

Frequently Asked Questions

FY25 Coping with Drought: Understanding and Assessing Drought in a Changing Climate Competition

Updated August 26, 2024

Eligibility, Partners, Project Team

Q: Who is eligible to apply to this grant competition?

A: Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, international organizations, and state, local, and federally recognized tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible to receive Federal assistance under this notice. (See “special instructions for federal applicants” on the CPO website.)

Q: Can International Organizations apply to this competition?

A: International organizations are listed in the eligibility criteria (Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, international organizations, and state, local, and federally recognized tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible to receive Federal assistance under this notice.). But please give attention to the Program Objectives and Program Priorities in the Notice of Funding Opportunity which do call out a focus on the "nation," which in this case is the United States. So international organizations can certainly apply and/or be part of a grant team, but to compete well in terms of relevance to Program Objectives and Program Priorities the research would need to be inclusive of and relevant to the United States.

Q: We are a startup company with a new technology. Can we submit the application or not?

A: Yes, we do accept applications from commercial organizations. As long as the application is relevant and focused on the topic of the competition, we would welcome your application.

Q: Can one be listed as PI or co-PI on multiple proposals?

A: Yes, you could be listed as PI or co-PI on multiple proposals.

Q: Will any preference be given for supporting students?

A: Preference, no, but it's extremely common to see a grant team that includes postdocs and graduate students. This could come into evaluation in terms of diversity and inclusion and

including students and early career scientists in the project team, but I would not say any preference is given.

Q: For projects with collaborations between universities and state government, is there a preference for which of these submit the application as primary recipient or organizer?

A: There is no preference for which entity is the primary applicant. Some entities have more capacity to apply for and administer grants so that will likely be a consideration and that is fine. It will also depend on which entity will serve as the primary to lead the project and its implementation. During review, the technical and relevance panels will look holistically across the project team and partners in their evaluation. So again, no preference.

Q: Are partnerships with stakeholders required for the proposal? If so, should stakeholders be included as collaborator or co-PI?

A: We are an applied research program, so we do want to see partnerships with stakeholders and partners who will use and apply the information and results. We want to see that they are truly integrated into the project from start to finish. If they have a large role and will be receiving funds through the grant, then I would say a co-PI. But if they're going to be part of, for example, a steering committee or a working group or you're going to work with them at various points in the project to get feedback and they're not receiving funds, then they can be listed as a collaborator. It's great to have letters of support from those collaborators, though, again, those aren't required.

Q: Do external partners need to be identified in advance of submitting the LOI, or can we name some tentative partners and confirm them in the full proposal?

A: They do not need to be fully identified and have committed at the LOI phase. However, naming tentative partners or types of partners so that it is clear you are thinking about it is a good approach. It is also okay if there is some shift in partners between the LOI and full proposal and the project is scoped more fully.

Q: Could the proposal include NIDIS personnel?

A: Great question. No. And the reason is that we want everyone to have an equal playing field. But what we are very interested in is collaboration with those who are successful in terms of the application process. And so while you cannot include NIDIS personnel as part of the project team, you can indicate your willingness to work with NIDIS and NIDIS staff, and we will look forward to working very closely with those applicants who are successful through the process.

Q: Can federal agencies apply and can federal scientists receive salary support?

A: NOAA, as a federal agency, cannot grant funds to another federal agency. However, we can work with federal agencies through other funding mechanisms. Federal lead investigators who wish to apply to this Announcement of Opportunity must prepare a proposal according to the NOFO guidelines and submit the proposal to the program manager directly, instead of to

Grants.gov. Federal co-investigators must submit a proposal identical to the proposal lead's but with personalized budget information. If your application involves a federal agency I encourage you to reach out early to ensure an understanding of the process and nuances to the funding mechanisms, etc.

Geography, Scale, Topic Focus

Q: Is there any geographic area focus or restrictions?

A: No, there was no geographical focus within the United States specified for this competition.

Q: Is this competition focused on any one type or definition of drought (e.g., hydrological or meteorological), or can the research questions be approached through the lens of other types of drought?

A: There is nothing in the Notice of Funding Opportunity that limits research to any particular definition or type of drought.

Q: Are projects at a local scale (e.g., in collaboration with a water utility) in scope, given that the Drought Early Warning Systems (DEWS) are at a larger regional scale?

A: Yes, projects having something like a water utility as a collaborator is fine. The DEWS are at a regional scale, but they actually involve multiple partners at multiple scales. In addition, if you are considering a project that is at a more local scale, please consider things like scalability and transferability of the approach and outcomes.

Q: Is there a minimum research area size, for example county or state level?

A: There is not. But I will call attention to our interest in scalability and transferability.

Q: Will you try and have all U.S. regions represented across the 8 projects funded? If yes, does that mean that only 1 project will be funded in a particular region?

A: So in the Notice of Federal Funding, there is a list of criteria that we can apply to the final funding decision. Geography is one of those, but we have not specified in the NOFO that we will only fund one project per region. We hope there is some geographical spread, but that is not a requirement.

Focus of the Competition

Q: In addition to "improving drought indicator performance," are you interested in proposals that emphasize indicator visualization and communication (to encourage use or adoption of the indicators)?

A: Indicator visualization and communication/outreach about the indicator could certainly be part of the project, but the goal of the competition is to improve drought indicator performance in the context of climate change and non-stationarity, and so we would want to see that as a focus.

Q: The definition of non-stationarity includes "anthropogenic climate change." Does that include the impact of climate adaptation projects on non-stationarity?

A: There are many sources of non-stationarity in the system, and that includes natural processes, that includes anthropogenic climate change, and that includes the human system. And so, from that perspective, yes.

Q: Will improvement of drought indicators focus on present climate (seasonal to inter-annual scales) or future droughts, e.g., projected climate change on decadal or longer time scales?

A: A proposal could include the range of timescales—seasonal to inter-annual to decadal or longer time scales. But remember the purpose of this grant competition is that we're trying to improve the way that we are understanding drought in the context of climate change. So I would encourage referring back to the focus of the competition and ensure that you are really focused there.

Q: Can we propose using different characterizations of drought as an indicator? For example, the spatial extent of drought or spatial compounding of drought over multiple regions?

A: This is getting a little more specific and I would encourage you to read the competition information carefully, but if we go back to the definitions in the NOFO and Information Sheet, an indicator is a physical manifestation of drought on the landscape. Then an index is the statistical representation of that physical indicator. There is a difference between a physical manifestation of drought in the landscape and ways that we use to characterize individual droughts, but the short answer is yes, the extent or spatial extent or severity of a drought being measured in different ways could still fit within that indicator. This will really be in how the project idea is presented.

Q: The research examples you listed are much more individual "drought indicator" focused, but are you also interested in the overall system perspective (across many drought indicators) akin to the Drought Early Warning Systems?

A: Both approaches could fit, but it will really depend on how the ideas are contextualized within the focus of the competition.

Q: If we propose to create novel datasets that can help with drought assessment that complement existing datasets, would that be within the scope? In this case, should the proposal focus more on the dataset creation or applications?

A: I would encourage you to do a dive deep into the Information Sheet and the NOFO. There's nothing that says that a novel dataset cannot be part of the proposal, but the challenge we're trying to address is improving drought indicator performance in a changing climate. So, again, I think with what you're asking, context is going to matter in terms of what you're proposing to do. And we are an applied research program, so we definitely want to see how that dataset would be applied in addition to its creation.

Budget

Q: Project cost is one of the evaluation criteria. Does that mean that universities where the cost of research is high (e.g., because of high student stipends due to high cost of living) are likely to be less competitive?

A: No, we are looking at how well the project is scoped—is the budget commensurate with the proposed work? We are as much concerned about a project that comes in under budget as opposed to one that might seem overly expensive.

Q: Do you allow course buyout in the budget?

A: No, at this time we do not.

General

Q: How many proposals do you expect to receive?

A: It is really hard to say as all competitions are different, but for our last research competition we received around 50 proposals.

Q: Will LOI stage be used to limit the number of proposals to improve the funding rate?

A: No, again for this competition, LOIs are encouraged but not required. It is up to the PI to decide whether or not they want to submit a full application, even if their LOI feedback is discouraged.

Q: Given the DEIJ requirement for proposals, what recommendations do you have for applicants who work within states or at agencies/institutions that limit/restrict/ban DEI work?

A: This is a question we are considering at NOAA, and this answer will be updated as there is additional information. If this is a consideration for your state or institution, please reach out to the program manager, Britt Parker (britt.parker@noaa.gov).

Q: Where can I find information on the competition and how to apply using the new eRA Commons system?

A: Key information can be found at the following links:

- NOFO: <https://cpo.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/NOAA-OAR-CPO-2025-27758.pdf>
- Information Sheet: https://cpo.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/FY25_NIDIS_CWD_Information_Sheet_Drought_Assessment_and_Climate.pdf
- Applicant Checklist: https://cpo.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/FY25_Compensation_Checklist_NIDIS.pdf
- Applicant Guidance: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2024-05/NOAA-Fisheries-New-Application-Process-508.pdf>

Q: Who do I contact if I have any questions about the competition?

A: Please contact the program manager, Britt Parker (britt.parker@noaa.gov).