

**Federal Agency Name:** U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Water, Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds

**Funding Opportunity Title:** Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Support of the National Estuary Program Watersheds Grant

**Announcement Type:** Request for Applications (RFA)

**Assistance Listing Number:** 66.456

**Funding Opportunity Number:** EPA-OW-OWOW-21-03

**Dates:** All applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov as explained further in Section IV. Applications must be submitted by **11:59 P.M. ET, November 15, 2021**. Late applications will not be considered for funding. Questions must be submitted in writing via e-mail and must be received by the Agency Contact identified in Section VII before, **November 1, 2021**. Written responses will be posted on EPA's website at: [www.epa.gov/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep).

EPA is providing flexibilities to applicants experiencing challenges related to COVID-19. Please see the **Flexibilities Available to Organizations Impacted by COVID-19** clause in Section IV of [EPA's Solicitation Clauses](#).

**Note to Applicants: Following the EPA's evaluation of applications, all applicants will be notified regarding their status.** If you name subawardees/subgrantees and/or contractor(s), including individual consultants, as part of your application, pay careful attention to the CONTRACTS AND SUBAWARDS provision found at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>.

## SUMMARY

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is soliciting applications from eligible applicants for the National Estuary Program (NEP) Watersheds Grant<sup>1</sup> to support projects that address urgent, emerging, and challenging issues that threaten the ecological and economic well-being of estuarine areas. EPA seeks applications that address the priorities established by Congress under Public Law No: 116-337, the Protect and Restore America's Estuaries Act, including:

- loss of key habitats resulting in significant impacts on fisheries and water quality such as seagrass, mangroves, tidal and freshwater wetlands, forested wetlands, kelp beds, shellfish beds, and coral reefs;
- coastal resilience and extreme weather events including flooding and coastal erosion related to sea level rise, changing precipitation, warmer waters, or salt marsh, seagrass, or wetland degradation or loss and accelerated land loss;

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this solicitation the word "Grant" refers to the award to be made under this solicitation.

- impacts of nutrients and warmer water temperatures on aquatic life and ecosystems, including low dissolved oxygen conditions in estuarine waters;
- stormwater runoff which not only can erode stream banks but can carry nutrients, sediment, and trash into rivers and streams that flow into estuaries;
- recurring harmful algae blooms;
- unusual or unexplained marine mammal mortalities; and
- proliferation or invasion of species that limit recreational uses, threaten wastewater systems, or cause other ecosystem damage.

Specifically, EPA is soliciting applications from eligible applicants to administer a national competitive subaward grant program to be performed under the agreement awarded under this announcement as further described in Section I. The competitive subaward process to be implemented by the applicant must be on a national scale and recipients must address urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues that threaten the ecologic and economic well-being of estuarine areas. Applications should reflect the applicant's familiarity with the NEP (see [www.epa.gov/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep)) and the key role EPA-approved Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 320 NEP Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans (CCMPs) play in addressing those environmental issues. The competitive subaward process described in the application must also demonstrate how it will support estuary protection and restoration subaward projects located entirely within the identified NEP Watersheds Grant geographic areas as defined by the EPA in this RFA. Please see **Section III.D** for those activities that are not eligible as subaward projects.

Eligible applicants under this announcement include state, interstate, tribal, inter-tribal consortia, and regional water pollution control agencies and entities; state coastal zone management agencies; and other public or nonprofit private agencies, institutions, and organizations<sup>2</sup>. Applicants must have the ability to work nationally within the defined geographic areas and be capable of undertaking activities that advance the NEP Watershed Grant priorities. Nonprofit private universities and colleges and non-profit institutions of higher education are considered non-profit organizations and are eligible under this announcement. Nonprofit organizations described in section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply under this announcement.

The total federal amount of funding expected to be available under this announcement is approximately \$18,000,000, depending on Agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations. It is anticipated that one cooperative agreement will be incrementally funded under this announcement with a six-year project

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<sup>2</sup> Nonprofit organization, as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative or other organization that: (1) is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable or similar purposes in the public interest; (2) is not organized primarily for profit; and (3) uses net proceeds to maintain, improve or expand its operations. Note that 2 CFR Part 200 specifically excludes the following types of organizations from the definition of nonprofit organization because they are separately defined in the regulation: (i) institutions of higher education; and (ii) state, local and federally-recognized Indian tribal governments. While not considered to be a nonprofit organization(s) as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, Institutions of Higher Education are, nevertheless, eligible to submit applications under this RFA. For-profit colleges, universities, and trade schools are ineligible.

period. EPA expects that funding for each subaward to be awarded by the recipient of the award under this RFA will range from \$200,000 to \$500,000 per project. Note: applicants can identify a slightly different range for each subaward as part of their application narrative and explain why they have chosen a different range. The subawards funded under the cooperative agreement are anticipated to have project periods ranging from three to four years and must be completed prior to the end of the cooperative agreement project period. The subaward projects must be completed in sufficient time to allow the recipient, to, for example, aggregate results and ensure that subawardees have been reimbursed for eligible incurred costs.

EPA requires the applicant to provide a minimum 25% match of the total Federal request which must be met by the end of the project period (see **Section III.B** for information on the minimum non-federal cost share/match requirement).

## **I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION**

### **A. BACKGROUND**

Due to rapid population growth and a changing climate, NEP estuaries and their watersheds face a host of challenges, among them industrial and municipal wastewater discharges, stormwater and polluted runoff from urban and agricultural areas, releases from septic systems, the physical alteration or loss of habitats, changes in species distribution in response to climate change and warming waters, and coastal flooding and shoreline erosion from storm surge and sea level rise.

These urgent, emerging, and challenging issues cause declines in water quality, living resources, their habitats, and overall ecosystem health. Impacts can include contamination of fish, shellfish, and sediments; marine mammal mortalities; closed beaches and shellfish beds; aquatic dead zones, fish die offs, and toxic algal blooms; spread of invasive species; and loss or degradation of important habitats. They can also have significant economic and socio-economic impacts. For example, sea level rise, storm surge, and coastal flooding can disproportionately affect poor and underserved coastal communities that are especially at risk because they are already experiencing other environmental health burdens.

All of these challenges affect our quality of life and local economies that depend on healthy coastal habitats and waters. Protecting and restoring ecosystem functions and services is essential to manage the stress caused by these urgent, emerging, and challenging issues. More holistically addressing the sources of these pollutants is also critical to prevent further impacts and degradation.

### **B. NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM WATERSHEDS GRANT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The goal of the CWA Section 320(g) NEP Watersheds grant is to address urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues that threaten the ecological and economic well-being of estuarine areas by implementing actions in EPA-approved CWA Section 320 NEP CCMPs ([www.epa.gov/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep)). The NEP Watersheds grant can demonstrate measurable results toward that goal by supporting competitive subaward projects that:

- implement Priority Actions identified in one of the 28 EPA-approved NEP CCMPs ([www.epa.gov/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep));
- demonstrate on-the-ground or tangible quantifiable improvements to conditions of estuarine waters and the health of habitats and living resources completely within the geographic areas defined by this RFA;
- provide results of monitoring and assessment that generate new understanding of systems under stress in these geographic areas defined by this RFA;
- achieve advances in new approaches, practices, methods, or techniques for preventing and addressing threats to estuaries, especially adapting and bolstering resilience to the impacts of climate change in the geographic areas defined by this RFA;
- demonstrate the establishment or improvement of sustainable local capacity particularly in underrepresented communities to prevent and address urgent, emerging, and challenging issues that affect the geographic areas defined in this RFA; and
- demonstrate partnerships and include diverse representation on project teams that address urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues within the geographic areas as defined by this RFA.

In their applications for this RFA, applicants should demonstrate their ability, and describe an approach, for serving as an organization to manage the NEP Watersheds award. Specifically, as part of their project approach in the project narrative portion of the application, applicants should demonstrate their ability to:

- administer a national competitive subaward grant, including: preparing, issuing, and managing a subaward competitive solicitation responsive to priorities of the NEP Watersheds award; establishing review criteria and expert panels for evaluating and selecting subawards; and overseeing and monitoring multiple subawards to support the urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues and priorities that threaten estuarine areas as described in **Section I.A** and **Section I.B** of this announcement, and ensuring compliance by subawardees with all quality assurance, financial, and reporting requirements;
- ensure subawardees carry out Priority Actions in at least one of the 28 EPA-approved CCMPs;
- ensure subaward projects will occur entirely within the study area boundaries of a NEP as identified in the EPA-approved CCMP and as defined in this RFA;
- provide technical support to subawardees to help ensure the quality of project data and environmental results, and QAPPs submitted by subawardees meet EPA requirements,
- transfer results from the subaward projects to other subawardees and EPA through an annual webinar;
- qualitatively and quantitatively measure, track, and report the outputs and outcomes of the environmental results of the NEP Watersheds Grant projects accomplished through the competitive subawards; and
- capturing the data and results, and documenting lessons learned from the subaward projects including any new successful methods, approaches, techniques, or practices to improve estuarine waters, their habitats, and living resources, and sharing that information with EPA and other coastal managers.

The competitive subaward process proposed by the applicant must be on a national scale and recipients must address urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues that threaten the ecological and economic well-being of estuarine areas. Applications should reflect the applicant's familiarity with the NEP (see [www.epa.gov/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep)) and the key role EPA-approved CWA Section 320 NEP CCMPs play in addressing the relevant environmental issues. The competitive subaward process described in the application should also demonstrate how it will support estuary protection and restoration subaward projects located entirely within the geographic areas as defined by the EPA in this RFA. The geographic areas are the study area boundaries of each National Estuary Program as identified in the EPA-approved CCMP. Those areas can be found by going to [www.epa.gov/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep). Subaward projects must occur entirely within the boundary of these identified geographic areas in order to be eligible to be considered for subaward funding. A high-resolution map of these eligible areas can be found by going to [www.epa.gov/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep). Existing CCMPs are also available at [www.epa.gov/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep). Applicants also need to address all the evaluation criteria in Section V in their applications.

As stated above, this RFA is for an applicant who would receive a direct award from EPA and would provide competitive subawards to other eligible subaward entities on a national basis. The description of eligible applicants for both a direct award, and the subsequent competitive subawards is provided below in **Section III. A.**

### **C. EPA STRATEGIC PLAN LINKAGES AND ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES, OUTPUTS, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

Funding provided under this announcement supports the following goal and objective of EPA's Strategic plan for FY 2018 – FY 2022: Goal 1- A Cleaner, Healthier Environment: Deliver a cleaner, safer, and healthier environment for all Americans and future generations by carrying out the Agency's core mission; Objective 1.2 - Provide for Clean and Safe Water: Ensure waters are clean through improved water infrastructure and, in partnership with states and tribes, sustainably manage programs to support drinking water, aquatic ecosystems, and recreational, economic, and subsistence activities. Information on the EPA Strategic Plan is available at [www.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan](http://www.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan).

All applications must demonstrate the linkage to the Strategic Plan and include specific statements describing the environmental results of the proposed project in terms of well-defined outputs, and, to the maximum extent practicable, well-defined outcomes that demonstrate how the project will contribute to the overall goal of restoring and protecting ecosystems. Additional information regarding EPA's Strategic Plan and discussion of environmental results can be found at: <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57007a1-epas-policy-environmental-results-under-epa-assistance-agreements>.

#### **Outputs**

Environmental outputs (or deliverables) refer to an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product related to an environmental goal or objective, that will be produced or provided over a period of time or by a specified date. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative, but must be measurable during an assistance agreement project period.

Examples of anticipated environmental outputs from the assistance agreement awarded

under this announcement may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- the number of projects that address urgent, emerging, and challenging issues that threaten ecological and economic well-being in geographic areas as defined by this RFA funded through subawards;
- the number of projects that remove or modify physical barriers that would prevent natural transition of salt marsh habitat;
- the development and verification of subawardee tracking (reporting) systems that include the ability to monitor progress and to upload reports;
- the number of new partnerships formed or existing partnerships strengthened that contribute to the ecological and economic well-being of the estuarine areas as defined by this RFA;
- the number of pounds of nitrogen or sediment discharge avoided;
- the number of acres, linear miles or feet of habitat created, re-established, rehabilitated, or enhanced funded through subaward projects;
- the number pounds of floatable debris reduced or prevented from entering the estuary;
- pollutant (e.g., nutrients and sediment) load reductions in estuarine waters as defined by this RFA; and
- the number of lessons learned captured from the subaward projects.

### **Outcomes**

Environmental outcomes are the result, effect, or consequence that will occur from carrying out an environmental program or activity that is related to an environmental or programmatic goal or objective, and are used as a way to gauge a project's performance and take the form of output and outcome measures. Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related or programmatic in nature. Outcomes must be quantitative and may not necessarily be achieved within an assistance agreement funding period. Outcomes may be short term (changes in learning, knowledge, attitude, skills), intermediate (changes in behavior, practice, or decisions), or long-term (changes in condition of the natural resource).

Examples of anticipated environmental outcomes from the cooperative agreement to be awarded under this announcement may include, but are not limited to, the following within the defined estuarine areas:

- a change made to regulations, codes, and/or ordinances to promote estuarine watershed-based protection and restoration;
- an increased capacity among state and local governments and underserved communities to address urgent, emerging, and challenging estuarine issues;
- an improvement in the function of estuarine, near-shore, wetland, and upland habitat communities;
- an increase in the quality of habitat that was impaired by non-native invasive species;
- an implementation of innovative watershed-based nutrient reduction strategies;
- the creation of a pathway or improvement of a pathway for coastal wetlands for landward migration in response to sea level rise; and

- a change in behavior of community members that results in improved conditions in estuarine waters or bolsters resilience to climate change.

Additional information regarding the EPA’s discussion of environmental results in terms of “outputs” and “outcomes” can be found at: [www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57007a1-epas-policy-environmental-results-under-epa-assistance-agreements](http://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57007a1-epas-policy-environmental-results-under-epa-assistance-agreements).

#### **D. STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

The statutory authority for the assistance agreement to be awarded under this announcement is section 320(g)(4) of the Clean Water Act (FWPCA § 320(g)(4); 33 U.S.C. § 1330(g)(4)). Section 320(g)(4) authorizes issuance of competitive assistance agreements to address urgent, emerging, and challenging issues that threaten the ecological and economic well-being of estuarine areas.

## **II. AWARD INFORMATION**

#### **A. AMOUNT OF FUNDING**

EPA anticipates awarding one cooperative agreement under this announcement. The total federal amount of funding expected to be available under this announcement is approximately \$18,000,000 depending on Agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations. The successful applicant should provide EPA with a negotiated, six-year work plan covering six distinct one-year periods of performance. Subawards awarded under the cooperative agreement are anticipated to have project periods ranging from three to four years. The subawards need to be completed in sufficient time for the recipient to, for example, aggregate results and ensure that subawardees have been reimbursed for eligible incurred costs. EPA expects funding for each subaward will range from \$200,000 to \$500,000. Note: Applicants can identify a slightly different range for each subaward as part of their project narrative and explain why they have chosen a different range.

In appropriate circumstances, EPA reserves the right to partially fund applications by funding discrete portions or phases of the proposed project. If EPA decides to partially fund an application, it will do so in a manner that does not prejudice any applicants or affect the basis upon which the application, or portion thereof, was evaluated and selected for award, and therefore maintains the integrity of the competition and selection process.

EPA reserves the right to make no awards under this announcement. In addition, EPA reserves the right to make additional awards under this announcement, consistent with Agency policy, if additional funding becomes available. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than six months after the original selection decisions.

#### **B. TYPE OF FUNDING**

It is anticipated that one cooperative agreement will be funded under this announcement. The grantee will make the final subaward selections and administer the subawards. When the cooperative agreement is awarded, EPA will have substantial involvement with the project workplan and budget. Although EPA will negotiate precise terms and conditions relating to substantial involvement as part of the award process, the anticipated substantial EPA involvement for the project selected may include:

1. Close monitoring of the recipient's performance to verify the results proposed by the applicant;
2. Collaboration during the performance of the scope of work and budget;
3. In accordance with the applicable regulations at 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart D (200.317 through 200.326), as appropriate, review of proposed procurements;
4. Review of qualifications of key personnel (EPA does not have authority to select or remove employees or contractors employed by the recipient);
5. Review and comment on content of tasks/deliverables and reports prepared under the cooperative agreement (the final decision of the content of reports rests with the recipient);
6. Review of evaluation criteria and in selecting subawardees (the final decision on the evaluation criteria rests with the recipient);
7. Review the subaward competitive solicitation and may provide comments to ensure consistency with the applicant's scope of work (the recipient is responsible for the content of, and all final decisions regarding, the subaward competitive solicitation including the disposition of any EPA comments on the subaward competitive solicitation);
8. Participation in the review process for selection of subawardees (the majority of the selection panel members must be non-federal members);
9. Review and approval of the substantive terms of subawards to verify compliance with federal requirements (the final decision on the selection of subawardees rests with the recipient); and
10. Provide access for the recipient to EPA scientific expertise, sampling protocols, publicly available data, and other forms of technical assistance, should the request be made by the recipient and EPA have available personnel

### **III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

#### **A. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS**

Under Assistance Listing 66.456, eligible applicants under this announcement are state, interstate, tribal, inter-tribal consortia, and regional water pollution control agencies and entities, state coastal zone management agencies, other public or nonprofit private agencies<sup>3</sup>, institutions, and organizations, who can select, award, and manage subaward projects within the defined geographic boundaries of the NEP Watershed Program.

Non-profit organizations described in section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying activities as defined in section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply under this announcement.

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<sup>3</sup> Non-profit organization, as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative or other organization that: (1) is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable or similar purposes in the public interest; (2) is not organized primarily for profit; and (3) uses its net proceeds to maintain, improve and/or expand its operations. Note that 2 CFR Part 200 specifically excludes the following types of organizations from the definition of non-profit organization because they are separately defined in the regulation: (i) institutions of higher education; and (ii) state, local and federally-recognized Indian tribal governments. While not considered to be a non-profit organization(s) as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, Institutions of Higher Education are, nevertheless, eligible to submit applications under this RFA. For-profit colleges, universities, and trade schools are ineligible.

Nonprofit organizations may be asked to provide documentation that they meet the definition of a nonprofit organization in 2 CFR § 200.70. Interstate agencies may be asked to provide a citation to the statutory authority, which establishes their status.

The term “interstate agency” is defined in CWA section 502 as “an agency of two or more states established by or pursuant to an agreement or compact approved by the Congress, or any other agency of two or more states, having substantial powers or duties pertaining to the control of pollution as determined and approved by the Administrator.” (Administrator refers to the head of the EPA.)

Tribes must be federally-recognized, although “Treatment as a state” status is not required. Intertribal consortia must meet the requirements of 40 C.F.R. §35.504 (a) and (c) ([eCFR — Code of Federal Regulations](#)). This section states that an intertribal consortium is eligible to receive grants only if the consortium demonstrates that all members of the consortium meet the eligibility requirements for the grant and authorize the consortium to apply for and receive assistance. An intertribal consortium must submit to EPA adequate documentation of: (1) the existence of the partnership between Indian tribal governments, and (2) authorization of the consortium by all its members to apply for and receive the grant(s) for which the consortium has applied.

Eligible entities for the competitive subawards issued by the successful applicant include state, interstate, tribal, inter-tribal consortia and regional water pollution control agencies and entities, state coastal zone management agencies, interstate agencies, other public or nonprofit private agencies and institutions. For the purposes of this announcement, EPA has determined that for-profit entities are ineligible for the competitive subaward program. EPA award officials will disapprove the costs of proposed subaward work to 501(c)(4) organizations identified in a subaward application, or workplan changes requiring prior approval, if the work involves lobbying activities or would otherwise violate the principles of EPA’s subaward policy.

## **B. COST SHARING/MATCH REQUIREMENTS**

All applicants must demonstrate in their application submission how a minimum non-federal cost share/match of 25 percent of the total federal funding provided will be met. Cost shares/matches can be in the form of cash or can come from in-kind contributions, such as the use of volunteers and/or donated time, equipment, expertise, etc., subject to the regulations governing matching fund requirements described in 2 CFR Parts 200 and 1500, as applicable. In-kind contributions often include salaries or other verifiable costs, and this value must be carefully documented. In the case of salaries, applicants may use either minimum wage or fair market value. The cost share/match must be for allowable project costs. Cost share/matching funds are considered grant funds and are included in the total award amount and should be used for the reasonable and necessary expenses of carrying out the work plan. All grant funds are subject to federal audit. Any restrictions on the use of grant funds (examples of restrictions are outlined in **Section III.D** of this announcement) also apply to the use of cost share/matching funds. Other federal grants may not be used as cost shares/matches without specific statutory authority. **Applicants that do not demonstrate how they will meet the minimum cost share/match requirement in their application submission will not be considered for funding.**

The minimum match is determined by dividing the total federal funds requested by four. To calculate the minimum match under this RFA, divide the total federal request by four using the following formula: *Total Federal Funds Requested (\$) divided by four (4) = minimum cost share/match*. For example, if the **total federal funds requested** are \$18,000,000 the applicant must be able to provide \$4,500,000 in cash or in-kind contributions as cost share/match.

### **C. THRESHOLD ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

These are requirements which if not met by the time of application submission will result in elimination of the application from consideration for funding. Only applications that meet all of these criteria will be evaluated against the ranking factors in **Section V** of the announcement. Applicants deemed ineligible for funding consideration as a result of the threshold eligibility review will be notified within 15 calendar days of the ineligibility determination.

1. An applicant must meet the eligibility requirements in **Section III.A** of this announcement at the time of application submission, or else they will be rejected.
2. An applicant must demonstrate that it can meet the cost share/match requirements in **Section III.B** of this announcement at the time of application submission.
3. Applications must address how the applicant will establish and manage a competitive subaward program on a national scale that addresses urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues that threaten the ecological and economic well-being of estuarine areas.
4. Applications must **substantially comply** with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in this announcement or they will be rejected. Where a page limit is expressed in **Section IV.C.2** with respect to the Project Narrative, pages in excess of the page limitation will not be reviewed. **Section IV.C.2** establishes a 12-page, single-spaced Project Narrative page limit that includes the cover page.
5. Applications must be submitted through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), as specified in **Section IV** of this announcement (except in the limited circumstances where another mode of submission is specifically permitted as explained in **Section IV**) on or before the application submission deadline published in **Section IV** of this announcement. Applicants are responsible for following the submission instructions in **Section IV** of this announcement to ensure that their application is timely submitted.
6. Applications submitted after the submission deadline will be considered late and deemed ineligible without further consideration unless the applicant can clearly demonstrate that it was late due to EPA mishandling or because of technical problems attributable to Grants.gov or relevant SAM.gov system issues. An applicant's failure to timely submit its application through Grants.gov because they did not timely or properly register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov will not be considered an acceptable reason to consider a late submission. Applicants should confirm receipt of their application via email with Connie Cahanap at [nep-rfa@epa.gov](mailto:nep-rfa@epa.gov) as soon as possible after the submission deadline – failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.
7. If an application is submitted that includes any ineligible tasks or activities, that portion of the application will be ineligible for funding and may, depending on the extent to which it affects the application, render the entire application ineligible for funding.

### **D. INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES**

Ineligible activities funded under this award include, but are not limited to, the following:

- research, studies, and educational programs;
- outreach and public awareness activities are not eligible as stand-alone projects but may be part of a larger on-the-ground implementation project;
- application tasks that are or might be required by a previous or pending permit (e.g., CWA Section 404 permit, CWA Section 402 permit, CWA Section 401 certification) or federal, state, tribal, or local government regulatory requirement(s);
- funds implementing individual mitigation projects, mitigation banks, in-lieu-fee mitigation programs, intervention with federal regulatory proceedings, supplemental environmental projects or projects associated with a violation or legal settlement;
- purchase of vehicles, boats, motor homes, or office furniture valued at \$5,000 or more;
- purchase of land or real estate;
- lease of a vehicle(s) may be permitted, but is contingent on justification of need in the project narrative;
- conduct social surveys, focus groups, or questionnaires;
- funds supporting political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, or litigation;
- funds supporting any event or portion of an event where alcohol is served, purchased, or otherwise available even if grant funds are not used to purchase the alcohol; and
- projects performed outside of the specified eligible geographic areas, which are the study area boundaries of each NEP. Please see [epa.gov/nep](http://epa.gov/nep) for a map of these locations.

#### **IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

##### **A. HOW TO OBTAIN AN APPLICATION PACKAGE**

Applicants must use the application package associated with this opportunity on Grants.gov. Please see Section IV.B. Form of Application Submission for additional information.

##### **B. FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION**

###### **a. Requirement to Submit Through Grants.gov and Limited Exception Procedures**

Applicants must apply electronically through [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov) under this funding opportunity based on the [grants.gov](http://grants.gov) instructions in this announcement. If your organization has no access to the internet or access is very limited, you may request an exception for the remainder of this calendar year by following the procedures outlined [here](#). Please note that your request must be received at least 15 calendar days before the application due date to allow enough time to negotiate alternative submission methods. Issues with submissions with respect to this opportunity only are addressed in **Section IVB. c. Technical Issues with Submission** below.

###### **b. Submission Instructions**

The electronic submission of your application must be made by an official representative of your institution who is registered with Grants.gov and is authorized to sign applications for Federal assistance. For more information on the registration requirements that must be completed in order to submit an application through grants.gov, go to [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov) and click on "Applicants" on the top of the page and then go to the "Get Registered" link on the page. If your organization is not currently registered with Grants.gov, please encourage your office to designate an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) and ask that individual to begin the registration

process as soon as possible. Please note that the registration process also requires that your organization have a DUNS number and a current registration with the System for Award Management (SAM) and the process of obtaining both could take a month or more. Applicants must ensure that all registration requirements are met in order to apply for this opportunity through grants.gov and should ensure that all such requirements have been met well in advance of the submission deadline. Registration on Grants.gov, SAM.gov, and DUNS for a number assignment is FREE. Please see [RAIN-2021-G01](#) for information about EPA's implementation of the upcoming Government-wide transition from DUNS to Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

Applicants need to ensure that the AOR who submits the application through Grants.gov and whose DUNS is listed on the application is an AOR for the applicant listed on the application. Additionally, the DUNS listed on the application must be registered to the applicant organization's SAM account. If not, the application may be deemed ineligible.

To begin the application process under this grant announcement, go to [Grants.gov](#) and click on "Applicants" on the top of the page and then "Apply for Grants" from the dropdown menu and then follow the instructions accordingly. Please note: To apply through Grants.gov, you must use Adobe Reader software and download the compatible Adobe Reader version. For more information about Adobe Reader, to verify compatibility, or to download the free software, please visit [Adobe Reader Compatibility Information on Grants.gov](#)

You may also be able to access the application package for this announcement by searching for the opportunity on [Grants.gov](#). Go to [Grants.gov](#) and then click on "Search Grants" at the top of the page and enter the Funding Opportunity Number, **EPA-OW-OWOW-21-03**, or the Assistance Listing number that applies to the announcement (66.456), in the appropriate field and click the Search button.

Please Note: All applications must be submitted through [Grants.gov](#) using the "Workspace" feature. Information on the Workspace feature can be found at the [Grants.gov Workspace Overview Page](#).

**Application Submission Deadline:** Your organization's AOR must submit your complete application package electronically to EPA through [Grants.gov](#) no later than **November 15, 2021 11:59 PM ET**. Please allow for enough time to successfully submit your application and allow for unexpected errors that may require you to resubmit.

Please submit *all* of the application materials described below using the Grants.gov application package accessed using the instructions above.

### **Application Materials**

**The following forms and documents are required under this announcement: Mandatory**

#### **Documents:**

- a) Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
- b) Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)
- c) EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54
- d) EPA Form 4700-4 – Preaward Compliance Review Report
- e) Project Narrative (Project Narrative Attachment Form) prepared as described in

Section IV of the announcement

**Optional Documents:**

- f) Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, if applicable (Use Other Attachments Form)
- g) Biographical sketches of major project managers, support staff members, or other major project participants for the proposed projects (Use Other Attachments Form found in the Optional Documents section)
- h) Letters of Support, if applicable (Use Other Attachment Form)

Applications submitted through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) will be time and date stamped electronically. If you have not received a confirmation of receipt from EPA (not from grants.gov) within 30 days of the application deadline, please contact Connie Cahanap at 202-566-1382. Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

**c. Technical Issues with Submission**

1. Once the application package has been completed, the “Submit” button should be enabled. If the “Submit” button is not active, please call [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) for assistance at 1-800-518-4726. Applicants who are outside the U.S. at the time of submittal and are not able to access the toll-free number may reach a [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) representative by calling 606-545-5035. Applicants should save the completed application package with two different file names before providing it to the AOR to avoid having to re- create the package should submission problems be experienced. Otherwise, a revised application needs to be submitted.
2. Submitting the application. The application package must be transferred to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) by an AOR. The AOR should close all other software before attempting to submit the application package. Click the “submit” button of the application package. Your Internet browser will launch and a sign-in page will appear. **Note: Minor problems are not uncommon with transfers to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). It is essential to allow sufficient time to ensure that your application is submitted to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) BEFORE the due date identified in Section IV of the solicitation.** The [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) support desk operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, except Federal Holidays.

A successful transfer will end with an on-screen acknowledgement. For documentation purposes, print or screen capture this acknowledgement. If a submission problem occurs, reboot the computer – turning the power off may be necessary – and re-attempt the submission.

Note: [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) issues a “case number” upon a request for assistance.

3. Transmission Difficulties. If transmission difficulties that result in a late transmission, no transmission, or rejection of the transmitted application are experienced, and following the above instructions do not resolve the problem so that the application is submitted to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) by the deadline date and time, follow the guidance below. The Agency will make a decision concerning acceptance of each late submission on a case-by-case basis. All emails, as described below, are to be sent to Connie Cahanap at [nep-rfa@epa.gov](mailto:nep-rfa@epa.gov) with the Funding Opportunity Number (FON) in the subject line. If you are unable to

email, contact Connie Cahanap at 202-566-1382. Be aware that EPA will only consider accepting applications that were unable to transmit due to [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov) or relevant [SAM.gov](http://SAM.gov) system issues or for unforeseen exigent circumstances, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access. Failure of an applicant to submit timely because they did not properly or timely register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov is not an acceptable reason to justify acceptance of a late submittal.

- a. If you are experiencing problems resulting in an inability to upload the application to [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov), it is essential to call [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov), for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 before the application deadline. Applicants who are outside the U.S. at the time of submittal and are not able to access the toll-free number may reach a Grants.gov representative by calling 606-545-5035. Be sure to obtain a case number from Grants.gov. If the problems stem from unforeseen exigent circumstances unrelated to [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov), such as extreme weather interfering with internet access, contact Connie Cahanap at 202-566-1382.
- b. Unsuccessful transfer of the application package: If a successful transfer of the application cannot be accomplished even with assistance from [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov) due to electronic submission system issues or unforeseen exigent circumstances, and you have already attempted to resolve the issue by contacting [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov), send an email message to Connie Cahanap at [nep-rfa@epa.gov](mailto:nep-rfa@epa.gov) prior to the application deadline. The email message must document the problem and include the [Grants.gov](http://Grants.gov) case number as well as the entire application in PDF format as an attachment.
- c. Grants.gov rejection of the application package: If a notification is received from Grants.gov stating that the application has been rejected for reasons other than late submittal and it is too late to reapply, promptly send an email to Connie Cahanap at [nep-rfa@epa.gov](mailto:nep-rfa@epa.gov) with the FON in the subject line within one business day of the closing date of this solicitation. The email should include any materials provided by Grants.gov and attach the entire application in PDF format.

Please note that successful submission through Grants.gov or via email does not necessarily mean your application is eligible for award.

### **C. CONTENT OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION**

**Applicants should read the following section very carefully and address all requirements. A complete application package must include the following documents described below.**

#### **1. Application Materials**

##### **Mandatory Documents:**

- a. **Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424),**  
Complete the form and have it signed. There are no attachments. Please note that the organizational Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number must be included on the SF-424. Organizations may obtain a DUNS number at

no cost by calling the toll-free DUNS number request line at 1-866-705-5711 or by visiting the web site at [www.dnb.com](http://www.dnb.com).

b. **Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)**

Complete the form. There are no attachments. The total amount of federal funding requested for the project period should be shown on line 5(e) and on line 6(k) of SF-424A. The total amount of non-federal cost share/match should be shown on line 5 (f) and in Section C of the SF-424A. If indirect costs are included, the amount of indirect costs should be entered on line 6(j), and the Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement must be submitted as part of the application submission. The indirect cost rate (i.e., a percentage), the base (personnel costs and fringe benefits), and the total amount of indirect cost should also be indicated on line 22. In Section B: Budget Categories column (1) should be filled out for federal funds, column (2) should be filled out for non-federal cost-share/match, and column (5) should be filled out for total project cost (federal funds and non-federal cost share/match).

c. **EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54.**

Complete the form. Attach additional forms as needed.

d. **EPA Form 4700-4, Pre-Award Compliance Review Report.**

Complete the form. There are no attachments.

e. **Project Narrative.**

See Section IV.C.2 (Project Narrative) for details on specific information that must be included. When developing the Project Narrative, applicants should refer to Section I.B of the announcement.

**Optional Documents:**

f. **Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (Use Other Attachments Form)**

Complete this form if indirect costs are included in the proposed project budget. You must submit a copy of your organization's Indirect Cost Rate Agreement as part of the application package if your proposed project budget includes indirect costs.

g. **Biographical Sketches (Use Other Attachments Form found in Optional Documents section)**

Submit a biographical sketch of each major project manager, support staff member, or other major project participant.

h. **Letters of Support. (Use Other Attachments Form)**

Applicants may provide up to 10 letters of support from potential recipients of technical assistance to demonstrate that the applicant's proposed approach is responsive to the potential recipients' needs. To ensure that the Agency can efficiently evaluate these letters of support, EPA will only consider letters that are included with the application itself. Letters of support (up to 10 maximum) do not count against the 12-page limit on the Project Narrative.

**2. Project Narrative**

Note: The Project Narrative must include sections A-E below. The Project Narrative is limited to no more than twelve (12) typewritten single-spaced 8.5 x 11 -inch pages (a page is

one side of paper) (**except** for documents specifically excluded from the page limit as noted below). Pages should be consecutively numbered for ease of reading. It is recommended that applicants use a standard 12-point type with 1-inch margins. While these guidelines establish the minimum type size recommended, applicants are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in selection of an appropriate font for use in the project narrative. Additional pages beyond the 12 -page limit will not be considered. Supporting materials (such as letters of support from potential partners and annotated resumes) are not included within the page limit for the project narrative. Any documentation pertaining to Quality Assurance/Quality Control and Invasive Species Control is also not included in the page limit for the project narrative.

The Project Narrative must be typewritten and must include the information listed below in items A-E and address the evaluation criteria in **Section V**. If a particular item is not applicable, clearly state this in the Project Narrative.

- A. Cover Page (included in the 12-page limit) including:
  - a. Project title;
  - b. Name of applicant;
  - c. List of all potential partners associated with the project;
  - d. Key personnel and contact information (i.e., e-mail address and phone number);
  - e. Total project cost, (specify the amount of federal funds requested, the non-federal cost share/match, and the total project cost); and
  - f. Abstract/project summary (recommended 75 words or less): Provide a brief description of the proposed project.
  
- B. Project description containing:
  - a. Environmental Results and Measuring Progress (describe a plan for tracking and reporting progress toward achieving the expected project outputs and outcomes which would include the following elements):
    - i. Stated Objective/Link to EPA Strategic Plan – Describe how the objective of the project (outcomes) and products (outputs) contribute to meet the EPA’s Strategic Plan Goal 1, Objective 1.2. Description should include how the application will be a step towards the goal of restoring and protecting estuarine resources. (See **Section I.C**, EPA STRATEGIC PLAN LINKAGES AND ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES, OUTPUTS, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES, of this announcement);
    - ii. Results of Activities (Outputs) – Describe the anticipated products/results which are expected to be achieved from accomplishment of the project, and an approach for tracking and reporting your progress toward achieving the expected project output(s) (examples of outputs can be found in **Section I.C**); and
    - iii. Anticipated Environmental Improvement (Outcomes) - List the anticipated environmental improvements to be accomplished as a result of this project. These improvements are changes or benefits to the environment which are a result from the accomplishment of project commitments and outputs. Describe an approach for tracking

and reporting progress toward achieving the expected project outcome(s) that are expected to be accomplished during the project period. (examples of outcomes can be found in **Section I.C**).

- b. **Project Approach:** Describe your approach for serving as an organization to manage the NEP Watersheds Program (see **Section I.B**). The competitive subaward process proposed in the project approach must be on a national scale by allowing for subawardee projects entirely located within the NEP Watersheds geographic areas as defined by the RFA. The project approach should demonstrate the applicant's ability to:
- i. Prepare, issue, and manage a national subaward competitive solicitation, establish criteria and panels for evaluation, and select, oversee, and manage subawards that address urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues and priorities as described in **Section I.B**;
  - ii. Demonstrate understanding of the NEPs and the key role EPA-approved CCMPs play in achieving effective watershed management by implementing projects that address urgent, emerging, and challenging issues. Demonstrate the intent to seek subawardees to advance CCMP implementation by carrying out a Priority Action (see **Section I.B**) in at least one of the 28 EPA-approved NEP CCMPs;
  - iii. Manage and monitor subawards nationally that are located completely within the geographic areas as defined by EPA in this RFA for successful completion of projects, and ensure awardees comply with quality assurance, financial, and reporting requirements;
  - iv. Provide technical support to subawardees to ensure QAPPs submitted by subawardees meet EPA requirements and coordinate on their submission to EPA;
  - v. Transfer results from the proposed subaward projects among subawardees and with EPA through an annual webinar;
  - vi. Capture data and results and document lessons learned from the subaward projects for technical transfer purposes to share with EPA and other coastal managers including any new successful methods, approaches, techniques or practices to improve estuarine waters, their habitats, and living resources, and bolster their adaptation and resilience to climate change; and
  - vii. Qualitatively and quantitatively measure and report on the environmental results of the subaward projects to address urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues and priorities as defined by this RFA, and report outputs and outcomes to EPA.
- c. **Milestone Schedule:** Provide a milestone schedule that covers each year of the total project period requested (up to six years for the cooperative agreement and three to four years for the subawards) and provides a breakout of the project activities into phases with associated tasks and a

timeframe for completion of tasks. The milestone schedule should show timeframes and major milestones to complete significant project tasks including, but not limited to, major annual outreach activities, release of the subaward competition, and the approximate time of award of the subawards. Include an approach to ensure that awarded funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. The project start date will follow acceptance of the award by the successful applicant.

- d. Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) (not counted in page limit): If you plan to collect or use environmental data or information, explain how you will comply with the Quality Assurance/Quality Control requirements (see **Section VIII.A**, QUALITY ASSURANCE/QUALITY CONTROL (QA/QC), of this announcement for additional information).
- e. Invasive Species Control (not counted in page limit): If applicable, describe how you will ensure that your project does not facilitate the introduction or spread of invasive species. Explain how you would respond if an invasive species problem occurs in relation to your project. (See **Section VIII.B**, INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL, of this announcement for additional information).

C. Programmatic Capability:

- a. Organizational Experience. Provide a brief description of the applicant's organization and experience related to the proposed project, and the organization's infrastructure as it relates to its ability to support subawardees and successfully implement the proposed project.
- b. Staff expertise/qualifications. Provide a list of key staff and briefly describe their expertise/qualifications and knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them to successfully achieve the goals of the project. Include an estimate of the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) workers (based on 2080 hours per year/FTE). Annotated resumes of applicant's key staff are also encouraged and are not included in the page limit.

D. Detailed Budget Narrative - Provide a detailed budget and estimated funding amounts for each workplan component/task. This section provides an opportunity for narrative description of the budget or aspects of the budget found in the SF- 424A such as "other" and "contractual". All subaward funding should be located under the "other" cost category. Applicants can refer to this guidance on budget development <https://www.epa.gov/grants/rain-2019-g02>.

- a. If applicable, the budget narrative for the "other" cost category must include travel reimbursement to pay for travel costs of non-federal personnel other than applicant staff.
- b. Total costs must include separate breakdowns for federal and required cost share/matching (non-federal) components. For each cost category, indicate what portion of the cost will be paid by EPA and what portion of the cost will be covered by the minimum non-federal 25 percent cost share/match as required in **Section III.B**. Letters of support from partners providing cost share/match are encouraged and will not count against the page limit for the

Project Narrative. Describe each item in sufficient detail for EPA to determine cost-effectiveness, reasonableness and allowability of costs, and value of in-kind contributions.

- E. Past Performance – Briefly describe federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include federal grants and cooperative agreements but not federal contracts) that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements) and:
- a. Describe whether, and how, you were able to successfully complete and manage those agreements.
  - b. Describe your history of meeting the reporting requirements under those agreements including submitting acceptable final technical reports.
  - c. Describe how you documented and/or reported on whether you were making progress towards achieving the expected results (i.e., outputs and outcomes) under those agreements. If you were not making progress, please indicate whether, and how, you documented why not.

**Note:** In evaluating applicant’s past performance, the Agency will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources, including information from EPA files and from current/prior grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information provided by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please indicate this in the application and you will receive a neutral score for these factors (a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). Failure to provide any past performance information, or to include a statement in the application that you do not have any relevant or available past performance or reporting information, may result in a zero score for these factors (see also **Section V**).

**NOTE:** The applicant should also provide in its project narrative any additional information, to the extent not already identified above, that addresses the selection criteria found in Section V.

#### **D. SUBMISSION DATES AND TIMES**

Applications must be submitted through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) by **11:59 P.M. ET November 15, 2021**. Late applications will not be considered for funding, unless the circumstances involve one of the situations stated in **Section III.C.6**.

#### **E. ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS FOR APPLICANTS INCORPORATED INTO THE SOLICITATION**

Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation, including but not limited to those related to confidential business information, contracts and subawards under grants, and application assistance and communications, can be found at [EPA Solicitation Clauses](#). These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing applications for this solicitation. If you are unable to

access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions.

**V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

**A. SELECTION CRITERIA**

All eligible applications, based on the Section III threshold eligibility review, will be evaluated based on the following evaluation criteria and weights (100 total point scale). Points will be awarded based on how well and thoroughly each criterion and/or sub-criterion is addressed in the application.

<p>1) Environmental Results and Measuring Progress (10 points)</p>	<p>Applications will be evaluated based on each of the following sub-criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. The extent and quality to which the application demonstrates the potential to achieve environmental results, anticipated outputs and outcomes, and how the outputs and outcomes are linked to EPA’s Strategic Plan Goal 1, Objective 1.2. (See <b>Section I.C</b>, ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS AND LINKAGE TO STRATEGIC PLAN, of this announcement). (5 points)</li> <li>B. The extent and quality to which the application demonstrates a sound plan for measuring and tracking progress toward achieving the expected outputs and outcomes (examples of outputs and outcomes can be found in <b>Section I.C</b> of this announcement). (5 points)</li> </ul>
<p>2) Project Approach (45 points)</p>	<p>Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated based on the extent and quality to which the project approach demonstrates the applicant’s ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Prepare, issue, and manage a national subaward competitive solicitation and program, establish criteria and panels for evaluation, and select subaward projects that address urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues that threaten the ecological and economic well-being of estuarine areas. (15 points)</li> <li>B. Understand the NEP’s and EPA-approved CCMPs key role in achieving effective watershed management through their implementation, and demonstrate their intent to seek subaward projects that carry out a Priority Action in an EPA approved NEP CCMP. (10 points)</li> <li>C. Manage and monitor subawardees for timely and successful completion of projects located entirely within the geographic boundaries of the geographic area defined by this RFA and ensure subawardees comply with quality assurance, financial and reporting requirements. (10 points)</li> <li>D. Qualitatively and quantitatively measure and track the environmental results from subaward projects to address urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues and</li> </ul>

	report outputs and outcomes to EPA. (10 points)
3) Milestone Schedule and Detailed Budget Narrative (10 points)	<p>Applications will be evaluated based on the extent and quality to which they demonstrate each of the following sub-criterion:</p> <p>A. A clearly articulated milestone schedule for project tasks including, but not limited to, major annual outreach activities, release of the subaward competitive solicitation, and the approximate time of award of the subawards, and a clearly articulated approach to ensure that awarded funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. (5 points)</p> <p>B. The reasonableness of the budget and estimated funding amounts for each project component/task. Applicants will be evaluated based on the adequacy of the information provided in the detailed budget and whether the proposed costs are reasonable and allowable. Total costs must include both federal and required cost share/match (non-federal) components. Describe the cost-effectiveness and reasonableness of all costs (both federal and non-federal components). (5 points)</p>
4) Technical Support and Transferability of Results (10 points)	<p>Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated based on</p> <p>A. The extent and quality of the approach to provide technical support to subawardees to ensure QAPPs submitted by subawardees meet EPA requirements and coordinate on their submission to EPA, and through sharing of progress from the subaward projects among subawardees and with EPA through an annual webinar; (5 points)</p> <p>B. How they demonstrate that the applicant will capture and document lessons learned from the subaward projects for technical transfer purposes to share with EPA and other coastal managers including any new successful methods, approaches, techniques or practices to improve estuarine waters, their habitats, and living resources, and bolster adaptation and resilience to climate change. (5 points)</p>
5) Programmatic Capability (Organizational Experience/ Staff Expertise/ Qualifications) (10 points)	<p>Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated based on the applicant's ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project taking into account their:</p> <p>A. Organizational experience related to the proposed project, and their infrastructure as it relates to the ability to support subawardees and successfully implement the project. (5 points)</p> <p>B. Staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project. (5 points)</p>

<p>6) Past Performance (15 points)</p>	<p>Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project taking into account their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Past performance in successfully completing and managing federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (an assistance agreement is a grant or cooperative agreement and not a contract) performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements). (5 points)</li> <li>B. History of meeting reporting requirements under federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements) and submitting acceptable final technical reports under these agreements. (5 points)</li> <li>C. Extent and quality to which they documented and/or reported on their progress towards achieving the expected results (e.g. outcomes and outputs) under federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements performed in the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements), and if such progress was not being made, whether the applicant adequately documented why not. (5points)</li> </ul> <p>Note: In evaluating applicants under A., B., and C. above, EPA will consider the information provided by the applicant, and may also consider relevant information from other sources including Agencyfiles and/or prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplementthe information provided by the applicant). Applicants with no relevant or available past performance information or reporting history must indicate that in the application and they will receive a neutral score for the factor (i.e., 2.5 points for subcriterion A., 2.5 points for subcriterion B., and 2.5 points for subcriterion C.). Failure to provide any past performance information, or to include a statement in your application that no relevant or available past performance information, may result in a zero score for the factor (i.e., 0 points for subcriterion A., 0 points for subcriterion B., and 0 points for subcriterion C.)</p>
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**B. REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS**

All applications received by the submission deadline will first be screened by EPA staff against the threshold criteria in Section III of the announcement. Applications that do not pass the threshold review will not be evaluated further or considered for funding.

A panel comprised of EPA staff will review eligible applications based on the evaluation

criteria listed in **Section V.A.** The panel will develop a ranking list of the applications based on the evaluation scores received. The ranking list will be provided to the Selection Official who makes final funding decisions. In making final funding decisions, the Selection Official will consider the application scores and may also take into account programmatic priorities.

**C. ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS FOR APPLICANTS INCORPORATED INTO THE SOLICITATION**

Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation including the clause on Reporting and Use of Information Concerning Recipient Integrity and Performance can be found on the [EPA Solicitation Clauses](#) page. These, and the other provisions that can be found on this page, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing applications for this solicitation. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions.

**VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION**

**A. AWARD NOTICES**

Following EPA's evaluations of the applications, all applicants, including those who are not selected for funding, will be notified regarding their status. The notification will be made to the original signer of the SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance. The notification of recommendation for award is not an authorization to begin performance, nor is it a guarantee that the award will be made. The official notification of an award will be made by the Award Official in the Grants and Interagency Management Division.

Applicants are cautioned that only an Award Official is authorized to bind the Government to the expenditure of funds; selection does not guarantee an award will be made. For example, statutory authorization, funding or other issues discovered during the award process may affect the ability of EPA to make an award to an applicant. The award notice, signed by an EPA Award Official, is the authorizing document and will be provided through electronic or postal mail. The successful applicant may need to prepare and submit additional documents and forms (e.g., work plan), which must be approved by EPA, before the cooperative agreement can officially be awarded. The time between notification of selection and award of a cooperative agreement can take up to 90 days or longer.

EPA reserves the right to negotiate and/or adjust the final grant amount and workplan prior to award, as appropriate and consistent with Agency policy, including EPA's Competition Policy ([EPA Order 5700.5A1](#)). An approvable final workplan is required to include:

1. Workplan components to be funded under the assistance agreement;
2. Estimated work years and the estimated funding amounts for each workplan component;
3. Workplan commitments for each workplan component and a timeframe for their accomplishment;
4. Performance evaluation process and reporting schedule; and
5. Roles and responsibilities of the recipient and EPA (for cooperative agreements only) in carrying out the workplan commitments.

The selected project will be posted on EPA's website at [www.epa.gov/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep). This website may

also contain additional information about this RFA. Deadline extensions, if any, will be posted on this website and [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

#### **B. ADMINISTRATIVE AND NATIONAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS**

The general award and administration process for assistance agreements are governed by the regulations at 2 CFR Parts 200 and 1500, as applicable. A description of the Agency's substantial involvement in the cooperative agreement will be included in the final assistance agreement.

#### **C. REPORTING**

In general, the application is responsible for managing the day-to-day operations and activities supported by the assistance funding, to assure compliance with applicable federal requirements, and for ensuring that established milestones and performance goals are being achieved.

Performance reports and financial reports must be submitted quarterly and are due 30 days after the reporting period. The final report is due 120 days after the assistance agreement project/budget period end date. The applicant will be required to report direct and indirect environmental results from the work accomplished through the award. In negotiating assistance agreements, EPA will work closely with the recipient to incorporate appropriate performance measures (e.g., measurable short and longer term results the projects funded will achieve) and reporting requirements in the workplan consistent with 2 CFR § 200.328. This includes any problems, issues or difficulties encountered that may affect the quality requirements of the project. The recipient must indicate what, if any, corrective actions were taken. Award recipients will be required to submit the final report electronically and should include, in addition, a 1-2-page project summary.

#### **D. DISPUTES**

Assistance agreement competition-related disputes will be resolved in accordance with the dispute resolution procedures published in 70 FR (Federal Register) 3629, 3630 (January 26, 2005) which can be found at [Dispute Resolution Procedures](#). Copies of these procedures may also be requested by contacting the person listed in Section VII of the announcement. Note, the FR notice references regulations at 40 CFR Parts 30 and 31 that have been superseded by regulations in 2 CFR parts 200 and 1500. Notwithstanding the regulatory changes, the procedures for competition-related disputes remains unchanged from the procedures described at 70 FR 3629, 3630, as indicated in 2 CFR Part 1500, Subpart E.

#### **E. ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS FOR APPLICANTS INCORPORATED INTO THE SOLICITATION**

Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation, including but not limited to those related to DUNS, SAM, copyrights, disputes, and administrative capability, can be found at [EPA Solicitation Clauses](#). These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing applications for this solicitation. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions.

## VII. AGENCY CONTACT

In accordance with EPA's Assistance Agreement Competition Policy (EPA Order 5700.5A1), EPA staff will not meet with individual applicants to discuss draft applications, provide informal comments on draft applications, or provide advice to applicants on how to respond to ranking criteria. Applicants are responsible for the contents of their applications. However, consistent with the provisions in the announcement, EPA will respond to questions from individual applicants regarding threshold eligibility criteria, administrative issues related to the submission of the applications, and requests for clarification about the announcement. In addition, if necessary, EPA may clarify threshold eligibility issues with applicants prior to making a final eligibility determination. Questions must be submitted in writing via e-mail and must be received by the Agency Contact identified below by **November 1, 2021** and written responses will be posted on EPA's website at: [www.epa.gov/nep](http://www.epa.gov/nep).

### Agency Contacts

Connie Cahanap

Email: [nep-rfa@epa.gov](mailto:nep-rfa@epa.gov)

## VIII. OTHER INFORMATION

### **A. QUALITY ASSURANCE/QUALITY CONTROL (QA/QC)**

Quality Assurance/Quality Control requirements apply to these grants 2 CFR §1500.12. QA/QC requirements apply to the collection of environmental data. Environmental data are any measurements or information that describe environmental processes, location, or conditions; ecological or health effects and consequences; or the performance of environmental technology require a QAPP. Environmental data include information collected directly from measurements, sampling activities, produced from environmental modeling, and compiled from other sources such as databases or literature.

The recipient must develop and implement quality assurance and quality control procedures, specifications, and documentation that are sufficient to produce data of adequate quality to meet project objectives. The QAPP is the document that provides comprehensive details about the quality assurance/quality control requirements and technical activities that must be implemented to ensure the project objectives are met. The QAPP should be prepared in accordance with EPA QA/R-5: EPA Requirements for Quality Assurance Project Plans. The QAPP *must* be approved by EPA at least 30 days prior to the initiation of data collection or data compilation. The recipient will assist subawardees in ensuring the quality of QAPPs meet EPA requirements and will coordinate on their submission to EPA. Requirements for QAPPs can be found at [www.epa.gov/quality/epa-qar-5-epa-requirements-quality-assurance-project-plans](http://www.epa.gov/quality/epa-qar-5-epa-requirements-quality-assurance-project-plans).

Successful applicants should allow sufficient time and resources for this process. EPA can assist successful applicants in determining whether QA/QC is required for the proposed project. See **Section VII**, AGENCY CONTACTS for Agency Contact information for referral to an EPA QA/QC staff. If water quality data is generated, either directly or by subaward, the successful applicant must ensure all water quality data is transmitted into the Agency's Data Warehouse annually or by project completion using the Water Quality

Exchange (WQX) in accordance with an EPA approved QAPP. Water quality data that are appropriate include physical, chemical, and biological sample results for water, sediment and fish tissue. The data include toxicity data, microbiological data, and the metrics and indices generated from biological and habitat data. The WQX is the water data schema associated with the EPA, State and Tribal Exchange Network. Continuous water quality data generated or collected, either directly or by subaward, is not required to be transmitted into the EPA Data Warehouse. More information about WQX including tutorials, can be found at [www.epa.gov/waterdata/water-quality-data-wqx](http://www.epa.gov/waterdata/water-quality-data-wqx).

## **B. INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL**

Pursuant to Executive Order 13112 ([www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/laws/execorder.shtml](http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/laws/execorder.shtml)), the recipient of EPA funds and all subcontractors/subawardees shall monitor the project to ensure it does not facilitate the introduction or spread of invasive species. If invasive species are detected or populations promoted in any way, the recipient will respond rapidly to control populations in an environmentally sound manner, as approved by the EPA Project Officer. "Control" as defined in Executive Order 13112 means "as appropriate, eradicating, suppressing, reducing, or managing invasive species populations, preventing spread of invasive species from areas where they are present, and taking steps such as restoration of native species and habitats to reduce the effects of invasive species and to prevent further invasions."