Northeastern States Research Cooperative
2024–25 Request for Proposals

Letters of Intent due January 6, 2025 by 4:30pm EST
Proposals due February 7, 2025 by 4:30pm EST

The mission of the Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC) is to foster research that is relevant and beneficial to the people who live within the Northern Forest boundaries, work with its resources, use its products, visit it, and care about it.

NSRC aims to link research to practice to make a difference in forest-based communities. In this request for proposals (RFP), NSRC seeks to advance problem-driven research that yields actionable results useful to and used by forest stakeholders and decision-makers.

NSRC funds research, supports outreach, and catalyzes actions that balance protection and utilization of the Northern Forest.

The Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC) is a research-granting program administered collaboratively by the USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station, the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Vermont, the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment at the University of New Hampshire, the Center for Research on Sustainable Forests at the University of Maine, the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and the Hubbard Brook Research Foundation.

The NSRC's research priorities are guided by an External Advisory Committee (EAC), selected to represent the communities, businesses, industries, and agencies in the Northern Forest region that contribute to and benefit from knowledge generated through NSRC-funded projects. The primary role of the EAC is to provide advice about the specific research needs for the region.

The NSRC is committed to advancing practical applications of forest research and to supporting a diverse, equitable, and inclusive research program. We encourage proposals that are relevant to Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities in the region. In addition, a separate RFP for the next round of NSRC's Indigenous Forest Knowledge Fund will be released in 2025. (For more information on that program, visit www.nsrcforest.org/indigenous-forest-knowledge-fund.)

For details about the history and mission of the NSRC and information about all past and ongoing NSRC projects, consult the NSRC website at www.nsrcforest.org.
For information about the organization and governance, consult the NSRC website at www.nsrcforest.org/governance.

Research Focus, Topics, and Engagement

The NSRC funds research with clear links to application and use by stakeholders and decision-makers in the Northern Forest region. **Successful proposals will clearly articulate the research question they are asking, their rationale for why that question is important to stakeholders, and their strategy for making their results actionable.**

Focus Areas. Proposals should encompass one or more of the following focus areas:

Community and Economic Resilience
Research should support rural forest-dependent communities, focusing on resilience to economic, social, and environmental changes. Topics may include sustainable forest product markets, job creation through wood utilization, and economic development aligned with climate resilience.

Decision Support and Management Tools
Develop practical tools and strategies for stakeholders to manage forests sustainably. This could include decision support systems, technologies for monitoring forest health, communication tools for stakeholder engagement, and methods to balance forest health with other needs such as carbon sequestration and biodiversity.

Forest Health and Resilience
Focus on understanding our changing forests with an emphasis on forest health and resilience. This includes predictive research on forest response to threats such as climate change, invasive species, and extreme weather events.

Social Science for Effective Public Engagement
Develop communication strategies for effectively engaging landowners and the general public around best practices for forest management, including locally and topically relevant social science to support professional foresters, non-profits, etc.

Priority Issues. NSRC encourages proposals that address one or more of these priority issues relevant to the Northern Forest region (in alphabetical order).

Biodiversity and Connectivity
Focus on preserving biodiversity through the maintenance of intact habitat and connectivity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Emphasize balancing carbon storage goals with biodiversity conservation and strategies for species adaptation.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
Focus on climate resilience, including flood resilience for human communities, carbon accounting, and the role of forests in renewable energy. Emphasis on balancing carbon sequestration with other ecosystem services (e.g., biodiversity, wood products, flood

resilience) and addressing the impacts of forest conversion for renewable energy development (e.g., solar farms).

Environmental Justice, Equity, and Inclusion

Research inclusive practices in forest management, especially access for Indigenous and other underserved communities. Prioritize studies integrating traditional practices, equitable access to forest resources, and inclusive conservation approaches.

Invasive Species and Forest Pests

Study impacts of invasive pests on forest diversity, health, and resilience, with emphasis on early detection and response, culturally significant species, and impacts on carbon sequestration.

Land Use and Sustainable Forestry

Address issues of forest fragmentation, regeneration, and sustainable forestry practices. Research should explore conservation incentives, communication with private landowners, and balancing diverse forest management needs (e.g., the balance between forest conservation and the need for housing).

Recreation, Tourism, and Land Use Impacts

Study the effects of recreation on forests, including economic impacts and carrying capacity. Focus on equitable access, management strategies for balancing recreation with conservation, and impacts on local communities.

Wood Products Innovation and Market Development

Encourage innovations in forest products, including sustainable wood markets, efficient utilization of biomass, and biorefineries. Emphasize market strategies that create sustainable economic value from low-grade wood and support the utilization of local or regionally sourced wood products (e.g., for construction, including housing)

Additional Considerations

NSRC prioritizes problem-driven, engaged research aimed at enhancing forest and community resilience. Keep the following in mind as you develop your proposal:

Applied Science with Stakeholder Partnerships: Projects should demonstrate clear application potential and foster partnerships with on-the-ground stakeholders to ensure that research outcomes are implemented.

Balance Between Active and Passive Management: Research that evaluates active and passive forest management and how to balance opportunities for diverse approaches, particularly for resilience to climate change and pest invasions, is encouraged.

Understanding the Past to Plan for the Future: Consider how 19th and 20th century land use policies have created forest ecosystem characteristics that reduce resilience in response to current and future stressors.

Timely and Impactful Results: Projects should provide relevant findings that address pressing forest management and community resilience needs.

Locally and topically relevant social science research to help professional foresters, non-profits, and others settle on effective, priority-driven, communication strategies. This type of research is complementary and is necessary to advance the implementation of best practices and application of the research that NSRC produces.

NSRC welcomes projects that may be at different **stages of development**, including:
1. Early-stage partnership development and problem investigation
2. New investigations with regional scope and importance
3. Synthesis of existing knowledge, perspectives, and tools/resources
4. Implementation of research results to practice
5. Scaling a local project or result to the broader Northern Forest region

Submission Timeline

- **Monday, January 6, 2025: Letters of Intent due electronically by 4:30pm EST**
- **Friday, February 7, 2025: Proposals due by 4:30pm EST**
- **Spring (April-May) 2025: Notification of funding decisions**

Eligibility

Who may apply? NSRC encourages applicants from any race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, and career stage. This program is an equal opportunity provider.

Participation in this RFP is open to scientists, resource managers, policy makers, and other stakeholders pursuing research relevant to forest lands in Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and the northern tier of New York. Any field research proposed must be conducted in or near the boundaries of the Northern Forest. The PI *must* be from an institution, business, agency, or organization in one of the four NSRC states. Other investigators with expertise in the Northern Forest may be part of the proposal regardless of geographic location. To distribute funds as broadly as possible, a researcher may submit only one proposal to this RFP as the lead-PI. A researcher may be a Co-PI or collaborator on multiple proposals to this RFP.

Participation by USFS personnel in projects is encouraged. Special conditions apply to USFS employees who submit proposals as PIs or Co-PIs. Potential USFS PIs or Co-PIs should speak with the NSRC Federal Coordinator (Daniel C. Dey, daniel.c.dey@usda.gov) before submitting the letter of intent and when developing the full proposal and budget. Cooperation on projects by USFS scientists and staff will be considered in the final stage of the review process and is described in greater detail below.

A **letter of intent is required** to be eligible to submit a full proposal. Any eligible PI may submit a proposal based on their letter of intent, as long as the letter of intent was received prior to the deadline.

Who may NOT apply? PIs who are delinquent with terms of current or previous NSRC awards, such as final or progress reports, are not eligible to apply for NSRC funds until outstanding award terms have been met.

Budget Considerations

Funding Source: Funding from the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service is made under the authority of Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Research Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-307), as amended (16 U.S.C. 1641-1646, Public Law 108-198, December 31, 2003). The Federal Assistance Listing (formerly Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance - CFDA) number and name are 10.652 Forestry Research.

Duration and Budget Limits: Proposals may be submitted for projects with a duration of one to three years, with a start date no earlier than May 1, 2025, and no later than September 1, 2025. We recognize that projects at different stages of development and with different scopes have different budget needs. Therefore, budget requests may range from $75,000 to $300,000. **Budgets will be reviewed closely for expected alignment with NSRC priorities, capacity for leverage, and expected regional impacts.**

Please consider aligning your budget within the following tiers:

   Tier 1: $75–$150k: 1–2-year research projects focused on forest management tools, workshops, synthesis projects, management recommendations/information sharing, data collection, and so forth
   Tier 2: $150–300k: larger, 2–3-year project for larger applied research projects

NSRC expects to be able to make nearly $2.2 million available for project awards from this RFP. The exact number of funded projects will be a function of the budget sizes of high-ranking proposals received. Based on experience, we expect to fund between 7 and 10 projects. Each project will be funded through a single award to the PI's institution or organization. The lead PI's organization may issue sub-awards or sub-contracts as described in the research proposal. However, at least 50% of the federal budget must be managed directly by a PI or Co-PI in one of the four NSRC states.

Equipment: Federal NSRC funds may ***not*** be used to purchase equipment (defined as $10,000 or more per unit and a useful life of more than one year). Equipment purchased with non-federal dollars may be used as matching funds if Uniform Guidance rules are followed. See CFR-2014-title2-vol1-sec200-306.

Indirect Costs: Applicants to the NSRC RFP may use their institution's or organization's federally negotiated indirect cost rate (NICRA), also called overhead or facilities and administration (F&A) rate. Applicants may elect to charge an indirect cost rate that is lower than their maximum rate for a federal sponsor. In this case, foregone indirect costs may be used as matching funding for the proposed project, if allowed by the institution's indirect cost policy. If an institution or

organization does not have a federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement, a 15% of modified total direct costs (de minimis rate) can be used.

Matching Funds: As specified in statute, NSRC *must* give **preference**, in cases where proposals are evaluated to have equal merit, to those proposals that offer non-federal cost share (matching funds) in an amount not less than 50% of the federal funds requested (i.e., $0.5 non-federal cost share for each $1 federal awarded). Matching funds will be considered in the final decision stage of the review process. Matching funds may derive from foregone indirect costs, direct expenditures from non-federal funding sources, or in-kind contributions, as described in Uniform Guidance for federally funded projects. Matching sources must be described in detail in the budget narrative, especially for non-federal and in-kind sources. Additional documentation of these sources will be required.

Review Process

All reviewers will abide by the NSRC's [Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement](). Reviewers will also be encouraged to watch this [Tips for Reviewers]() video from the National Science Foundation so they will be able to provide constructive feedback and avoid unintentional biases.

Letters of Intent

Receipt of all letters of intent will be acknowledged, but please note that there will be no assessment of the intellectual or technical merit of the proposed project.

Proposals

Technical Review

All proposals will be reviewed by at least two external experts (researchers, practitioners, or both). Please note that, as part of the letter of intent, PIs are required to nominate expert reviewers with whom they have no known conflicts of interest. The external experts will score proposals using the criteria listed below and respond to three short-answer questions to help prioritize closely ranked proposals. Anonymized responses to the short-answer questions will be sent to PI(s) when funding decisions are made.

> *Criteria:*
1. The **problem** is clearly defined, justified, and relevant to the Northern Forest.
2. The project **goals and supporting objectives** clearly address the problem and have potential benefit to the Northern Forest.
3. The **approach and methods** are well defined and appropriate.
4. The **budget** fits the scope of work proposed and has a favorable cost-benefit ratio.
5. There is a high **likelihood of success** within the project period.
6. The proposal has an established relationship with forest community partners and/or practitioners, a solid **rationale and communications plan, and outputs** will lead to wide use by practitioners, decision-makers, or other target audiences.

Short-answer questions with respect to both science and relevance on the ground:
1. Describe the major strengths of the proposal.
2. Describe the major weaknesses of the proposal.
3. Given adequate resources, would you recommend this proposal for funding and why?

Prioritization of Top-Ranked Proposals

The NSRC Executive Committee ([EC](#)) will rank all submitted proposals based on technical merit and applicability to the NSRC RFP. The EC will recommend approximately thirty of the top-ranked proposals for review by the Full Proposal Review Panel (FPRP).

Full Proposal Review Panel (FPRP)

An *ad hoc* FPRP will comprise forest stakeholders who have reasonable knowledge of the areas covered by the annual RFP and how this knowledge could serve regional stakeholders. Each proposal chosen for review by the FPRP will be fully reviewed by two FPRP members. The FPRP will use the criteria listed below to evaluate full proposals, and the FPRP reviewers will respond to three short-answer questions. Anonymized reviewers' responses to the short-answer questions will be sent to PI(s) in Spring 2025, when funding decisions are made.

Criteria:
1. Proposal clearly states (a) **problem** of practice or (b) **research question or hypothesis** to be addressed and why it is important in the Northern Forest.
2. The problem to be addressed is well-defined, with an appropriate **approach and methods** that correlate to a high likelihood of success within the project period.
3. The project is **widely applicable** to the NSRC region (versus narrow benefit to a specific location or entity).
4. The proposal has a solid **rationale and communications plan, and outputs** will lead to wide use by practitioners, decision-makers, or other target audiences.
5. **Community partners and stakeholders will be involved** throughout the design and execution of the project.
6. The project demonstrates a favorable **cost-benefit ratio** and justifies the requested budget.
7. The project has high or exceptional **potential to address stakeholder priorities** in the Northern Forest.

Short-answer questions:
1. Describe the major strengths of the proposal.
2. Describe the major weaknesses of the proposal.
3. Given limited resources, would you recommend this proposal for funding, and why?

The entire FPRP will discuss and rank the proposals during the FPRP meeting (in-person or virtual).

Funding Decisions

The NSRC EC will consider the rankings of the FPRP to decide on the final slate of funded proposals. Additional considerations the EC may use to determine the final slate of successful proposals are:

1. Per statute, in cases where proposals are evaluated to have equal merit, the NSRC will prioritize proposals that offer non-federal cost share (matching funds) in an amount not less than 50% of the federal funds requested.
2. The EC will assure that at least 25% of NSRC-funded research projects show coordination with Forest Service research.
3. Projects that have the potential to lead to new, lasting partnerships across institutions and entities in the Northern Forest region, particularly across forest boundaries.
4. Broad geographic distribution of projects/lead institutions across the NSRC region.
5. Projects led by early-career PIs and/or support substantive involvement of graduate and undergraduate researchers.
6. NSRC-funded projects will address a range of priority issues and stages of project development.

_____

Letters of Intent and Proposal Instructions

Letters of Intent (LOI) must provide the required information to be accepted and are a pre-requisite to proposal submission. LOIs will describe the research topic and relevance to the RFP, goals and objectives and approach or methods, and the relevance to stakeholders. A detailed budget, budget narrative, Curriculum Vitae (CV), figures, tables, references, and appendices are not required or allowed in the letter of intent.

LOI Requirements
LOIs are to be submitted via Google forms at: [NSRC Letter of Intent 2024-25](#)

1. PI Email
2. Project title
3. Principal investigator name and institution
   o List only one person here. This person will be the sole contact for all NSRC communication and should forward NSRC updates to Co-PIs and others.
4. Project collaborators name, institution, email address, role in the project
   o List persons or entities who will be directly supported by the proposed project or who will contribute documented matching resources to the project.
   o Roles may include Co-PI, Co-researcher, Research User, etc.
5. Estimated total amount of NSRC funds to be requested
6. Estimated non-federal cost share funds to be provided (if any)
7. Project duration in years
8. Select Focus Area(s)
9. Select Priority Issue(s)
10. Research topic and relevance to RFP (limited to 1,000 characters, approximately 150 words)
11. Goals, objectives, and approach or methods (limited to 2,000 characters, approximately 300 words)
12. Relevance to stakeholders and how the project will lead to application and use in the Northern Forest (limited to 1,000 characters, approximately 150 words)
13. Will there be US Forest Service employees on this proposal as Co-PIs or Cooperators?
14. Potential technical reviewers

- o Please suggest 3 or more technical reviewers including both researchers and practitioners (from public or private sector management or extension agencies) with whom you have no known conflict of interest.
- o Please include names, institutions, and email addresses.

If a confirmation email from Google Forms (subject "NSRC 2024–25 RFP Letter of Intent to Submit Proposal") is not received after submitting the LOI, please contact an NSRC program manager, listed on the last page of this RFP.

Proposal Content

Please include the following in your proposal in 12-point (or greater) Times New Roman font.

1. **Title Page**
    The proposal narrative should include the following elements:
    - Heading: "2024–25 NSRC Proposal"
    - Project Title
    - Principal Investigator (name, affiliation, address, telephone number(s), and email)
    - Project collaborator names, institutions, email addresses, and roles in the project. Roles may include Co-PI, Cooperator, Research User, etc. Forest Service collaborations should be highlighted, as the Forest Service requires NSRC-funded research projects to show tangible coordination with Forest Service research. Please also indicate any early career PIs or collaborators (defined as <7 years since last degree).
    - Total amount of NSRC funds requested and the amounts requested per year
    - Total amount of matching funds offered (if any) and the amounts offered per year
    - Total project costs (total amount of NSRC funds requested and matching funds offered)

2. **Abstract** (limited to 250 words)
    The abstract should briefly summarize the overall research project, including the problem, research question/s, specific objectives, approach or methods, expected outputs and/or outcomes, and short- and long-term benefits for the Northern Forest and its stakeholders and communities. If the proposal is funded, this summary will become the basis for public documents describing NSRC-supported research projects. The abstract should be written for a wide-ranging audience with limited use of field-related terminology.

3. **Proposal Narrative** (Six pages maximum)
    The proposal narrative should include the following elements:
    - **Introduction:** A summary of the issue(s), why the project is needed, and the expected benefits. State how this project will address the specific focus areas and priority issues in the Northeastern States Research Cooperative RFP.
    - **Project Goals and Supporting Objectives:** Include a clear statement of the project goals and specific objective(s). Clearly state the (a) problem of practice, or (b) research question or hypothesis to be addressed. Submissions proposing basic research must

clearly document an end user who will endorse that the proposed work would be beneficial, even if it is risky.

- **Project Justification and Relevance: Why it is important in the Northern Forest.** This section is intended to describe how the proposed project is relevant and beneficial to the Northern Forest region, including the people who live within its boundaries, work with its resources, use its products, visit it, and care about it. Provide a concise review and synthesis of existing knowledge to justify your goals and objectives. If your proposal builds on research previously funded by NSRC or part of a larger effort where NSRC funds may leverage or complement other funds, please take special care to explain this connection. Also include the rationale behind the current need for the proposed research and its timeliness. Be sure to describe the project's potential for *application* to Northern Forest lands and communities and how will it address the needs and interests of stakeholder groups in the Northern Forest region. Describe who will directly benefit from the results of the proposed research and why the beneficiaries or stakeholders that you have defined need this research. This section is intended to provide peer reviewers with evidence that the proposed work addresses concerns in the Northern Forest four-state region as stipulated in the RFP. Although the literature may be extensive, the synthesis should be restricted to the most important and/or most relevant sources.

- **Approach and Methodology:** Include a clear description of the proposed research methods without going into detailed statistical or technical descriptions and formulas. This section should include concise details of methodology as well as justification that would allow a diverse group of reviewers to assess (1) the merits of the proposed methods in providing long-term, credible, scientifically rigorous results; (2) the degree to which partners and stakeholders are involved throughout design and execution of the project; (3) the qualifications of the researchers to successfully complete the proposed study; and (4) the roles and responsibility of *all* collaborators and cooperators listed on the project.

- **Expected Products, Outputs, and Outcomes:** Include an explicit description of expected products, outputs, and outcomes as well as the benefits of the research project for lands and communities of the Northern Forest region. Outcomes are different from "products and outputs." Outcomes are changed behaviors, attitudes, understanding or conditions within the community that may take time to mature; whereas outputs are specific deliverables (e.g., a report, workshop, dataset) that should be deliverable by the conclusion of the project. Consider who wants this information and why. Fully describe (1) communication plans for how research results and products will serve and be disseminated to stakeholder groups and communities in the region, and (2) how you expect practitioners, decision makers or other target audiences to widely use the results of your research. *Note:* Annual progress reports and a final report following the NSRC-specified format are required submissions for funded proposals. These required outputs do not need to be described in the proposal.

- **U.S. Forest Service Collaboration** (if applicable): Please describe the nature of the proposed role (Co-PI, collaborator, etc.) and project involvement by any Forest Service employees on the project.

4. **References and Citations** (Two pages maximum) Citation page formatting may include smaller font sizes and/or spacing.

5. **Project Timeline** (One page maximum)
Include a **project timeline** to show your plans for managing the project over the course of the proposed project period.

6. **Budget and Budget Narrative**
Use the **budget and budget narrative template** found on the [General NSRC Grant Award webpage.](#) Budget details regarding non-federal cost share should mirror the categories and level of specificity found in the federal budget request. The budget narrative template is a separate tab within the budget Excel workbook. The budget narrative should describe the requested funding and matching funding (if provided) in sufficient detail to allow an independent review panel to assess the likelihood of meeting project objectives with the proposed funding level. The budget narrative is critical for reviewers to understand budget allocation choices that might not be clearly explained in the project narrative or budget table. It is required that the budget narrative address *each* component of the federal and cost share budget. Persons or entities that would receive NSRC funds must be explained and justified in sufficient detail to determine whether the requested funds are warranted. See "Budget Considerations" for details on equipment, indirect costs, and matching funds.

Subawards: A subaward budget in the same format as the proposal budget is required for any subawards described in the application. To be clear, the main proposal should have the annual budgets of subaward(s) listed. An additional budget and budget narrative form is required for each subaward within the same Excel workbook.

Budgets and budget narratives should be converted to PDF and combined with the overall proposal PDF prior to submission. Please contact an NSRC program manager if help is needed with the process.

7. **Resumes or CVs**
Include resumes or curriculum vitae (CV) of the PI, Co-PI, and any other cooperators specifically identified in the proposal. CVs should reflect recent, relevant experience and publications demonstrating expertise relevant to successful completion of the project. CVs are limited to two pages maximum per person; one page per person is acceptable.

8. **Letters of Endorsement from Proposed Funding Recipients**
A signed letter from an Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) stating that the enclosed application is accurate and approved for submission based on relevant institutional rules is required. A signed letter from an AOR of any institution or organization that would receive proposed NSRC funding (including subawards) or provide matching funds is also required. An AOR is typically someone from the institution's office of sponsored programs or research, or from the organization's business office. This endorsement from the AOR can be provided in many different formats. No matter the form, the endorsement letter should

indicate approval of submitted budget and amount as well as transmittal information for the institution, in preparation for the possibility that the proposal may be funded.

9. **Letters of Commitment**

    A **letter of commitment** must be included from each individual or group identified as collaborator or cooperator. A letter of commitment indicates a willingness to work with the PI(s) on a project and states what the collaborator or cooperator will do for the proposed research. A sample letter of commitment could contain the following statement: "If the proposal submitted by [insert PI name] titled [insert the proposal title] is selected for funding by the NSRC, it is my intent to collaborate as detailed in the scope of work."

10. **Letters of support**

    Letters of support are allowed, but are *not* considered letters of commitment. Additional appendices of figures/tables are *not* allowed.

Proposal Submission

When your proposal is ready for submission, please access the Google Proposal Metadata form at: https://forms.gle/WX1wztinuYRUKqwT7 where you will be asked to enter basic proposal metadata, including focus areas and priority issues relevant to your proposal. If the link does not work, please copy and paste into your browser.

 After submitting the Google Form, **please submit a pdf of the proposal via [NSRC 2024-25 Proposal Submission](#)**. *Files should be labeled as* Last GameFirst Name_NSRC_2024-25.

Alternatively, you can type https://bit.ly/nsrc24-25proposal into your browser. Simply upload the combined PDF file (all proposal sections as well as the budgets and budget narratives as one PDF). Please upload the proposal PDF only once. If you do not receive a confirmation email by February 8, 2025, or have trouble with submission, please contact one of the program managers (see contact information below).

_____

Contact Information

Maine
Meg Fergusson
margaret.fergusson@maine.edu

New York
Mary Beth Malmsheimer
mmalmshe@esf.edu

New Hampshire
Benjamin Fraser
benjamin.fraser@unh.edu

Vermont
Anna Marchessault
anna.marchessault@uvm.edu

Governance documents (NSRC Charter, Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement) are available at [www.nsrcforest.org/governance.](http://www.nsrcforest.org/governance)