NASA KENTUCKY EPSCoR 2026
Research Award (RA) Pre-Proposal Request
Announcement: RFP-26-001

Release Date: March 3, 2026

Letter of Intent (Required): March 24, 2026

Pre-proposal Submission: April 9, 2026

Teleconference for Proposers: March 10, 2026, 2:00 PM ET

NASA Kentucky

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Proposal forms, FAQ, and additional information available:
nasa.engr.uky.edu/epscor and nasa.engr.uky.edu/requests-for-proposals

NASA KENTUCKY EPSCoR Pre-Proposal Request

NASA EPSCoR Basic Research Funding

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Office of STEM Engagement (OSTEM), in cooperation with NASA's five Mission Directorates (MD) and ten Centers, will solicit FY26 proposals for the NASA Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) Basic Research award program. Each of the 28 EPSCoR states is permitted to submit one proposal to the NASA EPSCoR Basic Research solicitation, with 10 to 15 awards expected.

The NASA Kentucky EPSCoR program is offering this pre-proposal opportunity in order to select Kentucky's proposal team for the national solicitation.

Projects funded by the NASA EPSCoR Basic Research program are expected to establish research activities that will contribute to NASA's mission, specifically research and technology development priorities of one or more NASA MD or Centers. Funded projects should contribute to the overall research infrastructure, science and technology capabilities, higher education, and economic development of the EPSCoR jurisdiction (Kentucky). These projects should establish a significant research base, develop active collaborations with NASA and academia, and improve competitiveness for follow-on funding.

The FY26 NASA EPSCoR Research Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) will be available in mid-April 2026 at nspires.nasaprs.com. Prior to release, proposers may refer to the previous national NASA solicitation (NH24ZHA003C-EPSCOR FY25) for descriptions of national program objectives and guidelines.

Request for Pre-proposals

NASA KENTUCKY EPSCoR invites PRE-PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS that address
NASA mission, science and technical needs and aerospace-related research infrastructure for Kentucky.

Anticipated Size of Awards: The research team may budget for $675,000 in Federal NASA funds over 3 years with full indirect costs (F&A).

Cost-Share: Cost-share of 50% is required.

Period of Performance: Up to 3 years with estimated start date of September 2026.

Pre-Proposal Selection: One pre-proposal will be selected. The selected research team will work with the NASA KY Program to develop the selected pre-proposal as the state's single eligible entry in the national NASA EPSCoR competition. The pre-proposal selection process will be conducted according to the guidelines and timeline described in the following sections.

Eligibility: Pre-proposals will be accepted from any institution of higher education in Kentucky. US citizenship is not required.

Timeline

▪ Teleconference for Proposers	March 10, 2026, 2:00 PM ET
▪ Letter of Intent (Required)	March 24, 2026
▪ Pre-Proposal Submission Deadline	April 9, 2026
▪ Pre-Proposal Selection Announcement	Anticipated by May 15, 2026
▪ Full Proposal Submission to NASA via NSPIRES	June 15, 2026

Proposal forms available online at nasa.engr.uky.edu/requests-for-proposals/forms

Pre-proposal Submission Instructions

I. Letter of Intent (Required): Send to nasa@uky.edu by **March 24, 2026**

1) The Letter of Intent should summarize in one page: the research topic, 3-year scope of work, brief description of alignment with NASA including Mission Directorate or Center, existing NASA partnerships, and potential for additional research collaboration with NASA, industry and other research institutions.

2) Include on a separate page complete contact information (name, title, address, phone, email) for each of the following: PI and their Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) for Sponsored Projects. Please also include a list of potential NASA collaborators with brief description of their collaboration role.

The LOI should show evidence of well-developed research goals, strong potential for NASA partnership, and alignment with NASA research topics and KY programmatic objectives. Proposers are required to submit an LOI. Once an LOI has been submitted, then proposers are eligible to submit a pre-proposal.

II. Pre-Proposal: Submit online at nasa.engr.uky.edu by **April 9, 2026**

All pre-proposals must be submitted as PDF files via the NASA KY website. Documents can be submitted as a single, combined PDF. The pre-proposal cover page requires AOR signature. Please title documents beginning with the PI's last name. Letters of support are strongly encouraged with this submission.

- ☐ *NASA KY COVER PAGE:* Must be signed by institutional AOR
  - Digital signatures are acceptable or scan the signed original and save as PDF
- ☐ *PRE-PROPOSAL PROJECT DESCRIPTION:*
  - 10-page limit – See guidelines for required content (pg. 8)
  - Additional pages – See guidelines for list of documents (pg. 8)
  - 12-point font, 1-inch margins, single spaced
- ☐ *NASA KY BUDGET FORM & BUDGET NARRATIVE:* See budget guidelines (pg. 9)
  - Budget form for Federal funds ($675,000) with F&A
  - Include budget narrative describing in detail requested support and cost-share

Teleconference for Proposers (Optional)

Interested researchers may participate in a conference call at 2:00 pm ET, March 10, 2026 to discuss the submission and selection process, features of past successful proposals, and budget structure. Participant information will be kept confidential. Please register to receive meeting information and updates about the telecon: forms.gle/c5DYy92aMfcFFfA8A. Proposers may also contact NASA KY with questions during the pre-proposal process.

General Guidelines

See the following sections for specific content guidelines. Pre-proposals that omit required materials or exceed page limits may be considered non-compliant and rejected without review. Proposers can review the NASA Grants and Cooperative Agreement Manual (GCAM) for NASA-specific proposal guidelines.

- *Special Purpose Equipment* may be purchased or used as cost-share (during the performance period).
- *General Purpose Equipment* may not be purchased or used as cost-share.
- *Travel funds* may be used for domestic and foreign travel as specified in the NASA NOFO.
- *Cost-share must be 50%* from non-Federal sources (see below for more detail).
- *US citizenship not required;* foreign nationals receiving support must be employed by a US institution.

Additional information and FAQ: nasa.engr.uky.edu/epscor

Pre-Proposal Budget

Project Budget: The pre-proposal budget is considered a draft budget, not a final version. The budget should adhere to the research team's institutional policies. Proposers should include a budget justification consisting of 1) a NASA KY Budget Form for $675,000 in Federal funds including F&A and 2) a budget narrative that describes details of proposed expenditures and cost-share sources. Budget requirements are described in the following section (pg. 9). NASA EPSCoR funds shall be expended on institutions in NASA EPSCoR states.

Cost-Share: Federal funds must be cost-shared with in-kind contributions and/or non-Federal funds at a level of at least 50% of the $675,000 Federal amount ($337,500 in cost-share). Pre-proposal cost-share will not be considered a cost-share commitment, but only a description of potential matching sources available for the proposal if it is selected for submission.

Pre-Proposal Review Process

The NASA KY EPSCoR program and advisors from inside and outside the jurisdiction will review pre-proposals and rate them based on the following criteria:

- INTRINSIC MERIT (50%)
  - Proposed research and justification of proposed approach informed by the research team's prior research and relevant NASA studies
- NASA ALIGNMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS (30%)
  - Relevance of proposed research to NASA research topics and Kentucky research development
  - Strength of collaborations, including NASA, Kentucky, workforce and industry
  - Sustainability - specific plans for building partnerships, institutional support, continued funding
- MANAGEMENT (10%): Project management and evaluation, including task schedule and milestones; successful and timely completion of prior NASA Kentucky projects and reporting
- BUDGET (10%): Effective use of funds, reasonableness and detail of budget narrative

The review process will consider funding history and prior reporting of the research team to assess readiness to propose to the national competition. During review, the Director may contact NASA collaborators identified in the pre-proposal to evaluate strength of partnership and involvement in pre-proposal development. Note: Strength of partnership and NASA alignment are major determining factors.

Reviewers will recommend to the NASA KY EPSCoR Director one pre-proposal for development into a full proposal. The selected research group will work with the NASA KY EPSCoR Director to prepare the full proposal for submission to NASA via NSPIRES. The University of Kentucky will be the submitting institution and the NASA KY EPSCoR Director will serve as PI on the proposal submitted to NASA.

Research Alignment and Collaboration

Programmatic alignment is a major determining factor in this funding program. Proposals to this program must address objectives described in the following sections.

- Proposals should align with NASA missions, technical goals, and/or the NASA EPSCoR FY26 Research Topics as well as national NASA EPSCoR objectives and programmatic elements. Investigators can propose any NASA-related research topic, but should utilize NASA resources such as these as guidance.
- Proposals should address Kentucky's NASA EPSCoR program objectives and contribute to significant and sustained NASA-related research capabilities and infrastructure in Kentucky that will be well-positioned to compete for follow-on funding.

- Pre-proposals should include letters of support detailing the commitment of any participation, resources, or assistance to the project by external collaborators (NASA and third-party). Please note, letters that only express endorsement of the project are not accepted. Proposers must show evidence of collaboration with NASA researchers by including letters of support or informal statements of collaboration. For the pre-proposal process, formal letters of support are not required, but are encouraged. Proposers should allow for time required to obtain NASA letters. In addition to any existing NASA collaborations, it is recommended that proposers contact new NASA points of contact, such as those listed in the NASA EPSCoR FY26 Research Topics, to explore additional NASA collaboration.
- Proposers should utilize available NASA resources to help characterize their alignment with NASA priorities, such as the NASA Technology Taxonomy and NASA EPSCoR Research Topics. NASA Techport is available as a resource for proposers to review related studies and consider potential research task objectives to incorporate in their project. Relevant websites and documents are linked under "Proposal Resources" on the NASA KY EPSCoR web page.

National NASA EPSCoR Program Objectives

- Contribute to and promote the development of research infrastructure in NASA EPSCoR jurisdictions in areas of strategic importance to the NASA mission.
- Improve the capabilities of the jurisdictions to gain support from sources outside the NASA EPSCoR program.
- Develop partnerships among NASA research assets, academic institutions, commercial space programs, and industry.
- Contribute to the overall research infrastructure, science and technology capabilities of higher education, and/or economic development of the jurisdiction.

NASA KENTUCKY EPSCoR Program Objectives

The statewide Kentucky EPSCoR Program mission is to enhance research and intellectual capacity of the state's universities and colleges by building and coordinating strategic investments in human capital necessary for Kentucky to excel in Federal R&D funding competitiveness. Derived from this statewide mission, NASA Kentucky EPSCoR has goals to enhance R&D capacity through strategic investments focused on NASA-priority research areas and leading to competitiveness for non-EPSCoR funding.

A key factor in achieving these goals is initiation of relationships between Kentucky and NASA researchers that develop into partnerships. Every aspect of the program emphasizes the process of relationship building, including the contribution of early-career faculty and partnerships between in-state institutions to help solve NASA technical problems and expand NASA science outcomes.

NASA KY EPSCoR investment is focused on NASA priorities including Aeronautics, Science, Human Spaceflight and Space Technology, ISS National Laboratory, lunar and planetary exploration, and to develop researchers in Kentucky who are nationally and internationally recognized for contributions to their fields.

Equally important to building research capacity are the resulting contributions to workforce and economic development evidenced by securing follow-on research funding (non-EPSCoR) and supporting outcomes and training related to KY industry needs and associated job creation. Growth in economic development opportunities as a result of the NASA EPSCoR investment is therefore a jurisdictional emphasis underlying all aspects of the program. The NASA Kentucky EPSCoR Program receives support through the Cabinet for Economic Development and the statewide Kentucky EPSCoR Committee, the University of Kentucky, and cost-share commitment from participating institutions statewide.

NASA Research, Science and Technology Priorities

The NASA EPSCoR Program and the NASA Office of STEM Engagement (OSTEM) support alignment with research and technology priorities of NASA's five Mission Directorates: Aeronautics Research (ARMD), Exploration Systems Development (ESDMD), Science (SMD), Space Operations (SOMD), and Space Technology (STMD). For information on NASA's missions, please visit www.nasa.gov/nasa-missions and the following URLs:

- Aeronautics Research (www.aeronautics.nasa.gov)
- Exploration Systems Development (www.nasa.gov/exploration-systems-development-mission-directorate/)
- Science (science.nasa.gov)
- Space Operations (www.nasa.gov/directorates/space-operations-mission-directorate
- Space Technology (www.nasa.gov/space-technology-mission-directorate/)
- NASA Office of STEM Engagement (OSTEM) (www.nasa.gov/learning-resources/)
- NASA OSTEM Higher Education (www.nasa.gov/learning-resources/colleges-and-universities/)
- NASA EPSCoR (www.nasa.gov/learning-resources/established-program-to-stimulate-competitive-research/)

NASA Mission Directorate (MD) Descriptions

Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate (ARMD): NASA aeronautics has made decades of contributions to aviation. Every U.S. commercial aircraft and U.S. air traffic control tower has NASA-developed technology on board that helps improve efficiency and maintain safety. Research conducted by ARMD directly benefits today's air transportation system, the aviation industry, and the passengers and businesses who rely on aviation every day. ARMD scientists, engineers, programmers, test pilots, facilities managers and strategic planners are focused on aviation's future. They design, develop and test advanced technologies that will make aviation much more environmentally friendly, maintain safety in more crowded skies, and ultimately transform the way we fly. NASA's aeronautics research is primarily conducted at four NASA centers: Ames Research Center and Armstrong Flight Research Center in California, Glenn Research Center in Ohio, and Langley Research Center in Virginia.

Exploration Systems Development Mission Directorate (ESDMD): The Exploration Systems Development Mission Directorate defines and manages systems development for programs critical to the NASA's Artemis program and planning for NASA's Moon to Mars exploration approach in an integrated manner. ESDMD manages the human exploration system development for lunar orbital, lunar surface, and Mars exploration. ESDMD leads the human aspects of the Artemis activities as well as the integration of science into the human system elements. ESDMD is responsible for development of the lunar and Mars architectures. Programs in the mission directorate include Orion, Space Launch System, Exploration Ground Systems, Gateway, Human Landing System, and Extravehicular Activity (xEVA) and Human Surface Mobility. ESDMD duties were previously managed under the Human Exploration and Operations Mission Directorate (HEOMD).

Science Mission Directorate (SMD): NASA's Science Mission Directorate (SMD) is responsible for directing and overseeing the nation's space research program in Earth and space science. The Directorate engages the external and internal science community to define and prioritize science questions and seeks to expand the frontiers of four broad scientific pursuits: Earth Science, Planetary Science, Heliophysics, and Astrophysics. Through a variety of robotic observatory and explorer craft, and through sponsored research, the Directorate provides virtual human access to the farthest reaches of space and time, as well as practical information about changes on our home planet.

Space Operations Mission Directorate (SOMD): NASA's Space Operations Mission Directorate (SOMD) is responsible for enabling sustained human exploration missions and operations in our solar system. SOMD manages NASA's current and future space operations in and beyond low-Earth orbit (LEO), including commercial launch services to the International Space Station. SOMD operates and maintains exploration systems, develops and operates space transportation systems, and performs broad scientific research on orbit. In addition, SOMD is responsible for managing the space transportation services for NASA and NASA-sponsored payloads that require orbital launch, and the agency's space communications and navigation services supporting all NASA's space systems currently in orbit. SOMD duties were previously managed under the Human Exploration and Operations Mission Directorate (HEOMD).

Space Technology Mission Directorate (STMD): Technology drives exploration to the Moon, Mars and beyond. NASA's Space Technology Mission Directorate (STMD) develops transformative space technologies to enable future missions. As NASA embarks on its next era of exploration, STMD is focused on advancing technologies and testing new capabilities at the Moon that will be critical for crewed missions to Mars. In many ways, the Moon will serve as a technology testbed and proving ground for Mars. STMD engages and inspires thousands of entrepreneurs, researchers and innovators, creating a community of America's best and brightest working on the nation's toughest challenges. Space technology research and development take place at NASA centers, universities and national labs. STMD leverages partnerships with other government agencies as well as commercial and international partners. Our current technology portfolio spans a range of discipline areas and technology readiness levels. Investments in revolutionary, American-made space technologies provide solutions on Earth and in space. NASA technology turns up in nearly every corner of modern life. We make our space tech available to commercial companies to generate real world benefits – everything from creating jobs to saving lives.

Pre-Proposal Content Guidelines

A pre-proposal consists of a signed Cover Page and 10-page Project Description plus specified Additional Pages. Successful proposals clearly describe how the proposed research supports NASA priorities aligned with one or more NASA Mission Directorates or Centers, how the proposed effort enhances research capabilities within Kentucky that are also of strategic importance to NASA, and how Kentucky researchers will continue to interact with NASA researchers in the technical area.

Successful proposals include sound science plans aligned with NASA priorities. Discriminating considerations include addressing NASA technical needs, strength of NASA partnerships, contributions to state research capabilities and infrastructure, including in-state institutional partnerships and involvement of early-career faculty.

Project Description (10-page limit):
The project description includes a detailed description of the proposed research plan and addresses each of the sections described below. Page limit includes all illustrations, tables, and figures.

- ☐ **Abstract** (200-300 words)
- ☐ **Proposed Research:** Proposed research and justification of approach informed by the research team's prior research and relevant NASA studies. Goals, objectives, tasks, milestones and project schedule.
- ☐ **Partnerships and Interactions:** Describe partnerships and cooperative arrangements among NASA, academia, government, business, industry, and private research foundations.
- ☐ **Sustainability:** Describe how the research capability will be sustained beyond the funding period. There should be a clear plan for developing the research beyond NASA EPSCoR funding and for seeking institutional support and non-EPSCoR funding. Identify potential solicitations and opportunities.
- ☐ **Evaluation:** Describe an evaluation plan for measuring project success. The evaluation plan should be appropriate for the scope of the proposed activity and include discussion of data collection and analysis.
- ☐ **Prior NASA, NASA EPSCoR or NASA Kentucky Research Support:** Demonstrate effectiveness of prior research support. If the PI or Co-I's have received NASA EPSCoR or NASA Kentucky research funding in the past five years, information on the award(s) and results is required.

Additional Pages: the following should be included in addition to the 10-page Project Description

- ☐ **Cover page:** Signed by the PI's Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) for Sponsored Projects.
- ☐ **References:** No page limit
- ☐ **Budget Justification:** See guidelines on next page.
- ☐ **Team Management Summary:** No more than 2 pages summarizing qualifications, roles, responsibilities and effort committed by team members.
- ☐ **Curriculum vitae:** 2-page CV for lead PI, 1-page CV for Co-Is
- ☐ **Statements of Commitment:** Any third-party resources committed to the project from collaborators should include a letter of support detailing the commitment. A letter of support or email statement from at least one NASA technical contact is required. NASA letters should indicate some form of commitment to the proposed research project, relevance to funding priorities, and willingness to participate in the project. Please note, NASA collaborators require time to obtain authorization for letters of support. Informal letters of support (including email) are allowed. Letters that only express endorsement of the project are not accepted.

Pre-proposal documents can be submitted as a combined PDF and should be titled with the PI's last name.

Pre-Proposal Budget Guidelines

A draft budget table (NASA KY Budget Form) and budget narrative should be submitted with the pre-proposal. The budget should address proposed expenditures for the three-year project, starting in August or September 2026.

The research team may request $675,000 in Federal funds with full indirect costs (F&A) over 3 years. The budget should include a NASA KY budget form showing proposed costs for $675,000 in Federal funds (with F&A). Budgets are considered draft budgets, not final versions. The budget should adhere to Federal policies and the research team's institutional policies.

Cost-share of 50% is required. For additional information about cost-share, see pg. 4.

The budget narrative should describe how the award funds will be used to support faculty, student research assistants, travel, materials and supplies, research equipment and other costs. Describe the indirect cost rate (F&A) and cost basis of salaries, fringe benefits, travel, materials and supplies, and equipment. The budget should also describe institutional support or additional sources to address the required 50% cost-share, including any in-kind contributions.

Proposers should contact NASA KY with questions about allowable costs. Submitted proposals must be consistent with Federal policies and the research team's institutional policies and practices, e.g. definition of equipment, stipend, etc. Any external assistance or resources (NASA and third-party) committed to the project from collaborators should include a letter of support detailing the commitment.

Please note: The NASA EPSCoR Research Solicitation provides up to $750,000 in Federal funding, however proposers are requested to budget $675,000 for the research team pre-proposals. The NASA Kentucky EPSCoR program applies the additional $75,000 funding to project management, jurisdictional objectives, and F&A in support of the project. Proposers do not need to budget for this additional amount.

The following should be submitted with the pre-proposal package:

Signed Cover Page:
Submit a signed version of the project cover page. The project cover page *must be signed* by the PI's Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) for Sponsored Projects. Digital signatures are acceptable. For physical signatures, scan the signed original and save as PDF.

Draft Budget (no page limit):
The pre-proposal budget should include a NASA KY Budget Form for the Federal amount, along with a budget narrative fully describing the use of funds. Proposers may provide additional budget detail (e.g. annual budgets) using their own budget tables. The budget justification should address all requested support and cost-share.

- ☐ **NASA KY Budget Form** for Federal funds (cumulative over 3 years)
- ☐ **Budget Narrative:** Describe how the award and cost-share funds (if applicable) will be used to support faculty, students, travel, materials and supplies, research equipment and other costs. Describe in-kind matching contributions and plans to address the required 50% cost-share. Describe indirect cost rate and basis. Page limit as needed.
- ☐ **Budget Detail:** Proposers may include their own budget tables showing additional budget detail, including annual costs.

Note: No contractual forms are needed for the pre-proposal. If the pre-proposal is selected as a candidate for the national competition, the final budget version will be further developed before submission to NASA.