



Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement Northeastern States Research Cooperative May 9, 2025

Applicability

This statement applies specifically to involvement with the Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC) and is not intended to replace or supersede similar policies of the partnering institutions and organizations.

NSRC will support research to benefit the environment and economies of the Northern Forest through research competitions, which likely will be conducted annually. The roles, processes, and guidelines described in this document are designed to ensure a fair and transparent research competition process and to protect the confidentiality of research proposal contents and reviewer identities.

How We Will Operate

NSRC's RFP processes and conflict of interest policy aim to ensure that high-level and highly informed advice and expert, impartial technical reviews further NSRC's goal 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. We will accomplish this as follows.

NSRC is managed collaboratively by the Northern Research Station (NRS) of the USDA Forest Service (USDA/FS), the University of Vermont (UVM), the University of New Hampshire (UNH), the University of Maine (UM), the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in New York (ESF), and the Hubbard Brook Research Foundation (HBRF). NSRC directors from each of these institutions form the Executive Committee of the NSRC. The director from each collaborator institution will identify a manager from that institution. Together, the managers form the Management Committee.

An External Advisory Committee (EAC) composed of representatives of the communities, businesses, industries, and agencies in the Northern Forest Region and who contribute to and benefit from knowledge generated by research funded via the NSRC will advise the Executive Committee on specific research needs for the request for proposals (RFP). EAC members will not participate in any aspect of the review of pre-proposals or proposals or the selection of final projects to fund. This restriction of the responsibilities of the EAC is designed to allow members and their colleagues to be involved with proposals submitted in response to the annual RFP with limited conflict of interest.

Based on advice from the EAC, the Executive and Management Committees will develop elements and language of the annual request for proposal (RFP). Neither Executive nor Management Committee members may submit proposals in response to the RFP. Executive and

Management Committee members must recuse themselves from evaluating proposals in which they may have a conflict of interest.

A pre-proposal is a prerequisite for a full proposal. The form and content of the pre-proposal content will be described in the RFP. Pre-proposals will be received and reviewed by the Management Committee themselves or with the aid of an anonymous, ad-hoc committee formed for this purpose. Pre-proposal evaluation will focus on applicability to the RFP and likely competitiveness of the proposed project. Feedback will be for guidance only, not for selection.

Full proposals will be reviewed by External Technical Reviewers, who must recuse themselves from the review of proposals in which they have a conflict of interest. A Full Proposal Review Panel, composed of members who have reasonable technical knowledge of the areas covered by the annual RFP and the way that this knowledge could benefit stakeholders, will employ their knowledge and the content of external reviews to rank full proposals for consideration by the Executive Committee. To serve on the panel, Full Proposal Review Panel members must not have a conflict of interest with any full proposal.

The Executive Committee will consider the recommendations of the Full Proposal Review Panel and the external technical reviews and then finalize the ranked slate of specific projects for awards that year. Decisions will be reported to the U.S. Forest Service and the External Advisory Committee.

Conflict of interest defined

Participants in the NSRC RFP process must recuse themselves when conflicts of interest occur. The following are examples of potentially biasing affiliations or relationships:

1. You *may* have a conflict if you have/hold affiliations with applicant institution(s) including:
 - Current employment in the same department within the same institution as professor, adjunct professor, visiting professor or similar position.
 - Other current employment with the institution such as consulting or an advisory arrangement, or you are being considered for employment with the institution.
 - Formal or informal re-employment arrangement with the institution.
 - Ownership of the institution's securities or other evidence of debt.
 - Current membership on a visiting committee or similar body at the institution. (This is a conflict only for proposals or applications that originate from the department, school, or facility that the visiting committee or similar body advises.)
 - Any office, governing board membership, or relevant committee chairperson in the institution. (Ordinary membership in a professional society or association is not considered an office.)
 - Current enrollment as a student. (Only a conflict for proposals or applications that originate from the department or school in which one is a student.)
 - Received and retained an honorarium or award from the institution within the last 12 months.

2. You *may* have a conflict of interest if you have/hold relationships with an investigator, project director, or other person who has a personal interest in the proposal or other application in response to this RFP. This includes:
- Your collaboration on a project or on a grant proposal, book, article, report, or paper within the last 48 months.
 - Your explicit endorsement of a *specific* research proposal or project, including authoring letters of support on behalf of the research team. Members of the EAC are *not* in conflict with a proposal that arose in response to a *general* recommendation made by the EAC member. EAC members *are* in conflict if they *specifically* recommend a person or entity that subsequently submits a full proposal for consideration.
 - Known family or marriage relationship. (Conflict only if the relationship is with a principal investigator or project director.)
 - Direct business or professional partnerships that have financial implications.
 - Employment at the same institution within the last 12 months.
 - Past or present association as thesis advisory or thesis student.
 - Interests of the following persons are to be treated as if they were yours: any affiliation or relationship of your spouse, or your minor child, or a relative living in your immediate household or of anyone who is legally your partner that you are aware of, that would be covered by items 1 or 2 above (except for receipt by your spouse or relative or an honorarium or award.)
 - Other relationships, such as close personal friendship, that might tend to affect your judgments or be seen as doing so by a reasonable person familiar with the relationship.

Confidentiality

Following federal policy and guidance, the NSRC receives proposals in confidence and protects the confidentiality of their contents. For this reason, you must not copy, quote, or otherwise disclose or use material from any proposal you review.

Likewise, NSRC reviews and reviewer identities will not be disclosed except that verbatim copies of reviews (without the name and affiliation of the reviewer) may be sent to the principal investigator. NSRC considers reviews and reviewer identities to be exempt from public disclosure, but may be required to release information under terms of the Freedom of Information Act, or other laws. We may release a listing of all reviewers used within a specified period as a matter of acknowledgement, but will not reveal in what way these individuals interacted with NSRC.

More information

Please contact Gretchen Nareff (gretchen.nareff@uvm.edu) with any questions or concerns.