

# IEP Directed Studies Proposal Submittal and Review Process

## Directed Studies

Directed Studies are those activities that are identified by Interagency Ecological Program (IEP) member agencies and partners to be implemented under the auspices of IEP. There are three ways that Directed Studies can be proposed:

1. **Management Directed:** agency-initiated Directed Studies can occur when Directors have requested studies to be implemented by the IEP, such as emergency responses to changing environmental conditions, or a similar critical nature.
2. **IEP Project Element Reviews:** project element review recommendations for Directed Studies are the result of project or program reviews. These studies can utilize a Science Advisory Group (SAG) review for the required technical review.
3. **Science Management Team (SMT):** SMT-initiated Directed Studies are often the result of scientific collaboration amongst existing IEP staff.

## Directed Studies Proposal Submission and Review Process:

Prior to bringing a proposal to the IEP for consideration, principal investigators (PIs) are encouraged to share their proposal with an appropriate IEP Project Work Team (PWT) for input (if an appropriate and relevant PWT exists), or a sub-group of IEP staff.

The first step in the Directed Studies Proposal process is for the PI to consider submitting a study concept proposal (1-2 pages maximum) to the IEP Program Support Team (PST) and IEP Lead Scientist who will then share it with both the SMT and the Coordinators Team (CT).

**Concept proposals are optional except for studies that are requesting more than incidental take of Delta Smelt (and possibly other listed species in future years).** Studies requiring significant take coverage for wild Delta Smelt are required to submit a concept proposal to allow the Program Support Team time to work with the PIs and the SMT to determine take availability. Concept proposals are also recommended for directed studies looking for partial funding. This will allow the PIs to vet the potential for identifying additional fund sources through IEP processes before investing a great deal of additional effort. If the SMT and CT determine the study concept is worthy of further consideration based on its technical merit, management relevance, alignment with the [IEP Science Strategy](#), and is supported by both a funding and implementing entity, a full proposal will be requested by the IEP Program Support Team from the PI for review.

IEP has templates and guidance for developing many of the work planning submittals, including the study concept proposal. However, some agencies have required their staff to submit work planning documents (i.e., proposals and data management plans) to their management using agency-specific templates. IEP does not intend to impose duplicative work when unnecessary, so IEP will accept non-IEP work planning submittals if those documents contain the required key components outlined in the IEP templates.

Full proposals, especially those from a competitive solicitation process, receive three levels of review that include: 1) **Administrative Review** by the IEP Program Support Team, 2) **Technical Review** by the SMT, or other technical reviewers with appropriate expertise, and 3) **Relevancy Review** by the CT. Smaller studies require SMT technical reviews (assuming appropriate technical expertise is represented), while larger studies (~\$500K or higher) may require independent technical peer review involving external subject matter experts, as determined by the IEP Lead Scientist and SMT. The Program Support Team and the Lead Scientist will act as the point of contact with the PI throughout the duration of the proposal review process.

These three levels of review for inclusion of Directed Study full proposals into the IEP *Work Plan* are defined more clearly as:

- *Administrative Review* - IEP Program Support Team will conduct an administrative review to ensure that proposals are complete and comprehensive (including permitting of Take and scientific collection) before presenting proposal for a technical review. If proposals are incomplete (i.e., missing key components) the PI will be contacted. PIs should be in contact with the IEP Take Coordinator about their permitting needs and demonstrate they already have the necessary permits or have a clear strategy for obtaining their permits.
- *Technical Review* - A team comprised of a minimum of three SMT members and external subject matter experts (if needed) will review the proposal for scientific rigor, technical merit, and accordance with the IEP *Science Strategy*. The SMT may invite the PI to attend an SMT meeting to discuss the proposal and answer any questions prior to concluding the review.
- *Relevancy Review* - The Coordinators Team will review the proposal to ensure relevancy to the IEP Program, and that the study meets the [IEP Strategic Plan](#) goals and objectives. This review is mainly reserved for competitive solicitation proposals.

Upon the completion of the **SMT's technical review**, the Lead Scientist will notify the CT of the SMT's recommendation:

- Recommend for inclusion: the study is scientifically and technically supportable for inclusion as part of the annual IEP *Work Plan* and has been coordinated with other studies as appropriate,
- Requires additional modification: the study proposal requires additional work prior to inclusion as part of the annual IEP *Work Plan*, or
- Do not recommend for inclusion: the effort is not ready for the IEP *Work Plan* or is not a match for the program.

The SMT recommendations will be shared with the CT. Upon concurrence, the CT will:

- Recommend for Inclusion into the IEP *Work Plan*
- Request additional modification from the SMT or PI
- Do not recommend for inclusion into the IEP *Work Plan*

Elements recommended for inclusion will be presented to the IEP Directors for final approval in September, while those not ready or declined will be referred to the SMT or PI respectively.

Upon the Directors decision, the Program Support Team will notify the PI and Contract Manager (if applicable) and assign the project an IEP *Work Plan* Element Number. Approval for inclusion in the IEP *Work Plan* does not constitute approval for Take. PIs should continue to work with permit coordinators to ensure that Take permits are secured.

### **“Out of Cycle” Proposal Review Process:**

For projects that come to the IEP outside of the timeline outlined in the Work Planning Calendars, including significant modification of existing IEP elements, there is an extra step to follow in addition to the regular proposal review process outlined above. Like the regular process, the Lead Scientist acts as the point of contact and will coordinate the out of cycle review with the PI, IEP PST, SMT and CT.

PIs must include a **justification** explaining why their proposal deserves to be considered for inclusion in the IEP work plan out of cycle or as a mid-year adjustment. This justification will be considered at each level of review, including by the IEP Directors when they are asked to approve inclusion of the proposal into the IEP work plan out of cycle.

### **Interagency Ecological Program – Directed Study Full Proposal Outline**

There are certain key components that should be included in a Directed Study full proposal to be considered complete. PIs should review these relevant components in their proposal before submitting to the IEP Program Support Team, so as not to delay the processing of their proposal. These suggested components are shown in the outline below. PIs are available to use their own proposal format and not required to use the outline shown below, but they must ensure that their proposal includes the key components. Some components may not apply to a particular study and, if possible, should be identified as ‘not applicable’.

#### **Example Outline of a Proposal with Key Components**

- I. Project Title**
- II. Principal Investigator(s)**
  - a. PI Name, Affiliation, and Contact information
  - b. Collaborator(s) Name, Affiliation, and Contact information
- III. Background**
  - a. Scientific background
  - b. Project objectives and management implications
    - i. Does the project inform any specific mandate, biological opinion (BiOp), permit, and/or agreement? If so, include the full citation of relevant document.
    - ii. Is the study a recommended action or does it result from an IEP review or synthesis effort (e.g., SAG, MAST, SAIL, etc.)?
  - c. Hypotheses and/or study questions
- IV. Project Description**

- a. Study design
  - b. Site description
  - c. Methods of data collection
    - i. Gear descriptions (if relevant)
    - ii. Include a table summarizing number of samples per year type and sampling period (if known), this is required if requesting endangered species take.
    - iii. External data sources/data integration methods (for synthesis studies)
  - d. Methods of data analysis
  - e. Data management/QAQC methods (can include a data management plan if it exists).
  - f. Deliverables/reporting (such as IEP Newsletter article, IEP Workshop Poster or Presentation, IEP Technical Report, Peer Reviewed Manuscript, etc.)
  - g. Schedule – including timeline for data collection, reporting, deliverables, and data sharing (include how data will be shared).
- V. Coordination with IEP**
- a. Describe how your project relates to the IEP Science Strategy.
  - b. Describe how your project integrates with related IEP projects and how you intend to communicate/collaborate with the PIs of these projects.
  - c. Identify the IEP Project Work Team most relevant where study updates and results will be shared.
  - d. List any specific or specialized resource requests of IEP.
- VI. Funding** (including details about funder(s), cost per year, labor, supplies, overhead, etc.)
- a. Identify status of resources and personnel in place and those yet to be resolved
- VII. Collection and ESA Take Permit Needs**
- a. Include a table with estimates for take of state and federal listed species by life stage for the various sampling types (gear) over time (e.g., month) per year.
  - b. Disposition of Collected Organisms (release, preservation, intended transfer, etc.).
- VIII. External Review Information**
- a. Please describe any external review processes the proposal has undergone. IEP prefers review by one of the IEP Project Work Teams or technical teams but other processes, such as agency reviews, should also be described.
  - b. Succinct Study Concept (1-paragraph synopsis/abstract)
  - c. Statement of Research Problem
  - d. Research Objectives
  - e. Clearly Stated Questions/Hypotheses