Categories of Proposal Personnel

Every person expected to have a significant role (i.e., assigned responsibilities appropriate to a defined category of personnel) in the execution of the proposed effort must be identified on the proposal cover page, using one of the following seven categories of personnel. Each individual must also identify the organization through which they are participating in the investigation, which may differ from their primary employer or preferred mailing address, to facilitate organizational conflict of interest checks that must be considered in the evaluation process. Any organization requesting NASA funds through participation in the proposed project must list each team member on the proposal cover page. Other than the category of Principal Investigator, some NOFOs may explicitly disallow some or all of the below categories and/or may add other categories.

Principal Investigator (PI) – The PI is the individual a research organization designates as having an appropriate level of authority and responsibility for the proper conduct of the research, including the appropriate use of funds and administrative requirements such as the submission of scientific progress reports to the agency. Every proposal shall identify a PI who is responsible for the quality and direction of the proposed research and for the proper use of awarded funds regardless of whether or not they receive support through the award. The proposing organization has the authority to designate the PI and to designate a replacement if that becomes necessary. After the proposal selection, the replacement of a PI requires NASA’s prior approval.

Contact PI – To facilitate communication with NASA when proposing multiple PIs, the submitting organization must designate a “Contact PI” at the time of the proposal. The Contact PI refers as the “PI.” Any other PIs refer to “Co-PIs.” The NASA Grant or Contracting Officer and Program Officer will communicate with the Contact PI, and the Contact PI will be responsible for relaying communications between the Co-PIs and NASA.

Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) – When multiple PIs are proposed, the Co-PI(s) share the responsibilities of the PI.

NASA strongly encourages PIs to specify only the most critically important personnel to aid in the execution of their proposals. Such personnel must be designated as being in one of the following categories:

Co-Investigator (Co-I) – A Co-I is a member of the team who may hold either a full-time or limited-term appointment and who is a critical “partner” for the conduct of the investigation through the contribution of expertise and/or capabilities. A Co-I will serve under the direction of the PI and must have a continuing role in the proposed investigation. The Co-I may or may not receive funding through the award. Each Co-I, even if not funded, must demonstrate their commitment to participate in the proposed investigation by way of a brief signed statement, which may be the electronic confirmation through NSPIRES, even if they are from the proposing organization. The PI may also designate in NSPIRES one of the following roles for a Co-I who will carry additional responsibilities, as appropriate for the following unique circumstances:

- One Co-I may be designated as the “Science PI” for those cases where the proposing organization does not permit that individual to formally serve as a PI as defined above (e.g., non-tenured faculty, postdoctoral personnel). In such a case, that Co-I/Science PI will be understood by NASA to be in charge
of the scientific direction of the proposed work, although the formally designated PI will still be held responsible for the overall direction of the effort and use of funds.

- A Co-I at an organization other than that of the PI institution who is making a major contribution to the proposal (e.g., providing a significant piece of hardware) and who serves as the point of contact at that Co-I’s organization, may also be designated as the "Institutional PI" for that Co-I’s organization. If stated explicitly in the NOFO, NASA may elect to provide a separate award directly to the organization of the Co-I. In this case, the Co-I will serve as the "PI" for this separate award for their organization.

- A Co-I from a non-U.S. organization may also be designated as a "Co-Principal Investigator" (Co-PI) should such a designation be required to fulfill administrative requirements of that Co-I’s organization and/or to enable the acceptance of funding by that Co-I from their sponsoring funding authority.

Collaborator – A Collaborator is an individual who is not critical to the proposal but committed to providing a focused but unfunded contribution for a specific task. If funding support, including travel costs, is requested in the proposal, such a person must be identified in one of the other 34 categories above. For a proposal submitted via Grants.gov, collaborators should be listed on the Project Role “Other” line of the Senior/Key Person portion of the SF 424 (R&R) form.

Postdoctoral Associate – A Postdoctoral Associate holds a Ph.D. or equivalent terminal degree, is identified as a major contributor (but not explicitly as a Co-I) for the execution of the proposed research and receives funding through the proposal’s budget. Such a Postdoctoral Associate should be identified by name, if known, but may be identified only by designated function in those cases where recruitment depends on the successful selection of the proposal. Postdoctoral Associates might not be named on the proposal cover page, but their effort must be included in the technical description of work assignments and the proposed budget.

Other Professional – This category is appropriate for personnel who support a proposal in a critical manner, e.g., a key Project Engineer and/or Manager, but who is not identified as a Co-I or Postdoctoral Associate. This individual’s role in the proposal must be described in the budget narrative.

Graduate and/or Undergraduate Students – A proposal may incorporate students working for graduate or undergraduate degrees who will be paid through the proposal’s budget to help carry out the proposed research under the direction of the PI or one of the designated Co-Is. Such students should be identified by name, if known, but may be identified only by function in those cases where their recruitment depends on the successful selection of the proposal. These students might not be named on the proposal cover page, but their effort must be included in the technical description of work assignments and the proposed budget.

Consultant – A Consultant is an individual who possesses a special skill, receives a fee for their services, which may include travel to consult with the PI, and is not an officer or employee of the proposing organization. A consultant provides services that support the proposed activities but is not responsible for project oversight and completion. As opposed to a Co-I who is actively engaged in the proposed activities, a consultant provides
information, advice, engages in discussions, and serves as a resource—a person with whom the PI and Co-Is confer. The requirements for the proposal's budget include the identification, justification, and complete breakdown of all costs proposed for all consultants.

**Participant/Trainee** – This category is not a choice in NSPIRES as a personnel category because these individuals are not employees. A participant or trainee conducts research, and/or receives research or other training, e.g., travel support, etc. and/or tuition as described in the funding opportunity. Depending on the funding opportunity or appropriation, this participant often may be enrolled in a degree program as undergraduate or graduate students; however, not all NOFOs require participants to be enrolled as higher education students. NASA may require graduate students to be named on the proposal’s cover page.