played a variety of roles in Science Collaborative projects, including serving as project, technical, and collaborative lead, providing critical contributions to the technical work, and participating as a user and project advisor. Roles should match the expertise and interests of the individuals involved and the scope of a particular project, and be clearly explained in the proposal.

All projects must address a reserve management need and it's appropriate to consider the relevant reserve(s) to be a user for a project, even for projects led by reserve staff and engaging additional user groups. Applicants should consider which staff and which reserve programs are in a position to use the results/products and benefit from the project, and proposals should explain how the project will enhance the work of users, including reserve staff.

As outlined in the RFP, 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/policymakers, including Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities, landowners, regulators, resource managers, land use planners, leaders of impacted communities, and educators at all levels.

Q: Can NOAA be a user?
A: Yes, NOAA may be a user if they will use the results to benefit their work.

Q: Are intended users required to be team members?
A: No. However user representatives are encouraged to be incorporated into the project team if they will be contributing significant time, expertise, or other resources to project activities. You are not required to include users in your project team.

Q: We have a long list of intended users. Do you have suggestions for how we might go about identifying a smaller group of primary users?
A: There are a few resources on the Science Collaborative funding page that should help in identifying primary intended users. See the "Understanding intended user needs" and

[“Reflections on engaging intended users”]() resources in the Guide to Collaborative Science.

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

Letters of Support

Q: Do we need a letter of support from a reserve to be eligible or competitive?
A: It depends. Pre-proposals are required to include at least one and no more than three letters of support from primary intended users. At the pre-proposal stage, applicants should highlight the 1-3 users that are most engaged and best positioned to use project results. If a reserve is a primary intended user for a project, then it is appropriate for the reserve to provide a letter. However, *if a reserve is not a primary intended user, a letter of support from a reserve is not required nor expected.* Applicants are expected to work with their reserve partners to explain the project’s relevance to the reserve in the proposal narrative and make sure the reserve is fully supportive of their role in the project.

In a situation where the pre-proposal is designed to meet a reserve need that was NOT included in [this year’s reserve needs document](), a letter of support from a reserve is required. If your proposal is addressing an emergent need, reviewers require that letter to confirm that it is indeed a reserve need.

Q: If a reserve signs a letter of support, are they then ineligible to be a participating reserve in the project?
A: Signing a letter of support does not preclude a reserve from being a project partner; if a reserve is listed on the title page and also a user, then it makes complete sense for them to provide a letter of support, if they feel so inclined.

Q: Are group letters of support ok?
A: Group letters can be helpful but be sure that the voice of every partner signing the letter comes through very clearly and with specificity,, e.g., share their specific examples of use/interest. Even in a group letter, the more specificity, the better.

Q: If multiple reserves are involved, plus university and state and local partners, who should provide letters of support?
A: At the pre-proposal, only letters of support from primary intended users should be included. Applicants should think about which entities or partners are best positioned to use project results in decisions that will ultimately impact the management issue. Letters from these users will help demonstrate that you have initiated the necessary collaborations and the project is likely to be impactful.

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

Q: Who should letters of support be addressed to?
A: Letters of support should be addressed to the project lead or "Members of the Review Panel.".

Q: Does my pre-proposal need a separate letter of support from the reserve manager, or would it be appropriate if the reserve manager either authors or sign a group letter?
If the reserve is a primary intended user of the work, then a letter of support is absolutely a great idea. You could do it individually or as part of a group letter but make sure the reserve's voice comes through very clearly and with specificity.

Q: If a user is also contributing a letter of support for another proposal in this competition, does that mean they have a conflict of interest and cannot submit one for my proposal?
A: From our perspective, that does not constitute a conflict of interest. A user could certainly be interested and benefit from more than one project, and is free to submit a letter of support for more than one proposal. However, it is important to make sure that, if both proposals happen to be funded, that they can commit whatever time they need to be engaged in the project.

Project Roles

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

A: Project teams should include a collaborative lead who has the appropriate skills and experience to lead the collaborative process. The collaborative lead is responsible for the full engagement of users by helping to develop and manage a process that ensures iteration with them, including mechanisms for being adaptive and responsive to their input. The proposal should clearly demonstrate that the collaborative lead has the skills to facilitate the collaborative aspects of the project. This person may also play a technical or other role on the team, if appropriate. The collaborative lead may, but does not have to be, the project lead.

Q: Can a reserve manager serve as the project lead?
A: Yes, reserve managers may serve as project lead, or play any other role on a project team if it is appropriate for the proposed work.

Q: Can there be more than one technical lead?
A: We suggest limiting the number of "leads" on a proposal to project lead, technical lead, and collaborative lead, but you can have as many other co-investigators or team members as you would like, with roles that you might define yourself. Part of the technical lead role is to oversee and help coordinate and integrate the technical elements, which is probably best done by a single individual.

Q: Is it common to have one person be the project, fiscal, and the technical lead?
A: In most cases, the project lead is also the fiscal lead. Some projects do list the same person as project lead and technical lead. Just be sure to explain who will help manage the overall project process. For example, different project management tasks might fall to the project lead, collaborative lead, or another designated project manager, and some brief explanation of this is helpful so reviewers understand how the team will ensure good management and completion of the proposed work.

Q: If invited to submit a full proposal, can the fiscal lead in the full proposal be different from the pre-proposal fiscal lead?
A: 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 most cases, the project lead is also the fiscal lead. It is possible for the fiscal lead and/or the fiscal institution to change between the pre and full proposal, so long as these requirements are met. Keep in mind that a change in the project lead would require explanation and demonstration that the team is the right team for the work.

If a proposal includes a collaboration between a university and multiple reserves, who should serve as the fiscal lead?
A: The project lead should be 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.

Review & Selection Process

Q: On page 24 of the Collaborative Research RFP it says, "No reserve will serve as the lead reserve on more than one collaborative research project except in cases where a reserve is leading a project that involves three or more reserves." Does this mean a reserve can only support one single-reserve proposal submission?
A: A reserve may be the lead reserve for as many collaborative research proposals as desired but they are unlikely to receive funding for more than one of those proposals, except in cases where the additional project(s) engage three or more reserves. In other words, a reserve may be the lead reserve on more than one collaborative research award this year if the additional project(s) involve three or more reserves. This secondary selection factor allows the Science Collaborative, in consultation with the NOAA Program Manager, to make small deviations for the rank ordering of proposals provided by the review panel to ensure that a single reserve is not the lead reserve for more than one award through this funding opportunity, with an exception for proposals involving three or more reserves.

Q: Will the Science Collaborative be looking to the reserves to indicate their preference if there are multiple proposals involving their reserves?
A: All proposals will be reviewed independently; reviewers will not consider secondary selection factors (such as distribution of funds across regions or reserves) in their review and ranking process. While we do not expect reserves to choose one proposal over the other, managers can provide a letter of support to be included as an appendix to the proposal or share concerns only directly with the Science Collaborative via a proposal assessment form.

Q: Page 24 of the Collaborative Research RFP outlines secondary selection factors for proposals. How does this selection process relate to other Science Collaborative funding opportunities?
A: Both the 2025 Catalyst / Knowledge Exchange and the 2025 Collaborative Research RFPs include similar secondary selection factors, and the factors will be applied to the proposals submitted to that RFP independent of other funding opportunities. For example, it is possible for a single reserve to serve as lead reserve on both a catalyst/knowledge exchange and collaborative research grant award in 2025.

Q: Is there any advantage or disadvantage to reserves that have/had previous Science Collaborative projects?
A: There is no advantage or disadvantage to reserves that have had previous projects. Each proposal is reviewed independently for its own internal logic.

Q: When will invitations to submit a full proposal be issued and when will full proposals be due?
A: Invitations to submit a full proposal will be issued in early March. If you are invited to submit a full proposal, they will be due in mid-April.

Proposal Format and Appendices

Q: Does the order of the subheadings in the project narrative of my pre-proposal have to be the same as in the RFP guidelines?
A: Yes, applicants should follow the order of the headings in the pre-proposal narrative. Within each section, applicants can sequence content as they choose.

Q: Can we have a table or a conceptual figure in the project narrative?
A: Yes, figures and/or tables may be included within the narrative so long as the 5-page limit is not exceeded. These are usually somewhat situational depending on the proposal. If including a figure or table is important to convey a message you can, and should feel free, to include them but it is not necessary for the success of a pre-proposal.

Q: Other than a limit of two pages, is there a particular format or style you would like to see in the resumes of team members? For example, should we aim for a more formal academic style (with lists of publications) or are you looking for a more condensed display of project summaries (perhaps those that highlight examples of collaborative work)?
A: We do not specify a format for the resumes, other than to limit them to two pages. You are welcome to use whatever style you think best conveys the person's expertise that is most relevant to the proposal and their specific role in the project. You are also welcome to use different formats for different types of team members.

Q: Are we required to include the resumes of intended users in Appendix B?
A: Resumes are required for team members listed on the pre-proposal title page. Resumes will be used by reviewers to determine whether the team has the requisite technical and collaborative skills and experience to undertake the project successfully. If users are on your team and will be contributing to the work, you should include their resumes.

Q: Do we need resumes from each team member listed, or just the leads?
A: Resumes should be included for all the team members listed on the proposal title page, but not necessarily "advisors".

Budget

Q: If invited to submit a full proposal, can the budget request in the full proposal be different from the pre-proposal budget estimate?
A: Yes; however, the total budget request in the full proposal may not exceed the budget estimate in the pre-proposal.

Q: What are the requirements for Science Collaborative projects regarding indirect cost rates?
A: The Science Collaborative will reimburse overhead costs up to an institution's federally negotiated indirect cost (IDC) rate agreement. 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.

Q: Is there a cost match requirement?
A: We do not require matching funds for any Science Collaborative opportunities.

Q: How will budgets be handled for multi-institutional teams?
A: The University of Michigan will subcontract to the lead fiduciary institution which will then subcontract to all partners. If invited to submit a full proposal, you will need to provide a detailed budget and justification for your institution and all subcontracts.

Q: Would it be a disadvantage to submit a proposal with a relatively smaller budget compared to the maximum?
A: No, proposals should have appropriate budgets for the proposed work.

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

Q: When they are not subcontracted, what types of expenses are allowable to support user participation?
A: Honoraria, travel support, compensation for child care to attend a meeting, provision of traditional food/gifts that have cultural significance when convening partners are examples of allowable costs to support user participation. You will need to clearly articulate the purpose and justify the amount in the budget. Gift cards are not permitted.

Q: Are permit fees an allowable cost?
A: It would be an allowable cost if it has a sufficient direct benefit to the statement of work. If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you would need to make that connection clear in the budget justification.

Q: Is graduate student tuition an eligible expense?
A: Yes, projects that include graduate student support may include tuition for these students in the budget.

Q: Are expenses associated with infrastructure eligible expenses?
A: No, infrastructure is not supportable with the type of funds we have for this grant program.

Q: Is an estimate of the total budget sufficient for the pre-proposal?
A: Yes, the pre-proposal should only include an estimate of the total budget request for the project. If invited to submit a full proposal, a detailed budget and budget narrative will

be required. Please note that the total budget request in the full proposal may not exceed the budget estimate in the pre-proposal.

Other

Q: Is there a repository of previous successful collaborative research projects?
A: The Science Collaborative project catalog allows you to select "collaborative research" projects to get a full list of current and prior projects.

Q: If a project is based on a catalyst project, how much should the proposal reference this other project?
A: Referencing existing/prior work like a catalyst project is a good idea to help provide context and provide the rationale for the work that is being proposed. A likely location for this is in the narrative when you introduce the issue and provide the context. If appropriate, in the team section, you might also reference the prior work to demonstrate that the team has a history of working together. Keep in mind that reviewers are unlikely to be familiar with the specifics of your prior work, so you will need to explain whatever you think they should understand about it.

Q: Do you have any tips about team management for successful project management?
A: Previous teams have been successful with charters as a way to clarify roles and responsibilities early on, along with expectations and accountability. The Guide to Collaborative Science has a tool for developing project charters.

Can a project address more than one management need?
A: Yes, a project can address more than one management need. However, keep in mind that you must demonstrate that the project will inform and advance management related to each need you name. The link between the science you are proposing and the management need(s) that will be addressing should be very clear. Ensure that the project scope is realistic given the proposed budget and timeline.

Q: Collaborative Research grants and Catalyst Objective 1 grants both involve the need for new research. How do I choose between the two styles of grants?
If you have a well-defined research question that was developed with intended users and you have clarity about how you will approach the research together, a Collaborative Research grant is likely to be most appropriate for your project. If you are still developing your research question with intended users and could use more time to figure out how you will work together and/or could benefit from some preliminary data collection, a Catalyst grant (Objective 1) is likely to be more suitable.