

Active Societal Participation in Research and Education (ASPIRE)
ASPIRE Working Group (AWG) Request for Proposals (RFP)

Executive Summary

An opportunity for early-career academics and community(ities) to co-produce original geoscience research in the natural and physical sciences in the U.S. and its territories

ASPIRE Program Summary

Active Societal Participation In Research and Education (ASPIRE) aims to cultivate a new generation of geoscientists with the leadership knowledge and skills, scholarship, and material support to enhance the societal connection and relevance of the geosciences in service of , broadening participation in these fields. This generation of geoscientists will do so by using their work to bridge longstanding divides that impede access to and inclusion in the geosciences: between scholars in the academy and communities, and between the places where science is needed and the places where it is typically conducted.

Definitions (ABC-ordered)

Boundary Spanner - “an individual who simultaneously engages with and/or is a member of the mainstream scientific community, and is committed to working with, in and for their partner community” (as defined by Hatch et al. 2023).

Currencies - the rewards and values from participating in the research (e.g., publications, policy development)

Early-career - full-time academic appointment (Assistant or Associate level) and Principal Investigator status at a U.S. university

Goal - big, long-term outcome

Geosciences - atmospheric, geospace, earth, ocean, marine, and polar sciences

Objectives - steps to achieve the goal

Opportunity

This RFP supports ASPIRE Working Groups (AWGs) that are a collective of place-based community members, an early-career geoscientist, and at least one Boundary Spanner. We seek projects that understand that the currencies involved in research with communities may differ within and outside of the academy (Harris & Garza et al. 2021), and that propose to “pay” both community and academic currencies ensuring reciprocity of benefits for all AWG members.

Applicants

This RFP is open to early-career geoscience researchers who have prior experience as, or working with, a Boundary Spanner, and/or have established relationships with one or more community entities that align with research-in-community best practices (Harris et al. 2021). Funded projects will support AWGs that:

- address an environmental issue that is critical to a community (e.g., impacts their health and well-being, livelihood, and/or culture)
- embody an understanding of the currencies involved in research with communities
- expand and deepen current community-based efforts

Note: Projects that primarily have an education focus, or lack a geoscience research question in the natural or physical sciences are not eligible for funding.

Benefits to Applicants

Awards fund project activities for two years. Individual awards can be up to \$30,000. Multiple awards will be made in any one year. In addition, proposals can include up to \$10,000 for travel and stipends for community partner expertise for a total of \$40,000 maximum support to any one project. Additional incentives are provided through centralized travel support to all-ASPIRE convenings, co-authorship on ASPIRE manuscripts, networking opportunities with other AWG geoscientists and Boundary Spanners through an invitational Community of Practice.

The ASPIRE Working Group (AWG)

AWGs bring together community members, geoscientists, and other professionals (as needed) around a particular issue or problem in-community with solution potential in the geoscience research space.

Each AWG will focus on a specific issue linked to a specific community (or set of communities). ASPIRE seeks AWG projects that will implement interactions across the community and geoscience research spaces with careful consideration of varied currencies and care around reciprocity. This necessarily translates to the importance of AWG composition and consideration of the division of tasks and activities for the proposed project.

AWGs should be composed of 4-12 total members, including:

- Balanced participation from members of the partner community and the geoscience community as reflected in the community and main project budgets (Note that anyone could receive salary within the main budget while the community budget can only pay stipends as per [NSF Participant Support definition](#));
- At least 1 early-career geoscientist, and
- At least 1 Boundary Spanner

Within the geosciences, members must be excited by both the scientific issue/problem and have established community relationships to maximally support the in-community approach.

Requirements of the geoscientist

- Manage the award, including finances
- Meet with the AWG Program Team
 - Virtually at the start to discuss proposal and respond to questions and comments
 - In-person at ASPIRE convenings, e.g., relaying perceived community benefit from the AWG
- Submit brief, bi-annual progress reports to ASPIRE

Proposal types

The AWG concept is meant to be flexible within the bounds of work that advances solutions-based geoscience at the community scale, while increasing the stature and agency of Boundary Spanners within the geoscience community.

Proposals address a specific problem/issue for either:

- a specific community (e.g., expanding PM2.5 air quality monitoring on Coeur d'Alene tribal lands) or
- multiple communities (e.g., contaminant testing and tracing of wildfire runoff in the Los Angeles River)

This requires that the Boundary Spanner be well connected to the community(ies), well-versed on the issue and with a good start on the primary science such that the ASPIRE Working Group augments the work but does not conduct primary research.

Logistics

The AWG programmatic team, including Jane Dolliver, AWG Program Manager, and Corey Garza and Julia Parrish (ASPIRE PIs), will work with the geoscientist(s) and Boundary Spanner(s) to refine a linked logistics program and budget that accommodates the problem/issue and facilitates likely success. This may include broadening AWG membership, meeting location(s), and the balance of physical versus virtual meetings. At the start of each AWG, the geoscientist will set up one-to-several virtual meetings of the team to cover initial scientific scoping and relevant social and cultural conduct. Finally, the geoscientist will submit brief, annual progress reports and may work with the AWG programmatic team to adaptively manage AWG progress.

Funding Mechanism

Approved proposals will be funded via a subaward from the University of Maryland (UMD) Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) to the geoscientist's institution, an institution responsible for providing subaward-specific paperwork and invoicing to UMD. All proposals will be submitted as required statements of work to the National Science Foundation for processing as subawards.

Timeframe and Deliverables

Proposals will be accepted through Friday, October 30, 2026, 11:59pm PDT. Review of proposals will occur promptly in order to notify the geoscientist by December 11, 2026 and facilitate the start of AWGs as early as February 1, 2027. It is expected that AWG projects will be completed within 2 years. All proposals should be submitted through the application portal on the ASPIRE Working Group webpage following formatting guidelines outlined below.

Deliverables and activities expected from this project include:

- Virtual meetings with ASPIRE PIs
- Virtual meeting with other geoscientists and Boundary Spanners
- Final report that describes (1) how the work met the stated goals (2) how the project progressed, (3) challenges and solutions addressed by the team, and (4) products from this work (see below).
- Set of products from this work, which must include scholarly product(s), community product(s), and process-based product(s) (see next section for more details).

Proposal Format

Applications for AWGs to ASPIRE consist of the following components:

1. Narrative (6-page limit, 1 inch margins, font size 12 or larger)
 - a. Background and Rationale: Provide an overview of the geoscience problem, community, and rationale for using the AWG approach to implement participatory research.
 - b. Team: Detail membership in the AWG and projected roles for members. Identifying information regarding affiliation and contribution for members should also be included here.

- c. Goals and Objectives: Briefly describe the science goal and associated objectives, and the community goal and associated objectives of your proposed work.
 - d. Implementation Plan: Provide detailed plan on how the AWG will proceed with the stated objectives to achieve the stated goals, including a plan for communication and attention to features that may be key to implementing research-in-community best practices (Harris et al. 2021).
 - e. Societal relevance: The final section of the narrative should outline the societal relevance of the goals and planned products. This is the larger society, outside of the place-based community. Think of this as information transfer from one community to many communities.
1. Letter(s) of Commitment: Provide letter(s) of commitment from the partnering community(ities) (e.g., community organization). Each letter should demonstrate ongoing research-in-community best practices (Harris et al. 2021) with this/these entity(ities).
 2. Budget and Budget Justification: Provide a budget of costs associated with the AWGs and include justification for all costs using the provided [budgets template](#) and [justifications template](#). Please note that this work will be supported through a subaward from the University of Maryland to your institution and all requested funds must comply with the National Science Foundation's allowable costs.
 3. 2-page CV for proposal Principal Investigator.
 4. Products: Provide a description of all products from this work. This should include (1) scholarly products (e.g., manuscripts for peer-reviewed journals such as Community Science, GeoHealth, or Environmental Justice) and (2) community products (e.g., community protocols for water sampling).

Proposals should be submitted by Friday, October 30, 11:59pm PDT on the AWG webpage.

Proposal Evaluation

Proposals will be evaluated by a multidisciplinary team, including members of the ASPIRE ASPIRE Community Advisory Board and awarded according to a variety of metrics that include scientific merit and community integration, strength of the implementation plan for the AWG research project itself, and representation across disciplines in the geosciences.

If you have any questions or requests for technical assistance during the application process contact us at aspirewg@uw.edu or 206-616-5868.

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References

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