

# Earth Lab Proposal Best Practices

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**Purpose:** To establish a clear set of guidelines/best practices for preparing a proposal for submission.

\*Parts of this document are adapted from the CIRES Proposal Team guidelines, found [here](#).

## Initiating a Proposal:

- Let your supervisor, Alison Post (Earth Lab Program Manager), and Virginia Iglesias (Interim Earth Lab Director) know of your intentions to apply for a proposal. Send them the proposal solicitation.
- Ensure that you qualify to serve as PI. Refer to the Request for Proposal guidelines to learn about the specific eligibility requirements of each call.
- Submit a request to the CIRES Proposal Team using the Proposal Tool Application (located in InsideCIRES) and adding a new proposal. The CIRES Proposal Team requires that you notify them of your intent to apply at least **12 business days in advance** of the solicitation deadline, but you should let them know ASAP, preferably several months in advance. You will need the following information:
  - Name of funding agency
  - Agency's announcement number and program
  - Submission due date
  - Proposal title
  - Project period of performance
  - Estimate of expenses (salary, travel, equipment, etc.) to be included in the project budget
  - Cost-sharing requirements, if any
  - Names and contact information for Co-Principal Investigators and collaborating institutions
  - Names and contact information for any subcontractors, PI and Admin contacts, budgeted amounts.
- You will be assigned a proposal analyst who will assist you in the proposal submission process in the following ways:
  - Prepare the proposal budget using the University format
  - Complete required funding agency budget forms
  - Review the completed proposal format for compliance with the Request for Proposal guidelines
  - Assemble application packages for proposals submitted via Grants.Gov
  - Negotiate Indirect Cost Return with other campus departments
  - Route the proposal and obtain required signatures
  - Deliver the signed proposal to the Office of Contracts and Grants
  - Assist with proposal revisions, if necessary

- Assist with any necessary follow-up actions with OCG or the funding agency during the award process
- **It's critical that you work closely with your proposal analyst throughout the entire proposal preparation process.** Early in the process, work with your proposal analyst to develop guidelines/expectations regarding the timeline, meeting schedule, communication format and frequency, etc.
- Make sure the PI's and Co-PI's DEPA (Disclosure of External Professional Activities) forms are up to date (required annually) - must be done before proposals can be submitted by the University. See [here](#) for details.

### **Proposal Submission Request (PSR) form**

- CU Boulder requires that a PSR form is completed for every submitted proposal. Your proposal analyst will collect the information needed for it via the CIRES Proposal Tool. They will then fill out the PSR form for you, and all you have to do is sign it via InfoEd. Here are detailed instructions:
  - Login to InsideCIRES Proposal Tool and navigate to the "Additional Info" tab.
  - Complete the PSR form questions as you normally would.
  - Notify the Proposal Analyst when this is completed.
  - The Proposal Team will enter the information you've provided into InfoEd on your behalf.
  - Once your information has been entered into InfoEd, you will be sent an email from InfoEd notifying you that the online PSR form is ready for your review.
  - Click on the link provided to you in the email, which will direct you to your InfoEd Reviewer Dashboard. You will need to sign in to InfoEd in order to access the dashboard.
  - From the reviewer dashboard, click on the "Assembled Doc" icon in order to review the PSR information.
  - If everything looks correct, select the "Approve" button from your dashboard.
  - If changes need to be made to the PSR form, select "Disapproved" which will return the form to your Proposal Analyst for editing.
  - Once you select "Approve", you will be prompted to read the required certification statements.
  - Select "Accept" in order to agree and certify the PSR form.
  - The Proposal Analyst will then be prompted to review the PSR and certify as well.
  - The PSR form will be completed once both the PI and the Proposal Analyst have certified it.
- **The signed PSR form is due at least 5 business days prior to the submission deadline.**

### **Preparing a Budget:**

- It's good to start working on the budget as soon as possible because it usually takes multiple (2-8) iterations. It also helps you get a sense of what is feasible as you write your proposal.

- Work with the proposal analyst via email or a zoom to develop a preliminary budget. Tell them your target dollar amount and types of expenses to include. Consider including Alison on these calls if you want help with budget decisions.
- These are some initial things to consider sending to the proposal analyst for inclusion in the budget (but your proposal might require other items):
  - names of personnel to be paid, % of time, number of months/year
  - capital equipment (defined as an item costing \$5,000 or more, having a useful life greater than one year, and being a standalone item)
  - travel (include destination (if known), estimated trip duration, # of trips per year, registration and abstract fees for conferences)
  - participant support costs
  - any other direct costs (computers, publications, software, shipping costs, etc.)
- Continue iterating on the budget until it's finalized.
  - Be sure the budget mirrors the proposal narrative.
  - *Note:* For NSF grants, the budget total will need to be finalized before proposal senior personnel can complete their current and pending document. Thus, it's critical to have the budget finalized as soon as possible.
- Once the budget is finalized, work with the proposal analyst to complete a budget justification. The proposal analyst will help with the budget justification, but you will need to fill in the missing details.
- **The proposal budget and budget justification are to be completed no later than 5 business days prior to the submission deadline.**

### Preparing a Proposal:

- Develop a proposal development timeline and share it with the proposal team and Alison.
  - Be sure to assign specific tasks to people with deadlines.
  - Plan regular meetings with the proposal team to make sure everyone is on track.
- For high-dollar, complex proposals, consider reaching out to CU's Research and Innovation Office (RIO) for assistance with proposal writing. See more information [here](#).
  - RIO proposal writers provide the following services:
    - Read through and deconstruct solicitation
    - Help build proposal structure based on required elements
    - Make sure you address the funder's goals/objectives
    - Help make your writing persuasive
    - Make sure all the solicitation formatting requirements are followed
  - If using a proposal writer, contact them as soon as you decide to apply and include them throughout the proposal development process.
  - Process:
    - Submit [online form](#)
      - Earth Lab/ESIIL has worked on numerous proposals with Diane Carillo ([diane.carillo@colorado.edu](mailto:diane.carillo@colorado.edu)), a RIO proposal writer. You can consider reaching out to her directly to see if she has availability.

- Initial consultation with proposal writer and PI/project team to develop a timeline for proposal development and draft review.
  - Number of draft reviews depends on when you provide the draft:
    - ≥ 3 weeks before deadline: 2 rounds of review/edits
    - 2-3 weeks before deadline: 1 round of review/edits
    - <2 weeks before deadline: subject to proposal writer's availability
    - (Diane will generally do a First Draft and a Near-Final Draft review)
- Alison and/or Casey can also help with proposal preparation. Please schedule regular update meetings (every 1-2 weeks) to make sure everyone is on the same page.
  - Here's how they can assist:
    - Help outline proposal requirements, assist with general organization and length, proof-reading.
    - Format references
    - Collect letters of support and/or collaboration
    - Collect/create other required supplemental documents. For NSF grants, this includes a biosketch, current and pending (C&P), and collaborations and other affiliations (COA) table for all senior personnel on the proposal. See the [Earth Lab wiki page](#) for details on these forms.
- **Share your grants.gov (or other sponsor log-in) credentials with Alison** so that she can check that all documents are completed and attached to the application package as it comes together.
- Reach out to co-PIs/collaborators to ask for letters of support and other required documents at least 3-4 weeks before the deadline. Give them a deadline of 1-2 weeks before the proposal deadline to send in their documents (because someone will always be late!)
- **Complete a near-final version of the proposal project description (proposal body) at least 1-2 weeks before the sponsor deadline.** This allows time for your RIO proposal writer and/or Alison and co-PIs to do a final read-through.
- **Have all supporting documents finalized at least 2 days before the deadline.**

### Submitting a proposal

- For most proposals, your assigned CIRES proposal analyst will complete and submit the application package. **But be sure to confirm this with your proposal analyst at the beginning of the proposal preparation process.**
- The CIRES proposal team requires that all materials are sent to them at least **1 full business day** before the proposal deadline. **However, to allow time for internal review and other technical errors, best practice is to have everything ready at least 2 business days in advance.**
- Plan to have a “game day” call with your proposal analyst and Alison on the day of submission. This ensures that everyone is on the same page and that all of the required materials are included in the application package and formatted correctly.
- Once everything is ready, your proposal analyst will send you a PDF version of the application. Carefully look through it and let them know if anything is incorrect or missing. Alison can also look through the PDF for an extra set of eyes.

### Other things to consider

- Consider the complexity of the proposal - more people involved means a more complicated application package, and thus more time is needed to review all materials before submission.
- Some collaborators might not have the admin support to complete required documents. You and/or Alison might have to help with/create some of the documents.
- Familiarize yourself and comply with the Funding agency's guidelines regarding the use of AI chatbots like ChatGPT. Remember that when you enter an idea or part of a proposal to an online AI language model, it becomes part of the model's training data, and you have no control over how or by whom your data or ideas are used.
- For NSF proposals, be sure to follow all guidelines and formatting requirements included in the [Proposal and Awards Policies and Procedures Guide \(PAPPG\)](#).
- Never withdraw a proposal near the deadline in the NSF system! You will NOT be able to resubmit it. This might be different for other federal agencies.