National Estuarine Research Reserve System Science Collaborative

2020 Science Transfer RFP

Q&A Record

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Contents

About the Science Transfer Program

Q: What is the schedule of transfer grant opportunities over the next five years? Will the RFP be offered every year?
A: Our goal is to offer an RFP four times over the next five years. We plan to release the next ST RFP in fall of 2020.

Eligibility and Appropriateness for this RFP

Q: I see that a member of the environmental consulting company, Limnotech, is part of the Science Collaborative team. Could Limnotech be a vendor or subcontractor on a science transfer project to build on their prior work synthesizing SWMP data?
A: To avoid perceived conflicts, Limnotech cannot be a named partner on a proposal under any of our current RFPs. If your proposal is selected for funding, you could select Limnotech to be a vendor or contractor to complete a certain aspect of the project's scope of work.

Q: Is the transfer of social science equally eligible as the transfer of natural or physical science?
A: Yes. Science transfer grants are intended to support the transfer of existing information, approaches, and/or techniques to support NERRS activities and programs of direct relevance to Science Collaborative focus areas and reserve needs. The evaluation criteria do not focus on a particular type of science to be transferred.

Q: Can organizations outside of the NERRS submit an application for this RFP?
A: Yes, partners external to the reserve system can serve as project lead and manage the fiscal side of the project on behalf of a group. As noted in the RFP, all proposals must be developed in close collaboration with partners from at least one reserve to ensure it aligns with their programs and the manager endorses the proposed scope of work and budget allocation.

Q: For this RFP, is it appropriate to propose a transfer activity from an external partner to members of the reserve system?
A: Yes, as long as the benefit and use of the work is clearly articulated and aligned with reserve management needs.

Q: Regarding data collection - would developing and employing a survey to other NERRS to collect informational data be supported by this RFP?
A: It depends on the intended use of the information. For example, actions such as surveying reserves to scope a tool or develop a product would be appropriate. Collecting data toward a research question would not be appropriate for this opportunity; those types of research efforts are better suited for a Catalyst or Collaborative Research proposal.

Q: We want to transfer a new tool to other reserves. Can preparing a peer-reviewed publication be supported under this RFP? What about a manual to help others apply a new tool?
A: This grant opportunity is intended to promote the use and application of science, so developing a new manual to help transfer a methodology or tool could be an important part of a science transfer effort. It's possible some science transfer projects will lead to a peer-reviewed publication, however, it would be hard to justify spending science transfer grant funds on the development of journal article that are geared for other researchers rather than practitioners and users of the science.

End User Engagement, Collaboration and Letters of Support

Q: I know a lot of our end users will be very distracted in the coming weeks and I feel awkward asking for a few minutes of their time to write a letter. Do you have suggestions about how to best handle that?
A: We encourage applicants to limit the number of letters of support to one or a couple primary end users, which is all that is required. Applicants can also provide very specific guidance to users about what they should include in their letter.

Q: We are proposing to develop new content for our exhibits and educational programs based on our reserve research and monitoring programs. In this case, are the reserve educators considered the project end users, or the students, teachers and public that use our programs?
A: There are a variety of ways to frame any project, but you could certainly consider the reserve educators to be the immediate or initial users and the external audiences (teachers, students, public) to be the ultimate users of the proposed project. If both groups are named as "users", you should also explain how they will be consulted and engaged in the project. For example, explain how reserve program staff will collaborate and how you will be responsive to the needs and preferences of external users.

Q: Can a science transfer project be led by a project user, such as a reserve education coordinator?
A: Yes, project leads can also be considered a primary end user. One advantage of this arrangement is that the project lead is well positioned to manage the project in a way that maximizes utility for their programs. In the proposal, be sure to articulate how the proposed transfer activities will be beneficial and used by specific individuals and programs.

Q: Do you require proposals to identify end users that are outside the Reserve system?
A: No, science transfer proposals can focus on primary users within the reserve, for example in cases where a project fosters a transfer and collaboration across reserve programs. Applicants should still be specific about their users within the reserve system and how those individuals and programs will use the planned outputs and benefit from the project.

Q: Can grant funds be used to support external partner participation?
A: Yes. External partners could be subcontractors on a proposal if they are conducting a specific part of the proposed work, or partners could receive honoraria or travel support to enable their participation. Federal employees and agencies are not eligible to receive funding from the Science Collaborative, but may participate as unfunded project team members.

Proposal Format

Q: Is it ok if the title page is longer than 2-pages to accommodate all team members who should be listed?
A: Yes, the title page can exceed 2-pages in order to accommodate all the required information. You can also explore ways to format and condense the team list, for example by including more detail for the core team, or using columns or tables.

Q: Is there a recommended length for each section of the project narrative?
A: No. It is up to the applicant to determine the right content for each of the sections of the project narrative. We only require that the project narrative include all five sections in the order and with the heading labels specified in the RFP. The full narrative must not exceed seven pages.

Budget

Q: We plan to hire, via contract, a geospatial contractor that will be identified through a competitive bidding process. Do we need a separate budget and budget narrative for this subcontract?
A: You can include a line in your budget table for "contract with geospatial analyst" and you do not need a separate budget table for that subcontract. In your budget narrative you should also include a sentence or two explaining that part of the budget – i.e., how you will identify the subcontractor and the essence of the contracted work. This will also help reviewers see that you have a plan for filling that gap in your team.

Q: The budget guidance in the RFP indicates that we should explain the contribution of any personnel to the project even if not receiving support under this grant. Does this mean that we need to put a dollar amount on the time that each staff member contributes (even when this is paid for on our operational budget) or only a percent time or hours contributed?
A: You do not need to put unfunded people in your budget table, but they should be acknowledged in your narrative. We suggest listing the names (or job titles) of the individuals that will be contributing work and providing a rough estimate of their time (hours, weeks, or percent of FTE over the course of project) and the scope of their contributions. You do not need to estimate this contribution in terms of dollars. This level of specificity will make it clear to reviewers that you do have the people power to complete the project and that everyone, including managers, are on the same page.

Q: I'm filling out a transmittal form to route the application for internal approvals, and have two questions: What is the name of the entity contracting out the awards? And what is the CFDA # in the cooperative agreement that NOAA used to fund the Science Collaborative, that's funding the Science Transfer grants?
A: The grant contracts would be between the "Regents of the University of Michigan" and the project lead's fiduciary intuition. Our CFDA number is 11.419, but you may not need this. Our University is considered the direct sponsor (NOAA is the "prime sponsor") so these grants are not considered federal assistance or federal funding opportunities, technically.

Q: Should the Excel files (budget and timeline) be submitted as separate attachments or should they be joined together with the other application materials as a single file?
A: Please combine all application materials into a single PDF. To submit, you will need to upload your application as a single PDF file.

Q: Can all budget narrative details be included as a single appendix or must budget narratives be broken out individually for subcontracts?
A: You may include all budget narrative details in a single appendix, including budget narratives for each subcontract. If including a budget narrative for one or multiple subcontracts, please make this clear. E.g., organize the budget narrative for each subcontract as a separate paragraph or subsection.

Q: How should materials purchased for the project be listed in the budget template?
A: You should list any equipment that costs $5,000 or more in the "Equipment>$5k" category. All materials for your project that cost under $5,000 should be listed in the "Supplies" category.

Q: Does this RFP require matching funds?
A: No, the RFP has no matching fund requirement.

Appendices

Q: Is there a maximum number of resumes that may be included in Appendix E?
A: There is no set maximum number of resumes that may be included in *Appendix E – Resumes*. There should be a two-page resume for each team member listed on the proposal title page.

Q: The proposal requirements state that fiscal letters of commitment are required for all subcontracts. Is a letter required if a subcontractor is a consultant?
A: Yes. Please include a letter of commitment from the fiscal agent's home unit and institution and *all* subcontractors identified at the proposal stage, including consultants, in *Appendix C – Fiscal Letters of Commitment*.

Q: What should be included in the fiscal letters of commitment?

A: A letter of commitment from the fiscal agent's home unit and institution should demonstrate their support for the proposed budget and activities. Letters from each subcontractor should demonstrate that they are also in agreement with what is being proposed in their names. There is no standardized form for this letter.

Q: To whom should fiscal agents and sub-contractors address fiscal letters of commitment?
A: The letter of commitment from the lead fiscal agent should be addressed to "Members of the Review Panel". Subcontractors may address their letter of commitment to either the Review Panel or to the project lead.

Q: Should fiscal letters of commitment be mailed separate from the application to the Science Collaborative?
A: No. Fiscal letters of commitment should be submitted as a part of the project proposal PDF file.

Q: Should appendices adhere to the 12 point Times New Roman font and one-inch margins requirements?
A: Yes, all portions of the proposal should adhere to these requirements. Exceptions will be made for documents (e.g., letters of support) provided by project partners or others not on the project team.

Manager Proposal Assessments

Q: Where can managers find guidance and the form for Science Transfer Proposal Assessments?
A: Managers will be emailed the guidance and manager proposal assessment form ahead of the deadline. These assessments are submitted directly to the Science Collaborative within 10 days of proposal submission deadline.

Q: Should applicants coordinate getting the manager assessment form filled out and submitted with the proposal or is this done separately?
A: Managers have received guidance to submit their forms directly to the Science Collaborative, separate from proposals. Your job as the applicant is to ensure that the relevant managers are fully aware of and sufficiently engaged in your proposal as it is developed in order to provide a positive assessment, including making sure that they have a final copy of the proposal in hand. It is up to each manager to fill out the form and submit it to the Science Collaborative. We intentionally keep this form separate from the proposals to allow managers to be candid in their assessments. That being said, there is no harm in reminding the managers you have engaged that they should include your proposal in their forms.

Q: If reserves are both end users and partners on a project, should they supply a letter of support, a manager assessment, or both?

A: Both. All the reserves listed as a partner on a proposal should have their reserve manager complete a manager assessment form. Proposals are required to have a letter of support from at least one end user. If an end user(s) is a reserve, the reserve can provide the letter of support.

Review and Selection Process

Q: Are science transfer grants reviewed independently of the collaborative research or catalyst proposals? I ask because we are exploring complementary ideas for two grant programs.
A: Proposals for each of the three grant programs are being reviewed independently, through a different process and different set of reviewers. We will look across all three grant programs before making final decisions to ensure funds are maximized, e.g., through a combination of smaller- and larger-budget projects. Applicants should not submit the same idea to multiple grant programs, as each program is meant to support projects that differ in purpose and scope. Similarly, the relevance of one proposal shouldn't depend on the funding decisions for another proposal.

Q: How many proposals did you receive in the last round of Transfer grants? Any sense for how many you might get this time?
A: We typically receive about 12 – 15 proposals each year. We don't have a sense for how many we'll receive this time - each round is a bit different. We expect to fund 6 – 8 science transfer projects this year.

Q: Would it be a disadvantage to submit two unrelated proposals from one lead reserve? What are the rules for a reserve leading on more than one project?
A: Reserves are welcome submit multiple proposals to this RFP, but it is unlikely that a single reserve will be funded to **lead** multiple projects; unless one of their projects engages three or more reserves.

Q: Do you encourage people to re-submit proposals that did not receive funding?
A: Yes. Hopefully reviewer feedback can be used to strengthen the next proposal and we encourage applicants to re-submit. However, note that the composition of the review panel and suite of proposals changes every year, and we can't promise that proposals that address all prior feedback will emerge as a top ranking proposal this year.

Q: Are the panelists for the science transfer review process different from those for the research and catalyst proposal review process?
A: Yes.

Q: Do the written reviews come from the same group of panelists who are convened in the final stage of the process?
A: Yes.