

Science Mission Directorate

February 6, 2006

TO: Program Officers and Science Staff

FROM: Assistant Associate Administrator for Science

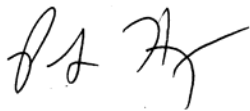
SUBJECT: Handling unsolicited proposals

The Science Mission Directorate (SMD) has established processes for handling unsolicited proposals. The SMD processes for handling unsolicited proposals are consistent with NASA policy as given in NPR 5800.1, Grant and Cooperative Agreement Handbook, Section A, Part 1260.17, and with NASA FAR Supplement, Part 1815.6, Unsolicited Proposals.

The basic processes for handling unsolicited proposals were approved by the SMD Science Management Council on February 14, 2005. These processes have been formalized and clarified as SMD Policy Document No. 04, "Handling Unsolicited Proposals." A copy of SPD-04 is attached to this memo.

The proper steps for handling an unsolicited proposal include (i) determining that the proposal is a valid unsolicited proposal, (ii) logging the proposal with the AAA for Science and notifying the proposer, (iii) reviewing the proposal either in house or by external reviewers, (iv) having the Selecting Official make a selection decision and notifying the proposer, (v) initiating the award, if applicable, and (vi) notifying the AAA for Science of the final disposition of the proposal.

Questions should be addressed to me.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Hertz". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Paul Hertz
Assistant Associate Administrator for Science

SCIENCE MISSION DIRECTORATE POLICY

HANDLING UNSOLICITED PROPOSALS SMD POLICY DOCUMENT 04 (SPD-04)

Approved by the SMD Science Management Council on February 14, 2005

Revised by Paul Hertz, Assistant Associate Administrator for Science, January 30, 2006

The Science Mission Directorate (SMD) has established processes for handling unsolicited proposals. The SMD processes for handling unsolicited proposals are consistent with NASA policy as given in NPR 5800.1, Grant and Cooperative Agreement Handbook, Section A, Part 1260.17, and with NASA FAR Supplement, Part 1815.6, Unsolicited Proposals.

All unsolicited proposals received by the Science Mission Directorate will be handled in compliance with the following guidelines.

Section 1. Initial Screening

- (a) Any unsolicited proposal received by SMD science personnel, including those from SMD IPA “alumni” who have finished their appointment at HQ and returned to their home institutions (sometimes called “post-service proposals”), should be immediately brought to the attention of the designated SMD official, currently the Assistant Associate Administrator for Science, who will screen it and then take one of the following actions as appropriate:
- (i) If the unsolicited proposal is not relevant to NASA, the proposal will be handled as technical correspondence (i.e., not as a proposal that requires review and selection activities) and returned to the sender without further review under cover of an appropriate letter.
 - (ii) If the unsolicited proposal is relevant to NASA but to a Mission Directorate or Program Office other than SMD, the proposal will be forwarded to the office of perceived relevance under cover of a copy of a letter to the proposer informing him/her of that action. Thereafter SMD takes no further responsibility for the proposal.
 - (iii) If the proposal is relevant to NASA SMD, the designated official will verify that it is a valid unsolicited proposal by virtue of being both relevant and affordable according to applicable acquisition guidelines (see NASA FAR Supplement 1815.6 and NPR 5800.1, Grant and Cooperative Agreement Handbook, Section A, Part 1260.17), namely, that it:
 - (a) falls within the domain of SMD's programs and interest;
 - (b) proposes a specific, unique or innovative project with sufficient technical and cost information to permit meaningful evaluation;
 - (c) is signed by an official authorized to commit the submitting organization;
 - (d) does not offer to perform standard services or be prepared under Government supervision (i.e., that the proposer and not a Government employee originated the idea and scope of a proposal – otherwise see Section 3 for solicited noncompetitive proposals);

- (e) does not propose something for which (i) a SMD Program Announcement (an AO, NRA, CAN, or ROSES program element) already exists and is open for the submission of proposals, or (ii) a SMD Program Announcement is expected to be open in the near future to which the proposal could be submitted, either of which would allow the proposal to stand in competition with other proposed efforts; and
 - (f) could be afforded, at least in principle, by available budget resources assuming that it is recommended for selection by virtue of favorable peer reviews.
- (b) Proposals which are solicited by SMD program staff are not unsolicited proposals; rather they are solicited noncompetitive proposals. See Section 3 for solicited noncompetitive proposals.
- (c) If the unsolicited proposal is not valid or tenable for any of these reasons, the proposal will be handled as technical correspondence and returned to the sender without further review.

Section 2. Procedures for Processing Valid Unsolicited Proposals

- (a) For a valid unsolicited proposal as defined in Section 1(a)(iii), the designated official will:
- (i) Log the unsolicited proposal into the SMD Unsolicited Proposal Log;
 - (ii) Assign the unsolicited proposal to an appropriate SMD Program Officer to conduct an appropriate peer review (see Section 4, Guidelines for Peer Review); and
 - (iii) Ensure that written notice is provided to the proposer that the proposal has been accepted for formal review, the approximate schedule for its review and disposition, and the Program Officer as point of contact (see sample letter in Appendix A).
- (b) In addition, for a valid unsolicited proposal as defined in Section 1(a)(iii), the responsible SMD Program Officer will:
- (i) Within eight weeks, conduct appropriate science/technical and programmatic reviews (see Section 4, Guidelines for Peer Review) and present a recommendation for selection or rejection to his/her Division Director as the Selecting Official;
 - (ii) After selection decision, prepare correspondence to the proposer from his/her Division Director conveying the selection/non selection decision;
 - (iii) Notify the designated official of the selection decision to allow closeout of the SMD Unsolicited Proposal Log as required by NFS 1815.6; and
 - (iv) In the case of selection, ensure that an appropriate funding recommendation action is initiated. A sample Justification for Acceptance of an Unsolicited Proposal (JAUP) is given in Appendix B. After the selection decision is made, the Program Officer handling the proposal shall ensure that written records of

the peer reviews that were conducted are preserved in the proposal's file at HQ (See Section 5).

Section 3. Solicited Noncompetitive Proposals

- (a) SMD policy is to conduct its research program, to the maximum extent practical, through peer reviewed and competitively selected investigations. One of SMD's annual performance goals in the NASA Integrated Budget and Performance Document is to award at least 80%, by budget, of research projects through competitive peer review.
- (b) Nevertheless, on occasion a SMD Program Officer may have sufficient reason to solicit a proposal for a specific investigation from a specific provider. Such a proposal is not an unsolicited proposal, it is a solicited noncompetitive proposal.
- (c) With the exception of having the designated official log in the proposal, SMD policy is to treat a solicited noncompetitive proposal like an unsolicited proposal. Specifically, the proposal must be peer reviewed in a manner consistent with the Guidelines for Peer Review provided in Section 4. The Division Director is the Selecting Official, and the Program Officer is responsible for maintaining written records of the peer reviews that were conducted and for initiating appropriate funding action if the proposal is selected.
- (d) A justification for proceeding without competition must be prepared. If a contract proposal is being solicited, an approved Justification for Other than Full and Open Competition (JOFOC) is required. If a grant or cooperative agreement proposal is being solicited, a succinct written justification must be included in the package that is forwarded to the grants administration office to issue an award.

Section 4. Guidelines for Peer Review

- (a) Regardless of their proposed costs, it is the responsibility of the Selecting Official to ensure that all unsolicited proposals are appropriately peer reviewed prior to being submitted for a selection decision and that the written evidence of these reviews are preserved. NASA's unsolicited proposal policy is formally given in its *Guidance for the Preparation and Submission of Unsolicited Proposals* (<http://ec.msfc.nasa.gov/hq/library/unSol-Prop.html>) as follows:

The principal elements considered in evaluating a proposal are its technical and programmatic relevance to NASA's specific mission, the intrinsic scientific or engineering merit, the qualifications of the investigator and the investigator's institution, and the overall cost (exclusive of the amount of cost sharing, if any).

Several evaluation techniques are regularly used within NASA. In all cases, however, proposals are reviewed by discipline specialists in the area of the proposal. Some proposals are reviewed entirely in-house, others are evaluated by a combination of in-house personnel and selected external reviewers, while still others are subject to a full external peer review either by mail or through assembled panels. Due regard for conflict of interest and protection of proposal information is always part of the process.

- (b) Regardless of the technique, the decision to fund or not fund an unsolicited proposal is made by NASA technical personnel. If additional information is requested during the evaluation of the proposal, that information should be forwarded directly to the requester.
- (c) In practice, once an unsolicited proposal has been formally accepted for review by the SMD designated official, the following guidelines may be used to determine the appropriate level and type of peer review (note that the Procurement Office may also ask for copies of these materials in order to execute an award):
- (i) For small proposals (up to ~\$25K), especially non-research activities such as support for conferences and workshops: Review by the Program Officer handling the proposal plus one other SMD Program Officer or NASA Center scientist is sufficient.
 - (ii) For moderate cost proposals (range \$25-75K): Depending on the availability of appropriately knowledgeable SMD staff, several in-house reviews may be sufficient but more preferable are one or more external reviews (solicited by mail), especially for proposals approaching the upper end of this cost range.
 - (iii) For large proposals (> \$75K): Two to three mail-in reviews from appropriately qualified scientists is the minimum, especially for proposals for which competition could be anticipated if an appropriate NASA research solicitation were to be released. For cases of especially large proposals (e.g. a facility with budget exceeding \$200K per year), a peer review panel (sitting or by teleconference) may be warranted.
 - (iv) For “post service” proposals (regardless of size) from SMD IPA’s who have finished their NASA appointments and have returned to research careers: Multiple, written external reviews are mandatory; depending on their proposed objectives and timing, if at all feasible such proposals should be submitted in response to a formal SMD solicitation such as ROSES.

Section 5. Maintaining Written Records

- (a) After the selection decision is made, the Program Officer handling the proposal shall ensure that written records of the peer reviews that were conducted are preserved in the proposal’s file at HQ.

Appendix A

Sample Letter to PI of a Valid Unsolicited Proposal

Dear Dr. NAME:

The NASA Science Mission Directorate (SMD) has received the unsolicited proposal entitled "TITLE," dated DATE, and submitted by ORGANIZATION. NASA policy regarding an unsolicited proposal requires determination of its nominal qualifications for format, content, and relevance to NASA programs, and whether the possibility exists for resources to be available for support should it be recommended for acceptance. All of these conditions are met by and for your proposal, and, therefore, NASA accepts it for review. Its designated unsolicited proposal log number is USP-SMD-XX-XXX.

Owing to the disciplinary focus of your proposal, it has been assigned to me to conduct appropriate peer and programmatic reviews, and then to recommend selection or rejection to the appropriate Selecting Official. In this respect, please be aware that an unsolicited proposal, even if determined to be of nominally high merit, may be rejected if there are insufficient resources for its support. You may anticipate further information about action on your proposal within eight weeks. Questions may be directed to me at E-mail: EMAIL@nasa.gov.

Sincerely,

Dr. PROGRAM OFFICER
DIVISION Division
Science Mission Directorate

Appendix B
Justification for Acceptance of an Unsolicited Proposal (JAUP)

Results of the Technical Evaluation:

Proposal Title:

Principal Investigator:

Institution:

Review Procedure: Describe the process used for review and selection.

Overall Rating (**Check one**): ()Excellent ()Good ()Fair ()Poor

1. Describe the specific features of the proposed research which led to favorable evaluation.
2. Explain the relevance of this research to this NASA Program (or to other programs).
3. Describe the proposal's overall scientific, technical, or socioeconomic merits of the proposed effort or activities.

Describe any changes desired: Pertains to changes in the proposal, include the reasons for the changes and any effect on level of funding and/or period of performance.

Analyze specific cost elements: Cite the need for and reasonableness of labor hours, labor mix, travel, computer time, materials, equipment, subcontracted items, publication costs, and other costs.

Justification for Acceptance of an Unsolicited Proposal (JAUP):

In accordance with Public Law 97-258, I hereby find that the Unsolicited Proposal entitled (insert title of proposal), from (insert university or non-profit organization's name) is basic research. The proposed work will accomplish a public purpose of support or stimulation by increasing basic knowledge and understanding in aeronautics or space as follows:

1. Identify the unique capabilities, experience, people, facilities or techniques offered in this proposal. Specifically describe the qualifications of the Principal Investigator or team leader.
2. Explain the potential contribution which the proposed effort is expected to make to the agency's specific mission.

(If the resulting award is to be a cooperative agreement rather than a grant, please indicate the nature of the collaboration this is anticipated.)

Based on the above, it is recommended that this proposal be funded as a grant/cooperative agreement award.

Technical Officer

Date

Concurrence:

Technical Supervisor

Date

(A level above the technical officer)