

Earth Science Division – 2020 Senior Review of Extension of Operating Missions
Call Letter Questions & Answers

Proposal Scenarios for Missions with Baselines That Assume Decommissioning

Q1. Our baseline assumes decommissioning within the period of the Senior Review; in the past ESD provided a target baseline that assumed a sustainable mission, and did not require an ‘in-guide’ submission. Do we still need to include an in-guide decommissioning scenario in this year’s Senior Review proposal, in addition to an optimal scenario with extended operations?

A1. For those missions with guideline budgets that assume decommissioning during the Senior Review period, followed by a Phase F, you must address that scenario in your proposal: describe your decommissioning plan, final data processing plan, and the science benefits of the final dataset. Then describe your optimal scenario for continued operations and the enhanced benefits of an extended dataset. There is no space or page-count requirement between these 2 scenarios – you do not need equal space for both scenarios.

In the past, missions with assumed decommissioning were not provided budget guidelines that supported an executable Phase F; the current budgets do support a Phase F that can be implemented and result in a valuable dataset. Describing the close-out scenario in your proposal ensures that the reviewers will better understand the value of the current dataset vs the extended dataset.

Q2. Our baseline scenario will require us to begin decommissioning before Senior Review extension decisions are made. Should we still describe such a scenario in our proposal, and do we need to include an alternate scenario for a delayed decommissioning, in addition to the full extension proposal?

A2. For those missions whose budget would require initiation of decommissioning procedures prior to receiving the 2020 Senior Review guidance letter (Aug-Sep 2020), you should plan to defer decommissioning until the Senior Review findings are available, and assume that funds to support such delay will be available. In the PPBE guidance that will come out in the next month or so, we may request a budget submittal for an interim one-year extension, but you will not need to propose that scenario in your Senior Review proposal, which should include only the in-guide and one optimal (overguide) scenario.

Q3. Our baseline scenario ends in FY25 with the completion of the close-out dataset. But you have told us to assume a budget for FY26 that is equal to the FY25 number. Can we use that assumed ‘in-guideline’ number to modify and/or extend our Phase F?

A3. You can extend or change your previously-approved Phase F baseline only if you have a solid, content-related reason for doing so, and only after receiving approval from the Senior Review Program Officer. The FY26 numbers are placeholders for planning purposes only. If you will not use the full baseline budget, submit the under-guideline baseline scenario in the Senior Review proposal. Note that in the PPBE, you will be expected to submit your under-guideline scenario as an alternate option to the formal guideline, i.e. you will be required to submit 3 scenarios: the guideline, the under-guideline, and the optimal over-guideline. For the Senior Review, submit only 2 scenarios: your preferred baseline/under-guideline and the optimal over-guideline. Specifically to those who inquired: for your

in-guideline proposals, Aura is approved to submit an alternate Phase F; Aqua should submit the original 2-year Phase F.

Proposal Format & Upload/Delivery to ESD

Q4. Can the NSPIRES uploads be initiated by a Center point-of-contact?

A4. Yes.

Q5. Will the NSPIRES system require administrative and budget information populated into the electronic cover page, or will the information in the proposal be sufficient?

A5. No, NSPIRES will not need information other than the proposal title. All other information will be reviewed based on what is in the proposal document.

Q6. When will the Senior Review 2020 solicitation be live in the NSPIRES system?

A6. It will be online no later than February 14, which is three weeks before the due date.

Q7. Is there separate proposal length guidance for smaller missions, such as Venture Instrument missions?

A7. No, ESD has never provided guidance for shorter proposals or smaller missions, although proposers are encouraged to write only as much as needed to make a compelling case for mission extension.

Q8. Is there flexibility on the page limits/can we be allowed to write longer proposals?

A8. Because of the change in the font size from 10-pitch to 12-pitch, ESD will consider requests for additional pages, especially from the larger flagship missions. Do not submit proposals that exceed the allowable limits without first receiving approval from the Senior Review Program Officer.

The current page limits are:

Terra and Aqua: 62 pages

All Other Missions: 40 pages

Budgets and Budget Template Formats

Q9. What value should we assume for FY26?

A9. The PPBE2022 guideline has not yet been released by the Agency. For planning purposes, you may assume that your FY26 budget will be the same as your FY25 budget (no inflation).

Q10. We found a discrepancy between the Agency N2 and the Senior Review template. Which is correct?

A10. The Agency N2 budget is the approved baseline, and the Senior Review templates should all match exactly. If they do not, please contact the Senior Review Program Officer and we will resolve the difference.

Q11. For the over-guideline/optimal proposal, do we submit deltas or the new total?

A11. Submit the TOTAL budget for each scenario. Do not submit delta budgets.

Q12. If we submit a different profile than the guideline, but it still adds up to the total (or less), is that considered an 'in-guideline' proposal?

A12. For the PPBE, a submittal that differs in any way from the guideline is not considered 'in-guideline' and you will be required to submit an in-guideline scenario in the PPBE cycle. However, for the Senior Review, ESD prefers to require only 2 proposal scenarios, one for a baseline that does not exceed the in-guideline total and one for an optimal over-guideline request. Therefore, ESD will consider accepting an under-guideline or alternate budget phasing for a baseline scenario, but you must gain approval from the Senior Review Program Officer before submitting such a proposal.

Q13. In the Senior Review call letter, you mention that we should recommend potential cost-cutting measures. We considered such measures, but further analysis decided us against implementation. Would discussion of this measure, even though we dismissed it, be adequate to show due diligence by the mission team?

A13. Yes, describing your cost-cutting attempt is acceptable, even though you choose not to exercise it. Assume that you will likely be asked about your decision during the mission interviews.

Q14. Table V, which provides additional details about the annual budget, is only for Year 1 of the proposal, but for those missions with baseline decommissioning plans, that year is no longer representative of the future years. Should we attempt to provide an alternate representative year?

A14. Still use Year 1 as the basis for Table V, but address in the budget narrative how the budgets are expected to change in future years. For example, with the completion of mission operations tasks, the budget and workforce in that area will be reduced eventually to zero, etc.

Q15. How should we handle the Terra and Aqua mini-proposal budgets & workforce in the budget templates?

A15. Note that this was an evolving answer, for those who sent in questions. The final outcome was that the mini-proposal budgets will be considered as a procurement line, with a roll-up total under WBS 4.0. The algorithm budget should also be submitted as a line item in Table III/Other Science Teams. Workforce numbers will not include the mini-proposal efforts. No special mini-proposal supplemental tables with budget/workforce details are required. In Table V, do not provide a line-item for each mini-proposal; a roll-up to one line is sufficient. For FY24-26, extrapolate the FY21-23 values (again, only at the total level).

It is important to understand that the transition of the algorithm maintenance tasks which were formerly competed under ROSES was not simply an accounting transfer, but a transfer of the management responsibility from Headquarters to the Center, to be executed by the Mission Project Scientist (or as delegated). The budget and responsibility were transferred from ESD/Research to ESD/Flight, beginning FY2018 and for all future years. The Mission is now fully responsible for the work scope covered by the mini-proposals, as part of the traditional Mission Data Analysis work scope.