

National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Office of Education

**Educational Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institutions
(EPP/MSI)**

Cooperative Science Center (CSC) Solicitation

NOAA-SEC-OED-2016-2004758

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Question: Can a CSC addressing “Coastal and Marine Ecosystems” be aligned with OAR as its primary line office affiliation instead of NOS?

Response: Applicants responding with a proposal, for any CSC type, adhere to the information published in the solicitation. The primary Line Office affiliation for each CSC Type is specifically provided in the published Federal Funding Opportunity, NOAA-SEC-OED-2016-2004758.

Question: What is the application submission deadline?

Response: The submission deadline is March 30, 2016.

Question: Applicants are required to seek partners with other academic institutions, NOAA and its affiliates, as well as, public and private entities, in fields that support the NOAA mission." Does this mean that we can get collaboration letters from NOAA scientists?

Response: Letters of collaboration may be submitted from NOAA mission related entities, external to NOAA, for education and training and/or research collaborations.

Question: The budget MUST include adequate resources for proposed CSC evaluation." Can further guidance be provided for what level is considered adequate - 1% of total budget? 5%? 10%?

Response: Determination of the resources and aligned costs are made by the applicant based on the planned proposal for evaluation of the proposed Center.

Question: Should (1) "name of the proposed CSC" be the "Center Type" or a proposal name that we are free to choose?

Response: The name of the proposed CSC must include the Center Type.

Question: Should "demographic data" be provided for the University, College, and Department separately? Just department of PI or all departments involved in the project? Which demographic data should be provided, e.g. race, gender?

Response: Format, content, and presentation are determined by the applicant.

Question: On the Mandatory \$150K Center-Wide Student Professional Development, are Operational Costs included?

Response: The Center-wide Student Professional Development requirement (FFO: IV., B., 8.1.2) at \$150K per year **is within the minimum 50% of total annual funding for direct student support for a cohort of students (FFO: IV., B., 8.1.1 and IV., F. Funding Restrictions)**. Operational costs are not included in direct student support.

Question: On Mandatory floors on student support, can we distribute the student support floors so that it covers things like mandatory summer internships, SSIO participation, conference registration, travel, etc.?

Response: The mandatory student support funding levels and what is supported are outlined in the FFO. Applicants may distribute the floor **within the range for specified use as identified in solicitation (FFO: IV., B., 8.1.1 (i) - 8.1.1, (v)).** The definition for direct student support with allowable is provided (FFO: VIII., D.).

Question: On International Travel: Does the international travel discount access to NOAA vessels (e.g. AEROSE)?

Response: Funds may be used for domestic travel to access NOAA vessels.

Question: On Student Training: Are ship time or other associated costs for maritime training included?

Response: Direct Student Support costs associated with maritime training are allowable (FFO VIII., D.).

Question: On Evaluation Plan: Clarification of Page 52 – Does the Center need to

hire/budget for an external Program evaluator or is the External Advisory Board model sufficient? Is a completely external evaluator required?

Response: Applicants are required to budget for an external program evaluator (FFO: IV B., 8.4.5, e.).

Question: Are summer-bridge students considered degree-seeking?

Response: Students supported in a cohort as described in IV., B., 8.1.1 (i) - 8.1.1, (v) are considered degree-seeking for this solicitation. Students not in a NOAA EPP/MSI CSC award recipient cohort, as specified in IV., B., 8.1.1 (i) - 8.1.1, (v), and participating in a summer-bridge programs are not eligible for support at the levels outlined for CSC students at degree-levels in IV., B., 8.1.1 (i) - 8.1.1, (v). Summer-bridge students, to be eligible for NOAA EPP/MSI CSC award support, must be post-secondary students and in a summer-bridge program that responds to: (i) Program Objectives (FFO: Sec. I., A, 1. - 5.3); (ii) Program Priorities (FFO: Sec. I., B.); (iii) Eligibility (FFO: III., A. - C.); (iv) Center Type (FFO: IV., B., 7) priorities, key focus areas, knowledge, working skills, and competencies; (v) participating along with NOAA EPP/MSI CSC students in Center-wide Professional Development (FFO: IV., B., 8.1.2 (i) through (iv)); and, (vi) included in Longitudinal Student Outcomes Tracking (FFO: IV., B., 8.1.4).

Question: Section 8.1.1 - (ii) (i1) What are the allowed costs in reference to the

one-time support of up to \$10000 for MS students and, (ii) the one-time support of \$5000 for NERTO students? Are these additional stipends?

Response: The solicitation describes a package (Sec. IV., B. 8.1) for support per student at the postsecondary level for CSC-supported students to be educated, trained, and graduated to become candidates for the workforce at NOAA and NOAA-mission related enterprises. The Master's level student support with one-time NOAA-mission focused student research activities (\$10K) per Center Type description and NERTO (\$5K) funds are not additional stipends but support for the eligible student when conducting their research activities and participation in a NERTO. The FFO Sec. VIII., D. Definitions provides a description of allowable costs. The FFO does not describe additional stipends for beneficiaries.

Question: Section 8.1.1 - (ii) (iv) What are the allowed costs in reference to the one-time support of up to \$20000 for PhD students and, (ii) the one-time support of \$10000 for NERTO students? Are these additional stipends? Please clarify.

Response: The standardized student support to allow assessment of Program effectiveness provides a doctoral student with a funding packaged described in the FFO. An eligible Center doctoral student receives a package that includes support for NOAA mission-focused student research activities (\$20K) as described for each Center Type and participation (\$10K) by the student in a NERTO. The FFO does not describe additional stipends for beneficiaries.

Question: Section 8.1.1 - (iii) what is the precise definition of a professional level student?

Response: For this FFO, a professional student is an eligible CSC student pursuing a NOAA mission-focused professional degree such as students in Law Degree programs conducting research in the area of NOAA mission-focused environmental law and/or policy, aligned with the Center Type proposed.

Questions: Section 8.1.2 - Is the \$150000 for the Center Wide Student Professional Development (SPD) part of the 50% direct student support requirement?

Response: The student professional development requirement is a component of the NOAA EPP/MSI CSC Student Education and Training funding of a minimum of 50% of total annual funding for direct student support for a cohort of students described in the FFO (Sec. IV., B., 8.1.0 - 8.1.4 and Sec., IV., F. 2., (ii)).

Question: Is the proposed CSC required to create a summer undergraduate NOAA-related research experience for rising sophomores within the CSC? If so, can students from one CSC partner attend the program at another partner's institution?

Response: The FFO Sec. IV., B., 8.1.2 (i) requires applicants to describe a rising sophomore summer experiential training program to be created under the Center-wide Student Professional Development programming. The applicant will determine how such a rising sophomore program will be undertaken and satisfy the purpose as outlined in 1-3 (FFO Sec. IV., B., 8.1.2 (i)).

Question: Would you please characterize the types of partnerships you are seeking in the proposals?

Response: The applicant determines which partnerships enable a proposed Center to be fully responsive to the FFO and to address the identified Program-level outcomes.

Question: Can we have international collaborations too?

Response: Applicants are reminded that the FFO funding restriction describes that NOAA EPP/MSI CSC award funds may NOT be used for foreign travel. Collaborations are expected to be NOAA mission-focused and aimed to increase collaborations with NOAA, academic within-Center and among Centers institutions, other Federal, state, local government, and non-governmental organizations that are NOAA-mission related. The FFO does not require international collaboration.

Question: To what extent are you interested in Master's, PhD and undergraduate levels?

Response: NOAA EPP/MSI awards are in the support of the full spectrum of postsecondary education and training (FFO Sec., IV., B., 8.1.0).

Question: Yearly performance metrics (students trained/graduated) should that include students to be supported with leveraged funds?

Response: Yearly performance metric reported are for EPP/MIS-funded education, research and administration as outlined in the FFO to clearly identify the outputs and outcomes from the NOAA EPP/MSI CSC award funding as distinct from activities funded from all other sources.

Question: Is it acceptable to fund students fully for 2 or 3 years and move them to leveraged funds?

Response: Center awards are comprised of 50% of total funding for direct student support. The primary purpose of Center awards is for student beneficiaries, at the postsecondary level, to be **educated, trained, and graduated** to become candidates for the workforce at NOAA and NOAA-mission related enterprises. The cohort of students a Center educates, trains, and graduates will be determined by the applicant.

Question: The NOAA EPP/MSI CSC requires a Minimum of 50% of total funding be used for direct student support. Is the 50% direct student support requirement applicable to each academic partner institution or is it applicable to the whole center?

Response: The 50% direct student support requirement is applicable to each academic partner institution in the Center and to the total annual funding of each Center Type (FFO: Sec., IV., F., (i)).

Question: The maximum number of pages required for the Center Administration Plan is 10 pages; and that section also requires inclusion of resumes for PI and other key personnel (2 pages). Seems that will easily exceed the 10 page limit.

Response: The applicant adheres to the guidance in the FFO and is responsible for submission of a complete application package. The page limitation does not include governmental forms and information provided to complete government

forms (FFO, Sec. IV., B. 5. Page Limitation).

Question: Are the title page and abstract part of the 55-page limit?

Response: The title page and abstracts are not included in the narrative description. The narrative description has a 55-page limit.

Question: For 8.3.1. Should we identify assistant director, education expert, distinguished research scientist, and the data, information, and communication manager before we submit the application?

Response: The FFO identifies the Distinguished Research Scientist position must be filled within one year of the CSC establishment at the lead MSI institution (FFO Sec., IV., B., 8.3.1., (d)). The FFO describes the requirements for prospective CSCs on page 16.

Question: The Supplemental Elements are limited to 10 pages; but it includes several sections (e.g., References, Letter of Commitments, Institutional data; IRB approval; letters of collaboration; current and pending support). How can we fit all of these within 10 pages?

Response: The applicant provides the complete application package (FFO: Sec. IV., B., 8.4.0 Complete Application Packager). The FFO (see Item 5. on pg. 22) indicates that materials submitted to allow Federal officers to make decisions have no page limit (such as current and pending support, other activities similar to proposal conducted by applicant, NEPA, etc.).

Question: There are four Supplemental Elements requested on page 23 but seven requested on pp. 54-55. Please clarify.

Response: The applicant provides the complete application package (FFO: Sec. IV., B., 8.4.0 Complete Application Package). The FFO (see Item 5. on pg. 22) indicates that materials submitted to allow Federal officers to make decisions have no page limit (such as current and pending support, other activities similar to proposal conducted by applicant, NEPA, etc.).

Question: To what extent does NOAA expect undergraduates to be included in the center training and research?

Response: NOAA EPP/MSI CSC awards are in support of the full spectrum of postsecondary education and training and graduation of CSC students who can be

candidates for the workforce at NOAA and NOAA mission-related enterprises.

Question: What about K - 12 outreach programs? Are they supported under this FFO?

Response: The focus of the FFO is postsecondary degree levels to graduate CSC beneficiaries as future workforce candidates in this Federal Mission Workforce STEM Education Program. The FFO describes support for post-secondary level students who a CSC will educate, train, and graduate to be candidates for the workforce at NOAA and NOAA mission-related enterprises. Engagement is a component of the FFO description for NOAA EPP/MSI CSCs.

Question: Will NOAA be awarding a Center in each of the 4 line organizations? (So, you would not award two centers in let's say NWS.)

Response: FFO solicits applications in four Center Types. After the technical review and selection process, a single award may be made per Center Type.

Question: A focus in this solicitation has included Social Science/Policy/Economics. With which line office would this focus be aligned?

Response: Social science, policy, and economics are integral to **all** NOAA Line and Staff Office activities. This Social Science/Policy/Economics focus in the FFO is cross-cutting.

Question: Is it encouraged to have collaborations with other NOAA entities (e.g.: ESRL, OAR, etc. that are interested in a center's research) in addition to the required primary line office?

Response: The applicants for a specific Center Type respond to the solicitation as described for the Center. The application review will utilize the information in the published solicitation for NOAA mission alignment including with the Primary NOAA Line Office. NOAA EPP/MSI CSC **award recipients** shall collaborate with the Primary and other NOAA Line and Staff Offices to enhance NOAA mission relevance for student education, training and graduation of a pool of candidates with postsecondary degrees, for the workforce at NOAA and NOAA mission-related enterprises. Concurrently, NOAA EPP/MSI CSC awardees shall develop collaborations with NOAA to enhance NOAA-mission research capacity at the MSI institutions and increase NOAA mission-relevance for student education, research, and training activities.

Question: Centers would start in Sep. 2016, is it expected recipients would have identified students by then?

Response: Recipients as academic institutions would be expected to identify student beneficiaries to be participants in the Year 1 cohort of Center students. FFO Sec. IV., B., 8.1.1 describes: "All scholars/fellows in the cohort must be appointed within 9 months of the initial award start date for Year 1."

Question: How should interested applicants engage with the Primary Line Office during proposal preparation?

Response: NOAA personnel shall **not** participate in any aspect of the preparation of applications to be submitted to NOAA under this financial assistance solicitation for NOAA EPP/MSI Cooperative Science Center awards. Any citizen may communicate with a Federal organization; however, **particular care must be taken by both applicant and NOAA to ensure that NOAA personnel are not engaged in proposal development** as this may impact the submission up to denial of consideration for this open competition.

Question: Which of the five positions for the center: director, assistant director, education expert, distinguished research scientist, Data, Information and Communication manager should be identified at: (i) time of application submission or (ii) after an award is made?

Response: At application submission, all CSC Management Key Positions are required except the Distinguished Research Scientist (Sec. IV., B., 8.3.1, (d)) position that must be filled within one year of CSC award.

Question: Is the distinguished research scientist (DRS) position tenure-track or non-tenure-track (NTT)? If it is a NTT position, can the hired person be a permanent position for the grant period?

Response: The FFO identified CSC Management Key Positions with the DRS (FFO: IV., B., 8.3.1, (d)) as a tenured position with 100% time allocation in a 9-month period.

Question: Can the collaborative partnerships with other academic institutions, public entities and private entities be Non-US organizations?

Response: The primary purpose of the Center awards is to educate, train, and graduate students, particularly from communities traditionally underrepresented in NOAA mission fields. Center graduates are expected to be candidates for the workforce at NOAA and NOAA mission-related enterprises. Collaborations with non-academic entities are determined by the applicant. Collaborations are expected to be NOAA mission-focused and aimed to increase collaborations with

NOAA, academic within-Center and among-Center institutions, other Federal, state, local government, and non-governmental organizations that are NOAA-mission related. The FFO does not require international collaboration. Applicants are reminded that the FFO funding restriction describes that NOAA EPP/MSI CSC award funds may NOT be used for foreign travel.

Question: Can you confirm that the doctoral degree in Environmental Science and Engineering meets your eligibility for the “Earth System Sciences and Remote Sensing Technologies” CSC?

Response: The FFO (Sec. III., A. and Sec.V., B., 1.) identified eligibility and included "fields with doctoral degrees in research utilizing emergent science and technologies." Applicants develop an application that adheres to the guidance in the solicitation.

Question: Can you tell which position equates to a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at an educational institution? Is this the President, Provost, Business Official, AOR or Department Chair/Dean?

Response: The President is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at an educational institution.

Question: We had a question on the IDC and MTDC. We understand that 25% must be used; however, the definition of MTDC is not clear.

Response: The FFO Part IV B., 8.4.9 provides a link to the NOAA Grants Management instructions on submission of budget justifications that will guide applicants in budget preparation and budget justification development.

Question: We have two questions regarding the information requested in the Supplemental Elements for the post-secondary students. Our University only maintains and reports by ethnicity but not by racial. Is this acceptable? Racial and Ethnic are often viewed as the same.

The second question in the Supplemental Elements section is to provide 'Placement for graduated post-secondary students from traditionally underrepresented groups.' Our University does not collect this type of information. A survey is given to students once they graduate; however, it is not aggregated.

Response: The applicant responds to the solicitation determining the content of their application submission to address the FFO.

Question: On page 22, and pages 54-55, 8.4.6 Supplemental Elements of the FFO includes a list of ‘Supplemental Elements’. Where should the ‘Federal, State and Local Government Activities’, ‘Current & Pending Support’ and ‘References Cited’ documents be included in the application package? Can you confirm that they are included in the “Narrative Description” document but are not counted as part of the 55 page limit for the Narrative Description? Or should they be separate files? Also, is the Appendices a separate file to be uploaded or is it to be included in the ‘Narrative Description’ document?

Response: The solicitation outlines components of the application in Part IV. B (pp. 21-58), including the content of the narrative description. Further, in Part IV., B., 1. - 6. is provided guidance for uploading the application package. The applicant, in responding to the FFO, is responsible for determination of content and compiling as well as uploading a complete application package that responds to the solicitation.

Question: Is this new solicitation to select the new four MSIs other than the current four MSIs having the CSCs or is it for the new competition for all MSIs including the current four MSIs.

Response: The current solicitation is an **open competition** for any eligible MSI to submit an application to establish an EPP/MSI Cooperative Science Center.

Question: Will NOAA allow an institution to participate in two center types under the different roles of lead and partner?

Response: The FFO PART III. Eligibility Information, A. Eligible Applicants (p. 17) states: "An application can only address one center type. An institution shall only submit one application as the lead. Institutions may collaborate on up to two proposals as partners."

Question: There is currently one of the Center Type being funded and they will be submitting a renewal application. Our question is, will we be in competition with this center or is their application considered a renewal application apart from the new applications?

Response: The current solicitation is for open competition among all eligible applicants. Renewal applications types are not submitted through this FFO.

Question: In addition to tuition, stipend, and travel, there will be "a one-time support of up to \$10,000 for research support, not including use to cover cost for computer or data resources and supplies." If research support does not include travel, computer, data resources or supplies, what would be considered research support?

Response: The applicant is required to provide support for student research that responds to the solicitation Center Type. The applicant is required to describe the research experiences and activities for the CSC-supported students that are: NOAA mission-aligned, and located at academic and/or NOAA facilities.

Question: Can the collaborative institutions be a non-minority institution (non-MSI)? Or should all of the partner institutions be minority institutions (MSI)?

Response: The applicant determines the number and type of partnerships in response to the published solicitation.

Question: What institutions are eligible to be the lead applicant in the FFO?

Response: To be the lead institution, an applicant is required to meet the eligibility requirements as published in Section III in the FFO.

Question: If my institution is on a U.S. Department of Education 2015 list, is that all that is needed to establish eligibility.

Response: The FFO states on p.15: *“Each applicant or academic partner indicating MSI status shall append official documentation of such designation, from the U.S. Department of Education, at the time of the application submission.”*

Question: What is the definition of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) in NOAA CSC Program

Response: The NOAA CSC FFO states that Hispanic Serving Institutions are eligible when they meet the requirements of the U.S. Department of Education definition at 20 U.S.C. § 1101a. Applicants may review a copy of this law for details.

Question: Can a university that has a joint-doctoral program with another university whereby a degree is conveyed by both institutions, serve as the lead institution?

Response: Applicant provides documentation to establish meeting the eligibility requirements as provided for in the published solicitation.

Question: Is there a limit on the number of co-PIs on the proposal?

Response: The solicitation does not address number of co-PIs. The composition of the personnel for an application is determined by the applicant.

Question: Are letters of commitment needed from each partner institution?

Response: The solicitation requests a letter of commitment from the applicant institution.

Question: Where does letter of commitment go?

Response: Guidance for submission of the letter of commitment is provided for in the FFO Section IV. B., 8.4.6 Supplemental Elements.

Question: Would terminal Master's degree students in environmental science and management fall in the category of professional Master's students?

Response: The professional level students are defined by the U.S. Department of Education for professional degree programs in the post baccalaureate award categories.

Question: For the student support, how do you define professional level?

Response: For the purpose of the solicitation, students supported in NOAA mission fields at professional levels are pursuing degrees as defined by the U.S. Department of Education for post baccalaureate award categories.

Question: The FFO has salary or stipend amount for each type of student. But there is no amount for postdoc.

Response: A postdoctoral fellow is not described as student in the published solicitation.

Question: How many NOAA partners would be considered sufficient for a proposal?

Response: The solicitation does not define a number of NOAA partners as a requirement.

Question: Our institution is both a Title III and a Tile V. Does that make us eligible?

Response: The applicant provides documentation to establish eligibility as required in FFO Section III.

Question: Where and how to get NOAA mission future workforce needs?

Response: At a minimum, an applicant may utilize the URLs in the FFO that indicate public access to NOAA's vision, mission, and strategic plan documents.

Question: When do you anticipate successful applicants will be notified of the award?

Response: In the FFO Section IV., D., an applicant will be notified by September 2016.

Question: Will you expand on the role and requirements of the advisory board mentioned on page 72? Is this an oversight body that is established and maintained by NOAA, not by CSCs?

Response: Advisory Board is not an oversight body.

Question: Resumes of PI and key personnel are in the 10 page limits, it seems not enough.

Response: The published solicitation provides the page limitation for applications submitted in response to the announcement.

Question: Do we need to have specific collaborations with NOAA scientists in the proposal, or are those relationships established after funding?

Response: Specific collaborations with NOAA scientists are established during the performance period of an award.

Question: Does all program evaluation, both formative and summative, need to be conducted by an OUTSIDE evaluator or could formative be conducted by an internal evaluation expert?

Response: The requirements for evaluation of a proposed Cooperative Science Center are as described in the FFO. An applicant determines evaluation content of the proposal that is to be submitted in response to the solicitation.

Question: What are the requirements/parameters of the Annual Center Meetings?

Response: Each Cooperative Science Center, during the performance of the award, is required to conduct an annual Center meeting that includes professionals

at the lead and partner institutions, NOAA, and some student representation. The meeting objectives and outcomes address the funded objectives of the award. The agenda for the meeting is developed in collaboration with NOAA Program and NOAA Technical Monitor.

Question: Who should attend the NOAA center meeting? So we can budget appropriate travel funds.

Response: Center annual meeting attendees are professionals at the lead and partner institutions, NOAA, and some student representation. Students supported on an award all attend the Biennial Program Education and Science Forum. NOAA-hosted annual Center Meeting attendees represent the award recipient.

Question: The FFO states, "Salary line shall not be used for funds to support student beneficiaries. All students supported through the CSC award are to be included in participant costs." Our students are paid in a salary line as student wages, with associated benefits. Our students are considered employees of the institution and do not meet the Federal definition of a "participant" or "trainee" for participant support costs under Uniform Guidance. In 2 CFR 200.75, Participant Support Costs means direct costs for items such as stipends or subsistence allowances, travel allowances, and registration fees paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with conferences, or training projects.

Please advise, since the program announcement and the Uniform Guidance regulations seem to contradict each other.

Response: After careful consideration of all program goals and objectives, the guidelines developed were determined to be applicable across the higher education landscape.

Question: Can you clarify the distinction between a multi-institution versus multi-investigator? From the FFO: Multi-institution applications must include the SF-424 A for each institution and a multi-investigator application using a lead investigator with a sub-grantee approach must submit a SF-424 A for each sub-grantee."

Response: In this FFO, multi-institutional means collaboration of distinct institutions with multiple investigators. Multi-investigator means more than one investigator from an institution.

Question: Can PhD's in physics, chemistry, math, engineering or biology **EDUCATION** be considered Education Experts for this proposal?

Response: For individuals who have had a robust career, supplemented by experiences that allow their education outside of teaching and development of pedagogical content, it is left to the applicant to identify relevant experiences, outside of the scientific disciplines, that show education expertise.

Question: Should the “institutional data” required as Supplemental Element 3 be provided for all partners or just the lead? Also, do the data need to represent the entire institution, or may they represent the disciplines involved in the proposed project?

Response: The applicant determines the institutional data content to be included in the proposal submitted in response to the solicitation.

Question: Is the required “strategic plan” meant to represent the strategic plan for the entire university, or is it meant to represent a plan that is prepared for the proposed project?

Response: The applicant determines the data and information content/span relative to the proposal to be submitted in response to the solicitation. The proposer would describe a strategic plan that would focus on relevancy to the Center.

Question: Are the “results from assessment of needs” meant to be a re-statement of the data that NOAA has reported in the FFO and elsewhere for its projected needs, or are these results meant to be from another source? If another source, could you please direct us to that source?

Response: The applicant defines the approach to determine the assessment of needs for the proposal to be submitted in response to the published solicitation. The approach to accomplish such an assessment and the linking to proposal content would be determined by the applicant. The applicant selects any sources and makes the connection to respond to the guidance in the solicitation (FFO: IV., B., 8.4.7) that states, “*results from Assessment of Needs for NOAA mission future workforce used to baseline and benchmark the CSC proposal.*”

Question: Are we too late in the game in your opinion? We believe that we can still pull together a competitive proposal unless we have missed critical information e.g. in the webinars. Are the webinars available online anywhere?

Response: The competition is open to eligible applicants who make the determination about submitting a proposal. The EPP/MSI CSC FFO Informational Webinar of December 17, 2015 is accessible from the Program website, www.epp.noaa.gov. The application is open to eligible applicants until March 30, 2016.

Question: We note that recent NOAA supported centers tend to engage a national/international group of institutions. We believe that we can develop a strong regionally based proposal in the northeastern US given the institutions . . . at our doorstep in the . . . region along with the relevant science issues in our region. Would such a proposal be considered competitive?

Response: Applicants determine content and context for proposals, including the partnerships necessary to respond with a proposal, for a specified Center Type. There is no direct funding in this solicitation for international partnerships. The FFO (IV., F.) addresses foreign travel, specifically: “*Foreign travel support is not available under this funding opportunity.*”

Question: Is previous NOAA funding a consideration? Our department has been heavily funded by NSF, DOE, NASA and DOD but we have not previously received direct funding from NOAA.

Response: The announcement is open for eligible applicants and prior NOAA funding is not included as a requirement or consideration for the published solicitation.

Question: Can you provide a definition for the term “matrix communications” as used in pp. 38, 44, and 53?

Response: The FFO term “matrix communications” provides guidance for eligible applicants to develop proposals that address proactive planning for communicating with internal and external stakeholders.

Question: With regards to the above referenced funding opportunity, we would like to confirm the requirements for the Risk Assessment. In other instances, there has either been a questionnaire or statement required, however, here it seems that the university should include the policies and procedures related to 2 CFR §200.331. Is this correct?

Response: The applicants are required to have established policies, mechanisms, and approaches to address, respond to, and mitigate risk related to the proposed Center Type. The applicant determines what information is to be submitted that is relevant in response to the solicitation.

Question: Risk assessment. At time of submission, the applicant shall append the internal controls procedures for assessing risk for the proposed CSC if funded and for sub-recipients. Factors for grantees to consider when developing their risk tools can be found at 2 CFR §200.331. Can we have more insight on how to identify and write about “Risk Assessment” as part of the appendices?

Response: The applicants are required to have established policies, mechanisms, and approaches to address, respond to, and mitigate risk related to the proposed Center Type. The solicitation states that **2 CFR §200.331** is a resource. The full 2 CFR 200 guidance for grants and agreements is available online at www.ecfr.gov.

Question: We have a technical question regarding the position of the Education Expert. One of our candidates for this position does not have a terminal Ph.D. or Ed.D. in Education. We would like to know if it is still possible to have this person as the Education Expert. The person has a Ph.D. in International Communication and here are some of his experiences that we think might qualify him for the position.

Response: For individuals who have had a robust career, supplemented by experiences that allow their education outside of teaching and development of pedagogical content, it is left to the applicant to identify relevant experiences, outside of the scientific disciplines, that show education expertise.

Question: May community college students receive stipend support during participation in a summer research program? If so, what types of costs may the stipend cover?

Response: The applicant determines the funding in an application using the guidance in the solicitation for eligibility to receive student beneficiary support. The mandatory student support funding levels and what is supported are outlined in the FFO (Sec., IV., B., 8.1.0).

Question: Is the required 24 semester hours of "cores sciences" limited to physics, chemistry, biology, oceanography or environmental science? Or, can this 24 semester hours also include the additional coursework listed, such as economics, environmental law, mathematics, engineering, hydrology, etc.?

Response: The applicant is required to propose how students will attain competency in the core sciences described for the Center Type in the published FFO.

Question: Must PhD students also fulfill these same requirements?

Responses: Applicants are required to propose how students will attain the competencies outlined for the Center Type in the published FFO. For the lead institution, the courses must propose how their doctoral granting program at their institution will fulfill the requirements.

Question: Would you please clarify if community college-level students participating in this NOAA-funded endeavor would be eligible to receive an undergraduate scholarship? If yes, what if any, restrictions or conditions must be in place for this scholarship process to occur?

Responses: Partnerships with community colleges may be considered as a mechanism to build the undergraduate pipeline of four-year academic institutions. A CSC may partner with one or more institutions that have demonstrated education and research performance in NOAA related sciences. (See FFO, PART III, Eligibility Information).

Question: Could you please let us know if the application process for current recipients seeking to renew funding for their Centers are in the same pool of applicants as first-time CSC grant seekers?

Response: Yes. There is a single competition where all interested and eligible applicants receive the same submission considerations published in NOAA-SEC-OED-2016-2004758. All applicants who choose to apply will have their applications, if eligible after an administrative review, in the same technical review pool.

Question: As we are preparing the materials, we have a few questions regarding the program. I would like to schedule a time to call you to discuss those questions. What would be a convenient time for me to call you in the next few days?

Response: Program recommends that questions be submitted via email. Program will respond and post for public access.

Question: We are considering hiring an outside contractor to review our proposal before we submit it. However, this individual is currently a subcontractor to a contractor that has contracts with NOAA. **I want to verify that this individual would not be considered “NOAA personnel” and therefore is eligible to work with us as a reviewer.**

Response: Each applicant determines the process to prepare and submit the application while pursuing ethically appropriate options. The applicant adheres to conflict of interest and appearance of conflict of interest perspectives. The FFO (p. 64) states, “*An independent peer panel review comprised of Federal and non-Federal experts, **external to the agency**, with education, scientific, and administration expertise will be formed to review the applications.*”

Question: Does the Jacques Cousteau National Research Reserve --one of 20 NOAA National Estuarine Reserves, count as NOAA facility?

Response: The Jacques Cousteau National Research Reserve is in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System that is a network of 28 coastal sites designated to protect and study estuarine systems. It is not a NOAA facility. The reserves represent a partnership program between NOAA and the coastal states. NOAA provides funding and national guidance, **and each site is managed on a daily basis by a lead state agency or university with input from local partners.**

Question: The guidelines for format do not mention line spacing for the document. Can you confirm that the documents are to be single spaced?

Response: The applicant uses the FFO Sec. IV., B. guidance and makes decisions that adhere to the FFO statement: “. . . readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in selection of an appropriate font. . .” Similarly, the line spacing is applicant determined to respond to readability needs.

Question: We would like to hire an outside contractor to review our proposal before submission; however, the reviewer we have identified is a current consultant and subcontractor to a contractor with contracts with NOAA/XX/XXX. We want to verify that it would not be viewed as a conflict of interest to have him review our proposal and provide feedback before submission.

Response: Each applicant determines the process to prepare and submit the application while pursuing ethically appropriate options. The applicant adheres to conflict of interest and appearance of conflict of interest perspectives. The FFO (p. 64) states, “An independent peer panel review comprised of Federal and non-Federal experts, **external to the agency**, with education, scientific, and administration expertise will be formed to review the applications.”

Question: One of our faculty members is working on a proposal to be submitted in response to CSC Solicitation NOAA-SEC-OED-2016-2004758 and has a question about the instruction in the call stating that “all students supported through the CSC award are to be included in participant costs.” Does this mean that funds requested to support student beneficiaries should be listed in the Participant Support category? If so, is NOAA expecting that these costs should be excluded from the indirect cost base?

Response: An applicant utilizes the uniform guidance in 2 CFR 200 and the solicitation guidance in preparing the budget for a proposed Center Type. Note where the FFO (p. 56) states: "Instructions on submission of budget justifications can be found at:

http://www.ago.noaa.gov/grants/docs/budget_narrative_guidance-04.09.2015.pdf."

All funds proposed for direct student support is in the participant costs category of the proposed budget. Direct student support costs should be excluded from the indirect cost base.

Question: Could you clarify the one time student support cost- should this be listed as a Participant Cost (meaning it is excluded from F&A)?

Response: Note where the FFO (p. 56) states: "Instructions on submission of budget justifications can be found at:

http://www.ago.noaa.gov/grants/docs/budget_narrative_guidance-04.09.2015.pdf."

All funds proposed for direct student support is in the participant costs category of the proposed budget. Direct student support costs should be excluded from the indirect cost base.

Question: Also, is the master's level minimum rate of \$25,000 per year in fellowship tuition, stipend and travel up to three years - a true stipend, meaning that the master's student isn't required to work a minimum?

Response: The applicant determines how the student support is labeled, disbursed and categorized for the purposes of a proposed Center Type, following the guidance provided in the solicitation for eligible student beneficiaries. (FFO Sec. IV., B., 8.1.0 . . .)

Question: Our concern is that participant support costs are not allowed per the Uniform Guidance for employees of the University, and it also appears that a participant support category is not included in the NOAA template budget. Since most of our grad students will be expected to be working at some point during their time at UC Davis as GSR employees, it would seem that they would be restricted from involvement in this program if the costs identified for student support will be listed in the participant support category. Do you know if the funds to be provided as student support will be furnished in the form of a fellowship or scholarship? If so, should they be included in the Other category of the budget as suggested by the NOAA budget narrative guidance?

Response: The published solicitation guidance has been reviewed and approved by legal counsel, prior to posting. **For this solicitation (FFO p. 24, Budget Explanation), support for eligible student beneficiaries is to be accounted for in the Participant Cost category.** Such student support is excluded from the F&A cost base. The guidance in the solicitation is the requirement for all interested applicants to follow in preparation of proposals for submission for a NOAA Educational Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institution Cooperative Science Center. An interested applicant determines their application content development in response to the published solicitation.

Question: According to the FFO the references are supposed to be in the supplemental elements section limited to 10 pages. ". . . *but has this question arisen before and did you have any suggestions or recommendation.*"

Response: To apply for a Center Type, the guidance in the solicitation is the requirement for all interested applicants to follow in preparation of proposals for submission to NOAA. An interested applicant determines the content and form of their application submission.

Question: On page 15, section 3, it states that "Each applicant or academic partner indicating MSI status shall append official documentation of such designation, from the U.S. Department of Education, at the time of the application submission."

Question: What type of document will meet this need, and is there a particular office in the Department of Education it should come from?

Response: An official letter that the U.S. Department of Education provided the academic institution to document that institution's Minority Serving Institution status. The chief administrative officer for an academic institution would be the source for such documentation from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Institutional Service.

Question: The FFO mentions line spacing (page 22: "adherence to type size and line spacing requirements is also necessary") but does not appear to specify line spacing in the same way that it specifies type size (page 21: "legible 12-point

font"). Is a line spacing of exactly 12 points acceptable? Also, are there any constraints on paragraph spacing?

Response: The applicant uses the FFO Sec. IV., B. guidance and makes decisions that adhere to the FFO statement: “. . . readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in selection of an appropriate font. . .” Similarly, the line spacing is applicant determined to respond to readability needs.

Question: Is it required that the salary and benefits for the Center Director and Distinguished Research Scientist be included in the project budget? In order to meet the 40% effort requirement, would they have to be listed on the project budget? If not, would this constitute voluntary cost share, which the Guidelines pg. 17 indicate Cost share and Voluntary Cost share is prohibited.

Response: All resources used in performance of proposed Center must be documented in the budget.

Question: The Supplemental Elements (FFO Section IV.B.8.4.6) require a Letter of Support from our institution's Chief Executive Officer. In the FAQs on page 17 it is clarified that the CEO at an academic institution would be the University President. What information is required in the letter of support? This would help us determine the appropriate delegated individual to sign the letter required. Is the letter a confirmation that our Institution is supportive of the proposed project?

Response: The applicant determines the content and context for letters of support.

Question: Is it allowable to pay a non-fellowship student (i.e. one not participating in the program) to assist with CSC administrative or course development activities and include that person in the salaries portion of the budget? This student would not be counted toward CSC educational/training outcomes.

Response: An individual who is a resource working in the performance of activities in the proposed Center must to be included in the award budget. The situation you present has the individual - a student - proposed to perform work and not be in the student beneficiary category. That individual would be in the salary line and identified as such in the budget narrative.

Question: We would like to know if we should exclude the stipends expenses to calculate the modified direct costs.

Response: The applicant uses guidance available in the solicitation. See where the FFO (p. 56) states: "Instructions on submission of budget justifications can be found at:

http://www.ago.noaa.gov/grants/docs/budget_narrative_guidance-04.09.2015.pdf."

An applicant institution uses the uniform guidance in 2 CFR 200. Student stipend costs are not used to calculate modified total direct costs.

Question: Is the second webinar available on the internet?

Response: That webinar is not accessible online. All information pertinent to webinar can be found in the published Solicitation FAQs accessible online, http://www.epp.noaa.gov/docs/EPP_MSI_CSC_Solicitation_FAQs.pdf.

Question: I would like to find out more about the function and size of CSC Science Advisory Board.

Response: The applicant proposes the composition of their proposed CSC's Science Advisory Board with function or role that will enhance the funded recipient in performing to meet the information published in the solicitation.

Question: I would like to know if letters of collaboration from NOAA offices can be included in the proposal for new Cooperative Science Centers. If they can be, please detail any specific requirements or restrictions related to the format of these letters.

Response: The solicitation states (FFO: p. 23): "Letters of collaboration may be submitted from . . . *external to NOAA*." Therefore, no letters of collaboration from NOAA can be included in the proposal.

Question: For Master's level support - is there a calendar time limit for the use of the one-time support of up to \$10K for research?

Response: The solicitation states that a Master's level student may be supported for no more than three (3) years (FFO: p. 18). The one-time support of up to \$10K

for research (FFO: p. 38) may be used within the period during which the specified Master's level student is eligible for Center support under an award at the Master's level.

Question: Can the required \$5,000 for the Master's level students and \$10,000 for the PhD students be used for travel and housing or does that ONLY cover student stipends?

Response: Student participants in NERTO are already supported by a NOAA EPP/MSI Center as a student beneficiary. The dedicated funding for NERTO is to enable participation is the NOAA Experiential Research and Training at a NOAA office, lab or facility. At the time of proposal submission, an applicant determines the composition of the award package for student support.

Question: Can our institution use our negotiated indirect cost rate with our cognizant Federal agency.

Response: The guidance in the solicitation is the requirement for all interested applicants to follow in preparation of proposals for submission for a NOAA Educational Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institution Cooperative Science Center. An interested applicant determines their application content development in response to the published solicitation.

Question: If collaborating with JPL, who is a NASA FFRDC, could JPL's portion of the work be directly funded through an interagency agreement between NASA and NOAA, instead of the lead institution issuing a subcontract agreement to NASA/JPL?

Response: No. This solicitation states that a single award will be made. See the FFO for qualifying criteria for award recipients.

Question: Are the required *Institutional Data and Profile* to be included for just the lead institution, or is it required that we provide it for the partnering institutions as well as the lead?

Response: The applicant determines the institutional data content to be included in the proposal submitted in response to the solicitation.

Question: Will the Appendices (10 page max) be included in the single .PDF file or shall it be uploaded as an 'Other Attachments' (e.g., Appendices.pdf)?

Response: In response to the solicitation, the applicant submits a complete application package. The applicant has the discretion as to how the complete application is assembled.

Question: Can institutions include a paragraph on the procedures and insert the hyperlink which points to its existing established procedures and tools for mitigating risk used for all sub-recipients (as such documents/procedures exceed the 10 page Appendices limitation)?

Response: The applicant determines content and style of response to the published solicitation. The applicant makes the assessment as to whether inclusion of Internet links may be determined, by an objective observer, to be circumnavigating the published page limitation guidelines.

Question: Are the "direct student support" costs included in the Modified Total Direct Cost?

Response: An application submitted in response to this solicitation uses the uniform guidance in 2 CFR 200. Student stipend costs are not used to calculate modified total direct costs.

Question: Can NOAA provide clarifying rationale on the use of the 25% indirect cost cap, rather than the University's federally accepted negotiated indirect cost rate?

Response: The solicitation states, "Consistent with of 2 CFR Part 200., Section 414, indirect costs recovery is limited to 25% of modified total direct costs." To meet the goals of the program, the indirect cost rate was capped with Department of Commerce Federal Assistance Law Division review and the required agency approval, prior to publication of the solicitation.

Question: Please confirm with your contact at NOAA that they have notified OMB of an approved deviation as required by 2 CFR 200.414(c)(2).

Response: Yes. DOC informed OMB.

Question: Please ask him or her to make available the policies, procedures and general decision making criteria they followed in justifying their deviation from negotiated rates, as required by 2 CFR 200.414(c)(3).

Response: NOAA has completed all needed actions to adhere to the requirements in 2 CFR 200.

Question: NOAA is interpreting “participant support costs” in a non-standard way. We are not aware of any other federal agency that defines graduate students working on a research grant as “participant support costs” for purposes of exclusion from MTDC. Furthermore, our cognizant federal agency (ONR) has never asked us to exclude graduate student stipends from MTDC for purposes of F&A rate calculations. The fact that no other federal agencies, including our cognizant audit agency, define graduate student stipends as an MTDC exclusion indicates that NOAA is taking a novel approach to this cost category. Please confirm that NOAA has received approval from OMB for its novel implementation of 2 CFR 200, as required per 2 CFR 200.106.

Response: Graduate students’ stipends are not salaries per the published solicitation. Graduate students’ support costs are as provided for in the published solicitation. Such costs are not used in the computation of modified total direct costs.

Question: On page 56, the FFO states “to submit a SF424 A Budget form for each fiscal year increment.” The SF424 A budget form would only permit up to four years, if each year were to be included in the budget. However, this is a five year project. How should the fifth year be reported?

Response: Applicants submit the SF 424 A complete information for lead institutions and each subaward. Applicants have used pooling years (e.g. Year 3+Year 4) into a single column identified as the years pooled and utilized. The Total Column of the SF 424 A is always used to provide the cumulative budget data.

Question: On page 56, the FFO states “a multi-investigator application using a lead investigator with a sub-grantee approach must submit a SF-424 A for each sub-grantee.” Will the SF424 A form for the subaward be submitted with the Budget Narrative since it cannot be downloaded/included as a separate form with the application? Again, the project period is 5 years but the form only permits four years if it is to be submitted for each fiscal year.

Response: The applicants have used a spreadsheet to provide the years that cannot be entered in the SF 424 A due to the number of columns being a limitation. Every applicant must utilize the uniform guidance in 2 CFR 200 about SF 424 A data for lead institution and subawards.

All of the required information for subawards may be appended in a spreadsheet and clearly identified as SF 424 A subaward in the Budget Explanation of an application at time of submission for a Center Type. Submission of full and clear budget information allows NOAA Grants Management to efficiently assess the proposed application.

Question: With institutions that have sub-grantees the solicitation states that those sub-grantee budgets should be included as well. Will these budgets need to be PDF together in one document and uploaded into the “other documents” location?

Response: All of the required information for subawards may be appended in a spreadsheet and clearly identified as SF 424 A subaward in the Budget Explanation of an application at time of submission for a Center Type.

Question: Are the "direct student support" costs included in the Modified Total Direct Cost?

Response: An application submitted in response to this solicitation uses the uniform guidance in 2 CFR 200. Student stipend costs are not used to calculate modified total direct costs.

Question: Can NOAA provide clarifying rationale on the use of the 25% indirect cost cap, rather than the University's federally accepted negotiated indirect cost rate?

Response: The solicitation states, "Consistent with of 2 CFR Part 200., Section 414, indirect costs recovery is limited to 25% of modified total direct costs." To meet the goals of the program, the indirect cost rate was capped with Department of Commerce Federal Assistance Law Division review and the required agency approval, prior to publication of the solicitation.

Question: Can you please clarify what is meant by the highlighted below? By "placement", do you mean "how many graduates have been hired?" I appreciate any assistance you can offer.

- **Institutional data and profile that includes:**
 - o numbers for post-secondary student enrollment,
 - o retention and graduation by gender,
 - o racial groups, ethnic groups for the past five (5) years;
 - o placement of graduates during the past five years; and,
 - o enrollment and graduation numbers and
 - o placement for graduated post-secondary students from traditionally underrepresented groups, for the past five (5) years;

Response: For this FFO, “placement of graduates during the past five years” means for the proposal being submitted for a single Center Type, the applicants provide, for the interval that is five years prior to 2016: where **ALL students who have been awarded degrees in fields relevant to proposal** end up, e.g. in the workforce – which sector/level and/or further education, and/or postdoctoral positions, etc.

For the second highlighted area referenced in your question, the same information as above is required **with the distinction that the data provided must specifically describe where your graduates who are students from traditionally underrepresented groups** end up after being awarded a degree from your institution.

Question: Is the IRB approval required at time of application submission?

Response: An applicant determines content and describes response to the guidance in the solicitation regarding FFO: Page 61. (G. Other submission requirements) states: "*Due to the nature of the evaluation activities, an Institutional Review Board approval for research involving human subjects . . . or a description of the timing and plans for obtaining such approval for research involving human subjects anticipated later in the project period.*"

Question: The FFO states: **Salary line shall not be used for funds to support student beneficiaries. All students supported through the CSC award are to be included in participant costs.** Please clarify the definition of the line above.

Response: **For this solicitation (FFO p. 24, Budget Explanation), support for eligible student beneficiaries is to be accounted for in the Participant Cost category.** Such student support is excluded from the F&A cost base. The guidance in the solicitation is the requirement for all interested applicants to follow in preparation of proposals for submission for a NOAA Educational Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institution Cooperative Science Center.

The solicitation provides no guidance that tuition, health, fees of students may not be applied. All student beneficiary support described in the call for applications must be placed in the category of participant costs in "Other". An interested applicant determines their application content development in response to the published solicitation.

Last Update: March 24, 2016