National Estuarine Research Reserve System Science Collaborative

2016 Collaborative Research and Integrated Assessment Funding Announcement & Request for Pre-Proposals

Integrated Assessment Track

December 9, 2015
Contents
About this Request for Pre-Proposals ......................................................................................................................... 3
Key Dates ................................................................................................................................................................. 4
About the NERRS Science Collaborative ................................................................................................................ 4
Required Elements .................................................................................................................................................. 4
Collaboration and End User Integration .................................................................................................................. 4
Reserve Engagement ........................................................................................................................................... 5
Data Management .................................................................................................................................................. 6
Eligibility ................................................................................................................................................................. 6
Integrated Assessments ....................................................................................................................................... 7
Pre-proposal Requirements ................................................................................................................................... 8
Review Process ....................................................................................................................................................... 12
Pre-proposal Evaluation Criteria .......................................................................................................................... 13
Environmental Compliance Review ....................................................................................................................... 14
Guidance to Applicants ....................................................................................................................................... 14
Proprietary Information & Intellectual Property ................................................................................................. 15
Questions Regarding this Request for Proposals? ............................................................................................... 15
Question and Answer Webinars ............................................................................................................................. 15
Email ................................................................................................................................................................. 15
Phone ................................................................................................................................................................. 16
Question and Answer Record ................................................................................................................................ 16
Other Information ............................................................................................................................................... 16
About this Request for Pre-Proposals

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Science Collaborative solicits pre-proposals for funding to support end user\(^1\) driven collaborative research projects and integrated assessments that adopt a collaborative approach to design and implementation to meet a reserve management need. For more information on the current management needs of individual reserves, see the 2016 Reserve Management Needs.

This request for pre-proposals (RFP) is split into two tracks based on project type:

1) **Collaborative research projects** (maximum award: $250,000 per year, for up to 3 years) – conducting new applied science that addresses reserve management needs through the co-development of research, data, tools, or products that inform management and decision making; and

2) **Integrated assessments** (maximum award: $250,000 total, for up to 2 years) – aggregating and analyzing existing data or products for the purpose of evaluating a suite of management or policy options related to a reserve management need.

The review process, evaluation criteria, and due dates are identical for both pre-proposal tracks because both project types are end user driven and reserve focused.

To help you determine which project type is best suited for your idea, please refer to the decision tree at [http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding](http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding). If you still have questions after reviewing the decision tree, please [contact us](http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding/research-ia).

All RFP supporting documents can be found at [http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding/research-ia](http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding/research-ia).

The remainder of this document provides guidelines for developing an INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT PRE-PROPOSAL.

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\(^1\) End user is defined as a person or group in a position to apply the information or tools being produced, evaluated, or transferred through a Science Collaborative project in a way that is of direct consequence to the ecological, social, or economic integrity of a reserve(s) and/or surrounding watershed(s). Examples of end users include, but are not limited to, reserve staff, and public, private, or non-governmental decision/policy makers, including landowners, resource managers, land use planners, and educators at all levels.
### Key Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 10, 2015 at 12pm EST</td>
<td>Webinar: <em>Engaging End Users – Working iteratively to produce usable science</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 17, 2015 at 2pm EST</td>
<td>Webinar: <em>Research and Integrated Assessment RFP Questions &amp; Answers</em> (two offerings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 12, 2016 at 12pm EST</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1, 2016 by 11:59pm EST</td>
<td>Pre-proposals due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 8, 2016</td>
<td>Manager pre-proposal assessments due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 24, 2016</td>
<td>Invitations to full proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 16, 2016 by 11:59pm EST</td>
<td>Proposals due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 18, 2016</td>
<td>Manager proposal assessments due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2016</td>
<td>Funding notifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2016</td>
<td>Anticipated project start date</td>
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</table>

### About the NERRS Science Collaborative

The University of Michigan Water Center and partners are working with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to coordinate the NERRS Science Collaborative. The Science Collaborative’s primary goal is to support the co-development and application of relevant and usable knowledge and assessment information to address critical coastal management issues identified by the NERRS in order to improve the long-term stewardship of the nation’s valuable estuaries.

The Science Collaborative works to achieve this goal through regular funding opportunities, project support and management, and an adaptive approach to program implementation that fosters ongoing learning and improvement. The Science Collaborative supports projects that address reserve management needs, engage end users, are highly collaborative, and emphasize outcome-oriented products that are usable and accessible. Focus areas for the Science Collaborative include climate change, water quality, habitat restoration, shoreline stabilization, ecosystem service valuation, and the application of data from the NERRS System-wide Monitoring Program (SWMP) and Sentinel Sites.

### Required Elements

#### Collaboration and End User Integration

The objective of all Science Collaborative grants is to foster applied research that directly benefits the management of resources of concern to one or more reserves. For this objective to be realized, it is essential that collaboration occur between the project team and end users. The ability to produce usable science is greatly enhanced when researchers understand and are responsive to the interests and needs of end users; likewise, the application of knowledge increases when end users understand and acknowledge the
capabilities of science to address their management challenges and actively seek to incorporate the research into management plans and decision processes.

Collaboration succeeds when there is a clear purpose, motivated participants, and a carefully-structured and well-managed iterative process between science producers and end users. Therefore, the pre-proposal must identify the primary end users 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 among the project team and end users, including a mechanism for being adaptive and responsive to the respective input, needs, and capabilities of each. The pre-proposal must identify an individual who will be responsible for leading the collaborative process and describe his/her relevant experience and skills.

Finally, collaboration is demanding in terms of time and effort. To be successful, pre-proposals must convey project team and end user commitment in the project narrative and timeline. The Science Collaborative has resources available for your reference as you plan for and engage in this process, including key considerations for engaging end users effectively and efficiently, particularly during the proposal development process ².

**Reserve Engagement**

All projects supported by the Science Collaborative must address one or more reserve management needs. Reserve managers and staff must be consulted and engaged in the development of project proposals and it is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that there is sufficient engagement of reserve staff, e.g., the manager and other appropriate personnel in project development. Managers will be completing a proposal assessment for each proposal that involves their reserve by responding to the following criteria:

1) The pre-proposal addresses a current management need for your reserve;

2) The proposing team engaged reserve staff sufficiently during pre-proposal development process; and

3) You agree with the proposed allocation of resources to the reserve, and/or proposed allocation of reserve staff time or other resources if not covered in the budget.

These assessments will be submitted by reserve managers directly to the Science Collaborative, separate from the pre-proposal submission. Applicants will initiate the

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² These resources are available at [http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding/research-ia](http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding/research-ia). This includes tools for characterizing end users and stakeholders and a webinar, “Engaging end users: Working iteratively to produce usable science” to be held at 12pm EST Dec 10, 2015. Register at [https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8140737183837051138](https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8140737183837051138). A recording of the webinar will be posted to the RFP site.
reserve manager assessment by providing a copy of their final pre-proposal to the manager of every reserve named in the project.

Data Management
NOAA requires that environmental data collected and/or created under NOAA grants and cooperative agreements be made visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users, free of charge or at minimal cost, in a timely manner (typically no later than two (2) years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy, or security requirements.

If invited to submit a proposal, applicants that propose the collection of new data will be required to develop and include a Data Sharing Plan (DSP) as a part of their proposal package. This plan must address elements such as methods and protocols for data collection, data quality control/quality assurance (QA/QC) procedures, metadata, data access, and data archival. A valid data management plan may include only the statement that no detailed plan is needed, as long as the statement is accompanied by a clear justification, e.g. no new data are being collected.

At the pre-proposal stage, applicants must account for the costs associated with implementing a data management plan in their budget estimate. Additional guidance and details for support in developing a DSP will be provided to those teams invited to submit proposals.

Integrated assessments generally do not collect new data, and therefore we do not anticipate the need for a data management plan in these projects. However, at the proposal stage, integrated assessment 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.

Eligibility
Projects must address one or more reserve management needs that are consistent with Science Collaborative focus areas and have the full support of the relevant reserve manager(s), as demonstrated in reserve manager proposal assessments.

This funding opportunity is open to applicants from United States academic, non-government organizations, or non-federal public sectors, especially those working in partnership with NERRS staff.

Each pre-proposal must designate a single fiscal agent. The person in this role must be a project team member from the reserve, agency, institution, or friends group who will receive the award, if granted. Researchers from institutions outside the U.S. may be included on the project but cannot serve as the fiscal agent. Foreign researchers may also be funded by sub-awards through an eligible U.S. entity. Federal employees and agencies
are not eligible to receive funding from the Science Collaborative program, but they can participate as unfunded project team members.

**Integrated Assessments**

*The remainder of this document provides guidelines for developing an integrated assessment pre-proposal. Guidelines specific to collaborative research projects can be found [here](#).*

Integrated assessment (IA) offers an effective way to frame and inform decisions for sustainability problems that lack consensus on the cause or solution. This approach is most relevant for situations where considerable information exists but it has not yet been integrated and synthesized in ways that are useful to end users, e.g. decision or policy makers, in their evaluation of management or policy options. These grants are intended to support a robust stakeholder engagement process and an iterative analysis of existing data, rather than new field work or experimentation. IA projects are eligible for up to $250,000 total funding for up to two years.

Integrated assessments focus on a particular management or policy question of concern related to a [reserve management need](#) and aim to clarify the issue, build consensus, and help evaluate options for action, such as different strategies for natural resource management, permitting, or land use planning. Projects are typically guided by an advisory group that includes end users (individuals with authority to implement identified options) and representative stakeholders that have unique or competing views on the issue. Integrated assessments include an external technical review to ensure credibility and acceptance of project results.

Most integrated assessments include the following elements:

1. Collaboratively define the focal question;
2. Clarify the history, causes, and consequences of the issue;
3. Identify and evaluate potential options; and
4. Develop information to guide decisions.

Project outputs are specific products that are developed during or upon project completion. IA outputs **must** include:

- A synthesis and analysis of available data or other information related to the focal question, which will be used to inform the development and analysis of policy or management options;
- A set of potential policy or management solutions, including analyses of the trade-offs associated with each option and technical guidance for implementation;
- A report that summarizes the assessment, examines the focal question, describes the external technical review findings, and presents an analysis of options; and
• An activity that shares the project results with the broader NERRS community, such as a poster or session at a conference, like the NERRS Annual Meeting, a system-wide webinar, or a sector meeting.

Project outcomes are the consequences of the application of the output(s) associated with the project. IA outcomes may include:

• Stronger collaborative relationship among reserve staff, partners, and end users;
• Better understanding of the context in which researchers, stakeholders, and end users operate, including their unique constraints, contributions, and needs; and/or
• An improved capacity to address the identified question.

For more information on IAs, please see http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/resources/ia.

Pre-proposal Requirements

Pre-proposals must be provided as a single pdf file using 12 point Times New Roman font, no less than single space, and one-inch margins and organized using the headers below. Pre-proposals must include a title page, 5 page maximum narrative, and appendices as outlined below. Pre-proposals not meeting these requirements, including the header requirements, will be removed from the competition without further review.

Pre-proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on February 1, 2016 at http://graham.umich.edu/application-request/34770.

Title Page (up to two pages):
Organize your narrative using the following headers:

1) Project Title
2) Project Type – Collaborative research project or integrated assessment.
3) Project Lead / Principal Investigator (primary contact for the project) –
   a) Title / Position
   b) Institution
   c) Telephone Number
   d) Postal Mailing Address
   e) E-mail Address
4) Additional Team Members (anyone receiving project resources or contributing significant resources to the project) – Name, institution, telephone, e-mail, and nature of contribution.
5) Fiscal Agent – Provide the name of the fiscal agent. If different than the project lead, please include contact information.

6) Name of Reserve(s) – Identify the reserve(s) affiliated or involved with the project.

7) Budget Request – Requested dollar amount.

8) Project Duration – Project start date should be November 1, 2016 or later and the end date can be up to two calendar years later.

9) Project Summary – Provide a 200-word summary of the proposed project suitable for a non-technical audience; be sure to include the project’s objectives, responsiveness to end user needs, and planned outputs/outcomes.

Project Narrative (5 page maximum):
Before proceeding with the development of your proposal, please refer to the Integrated Assessment Primer. The primer describes essential elements of an IA process, tips for developing competitive proposals for this funding opportunity, and requirements for a final integrated assessment report. The primer is available at http://graham.umich.edu/media/files/NERRS_IA_Primer.pdf.

Organize your narrative using the following headers:

1) Problem Statement and Response to End User Needs – Describe the issue(s) the project will address, discussing the importance and context, with particular emphasis on how the project will address one or more reserve management needs. Identify the project end user(s) and describe how the IA is designed to meet their needs. Identify previous and ongoing attempts to address the focal problem, and the technical and non-technical barriers that hinder an effective response. Demonstrate why the IA approach is appropriate for this issue at this time.

   If applicable, briefly describe how the proposed work will leverage the outputs or outcomes of work previously supported by the Science Collaborative.

2) Outputs and Outcomes – Clearly distinguishing between the two, provide a list of the outputs and a list of the anticipated outcomes of the work. Describe these briefly, with reference to how they meet the end user and reserve management needs discussed in the “problem statement.” Explain how the usability of the outputs will be sustained beyond the project period, e.g., who will be responsible for disseminating products and how information products will be updated/maintained.

   a) Output – a specific product that is developed during or upon project completion; there may be several outputs associated with a project. See examples and requirements provided above in the “Integrated Assessments” section of this RFP; these are illustrative only and not meant to be exhaustive.

   b) Outcome – the consequences of the application of the output(s) associated with the project. See examples provided above in the “Integrated
**Assessments** section of this RFP; these are illustrative only and not meant to be exhaustive.

3) **Project Approach** – Referencing the IA process outlined in the [Integrated Assessment Primer](#), briefly describe the planned project approach. Your approach should include the following elements:

   i. **Collaboratively define the focal question.** Clearly state a draft focal question for the assessment, recognizing that this question will evolve as the project is further developed and your end user consultation process expands. If funded, the team should allow a larger group of stakeholders to offer feedback on the focal question and project approach. Outline your approach for identifying, engaging, and incorporating input from end users and stakeholders, including individuals that may have unique or competing views on the issue and potential solutions.

   ii. **Clarify the Issue.** Projects should examine and clarify aspects of the focal issue that are uncertain and are impeding action. This often includes an analysis of the current status, historical trends, root causes, and implications of the issue. Briefly outline your proposed analysis methods. Identify and demonstrate access to appropriate data sources for the planned analyses.

   iii. **Identify and evaluate potential options.** Integrated assessments help end users compare a suite of potential options for addressing the focal issue. Briefly describe how your team will evaluate different options and indicate the type of options that will be considered, e.g., management actions, regulations, legislation, education/outreach programs, or a combination of these and other initiatives.

   iv. **Develop information to guide decisions.** Integrated assessment results should be summarized so that they are accessible and usable by end users and stakeholders. Identify any resources that will be aggregated or developed by the project, either as part of, or as a complement to, the required integrated assessment report.

4) **Team** – Identify each team member and explain how the team and its expertise are well qualified to implement the project, including the collaborative approach. Describe the role(s) of the various team members; include a project lead (someone who ensures all elements of the project are being implemented), a technical lead, and a collaboration lead. Note: the project lead can also serve as the technical lead or the collaboration lead. Two-page resumes for all team members must be included as an appendix.

5) **Budget Estimate** – Provide an estimated total budget request for the project. **Please provide only the total budget figure in the pre-proposal.** When developing the budget estimate, be sure to take into consideration all potential project costs,
including data management if applicable\(^3\), personnel, fringe benefits, equipment, supplies, travel, contractual costs, and indirect costs. If invited to submit a full proposal, a detailed budget and budget narrative will be required; the total request in this detailed budget may not exceed the budget estimate in the pre-proposal.

**Appendices:**

1) **Timeline** – Using the timeline template found on the application website ([http://graham.umich.edu/media/files/2016-NERRS-Science-Collaborative-Research-IA-Timeline-Template.xlsx](http://graham.umich.edu/media/files/2016-NERRS-Science-Collaborative-Research-IA-Timeline-Template.xlsx)), identify anticipated start and end dates of the proposed work. Identify significant project tasks and activities. The timeline must include completion of the final project outputs. Project start date should be November 1, 2016 or later, and the end date can be up to two calendar years later.

2) **Resumes** – Two-page resumes for each team member are required. Resumes will be used by pre-proposal review panelists to determine whether the team has the requisite technical and collaborative skills to undertake the project successfully.

3) **Reviewers** – Please identify 3-4 qualified technical reviewers who could review your project if invited to submit a full proposal.

4) **Other supporting documents** – Up to 5 pages of supporting documents may be included as appendices.

\(^3\) For budget allocation guidance, it is anticipated that at least 10% to 15% of the overall budget should go to support data management activities.
Review Process

The review process for both collaborative research projects and integrated assessments is as follows:

1) **Minimum requirements assessment** – Science Collaborative staff will review all submitted pre-proposals to ensure that they meet the requirements as described in this RFP, including all pre-proposal elements and adherence to the header requirements.

2) **Pre-proposal panel review:**
   
   a) **Written review** – Pre-proposals that meet the minimum requirements will be reviewed by a panel of experts in collaborative research and/or estuarine science representing diverse geographic regions of the U.S. Each research and IA pre-proposal will be matched to non-conflicted panel members who will conduct written reviews. In the written review, reviewers will be asked to rate and provide comments according to the pre-proposal evaluation criteria listed below.

   b) **Panel meeting** – Panelists will convene for an in-person panel meeting to discuss the outcomes of the written reviews and the pre-proposal assessments provided by relevant reserve managers. The goal of this meeting
will be to identify the top pre-proposals to advance in the competition.
Applicants will receive a brief summary of the panel discussion along with
the blinded written reviews.

3) **Invitations to submit full proposals** – Based on the recommendations of the panel,
a subset of pre-proposals will be invited to submit full proposals.

4) **Written full proposal technical review** – Collaboration and subject matter experts
will conduct written technical reviews of invited full proposals. These technical
reviewers are individuals who are not sitting on the panel at the pre-proposal stage.
The technical review will consist of written evaluation by experts from the specific
content area of the proposed work and collaboration practitioners with experience
working on natural resource issues. Reviewers will be asked to rate each proposal
according to the evaluation criteria provided in the full proposal requirements.

5) **Panel consultation** – The panel convened at the pre-proposal stage will be
consulted to consider the written technical reviews and which proposals to invite to
the full proposal panel meeting.

6) **Invitations to full proposal panel meeting** – Invitations to the full proposal panel
meeting will be based on the outcomes of the written technical reviews, reserve
manager assessments, and consultation with the panel.

7) **Full proposal panel meeting** – The panel will be convened in-person to hear
virtual presentations from invited teams. The panel will consist of the pre-proposal
panelists plus non-conflicted NERRS representatives. Project end users MUST be
available to answer questions from the panel; likewise, team members should be
prepared to answer any questions regarding the more technical aspects of the
project. Panelists will identify the strongest projects as input to a final Science
Collaborative program decision.

8) **Response to panel** – Finalists will work with the Science Collaborative to address
any specific questions or clarifications requested by the review panel.

9) **Funding notifications** – Final decisions will be made by Science Collaborative staff,
with input from the NOAA program officer, based on the recommendations of the
panel and available budget. Funding notifications are expected in August 2016.

**Pre-proposal Evaluation Criteria**

Pre-proposals must comply with all submission instructions and guidelines to be
considered for funding. They will be evaluated based on how well they meet the following,
equally weighted, criteria:

- **Management Need**: The pre-proposal demonstrates a comprehensive understanding
  of the issue, and clearly articulates and addresses at least one [reserve management need](#) as confirmed by the relevant reserve manager(s).
• **Responsiveness to End User(s):** The pre-proposal identifies and clearly articulates how planned outputs will be used within the context of the described management need.

• **Approach:** The approach is appropriate for the problem being addressed, integrates the end user(s), and is likely to produce the planned outputs. Integrated assessment pre-proposals must identify and demonstrate access to appropriate data sources for the planned analyses.

• **Team:** The team has the appropriate expertise and experience for the proposed technical methods and end user integration.

• **Potential Impact:** The proposed process and outputs are feasible and likely to lead to the identified outcomes.

**Environmental Compliance Review**

Applicants should be aware of the following environmental compliance requirements:

NOAA requires that, prior to award, every Science Collaborative project recommended for funding undergo review for potential impacts to the environment and/or cultural resources. This initial review process by NOAA takes a minimum of 30 days.

Projects that are identified by NOAA as potentially impacting the environment and/or cultural resources e.g., involve field work, and/or are conducted in areas where historic or archeological artifacts might be present, will require further review by the agency. NOAA will be reviewing for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act related to essential fish habitat (EFH). If the proposed project is placing fixed structures in the environment, consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may also be required. NHPA, ESA, and EFH reviews take a minimum of 30 days to complete, but can often take 60 to 90 days.

**Guidance to Applicants**

At this pre-proposal stage, please keep the timelines above in mind when determining your project start dates. **All applicants should plan for a minimum 30-day initial review process by NOAA; this process will be initiated immediately after funding notifications.** If you are invited to submit a full proposal and you anticipate that your proposal will require further review by NOAA, you will be encouraged to include a detailed description of the field sampling methods (if applicable) along with a map showing the location of the each field site including the latitude and longitude location of each site in your proposal; you do **NOT** need to include these items in your pre-proposal.

Questions regarding this requirement should be directed to Dwight Trueblood (603-862-3580, Dwight.Trueblood@noaa.gov).
Proprietary Information & Intellectual Property

Applicants should be aware that the disclosure of patentable ideas, trade secrets, and privileged, confidential, commercial, or financial information can hinder an applicant’s chances to secure patents, trademarks, or copyrights.

Proprietary information of this kind should only be included in proposals when it is necessary to convey an understanding of the proposed project. Applicants must mark proprietary information clearly in the proposal with appropriate labels, such as, “The following is (proprietary or confidential) information that (proposing entity) requests not be released to persons outside the NERRS Science Collaborative, except for purposes of review and evaluation.”

Please protect your intellectual property rights at the pre-proposal preparation stage as appropriate. This will allow you to speak freely about ideas and avoid the inadvertent loss of intellectual property rights. You should contact your institution’s technology transfer or intellectual property office to determine the best way to protect your intellectual property.

Questions Regarding this Request for Proposals?

Question and Answer Webinars

The Science Collaborative will host question and answer webinars at the following times:

- December 17, 2015 at 2pm EST
- January 12, 2016 at 12pm EST

The purpose of these webinars is to provide an opportunity for applicants to ask questions about this RFP and the application process. Audio recordings, questions, and responses from the webinars will be posted online at http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding/research-ia.

To register for the December 17 webinar, go to

To register for the January 12 webinar, go to

Email

The Science Collaborative will accept and reply to written questions regarding this request for proposals until January 28, 2016. Questions should be submitted to NERRS-info@umich.edu.
**Phone**

The Science Collaborative will also accept questions via phone regarding this request for proposals. Questions should be directed to Melissa Zaksek (734-763-0034) or Maeghan Brass (734-763-0727).

**Question and Answer Record**

Responses to all questions, without reference to project specifics, will be posted on a rolling basis for all interested applicants to view online at [http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding/research-ia](http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/funding/research-ia).

**Other Information**

More information about the NERRS Science Collaborative can be found at [http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs](http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs).