
TAILORED COLLABORATION PROGRAM PRE-PROPOSAL GUIDELINES AND REQUEST FOR PRE-PROPOSALS

I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Water Research Foundation

The Water Research Foundation (WRF) is the leading research organization advancing the science of all water to meet the evolving needs of its subscribers and the water sector. WRF is a nonprofit educational organization that funds, manages, and publishes research on the technology, operation, and management of drinking water, wastewater, water reuse, and stormwater systems—all in pursuit of ensuring water quality and improving water services to the public.

The Tailored Collaboration Program

The Tailored Collaboration (TC) Program provides an opportunity for subscribing utilities to partner with WRF on research projects that address issues of interest to a significant subgroup of WRF subscribers. The program supports research projects that may address local or regional concerns but are broadly applicable to WRF subscribers. Projects often address innovative ideas that have not been the focus of other WRF programs or that expand upon existing research to determine application potential at a utility.

The unique benefit of this program is that not only are utilities' research funds leveraged, but projects are further enhanced by WRF's independent review process (via a Project Advisory Committee [PAC]), professional project management, and a broad network for sharing research outcomes and deliverables. Applicants may serve as the research organization, conduct the research themselves, select their own contractor to serve as the research organization, or use WRF's competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process to engage a research organization.

The total funds available for the 2024 TC Program is \$2,007,704. Applicants can apply for a 1:1 match of up to \$150,000 of WRF funds. The TC Program uses a two-step application process, including pre-proposals and full proposals. A shortlist of pre-proposal applicants will be invited by WRF to submit full proposals for further review. Pre-proposals—or draft RFPs in cases where applicants plan to use WRF's RFP process—are due by **Monday, June 3, 2024, at 5 pm Eastern Time.**

The estimated timeline for the 2024 Tailored Collaboration Program is as follows:

- **June 3, 2024:** Pre-proposals and draft RFPs due
- **Early August 2024:** Shortlisted applicants invited to prepare full proposals/RFPs
- **Mid-September 2024:** Full proposals/RFPs due
- **Mid-November 2024:** Projects are awarded under the 2024 Tailored Collaboration Program

II. PRE-PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

1. Sponsor Requirements

Each TC pre-proposal must be sponsored by a utility that has paid its WRF subscription as calculated on the most current year's Utility Subscription Worksheet. The Sponsoring Utility may partner with one or more organizations in a pre-proposal.

2. Sponsoring Utility Proposal Submittal Frequency

The Sponsoring Utility is defined as a WRF subscribing utility that initiates a proposed project. There can only be one Sponsoring Utility per pre-proposal; however, multiple subscribers can contribute funds to a project. In the interest of broadening program participation, a utility is limited to sponsoring one project per program cycle. However, a Sponsoring Utility may provide support to other projects (i.e., providing data or some analyses).

3. Project Funding and WRF Fund Matching Guidelines

WRF will provide matching funds for cash contributed by qualifying organizations (e.g., subscribers and contributions approved by the Chief Research Officer [CRO]) to fund the research. WRF will provide a 1:1 match, up to \$150,000, for every \$1 in cash that a subscriber or group of subscribers provides toward the project.

Only organizations that have paid their WRF subscriptions are eligible to have their project's funding matched by WRF. However, organizations that are not eligible to be WRF subscribers (e.g., nonprofit organizations or government agencies) may participate in TC projects as co-funders. Funding contributed by these organizations may qualify for WRF matching funds. Proposing teams must obtain approval from the CRO. Grants and awards from other institutions are not eligible for the cash match.

In order to be eligible for the WRF cash match, all money invested by the sponsor or other co-funder(s) is due to WRF upon execution of the funding agreement. All co-funder(s) shall execute a simple Letter of Agreement (LOA) for their contributions. WRF's disbursement of the project funds shall be subject to WRF first receiving the full corresponding payment from all co-funders.

4. Additional In-Kind Match

There is no minimum in-kind contribution required for TC projects that are sole-sourced (i.e., not using the WRF RFP process), though such contributions are welcome. However, if a TC project will be using the RFP process, a 25% in-kind match will be required from the awarded team. In-kind contributions—such as personnel costs, support services, facilities, and consulting services—are not required to be documented in the pre-proposal. In the event that a team is invited to submit a full proposal, all in-kind contributions should be documented in the budget submittal and accompanied by a letter of commitment from each organization providing in-kind services.

5. Application Review and Selection

TC applications are accepted once per year under a two-step process. An initial pre-proposal or draft RFP of no more than four pages is first submitted for review and screening.¹ WRF's Expert Review Committee (ERC), consisting of WRF staff and industry experts, will review the pre-proposals/draft RFPs and recommend to the Tailored Collaboration Review Committee (TCRC) a shortlist of projects that have the greatest potential impact or outcome. The number of full proposals/RFPs requested will

¹ See Section III for specific requirements. Pre-proposals not meeting these requirements will be automatically disqualified.

be approximately twice the number of projects to be awarded. The review criteria for pre-proposals and draft RFPs are provided in Attachment 3. The TCRC will determine which Sponsoring Utilities will be invited to submit full proposals and full RFPs.

The Sponsoring Utilities and research teams that are not invited to submit full proposals or RFPs can request verbal feedback from WRF staff about the following:

- Strengths and weaknesses of the project concepts and components described in the pre-proposal
- Redundancy or uniqueness when compared to past and ongoing research
- Identification of potential fatal flaws

6. Contract Requirements

For a project selected for funding, a Project Funding Agreement (PFA) must be established between WRF and the Principal Investigator's (PI's) organization. The PI is the person who will have primary responsibility for ensuring that all terms and conditions of the agreement are met. If the Sponsoring Utility is the PI, the PFA will reflect their level of contribution. All co-funding organization(s) will execute a simple co-funding LOA. If a third-party research organization is contracted to do the work, that sub-recipient will enter into a PFA. It is recommended that the Sponsoring Utility, all co-funders, and the PI review the PFA on the WRF website in advance. The PFA can be found at www.waterrf.org/contract-materials.

Prior to submitting a full proposal or RFP, the Sponsoring Utility should verify with each co-funder and the PI (if pre-designated) that the PFA is acceptable to their respective organizations. All funding partners in the research project should ensure that all co-funding contributions will be available before the final execution of the PFA and that the funding is in U.S. dollars—unless prior approval has been received. The PFA must be signed within 45 days of receipt of the draft agreement. Items requiring negotiation must be identified in the proposal on the Co-funding Support Form. The PFA must be signed by the sub-recipient and the PI before WRF can move forward with the project. Projects that are solicited through the RFP process will begin the contracting process using the PFA after the research organization is selected.

WRF encourages research sponsors to involve their legal counsels in the review of the PFA. If there are any significant revisions, expected funding arrangements, timelines, or legal discussions, WRF would like to work with applicants early in the contracting process to avoid delays.

III. GUIDE FOR THE PREPARATION AND SUBMITTAL OF PRE-PROPOSALS/DRAFT RFPs

Pre-proposal Checklist

A Pre-proposal/Draft RFP Checklist (Attachment 2) has been provided to avoid confusion and address questions. Please check off the items on the checklist to show that you are aware of these key points. Although WRF asks that you review this list before the pre-proposal is submitted, all of these items do not need to be completed until the full proposal is submitted. WRF wants to ensure these issues have been discussed and understood during the full proposal's preparation to avoid delays.

Pre-proposal or Draft RFP Preparation

- Pre-proposals must be at least two pages and no more than four pages, including figures, tables, and appendices. The cover sheet (Attachment 1), Pre-proposal Checklist (Attachment 2), résumés/bios (limited to two pages per person), and lists of references are excluded from this page limit.
- Pre-proposals must be formatted for standard letter-size paper with 1-inch margins and font size of at least 11 pt.

Pre-proposal submissions must include:

1. Tailored Collaboration Program Pre-proposal/Draft RFP Cover Sheet (Attachment 1)
2. Project Title
3. Research Objective: Clearly identify the research objective in one or two sentences.
4. Background/Understanding of the Problem: Provide a brief background on the topic and articulate why this research is important and necessary.
5. Technical Approach: Describe the main tasks to be accomplished. This will serve as the basis for the scope of work that will be more thoroughly described in the full proposal.
6. Originality and Innovation of the Research: Briefly detail how the proposed work is unique and innovative. Describe how this research will add to the advancement of science. How is the proposed work different from other related research? How does this work benefit other utilities?
7. Potential Relevance and Future Applications: Discuss why this work would be important to the broader water community. Explain the potential benefits of the work, as well as the project's potential impact on future research.
8. Budget: A detailed budget is not required in the pre-proposal. Pre-proposals should identify the amount of WRF funds requested as well as matching and other funding. The scope of work must be based on the requested WRF funds and in-kind contributions. Project teams for sole-sourced projects are encouraged but not required to provide an in-kind contribution of items such as personnel costs, analytical and support services, facilities, consulting services, etc.
9. Schedule: A detailed task-specific schedule is not required in the pre-proposal. However, an estimate of the project duration should be provided.
10. Statement of Qualifications (if project is to be sole-sourced): Have research team members previously done this type of work? Does the team have the appropriate equipment?
11. Pre-proposal/Draft RFP Checklist (Attachment 2)

Draft RFP Preparation

If the Sponsoring Utility would like to have an RFP issued to select a research organization, WRF can support this effort. Utilities should submit a narrative to address items 1-9 and 11 above, which should not exceed **four** pages. If shortlisted, an RFP template will be provided by WRF.

All due dates applicable to pre-proposals and full proposals also apply to draft RFPs and full RFPs.

The ERC will review the draft RFPs and provide its shortlist of recommendations to the TCRC. If a draft RFP is selected for the shortlist, the Sponsoring Utility will be invited to develop a competitive full RFP and accompanying narrative as described in the Full Proposal Guidelines. The full RFP will be due to WRF at the same time full proposals are due for sole-sourced projects. The TCRC must approve the funding for the project before WRF issues an RFP for the purpose of selecting a research organization for the project.

Pre-proposal/Draft RFP Submission

Pre-proposals/draft RFPs are considered the intellectual property of the submitter and are handled confidentially. Pre-proposals/draft RFPs must be submitted online at <https://forms.waterrf.org/cbruck/-2024-TC-preproposal-submission> by **Monday, June 3, 2024, at 5 pm Eastern Time**. Pre-proposals/draft RFPs received after this deadline will not be considered.

ATTACHMENT 1
TAILORED COLLABORATION PROGRAM PRE-PROPOSAL/DRAFT RFP COVER SHEET

PROPOSER INFORMATION

Sponsoring Utility: _____
 Contact Person at Utility: _____
 Address: _____
 Phone and Email: _____

Coordinating PI/Organization: _____
 Address: _____
 Phone and Email: _____

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: _____
 Topic/Keywords: _____
 Project Period: _____

Project is to be: Sole-Sourced RFP

<u>Organization Name</u> (note with * subscriber organizations whose funding is eligible for WRF match)	<u>Cash Co-funding</u> (Funds to WRF)	<u>In-Kind</u> (Goods & Services by 3rd Parties)	<u>Total Funding</u> (Cash + In-Kind)
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
Subtotal			
Funds Requested from WRF		N/A	
Total Project Budget			

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURES

Principal Investigator

I agree to accept responsibility for scientific conduct of the project and to provide the required project reports if a contract is awarded as a result of this application.

Signature: _____ Date: _____
 Name: _____

Designated Official Responsible for Contracts in the Proposer's Organization

To the best of my knowledge, this organization can comply with the WRF policies and contractual conditions listed in Section II.6 of the instructions.

Signature: _____ Date: _____
 Name: _____

ATTACHMENT 2 PRE-PROPOSAL/DRAFT RFP CHECKLIST

Please check the points below to acknowledge that you, as the proposer, are aware of each point. If you have any questions, contact Dr. Kenan Ozekin at kozekin@waterrf.org or the Regional Liaison for your area.

General

- Guidelines. The person submitting this pre-proposal (the Proposer) has read the Tailored Collaboration Program Pre-proposal Guidelines posted on the WRF website at www.waterrf.org/proposal-guidelines#tcGuidelines

Financial

- All co-funding organizations are identified on the Pre-proposal/Draft RFP Cover Sheet.
- WRF funding. WRF will provide 1:1 matching funds up to \$150,000 cash for all funds provided by qualifying organizations (i.e., subscribers and contributions approved by the CRO) if the full proposal is accepted for funding.
- Purchase orders. Cash co-funders have been asked if they need purchase orders to pay WRF the co-funding amount.
- Timing of payment from co-funders. All co-funding is due to be paid to WRF at the beginning of the project to ensure that WRF can meet the contractual obligation to distribute funds for the entire project as work is completed by the research organization.
- Initial payment to researcher. All co-funding must be received by WRF before the 10% project advance will be paid to the research organization or sub-recipient. No invoice will be required from the sub-recipient to obtain the 10% project advance. The advance will be issued upon WRF's receipt of all parties' signatures on the PFA and receipt of full co-funding.

Contractual

- A completed W-9 form will be submitted to WRF.
- Signature authority. The proposer will provide the name of the individual with signature authority for each organization providing cash to WRF. This person must be listed in the proposal paperwork. Technical participants may not necessarily have the authority to commit funding or sign legal documents on the organization's behalf.
- Agreement signed by all cash contributors. All utilities and other organizations providing cash to WRF that will be used toward the project are aware that they will need to sign a Letter of Agreement (LOA).
- Draft WRF contract is on website. A template of the Project Funding Agreement (PFA) that will be used for all parties, should the project be funded, is available on the WRF website. It can be found at www.waterrf.org/contract-materials.
- Legal review. The PFA template has been provided to the sub-recipient, who is encouraged to share it with their legal and contract staff for review prior to project award. WRF highly recommends legal review of this document to avoid any contractual roadblocks or project delays.

- Intellectual property (IP) is owned by WRF. WRF's IP includes text, tables, and figures that were created during the project and are included in the Project Information Summary, periodic reports, draft report, final report, or other materials produced during the course of a project. As stated in the PFA, the PI may use, without restrictions, all data produced during the course of the project, such as innovations, creations, processes, designs, methods, formulas, plans, technical data, and specifications.
- Copyright for the report is owned by WRF, and a license to use the information will be granted to other parties, including the researcher.
- Timeframe. The proposer understands the timeline expectations outlined below. The cash co-funders have been informed of these expectations.
 - A draft contract with all participating cash co-funders' information will be outlined in the PFA for the project award. All parties sign either the Letter of Agreement for the co-funders or the PFA for the PI's organization to ensure contractual consistency.
 - A contracting pre-call, scheduled by the WRF Regional Liaison, will be held with all project participants: research organization key personnel (including contract or legal counsel if available), co-funders, Sponsoring Utility, and WRF key personnel involved in the project.
 - Proposers will have 10 business days to review and respond to WRF's Contract Manager with requested contract revisions.
 - Requested revisions will be reviewed by WRF's Contract Manager. The negotiation period begins in good faith, and reasonable requests may be approved. WRF's Contract Manager will keep participants apprised of any delays presented during the negotiation period.
 - The final contract will be emailed to all parties after final execution has been completed. This final agreement will include all contract exhibits.
 - The total contracting process from draft contract to final contract execution should take no longer than 45 calendar days.
 - Draft and final contracts are sent with specific due dates (2 weeks). In the event a due date is not met, the WRF Contract Manager will send out a final request. If no reply is received, the contracting period will not proceed. Delays or lack of response may result in the funding being withdrawn. WRF retains the right to allocate funding to other organizations and projects if the contract cannot be mutually agreed upon by all parties.

ATTACHMENT 3
WRF TAILORED COLLABORATION PROGRAM: PRE-PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

	Score
A. Topic Breadth and Applicability (maximum 20 points)	
Does the topic fit with WRF's mission? Is the topic broadly applicable to the water sector?	_____
B. Project Originality (maximum 20 points)	
Is the proposed project original or innovative? Does the proposed project complement rather than duplicate WRF's ongoing research? Is it building on or applying previous work?	_____
C. Technical Approach (maximum 35 points)	
Does the pre-proposal outline the main tasks to be accomplished, and are they technically defensible? Do the expected outcomes clearly demonstrate how the project will benefit WRF subscribers?	_____
D. Budget (maximum 10 points)	
Does the budget accurately represent the scope of the work proposed?	_____
E. Project Schedule and Qualifications of Key Personnel (maximum 15 points)	
Is the proposed schedule realistic and manageable? Do the key personnel have experience and expertise in the issues and objectives discussed in the pre-proposal?	_____
Total Score: _____	