

Frequently Asked Questions

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

Updated October 28, 2024

Questions from Post-LOI Informational Webinar on October 23, 2024

Stakeholder Engagement

Q: Can we allocate funds in the budget for stakeholder engagement (workshops, surveys, etc.)?

A: The answer is yes, absolutely. This is a very important component of the projects, and allocating a portion of the budget to this activity is completely acceptable.

Q: When you talk about engaging stakeholders and partners, does this refer specifically to individuals such as water managers on the ground, or can it also include other NOAA-affiliated scientists we've previously collaborated with?

A: The stakeholders and partners that we are interested in are those that would be the users of the outcomes of your work. So if there is an indicator/index that you are targeting to improve, who would be the users of that information in drought assessment? For example, depending on the project it could be a state drought task force, or if it is sector-focused it could be representatives from those sectors such as in your example—water managers on the ground. The aim of this competition is to support work that will result in applications, not just an academic exercise or scientific paper. The results should be applicable to drought assessment and decisions, and those decisions should be identified in the proposal stage of the project.

Q: Is it better to include multiple sectors or a single sector for stakeholder engagement?

A: This will be completely dependent on the proposed project. If the project is focused on one sector, it would not make sense to arbitrarily bring in other sectors. If you're working with an indicator that's broadly applicable you might engage multiple sectors. One approach will not take priority over the other in terms of competitiveness.

Q: Are there specific types of stakeholders that are prioritized (federal versus state government versus nonprofit versus private sector)? What about types of decisions? Is state-level monitoring, i.e., like a state climatologist, considered competitive or do you prefer to prioritize more on-the-ground decisions such as from water managers? And in general, what defines a decision?

A: We are not prioritizing any specific type of stakeholder. It's really going to be driven by the scope of your project, geographical focus of your project, sectoral focus. What we are looking for is that you have considered who and how the outcomes of your project will be applied post-project. We also aren't prioritizing types of decisions. How a decision is defined will be specific to the type of indicator or index you're trying to improve, the kind of information you're providing. It could go into things like state drought assessment or drought assessment for a specific location or community or sector. It could be that it's informing decisions that a water manager or resource manager would make. But we just want to see that you've thought through how the outcomes of your project would be applied.

Q: Is it preferred to have one letter of support from a boundary entity that can assist with stakeholder engagement or multiple letters from individual stakeholders from multiple sectors?

A: We want to be respectful of the time it takes both you and those writing the letters of support given they are not required. That said, given what I have seen in panels, I would say perhaps the letter from the centralized collaborator would be great and then, if you might choose a couple individual stakeholders who may be particularly involved and demonstrate a clear need and intent to use the outcomes of your work, that spread would be nice. But don't feel the need to ask this of all potential partners/stakeholders.

Q: One of the stated goals is for the improved drought indices to be used in drought monitoring. How do we interface with the drought early warning systems and the U.S. Drought Monitor to integrate improved indicators into these monitoring efforts?

A: Regarding the NIDIS Drought Early Warning Systems (DEWS), once the projects are awarded, you will have the opportunity to work with the DEWS coordinators at NIDIS. At that time, you can tap into their expertise and their familiarity with the partners in their regions. You can indicate the desire to work with coordinators as part of your application, but they cannot be part of the application development. Their engagement will occur once the awards are made.

Regarding the U.S. Drought Monitor (USDM), it is not necessary for each project to engage with USDM, or individual authors, unless there is a specific reason to do so. Ultimately the USDM is a consumer of information, thus if there are improved indicators available, USDM would integrate those into their drought assessment process. You may consider other levels of engagement to ensure that your improved indicators are informing USDM efforts. For example, if you are working on an indicator important to a state or region you may propose to work with state-based groups that are assessing drought and providing feedback to the USDM.

Q: Can you give an example of successful stakeholder engagement?

A: Yes, in the past we have had research projects that have set up a small advisory group who they engage to understand needs and work together to meet needs. There are also projects who are touching base with existing groups—state drought task forces or drought monitoring committees, other existing communities of practice, water or resource management entities. We also have projects where there are a couple key members of the project team, even as funded partners, who are users of the outcomes. Starting with the types of decisions or assessments you are hoping to inform and understanding what information is needed to improve those is a starting point, then identifying the right partners, and building the relationships needed to work together is key.

Dissemination of Products & Outcomes

Q: At the end of the project, how ready do the drought indicators need to be for stakeholder use?

A: They should be ready for stakeholder use as this is an applied research program. As such, we encourage proposals to explore how the results will be disseminated in a way that they are available to be incorporated into drought assessment. This is not to say that an iterative process for improvement cannot continue, nor is this to say that foundational research will not be considered, but it must introduce tangible improvements to drought assessment decisions today. Those applications that do this will score higher than those that might one day (in the future) result in an improvement to some indicator performance.

Q: Is there a preferred mode to disseminate new information discovered through the project, a new methodology or advanced knowledge?

A: No, there is not a preferred mode. Obviously, scientific publication is great to get it out in the peer-reviewed literature, but that is not enough. If the result is an improved drought indicator/index, it will need to be made publicly available in a sustained way such that it can be found and used. This could be through websites or working with the existing data producers to incorporate it into their processing. The ideal mode for dissemination will depend on what the outcome of the project is, who the target audience is, and what their trusted sources of information are. In the past, projects have created websites and dashboards to share information depending on that target audience; these have been great, but have not always been sustainable after the grant funding ends. Submitted proposals will not need a full product plan, but should indicate that the PIs are thinking about dissemination and that you have some thoughts and ideas on continuity for delivering the information. Dissemination would also include metadata and information on how the product should be used (strengths, weaknesses, caveats of use, etc.) The dissemination of results is something we can discuss with successful applicants as the project kicks off, but the project team should have initial thoughts on this to build upon. The U.S. Drought Portal (www.drought.gov) can also be used to amplify the existence of a product.

Q: By drought indicator, I assume you mean drought index because drought indicators as physical variables need more fundamental improvements in their measurement itself as opposed to indices created with non-stationarity incorporated.

A: So, it could be either. Projects that examine the indicators themselves, how those are changing, and how we might extract information that is better informing drought assessment in that regard are acceptable. Focus could also be on improving the performance of indexes by accounting for non-stationarity.

Application Components (DEIJ Statement/Budget)

Q: What do I do about the required DEIJ statement if my state/institution has laws/policies against such activities?

A: I would like to encourage anyone who is in this situation to take advantage of the [“office hours”](#) and sign up for a 15-minute appointment with me so that we can discuss the nuances of your situation. You can also reach out directly to the program officer for the competition, [Britt Parker](#).

Q: The proposals are to include travel to an all-PI meeting. Could you clarify if this refers to a meeting attended only by the lead PI from each project, or if all PIs involved in each project are expected to attend? Do you know where the meeting will be and how long it will take? We will need to allocate grant funds to cover the costs associated with attending this all-PI meeting. Is this correct?

A: For our last couple grant cohorts we have done two all-PI meetings, one at the beginning and one at the end of the grant life cycle. These have been very well received but they have been virtual and we have had feedback that it would be great to do the final all-PI meeting in person. We will work with the grant cohort on exact timing and location but for now please use Boulder, CO (where NIDIS is headquartered) and 3 days to create a budget. We would like at least the lead PI to attend. Whether time/travel is budgeted for co-PIs or early career scientists/post docs to attend can be determined by your overall project budget, other scientific meetings you would like to present the work at, etc. We are not opposed to more than one person attending, but would want to see a balance in the budget.

Q: There is a mismatch in the general instructions associated with federal budget form SF-424A and the guidance in the NOFO (page 11); which instructions take precedence and which should I follow?

A: The guidance in the NOFO on page 11, number (11) federal budget forms. NOAA requests the budget broken out by year, which is different from the instructions on the form, which asks for a task/activity break out. Please break down your budget by year. Please also note that ALL budget numbers throughout the application need to match and be rounded to the nearest whole dollar. Note if we receive a SF-424A broken out by task/activity, we will still review your application - this is just an issue that we have seen again and again so we want to flag it for

everyone now as it saves back and forth if your application is successful through the process. It also makes panel evaluation of your budget easier.

Application Process

Q: What is the official competition name we should have on the title page?

A: FY25 NIDIS Coping with Drought: Understanding and Assessing Drought in a Changing Climate is fine.

Q: Can you clarify what the difference is between a co-applicant and a subawardee?

A: There are two ways that you can submit a project with multiple institutions—the primary applicant can apply and include sub-awards to other institutions (let's say 1 primary with 2 subawards) **or** the 3 partners in the first example could each put in a separate application for their portion of the budget, which is referred to co-applicants. If that latter is the case, then there is guidance as to what parts of those applications should match and which should be different. NOTE that there should still be a primary applicant who includes a holistic budget for the whole project. If you are going this latter route I would definitely take advantage of the 15-minute office hour appointments to talk through the application requirements.

Q: Do all funded partners have to be signed up and have an account in SAM.gov, grants.gov, and eRA Commons?

A: It depends. If you are submitting a primary application and have subawards, then you and your institution are responsible for submitting the application and then disseminating the funds through subawards. In this case your institution needs to have current accounts and takes responsibility for submitting the application. If you are doing the co-applicant route (e.g., three funded partner institutions are each putting in an application for their portion of the project budget) then yes, all three of those institutions need to be registered in all three of those systems and each institution is responsible for ensuring their application is submitted so that the project, as a whole, can be appropriately reviewed.

Q: Is there a specific budget template we need to use?

A: Yes, when you go to Grants.gov and to the funding opportunity, there are templates for the SF-424, 424A, and other required federal forms. And then it would definitely benefit everyone to review the [NOAA Grants Management Division Budget Narrative Guidance](#) that also provides some template information on how to put together your budget narrative. If you have any issues finding the federal forms please reach out.

Q: Will the applications be submitted in Grants.gov or eRA Commons?

A: The process will start with Grants.gov and proceed to eRA Commons. We are providing guidance ([Applicant Guidance for the New Application Process](#)) that describes the new process

and how to troubleshoot common issues. Please read these carefully and again do not wait until the last minute to start the application process.

Other Questions

Q: Can you distill down the feedback in terms of what is really important to consider in a full application?

A: Yes, these are the key questions to ask yourself as you prepare your application. The answers should be obvious to a review panelist.

1. Which drought indicator/indice(s) are being targeted and how will they be improved in the face of a changing climate?
2. Who are the beneficiaries of this work; how can they be engaged through the life cycle of the project?
3. How will outcomes be disseminated such that they can be incorporated and improve drought assessment?

Q: Is it okay to focus on a specific region versus national?

A: Yes, the geographical scope will be driven by the project. We have not specified any geographical requirements in the NOFO.

Q: If I still have questions about my Letter of Intent feedback, can I talk to the program officer for the competition?

A: Yes, please use [this link](#) to sign up for a 15-minute time slot to discuss your LOI feedback or ask any application process related questions. If none of the times work, please reach out to [Britt Parker](#).

Q: Can you provide the links to the key documents for this competition?

A: Yes, see below.

- FY25 Coping with Drought NOFO: <https://cpo.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/NOAA-OAR-CPO-2025-27758.pdf>
- FY25 Coping with Drought Information Sheet: https://cpo.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/FY25_NIDIS_CWD_Information_Sheet_Drought_Assessment_and_Climate.pdf
- FY25 Coping with Drought Applicant Checklist: https://cpo.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/FY25_Compition_Checklist_NIDIS.pdf
- Applicant Guidance for New Application Process: https://cpo.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Application_guidance.pdf

- NOAA Grants Management Division Budget Narrative Guidance: https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/document/2019/Jun/gmd_budget_narrative_guidance_-_05-24-2017_final.pdf
- NOAA Climate Program Office FY25 Coping with Drought Competition Page: <https://cpo.noaa.gov/understanding-and-assessing-drought-in-a-changing-climate-nidis/>
- NIDIS FY25 Coping with Drought Competition Page: <https://www.drought.gov/drought-research/coping-with-drought-competition>
- Assessing Drought in a Changing Climate Technical Memorandum: <https://www.drought.gov/drought-in-action/drought-assessment-changing-climate-report>

Questions from Informational Webinar on August 22, 2024

Eligibility, Partners, Project Team

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

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

Q: Can International Organizations apply to this competition?

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

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

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

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

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

Q: Will any preference be given for supporting students?

A: Preference, no, but it's extremely common to see a grant team that includes postdocs and graduate students. This could come into evaluation in terms of diversity and inclusion and including students and early career scientists in the project team, but I would not say any preference is given.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: Could the proposal include NIDIS personnel?

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

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

A: NOAA, as a federal agency, cannot grant funds to another federal agency. However, we can work with federal agencies through other funding mechanisms. Federal lead investigators who wish to apply to this Announcement of Opportunity must prepare a proposal according to the NOFO guidelines and submit the proposal to the program manager directly, instead of to Grants.gov. Federal co-investigators must submit a proposal identical to the proposal lead's but with personalized budget information. If your application involves a federal agency, I encourage you to reach out early to ensure an understanding of the process and nuances to the funding mechanisms, etc.

Geography, Scale, Topic Focus

Q: Is there any geographic area focus or restrictions?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Focus of the Competition

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Budget

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

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

Q: Do you allow course buyout in the budget?

A: No, at this time we do not.

General

Q: How many proposals do you expect to receive?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- NOFO: <https://cpo.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/NOAA-OAR-CPO-2025-27758.pdf>
- Information Sheet: https://cpo.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/FY25_NIDIS_CWD_Information_Sheet_Drought_Assessment_and_Climate.pdf
- Applicant Checklist: https://cpo.noaa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/FY25_Competition_Checklist_NIDIS.pdf
- Applicant Guidance: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2024-05/NOAA-Fisheries-New-Application-Process-508.pdf>

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

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