

DOE Office of Science PIER Plans Frequently Asked Questions

The following questions and answers have been prepared to address common questions related to the Office of Science (SC) requirement for Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Research (PIER) Plans

What is a PIER Plan?

A PIER Plan is a description of activities and strategies to enhance the scientific and technical merit of the proposed research through inclusion and equity efforts. Plans may include, but are not limited to: strategies of key personnel and/or the applicant institution (and collaborating institutions, if applicable) for enhanced recruitment of undergraduate students, graduate students, and early-stage investigators (postdoctoral researchers, and others), including individuals from diverse backgrounds and groups historically underrepresented in the research community; strategies for creating and sustaining a positive, inclusive, safe, and professional research and training environment that fosters a sense of belonging among all research personnel; and/or training, mentoring, and professional development opportunities. PIER Plans may build from current diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts of the key personnel and/or applicant institution, but they should be distinct from those efforts and should be an integral part of the proposed project. The PIER Plan is submitted as an appendix to the research proposal at the time of application.

What does “inclusive and equitable research” mean?

Inclusive and equitable research refers to, but is not limited to, the research environment, the composition of the research team, the responsibilities among the research participants, and the distribution of leadership activities of the research personnel. Inclusion is an intentional and ongoing effort to ensure that research personnel from all backgrounds are psychologically and physically safe, fully involved and respected in all aspects of the research project, including decision-making. Equity requires that resources are distributed to provide all project personnel access to opportunity.

Will exemplar PIER Plans be posted?

No. PIER Plans are intended to be specific to the proposed research project. Innovative approaches that are integral to the research and support participation from diverse participants are encouraged. Applicants may build on existing diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion efforts of the project personnel or applicant institution(s). The complexity and detail of a PIER Plan is expected to increase with the size of the research team and the number of personnel supported. Also, be sure to read the funding announcement (Funding Opportunity

Announcement or DOE Laboratory Call) carefully since it may contain unique requirements and include additional reviewer questions to address the unique requirement.

Where in the application should the PIER Plan be included?

The PIER Plan should be submitted as part of the research proposal narrative in an appendix. It should be part of the single PDF that is submitted with the application materials.

What are the length and format requirements of a PIER Plan?

The format of the PIER Plan should follow the format requirements in the guidance for the proposal narrative. If not otherwise specified, use 1-inch margins and font no smaller than 11-point. The length of the PIER Plan should not exceed three pages. The PIER Plan does not count toward the overall page limit of the research proposal narrative specified in the solicitation.

If multiple institutions are partnering on a research proposal, does each partner institution need to submit a separate PIER Plan with the application?

No. Only one PIER Plan should be submitted with the application and it should incorporate the roles, activities, and strategies of those institutions for promoting equity and inclusion as an intrinsic element of the research project.

Is it permissible to include costs related to the PIER Plan in the budget of my application?

Yes. Applicants may include costs related to the development and implementation of their PIER Plan in the budget. DOE expects that the majority of costs incurred with PIER Plans will be for personnel (time and effort). All costs must conform to the applicable cost principles, institutional policies, and be properly documented in a budget justification.

Is the PIER Plan weighted more significantly than other review criteria in the merit review process?

In general, SC's merit review criteria are established as the following in descending order of importance (weight), unless otherwise specified in the solicitation (Funding Opportunity Announcement or DOE Laboratory Call):

- Scientific and/or Technical Merit of the Project;
- Appropriateness of the Proposed Method or Approach;
- Competency of Applicant's Personnel and Adequacy of Proposed Resources;
- Reasonableness and Appropriateness of the Proposed Budget; and
- Quality and Efficacy of the Plan for Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Research.

Read the solicitation carefully to determine the relative significance (or weight) of the criteria for the merit review process associated with the particular solicitation.

How will the PIER Plan be evaluated by merit reviewers?

The standard merit review criterion for the evaluation of the PIER Plan is, **Quality and Efficacy of the Plan for Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Research.**

The guiding questions for reviewers in the evaluation of this criterion include the following:

- Is the proposed PIER Plan suitable for the size and complexity of the proposed project and an integral component of the proposed project?
- To what extent is the PIER Plan likely to lead to participation of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including individuals historically underrepresented in the research community?
- What aspects of the PIER Plan are likely to contribute to the goal of creating and maintaining an equitable, inclusive, encouraging, and professional training and research environment and supporting a sense of belonging among project personnel?
- How does the proposed Plan include intentional mentorship and are the associated mentoring resources reasonable and appropriate?

Please refer to the guiding reviewer questions posted in the solicitation (Funding Opportunity Announcement or DOE Laboratory Call) as some questions may be slightly tailored to the scope and objectives of the solicitation. Plans should include sufficient detail for reviewers to evaluate the plan against the above questions.

Will my application still be considered and evaluated if it does not include a PIER Plan?

No. If an application is missing a PIER Plan, it will be considered an incomplete application and will not be evaluated. Applicants should consider whether it would be in their best interests to withdraw the application.

I forgot to include my PIER Plan; may I email it to the program manager?

No. The PIER Plan must be submitted in the single PDF containing the research proposal narrative. Do not email the PIER Plan to the program manager. If the application was submitted before the submission deadline, you may go back into PAMS and resubmit the complete application that includes the PIER Plan prior to the submission deadline. If it is past the submission deadline, the application will be considered incomplete and will not be evaluated.

I am only requesting support for myself as a PI, do I still need to submit a PIER Plan with my research proposal?

Yes, all applications for funding to the Office of Science, **with the exception of supplemental proposals, conference proposals, and proposals to the SBIR/STTR Programs (at this time)**, require a PIER Plan. All applicants are encouraged to consider what contributions they can make to creating more equitable and inclusive research environments. It is expected that the complexity and detail of a PIER Plan for a single PI submission would be less than that for a larger research project.

I am only requesting support for one graduate student; do I still need to submit a PIER Plan?

Yes, all applications for funding to the Office of Science, **with the exception of supplemental proposals, conference proposals, and proposals to the SBIR/STTR Programs (at this time)**, require a PIER Plan. All applicants are encouraged to consider what contributions they can make to creating more equitable and inclusive research environments. It is expected that the complexity and detail of a PIER Plan for a smaller research project and fewer project personnel would be less than that for a larger research project.

I am submitting a proposal for funding to host a session at a scientific conference. Do I need a PIER Plan?

No. Applications requesting SC funding to support a conference do not require a PIER Plan. However, SC has established new requirements for conference proposals beginning in FY 2023. Please see the FY 2023 SC Open Call ([FY 2023 Continuation of Solicitation for the Office of Science Financial Assistance Program](#)) for additional information on those requirements for financial assistance awards; requests for conference support from DOE National Laboratories are subject to similar requirements.

I am submitting an application in response to a DOE Laboratory Announcement. Do I need to submit a PIER Plan?

Yes. Beginning in FY 2023, applications submitted in response to a DOE Laboratory Announcement must include a PIER Plan. Please refer to the detailed language in the DOE Laboratory Announcement regarding the PIER Plan requirements.

I am a Principal Investigator of an SC-sponsored DOE Laboratory core lab base research program, or science focus area. At the request of my sponsoring SC Program Office, I am submitting a renewal proposal to SC, do I need to include a PIER Plan with my proposal?

Yes. All research proposals submitted to SC from the DOE National Laboratories beginning in FY 2023, whether submitted to a Laboratory Announcement or in response to Program-specific

invitation, must include a PIER Plan. Please refer to [the general guidance language](#) on the SC website.

Can I submit my institution's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Plan as a PIER Plan?

PIER Plans are expected to be specific to the proposal and an integral part of the scientific and technical merits of the proposed research. PIER Plans may incorporate or build upon existing diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion efforts of the project key personnel or applicant institution(s) but should not be a re-statement of standard institutional policies or broad principles.

Can a PIER Plan include relevant experiences I did not include in my proposal CV?

Yes. Plans may incorporate or build upon existing diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion efforts of the project key personnel, so relevant experiences germane to the PIER Plan may be included. The PIER Plan should be developed to uniquely support the application, and it should provide sufficient relevant detail in order for reviewers to evaluate the PIER Plan consistent with the [merit review criterion's](#) guiding questions for reviewers.

In addition, be sure to read the solicitation you are responding to carefully since it may contain requirements unique to that solicitation.

Do current awardees need to provide a PIER Plan for the continuation of their existing multi-year award?

No. Current awardees are not subject to the new PIER Plan requirement. However, any renewal proposal submitted to the Office of Science beginning in FY 2023 will require a PIER Plan as part of the application.

Do renewal proposals require a PIER Plan?

Yes, renewal proposals submitted to the Office of Science (SC) starting in FY 2023 require a PIER Plan, with the exception of the SBIR/STTR Programs. This includes all Funding Opportunity Announcements, the FY 2023 SC Open Call (FY 2023 Continuation of Solicitation for the Office of Science Financial Assistance Program), DOE Laboratory Announcements, or a proposal submitted to SC in response to a specific SC Program invitational request to a DOE Laboratory for new or renewal funding (e.g., renewal of DOE laboratory base research program, or Science Focus Area proposals).

My current award was funded prior to FY 2023, do I need to submit a PIER Plan for an application for supplemental funding on my current award?

No, proposals for supplemental funding on existing awards do not require a PIER Plan.

Who should I contact if I have additional questions about the solicitation and the PIER Plan requirement?

Investigators should always direct their questions to their institutional Office of Sponsored Research (or equivalent). This office is responsible for the content and submission of any applications. Technical SC program managers can always offer advice about the scientific intent of any FOA or Laboratory Announcement. General administrative questions may be sent to sc.grantsandcontracts@science.doe.gov.

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Q&As for Reviewers

My technical expertise does not include diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility issues. Am I qualified to review a PIER Plan?

Yes, the expectation is that all reviewers have the necessary knowledge and experience to review a PIER Plan. Topics and issues involving diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are critical to the success of institutions and their employees, trainees, and students. As members of the scientific community who work in institutions with a commitment to DEIA efforts, reviewers should be able to evaluate PIER Plans. Reviewers should use the guiding reviewer questions provided to assist them as they evaluate plans that will achieve equitable and inclusive research environments and enhance the scientific merit of the proposed research

What are the guiding reviewer questions for evaluating a PIER Plan?

- Is the proposed PIER Plan suitable for the size and complexity of the proposed project and an integral component of the proposed project?
- To what extent is the PIER Plan likely to lead to participation of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including individuals historically underrepresented in the research community?
- What aspects of the PIER Plan are likely to contribute to the goal of creating and maintaining an equitable, inclusive, encouraging, and professional training and research environment and supporting a sense of belonging among project personnel?
- How does the proposed Plan include intentional mentorship and are the associated mentoring resources reasonable and appropriate?

Additional guiding questions may be provided by the SC Program staff leading the merit review process. Please follow the Program guidance for the review. There may be additional guiding reviewer questions that are unique to the underlying solicitation (Funding Opportunity Announcement or DOE Laboratory Call).

Where can I find information about how to review a PIER Plan?

During the merit review process, the lead SC Program Manager is the best resource for additional information or guidance regarding evaluating the PIER Plan. General information on the PIER Plan requirement is available on the [SC website](#). PIER Plans should address the guiding questions listed in the solicitation under the relevant review criterion: **Quality and Efficacy of the Plan for Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Research**. The guiding reviewer questions include:

- Is the proposed PIER Plan suitable for the size and complexity of the proposed project and an integral component of the proposed project?
- To what extent is the PIER Plan likely to lead to participation of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including individuals historically underrepresented in the research community?
- What aspects of the PIER Plan are likely to contribute to the goal of creating and maintaining an equitable, inclusive, encouraging, and professional training and research environment and supporting a sense of belonging among project personnel?
- How does the proposed Plan include intentional mentorship and are the associated mentoring resources reasonable and appropriate?

Additional reviewer questions may be included in the solicitation if applicable to the scope of the solicitation and history of the research efforts; those additional reviewer questions should be provided by the SC Program Offices as part of the overall guidance to reviewers.

Is the PIER Plan weighted more significantly than other review criteria in the merit review process?

In general, SC's merit review criteria are established as the following in descending order of importance (weight), unless otherwise specified in the solicitation (Funding Opportunity Announcement or DOE Laboratory Call):

- Scientific and/or Technical Merit of the Project;
- Appropriateness of the Proposed Method or Approach;
- Competency of Applicant's Personnel and Adequacy of Proposed Resources;
- Reasonableness and Appropriateness of the Proposed Budget; and
- Quality and Efficacy of the Plan for Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Research.

In general, the order of the merit review criteria listed in the solicitation (Funding Opportunity Announcement or DOE Laboratory Announcement) conveys the relative significance (or weight) of the criteria in descending order of importance. Every SC Program Office has its own established processes and guidance for reviewers regarding how applications will be evaluated and scored (e.g., numerically and/or adjectivally) in the merit review process for a particular solicitation. The order of importance (i.e., weight) of a particular review criterion relative to other review criteria are specified in the solicitation, and the reviewer guidance relative to their consideration of the review criteria should be consistent with that published order of importance. The lead SC Program Manager is the best resource for information about the relative weighting and scoring rubric for the review you are participating in.

What are the elements of a PIER Plan? Are there examples available to read?

No examples of PIER Plans will be provided. The general guidance to applicants about the scope of PIER Plans can be found on the PIER Plan [website](#). Each PIER Plan is expected to be unique and should be integral to and enhance the scientific and technical merit of the proposed research. It should address the guiding reviewer questions listed for the criterion, **Quality and Efficacy of the Plan for Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Research**.