

Interventions and Communication Strategies to Reduce Health Risks of Wildland Fire Smoke Exposures RFA Informational Webinar

Questions and Answers October 29, 2020

Question: Is it acceptable if the intervention is represented by a technical solution that is from the private sector?

Answer: Whether a solution comes for the private or public sector has no bearing on the acceptability of proposed research. For the purposes of research involvement, however, private, profit-making companies may serve as consultants according to the rules stated at Section IV.C.7.b (6).

Question: Are clinical interventions eligible?

Answer: Clinical interventions are eligible.

Question: What is considered a doctorate in a field relevant to this RFA?

Answer: We interpret this broadly. If you feel your experience and expertise are relevant to the research for which we request applications, you should apply. Part of the peer review is to evaluate investigator experience.

Here are some examples of relevant fields for this RFA: Communications, Psychology, Sociology, Engineering, Fluid Dynamics, Air Filtration, Epidemiology, Emergency Management, etc.

Question: Are references to be included in the 15-page research plan?

Answer: Please see Section IV.C.6 (f) of the funding notice: "References: References cited are in addition to other page limits (e.g., research plan, quality assurance statement)."

Question: Is this a one-time funding opportunity or will there be subsequent offerings in later years?

Answer: The Science to Achieve Results (STAR) grants program is contingent on budget appropriation from Congress. To ensure fairness in grant competition, we cannot provide information on topics for potential future opportunities.

Question: Do we have access to a detailed scoring system that will be used to score the projects?

Answer: Scoring systems for Peer Review and Relevancy Review are provided in Section V.A (starting on page 44) and Section V.B (starting on page 46) of the RFA, respectively.

Question: What specific target audiences do you envision the content from these projects would be created for? (i.e. government officials, community leaders, etc.)

Answer: The target audiences are anyone who can make use of the expected outputs, as described in section I.D the RFA:

Expected outputs include reports, presentations, and peer-reviewed journal publications describing improved understanding of what actions are effective for reducing health impacts related to wildland smoke exposure; what behavioral, technical, and practical aspects influence their effectiveness; and how best to communicate these actions to various groups. Additionally, outputs that are readily transferable to practical application are also expected; these may include outreach and communication materials such as sample social media messages, infographics, etc.

Please note also in the peer review criteria, Section V.A., that applications are evaluated on “the degree to which that project results...will be disseminated to enhance scientific and technological understanding.”

Question: Are the scoring criteria different for the early investigator awards? Are career development and mentorship considered within this track?

Answer: The scoring criteria are the same for regular and early career awards. The criteria for Peer Review and Relevancy Review are provided in Section V.A (starting on page 44) and Section V.B (starting on page 46) of the RFA, respectively. Career development and mentorship are not part of the criteria. Note that regular and early career are separate funding competitions (EPA-G2021-STAR-G1 for regular award and EPA-G2021-STAR-G2 for early career awards), and applications for each competition will be ranked independently, according to the criteria and ranking system described in sections V.A and V.B.

Question: Can a federal national lab be a subcontractor to provide a technology for this award?

Answer: No, but applicants may direct funds to a national lab with some restrictions. Below is an excerpt from page 18 of the RFA:

National laboratories funded by Federal Agencies (Federally-Funded Research and Development Centers, “FFRDCs”) may not apply. FFRDC employees may cooperate or collaborate with eligible applicants within the limits imposed by applicable legislation and regulations. They may participate in planning, conducting, and analyzing the research directed by the applicant, but may not direct projects on behalf of the applicant organization. The institution, organization, or governance receiving the award may provide funds through its assistance agreement from the EPA to an FFRDC for research personnel, supplies, equipment, and other expenses directly related to the research. However, salaries for permanent FFRDC employees may not be provided through this mechanism.

Question: When will the outcome of the award be announced?

Answer: We anticipate the awards will be announced around September 2021.

Question: Can you confirm if FFRDC's are eligible to apply or are they allowed to be collaborators under a University PI?

Answer: Federally-Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs) are **NOT** eligible to apply. Eligible applicants may purchase some supplies and services from FFRDCs, with restriction on the role of FFRDC employees and what EPA funds may be used for. Please see the excerpt below from page 18 of the RFA:

National laboratories funded by Federal Agencies (Federally-Funded Research and Development Centers, “FFRDCs”) may not apply. FFRDC employees may cooperate or collaborate with eligible applicants within the limits imposed by applicable legislation and regulations. They may participate in planning, conducting, and analyzing the research directed by the applicant, but may not direct projects on behalf of the applicant organization. The institution, organization, or governance receiving the award may provide funds through its assistance agreement from the EPA to an FFRDC for research personnel, supplies, equipment, and other expenses directly related to the research. However, salaries for permanent FFRDC employees may not be provided through this mechanism.

Question: Does the Human Subjects IRB approval have to be initiated before submitting our grant proposal?

Answer: No, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval does NOT have to be initiated before submitting the proposal to EPA. Note that all proposals need to provide a Human Subjects Research Statement (HSRS) as described in Section IV.C.6 (c) (starting on page 29) of the RFA.

Question: Can we apply in partnership with a fiscal agent?

Answer: You may accept cost share from the outside, and if this organization is an eligible one it may be a subawardee. If it is a private, profit-making company then it may serve as a consultant according to the rules stated at Section IV.C.7.b (6).

Question: In the RFA, EPA also requires that grant applicants adequately describe environmental outputs and outcomes to be achieved under assistance agreements. What would be an example of this?

Answer: Please refer to the following link provided in the RFA: <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57007a1-epas-policy-environmental-results-under-epa-assistance-agreements>, and the following excerpts from Section I.D of the RFA:

Note to applicant: The term “output” means an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work products related to an environmental goal or objective, that will be produced or provided over a period of time or by a specified date. The term “outcome” means the result, effect or consequence that will occur from carrying out an environmental program or activity that is related to an environmental or programmatic goal or objective.

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Expected outputs include reports, presentations, and peer-reviewed journal publications describing improved understanding of what actions are effective for reducing health impacts related to wildland smoke exposure; what behavioral, technical, and practical aspects influence their effectiveness; and how best to communicate these actions to various groups. Additionally, outputs that are readily transferable to practical application are also expected; these may include outreach and communication materials such as sample social media messages, infographics, etc. The expected outcomes EPA anticipates from this research include improved understanding of health risks related to wildland fire smoke, enhanced interventions to reduce the health risks, improved methods to communicate risks and ultimately reduced health burdens associated with wildland fire smoke exposure.

Question: Is there a preference for either a novel pilot intervention study vs widescale intervention study of a common, low-cost device?

Answer: There is no predefined preference. Applications are evaluated for overall quality of proposed research according to the Peer Review criteria (Section V.A) and Relevancy Review criteria (Section V.B) stated in the RFA.

Question: Is a logic model an expected part of the proposal?

Answer: No. A logic model may be included but is not expected. Applications are evaluated for overall quality of proposed research according to the Peer Review criteria (Section V.A) and Relevancy Review criteria (Section V.B) stated in the RFA.

Question: Are there preferred deliverables for this? E.g. journal articles, public-facing presentations, guidebooks for government policymakers, etc.

Answer: Please see the following from Section I.D of the RFA:

Expected outputs include reports, presentations, and peer-reviewed journal publications describing improved understanding of what actions are effective for reducing health impacts related to wildland smoke exposure; what behavioral, technical, and practical aspects influence their effectiveness; and how best to communicate these actions to various groups. Additionally, outputs that are readily transferable to practical application are also expected; these may include outreach and communication materials such as sample social media messages, infographics, etc.

Please note also in the peer review criteria, Section V.A., that applications are evaluated on “the degree to which that project results ... will be disseminated to enhance scientific and technological understanding.”

Question: Is it possible for EPA to make those entities that inquire about the RFA known to each other so that collaborations could be developed?

Answer: No. To ensure fairness in grant competition, EPA cannot facilitate collaborations between potential applicants. Section I.F of the RFA states “Agency policy and ethical considerations prevent EPA technical staff and managers from providing applicants with information that may create an unfair competitive advantage. Consequently, EPA employees will not review, comment, advise and/or provide technical assistance to applicants preparing applications in response to EPA RFAs. EPA employees cannot endorse any particular application.”

Research/Project Focused Questions:

Question: The research areas discuss evaluations of effectiveness for wildfire smoke exposure interventions. Would proposals that focus on the safety of various interventions as opposed to the effectiveness be considered?

Answer: Effectiveness is stated in both research areas as described in Section I.D of the RFA. Proposed research is responsive to one or both of the research areas described in Section I.D. of the RFA, as evaluated by Peer Review (Section V.A).

Question: I'm curious about the relevance of my idea for this RFA. I have a concept for lightweight PPE that would be issued to wildland firefighters. Would an engineering development effort of a device like this be relevant to this RFA or are you looking for more community level research?

Answer: We cannot discuss specific research topics. Proposed research is considered responsive to one or both of the research areas described in Section I.D. of the RFA, as evaluated by Peer Review (Section V.A).

Question: Airflow patterns in a space can affect the performance of air cleaning technology performance. Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) analysis can help optimize performance. Can CFD analysis be included as a part of this research?

Answer: Yes, if the proposed research is responsive to one or both of the research areas described in Section I.D. of the RFA, as evaluated by Peer Review (Section V.A).

Question: Can you repeat the kinds of outcomes you are most interested in? Let's say we test various comm strategies to reduce risk for migrant families?

Answer: Please refer to Section I.D. of the RFA:

The expected outcomes EPA anticipates from this research include improved understanding of health risks related to wildland fire smoke, enhanced interventions to reduce the health risks, improved methods to communicate risks and actions, and ultimately reduced health burdens associated with wildland fire smoke exposure.

Question: We work with fire operations managers who use prescribed fire to reduce wildfire risk throughout the year, would this RFA allow for that aspect of reducing smoke exposure as part of the community response component?

Answer: Yes, if the proposed research is responsive to one or both of the research areas described in Section I.D. of the RFA, as evaluated by Peer Review (Section V.A).

Peer Review: Note the Peer Review Panel will be a multi-disciplinary (communications, engineering, epidemiology, etc.) group of 3 professionals. As not all will be in the same profession as the applicant, keep in mind when writing that you should use sufficient plain-language explanation in the application to convince the various experts of its scientific merits.