Extramural Research Facilities Improvement Program (C06) Frequently Asked Questions

SEE ALSO: RFA-RR-09-008

Updated Friday, March 6, 2009

General Information

1. What is the ARRA, and how much funding is allocated for the C06 program?

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (known as the Recovery Act) was passed by Congress in February 2009 to provide funds intended to help the economy recover. As part of the $10.4 billion allocated to the NIH under ARRA, NCRR received, among other allocations, $1 billion for construction and improvement of biomedical research facilities. This set of FAQs applies specifically to the CO6 program entitled "Recovery Act Limited Competition: Extramural Research Facilities Improvement Program (C06)," RFA-RR-09-008.

2. When will funds be available?

Funds for design specified on the Standard Form 424C, Budget Information Table are immediately available for use upon receipt of the Notice of Award. However, funds for actual construction or improvements projects and associated fixed equipment will not be released until final architectural drawings, specification and updated cost estimates are approved by NCRR.

3. What organizations/institutions are eligible to apply to this FOA?

Domestic (non foreign-based) organizations are eligible to apply including:

- Public/State-Controlled Institutions of Higher Education
- Private Institutions of Higher Education
- Hispanic-Serving Institutions
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
- Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCUs)
- Alaska Native- and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions
- Nonprofits with 501(c) (3) IRS Status (Other than Institutions of Higher Education)

FAQs and Presentations About Recovery Act Funding Opportunities

FAQ: Administrative Supplements
New April 9

FAQ: C06 and G20 Construction Programs
Updated April 8

Applicant Help: ARRA/Recovery Act Construction Programs
March 23 videocast

FAQ: Extramural Research Facilities Improvement Program (C06)
RFA-RR-09-008

FAQ: Core Facility Renovation, Repair and Improvement (G20)
RFA-RR-09-007

Recovery Act Links

NCRR Director's Message

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (1MB PDF)

Learn more about the Act @ Recovery.gov

Comment on the Act @ WhiteHouse.gov

PDF files require free Acrobat Reader.

HHS.gov/Recovery
Overview
Plans & Reports
Grants & Contracts
Announcements

- Nonprofits without 501(c) (3) IRS Status (Other than Institutions of Higher Education)
- Regional Organizations
- Indian/Native American Tribal Governments (Federally Recognized)
- Indian/Native American Tribally Designated Organizations
- Indian/Native American Tribal Governments (Other than Federally Recognized)

4. Is institutional/organizational cost sharing required?

No. This program does not require cost sharing as defined in the current NIH Grants Policy Statement. Applicants may choose to use additional institutional funds to augment the improvement project. If institutional funds are added, the NIH funded portion of the improvement project must be clearly identified in the application.

5. Is there a deadline for obligating award funds?

This FOA requires all funds to be obligated within three years after the design phase is concluded, or no later than June 30 of the fifth year after the award is issued.

Key Application Submission Dates

6. What is the earliest opening date for submitting an application to NIH through Grants.gov?

The earliest opening date is one month prior to the application due date; applicants must download the SF424 (R&R) application forms and the SF424 (R&R) application guide for this FOA through the "Apply for Grant Electronically" button in the RFA.

7. What are the application deadlines?

There are three receipt dates, depending on the requested amount of funding:

- The receipt date of May 6, 2009, is for projects between $2 million and $5 million.
- The receipt date of June 17, 2009, is for projects between $10 million and $15 million.
- The receipt date of July 17, 2009, is for projects between $5 million and $10 million.

8. When does this FOA expire?

This FOA expires on July 18, 2009.

9. What is the total project period for an award?

The total project period for an award made in response to this FOA may not exceed five years. The grantee is required to begin the design phase immediately upon receipt of the Notice of Award (NOA). Initial schematic designs must be submitted to NCRR no later than four months following the receipt of the NOA. NCRR expects to review those documents in four weeks or less. Design development documentation, incorporating comments from the review of the initial schematic design, must be received within eight months of the release of the NOA. NCRR also expects to review those documents in four weeks or less. The final construction document is due no later than 14 months following the release of the NOA. Following approval of the final construction document, all funds will be released. All funds must be obligated no later than June 30th of the fifth year from the initial date of award.

Types of Possible Projects

10. What types of improvement projects are appropriate for this FOA (RFA-RR-09-008)?

New construction or alterations and renovations (A&R) of facilities for biomedical and/or behavioral research should use this RFA (RFA-RR-09-008). Allowable costs include the construction of new facilities, additions to existing buildings, completion of shell space in new or existing buildings and major A&R. The acquisition of fixed equipment — such as casework, fume hoods, large autoclaves, upgrading heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems for research areas, cage washers, animal ventilated racks, static racks, downdraft tables, sterilizing equipment and other large equipment that are connected to building structure and services or biological safety cabinets — is allowed. Examples of improvements are listed in RFA-RR-09-008.

How to Apply

11. How will I know if my application has been received?

There will be an acknowledgment of receipt of applications from Grants.gov and the eRA Commons. The submitting authorized organizational representative/signing official (AOR/SO) receives the Grants.gov acknowledgments. The AOR/SO and the principal investigator (PI) receive eRA Commons acknowledgments. Information related to the assignment of an application to a Scientific Review Group is also in the eRA Commons. To avoid the unreliability of e-mail, applicants assume the responsibility to check the status of their applications via their eRA Commons accounts.

12. How are applications submitted?

Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov using the SF424 Research and Related (R&R) forms and the SF424 (R&R) application guide. Paper applications will not be accepted.

13. What is considered "on time" in submitting applications to Grants.gov?

On-time submission requires that applications be successfully submitted to Grants.gov no later than 5:00 p.m. (local time of the applicant institution/organization).

14. Is a letter of intent required?

No.

15. Who is eligible to be designated as the project director/principal investigator (PI)?

Any individual(s) with the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to carry out the proposed research as the PD/PI is invited to work with his/her organization to develop an application for support. The PI must be a highly placed institutional individual (e.g. dean, provost, department head, center or institute director) who has responsibility for allocation of space for biomedical and behavioral research and research training. Individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, as well as individuals with disabilities, are always encouraged to apply for NIH support. Only one PI may be designated on the application.

16. May the same PI be listed for more than one application?

Yes. However, to minimize confusion, it is recommended that each application title be distinct if the same PI submits more than one application in response to this FOA. A change of PI must be approved by NCRR during the grant period.

17. Are multiple PIs allowed?

No. Only one PI is allowed.

18. Will additional materials be accepted after the receipt date?

No. All applications are expected to be complete when submitted. Additional materials will not be accepted.

RFA Content Details

19. When is a project considered new construction?

If the project changes the footprint of the original building (e.g., the foundation of the building) by extending or expanding the foundation of the building, it is considered to be new construction. Applicants may submit applications that include new construction combined with renovations in the same application project.

20. Will office spaces or dry labs be given equal consideration compared to wet labs?

Dry and wet laboratory spaces are equally considered in this RFA as they were in the previous construction/renovation program announcement. Special consideration is not given to one type of space over the other type of space. Applicants generally request support for a combination of dry and wet laboratory space. Office space is dry space that is allowed to the extent it can be justified for use by Public Health Service (PHS)-funded investigators who will benefit from the use of the space. Similarly, a conference room is dry space and is allowable as part of a project in response to the RFA.

21. Who should be included in the Research & Related Senior/Key Person Component?

Include information about the PI/PD, the project manager, and any other key persons in this component. Do not include information about every user of the facility. C06 applications must specify a facilities person in the R&R Senior/Key Person Profile component, or the applicant will receive the following error message: "Facilities Person must be identified for this application." The project manager for the construction/repair/renovation project should be given the title of "Facilities Person."

22. What do "green" technologies and design approaches involve in reference to this FOA?

Green technologies and design approaches relate to technologies and approaches that meet the needs of society in ways that can continue indefinitely into the future without damaging or depleting natural resources; reduce waste and pollution by changing patterns of production and consumption; use technologies and products that benefit the environment and protect the planet; use new means of generating energy and energy efficiency; and invent, design and apply chemical products and processes in ways that reduce or eliminate the use and generation of hazardous substances. Green building practices encompass a broad range of considerations, including — but not limited to — the choice of building materials and where a building is located.

23. What is "sustainability?"

Sustainability is the outcome of an integrated process of development and operation of a facility that incorporates a balance of life-cycle cost, environmental impact and occupant health and safety, security and productivity. References listed in the FOA may be useful in regard to green technologies and design approaches.

24. Is green/sustainable design required?

Review and funding of applications will take into account the implementation of the primary elements of sustainable design as detailed in RFA-RR-09-008. Note that if the improvement and repair projects have a total project cost equal to or greater than $10 million and/or impacting 40 percent or more of the overall floor area, the grantee must obtain certification from the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) or the Green Building Initiative's Green Globes System Certification Rating System.

25. In the case where existing facilities are to be altered and renovated, does the current status of the space need to be described?

Yes. A description of the current conditions of the space to be improved is needed, as well as the age of the existing space, deficiencies in the current space and the current number of users. The applicant should also include descriptions of how the requested improvements will correct these deficiencies and problems and the modifications to the existing facility that will accommodate the proposed functions and the requested equipment. An explanation of how the proposed improvements will expand, improve or maintain existing research and research support activities and the future scientific needs that would be accommodated as part of the improvement request also should be included in the narrative.

26. If new construction is proposed, what information needs to be provided?

Include a description of how the new facilities will expand, improve or maintain existing research and research support activities and a description of how future scientific needs would be accommodated by the new facility.

27. Is movable equipment allowable in the construction and renovation FOA?

No. Movable equipment is not allowable in the construction and renovation FOA. However, fixed equipment is allowable as described in the FOA.

28. Are there limitations on the types of equipment allowed?

The requested equipment should serve the needs of the entire facility and should not be intended to benefit only one investigator or small group of investigators.

29. How important are line drawings?

Line drawings are extremely important. Applicants are encouraged to submit legible drawings with the scale clearly indicated. Applications with incomplete or unreadable drawings are unlikely to receive competitive scores in review.

30. Are there specific criteria for the line drawings?

Yes. The line drawings must fit on an 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper. The line drawings must be legible with the scale clearly indicated. If applicable, submit both existing and proposed drawings. The plan should indicate the location of the proposed renovation area in the existing building. The floor plans must indicate the location of equipment and illustrate safety clearances and workspace, as well as egress routes. The drawings must indicate the functional layout of the proposed facility showing the location of entries and exits, clearances and the location of fixed equipment. The drawings should indicate size dimensions, function and the net and gross square feet for each room. The total net and gross square footage of space to be renovated should be indicated. Changes or additions to existing mechanical and electrical systems should be clearly described in notes made directly on the plan or attached to the plan.

31. If the project is only for equipment, are line drawings required?

Yes. Line drawings are required to demonstrate the appropriateness of the location of equipment placement and spaces.

32. Do the line drawings count toward the page limits?

No. The line drawings do not count toward the page limits.

RFA Applications Details

33. What is the number of applications that an eligible institution/organization is allowed to submit?

Eligible institutions may submit no more than three applications, provided that each application describes a distinct and different improvement project.

34. How should the project narrative component be constructed?

The project narrative component should be constructed as a single document.

35. How should attachments be formatted?

All attachments must be provided to NIH in a computer-readable PDF format (i.e., do not upload text as images), file names must be included with no spaces or special characters and a .pdf extension must be used.

36. Is there a specific order required for the assembly of the application?

Yes. All applications should follow the order described in RFA-RR-09-008.

37. Are grant support tables required in the Significance and Need Section?

Yes. Include two tables containing 1) Active and 2) Pending Grants from the NIH and other sources that will be affected by the proposed project. Both tables should contain columns listing the following information: Grant Title, Name of Principal Investigator, Grant Number, Annual Amounts of Funding and Start and End dates.

38. Do these tables count toward the page limits in the Project Plan?

No.

39. What information is needed in the Project Management and Institutional Commitment Section?

This section describes the administrative structure and oversight for the project, as well as the ongoing institutional commitment to the new or altered space.

40. What information is needed in the Design Consideration Section?

In this section, list in tabular format, the size (dimensions) and square footage of each component (e.g., room, alcove, cubicle, laboratory, etc.) that will be directly affected by the improvement project. Floor plans for the improvement project are part of this section. Also include all the engineering and architectural criteria as specified in RFA-RR-09-008.

41. Are blueprints for the design required at the time of application?

No. Do not submit blueprints with your application; during the design phase of the project, architectural and engineering documents shall be submitted to NCRR for review and approval prior to the start of construction.

42. What information is needed for the purchase of equipment?

Provide a list and justification for all fixed equipment. Equipment should be relevant and should serve an identified user group. Information such as the manufacturer, model number, size, capacity, total cost and the location in the facility should be included.

43. Are vendor quotes necessary?

Yes. Vendor quotes need to be included in the other attachment section.

44. Would it be useful to indicate who is responsible for providing project cost estimates?

Yes. The source of project cost estimates should be identified in the application.

45. Is a Project Timeline required?

Yes. The design phase must be completed within two years after the award date. Construction must be completed within five years of the award date.

46. What information is included in the Other Attachment Section?

- Environmental Analysis Form, on the Web at www.ncrr.nih.gov/research_infrastructure/environmental_analysis_form.doc.
- Budget Justification and Vendor Quotes: The next attachment should be all vendor quotes and the budget justification. A justification must be provided for each piece of equipment.
- Certification of Title to Site: Applicants must include a legal opinion describing the interest the applicant has in the performance site. The legal opinion should describe any mortgages or other foreclosable liens on the property, including the principal amount of the mortgage (and the rate of interest); the dates of the mortgage; the terms and conditions of repayment; the appraised value of the property; and any provisions designed to protect the federal interest in the property. The facility must be utilized for biomedical or behavioral research purposes for which it was renovated for at least 10 years beginning on the date of beneficial occupancy of the space. Any lease agreement must cover a time period sufficient for the usage requirement and be a minimum of 10 years in length from the completion of the facility.
- Documents associated with the Executive Order 12372, if applicable.
- Applicants must include an estimate of the number of American jobs that are expected to be created or maintained by this project. In this document, applicants must also briefly summarize their plans to implement green/sustainable design principals.

47. Are Appendix Materials allowable?

No.

48. Is there a Resource Sharing Plan(s)?

No.

49. Are there any other sources for instructions?

Yes, all application instructions to be followed are outlined in the SF424 (R&R) Application Guide.

Application Review Procedures

50. What criteria will be considered in the review of the application?

Only the review criteria specified in RFA-RR-09-008 Section V. Application Review Information will be considered in the review process.

51. Who will review the application?

Applications that are complete and responsive to this FOA will be evaluated for scientific and technical merit by an appropriate peer review group convened by NCRR, in accordance with NIH peer review procedures. The review panel roster will be posted and available to applicants in the NIH eRA Commons and will appear on your summary statement. However, the names of the specific reviewers assigned to write the critiques for the applications remain confidential.

52. What happens during the scientific review process?

All applications undergo a selection process in which only those applications deemed to have the highest scientific and technical merit will be discussed and assigned an impact/priority score. All applications will receive a written summary statement and a second level of review by the National Advisory Research Resources Council.

53. What is the basis for the overall impact/priority score of the application?

The peer review committee will provide an overall impact/priority score that will reflect their evaluation of the application according to the published review criteria as specified in RFA-RR-09-008.

54. Who will have access to the impact/priority score and summary statement?

NIH staff and members of the National Advisory Research Resources Council will have access to the impact/priority score and summary statement. The PD/PI also will have access to these items through their NIH eRA Commons account.

55. What is the summary statement?

The summary statement officially documents the outcome of the initial peer review recommendations. This document is provided to the NCRR Advisory Council for their recommendations and is used by NIH staff in making final funding decisions. The summary statement primarily consists of the peer reviewers' critiques and administrative information.

56. When will the impact/priority score be available?

The impact/priority score typically is released to the NIH eRA Commons within three business days from the close of the initial peer review meeting.

57. What factors will be considered in making funding decisions?

Applications submitted in response to this FOA will compete for available funds with all other recommended applications submitted in response to this FOA. The following factors will be considered in making funding decisions:

- Recommendations of scientific and technical merit of the proposed project as determined by peer review
- Availability of funds
- Relevance of the proposed project to program priorities
- Geographic distribution of awards
- Priorities specified in the Recovery Act, such as energy-efficient building and job creation

58. Who should be contacted prior to the review of the application?

The scientific review officer is the appropriate contact after the application has been submitted. Prior to submission, contact the program officer.

59. Who should be contacted after the review of the application?

If you have any questions after you receive your overall impact/priority score, contact the program officer for assistance.

60. After the peer review meeting, when is the best time to contact the program officer?

Although you may contact the program officer at any time, it is best to wait until you receive and review your Summary Statement.

Award Notification Process

61. Is there any formal notification of an award from NIH?

Yes. A formal notification in the form of a Notice of Award (NOA) will be provided to the applicant organization/institution.

62. What is the earliest anticipated start date for an award?

The earliest anticipated start dates for an award are December 2009 or April 2010 depending on the date of submission.

63. Does selection of an application for award authorize the applicant to begin performance?

No. Any costs incurred before receipt of the NOA are at the recipient's risk. These costs may be reimbursed only to the extent considered allowable pre-award costs. See the Funding Restrictions Section IV.5 in the RFA.

64. What is the procedure following the Notice of Award receipt?

The institutional/organizational official must sign and return the Terms and Conditions of the Award to the Office of Grants Management, NCRR, and must immediately begin the design phase of the award.

65. Are there any administrative and national policy requirements?

Applicants must make a public disclosure of the project by publication and describe its environmental impact at the time the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) is notified. It is suggested that this notice be published in a large-circulation newspaper in the area. This public disclosure is required by Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and by Federal Executive Order 11514.

Other FOA Requirements

66. Are there any NIH Grants Policy Statement Public Policy Requirements for Construction Awards?

Yes. All awards under this FOA need to meet the NIH Grants Policy Statement Public Policy Requirements for Construction Awards. Those requirements include, but are not limited to the following:

- Elimination of architectural barriers to the disabled
- Clearance from the appropriate State Historic Preservation Office before submission of application for Historic Properties/Archaeological Sites
- National Environmental Policy Act (including Public Disclosure). A completed environmental analysis form and the public disclosure must be included with the application.
- Flood Insurance: The Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973, as amended (Public Law 93-234)
- Clean Air and Clean Water Act: 42 U.S.C. 7606 and EO11738
- Safe Drinking Water Act: 42 U.S.C. 300h-3

67. Is there an insurance requirement for the property?

Yes. Immediately upon completion of the construction and/or renovation, the grantee must, at a minimum, provide the same type of insurance coverage as it maintains for other property it owns. This is consistent with the minimum coverage specified in the NIH Grants Policy Statement.

68. Why must information must be collected on the number of American jobs created or maintained as a result of the improvement project, and what are the reporting requirements?

The funds to support this FOA have been made available under the Recovery Act, which became law in February 2009. The Recovery Act requires that the number of American jobs created or maintained and environmental impact as a result of the improvement project be reported to Congress. As a result, awardees will be required to submit special progress reports. Special Progress reports will be required more frequently than every year and will be required after the award has terminated. Information provided in special progress reports will be made available to the public.

69. Is a Notice of Federal Interest (NFI) record required?

Yes. To protect the federal interest in real property that has been constructed or undergone major renovations with the use of NIH grant funds, grantees shall record a NFI in the appropriate official records of jurisdiction in which the property is located. The time of recordation shall be when construction or renovations begin. Fees charged for recording the NFI may be charged to the grant.

70. What progress reports are required?

See the details for the reporting requirements in RFA-R-08-008.

71. Is there a penalty for failure to comply with the 10-year utilization requirement?

Yes. Failure to comply with the 10-year utilization requirement will result in recovery of the federal share of funds used to renovate the facility in accordance with Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 74.32.

Contact Information

For further information about RFA-RR-09-008, contact:

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