



NSF ERC EARTH RIVER Program

RIVER: Research Immersion through Visits and Exchange Relationships

Program Overview

The EARTH RIVER Program (Research Immersion through Visits and Exchange Relationships) supports short-term research visits among EARTH partner institutions to strengthen collaboration, accelerate research progress, and promote knowledge transfer across the ERC.

Graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and research staff may apply for travel support to conduct research activities at another EARTH core or affiliate institution. Applications may be submitted by an individual participant or on behalf of multiple participants traveling together to the same host institution. Applicants should describe how the proposed visit will advance their research, professional development, and contributions to EARTH. We encourage proposals that support multi-disciplinary research that will lead to coauthored papers, presentations, and proposals across institutions. Priority will be given to activities that establish new collaborations, develop specialized skills or expertise, provide access to unique facilities, equipment, or Testbeds, and advance EARTH research objectives.

RIVER Program Website

Application materials, forms, and reporting resources are available at <https://erc-earth.ku.edu/river-program>.

Application Schedule

The EARTH RIVER Program is offered on a recurring basis and applications are reviewed quarterly. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions within approximately 30 days of the application deadline.

Submission Deadlines

- November 30, 2026, 5:00 p.m. CT
- February 26, 2027, 5:00 p.m. CT
- May 28, 2027, 5:00 p.m. CT
- August 31, 2027, 5:00 p.m. CT

Eligibility

Applicants must be graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, or research staff members at an EARTH core or affiliate institution. All applicants must have support from both a faculty advisor or supervisor at their home institution and a host faculty mentor at the receiving institution. For applications involving multiple participants, each individual requesting support must independently meet these eligibility requirements. Applicants are encouraged to identify a graduate student, postdoctoral researcher, or research staff member at the host institution to serve as a day-to-day mentor during the visit. RIVER applicants whose proposals are not selected are encouraged to revise and resubmit in future application cycles.



Funding

RIVER awards of up to \$5,000 per application are available to support short-term research exchange visits between EARTH institutions. Requests may include support for one or more participants traveling to the same host institution; however, all travelers and associated costs must be clearly identified and justified in the application. The maximum award amount is \$5,000 regardless of the number of participants included in the application. Awards are provided on a reimbursement basis. Additional information regarding award administration and reimbursement procedures will be provided to award recipients. EARTH expects to support multiple RIVER exchanges each year. The number and size of awards may vary based on available program funds, the number of applications received, and the budgets requested by selected applicants.

Allowable Expenses

- Airfare and ground transportation
- Lodging
- Meals and incidentals (reimbursed at the applicable GSA per diem rate for the travel location, <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-a-trip/per-diem-rates>)
- Accessibility accommodations necessary to support participation in the exchange

Unallowable Expenses

RIVER funds support travel and short-term research exchange activities only. Unallowable expenses generally include salaries, stipends, fringe benefits, honoraria, equipment, supplies, conference registration or travel, publication costs, travel for mentors or other non-participants, expenses covered by another funding source, travel for dependents or guests, entertainment, alcohol, personal travel expenses, fines, penalties, and costs incurred outside the approved project period. This list is illustrative rather than exhaustive, and additional restrictions may apply under institutional, NSF, and EARTH policies.

The requested budget should be developed in consultation with the applicant's home advisor and host faculty mentor. Applicants should seek cost-effective travel and lodging options and provide clear budget justification.

Awarded exchanges should generally be completed within six months of the award date unless an extension is approved by EARTH leadership.

Application Requirements

Applications are submitted through the online RIVER application form. Applicants will be asked to provide program information and upload a single PDF containing the proposal narrative, budget and budget justification, and required support statements. The proposal narrative is limited to two pages, excluding all other application components. Applicants are encouraged to use 12-point Arial font, single-spaced formatting, and one-inch margins.

Applications should include:

- Participant Information
- Proposal Narrative
- Budget and Budget Justification
- Home Institution Support Statement
- Host Institution Support Statement



Proposal Narrative

Please address the following:

1. Proposed Host Institution and Mentors

Identify the institution to be visited, the faculty mentor involved, and the proposed travel dates and duration of the visit.

2. Research Activities and Objectives

Describe the specific research activities that will be conducted during the visit, the research objectives the exchange will help achieve, and any facilities, equipment, Testbeds, data, or expertise that will be utilized. Explain the roles of the home institution advisor, host faculty mentor, and day-to-day mentor in supporting the exchange. For group applications, describe the role of each participant and how each individual will contribute to and benefit from the proposed activities.

3. Need for an In-Person Visit

Explain why an in-person visit is necessary rather than virtual collaboration and why the proposed timing is important to the participant's research or professional development.

4. Expected Outcomes

Describe the new skills, knowledge, or research capabilities participants expect to gain; the anticipated research products or accomplishments; and how the exchange will strengthen collaboration among EARTH researchers or institutions.

Examples of outcomes include joint experiments or measurements, shared datasets, coauthored publications and presentations, thesis or dissertation progress, joint proposal development, new research capabilities, and new collaborations across institutions.

Budget

Provide an itemized budget and brief justification for all requested expenses.

Home Institution Support

Include a brief statement from the home faculty advisor confirming support for the proposed exchange and describing how the activities align with the participant's research and professional development goals.

Host Institution Support

Attach a brief statement from the host faculty mentor confirming their willingness to host the participant(s), provide access to relevant facilities and resources, and support the proposed activities during the visit.



Evaluation Process

Applications will be reviewed quarterly by an EARTH review committee consisting of EARTH leadership and selected faculty members. Reviewers will evaluate applications using the following criteria:

Criterion	Considerations
Alignment with EARTH	Relevance to EARTH's mission, research goals, and strategic priorities
Collaboration Potential	Ability to strengthen collaboration among EARTH researchers and institutions
Research and Professional Development Impact	Expected benefits to participants' research progress, training, and career development
Feasibility	Appropriateness of the proposed activities, timeline, mentoring plan, and budget
Expected Outcomes	Likelihood of producing meaningful research outputs, new capabilities, or long-term collaborative relationships

Funding decisions will also consider the availability of program funds and the reasonableness of the proposed budget. Preference may be given to applicants who demonstrate a clear need for in-person engagement, meaningful engagement and support from proposed mentors, and who have not previously received support through the RIVER Program.

Conflict of Interest

Reviewers who serve as a home institution advisor, supervisor, host faculty mentor, collaborator, or have another potential conflict of interest related to an application will recuse themselves from the evaluation and funding recommendation for that application. To the extent practicable, applications will be reviewed by individuals from institutions other than those directly involved in the proposed exchange. However, due to the collaborative nature of the ERC and the limited pool of subject-matter experts, complete institutional separation may not always be possible.

Reporting and Knowledge Sharing

Within 30 days of completing the exchange, recipients must submit a final report through the online RIVER Final Report form. The report should summarize activities completed during the visit, skills and knowledge gained, research outcomes and accomplishments, new or strengthened collaborations, and planned next steps, including anticipated publications, presentations, proposals, or future collaborative activities.

Recipients are encouraged to share photographs and testimonials for reporting and program promotion and may be invited to present their RIVER experience at a future NSF ERC EARTH event.

Publications, presentations, and other products resulting from the program must acknowledge NSF support: "This research is based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under award number EEC-2330175 for the Engineering Research Center EARTH."

Questions

Questions regarding the EARTH RIVER Program should be directed to Jessica Tami, ERC EARTH Research Project Manager (iltami@ku.edu).