



NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION (NASA)

**GUIDEBOOK FOR PROPOSERS
FOR THE PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF
UNSOLICITED PROPOSALS**

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PREFACE

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA or Agency) encourages the submission of unique and innovative proposals that will further the Agency's mission. While the vast majority of proposals are solicited via a publicly-available solicitation, a small number of unsolicited proposals that are not appropriate for submission in response to those solicitations, and yet are still relevant to NASA, are reviewed and funded each year. NASA's solicitations are published on the [NASA Solicitation and Proposal Integrated Review and Evaluation System \(NSPIRES\)](#).

This document provides guidelines for the preparation of unsolicited proposals for those proposers that wish to convey their creative methods or approaches to NASA. These guidelines apply to all unsolicited proposals, regardless of the NASA Center or Agency program for which they are intended.

As part of the NSPIRES submission process, proposers are asked to complete limited program-specific data questions. These questions support internal routing, compliance screening, and identification of appropriate technical reviewers.

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Important Caveat to Potential Proposers

Before any effort is expended in preparing a proposal, potential proposers must review:

- The current version of the [NASA Strategic Plan](#) and documents from the specific Mission Directorate, office, or program/project for which the proposal is intended (e.g., the Science Plan, the Strategic Space Technology Investment Plan, and the Voyages: Charting the Course for Sustainable Human Space Exploration) to determine if the work planned is sufficiently relevant to current goals to warrant a formal submission. NASA will return, without review, any proposal that it determines is not relevant to the office to which it was sent or if funding is unavailable.
- Current opportunities on NSPIRES to determine if a solicitation or Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) including those described in the NASA Grant and Cooperative Agreement Manual (GCAM), Appendix F, already exists to which the potential project can be proposed. NASA will return, without review, any proposal that may have been responsive to a recent or current solicitation or one that is planned. Missing a deadline for a recently-issued solicitation does not allow a late proposal subsequently to be submitted as an unsolicited proposal.
- Current awards (e.g., by doing key word searches at [USAspending.gov](#), [Research.gov](#)) to learn what, if any, related work is already funded by NASA. Such preparation reduces the risk of redundancy, improves implementation of the proposed effort, and may result in better collaboration between the potential proposer and the Agency.

1. ELIGIBILITY

1.1 Eligibility Requirements and Restrictions

Any category of organization or institution may submit an unsolicited proposal. There is no restriction on teaming arrangements involving U.S. organizations, including teaming with Government personnel. However, each proposal must be a separate, stand-alone, complete document for evaluation purposes. Any proposal that involves more than one organization must describe the distinct contributions expected from any participating investigator or organization, including facilities or equipment that will be required. When multiple organizations are involved in a single proposal, Government labs generally are funded directly. Otherwise, a single award is made to the submitting organization. Simultaneous submission of related proposals from cooperating organizations is permitted if each proposal indicates the nature of the relationship among the proposals. Such simultaneous submissions may result in parallel awards.

NASA's policy is to conduct research with foreign entities on a cooperative, no-exchange-of-funds basis. Generally, NASA does not fund foreign research proposals from foreign organizations or research efforts by individuals at foreign organizations as part of U.S. research proposals. This includes subawards from U.S. organizations to investigators at foreign organizations and travel by individuals at foreign organizations to conduct research, fieldwork, and present at conferences. Rather, each country agrees to bear its own costs of carrying out their respective responsibilities (i.e., the work to be done by team members affiliated with organizations in their country). The direct purchase of supplies and/or services, which do not constitute research, from non-U.S. sources by U.S. award recipients is permitted. Proposals from foreign entities must be submitted in the same format as U.S. proposals and in U.S. dollars. All information must be typed and in the English language. Proposals must emphasize the unique nature of the project and/or the unique expertise of the proposer. Foreign proposals will undergo the same evaluation and selection process as U.S. proposals.

There are special restrictions on NASA regarding the People's Republic of China. In accordance with annual appropriations acts, NASA is prohibited from funding any work that involves the bilateral participation, collaboration, or coordination with China or any Chinese-owned company or entity, at the prime recipient level or at any subrecipient level, whether funded or performed under a no-exchange-of-funds basis. Accordingly, proposals must not include bilateral participation, collaboration, or coordination with China or any Chinese-owned company or entity, whether funded or performed under a no-exchange-of-funds basis. Proposals involving bilateral participation, collaboration, or coordination in any way with China or any Chinese-owned company, whether funded or performed under a no-exchange-of-funds basis, will be ineligible for award.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) include machine-based systems or models that, for a given set of human-defined objectives, perform tasks such as analysis, prediction, recommendation, decision support, autonomy, or content generation. Proposers must identify whether their submission includes, or is reasonably expected to include, the development, training, procurement, or use of AI/ML (including generative AI)- whether as a primary capability or incidental to the proposed work- and, if so, provide a brief description of the intended use, safeguards, human oversight, and responsible AI considerations.

1.2 Defining an Unsolicited Proposal:

An unsolicited proposal is a written submission to an agency on the proposer's initiative for the purpose of obtaining an award from the Government, and it is not in response to a formal or informal agency request.

To be eligible as an unsolicited proposal, a submission must:

- Be of high scientific and/or technical merit, including but not limited to methods, approaches, concepts, or advanced technologies; demonstrate adequate qualifications, capabilities, and experience of the proposed team, facilities, or other capabilities of the proposer;
- Be relevant to NASA generally and specifically to the NASA office to which the proposal is directed.
- Have reasonable and realistic proposed costs; and
- Not be a recent, current, or pending proposal submitted in response to a NASA solicitation or NOFO (refer to the important caveat to potential proposers in the preface of this document).

Moreover, the proposal must contain adequate detail and be clear and organized so that reviewers can easily assess the proposal's responsiveness to the eligibility factors above.

1.3 What Is Not an Unsolicited Proposal

A proposal that fails to meet the definition of an unsolicited proposal or that falls under any of the following categories is not a valid unsolicited proposal:

- Technical correspondence that consists of a written inquiry from an individual, academic researcher, or others that should be addressed to NASA program/project offices, including:
 - Inquiries regarding NASA's interest in research areas,
 - Pre-proposal exploration,
 - General technical inquiries,
 - Concepts or ideas with little or no detail,
 - Unofficial submissions not sent according to the submission instructions in this document, and
 - Research descriptions or suggestions that do not request NASA resources, typically funding.
- Proposals addressing known NASA requirements that should be acquired by a competitive method, such as an offer to perform ordinary tasks (e.g., provide computer facilities or services) or that resemble a response to a current, recent, or pending NASA solicitation.
- Proposals for commercial items that are generally sold to the public.
- Advertising material designed to acquaint the Government with a prospective award recipient's products or potential capabilities.
- Contributions that are concepts, suggestions, or ideas presented to the Government, but the

proposer does not plan to provide further effort on the Government's behalf.

- An invention or discovery that has officially received a patent or is otherwise protected under title 35 of the U.S. Code. If the proposer is an owner of an issued U.S. patent, they may offer NASA a license in the patented invention by writing to the NASA Office of the General Counsel, ATTN: Commercial and Intellectual Property Practice Group, NASA Headquarters, 300 E Street, SW, Washington, DC 20546. Please identify the U.S. patent number in your correspondence. An investigation will then be made to determine the extent of NASA's interest. Note that only U.S. patents will be considered.
- A proposal for a new award or the renewal of an existing award that falls within the scope of an open NASA solicitation or contract. Such proposals must be submitted in response to that solicitation or the Contracting Officer.
- An unsolicited proposal is not an appropriate mechanism to request start-up funds to establish a laboratory.

2. SUBMISSION

2.1 How to Submit

NASA accepts only unsolicited proposals submitted electronically via NSPIRES in response to the unsolicited proposal response structure. After logging into NSPIRES, a prospective proposer will follow the link from "Proposals/NOIs," and then "Create Proposal," choose source "NOFO," click continue, and then click the radio button for "Unsolicited" and proceed from there. As part of the submission process, proposers will answer the program-specific questions on the NSPIRES web pages that will identify the appropriate Proposal Coordinating Office at NASA. Only one version of a proposal must be submitted to NASA. Proposals that duplicate (or that have significant overlap with) a proposal currently under review with NASA must not be submitted.

Electronic proposals must be submitted by one of the officials at the Principal Investigator's (PI's) organization who is authorized to make such a submission; an electronic submission by the authorized organization representative (AOR) serves as the required original signature on the proposal by an authorized official of the proposing organization. Every organization that intends to submit an unsolicited proposal to NASA must be registered in NSPIRES. This registration must be performed by an organization's electronic business point-of-contact in the registered in the System for Award Management (SAM.gov), including a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

Every identified individual expected to have a role in the execution of the proposed effort must be identified on the proposal cover page, using the most appropriate personnel role. Prior to proposal submission via NSPIRES, every individual named on the proposal's electronic cover page form as a team member (even Collaborators) must be registered in NSPIRES and confirm their commitment to that role. Team members will receive an email from NSPIRES indicating that they have been added to the proposal and must log into NSPIRES to corroborate. Through this electronic confirmation process, the organization through which they are participating in the

investigation is also identified to enable organizational conflict of interest checks that are required as part of the evaluation process.

Although any individual may create a proposal and release it to their organization, only a responsible person authorized to represent and obligate the proposer (i.e., the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR). may officially submit a proposal via NSPIRES. For more information about registering an organization in NSPIRES and/or affiliating as an individual with an existing organization.

2.2 When to Submit

There are no specific deadlines for the submission of unsolicited proposals. However, it is strongly recommended that proposals be submitted at least six (6) months in advance of the desired starting date. Near the start of every new Government fiscal year (i.e., October 1 to September 30), a new response structure will be created in NSPIRES, which will begin on October 1 and end on September 30. Proposals must be submitted in the same fiscal year in which they were created. If a proposal is not submitted by the end of the current fiscal year then it may be lost; if this happens, it will have to be resubmitted to the following fiscal year's response structure.

2.3 Revision or Withdrawal

A proposing organization may withdraw its proposal from consideration at any time. If a proposer wishes to submit additional material or a proposal revision, an AOR must withdraw the proposal in NSPIRES and, after revision, resubmit the revised proposal via NSPIRES. The resubmitted proposal will be assigned a new proposal number in NSPIRES. It is important for proposers to note that major proposal revisions will likely delay the evaluation process.

2.4 Interagency Coordination

NASA does not transfer formal submissions to or accept similar submissions from other agencies, except as they may be related to an interagency funding arrangement. Unsolicited proposals submitted to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) are not considered as submissions to NASA since JPL is not a NASA Center but is the Agency's only Federally Funded Research and Development Center.