

Observations on DOE Merit Review Criteria from the 2011 Competition

The comments in this section reflect lessons learned from previous competitions and from the review of solicitations such as the 2011 Funding Opportunity Announcement DE-FOA-0000546.

Summary of DOE Merit Review Criteria (weighting factors not identified)

- Scientific and/or technical merit
- Appropriateness of proposed method or approach
- Competency of personnel and adequateness of resources
- Reasonableness and appropriateness of budget
- Synergism among PIs in a program (versus an application that is simply a collection of individual projects)
- Programmatic focus of a multi-PI effort
- Likelihood of success
 - Fit with WV EPSCoR strategy (Disregard this criterion for the present; WV EPSCoR will work with the designated research team to satisfy this criterion)
 - Plan for hire of competent faculty for the research effort or the inclusion of outstanding faculty currently on staff
 - Plan for including on the project team outstanding graduate students or postdoctoral persons currently on staff or to be recruited in future
 - Presently existing or to-be-developed infrastructure (uniqueness or quality of infrastructure)
 - Ability to have a sustained leadership position/recognition in the chosen discipline after the completion of the program
 - Leveraging with local and regional resources - the 2011 program did not require cost share, but this criterion implies that investments by the applicants will be considered under merit criteria. Cost sharing by industry collaborators will be a plus.

- Plans by the WV EPSCoR leadership to maximize the long-term impact of the award (WV EPSCoR will assist in meeting this criterion by working with the down-selected team to prepare the proposal for submission to DOE).
- DOE reserves the right to include consideration of the performance of previous WV EPSCoR research teams under previous awards
- DOE reserves the right to include the management value of administrative support by WV EPSCoR as a factor in award decisions
- DOE reserves the right to prioritize applications involving investigators in tenure-track or tenured positions - this criterion may mean that they will give extra consideration to including junior faculty in the research team. This criterion may also mean that they may favor applications from universities over industry applications. Note that industries in the State may also apply for awards according to the 2011 solicitation.
- Relevance to agency (DOE) programmatic needs.

Note to WV Researchers: In describing your proposed research to WV EPSCoR in your concept proposals, you should focus on the DOE criteria. WV EPSCoR criteria are similar to the DOE criteria. Issues related to compliance with WV EPSCoR goals will be resolved by working with the selected team in the preparation of the DOE proposal.

General Comments Abstracted from DE-FOA-0000546

The following comments are written from the perspective of what should be included in the actual proposal submission to DOE. In preparing a concept proposal, please use these considerations in formulating your research plan and in the description you will submit in your concept proposal to WV EPSCoR.

- The program is open to submissions from universities or from industries in a given jurisdiction
- Proposals should be in key science and technology areas related to DOE's mission(s) that are also of interest to WV EPSCoR
- Grants are intended to support a group of scientists and engineers including graduate students and postdoctorals working on a common scientific theme
- A proposal can be submitted using members from two or more jurisdictions (e.g., WV and KY)

- Wording in the Announcement on page 7 of the FOA implies that the DOE EPSCoR program has a mission to support a variety of programs of interest to Office of Science, and may have a slightly lesser interest in supporting programs that fit the mission of other DOE offices, such as Solar Energy or Nuclear Energy or So, if your program fits within the Office of Science as DOE Program office you are asked to identify in the proposal, you may get preferential consideration.
- DOE expects that WV EPSCoR will have developed a plan for energy research. Please refer to Page 7 in the FOA for additional discussion on this topic. You may refer to the WV EPSCoR document called Vision 2015 for information on the WV EPSCoR goals in energy. For the concept proposal competition, we recommend that minimal effort be given to this criterion in deference to investing effort in formulating a nationally competitive proposal.
- Best chances of success are to focus on one central theme that the whole group works on.
- The proposal needs to describe how completing this research will position the team to get sustainable support after the grant is completed.
- A coordinated effort on the part of the team is needed and should be clearly stated in the proposal. Performance milestones and a timetable for achieving project goals (for example, sustainability, education of students, and not just research goals) and deliverables are prerequisites for support from DOE.
- The proposal should be in line with the goals of one of the DOE Offices listed in the Funding Opportunity Announcement. E.G., science, nuclear, fossil, ...
- We need to hook up with a DOE program office that would be interested in our work. Note that national laboratories do not count here – DOE is looking for a DOE program office in this criterion. The national laboratories are run by contractors and do not speak for DOE. An exception is NETL where it is both a national lab and is operated by federal (DOE) personnel, as distinct from the other national labs. Researchers should try to establish their DOE relationships in time for consideration by WV EPSCoR in the down selection process.
- The targeted DOE program office will need to provide up to 10% cost share for the proposal. (That is, if DOE awards \$2 million per year, then the DOE program office would have to provide to the EPSCoR program in the Office of Science a total of \$200 K each year as its 10% cost share of the total money that DOE awards to you). Please be sure to go over this concept with your DOE counterparts to avoid surprises at the end stage of proposal preparation when endorsements would be needed. You are talking real money here that the DOE program officer will have to take from his or her budget and give it to DOE

EPSCoR. This requirement was in force for the 2011 competition. This requirement will likely be enforced in the 2013 solicitation. Begin now to identify the relevant DOE program office and establish a relationship with someone in that office who is supportive of your proposed work.

- The four DOE EPSCoR objectives of the program are to:
 - Improve capability of the jurisdictions to do sustainable and nationally competitive energy-related research
 - Support scientists and engineers working on a common theme. To this end, collaborations among two or more jurisdictions are permitted. Note the word permitted is different from saying “encouraged”, so we should not feel compelled to join with another state unless the program would be stronger by doing so
 - Jump start infrastructure development in the jurisdictions
 - Promote partnering with other universities, national labs, industry via strong participation by graduate students postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty.

- Although not required, DOE EPSCoR encourages collaborations with one or more of the 10 Office of Science national labs, taking advantage of their user facilities.

- Project proposals should be new programs and not continuation of previously funded programs under DOE EPSCoR.

- DOE expects there to be a Technical Principal Investigator who should be the lead technical director for the research. DOE expects there to be an Administrative Principal Investigator who will be the Principal Investigator of record. WV EPSCoR will appoint a specified Project Director (PD) who will assist in the management of the award and coordination of the award with regard to meeting the jurisdiction’s goals. The PD must provide a letter from the institution’s administration confirming that he or she and the Technical PI will be making a significant time commitment to the project. Richard Bajura, Director of the National Research Center for Coal and Energy at WVU, has served as the PD for the previous two awards won by WV researchers under this program.

- WV EPSCoR is responsible for selecting one (and only one) applicant for submitting a proposal to this competition.

- Cost sharing is not required, but in practice strong cost sharing is recommended. This cost sharing should be in the form of new resources and not simply student waivers or release time, but such cost sharing should be listed if available. Many of the successful applications submitted to DOE EPSCoR over the years by WV and other states involved considerable substantive cost sharing from the applicants even though minimal cost sharing is legally required.

- The budget must be prepared on a special budget form. Please allow a sufficient time to prepare the budget so that both your institutional and the DOE requirements are satisfied.

Interested researchers should consider the above comments as they prepare their project plans for the concept proposal to WV EPSCoR.

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Interested researchers are encouraged to contact Richard Bajura or Trina Wafle as a resource for information and assistance in preparing proposal materials. Richard Bajura can be reached at Richard.Bajura@mail.wvu.edu and 304-293-6034. Trina Wafle can be reached at tkwafle@mail.wvu.edu and 304-293-6038.