

Questions & Answers for USAP_RFI_01

1. The RFI appears to indicate the Consortium Management Firm (CMF) would screen, select, and organize members, and further would be responsible for quality and financial oversight. Can the NSF clarify how this is different from the current model where a prime contractor screens, selects, and organizes its subcontractors, and is responsible for quality and contract financials?

A: The intent here is to explore the possibility of using NSF's OA authority to form this agreement. As discussed in the webinar, OA authority offers benefits to both NSF and industry. A consortium is an example of a way that OA authority can be applied. In any case, the RFI did not indicate or wed NSF to any particular contracting design, including any particular variety of a CMF model. Rather, among other things, it discussed a CMF approach as a "hypothetical example only and subject to further industry feedback and planning." In addition, note that the formation and the ongoing administration of the incumbent contract was/is FAR-based. To the extent NSF decides to issue an Other Arrangements solicitation that contemplates the creation of a consortium/CMF, such an issuance would be entirely distinct from a FAR-based procurement process.

2. Can the NSF provide insight into their anticipated oversight role for the CMF and/or consortium partners? Who would have ultimate authority to make decisions and press forward? Similarly, who would be responsible and accountable for risk within each business line, overall program risk, and other potential events such as major catastrophes or fatalities?

A: If a consortium model is provided for, the ultimate structure would be specifically developed and negotiated with the CMF. Subject to those negotiations, the CMF, in concert with USAP, would likely have some form of authority to make decisions and move forward.

3. Can the NSF expand upon what interactions they anticipate among the CMF, the research community, and NSF, and how those interactions will occur or be governed?

A: When issued, NSF's solicitation may expand upon these anticipated interactions. In addition, these matters may be subject to negotiation and may be considered elements of the relational contracting approach. E.g. joint specification development, management to budget, and ad hoc requirement development.

4. What will be used to incentivize the consortium to be cost effective, provide unique solutions, ensure individual accountability for safety, and improve the quality of experience for all program stakeholders?

A: NSF is interested in industry's feedback on the best ways to structure incentives to ensure goal achievement. NSF is open to all feedback.

5. How will budgets be managed between the hypothetical business lines to ensure accountability and success of meeting mission goals (e.g., NSF and USAP priorities are adequately represented and supported), especially when dealing with a set level of funding from the same source that is applicable across many business lines?

A: Joint management to budget and for accountability are key components of a relational contracting formation process.

6. Will the consortium structure allow for entities to enter and leave the consortium at will or as deemed necessary by the NSF? If an entity in the consortium is not performing well, can they be removed?

A: Here, again, a consortia model is just one model under consideration. The ultimate structure and terms will be negotiated between NSF and CMF, but those suggested flexibilities may be one of the benefits of a CMF structure subject to negotiation.

7. Is participation in the consortium expected to be competed, or will the NSF award roles in some other way?

A: NSF expects its follow-on transaction to be competitive regardless of whether it is structured as a procurement or non-procurement contract.

8. We don't see that any environmental / sustainability services are included in the 9 business lines identified in the RFI; are they specifically excluded from this contract, and possibly included in a separate scope of work?

A: No, environmental/sustainability services are not specifically excluded. The RFI listed business lines as a "hypothetical," stating that the "business lines within the Consortium might include (but might not be necessarily limited to)" the lines identified. In other words, the list of lines of business in the RFI are not necessarily exhaustive.

9. NSF published a separate SSN in late 2021 for A&E services with the guidance that you are considering putting this out as a separate contract. This current RFI is titled Engineering and Science support and yet the business line areas do not contain any engineering items - can NSF clarify whether Engineering is to be included in this contract or will it be procured under a separate contract process as indicated by the separate A&E services RFI?

A: The referenced A&E services SSN reflects market research for a separate requirement. See also response to Question 1 directly above.

10. Does the NSF have experience using the Other Arrangements contracting methodology to contract with CMFs for past NSF work scope (not necessarily under the Antarctica contract)? We are curious if you have found it to be a successful procurement process.

A: To avoid any confusion, an Other Arrangements contracting process is not a procurement but a non-procurement process similar (but not identical) to processes used by other federal agencies that possess Other Transactions Authority. NSF has found its prior use of OA contracting to be successful and is aware of the successful use of OTA authority by other federal agencies that possess it.

11. Will you be releasing an attendee list from the Information Session?

A: Please see January 14 update for the Interested Parties form. The list of interested parties will be appended to this RFI after the closing date for responses.