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Proposals That Include U.S. Academic Research Fleet Ship Time

Some programs within OCE now accept proposals at any time with no target dates, and therefore there may be confusion regarding when to request ship time on vessels in the U.S. Academic Research Fleet (ARF). This is an update to the May 2017 guidance on proposals with ship time.

Our purpose here is to reformulate OCE guidance on the submission of NSF seagoing science proposals in terms that emphasize the need for sufficient lead time between proposal submission and the expedition itself.

When should an ocean-going science proposal be submitted to NSF?

For research requesting Global or Ocean class ARF vessels and especially those needing National Deep Submergence Facility (NDSF) assets: The proposal with Ship-time & Marine Equipment Request Form (SME) should be submitted at least 18 months before the anticipated time of the first expedition. The ship time request is created in the Marine Facilities Planning website <https://mfp.us>. The timing of the cruise needs to consider many factors to align the work with the study region along with the necessary ancillary components to enable efficient scheduling.

For Intermediate, Regional and Local-class vessels: The proposal with SME should be submitted with as much lead time as is practical, but we recommend doing so at least 12 months before the anticipated time of the first cruise.

Is that a hard-and-fast rule? Or are exceptions possible?

While it is impossible to foresee every possible situation or research opportunity that might occur, as a rule ship time will only rarely be scheduled within 12-months from proposal submission. In general, most ship schedules are finalized by September of the previous year.

Highly meritorious RAPID proposals are notable exceptions that would be handled on a case-by-case basis by the cognizant science, ship operations, and facilities program officers in dialog with the ship operator and the principal investigator.

What else should a principal investigator do before submitting a proposal to go to sea?

Once the scientific scope of the research is defined, prospective PIs should carefully and realistically consider the technological and logistical requirements of the expedition and then align the request for a specific ship and the amount of ship time accordingly.

Principal investigators should educate themselves regarding potential scheduling opportunities by either contacting ship operating institutions, calling the UNOLS Office and/or logging onto the UNOLS scheduling website (accessible with password provided by UNOLS).

Remember to include a copy of your ship time request as a supplementary document in your proposal.

All funding status updates (i.e., funded, pending, or declined) need to be updated in the MFP system by the PI. However, due to restrictions regarding Controlled Unclassified Information, NSF cannot provide proposal status updates to UNOLS. Therefore, if you want to be scheduled, be proactive in updating your SME.

And last but not least, early engagement with your cognizant program officer at NSF, the ship operators, and UNOLS office – even before the proposal writing is begun — is always wise, especially if the project is logistically complex and carries a significant cost. If in doubt about what you are doing or what you need to do, get in touch with your program officer!

U.S ARF Scheduling Time-line for NSF Proposals

