

# 2024 NSF E-CORE Strategic Planning Guidance

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**NSF EPSCoR**  
ADVANCING GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY IN STEM



Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research  
NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION | ALEXANDRIA, VA

# 2024 NSF E-CORE Strategic Planning Guidance

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## 1. OVERVIEW

Your proposal, written a year ago, is now ready to be put into practice. What you presented in your proposal's **Section II.A – Strategic Plan** now must be converted to a comprehensive Strategic Plan (“Plan”) in a format that allows you to implement the project’s ideas.

This guide has been prepared by NSF EPSCoR to establish clear expectations of the full strategic planning process for E-CORE<sup>1</sup> projects and to assist Project Directors (PDs) of new E-CORE awards in developing successful Strategic Plans.

## 2. THE PROPOSAL’S STRATEGIC PLAN SECTION

Your proposal was found meritorious, in part, because of the detail you presented in required **Section II.A – Strategic Plan**. The instructions for that section are the basis for the Plan you will be developing in the coming weeks. Those instructions are reproduced here:

The Strategic Plan must clearly define the status of the jurisdictional research ecosystem and describe how the features of the project will be integrated to achieve the vision. In particular, the plan for building networks to connect participants in the jurisdictional research ecosystem must be presented with clear strategies that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART).

The Strategic Plan should include the high-level goals of each of the networking and core components described in previous sections and the interrelationships among those goals, as well as the strategic role of each of the partner institutions in achieving these goals. The plan should also include the high-level expected progress of the E-CORE RII efforts across the first four years of support. The E-CORE RII Strategic Plan should provide a roadmap with major milestones and describe how the E-CORE RII leadership will know when it has been successful in meeting its goals. Finally, the E-CORE RII Strategic Plan should also articulate the logical reasoning that connects the proposed activities to the identified goals and how they will be connected across the jurisdictional partners. The overall strategy must have the flexibility and the agility to evolve over time as these goals are met, or challenges are encountered.

## 3. STRATEGIC PLAN TIMELINE AND EXPENSES

E-CORE projects must hold a Strategic Planning Meeting within **120 days** after the project’s award date (exceptions will be considered by NSF EPSCoR on a case-by-case basis). Projects must also submit a Strategic Plan to NSF EPSCoR for approval no later than **60 days** after the Planning Meeting. Development of the Strategic Plan should begin before a Planning Meeting is held. Upon being notified by NSF EPSCoR

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<sup>1</sup> [NSF 23-587: EPSCoR Collaborations for Optimizing Research Ecosystems Research Infrastructure Improvement Program \(E-CORE RII\) | NSF - National Science Foundation](#)

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of the award, the PD may begin preparations for developing the Strategic Plan, including scheduling the Strategic Planning Meeting date and identifying an external facilitator for the Meeting. See Appendix D for an example Statement of Work for contracting a facilitator.

If needed, E-CORE projects should request supplemental funding from NSF to cover expenses associated with the Strategic Planning Meeting, including contracting a facilitator and travel by Meeting participants. Supplement requests should:

- Be 5 pages or less (for project description).
- Follow general guidance in the [NSF PAPPG](#).
- Include a timeline, outline of Meeting, and clear indication of intended outcomes.
- Not exceed a total budget of \$20,000, including indirect costs.
- Be submitted in research.gov as a supplement to the existing active E-CORE award.
- Be approved for submission by NSF EPSCoR prior to submission.

Once the supplement request has been submitted in Research.gov, the project should notify the NSF EPSCoR RII Strategic Planning Meeting Coordinator, Jeanne Small, at [jsmall@nsf.gov](mailto:jsmall@nsf.gov). If supplemental funding is not needed to support the Strategic Planning Meeting due to availability of funds in the existing budget of the active E-CORE award, a supplement should not be requested, but the Strategic Planning Meeting should still be held using the included guidance.

#### 4. STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT

As the project team works through the Strategic Planning process described below, the team should start by sketching out a “logic model” of the project – starting with how the Activities make up the Objectives, which comprise the Goals, which comprise each project component (e.g., K-12 Teacher Development, Broadening Participation) – all of which fulfill the Vision and Mission for the Project. The start of a logic model for an EPSCoR E-CORE project is shown below.<sup>2</sup>

Once the project has been envisioned at this level, with the Milestones, Metrics, Outputs, and Outcomes required, the Strategic plan can be developed, as described in the sections below. Additionally, the project can be conceptualized in a format that leads to a formal logic model or similar mechanism, which starts with inputs and ends with long-term outcomes (impacts) for each major Project Core and project element. The logic model links the Strategic Plan with the external evaluation plan and sets up the project to optimize what was proposed into measurable impacts over time. The logic model or mechanism selected should be developed over the course of the project’s first year, in collaboration with the project’s external evaluator. Example logic models are provided in Appendix A.

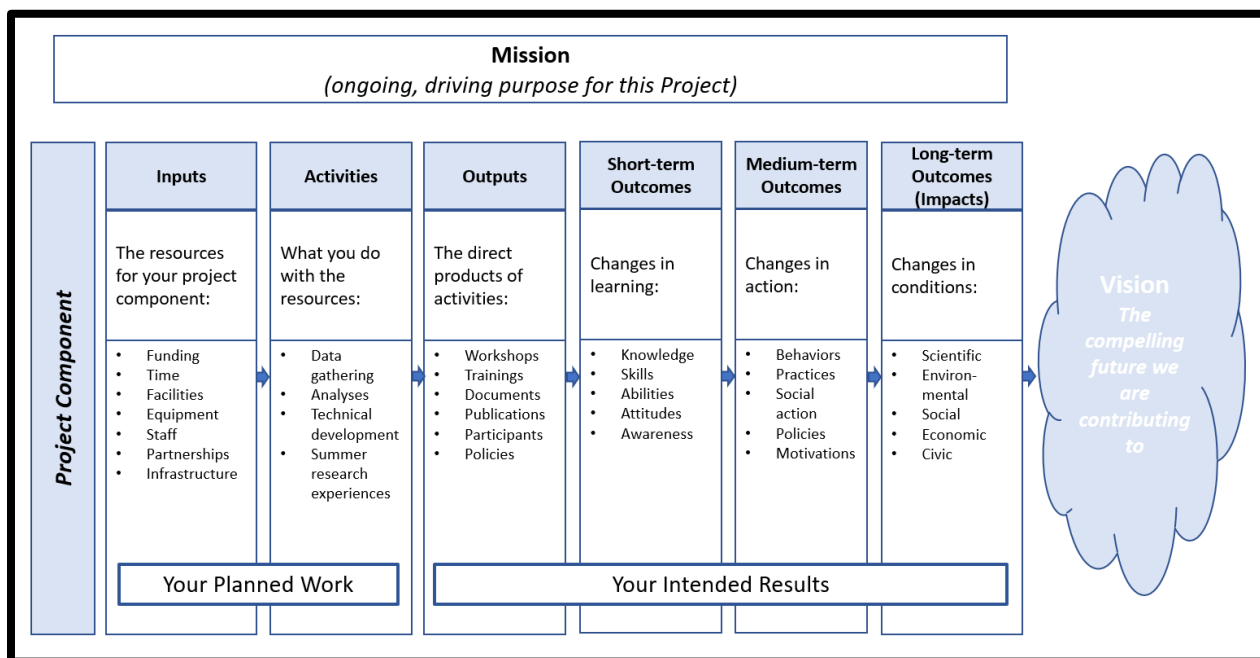
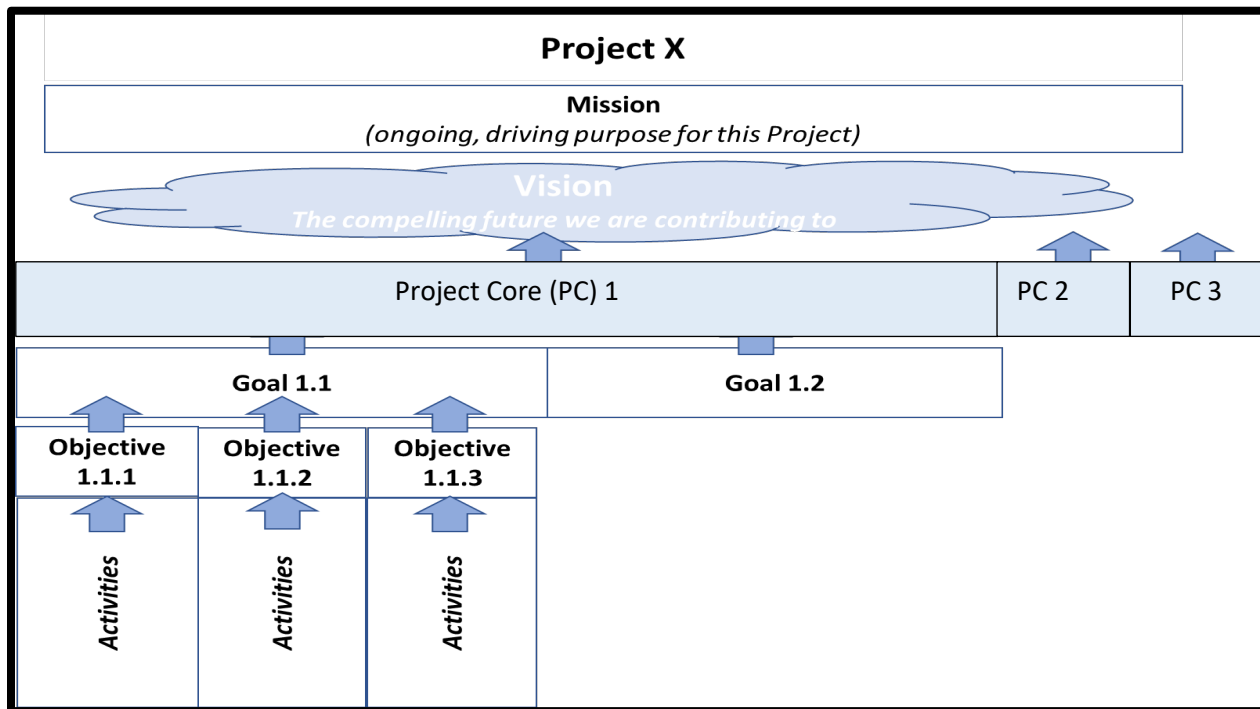
The draft plan for each Project Core and other project elements should be prepared by the individuals involved and reviewed by the PD and management team. The draft Plan should be provided to all meeting

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<sup>2</sup> The figures in this section are from John Riordan of Cindy Zook Associates and used with permission.

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participants before the Meeting. The Meeting itself should include an intensive overview and review of the draft plans for each Project Core and other project element. Following the Strategic Planning Meeting, the project team will finalize the Plan based on the results of the Meeting.



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Approaches to developing the Plan may vary, but some of the key elements include:

- The goals and objectives for each Project Core must be formulated based on the proposal and with consideration given to the feedback contained in the proposal reviews, panel summary, and any jurisdiction-specific Programmatic Terms and Conditions (PTCs) on the award.
- Individual participants should know what their expected contributions to the project are. Project-Core leads should collate information on the specific project activities from the participants who will implement them.
- Participants who are identified in the Plan as being responsible for leadership roles, specific deliverables, or implementing activities should be involved in determining how these aspects of the Plan are formulated.

In addition, the PD should provide all participants who will attend the Meeting (see Participants below for required attendees) with:

- copies of this document (*2024 E-CORE Strategic Planning Guidance*);
- the original proposal;
- the proposal reviews and panel summary; and,
- the full PTCs of the award, including the jurisdiction-specific conditions, if any.

## 5. THE SWOT ANALYSIS

In order to achieve a strong and efficient Strategic Plan, the project team must complete a SWOT Analysis (or comparable analysis) prior to the meeting. An important component of Strategic Planning is an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the project – a SWOT analysis. Strengths and weakness are considered to be **internal** to a project, while opportunities and threats are considered **external** to the project. A SWOT analysis permits the leadership team to reassess aspects of the project which may require adjustments since proposal submission; encourages input from key participants who may have crucial information not previously considered during the proposal submission stage; and informs prioritization of the project goals and objectives and the use of funds and resources. It is also an essential exercise for developing a thorough Risk Management Plan. The results of the SWOT analysis should be included as an appendix to the Strategic Plan.

Conditions may have changed since submission of the proposal to NSF. For example, key individuals may have left the jurisdiction, or some aspects of the proposal might not have been funded. In addition, the proposal reviews and panel summary often contain valuable feedback that could lead to improvements in approaches or methods or take advantage of opportunities. Strategies to meet the jurisdiction-specific PTCs should also be developed.

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## 6. THE STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETING

The Strategic Planning Meeting is an opportunity for the project participants and key stakeholders to clarify and refine their specific roles in the project, as well as to understand how their participation supports the goals and objectives of the project. The Meeting should also function as a team-building exercise and serve to establish cohesion among all aspects of the project. The primary product of the Meeting is a well-defined, cooperatively developed, Strategic Plan.

### **a. Meeting Facilitator**

A facilitator manages and guides the group through the Strategic Planning Meeting, keeping the group on task toward synthesizing a coherent plan. The facilitator takes extensive notes during the Meeting and provides feedback to the PD. The facilitator should also be consulted during preparations for the Meeting. The PD arranges the contract for this facilitator, who is external to the project and selected to be effective in working with teams and supporting their efforts to produce an effective Strategic Plan.

### **b. Meeting Participants**

It is expected that *all* funded partner institutions be represented at the Strategic Planning Meeting, and that the meeting be as inclusive as possible when inviting participants. Meeting participants **must minimally include:**

- The Project Director (PD) (same as Principal Investigator (PI)), and co-PIs of the award;
- The members of the project management team (these participants will likely overlap with one or more of the responsibilities identified below);
- The Project Core leaders;
- The External Evaluator; and,
- The managing PO from NSF EPSCoR.

Others may also attend the meeting, at the discretion of the PD, leadership team, and NSF EPSCoR. Some examples of possible other attendees include:

- Project participants, especially anyone responsible for tasks that are noted in the Strategic Plan (non-faculty participants such as postdocs and students may also be appropriate to include at the meeting, depending on their roles);
- Key stakeholders or their representatives;
- University administrators;
- A member of the external advisory; and,
- Representative(s) from the jurisdiction's steering committee.

When including attendees other than those required, the leadership team should consider the advantages as well as possible distractions associated with their presence. The Strategic Planning Meeting is a working

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meeting and should not be used as a platform for advertising or showcasing the project. The PD should consult with NSF EPSCoR if there are questions concerning who should attend the Meeting.

### ***c. Meeting Format and Agenda***

An agenda should be agreed upon with the facilitator and the managing PO and be shared with the attendees in advance of the Meeting. The following elements should be explicitly scheduled to be in the Meeting agenda:

- The following attendees address the Meeting briefly at the beginning:
  - The NSF managing PO will provide the overall charge and expectations of the Strategic Planning process.
  - The PD will briefly address the attendees, including an introduction to the management team, and clearly explain the expectations of meeting attendees.
  - The facilitator will address the Meeting to outline the agenda, describe the Meeting processes, and describe any ground rules for interactions.
- The Meeting should span two to four days. This timing may be adjusted for an asynchronous virtual or hybrid meeting format, if needed, and for team building prior to the main Strategic Planning Meeting.
- The Meeting agenda should balance the emphasis placed on presentations with working sessions that elicit new information or revisions to the draft Plan. It may be beneficial to schedule breakout working groups.
- Time must be allotted for the External Evaluator to address the Meeting and outline the role of evaluation for the project and strategic planning. Alignment of the evaluation approaches with the goals, objectives, and metrics of the Strategic Plan should be explicitly addressed.

Additionally, the Meeting should specifically review and include discussion of the following:

- The plan for project implementation; specifically, the goals and objectives for all Project Cores. Time permitting, the most important activities, or those that affect most participants, or are most interconnected throughout the project, should be explicitly discussed. It is crucial to identify critical activities that will effect successful attainment of the project objectives, including the resources (equipment, personnel, financial) needed.
- The results of the SWOT analysis.
- The Risk Management Plan.

The agenda should be geared towards ensuring that the project leadership will have, by the end of the Meeting, the crucial information and feedback necessary to finalize the Plan.



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## 7. STRATEGIC PLAN CONTENTS AND FORMAT

The Strategic Plan is meant to be a stand-alone document, typically 20-50 pages in length, depending on the complexity of the project and the interconnectedness of project elements. The Plan must address all Project Cores detailed in the proposal.

### *a. Content*

The Strategic Plan must include the following components:

- **Cover Page** - One page with the award number, project title, PD name, jurisdiction name, and project start and end dates.
- **Vision Statement** - A sentence stating the long-term view of the project. The Vision is the ideal, desired state that the project aims to achieve. The vision is usually more utopian than fully realistic; there is no expectation that it would be achieved solely through the project activities.
- **Mission Statement** - A sentence that defines the fundamental purpose of the project and what will be done to support the Vision. The Mission explains why the project exists and is expected to be achieved through accomplishment of the project goals.
- **Preface** - A brief description of the project, its overall purpose, and how it aligns with the jurisdiction's S&T Plan as well as the expected benefits of the project to the jurisdiction and to the jurisdiction's academic research and education infrastructure. This section should also briefly introduce the primary organizational partners and their roles.
- **Project Implementation** – A thorough description of how the project will be implemented including the goals, objectives, and supporting activities for each Project Core. This section is the core of the Strategic Plan; it forms the basis for monitoring of the project (including monitoring jurisdiction-wide outcomes and impacts) by NSF EPSCoR, external assessment of progress by Site Visit panels, and evaluation by the External Evaluator. It should be presented through a judicious balance of prose and tables. (See Appendix B and C for example table templates).
- **Risk Management Plan** - A thorough analysis of the challenges and risks involved in meeting the project's goals and objectives, and of the strategies to mitigate those risks.
- **SWOT Analysis** – The results of the SWOT analysis should be included as an appendix to the Strategic Plan.

### *b. Project Implementation*

The goals, objectives, and supporting activities for the Project Cores should be described in detail in the Project Implementation section. Project interdependencies should be described, and strategies developed to promote cross-project integration, when appropriate. For E-CORE projects, the following terms should be used consistently across Strategic Planning, project reporting, and evaluation and assessment:

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- **Goals** are broad statements of what will be achieved within a Project Core over the course of the project. The goals should be directly supported by the objectives (below). The goals should be Actionable, Realistic, and Time-bound (ART).
- **Objectives** are Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-bound (SMART) targets that contribute to reaching the goals. Progress towards objectives is how the success of the project is quantified.
- **Activities** are tasks and strategies that will be implemented to achieve the project objectives.

Each Project Core must have at least one Goal, which in turn should be supported by two or more (SMART) objectives that contribute to reaching the goals. Each objective, in turn, must be supported by activities - i.e., tasks and strategies that will be implemented to achieve the project objectives. Each objective should include at least several activities and each stated activity must include a timeline with annual ***milestones*** and ***metrics***, and identify the key responsible participant(s). The Strategic Plan need not include all project activities in detail, but the highest-level activities that project participants and management need to be aware of, which will be measured for progress towards achieving the goals and objectives.

This section of the Plan should also briefly summarize the anticipated ***outputs*** and ***outcomes*** associated with each objective, to be more fully characterized in the External Evaluation Plan. Use of some of these terms varies across disciplines and professions, but for the purposes of E-CORE Strategic Planning, working definitions follow:

- **Milestones** mark specific accomplishments, with target dates for the stated activities. The milestones serve as check points and might cross project areas or show integration. Accomplishing all stated milestones should achieve the goals and objectives of the project.
- **Metrics** are the evidence used to document attainment of the milestones; they are tracked for measuring the project's progress over time. Types of metrics include ***outputs*** and ***outcomes*** (below).
- **Outputs** are tangible products produced by the activities that can be quantified (counted). Examples of research outputs include published papers and distributed or disseminated data. The number of students graduated is an example of an education output. New awarded proposals catalyzed by the project are also examples of outputs.
- **Outcomes** (or **Impacts**) are expected changes or benefits resulting from project's activities. They are aligned with project goals and they result from goals being met. They fall along a continuum, ranging from short- to long-term impacts. Research outcomes include discoveries and new applications. A workforce development outcome might include the inclusion of a new education module in the classroom or the development of a new course or curriculum as a result of the project activities (the module would be an output, but its use would be an outcome). Outcomes to the jurisdiction may include a broader engagement of different educational institutions in the research enterprise, or enhanced collaboration among diverse institutions. Outcomes also include measurable changes in behavior, such as: increasing the enrollment of students in STEM degree programs as a result of summer research experiences; establishing new collaborations

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across institutions; or catalyzing increased research activity as evidenced by proposal submissions.

In instances where metrics will be used to measure progress, the values for those metrics should be presented. For a project element such as workforce development, the metrics might include enrolling a certain number of students in an activity (e.g., bridge program, workshop, summer research program, etc.). The purpose of providing numerical metrics is so that progress towards the project's goals can be easily assessed over time.

The Plan should include a section on how evaluation feedback and recommendations will inform changes to the strategies and the course of the project to achieve the project goals and objectives. This section should explicitly describe the progress relative to milestones expected in each year and what evidence in the form of metrics will be needed to demonstrate attainment of the goals and objectives.

### **c. Risk Management**

The risk management plan should be based on a thorough risk analysis that accounts for the weaknesses and threats identified by the SWOT analysis and should identify issues or circumstances that could impact the scope, timing, or budget of specific activities. Some categories of risks include technical, cost, schedule (risks to the project timelines), environmental, and personnel. Examples are: adverse weather affecting project activities; failure to hire key personnel or key personnel leaving the project; unexpected jurisdiction changes that could affect out-year project plans; etc.

The risk analysis should identify both the likelihood of each risk occurring and the potential impact it would have on the project. Likelihood and impact should be estimated on the scale of **low, medium, high**. The risk management plan should consider whether the potential impacts can be avoided, mitigated, or sustained and provide strategies for each of these approaches to deal with the risks. All risks with either high likelihood of occurring or potentially high impact and those with medium likelihood and impact must be analyzed and planned for (it is not sufficient to argue that the likelihood of occurrence is low). "Mission-critical" milestones should also be identified in this section as they relate to the milestones presented in the Strategic Plan tables (Appendix A).

The risk management plan should include a **succession plan** that accounts for the possibilities that key team members may be unable to fulfill their roles in the project. The succession plan must address key leadership positions within the project, regardless of the perceived likelihood or impacts of leaders leaving the project. This includes, but is not limited to, the PD, the Project Core leads, other project element leads, and other key project personnel who report directly to the PD.

### **d. Format**

The Strategic Plan should be written so that all project participants can understand the details. It should also be possible for someone not associated with the project to understand what the primary activities of the project are, who is responsible for ensuring that they occur, when they are expected to be completed,

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and how they are related to the goals and objectives of the project. The Plan should include both prose and tables to communicate these ideas – the exact balance between these is left to the jurisdiction. However, at a minimum *the complete four-year timeline for all major activities supporting objectives must be illustrated in tabular format.* This must be the case for every objective. Additionally, the goals, objectives, and activities must be clearly stated in the text of this section (i.e., in non-tabular format) and their relationships to each other described in succinct prose. The Plan may include additional tables, schematics, or flow diagrams as may be useful to illustrate aspects of the Plan. The descriptions of the activities for the Project Cores should be detailed enough so that the External Evaluator and future Site Visit panels can use them to assess progress.

The font size and spacing should meet NSF proposal submission standards. If included, figures should support specific topics in the Plan and not be present merely as general illustrations. All acronyms should be spelled out at first use. It is acceptable to include a ***glossary*** to summarize acronyms and abbreviations.

An example template for tables that can be used to demonstrate the timeline for activities is included as Appendix B to this guidance. Each project element (i.e., workforce development, diversity plan, etc.) should include tables. The organization of the project activities and milestones within tables is not a substitute for describing the project activities and how they support the goals and objectives in prose in the plan.

### 8. PLAN APPROVAL AND REVISIONS

The completed Strategic Plan must be submitted directly to the managing PO for review, no later than **60 days** after the Meeting. The managing PO will evaluate the Plan for completeness and clarity and whether it conforms to this guidance. The managing PO will provide feedback to the team within **60 days** of receipt from the PD. After concerns identified by the managing PO have been fully addressed, the final Plan will be accepted and used for post-award management.

The management team should revisit the Strategic Plan at least annually to confirm that the strategies are appropriate to reach the objectives. Any significant updates to the Plan must be discussed with, and reviewed and approved by, the managing PO before they are enacted. The PD should submit draft revisions directly to the managing PO (the revision date should be clearly indicated on the cover page). For the purposes of review by NSF, the revision draft must indicate all changes in a consistent and unambiguous manner (e.g., through Track Changes in a Microsoft Word document, or highlighted text with footnotes, or clear references to an appendix listing the changes).

Changes in strategic tasks and timing are normally acceptable without prior approval; however, changes in project scope, subrecipients, and PI/co-PIs must specifically be requested in Research.gov and approved by the managing PO before being implemented and introduced into the Strategic Plan. Changes to any of the goals or objectives, changes in leadership, or variations in plans for new faculty hires are considered changes in scope. It is important to note that since scope, schedule, and budget are related, significant changes to the latter two imply changes in scope as well and must be approved by NSF EPSCoR.

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Allow **30 days** for NSF EPSCoR to review Strategic Plan revisions. It is strongly recommended that the last updated version of the Plan be approved at least 6-8 weeks in advance of a Site Visit as Site Visit panels are instructed to assess progress relative to the Strategic Plan. Revisions to the Plan will not be approved after panels have been provided with documentation needed for their evaluation.

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## APPENDIX A: EXAMPLE LOGIC MODELS FOR PROJECT COMPONENTS

Project Element	Planned Work		Intended Results			
	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Medium-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes
Research Theme X: enhanced infrastructure for research <i>focus area</i>	Funding; new instruments A, B, and C; faculty and staff; equipment and materials; dedicated jurisdiction facilities	Acquire, install, and commission instruments A, B, and C; develop and install accessory probes for instrument A; modify instrument B for low temperature work; implement remote-user accessibility for instrument C; familiarize support staff on all instruments; test remote access to instrument C	Instruments A, B, and C made available to users; facility website revamped to include service request scheduling submission and scheduling for all users	Enhanced <i>focus area</i> research infrastructure available to jurisdiction researchers by maintaining current facilities and acquiring new instrumentation; increased awareness of the <i>focus area</i> resources among academic and industrial users in the jurisdiction and region	Infrastructure and expertise for the <i>focus area</i>	A sustainable research infrastructure to support the <i>focus area</i> ; long-term collaborations with industries in <i>focus area</i>

Project Element	Planned Work		Intended Results			
	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Medium-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes
Workforce Development	Funding; staff members dedicated to Workforce Development; engaged faculty; jurisdiction collaborators	K-12 teacher professional development	4 training workshops and 8 webinars, platform for resource sharing and troubleshooting		400+ K-12 teacher participants confidently teach STEM skills in focus area	Diverse skilled workforce trained to meet the needs of the focus area industries and contribute to economic development in the jurisdiction
		Provide funding for faculty at collaborating institutions to learn new skills and tools in focus area	50 faculty trained	Developing human infrastructure needed to achieve implementation	Each collaborating institution has faculty resources needed to teach focus area curriculum	
		Faculty career development workshops	15 workshops hosted		Increased faculty research competitiveness with progress in proposals submitted and collaborative projects	
		Student support at participating institutions	75+ undergraduates supported and trained, 75+ graduate students supported and trained	Network of student participants established	Students with rich educational experiences matriculating and getting jobs in relevant industries	
		Summer internships	20+ internships placed	Students are aware of the opportunities and there is completion for placements.	Interns graduating and entering workforce	
		Research-based capstone projects	9+ capstone projects	Research faculty are contributing a variety of potential capstone projects. Students have capstone opportunities relevant to their chosen specialization in data science.	Students are graduating with meaningful and relevant capstone experiences.	

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## APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE TEMPLATE FOR TABLES OF TIMELINES OF ACTIVITIES

<u>Project Core 1: Description ...</u>					
<b>Goal 1.1:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective 1.1a:</li> <li>Objective 1.1b:</li> <li>Etc.</li> </ul>					
Objective 1.1a	Specific milestones				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Responsible parties
Activity 1					
Activity 2					
Etc.					
Objective 1.1b	Specific milestones				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Responsible parties
Activity 1					
Activity 2					
Etc.					
<b>Goal 1.2:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective 1.2a:</li> <li>Objective 1.2b:</li> <li>Etc.</li> </ul>					
Objective 1.2a	Specific milestones				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Responsible parties
Activity 1					
Activity 2					
Etc.					

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## APPENDIX C: KEY COMPONENTS OF STRATEGIC PLAN FOR EXAMPLE PROJECT “LIFE ON MARS”

### *Example: Life on Mars*

*Vision:* New understanding of the origins of life through robotic exploration of Mars.

*Mission:* To land a robotic rover on Mars and use it to explore the Martian surface, searching for evidence of past or present life on Mars, through imaging, sampling, and analysis of soils, the atmosphere, and geologic features.

*Research Theme 1:* Mars Rover

*Research Theme 2:* Search for Life

*This theme is aligned with these hypotheses or questions from proposal:*

*Example Hypothesis:* Life once arose or existed on Mars.

*Example Research Question:* Is there evidence that life ever existed on Mars?

*Goal 2.2:* Search for evidence of past or present life, or conditions supportive of life, on Mars. [ART; Time is 5 years unless otherwise noted]

*Objective 2.2.1:* Explore multiple candidate sites on the Martian surface for evidence of past or present life. [SMART; adds Specificity and can be Measured (how many sites)]

#### *Activities:*

- Image and map the geologic characteristics of 6 different candidate sites to determine suitability for sampling and analyses.
- Obtain surface soil samples (reaching to 2m depth) from the top 3 candidate sites and analyze them to estimate current and past water and chemical characteristics relevant to life.

### Research Theme 2: Search for Life

#### *Goal 2.2: Search for evidence of past or present life, or conditions supportive of life, on Mars.*

Objective 2.2.1	Specific milestones				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Responsible parties
Image and map 6 sites	Image and map 3 sites	Image and map 3 sites	Analyze images/maps and choose top 3 candidate sites		Sensing, radar teams (J. Doe)
Obtain and analyze soil samples from 3 sites			Begin sampling	Complete soil sampling and chemical analyses	Soil, chem, bio teams (W. Hoozit)



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## APPENDIX D: EXAMPLE STATEMENT OF WORK FOR CONTRACTING WITH A FACILITATOR

### EPSCoR 2024 E-CORE Strategic Planning Meeting Facilitation

#### Statement of Work

##### Background:

[Awardee institution] has been awarded a \$[XX]M NSF award that requires the development of a four-year strategic plan within 90 days of the award date. [Awardee institution] seeks a facilitator for a strategic planning meeting, which will be organized and run by [Awardee institution] in collaboration with the NSF managing Program Officer and the facilitator. Each Strategic Planning Meeting will be expected to be held as an in-person event, with a back-up plan for a hybrid, in-person/virtual meeting. The meeting is anticipated to be held at [location] on [dates]. It is expected that the vendor will travel to the meeting location and be reimbursed for all travel-related expenses at the conclusion of each event. The anticipated work of the facilitator (the contractor) is described below.

##### Preparation:

- **Meetings between the jurisdiction's leadership team and facilitator:** Teleconferences/videoconferences and email communications will be critical to the preparation for a successful workshop.
- **SWOT Analysis:** The facilitator will support the preparation, facilitation, and documentation of the SWOT Analysis prior to the Strategic Planning Meeting, to include:
  - Identifying internal (project) Strengths & Weaknesses and external (environment) Opportunities & Threats
  - Linking the SWOT assessment to the Strategic Plan and Risk Assessment
- **Meeting Platform(s) preparation:** Confirmation of a suitable platform(s) for the Strategic Planning Meeting is critical. Platform(s) must support:
  - **Videoconferencing (in a hybrid context, as a back-up plan to a fully in-person meeting)** – accessible for all participants, including the NSF Program Officer, external evaluator, and facilitator.
  - **Collaborative documentation** – i.e., shared access to planning documents, tables, etc., for all participants, including the NSF Program Officer, external evaluator, and facilitator.
- **Suggested participants for Meeting:** The facilitator will work with the jurisdiction's leadership team and other key project leaders to define the optimal participant list in accordance with the 2024 E-CORE Strategic Planning Guidance distributed NSF EPSCoR.
- **Pre-work definition:** The facilitator will work with the jurisdiction's leadership team to define necessary materials for preparation and distribution in advance of the meeting.
- **Agenda development:** The facilitator will develop an agenda for the meeting to achieve optimal results.

##### Facilitation:

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At the Strategic Planning Meeting, the contractor will facilitate the process and ensure that all necessary information is captured and recorded. The Strategic Planning Meeting will serve to support the jurisdiction in developing a Strategic Plan that:

- Meets the requirements of the 2024 E-CORE Strategic Planning Guidance.
- Describes the overall scope of the project, annual milestones, expected outcomes, and strategies for project implementation to accomplish and sustain project goals and objectives.
- Serves to guide the E-CORE project team in determining whether the project is progressing on time, within scope, and with appropriate allocation of resources.

### **The Strategic Planning Meeting itself will be designed to:**

- Develop and refine critical content for the Strategic Plan, including the elements defined in the 2024 E-CORE Strategic Planning Guidance.
- Address Reviewer and Panel comments, building on strengths and addressing weaknesses.
- Lay out strategies and implementation activities necessary to achieve project goals and objectives.

### **The Meeting Report will include:**

- Participant input on major sections of the Strategic Plan (e.g., Executive Summary, Preface, Vision, Mission, Project Areas, Milestones, Risk Mitigation Plan, Succession Plan, and Evaluation and Assessment process).
- Key decisions and discussion notes.
- Milestones and Action Items defining steps to completion and submission of the Plan.

### **After the Meeting:**

The facilitator will deliver the Meeting Report within one week of the workshop. He or she will continue to be available to the Research Team to encourage timely submission of the Strategic Plan to the NSF EPSCoR Office.

### **Travel:**

[Describe the travel policies of the awardee institution.]