

## Air, Climate and Energy (ACE) Centers RFA Informational Webinar Q&A

Date: July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014, 12-1pm EDT

Webinar information: <http://epa.gov/ncer/events/news/2014/07-09-14-calendar.html>

RFA: <http://www.epa.gov/ncer/rfa/2014/2014-star-ace.html>

### REMINDERS

- Please make sure your application is complete. We review for completeness, so make sure all required pieces are in place. If an application is missing major pieces, it will not be reviewed. Unless it is the fault of the government, an application cannot be submitted after the deadline.
- Please note that applications greater than 70 MB in size cause issues and that if the application you are submitting is greater than 70 MB in size, please call or send an email message to the Electronic Submissions Contact listed for this RFA. Please see section IV.E.5 for a more detailed description of potential transmission difficulties and what to do in the event of submission difficulties. If you have issues during the application and submission process, please contact Todd Peterson (Electronic Submissions contact; [peterson.todd@epa.gov](mailto:peterson.todd@epa.gov); phone: 703-308-7224).
- Please remember to include the human subjects research statement (maximum 6 pages) even if no human subjects research will be conducted.
- For those who choose not to apply or who are ineligible to apply, let us know if you are interested in being a peer reviewer.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- Can you provide an example of protocols to evaluate program effectiveness and success as is required for the Administrative Unit?
  - RFA Section IV.B.10 states, "In conducting its research, the Center should apply measures of success or progress, including developing and promoting the use of statistically valid protocols to evaluate program effectiveness and applying metrics to evaluate the project's success, progress, or effectiveness." It is up to the applicant to determine what those protocols are.
- SF-424A appears to be missing from the electronic application package.
  - This has been fixed and the 424A budget form is now part of the application package. If you have further issues, please contact Todd Peterson.
- Are there guidelines for purchasing equipment or for what fraction of the budget should be devoted to equipment?
  - The RFA does not list guidelines for purchasing equipment or what fraction of the budget should be devoted to equipment – this is up to the applicant. The RFA does require a budget justification which includes a section for Equipment (please see RFA Section IV.B.13.b.4 for details).
- Does the Administrative Unit count towards the limit of up to 2 Facility Support Units? What is the definition of a "Facility Support Unit?"
  - Centers may have up to two Facility Support Units in addition to the Administrative Unit. Please see RFA Section IV.B.10 for a description of the Administrative Unit and Section IV.B.11 for a description of the Facility Support Unit(s). The Administrative Unit is required. Facility Support Units are not required. The function of the Facility Support Unit(s), if included in the application, will depend on how the Center is defined by the applicant. For further questions, contact Sherri Hunt (Technical Contact; [hunt.sherri@epa.gov](mailto:hunt.sherri@epa.gov); phone: 703-347-8042).

- What are the requirements to document collaboration with state air agencies and regional organizations of states-tribes-local air agencies, etc. in the proposals?
  - RFA Section I.D. states in the description for Question #4, “Work may also involve connections with local, state, or regional agencies or community groups in order to implement or assess the potential for incorporating new ideas.” These collaborations are not required, but they are recommended to ensure that results are applicable.
  - RFA Section IV.B.16.a describes letters of intent, which document intended interactions and are limited to one brief paragraph committing the availability of a resource (e.g., use of a person's time or equipment) or intended interaction (e.g., sharing of data, as-needed consultation) that is described in the Research Plan.
  
- How should collaborative studies be defined in the proposal?
  - Collaborative projects do not need to be defined in the proposal, as these projects are not developed until after the Centers have formed. The RFA only requires that \$75,000 be included in the budget for comparative or collaborative studies in years two through five (for a total of \$300,000, see RFA Section IV.B.10).
  
- Can you give any guidance on how additional monitoring would be viewed within a Center project? For example, a proposal might include a 3-year augmentation of standard monitoring networks (with a regional focus) to include special measurements.
  - This would depend on the other details of the project and on the nature of the Center. Monitoring may be helpful if it is directed towards supporting the scientific goals of the Center. Please contact Sherri Hunt if you have further questions.
  
- There is a current EPA RFA for low-cost, portable air pollution sensors. Do you see work involving these low-cost sensors as a part of the ACE proposal?
  - Work could potentially (but is not required to) include low-cost portable air pollution sensors as long as the proposal is responsive to this RFA and to the specific areas of interested listed in Section I.D.
  
- Will a given Center award be made to just one institution?
  - Please see RFA Section I.F. Multiple investigator applications may be submitted as a single Lead Principal Investigator (PI) application with co-PIs or a multiple PI application (with a single Contact PI). Only one institution can be listed as the main contact.
  
- Human Subjects Information:
  - Check with your Institutional Review Board on what is classified as human subjects. If you are recruiting people, you may be doing human subjects research. Please contact Sherri Hunt for specific questions.
  - Note that EPA has a very specific human subjects requirement in that EPA cannot fund intentional exposure changes to pregnant women and their fetus, nursing mothers, or children.
  - Free online training: [http://www.epa.gov/osainter/phre/phre\\_course/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/osainter/phre/phre_course/index.htm)
  - Code of Federal Regulations Title 40 Part 25 – Protection of Human Subjects: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2010-title40-vol1/xml/CFR-2010-title40-vol1-part26.xml>
  
- How/when will EPA acknowledge receipt of Center proposals? Should PIs follow up with EPA to confirm?
  - RFA Section IV.E.2 states, “Acknowledgement of Receipt. The complete application must be transferred to Grants.gov no later than 11:59:59 pm Eastern Time on the solicitation closing date (see “Submission Dates and Times”). Applications submitted through grants.gov will be time and date stamped electronically. Grants.gov provides an on-screen notification of successful initial

transfer as well as an email notification of successful transfer from Grants.gov to EPA. While it is advisable to retain copies of these Grants.gov acknowledgements to document submission, *the only official documentation that the application has been received by NCER is the email acknowledgement sent by NCER to the Lead/Contact PI and the Administrative Contact.* This email will be sent from receipt.application@epa.gov; emails to this address will not be accepted. *If an email acknowledgment from receipt.application@epa.gov has not been received within 30 days of the solicitation closing date, immediately inform the Eligibility Contact shown in this solicitation. Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.*”

- It was mentioned that private consultants are eligible to apply under specific circumstances. What specific circumstances? Where we can find more information?
  - Please see RFA Sections IV.B.13.b.6 and IV.B.13.b.7 for details on consultants. Consultants are defined as individuals with specialized skills who are paid at a daily or hourly rate. EPA’s participation in the salary rate (excluding overhead) paid to individual consultants retained by recipients or by a recipient's contractors or subcontractors is limited to the maximum daily rate for a Level IV of the Executive Schedule (formerly GS-18), to be adjusted annually. Any procurement of services from individual consultants or commercial firms (including space for workshops) must comply with the competitive procurement requirements of 40 CFR Part 30.40-30.48 or 40 CFR 31.36, as appropriate. Subawards may not be used to acquire services from consultants or commercial firms. Please see [Contracts and Subawards](#) for more details.
- Are 5 year project periods required, or can we propose fewer (e.g. 4 years)?
  - The RFA states that the maximum duration of an Award is 5 years. Therefore, applications for Centers lasting fewer than 5 years are acceptable.
- Can you clarify if you want (or require) explicit assessments of economic costs of different options for reducing air pollution mixtures from a Center’s research?
  - The RFA does not list this as a requirement. The application must be responsive to the RFA and to the specific areas of interested listed in Section I.D.
- Can I find information with regard to the Centers currently funded?
  - The current Centers are called the “[Clean Air Research Centers](#).” However, in preparing an application, one should refer only to the current open solicitation for the Air, Climate and Energy (ACE) Centers: Science Supporting Solutions to ensure that the application is responsive to the RFA. Reviewers will be using the criteria and questions listed in the Air, Climate and Energy (ACE) Centers: Science Supporting Solutions RFA to judge proposals.
- Will the research projects be reviewed separately from the other proposal components such as the Center overview, or will project reviewers be reading the entire proposal?
  - The first criterion for peer review in Section V.A of the RFA (“Research Proposal”) specifies that “Reviewers will evaluate each proposed research project included in the Center” according to the elements specified in that criterion. Peer reviewers will read the entire application package and the full set of abstracts for each application they are assigned and then write their evaluation (see RFA Section V.A. for a complete list of criteria for evaluation). Each application receives one score as a whole. Applications receiving final peer review scores of excellent or very good will then undergo an internal programmatic review. Please see RFA Section V.A. for details on the Programmatic Review.

- Do you anticipate a future RFA similar to this one for additional centers?
  - It has not yet been decided at this time.
- Multi-institution proposals were mentioned and the RFA speaks of the opportunity to do this as a “consortium.” However, the RFA later says that subawards are not expected to be more than 40% of the budget. Please clarify how this can be handled for teams with substantial involvement from 3 or more institutions.
  - The RFA advises that no more than 40% of direct costs go to subawards or subcontracts; however, this is not a hard limit, and subawards/subcontracts constituting more than 40% are allowed. Please note that if a subaward/subcontract constitutes more than 40% of the total direct cost, additional justification may be required before award, discussing the need for the subaward/subcontract to accomplish the objectives of the research project.
- Can you have a unit with research personnel from multiple institutions?
  - Yes.
- How should the spatial and temporal scales be defined?
  - It is up to the judgment of the applicant what spatial and temporal scales to investigate, as long as the proposal is responsive to the RFA.
- Are proposals rated higher if they consider multiple regions in their project description?
  - This is up to the review panels. The application must be responsive to the RFA. Reviewers will be using the criteria and questions listed in the RFA to judge proposals, so reviewers will have the same information that applicants have.
- Are salaries for soft money researchers (i.e. research faculty) allowable in the budget?
  - Yes.
- Other than technology transfer to state/local governments, how important is the outreach component?
  - Outreach is not required for the Centers.
- Are there any criteria for multi-institution proposals to demonstrate that they will be truly integrated?
  - The RFA does not list any specific criteria for demonstrating that multi-institution proposals are integrated. Please see section I.F for details on integration within and between Centers.
- Does EPA want an entirely U.S. focus to all work, or is there interest in extensions to air quality beyond the U.S.?
  - Both would be acceptable as long as the application is responsive to the RFA. Note that the primary awardee must be located within the U.S. Subawardees and subcontractors can be outside the U.S. Research can be conducted outside the U.S.
- How would a proposal that married a strong academic team with City and County officials for large metropolitan areas be viewed?
  - This is up to the review panels.
- Is there a limit to the number of letters of support or intent that can be included?
  - No. Please note that any letter of intent or support that exceeds one brief paragraph (excluding letterhead and salutations), is considered part of the individual Research Project Description it is associated with and is included in the 15-page Research Project Description limit for that project.
- Can early career scientists apply?

- Early career scientists are welcome to apply as long as they are eligible. There is no separate early career competition.

**CONTACTS**

Technical Contact: [Sherri Hunt](mailto:hunt.sherri@epa.gov) (hunt.sherri@epa.gov); phone: 703-347-8042

Eligibility Contact: [Ron Josephson](mailto:josephson.ron@epa.gov) (josephson.ron@epa.gov); phone: 703-308-0442

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