Q: What is the total amount of funding available for projects this year? Will you be forward funding beyond the annual appropriation?
A: There is approximately $2.75 million available to support collaborative research, integrated assessment and science transfer projects this year. Projects will not be forward funded. Project funds will be awarded on an annual basis after a successful review of the prior year’s progress, and contingent on appropriations and funds received from NOAA each year.

Q: Are these funds considered federal or state dispersed funds?
A: The origin of the money is federal but the subcontract will be from the University of Michigan.
FUNDING ELIGIBILITY

Q: Can NSC funds be used to support federal employees and/or their travel?  
A: NSC funds may not be used to support salary or travel for federal employees.

Q: Are Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDC’s) eligible to receive NERRS Science Collaborative (NSC) funding?  
A: FFRDC contractors (but not full or part time employee of a federal agency) are eligible for NSC funding; please note that FFRDC's may not serve as the fiscal agent of an NSC grant (i.e., the contract and/or any subcontract(s) needs to go to the contractor's company, not to the federal sponsor of the FFRDC).

Q: Can subcontracts from the fiscal agent for an NSC-funded project go to a federal agency (e.g. USGS) for technical services? If so, how exactly, and if not, what options might exist to allow their inclusion in NSC-funded projects?  
A: Funds awarded by the NSC originate from NOAA and are federally appropriated dollars and, therefore, cannot go to a federal agency. Staff from federal agencies can be included as part of a project team as unfunded partners. Funds from other sources, e.g., foundations, could be used to support their work and leverage an NSC grant.

Q: Is funding restricted to work performed on reserves? Does at least part of a research project need to be located physically within a reserve’s watershed?  
A: NSC projects are not required to be located within the physical boundaries of a National Estuarine Research Reserve, or necessarily a reserve’s watershed. However, as described in the 2015 NSC Science Collaborative Request for Pre-Proposals, projects must be directly related to at least one reserve, address at least one or more reserve priorities in the context of NSC priorities, and must have the full support of the relevant reserve manager(s), as demonstrated in the reserve manager proposal assessment. To be eligible for funding, all pre-proposals must demonstrate:

1) Engagement of end users in all stages of the project;
2) A sound approach that addresses one or more reserve priorities in the context of the NSC priorities;
3) A strong collaborative and iterative process integrated throughout the project; and
4) A project team that has the appropriate technical and collaborative expertise to meet the project goals.

BUDGET AND TIMELINE

Q: If our start date is September 1, when would the funding year end?  
A: The funding year ends exactly one year less a day, after it starts (e.g., if your start date is September 1, 2015, then the end date for that funding year would be August 31, 2016).
Q: Is a timeline required at the pre-proposal stage?
A: Yes, a timeline is required at the pre-proposal stage. However, the timeline required for the pre-proposal is less detailed than what will be required at full proposal. At the pre-proposal stage, your application must, using the template found on the application website (http://graham.umich.edu/application-request/31949) and as indicated in the RFP, include a timeline with estimated dates for the following:

- Project start and end dates;
- Significant project benchmarks/milestones; and
- Completion of final project outputs.

Q: Is there a match requirement for NSC grant funding?
A: No. NSC grants are not required to demonstrate a funding match.

Q: If the end user(s) is included in the project budget, are they eligible to serve as project advocates before the final review panel?
A: Yes. End users may be integrated into the project budget and may serve as the project advocate.

Q: If the fiscal agent is not the project lead but will be submitting the proposal, should the fiscal agent be listed as a project co-lead?
A: The project lead should be the person who ensures that all elements of the project are being implemented. If the fiscal agent will not be serving this role, they should not be named as a project co-lead.

Q: Does the fiscal agent need to submit the pre-proposal?
A: No. Please just make sure you indicate the appropriate roles and provide requested contact information for all involved, e.g. fiscal agent, project lead, etc., in the pre-proposal.

Q: Is there a cap on overhead?
A: The request for proposals does not include a cap on overhead. We will honor your institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate.

Q: If we do not use all budgeted funds in the first project year, will we still be able to use them in the second year?
A: Yes, carry-over between project years is allowed and would not affect the overall award amount. You would have until the project end date to expend funds. For example, we would issue a subcontract for $250k for year one, and for year two, extend the contract date for another year and add the next year's $250k. You would be able to spend your year one remainder plus all of your year two funds in year two.
Q: Can we exceed the yearly budget cap ($250K) in year 1, for example, but then budget accordingly in the following years to keep the total under $750K?
A: There is no flexibility in the yearly funding caps. The maximum allowed per year for a research project is $250,000.

Q: Will pre-proposals that request less than the per project funding cap be equally considered against those that request the full amount?
A: Your budget is not part of the pre-proposal evaluation process, as long as your request does not exceed the maximum allowable per project request. At the full proposal stage, your budget and budget justification will be reviewed to make sure the work and anticipated outputs are in line with the resources requested. As a reminder, if invited to submit a full proposal, your budget may not exceed the budget estimate in the pre-proposal.

Q: If multiple reserves are involved in a research project, would the NSC consider a budget that exceeds $250K/year?
A: There is no flexibility in the yearly funding cap, even if multiple reserves are involved in a single project. The maximum allowed per year for a research project is $250,000. If resources are insufficient to support the work, it is possible that complementary proposals, if strong separately, could be selected for funding.

COLLABORATION AND END USER ENGAGEMENT

Q: Can the end user also serve as the PI for a project?
A: The end user can serve as both the PI and project advocate.

Q: Can a team member who is also serving another role, e.g., collaboration lead or researcher, be listed as an end user?
A: If appropriate, i.e., they fit the definition of end user provided in the NSC RFP, team members serving other roles may also be listed as end users.

Q: Are all end users considered collaborators?
A: All end users are potential collaborators. To be eligible for funding, projects must engage representative end users as collaborators to ensure that the project design, output, and outcomes will directly contribute to end user needs.

Q: Can we designate collaboration co-leads, rather than a single lead? We have multiple project team members who can and will facilitate and support our collaborative process, and doing so would be considered part of their current job duties.
A: Yes, you may list collaboration co-leads rather than a single collaboration lead. However, if you take the approach of collaboration co-leads, you will need to clearly describe how the role will be shared by the designated team members and how this important responsibility will be
fulfilled. Each co-lead should have clearly designated roles and responsibilities that, in total, sufficiently support the team's collaborative process.

**Q:** Are national NGOs potential end users for reserve-specific integrated assessments or research projects? A national organization can take results to new audiences outside the reserve while potentially also supporting outcomes at the local level.

**A:** National NGOs can be end users for NSC research projects/integrated assessments, but proposals should demonstrate how the organization is well positioned to use project results to achieve intended outcomes that are responsive to the RFP.

**Q:** Are letters of support or letters of collaboration required at the pre-proposal stage?

**A:** Letters of support are not required at the pre-proposal stage. Pre-proposals may include up to five (5) pages of supporting documents as appendices; this may include letters of support or collaboration. If letters of support are included, please address them to “Members of the Review Panel”.

**Q:** How firm do commitments from end users and other partners need to be at the pre-proposal stage?

**A:** At the pre-proposal stage, end users and other partners should be engaged in the process of identifying the need for the project and the desired outputs and outcomes. The pre-proposal should describe this engagement process, provide evidence of end user interest in the project and intent to be involved in it, and describe the process that will be followed throughout the project to ensure that productive collaboration occurs between project researchers and end users of the research. Likewise, reserve staff (who in some cases are end users and/or project partners) should be engaged sufficiently such that the reserve manager is able to address the criteria included in the Reserve Manager Proposal Assessment (available at [http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding](http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding)).

**Q:** If the end user(s) is included in the project budget, are they eligible to serve as project advocates before the final review panel?

**A:** Yes. End users may be integrated into the project budget and may serve as the project advocate.

**RESERVE ENGAGEMENT & RESERVE MANAGER PRE-PROPOSAL ASSESSMENTS**

**Q:** What is the deadline for the reserve manager pre-proposal assessments?

**A:** For NSC research project/integrated assessment pre-proposals, reserve managers must submit their pre-proposal assessments by March 10, 2015, using the template and following the guidance available on the [NERRS Science Collaborative funding opportunities](http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding) web page.
Q: For multi-reserve proposals, are reserve manager proposal assessments from all involved reserves required?
A: Yes. Projects that involve multiple reserves should engage and provide a copy of their final pre-proposal to every relevant reserve manager. Reserve managers are asked to provide a pre-proposal assessment for each NSC pre-proposal that includes efforts involving their reserve.

Q: Please clarify what is meant by the following criterion from the Reserve Manager Pre-Proposal Assessment form: To what extent does the pre-proposal reflect agreement between the proposing team and reserve regarding reserve resource commitments?
A: This criterion is meant to ensure that the pre-proposal includes acceptable funding, support, and commitment levels for reserve resources. The reserve manager is being asked if the reserve resources (staff time, salary, etc.) included in the project pre-proposal reflects a mutual and agreed upon understanding between the reserve manager and the proposing team about what is required to support the work. In other words, does the scope or extent of reserve involvement included in the pre-proposal align with reasonable and agreed upon commitments?

Q: If the reserve manager submits a pre-proposal, how should he/she address the project in the pre-proposal assessment?
A: Reserve managers should address every pre-proposal that involves their reserves, including any for which they serve as a lead or team member.

Q: Is it acceptable for a reserve manager to serve as a project lead, even though she/he must also submit a pre-proposal assessment for all projects associated with the reserve?
A: Yes. A reserve manager may serve as the project lead even though she/he must also submit the reserve manager pre-proposal assessment for all projects associated with their reserve. As a clarifying follow up point, in the pre-proposal assessment, reserve managers should address every pre-proposal that involves their reserves, including any for which they serve as a lead or team member.

DATA MANAGEMENT
Q: Do projects that use only existing data require a data management plan? How is data management achieved with integrated assessments?
A: Projects that propose to use only existing data do not require a plan for data management.

IAs generally do not collect new data, therefore we do not anticipate the need for a data management plan in these projects. However, at the full proposal stage, teams will be required to consider how they will sustain their products, e.g., maps, data syntheses/evaluations, etc., and make them available to end users as appropriate.
The above being said, if an IA project team intends to collect some data, e.g., to support modeling or characterize stakeholder concerns, a data management plan would likely be required. Teams invited to submit full proposals can consult the Centralized Data Management Office about how to plan for social science data management. Further guidance will be offered directly to project teams invited to submit full proposals.

DETERMINING PROJECT TYPE

Q: We have a project idea that includes elements of collaborative research, IA, and science transfer. Could you provide some more guidance on how to select the right funding opportunity so the proposal is reviewed appropriately?

A: The focal question/topic and the nature of the proposed activities should drive the choice of funding opportunities. Applicants will also need to consider the most appropriate next step for the issue, how much money is needed to do the work, and whether they have the right mix of expertise for the type of project.

Science transfer (ST) grants are an opportunity to develop and implement strategies for applying scientific information for both reserve-based end users and other users outside the reserve system. If not already completed, a ST project could include some collaborative research, planning and needs assessment activities to inform a science transfer effort. However, ST projects should culminate in completed science transfer products or the implementation of specific outreach or training activities, and therefore any scoping needed to inform the science transfer work may need to be fairly discrete, e.g., focused on a particular type of end user and application.

Funds for Integrated assessment (IA) are intended to support a robust stakeholder engagement process and a synthesis of existing information to support decisions around a specific management or policy question. IA projects often start with a fairly nebulous, complicated natural resource problem that may require some scoping before a competitive IA proposal can be developed. IA proposal should focus on a fairly specific management or policy question so that proposed assessment activities can be adequately articulated and reviewed. If you can frame your question appropriately, an IA grant could help you build consensus and conduct an iterative data analysis and feedback process with your different "stakeholders".

Science Collaborative research projects are an opportunity to conduct new research, characterize a natural resource problem and inform management. Some amount of social science research, such as a needs assessment, may occur within IA or ST projects, but if the bulk of project resources are supporting new data collection, than we recommend framing the work as a collaborative research project. Collaborative research projects can emphasize social and/or natural science research approaches, as long as the needs of end users are integrated into the project design and implementation. This type of project could help you research the needs, communication challenges, and best data visualization techniques for different end users.
Q: How do I determine if an emerging issue is best suited for a research project or an integrated assessment?
A: The most important defining feature of integrated assessments is that they focus on a specific management or policy question, assess existing data/information to address the question, and result in outputs that help end users evaluate potential management actions or policy options. It may be helpful to think of an IA as a process that engages stakeholders who have differing opinions on the solution to a specific issue in order to provide clarity on the range of possible solutions. Integrated assessments focus on a specific management or policy question and are not well suited for open-ended topics where the questions have not yet been identified and/or prioritized.

Research projects, however, typically focus on gathering new information related to a more specific research or information need.

Example IA question: What are the economic and performance advantages to various stormwater and waste-water management approaches?

Example research question: What is the impact of increased stormwater run-off on estuarine habitat restoration projects?

Q: Can a proposal be a combination of an integrated assessment and new research? For example, we would like to gather and assess existing data, get feedback in the first stage, and then conduct new research to address gaps.
A: We recommend splitting these processes into separate projects and choosing one aspect to focus on first.

Q: Given the data collection component of a project, how do I determine if a project is best suited to be a research project versus an integrated assessment?
A: There may be some amount of data collection within the IA framework, e.g., to support modeling or characterize stakeholder concerns, but if the bulk of project resources are supporting new data collection, than we recommend framing the work as a collaborative research project. Conversely, there may be a need for data synthesis and modeling to advance scientific understanding of an issue, which could be best addressed through a collaborative research project even if it does not involve new data collection.

INTEGRATED ASSESSMENTS
Q: Can a proposal be a combination of an integrated assessment and new research? For example, we would like to gather and assess existing data, get feedback in the first stage, and then conduct new research to address gaps.
A: We recommend splitting these processes into separate projects and choosing one aspect to focus on first.
Q: How much and what type of support can the NERRS Science Collaborative team provide for integrated assessments that get funded?
A: The NSC team, including project managers, will be available to provide advice and support for funded projects. The level of support will depend on the needs of the project and could include feedback on project plans, participation in team meetings or workshops, and review of project documents. In addition, the NSC will direct teams to exemplary resources about facilitating effective collaborations and integrated assessments, and will look for opportunities to address needs that are common to multiple projects through targeted trainings and other tools.

Q: Who should we include as science/technical team members for an integrated assessment? Are researchers or consultants better suited to complete the analysis portion of an integrated assessment?
A: We cannot provide specific direction regarding who should be on a project team. More generally, the pre-proposal should include team members that have the appropriate collaborative and technical research experience to complete the proposed work. A combination of natural and social science expertise can help IA project teams look at an issue from multiple perspectives and effectively evaluate trade-offs. Those eligible to receive funding are referenced in the RFP. Additionally, we recommend that you engage the relevant reserve staff/reserve manager for input when identifying appropriate team members.

Q: How is data management achieved with integrated assessments?
A: IAs generally do not collect new data, therefore we do not anticipate the need for a data management plan in these projects. However, at the full proposal stage, teams will be required to consider how they will sustain their products, e.g., maps, data syntheses/evaluations, etc., and make them available to end users as appropriate.

The above being said, if an IA project team intends to collect some data, e.g., to support modeling or characterize stakeholder concerns, a data management plan would likely be required. Teams invited to submit full proposals can consult the Centralized Data Management Office about how to plan for social science data management. Further guidance will be offered directly to project teams invited to submit full proposals.

Q: Do integrated assessments compete directly against collaborative research projects?
A: Yes. IAs and collaborative research proposals will be evaluated via the same process and those selected for funding will be the strongest projects, regardless of type.

Q: For integrated assessment pre-proposals, can a list of potential data sources be attached in an appendix?
A: Yes. Please include this list in the “other supporting documents” appendix if it is not in the pre-proposal narrative.
APPLICATION FORMAT
Q: We have a large project team, and our list of team members will not all fit on the title page. Can we extend the title page into a second page?
A: If necessary, you may extend the project title page to a second page to accommodate a large team.

Q: Are we permitted to use space in the "other supporting documents" section of the appendices for our list of references relating to citations included in the five-page narrative?
A: You may use the space in the "other supporting documents" appendix however best supports your pre-proposal.

Q: If we choose to provide a list of references, where should we include them in the pre-proposal?
A: References are not a required component at the pre-proposal stage. If you choose to include a list of references, it should go in the “supporting documents” section and would count towards the 5-page limit.

Q: Are letters of support or letters of collaboration required at the pre-proposal stage? If so, to whom should they be addressed?
A: Letters of support are not required at the pre-proposal stage. Pre-proposals may include up to five pages of supporting documents as appendices; this may include letters of support or collaboration. If letters of support are included, please address them to “Members of the Review Panel”.

Q: Is it permissible to exceed the 5-page limit for supporting documents?
A: Please do make an effort to work within the 5-page limit for supporting documents.

Q: Does the fiscal agent need to submit the pre-proposal?
A: No. Please just make sure you indicate the appropriate roles and provide requested contact information for all involved, e.g. fiscal agent, project lead, etc., in the pre-proposal.

Q: Do resumes/CVs need to be formatted with 1-inch margins and in 12-point, Times New Roman font?
A: No. Resumes/CVs are NOT required to be formatted with 1-inch margins and 12-point, Times New Roman font.

Q: For integrated assessment pre-proposals, can a list of potential data sources be attached in an appendix?
A: Yes. Please include this list in the “other supporting documents” appendix if it is not in the pre-proposal narrative.
REVIEW PROCESS

Q: Is the deadline for pre-proposals a hard one?
A: Yes. We realize the deadlines are tight this year, but we need to stick to them in order to get projects started in a timely fashion.

Q: Will reviewers be sourced from within the reserve system or externally? How will reviewers be selected and will panelists’ areas of expertise be matched to the focus of specific proposals?
A: At the pre-proposal panel stage, all panelists and reviewers will be selected from outside the NERRS to avoid potential conflicts of interest. Reviewers and panelists with broad and specialized expertise in coastal and estuarine issues, applied sciences, and collaboration with representation from different geographic regions and disciplines are being solicited. Full proposals selected for panel review will be reviewed by a larger panel, comprised of the pre-proposal panel plus non-conflicted NERRS sector representatives. At both the pre-proposal and full proposal stages, applications will be matched to reviewers with relevant technical and collaborative expertise. More details regarding the review process can be found on pages 9 and 10 of the RFP.

Q: Will review panels be held in-person or virtually?
A: The NSC research project/integrated assessment review panel will meet in-person at both the pre-proposal and full proposal stages. At the full proposal review panel meeting, proposing teams and their end user(s) will be asked to participate remotely, and the end user will present the work to the panel.

Q: Do integrated assessments compete directly against collaborative research projects?
A: Yes. IAs and collaborative research proposals will be evaluated via the same process and those selected for funding will be the strongest projects, regardless of type.

Q: How will end user involvement be evaluated?
A: Each NSC project must be structured and managed in a way that encourages and accommodates effective ongoing collaboration and iteration between the project team and intended end users. The pre-proposal must identify the primary end user(s) and the process through which they have been identified. It should provide evidence of their interest in the project and intent to be involved in it. The pre-proposal must also clearly describe the process that will be followed to ensure that productive collaboration occurs between project researchers and end users of the research. Finally, the pre-proposal must identify a collaborative lead that will be responsible for the collaborative process and describe his/her relevant experience and skills.

At the pre-proposal stage, reviewers will be evaluating evidence of end user interest and involvement according to the following criteria:
Is the end user clearly identified and appropriate for the project? Does the project approach adequately integrate the end user?

Whether or not and how well a pre-proposal achieves the above will be evident throughout the project narrative.

At the full proposal stage, a representative end user(s) of those proposals invited to the final review panel meeting will be asked to advocate on behalf of the project in front of the panel remotely, via webinar/teleconference. By this point in the review process panelists will be familiar with the proposed work (this will be the same panel that reviewed the pre-proposals and the panel will have the results of the written technical reviews). The intent of the presentation will not be to provide the technical details of the project but to speak to the need for and expected impact of the work. This is a task best-suited to the project end user(s). The end user(s) will be asked to speak to the extent of their involvement in defining the issue or need, shaping the research question(s), developing the proposal, and expected engagement throughout the project. The end user(s) will also be asked to describe the importance of the project outputs and outcomes relative to their needs. Proposing team members will also be asked to join remotely but will not be the lead presenters.

Q: Is the end user the only team member expected to make the full proposal presentation?
A: The end user will lead the presentation to the panel. Other members of the project team can participate, but only in a supporting role, e.g., by answering technical questions from the panel.

Q: Are proposals limited to one end user "advocate"?
A: No; the project team may consider it beneficial and choose to present more than one end user perspective to the panel. However, please keep in mind that there will be a time limit for presentations to the panel which will be strictly enforced.

Q: If the end user(s) is included in the project budget, are they eligible to serve as project advocates before the final review panel?
A: Yes. End users may be integrated into the project budget and may serve as the project advocate.

Q: Will pre-proposals that request less than the per project funding cap be equally considered against those that request the full amount?
A: Your budget is not part of the pre-proposal evaluation process, as long as your request does not exceed the maximum allowable per project request. At the full proposal stage, your budget and budget justification will be reviewed to make sure the work and anticipated outputs are in line with the resources requested. As a reminder, if invited to submit a full proposal, your budget may not exceed the budget estimate in the pre-proposal.
Q: Can you provide any indication of how the review process will evaluate new research as compared to research that is building on existing success?
A: Pre-proposals will be evaluated based on the evaluation criteria listed on pages 13 and 14 of the RFP. There is no requirement for new projects to link directly to previous NSC projects. However, if a proposed project does build on or relate to previous work, no matter how it was funded, this should be made clear in the pre-proposal.

OTHER
Q: Is it required and if so how should pre-proposals link to projects funded previously by the NERRS Science Collaborative?
A: There is no requirement for new projects to link directly to previous NSC projects. However, if a proposed project does build on or relate to a previous NSC project(s), this should be made clear in the pre-proposal.

Q: Are NERRS Science Collaborative team members eligible to be members of the project team?
A: No. However, NERRS Science Collaborative Team members can provide general guidance to teams (e.g., directing them to reference sources, answering non-project specific questions) during the pre and full proposal development stages. These questions should be directed to nerrs-info@umich.edu. Relative to data management plan development, the Centralized Data Management Office can provide project-specific guidance at the full proposal development stage.

Q: This question is with regard to the guidance for describing outputs and outcomes in the project narrative, more specifically the part that reads “With reference to the NSC priorities, describe the outputs and outcomes of the work, focusing on their direct contribution to reserve and end user needs.” Can you provide an example of what you would consider a fully responsive answer to that question? The previous section (“Problem Statement and Response to End User Needs”) requires an explanation of how the project addresses NSC and reserve priorities. How do we avoid being redundant?
A: We do not have an example response. However, the emphasis of this section is on the direct contribution of outputs and outcomes to end user needs. The pre-proposal should make the connection to reserve and NSC priorities clear, and this connection should be visible in the desired outputs and outcomes. If you have already described this in the previous section, you do not need to go into detail doing so again in this section. Simply referencing the relevant priorities you discussed previously should be sufficient.

As described in the RFP, the outputs and outcomes will be evaluated according to the following criteria: Are the outputs and outcomes clearly identified and appropriate for the proposed
work? Are the outputs achievable in the proposed time frame and budget request? Are the outcomes appropriate given the scope of the project?

Q: Are letters of support or letters of collaboration required at the pre-proposal stage?
A: Letters of support are not required at the pre-proposal stage. Pre-proposals may include up to five pages of supporting documents as appendices; this may include letters of support or collaboration. If letters of support are included, please address them to “Members of the Review Panel”.

Q: Does the fiscal agent need to submit the pre-proposal?
A: No. Please just make sure you indicate the appropriate roles and provide requested contact information for all involved, e.g. fiscal agent, project lead, etc., in the pre-proposal.

Q: Once I setup my U-M Friend Account, are there any additional steps I should take to request additional access in order to submit my pre-proposal?
A: If you received a confirmation email, you should be all set to login and submit your pre-proposal. You do not need to request any additional access in order to submit a pre-proposal.

Q: Is there specific literature available detailing the process that Dr. Moser will use in her engagement with reserves?
A: Each reserve that expressed interest in working with Dr. Susi Moser on the Successful Adaptation Indicators and Metrics project has received correspondence directly from Dr. Moser detailing the general approach and timeline for this work. Should you have any general clarifying questions about the SAIM project, please address them to Dr. Moser. Other resources include those listed on the Water Center website here: http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/resources/climate-adaptation.