



Guidance for Applicants US NSF/BIO/DEB – UK NERC and US NSF/GEO – UK NERC Lead Agency Opportunity

(First version Issued September 2016, updated April 2019)

NERC and the US's National Science Foundation (NSF) have agreed to work together to make it easier for world-leading environmental scientists to collaborate on discovery science projects and tackling global environmental challenges. Proposals must be an integrated UK-US effort to address a research topic of interest to both NERC and a relevant NSF division that would benefit from a collaborative approach.

The US NSF and RCUK have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Research Cooperation. The MOU provides an overarching framework to encourage collaboration between US and UK research communities and sets out the principles by which jointly supported activities might be developed. The MOU provides for a lead agency arrangement whereby proposals may be submitted to either NSF or NERC.

Agreements operate with the NSF Division of Environmental Biology (DEB) and the NSF Directorate for Geosciences (GEO) through NERC's discovery science schemes and NSF's equivalent schemes.

The goal of this opportunity is to reduce some of the current barriers to working internationally. Through a lead agency model, DEB, GEO and NERC address these issues by allowing US and UK researchers to submit a single collaborative proposal that will undergo a single review process.

Proposals will be accepted for collaborative research in areas at the intersection of NSF and NERC interest as set out below:

NSF/BIO/DEB Solicitation

- Division of Environmental Biology (Core Programs)

NSF/GEO Solicitations

- Atmospheric and Geospace Sciences, Earth Sciences, Ocean Sciences, and Polar Programs

NERC Discovery Science (responsive mode)

- [Standard Research Grants](#) (including New Investigator Grants)
- [Large Research Grants](#)

Proposals are expected to adhere to the remit, funding limits, and grant durations of the NSF/BIO/DEB, NSF/GEO and NERC schemes from which funding is sought and must represent an integrated collaborative effort. The usual guidance for proposals submitted to these schemes applies, in addition to the information presented in this document. If a proposal is recommended for funding, the US organisation(s) will be supported by NSF and the UK organisation(s) will be supported by NERC, with funding awarded to the UK applicants on the basis of full economic costs as described in the [NERC Grants Handbook](#)

This document provides guidelines for the preparation, submission, review, and award of NSF/BIO/DEB-NERC and NSF/GEO-NERC collaborative proposals. This lead agency opportunity is the extension of a successful initial two-year phase (2015-2016).

All documents submitted to NSF or NERC may be shared with the other agency in order to implement these activities.

1. ELIGIBILITY

UK: UK investigators must be eligible for NERC funding. Full details of eligibility criteria for NERC funding can be found in section C of the NERC [Research Grants Handbook](#).

US: US Principal Investigators must be eligible for funding from the National Science Foundation and should refer to the relevant DEB or GEO solicitation for details of their eligibility.

Involvement in a NSF-NERC proposal will count towards any individual limit on the number of proposal submissions for a given period, whether submitted to NSF or NERC.

For NERC any applicant to a Standard or Large grant call may submit no more than two proposals as an investigator, only one of these may be as the lead Principal Investigator (PI). Involvement of a UK investigator in a preliminary proposal submission to NSF/BIO/DEB or NSF/GEO as the lead agency will count as a submission as non-lead PI/Co-I to the NERC July standard grant call in that year.

For DEB, in a given year, an individual may participate as a PI, Co-PI, or PI of a sub award, on no more than two proposals submitted in response to the DEB core program solicitation.

Proposal submission limits vary across GEO, so individuals are encouraged to check specific program solicitations for any restrictions on participation.

Please note that when a NSFDEB-NERC or NSFGEONERC proposal is submitted into the NERC Standard Grant closing date the proposal will count towards the research organization's submission cap introduced in the [NERC demand management measures](#)

2. REMIT

The proposed work must represent an integrated collaborative effort requiring UK and US

research teams to deliver. The aspects requesting funding from NERC should have suitable relevance to the [NERC remit](#). The aspects requesting funding from NSF must be within the confines of the DEB/GEO solicitations.

For example a proposal submitted under the NSF/BIO/DEB-NERC agreement could involve US environmental biology researchers and UK research from any environmental science discipline.

Options may exist to co-fund other aspects of UK-US projects using existing processes within RCUK (Cross Council Funding Agreement) or across Directorates within NSF as per standard procedures.

3. PRELIMINARY/OUTLINE PROPOSAL or LETTER OF INTENT

Researchers should first identify a prospective lead agency (either NSF or NERC) based on where the largest proportion of research lies. Prior to submission of a preliminary/outline proposal or letter of intent, the PI should contact the proposed lead funding agency at NSFDEB-NERC@nsf.gov, NSFGEO-NERC@nsf.gov or international@nerc.ac.uk to discuss the research focus of the project. The relevant UK and US agencies will consult and confirm which one will act as lead funding agency, and this will be communicated to the PI.

The title of the document (preliminary proposal, or LOI) must be prefaced with “NSFDEB-NERC:” or “NSFGEO-NERC:” to indicate that the document is to be considered under these lead agency activities.

If NERC is the lead agency and the proposal meets the **Standard Grant (or New Investigator)** scheme criteria, a Letter of Intent (LOI) must then be submitted via the online form.

The deadline for submission of the LOI is 3 months prior to the Standard Grant full proposal closing date to which the applicants plan to submit.

The following information must be included:

- A brief description of the proposed research and justification for collaboration (up to 5000 characters including spaces)
- The names, institutions, and qualifications of the researchers (US and UK)
- Bottom line estimates of funding to be requested from NERC (in pounds) and NSF (in US dollars), these amounts should be listed separately. The total combined budget must be within the scheme funding limit, based on UK costs calculated at 100% FEC and US costs converted from \$ to £ using a stated appropriate exchange rate. As the non-lead agency, NSF/BIO/DEB will make awards to the US costs of projects up to a limit of \$500,000. As the non-lead agency, NSF/GEO may limit the US component of any project.
- The proposed use of NSF or NERC facilities
- Proposed project duration

- NERC remit subjects

If NERC is the lead agency and the proposal meets the **Large Grant** scheme criteria an Outline Proposal must be submitted via the Je-S system in accordance with usual large grant outline closing date and requirements.

An additional page is allowed in the case for support that must be used to detail the US team and provide bottom line estimates of funding that the US team will be requesting from NSF (in US dollars, a detailed budget is not needed at this time). The total combined budget must be within the scheme funding range, based on UK costs calculated at 100% FEC and US costs converted from \$ to £ using a stated appropriate exchange rate. As the non-lead agency, NSF/BIO/DEB will make awards to the US costs of projects up to a limit of \$500,000. As the non-lead agency, NSF/GEO may limit the US component of any project.

If NSF DEB is the lead agency, Letter of Intent (LOI) must then be submitted via the online form. As of September 2018 DEB core solicitations no longer have fixed deadlines, therefore there is no specific point for an LOI to be submitted to NSF-DEB by.

If NSF GEO is the lead agency, a Letter of Intent (LOI) must then be submitted via the online form at least three months in advance of the program deadline.

The letter of intent is the same format as when NERC is the lead agency and should include the following information:

- A brief description of the proposed research and collaboration (up to 5000 characters including spaces)
- The names, institutions, and qualifications of the researchers (US and UK)
- NSF Program Officer
- Bottom line estimates of funding to be requested from NSF and NERC. As the non-lead agency, NERC will make awards to the UK costs of projects up to a limit of £300,000, calculated at 100% Full Economic Cost. In addition NERC anticipates managing an annual volume of 3% of its Discovery Science budget that can be committed as the non-lead agency through all responsive/unsolicited NSF-NERC activities.
- The proposed use of NSF or NERC facilities
- NERC remit subjects

The lead agency will share documents with the non-lead agency to check for eligibility (whether the proposed research is within the participating agencies' portfolio/remit, and if the investigators and institutions meet agency eligibility requirements and have justified why bilateral collaboration is essential for the project). Outline proposals will undergo a peer evaluation for intellectual merit and broader impacts. Based on these evaluations, the lead agency may invite submission of a full proposal.

The lead agency will provide a written response to the PI on whether or not the proposed submission is invited to proceed under the lead agency process.

4. SUBMISSION OF FULL PROPOSALS

Applicants who are invited to submit a **full proposal** following their LOI will do so in accordance with the proposal preparation requirements of the lead agency to published deadlines.

When NERC is the Lead Agency

Upon confirmation from NERC that the proposed submission is appropriate for the NSF/BIO/DEB-NERC or NSF/GEO-NERC Lead Agency Opportunity and invited to proceed to full proposal, the UK applicant must comply with the requirements outlined in the NERC Research Grants Handbook and submit the proposal to NERC via the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system.

How to apply

Applicants should follow the guidelines for submissions to NERC as described in the NERC [Research Grants Handbook](#) and [Je-S helptext](#).

To create the proposal in Je-S:

- Select Council: 'NERC'
- Select Document Type: 'Standard Proposal'
- Select Scheme and Call as appropriate

Start the title of the proposal with 'NSFDEB-NERC:' or 'NSFGEO-NERC:'

The UK applicant should list the US collaborators as Project Partners and should indicate the approximate value of the NSF and other contributions in the project partner in-kind support section of the proposal form. Note the requirements below for providing full details of the NSF budget requested.

The following additional attachments must be provided on the lead proposal:

- Institutional endorsement: An institutional acknowledgement of the submission must be a signed letter of support from an authorized institutional representative from the US partner's institution(s) with the following text: "I confirm on behalf of [name of institution] that the US-UK Collaborative proposal between [name of UK PI and institution] and [name of US PI and institution] is endorsed and has been submitted by [name of Research Office], thereby acknowledging the proposed collaboration". This must be uploaded as the compulsory attachment of "Project Partner Letter of Support" one letter per partner.
- CVs for each of the named US collaborators (maximum 2 pages per person)

should be combined into one document as attachment type 'Non-UK Components'.

- Completed NSF budget form as attachment type 'Non-UK Components' (see **Costs**). A detailed breakdown of funding requested from the non-lead agency, using the non-lead agency's budget form.

Costs

If NERC is the lead agency only include the UK expenses in the relevant finance fields of the Je-S form. Expenses being requested from NSF for US based investigators should **not** be entered in these fields. A copy of the proposed budget requested from NSF should be included as a separate attachment on the lead proposal of type 'Non-UK Components', using the NSF-NERC budget template. As the non-lead agency, NSF/BIO/DEB will make awards up to a limit of \$500,000. Information on the estimated NSF programme budget and the estimated number of awards can be found in the award information section in the current DEB Core Program solicitation. As the non-lead agency, NSF/GEO may limit the US component of any project.

The Justification of Resources (JoR) attachment should address both UK and US project budgets and they must be clearly differentiated in the justification. Proposals that request duplicative funding may be returned without review.

Applicants must adhere to the usual NERC scheme rules (proposal format, attachment page lengths, allowed fonts and margins) and scheme funding limits which apply to the combined UK/US budget.

When NSF/BIO/DEB is the Lead Agency

Upon confirmation from NSF that the proposed submission is appropriate for the NSF/BIO/DEB-NERC Lead Agency Opportunity and invited to proceed to full proposal, the US applicant must comply with the proposal preparation requirements outlined in the current DEB Core Program solicitation and submit through NSF's [FastLane system](#) or [Grants.gov](#) to the appropriate cluster in the Division of Environmental Biology. All queries regarding NSF lead agency submissions should be directed to NSF at NSFDEB-NERC@nsf.gov. Refer to [NSF DEB guidance](#) for full details and how to incorporate the UK budget, note that as the non-lead agency, NERC will make awards up to a limit of £300,000 per project, calculated at 100% Full Economic Cost.

When NSF/GEO is the Lead Agency

Upon confirmation from NSF that the proposed submission is appropriate for the NSF/GEO-NERC Lead Agency Opportunity and invited to proceed to full proposal, the US applicant must comply with the proposal preparation requirements of the appropriate GEO program and solicitation. All queries should be directed to NSF. Refer to [NSF GEO guidance](#) for full details and how to incorporate the UK budget, note that as the non-lead agency, NERC will make awards up to a limit of £300,000 per project, calculated at 100% Full Economic Cost.

UK Investigators on US led applications

Once recommended for funding by NSF and NERC, UK applicants **must** submit the proposal to NERC via the Je-S system in order for the UK funds to be awarded. Full details on how to submit and the information required will be provided to successful applicants. This is an administrative process and the proposals will not undergo further peer review.

5. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Peer Review

NSF/BIO/DEB-NERC and NSF/GEO-NERC collaborative proposals will be reviewed alongside all other proposals received in the same funding round or call and will not undergo a separate or special review process. Proposals will be reviewed in accordance with the lead agency's review criteria. While these are not identical, NSF and RCUK ask reviewers to evaluate the proposed project on both its scientific or intellectual merit as well as its broader societal impacts.

Funding decisions

The funding decisions will be discussed with the partner agency. The lead agency will use its usual internal procedures to determine whether a proposal will be awarded or declined. Funding decisions may be subject to availability of funds.

The PI will be advised by the lead funding agency whether their proposal has been recommended for funding or will be declined. Applicants will receive copies of the reviewers' unattributed comments and, where applicable, a panel summary.

Each agency will notify the PI that these awards were made possible by the NSF/BIO/DEB-NERC and NSF/GEO-NERC lead agency activities.

Because the participating agencies have different funding cycles, it is possible that some projects will have delayed start dates in order to wait until funds become available.

Should a proposal be declined for funding, applicants should refer to each agency's individual resubmission policies. Involvement in a proposal submitted to the lead agency will count as a submission to the non-lead agency for purposes of resubmission monitoring.

Research Locations & Collaborations

There may be limitations to how NSF funding can be used to support collaborations with or research located in certain countries. UK partners should discuss this with the US team prior to application to check for any issues.

Post award considerations

Awardees will be expected to comply with the award conditions and reporting requirements of the agencies from which they receive funding.

Awardees will be required to acknowledge NSF and NERC lead agency activities in any publications arising from the grant.

Extensions and supplement requests will be considered by participating agencies using standard procedures. Requests for changes to awards pertaining to the scope of research or significant changes or delays to the research will be communicated to counterpart funding agencies.

All NSF and NERC requirements for data management are applicable to awards funded by these respective agencies.

In accordance with NSF and NERC standard procedures awards are announced publically.

6. CONTACT

For enquires concerning NERC implementation of the NSF/BIO/DEB-NERC and NSF/GEO-NERC lead agency agreement please contact:

international@nerc.ac.uk

For guidance from NSFDEB please contact:

NSFDEB-NERC@nsf.gov

For guidance from NSFGE0 please contact:

NSFGE0-NERC@nsf.gov