



**NSF EPSCoR**  
ADVANCING GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY IN STEM



**U.S. NSF Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR)  
Research Capacity and Competitiveness Section (RCC)**

## Renewal Project Site Visit Guidelines for

### E-CORE RII

EPSCoR Collaborations for Optimizing Research Ecosystems  
Research Infrastructure Improvement Program

and

### E-RISE RII

EPSCoR Research Incubators for STEM Excellence  
Research Infrastructure Improvement Program

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## **Table of Contents**

1. Introduction
2. Goals of the Renewal Site Visit
3. Preparation for Renewal Site Visit (RnSV)
  - 3.1. Timing of RnSV
  - 3.2. Development of RnSV Panel
  - 3.3. Submission of RnSV Proposal
  - 3.4. Submission of Pre-RnSV Materials
  - 3.5. Hotel Accommodations for RnSV Panelists and NSF Staff
  - 3.6. Provision of Transportation on Site
  - 3.7. Meals
  - 3.8. Briefing Rooms, Executive Session Rooms, Report Writing Rooms
4. Preparation of RnSV Briefings and Meetings
5. Agenda for the RnSV
  - 5.1. Day 0 – Executive Session – Panel Charge
  - 5.2. Day 1 and Day 2
  - 5.3. Day 3
6. Logistics and Other Issues
7. Determination of Renewal Award

Renewal Site Visit Guidelines for  
EPSCoR Collaborations for Optimizing Research Ecosystems RII Program (E-CORE RII) and EPSCoR Research Incubators for STEM Excellence RII Program (E-RISE RII)

In the third year of the E-CORE RII or E-RISE RII award, the funded project will be eligible to apply for a renewal award to support an additional three-year (E-RISE) or four-year (E-CORE) period for the project. The process for applying for a renewal award is a two-step process that is initiated by the project team's lead PI/PD, who will submit by electronic mail to the cognizant NSF program officer a notice of intent to apply for a renewal award no later than the end of the second quarter of year 3 (Y3Q2) of the award. As the first step for the application process, project teams will submit a renewal proposal in the third quarter of their third year, the timing of which corresponds to the annual reporting period. The renewal proposal will consist of a *cumulative* annual report of all progress made on the active E-CORE RII or E-RISE award plus an additional section detailing the proposed activities and proposed budget for the renewal period, *and is hereafter referred to as the renewal report*. For the second step, NSF EPSCoR, with a panel of experts, will conduct a renewal site visit (RnSV) in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the third year to evaluate the progress, capability, and performance of the awardees, and will include the review of the cumulative annual report that was submitted in step 1 in formulating a RnSV report. A final renewal recommendation then will be made by the cognizant NSF program officer that is based on the progress as reported in the Renewal Annual Report and the evaluation of the Renewal Site Visit.

As defined in the NSF PAPPG, *renewal award* means an award made subsequent to an expiring NSF award for which the start date is contiguous with, or closely follows, the end of the expiring NSF award. A renewal award's start date will begin a distinct period of performance. Generally, costs incurred under the old award cannot be transferred to the new award. Residual funds remaining in the old award cannot be transferred to the new award. Thus, there is an expectation that funds on an existing E-CORE RII or E-RISE RII award will be spent out before a renewal award is made.

Projects may elect not to renew an E-CORE RII or E-RISE RII award. In this instance, a renewal site visit will not occur, and the third-year annual report will follow the guidelines provided above. Projects will submit their final report in year four of the project.

The following guidelines aim to assist E-CORE RII and E-RISE RII Principal Investigators (PIs)/Project Directors (PDs) in the preparation for the project's renewal site visit (RnSV). This guideline specifies the timeline, the preferred structure, and the process of the renewal site visit. In cases where this document differs from the solicitation, the guidelines

provided here take precedence. All E-CORE RII and E-RISE RII projects undergoing renewal review must adhere to these guidelines.

## 1. Goals of the Renewal Site Visit

NSF EPSCoR uses the Renewal Site Visit (RnSV) to evaluate the project's overall performance to date in the context of its renewal proposal for continuation of funding of E-CORE RII/E-RISE RII projects. The RnSV allows NSF to evaluate the use of its investments to achieve the goals of NSF EPSCoR and to assess the capability, performance, and compliance of the awardee with respect to administrative regulations, as well as to ensure that a project is operating and evolving in a manner that is consistent with the project's strategic plan. In conjunction with the renewal report, which is a report of the progress made across the cumulative three years of the project, the RnSV will verify that satisfactory progress has been made on what was proposed in the original proposal. The RnSV will also determine if NSF will approve additional years of funding to advance the work conducted in the initial project period. The outcome of the RnSV, along with approval of the previously submitted renewal report, will determine whether projects are awarded a renewal or transitioned to a phase down period.

## 2. Preparation for Renewal Site Visit

### 2.1. Timing/Confirmation of Renewal Site Visit (RnSV):

The RnSV is the second step of the process for applying for a renewal award, which is initiated in the second quarter of year 3 (Y3Q2), when the project team alerts NSF EPSCoR of their intent to apply for a renewal award. Subsequently, in Y3Q3, the project team will submit a renewal report following the guidelines provided in the document titled "Annual Report and Renewal Report Guidelines for E-CORE RII/E-RISE RII" (available here) and, between Y3Q4 and Y4Q1, NSF will conduct the RnSV. A recommendation of whether to award the renewal request will be made by the second quarter of year 4 (Y4Q2).

The project team's lead PI/PD is responsible for initiating the application for renewal. This notification of the intent to apply for a renewal award must be sent to the NSF cognizant Program Officer by electronic mail no later than the end of the second quarter of year 3 (Y3Q2, months six of the third year of the award). At that time, NSF EPSCoR will work with the PI/PD to identify dates for the RnSV that fall within a period that ranges from the beginning of the fourth quarter of project Year 3 (Y3Q4) to the end of the first quarter of project Year 4 (Y4Q1). The dates for the RnSV, which will consist of three consecutive days, will be finalized within 60 days of receipt of the intent to request renewal funding. To allow full participation of all

project team members, including students, NSF anticipates that the RnSV dates will not conflict with graduation, examination, and/or defense schedules at the lead or partner institutions. Once the dates are finalized, NSF EPSCoR will provide the PI/PD with the following documents, which will include information regarding the delivery format of the renewal report that is required as part of the renewal review: the *E-CORE RII/E-RISE RII Renewal Site Visit Guidelines* (this document) and the *Guidelines for Preparing the Annual Report and Renewal Report*. These documents are also available on the [NSF EPSCoR website's Annual Reporting link](#).

## 2.2. RnSV Participants

The RnSV is an opportunity for project teams to showcase their accomplishments over the award period, and to highlight their potential to expand and enhance the project over the next proposed funding period. Participants in the site visit will include all members of the project leadership team, all funded senior personnel, all postdoctoral fellows and graduate students, and a broad representation of participating undergraduate students. Additionally, any funded or unfunded collaborators, particularly those representing industry partners and partners from non-profit organizations or other sectors, as well as advisory board members, are welcome to attend.

NSF also anticipates engaging with university leadership (for example, Deans, Vice Presidents, Associate Provosts, and/or Provosts) that are representative of the lead institution and all partnering institutions. The PI/PD has the option to attend this meeting. The meeting can be in hybrid format to accommodate those representatives who are not co-located at the host institution.

## 2.3. Location of the RnSV

The location of the RnSV can be determined by the project leadership team, ideally at the institution or institutions that will provide the best opportunities to allow observation of NSF investments made as part of the E-CORE RII/E-RISE RII award(s). If geographical distances present barriers to visiting partnering institutions, the project team may opt to include virtual tours of facilities and investments as needed.

## 2.4. Development and Confirmation of the Renewal Site Visit Panel

The cognizant NSF program officer will select the members of the RnSV panel to include experts from academia, industry, and government with experience in the disciplines relevant to the project's goals and activities, including research (only applicable to E-RISE RII awards), research infrastructure, education, workforce development, and other goals described in the proposal.

## 2.5. Submission of Renewal Proposal

The project team will write a renewal proposal in accordance with the “Guidelines for Preparing Annual Reports and Renewal Proposals” and submitted using [the EPSCoR Data Outcomes Collection System](#) (EDOCS) as directed in the guidelines. The renewal proposal must be received by NSF by the end of the third quarter of year 3 (Y3Q3), which will correspond to at least eight weeks (60 days) prior to the RnSV. The renewal proposal and must include information on cumulative progress on the award and plans for the proposed years of the renewal period. This document will be made available to the RnSV panelists by NSF EPSCoR.

## 2.6. Submission of Pre-Site Visit Materials and Distribution to Panelists

The PI/PD will provide the following documents electronically to NSF EPSCoR prior to the RnSV, in the formats and at the times indicated below. These materials will be distributed to the panelists by NSF EPSCoR.

<b>Document</b>	<b>Format/submission mechanism</b>	<b>Due to NSF</b>
Renewal proposal	PDF and/or other formats as required for EDOCS submission	End of Y3Q3
External evaluation report (cumulative)	PDF/EDOCS	Y3Q3
Hotel and venue information, including hotel point of contact for meeting and events	PDF/spreadsheet/email to cognizant NSF PO	60 days prior to RnSV
List of participants	PDF spreadsheet/email to cognizant NSF PO	21 days prior to RnSV
Poster presentation titles and abstracts	PDF spreadsheet/email to cognizant NSF PO	14 days prior to RnSV
Final agenda	PDF/email to cognizant NSF PO	14 days prior to RnSV
Slides for all presentations	Separate documents for each presentation as PDF/email(s) to cognizant NSF PO	7 days prior to RnSv

The panelists also will have access to the merit review documents for the project award, including the original proposal, the NSF approved strategic plan, the programmatic terms and conditions (E-CORE RII projects only), and any additional guidance provided to the team by the cognizant NSF program officer in response to Year 1 and Year 2 annual reports.

## 2.7. Hotel Accommodations for RnSV Panelists and NSF Staff

The project team will locate a suitable hotel near the RnSV location that has an on-site or nearby restaurant. The project team will be responsible for arranging the four-night (arrival on day 0, depart on day 4) room block for the panelists and NSF

staff and will send an e-mail to the cognizant NSF program officer that contains the name, address, website, and telephone number of the hotel, as well as the email address for the hotel's point of contact for meeting room/conference planning.

NSF EPSCoR will instruct the panelists to guarantee their rooms with their personal credit cards and NSF will be responsible for reserving and paying for the meeting conference room to be used at the hotel on Day 0 of the site visit.

## 2.8. Provision of Transportation on Site

The project team will arrange transportation for the panelists and NSF staff from the hotel to the university and back during the three days of the RnSV. The project team should be prepared to arrange for parking for those panelists or NSF staff who will be driving their own vehicles. In general, the panelists and NSF staff are expected to find and pay for their own transportation from the airport to the hotel and back; however, the project team may provide assistance with arrangements. If the host institution (not to include members of the project team) provides transportation to and/or from the airport for panelists or NSF staff, the project team should calculate the value of the transportation provided and add that amount to the agreed upon amount collected for meals (see below).

## 2.9. Meals

The panelists and NSF staff will reimburse the project team for their meal costs. At least seven days prior to the RnSV, the project team should provide NSF EPSCoR with an itemized cost of the meals and should indicate the preferred method of payment (i.e., cash, credit card, personal check, other). The project team should be prepared to provide each panelist and NSF staff with a receipt for the meal and/or travel reimbursement.

Meals: Please make sure to meet dietary restrictions (NSF EPSCoR will provide this information to the PI/PD prior to the meeting).

- Breakfasts. The project team will provide a continental breakfast for the panelists, NSF staff, project team members, and other site visit participants. Breakfast should be an opportunity for the panelists and NSF staff to mingle informally with the project team members, including students.
- Lunch on Day 1. Lunch on Day 1 should be organized to mix faculty, students, industry members, and other project team members with the panelists and NSF staff.
- Lunch on Day 2. Lunch on Day 2 may be used for private meetings if appropriate.
- Lunch on Day 3. Lunch on Day 3 will occur in a closed executive session with only NSF staff and panelists. Please provide a box lunch or make arrangements with the hotel if Day 3 activities will occur there.

- Dinners. There will be no dinners arranged between the project team and the panelists and NSF staff. Please ensure that the site visit occurs in a location where there are dinner options for NSF staff and panelists.

#### 2.10. Briefing Rooms, Executive Session Rooms, Report Writing Rooms, Projectors, and Printers

Please secure a briefing room large enough to accommodate the panelists and NSF staff, university leadership, and all members of the project team that will be attending, including external evaluators, advisory members, industrial partners, and other participants. There should also be a second room nearby that will allow the panelists and NSF staff to meet privately for designated executive sessions. The table in the executive session room should be large enough to accommodate up to 15 people and the room should be equipped with wireless access to the Internet and a projector connected to a laptop.

On Day 3, the project team will provide the panelists and NSF staff with a room for site visit report writing. The space must be large enough to allow the panelists and NSF staff to work on laptops, and to include a second table or adjacent space for lunch and discussion. This space can be at the university or at the hotel where the panelists and NSF staff are staying. The project team will ensure that the panelists and NSF staff have wireless access to the Internet, including instructions and passwords. In addition, the project team will provide one laptop which will be connected to a functioning printer and to a projector.

### 3. Preparation of Site Visit Briefings and Meetings

The presentations and discussions during the RnSV will allow the panelists to calibrate the accomplishments and planned activities of the project team against related efforts and against the E-CORE RII or E-RISE RII review criteria, including NSF's merit review criteria established by the National Science Board, intellectual merit and broader impacts. The presentations should convey an overall command of the research ecosystem of the jurisdiction before and the onset of the E-CORE RII /ERISE RII, as well as of the field upon which the project goals are focused (E-RISE RII only) and should provide information pertinent to the review criteria, including the solicitation specific elements and the solicitation specific requirements, as outlined in the solicitation. Regardless of the length of each individual presentation segment, the time should be allotted to allow approximately 70 percent for the presentation with the remaining 30 percent for questions from the panelists. This will enable a dialogue to explore issues and resolve any ambiguities.

#### 4. Agenda for the Site Visit

The project team will construct an agenda informed by the following guidelines. The team should provide the cognizant NSF EPSCoR site visit lead with an initial draft of the agenda, highlighting any suggested modifications, at least 6 weeks prior to the RnSV, and the agenda should be finalized, with approval from the NSF EPSCoR site visit lead, at least 21 days before the RnSV.



#### 4.1. Day 0 – Executive Session – Panel Charge

The NSF staff will brief the panelists about the E-CORE RII or E-RISE RII program goals and the renewal review process. This briefing will take place on the afternoon or evening before Day 1 of the RnSV at the hotel where the panelists will be staying. *No action or participation by the project team members is needed for this briefing. The NSF staff will work with the hotel to arrange the meeting room for this meeting.*

#### 4.2. Day1 and Day 2

- Breakfast (at least 30 minutes in duration) should begin and end in time for the briefing sessions to start no later than 9:00 AM and to conclude no later than 6:00 PM.
- The visit should start with introductions of key project team and university personnel by the project team director. The NSF staff and RnSV panelists will introduce themselves.
- Key elements of the briefings to the panelists are outlined below. The agenda should begin with a Project Overview. The order of the remaining items can be determined by the project team, unless otherwise noted. All sessions involving the members of the project team must be concluded by the end of Day 2, and unless otherwise specified, may be attended by the full project team.
- The full project team (with university leadership also encouraged to attend) should be prepared to participate in a Q&A session at the end of Day 2. This session is intended to will allow panelists and NSF staff to identify concerns and opportunities that should be addressed by the team before the report is drafted and to provide an overall summary of the panelists' overall perspective of the RnSV.

##### 4.2.1. General Notes about Executive Sessions (ES)

There will be executive sessions throughout Days 1 and 2 for the panelists and NSF staff.

- Day 1: ES1 following the Program and Research Overviews, lasting approximately 40 minutes, including a 10-minute break
- Day 1: ES2 will occur prior to dinner.
- Day 2: ES3 will occur in the late morning, and should last 40 minutes including a 10-minute break
- Day 2: ES4 will be one hour in duration at the end of the day, prior to the final Q&A session. The purpose of the executive session, and the subsequent Q&A session is for the panelists to resolve major concerns and lingering questions. A projector and laptop should be available for this session.

##### 4.2.2. Required Agenda Items for E-CORE RII

- 4.2.2.1. Project Overview. This includes an overview of administrative core, organizational networking and engagement activities; results from strategic planning and evaluation including plans for sustainability; and progress related to the jurisdiction's Science & Technology Plan .
- 4.2.2.2. Goals, Accomplishments, and Progress of Other Cores.
- 4.2.2.3. Coordination for Networking Across the Research Ecosystem
- 4.2.2.4. Plan for Cores and Activities in the Renewal Period
- 4.2.2.5. Facilities Tours. If appropriate and with opportunities for student engagement when possible.
- 4.2.2.6. Industrial Partners/Non-Profits and Other Participating Organizations
- 4.2.2.7. Support of Diversity and a Culture of Inclusion.
- 4.2.2.8. Meeting with University Officials. This discussion will include but will not necessarily be limited to sustainability, institutional engagement, and institutional impact.

#### 4.2.3. Required Agenda Items for E-RISE RII

- 4.2.3.1. Project Overview. This includes information to provide context of the existing research ecosystem in the jurisdiction with respect to the research topic focus for the project, a review of project goals with respect to the six key elements of a successful E-RISE project as outlined in the solicitation (NSF 23-588), an overview of the organization and structure of the project and project team, with an emphasis on efforts to ensure a culture of inclusion across all participating organizations and institutions.
- 4.2.3.2. Research Program by Goal/Thrust/Theme. This should be presented by the goal/thrust/theme leads, and should highlight the scope and breadth of jurisdiction-wide networking and efforts
- 4.2.3.3. Plans for Research Activities in the Renewal Period. Discuss plans for the incorporation of new research and/or expansion of existing research in the renewal period, as well as any proposed future elements, such as the incorporation of new research thrusts, if applicable.
- 4.2.3.4. Progress with Workforce Development in the Context of the Research Focus.
- 4.2.3.5. Facilities tours, including opportunities for student engagement when applicable. Tours may be interspersed in the time devoted to research programs.
- 4.2.3.6. Poster session
- 4.2.3.7. Private meeting with students, postdoctoral fellows,
- 4.2.3.8. Private meeting with early career faculty
- 4.2.3.9. Meeting with University Officials. This discussion will include but will not necessarily be limited to sustainability, institutional engagement, and institutional impact.

### 4.3. Day 3

#### 4.3.1. Breakfast and Discussion

Please provide a continental breakfast at 7:30 a.m. for the site visit team members.

#### 4.3.2. Site Visit Report Writing

Please have technical support available in the event of I.T. issues (i.e. internet accessibility)

### 5. Logistics and Other Issues

The project team will provide NSF EPSCoR with an electronic copy of all site visit materials (as detailed above). If hard copies of any material are to be provided, they should be provided on site on Day 1 and should not be delivered to the hotel ahead of time. The project team will prepare nametags for the panelists (who will write their own names on the tags on Day 1) and NSF staff.

### 6. Determination of Award

The RnSV assessment will be based on the merit review criteria, including overall performance to date, satisfactory progress based on what was proposed in the original proposal, and feasibility and potential impact of activities proposed for renewal period. Overall outcomes of the RnSV and renewal proposal will be categorized in one of two categories:

- **Recommend for Continued Funding:** Must meet or surpass Yrs. 1-4 criteria and be positioned to excel in the following years.
- **Recommend Not to Renew (Phase Down Funding):** Weak past performance, little or no improvement to weaknesses/threats noted in prior annual reports, plans for the future will not be able to correct deficiencies

In extenuating circumstances, projects may be granted an intermediate, probationary renewal status to allow the project a short period to respond to significant project weaknesses or threats. Projects will be reassessed after the probationary period and either recommended for continued funding or transitioned to phase down of the project.

NSF will communicate the final outcome of the renewal process within 120 days of the end of the RnSV, which will be no later than the second quarter of Year 4 (Y2Q4) in the project.

In cases where the recommendation is Not to Renew, NSF EPSCoR will support transitional needs of the project team, including allowance of one year of supplemental transitional funding to allow phasing down of the project.

In cases where the recommendation is Continue Funding, NSF EPSCoR will forward the recommendation to the Division of Grants and Agreements, which is the NSF unit that will grant the renewal cooperative agreement (E-CORE RII) or award (E-RISE RII).

