

**DRAFT**

**Appendix K: Policy and Procedures for Research Funding**

Funding scientific research is a key means for the Delta Science Program to achieve its mission to “provide the best possible scientific information to inform water and environmental decision making in the Delta.” There are three basic processes that the Delta Science Program uses to select research projects for funding: Proposal Solicitations, Requests for Proposals, and Directed Actions. The choice of which of these processes to use to fill any given research need depends on the source of funding, the time frame for the scientific information needed, and the specificity of the information needed. Each of these three methods for funding research is described here. Decisions about funding ultimately rest with the independent Lead Scientist for the Delta Science Program in consultation with the Executive Officer of the Delta Stewardship Council. All proposals will be subjected to administrative and scientific peer review as described below, under the direction of the Lead Scientist. All reviewers will be screened for potential conflicts of interest as described in Appendix L.

**Proposal Solicitations**

This funding method is implemented through development of a Proposal Solicitation Package (PSP) and is a competitive process for distributing available research funding. Proposal solicitations are used when the research needs (topics) are relatively broad and the funding is available to a broad range of potential recipients. Funding may come from several sources with differing constraints and priorities. Proposals submitted by the due date and in accordance with the PSP instructions receive independent external scientific review with final recommendations for funding made by the Lead Scientist. Proposal solicitations will be conducted as follows.

*Planning*

While topics for a proposal solicitation may come from existing planning efforts, it is important to have up-to-date input from the agencies and institutions participating in the solicitation. A proposal solicitation planning group, organized by the Delta Science Program, will help to develop the solicitation topics and will make recommendations on other elements of the PSP. Final approval of the PSP rests with the Lead Scientist.

*The PSP*

The PSP is a comprehensive package of information for applicants wishing to submit a proposal for research funding. The PSP covers the priority research topics, eligible applicants, approximate amount of funding available, constraints on the available funding, instructions for proposal submission, due date, the review process, criteria for review, how proposals are recommended for funding, and how final funding decisions will be made. The PSP may be supplemented with guidelines required by the funding legislation.

### *Review of Proposals*

Proposals first undergo administrative review to determine if they are responsive to the PSP, are complete, were submitted on time, and the applicant is eligible.

Administrative review may also include an assessment of past performance by the applicants on previously-funded research grants, if applicable. Applications that pass administrative review are distributed to subject matter experts for scientific review. All reviewers are given the same set of instructions and criteria for rating the proposals. Each proposal is reviewed by no less than two and preferably three or more individual reviewers. The Lead Scientist organizes a review panel meeting that consists of technical experts in fields relevant to the topics and proposals. The purpose of the review panel is to make funding recommendations to the Lead Scientist.

### *Recommendations for Funding*

Based on the recommendations of the review panel, the Lead Scientist will make draft funding recommendations that will be noticed for public comment. The Lead Scientist may recommend partial or reduced funding for specific proposals. After reviewing the scientific reviews and public comments, the Lead Scientist will make funding decisions.

## **Requests for Proposals**

Situations may arise outside the normal PSP cycle when scientific research or planning activities are needed in response to management needs such as information to support an important management decision, or exploratory scientific advice or analysis essential to create the foundation or proof-of-concept for a larger project. Requests for scientific research or planning that are appropriate for a request for proposal (RFP) can come from the Delta Stewardship Council (Council), Agency Directors, research programs, science teams, individual scientists, or other science-linked entities.

RFPs follow well established State policies and guidelines. Requests for proposals are used when the project scope is well developed and many individuals or entities may be qualified to do the work. That is, the “what” is known but not the “who.” RFPs follow a formal competitive bidding process open to any eligible and qualified individual or team. For the Delta Science Program, the preferred process is as follows: 1) RFP is posted online (qualified individuals or teams may be notified of the RFP posting), 2) proposals including cost proposals are submitted, 3) responsive proposals are reviewed and scored by an evaluation committee that will include appropriate discipline-relevant scientists determined by the Lead Scientist, and 4) the contract is awarded to the highest scoring proposal.

## **Directed Actions**

Similar to the “Rapid Response Grants” process of the National Science Foundation, Directed Actions are appropriate when the scientific research or advice is needed quickly, and/or an important opportunity would be lost if the proposal waited for

the standard competitive PSP process. Typically, there is only one entity (individual or team) that is qualified and available to do the work within the desired timeframe. Examples might include scientific research in response to a natural event such as a flood or drought, detection and description of a new invasive species, or proposals addressing high priority management issues developed through a collaborative process. The Directed Action funding process is non-competitive but must comply with Delta Stewardship Council rules. As with science RFPs, requests for Directed Actions can come from the Council, Agency Directors, research programs, science teams, individual scientists, or other science-linked entities.

Proposals for a Directed Action grant can be submitted to the Delta Science Program at any time. Funding decisions will be based on the:

- Availability of funds
- Benefits that the grant would accrue to our understanding of the Bay-Delta system
- Urgency and unique nature of the problem to be addressed (Could it be competitively bid through an RFP or deferred to the regular PSP process?)
- Expected contribution to supporting management actions or policy decisions
- Scientific and technical merit
- How the proposal was developed (Was it developed through an open transparent collaborative process that included stakeholder participation?)

### **The Review Process and Decision**

Timing will be critical for directed actions. The proposal should be submitted to the Delta Science Program. The Lead Scientist will decide whether the urgency and topic merits further consideration. If not, the proposal will be returned to the proposers with confidentiality of the proposal maintained and an explanation of why the proposal is not being considered further. Applicants are strongly encouraged to talk to DSP staff before submitting a proposal. The Lead Scientist will determine the specific set of proposal reviewers depending on the scope of the proposal and the magnitude of the problem. Unless the proposal has already been independently reviewed, the proposal will be reviewed by at least:

- One Delta Science Program scientist
- One discipline-relevant scientist from within the Bay-Delta community of scientists
- A State or local agency manager with direct knowledge of the relevance of the activity

The Lead Scientist may request additional reviews by external discipline-relevant scientists from outside the Bay-Delta science community. The Lead Scientist will make the final decision and may approve, approve with specific conditions, or reject the proposal. Because approved Directed Action proposals meet an urgent need, funding of approved proposals will be pursued as quickly as feasible and should be of limited duration, normally less than two years.