Columbia’s Earth Institute blends research in the physical and social sciences, education and practical solutions to help guide the world onto a path toward sustainability. The Earth Institute, through its Earth Networks program, is providing a framework of support for interdisciplinary collaboration across Columbia University, to promote fresh approaches to research, education and impact on themes related to climate, sustainability and the future of planet Earth. Networks can be formed around any interdisciplinary topic that relates to the Earth Institute’s mission.

As of early 2020, the Earth Institute has one active network on climate and sustainability communications. Examples of other topics appropriate in scope might include, but are not limited to: future cities; sustainable and resilient food systems; mental health impacts of climate change; pathways to negative emissions; climate justice; diversity in earth science/sustainability and climate migration. Although many of these have a strong component of direct societal impact, networks will also be considered if they are needed to bring together researchers from different parts of the university to work on more fundamental discovery research, such as: AI and ocean circulation; planetary habitability; or the impact of climate on human history and civilization.

The Earth Networks program started last year but now is being modeled after a successful program at Columbia’s Center for the Study of Social Difference. You can learn more about their projects and various outputs here.

How the Networks function:

Earth Networks are 3-year working groups formed around one interdisciplinary topic. It is envisioned that each network will be led by two co-directors, each from a different discipline and unit of Columbia, who will guide the overall strategic direction, goals and outputs of the network, working together with a core group of (at least 6-10) engaged faculty and/or researchers. The core group would then engage a wider group of participants in its Network activities; those participants can come from across disciplines/units/departments both within and outside of Columbia University. An Earth Institute staff manager will provide logistics and coordination support for all networks and their associated activities, such as meeting and event planning, online webinars, distribution to EI email listservs, hiring of student assistants, etc.

There is no prescribed output or product for a network. Indeed, it is anticipated that each network’s ultimate outputs might look very different, and could be centered around research, education, practice, and/or communication and outreach. Nonetheless, a typical evolution of a network might look like:

- Year 1: Consolidation of core working group, developing ideas for outputs, small group meetings, exploratory seminars.
- Year 2: Regular meetings of core working group, engagement of a wider number of participants, workshops or events, determining final outputs/products/projects, etc.
- Year 3: Execution of project(s), public event, or other output, dissemination of results.
A Networks steering committee, consisting of faculty from the Earth Institute’s executive committee, will guide the overall program, RFP process and selection of funded proposals. One co-director from each network will also sit on the steering committee. The Earth Institute will open the RFP once annually in the spring/summer, for network activities that will begin in the fall. Up to 3 networks may be funded in a given year.

Eligibility:

- Proposals will be accepted by Columbia University full- or part-time officers of instruction and officers of research (although the Network itself can engage people outside of CU).
- At least one proposed co-director must be affiliated with the Earth Institute. ¹

Criteria for Selection:

- Relevance to the mission of the Earth Institute;
- A diverse core working group across gender, race, discipline, career stage, CU department, etc.
- Activities that demonstrate the potential to be interdisciplinary;
- Clear goals for the network over the 3-year period; and
- Co-directors who stem from different disciplines and Columbia units.

Funding:

Funding for each network is in the amount of $50,000 over three years. It is recommended that the proposed budget outlines a roughly even distribution across the three years (e.g. $18K, $18K, $14K) although the budget will ultimately depend on the activities and outputs outlined in the proposal narrative. Unused funds can roll over, although year 3 funding is contingent on an assessment of the network at the end of year 2. This assessment is conducted by the steering committee.

Funds may be used by Network directors at their discretion. However, budgets will typically include the following: course relief or salary support for a co-director; stipends for graduate students or intern support; working group meetings; other meetings/conferences/seminars. Networks must include at least one public convening (online is acceptable), and budgets should reflect any in-person convening space costs (more details on these costs are provided in the budget template). Each network is encouraged to hire a graduate student to maximize coordination across the network theme, which should be incorporated in the proposed budget. EI staff will support the student recruitment and hiring.

How to apply:

Network proposals should include the following three items:

(1) Narrative: In no more than three single-spaced pages, describe the network theme, broad goals and potential outputs, and a general 3-year work plan for group meetings, public events, and the dissemination of project outputs. Proposal narratives should also describe a plan for soliciting network membership from the wider University community (EI staff would help facilitate), as well as any anticipated curricular or pedagogical outcomes.

¹ Columbia faculty, researchers and staff not currently affiliated with EI can sign-up for formal affiliation through the EI Affiliates program.
(2) Bio page: Please include a short paragraph length bio for each of the 6-10 proposed core working group members, including co-directors. Please indicate if their participation has been confirmed.

(3) Budget: Please use the provided budget template (click to download).

Complete proposals should be emailed to Hayley Martinez, hmartinez@ei.columbia.edu by COB Friday, August 21, 2020 with the subject heading “Earth Networks Proposal Submission.” Proposals will be evaluated by the Networks steering committee. All applicants will be notified no later than six weeks after the submission due date. Questions can be directed to Hayley Martinez.