How to Interpret Your NSRC Pre-Proposal Review Criteria
November 2021

We received many pre-proposals in response to the NSRC RFP, which makes it difficult to provide detailed, individual feedback. However, we understand that you want useful guidance on your pre-proposal. As an alternative, we have indicated whether your pre-proposal was either “sufficient” or “requires attention” with respect to the five evaluation criteria stated in the RFP. To provide some context for these ratings, we provide here a summary of factors that the NSRC executive and management review teams viewed as most often causing deficiencies in the pre-proposals. If you received a “requires attention” rating for a criterion, then look at the possible deficiencies for that criterion in this summary and ensure that your full proposal addresses this weakness. Remember that this is a summary of common deficiencies across all pre-proposals. It is not exhaustive or directed at individual submissions and therefore some of these deficiencies may not be relevant to your project idea.

As a general comment, we understand that the space allocated to you to respond to each of the RFP criteria was limited. This places a premium on expressing your idea as clearly and succinctly as possible. A common deficiency in the pre-proposals across all criteria was a lack of clarity. Should you decide to submit a full proposal, you will have more space to expand on your ideas (of course, clarity will still be essential).

As a reminder:
• The project PI must be from within the NSRC region.
• For USFS PIs, the Co-PI (hence the fiduciary grantee of record) must be from within the NSRC region per the congressional authorization language (Public Law 105-185) requiring grantees be located within the defined cooperative region. USFS PIs may be from outside the NSRC region as the USFS operates across all regions of the US, but the fiduciary grantee must be located in one of the NSRC states.

Common deficiencies for individual criteria are described below.

Criterion: The research topic addresses one or more RFP focus areas and priority issues.
• The RFP was developed based on input from an External Advisory Committee (EAC) composed of agency, industry, and NGO stakeholders. There are many ideas that can serve as the foundation for a good research proposal. However, among these ideas there are some that the EAC has prioritized, via the RFP, as being of greatest interest. A common deficiency for this criterion was that the link between the proposed research topic and the RFP focus areas and priority issues was unclear, tangential, or unconvincing.

Criterion: The project goals, objectives, and methodology were clearly stated.
• The description of the proposed methods was unclear or insufficient to understand the general approach(s) to be used.
The connections between the objectives and the methods were unclear.
In the specific case of a proposed research synthesis, it was unclear that the project would result in a useful tool, guidance, or prescription. A literature review by itself is not a sufficient outcome.

Criterion: The research has **wide applicability** to the NSRC region (versus narrow benefit to a specific location or entity).
- Understanding that field research is necessarily conducted at a place, it was nevertheless the impression that the focus and value of the project was mostly local.
- The proposed approach seemed too narrow to yield regionally relevant results.
- It was not clear that the proposers had a plan or vision for how the results from one specific location could be translated or adapted to other areas of the region.
- The spatial scope of the project was not clear.
- The spatial scope of the project included substantial areas outside of the Northern Forest region.

Criterion: **Solid rationale** for why the project is important to stakeholders and how the project will lead to application and use.
- It was unclear that stakeholders had asked for the research to be done. Who wants it?
- The mechanism by which the knowledge generated would lead to application and use by stakeholders was not clear. How would they use it?
- A tool or related product for stakeholders was proposed but there was little or no evidence that stakeholders wanted or would use the proposed tool or product. Did they ask for it?
- A tool or related product for stakeholders was proposed but the rationale for why a new tool/product was needed in light of existing tools/products was weak or missing. Is it really needed?

Criterion: The **communication plan and outputs** are designed to meet the needs of practitioners, decision-makers, and target audiences.
- The communication plan relied largely on published scientific papers and presentations in scientific meetings.
- There was a lack of plans or guidelines specifically oriented to or designed to address stakeholder needs.
- The mechanism by which the project results would lead to application and use by stakeholders was missing or unclear.
- Creative or robust outputs were proposed but lacked a rationale for why the outputs were chosen with respect to audience interest/need and how target audiences would be reached.

Criterion: There is **partner and stakeholder involvement** during the design and execution of the project.
- It was unclear that stakeholders were substantively involved in the project from the onset.
- Stakeholders and partners were listed, but there was no clear demonstration of how they are involved.
- Stakeholders were not clearly identified.

Criterion: The project has the **potential to address stakeholder priorities** in the Northern Forest.
- The project stakeholders were not within the NSRC region.
- The potential to address those priorities regionally was not clearly defined.