

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration



EXPLORE SCIENCE

Inclusion Plans in Research Proposals

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(Brief) History of the Inclusion Plan Pilot Program

Inclusion is a core NASA value and SMD is committed to fostering a more diverse and inclusive community.

- To support Agency values, the Inclusion Plan pilot program was started in 2021 by program element D.4 Astrophysics Theory (ATP; ROSES 2021).
 - Led by Evan Scannapieco, the chair of the Astrophysics Division R&A Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Task Force at the time.
- The main goal of the Inclusion Plan Pilot Program was to determine if SMD could assess **whether R&A proposals would further NASA's inclusion goals** and whether such assessments could be factored into future selection decisions.



(Brief) History of the Inclusion Plan Pilot Program

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- SMD's Payloads and Research Investigations on the Surface of the Moon (PRISM, ROSES-2021; PRISM-21) was the second program element to require IPs.
 - PRISM-21 took lessons learned from ATP and made changes to the solicitation and review process and gathered further input from proposers and panelists to further refine the requirements for PRISM-22.
- ~13 ROSES-2022 program elements required Inclusion Plans.

Lessons Learned From Early Pilots

Reviewers from both the ATP-21 and PRISM-21 Inclusion Plans provided suggestions on how to improve the solicitation language and review process. For example:

- Extend page length and allow for references and letters of support
- IPs should be reviewed by a separate panel and should be comprised of ~50% members of the planetary science community and ~50% IDEA professionals from outside the community
 - This is the practice PRISM has adopted for both iterations of their IP review
- NASA should develop resources and workshops to educate the community on inclusion best practices and how to write Inclusion Plans.

From both panels, there was unanimous support from the reviewers of continue inclusion plans in future ROSES solicitations

Inclusion Plan Community of Practice

- Originally, the language for the IP requirements was up to each program, based on language crafted from prior solicitations and finalized by the SMD IDEA R&A group.
- In 2022, an **Inclusion Plan Community of Practice** (CoP) was established by the Deputy Associate Administrator for Research, Michael New, and his team.

Lead: Amanda Nahm, ESSIO/PSD

Co-Lead: Ryan Watkins, ESSIO

Members: Representative from each division within SMD (including Sci Engagement & Partnerships), as well as the Exploration Science Strategy and Integration Office (ESSIO), DAAR, and a social scientist from the Logistics Management Institute (LMI) at NASA HQ.

Goal: Centralize the goals and processes related to Inclusion Plans

Tasks:

- Drafting standardized language for all ROSES elements that require Inclusion Plans
- Develop standard evaluation criteria and review processes
- Develop resources for crafting Inclusion Plans

Standardized IP Language for ROSES-2023

(Some) Requirements:

- Proposals must:
 - Clearly state goals for creating and sustaining a positive and inclusive working environment and describe activities to achieve these goals.
 - Address ways in which the investigation team will work to attenuate or reduce these barriers.
- Barriers must be specific to the proposing team and not generic to the broader STEM community.
- Contain assessment mechanisms for evaluating progress towards the proposed Inclusion Plan activities or goals.
- Describe roles, responsibilities, and work effort for all team members who will be participating in Inclusion Plan activities.
- Page length is dependent on individual programs but must not exceed 3 pages.

All ROSES-2023 elements that require IPs will have the same language. The full standardized language can be found in the ROSES-2023 AO at

<http://solicitation.nasaprs.com/ROSES2023>

Standardized IP Language for ROSES-2023

Proposers are Encouraged to:

- Leverage institutional resources, if available.
- Request time or funded work effort for team members to carry out proposed IP activities.
- Hire IDEA experts as consultants to (e.g.) advise the team on the proposed IP activities (consider paying them well, too!).
- Cite references to appropriate literature in a references section separate from that of the S/T/M section.
- Request funds to support IP activities, such as training for the proposal team

The full standardized language can be found in the ROSES-2023 AO at
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Evaluation of Inclusion Plans

Beginning in ROSES-23 (and beyond):

- Inclusion plans will be reviewed by individuals with practical and/or research expertise in IDEA topics, from both within and outside the science community.

*Inclusion Plans will again **not** be part of the adjectival rating for the proposal and will **not** inform the selection of proposals, but some programs may require an acceptable plan for the selected proposal(s) before funding may be released.*

Evaluation of Inclusion Plans

Reviewers will be asked to consider whether the IP:

- Demonstrated an awareness of system barriers to creating and sustaining inclusive work environments;
- Related identified barriers to the team;
- Provided actionable steps to address the barriers;
- Contained specificity around who will benefit from the actions in the plan;
- Included plans for assessing the progress towards and effectiveness of the proposed activities;
- Considered psychological mechanisms (belonging, team climate, etc.) rather than solely focusing on demographics when thinking about barriers

Evaluation of Inclusion Plans

Reviewers will be asked to consider whether the IP:

- Demonstrated an awareness of the literature surrounding inclusion and barriers team members may face (include citations and references)
 - Does the IP demonstrate an understanding of the differences between diversity and inclusion?
- Described roles, responsibilities, and work effort for all team members who will be participating in IP activities.
 - Involve professionals (and pay them!)
- Provided a reasonable timeline and budget for accomplishing the proposed activities.

Panel Feedback

After every panel, HQ gathers feedback from IP reviewers.

We discuss, e.g.,:

- IPs for each proposal
- Call language
- Review/evaluation process

Feedback is incorporated into call language and evaluation process

- e.g., feedback from ATP directly fed into PRISM 2 call text

At this time, we do not intend to solicit feedback about the call language or evaluation from proposers writ large, but welcome feedback via the CoP members and/or individual proposal debriefs.

Some common weaknesses

- Tokenizing diverse team members
- Confusing inclusion with team building and/or outreach activities
- Confusing diversity *numbers* with inclusion
 - e.g., solely hiring more members of diverse backgrounds in an effort to “check the box” of being inclusive.
- Use of IDEA language from the PI’s institute and claiming “this flows down to our team”
 - *i.e.*, posting of institutional statements with no explanation of how it applies to the project team.
 - Proposers are encouraged to leverage institutional resources rather than solely outsourcing (and assuming adequate team support) from institutions”.
- Insufficient (or lacking) descriptions of desired outcomes and evidence supporting the likelihood of success.
- Explaining good workplace practices without (or by only weakly) tying these practices back to the team and proposed investigation.
- Uncertainty regarding how to utilize metrics of success.

Some common strengths

- Clearly discussing barriers specific to the proposal team
- Discussing specific, actionable items to mitigate identified barriers
- Connecting barriers to specific mitigating actions
- Containing well-defined goals
- Demonstrating understanding of inclusion vs. diversity
- Including metrics for assessing success of described plan
- Identified/acknowledged intersecting axes of diversity of team members

Resources

In response to community feedback, SMD has developed a website with resources to support writing, revision, and implementations of Inclusion Plans. This website also contains the recordings from the first Inclusion Plan Best Practices Workshop, held in November 2022.

<https://science.nasa.gov/researchers/inclusion>



Ideas or requests for resources can be sent to amanda.l.nahm@nasa.gov.