

Enhanced Aquifer Recharge Performance and Potential Risk in Different Regional and Hydrogeologic Settings Request for Applications (RFA)

Informational Webinar Questions and Answers
September 29, 2022

Application Information

- **On an application, can there be only one principal investigator (PI) per university or only one PI for the project?**

Answer: There can be only one lead PI on the application. Other investigators who are considered to be key personnel can be listed as co-PIs or Investigators.

As stated in the RFA: “Multiple Investigator applications may be submitted as: (1) a single Lead Principal Investigator (PI) application with Co-PI(s) or (2) a Multiple PI application (with a single Contact PI). If you choose to submit a Multiple PI application, you must follow the specific instructions provided in Sections IV and V of this RFA. For further information, please see the [EPA Implementation Plan for Policy](#) on Multiple Principal Investigators.”

- **Can universities submit a joint application (e.g., from 2 universities)?**

Answer: Yes, universities can submit a joint application. One university must serve as the applicant/lead institution and the other universities would be subawardees. In addition, applicant institutions and PIs may submit more than one application if each application is significantly different.

As stated in the RFA: “Groups of two or more eligible applicants may choose to form a coalition and submit a single application under this RFA; however, one entity must be responsible for the grant. Coalitions must identify which eligible organization will be the recipient of the grant and which eligible organization(s) will be subrecipients of the recipient (the “pass-through entity”). *Subawards* must be consistent with the definition of that term in 2 CFR 200.1 and comply with EPA’s [Subaward Policy](#). The pass-through entity that administers the grant and subawards will be accountable to EPA for proper expenditure of the funds and reporting and will be the point of contact for the coalition. As provided in 2 CFR 200.332, subrecipients are accountable to the pass-through entity for proper use of EPA funding.”

- **Should foreign national PIs be listed as Co-PIs or Service Providers?**

Answer: Foreign institutions cannot be the lead institution on an application, and investigators at foreign institutions cannot serve as the lead PI. Investigators at foreign institutions can participate as Co-PIs. Foreign nationals who are affiliated with an eligible American institution may serve as PIs.

- **Where can I find similar funding opportunities?**

Answer: You can search for funded grants under [research recipients](#) and [research results search pages](#). You can also find links to previous RFAs on our [Past Research Funding Opportunities](#)

[page](#). To be notified of grant opportunities, please sign up for our [listserv](#). You can also search for other funding opportunities at [grants.gov](#).

- **Are there limits to how many projects a faculty member can join?**

Answer: No.

As stated in the RFA, "If you wish to submit applications for more than one STAR funding opportunity you must ensure that the research proposed in each application is significantly different from any other that has been submitted to the EPA or from any other financial assistance you are currently receiving from the EPA or other federal government agency."

- **What is the difference between fellowship application and federal application?**

Answer: A fellowship is to support a student's academic education, not to support research per se. The fellowship award pays their tuition. We do not have a fellowship program at this time. This grant is supplying an award to a university or non-profit organization to support research and is not directly funding a student.

- **Is there a page limit for the research plan?**

Answer: The research plan should not exceed fifteen pages. Appendices may be included but the research plan must remain within the 15-page limit.

- **Can the research focus on foreign populations?**

Answer: Research on foreign populations is allowed as long as the results of research under this RFA benefit the U.S. and are applicable/transferable across the U.S.

- **How will EPA choose awardees?**

Answer: Eligible applicants are evaluated through a two-stage competitive review process. Eligible grant applications are subject to external peer review to evaluate scientific merit. Applications receiving peer review scores of Excellent or Very Good will then undergo an internal relevancy review to evaluate relevance. Final funding decisions are made by the EPA selection official based on the results of the review panels, past-performance history review, and the evaluation of the Scientific Data Management Plan. In addition, in making the final funding decisions, the selection official may also consider program balance and available funds. Please see section V. of the RFA for more information on the application review process.

- **Can you address this issue of "cooperative agreements" versus conventional grants? How will EPA determine when to fund as a cooperative agreement?**

Answer: Applications will be funded as grants. After the award is made, if there is a need from the grantee that EPA can address, and there is capacity and interest within EPA to collaborate, then EPA will consider a request to convert the grant to a cooperative agreement.

- **Is cost sharing required?**

Answer: No, cost sharing is not required.

- **Are salaries for permanent Federally-Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs) allowed?**

Answer: Yes. Salaries for permanent FFRDC employees may be charged under the assistance agreement.

- **Can an FFRDC receive a subaward?**

Answer: Yes. For distinctions between subrecipients and contractors see EPA's Subaward Policy.

Research Projects

- **Is there a preference for region or requirement for performing research in a named watershed? Can it be more generally focused on contaminant movement and mobilization (in representative conditions)?**

Answer: No, there is no preference for region or location of research. We do give three examples in the RFA, but there is no preference for these locations. This is up to the researcher, but make sure that the research findings are applicable to a broader scale across the U.S. Contaminant movement and mobilization is a subtopic under Research Area 3 that can be included in the application. Remember, you must address **three** of the **four** research areas.

- **Will certain source water types have preference?**

Answer: No, there is no source water preference. The only restriction is that you should not study oil and gas produced water.

- **Is there a preference for including PFAS as a focus of the research activities?**

Answer: No, there is no preference for PFAS in this RFAs.

- **Are proposers expected to address all 3 geohydrologic settings listed in the RFA?**

Answer: No, you do not have to address all or limit research to the subtopics, but you must address **three** of the **four** research areas.

- **Are site suitability studies considered?**

Answer: Yes, site suitability studies may be included in the research. However, applicants should seek opportunities to partner with states, municipalities, or other interested parties to leverage, to the extent possible, existing infrastructure, models, data, and other available resources at existing EAR operations. Otherwise, your application may not be rated as highly in peer review. Additionally, be sure to address **three** of the **four** research areas.

- **Will mobilization of Natural Dissolved Organic Carbon be considered as contaminant mobilization in this program?**

Answer: Yes, we do not have specific requirements for which contaminants to include.

- **Will you fund epidemiological studies as part of Research Area 3 that will focus on public health effect of drinking water from enhanced aquifer recharge?**

Answer: Research Area 3 focuses on methods and technologies for monitoring and maintenance of EAR systems. Potential environmental and public health risks from drinking water caused by EAR is something that can be considered and studied as a part of this research. However, keep in mind you must address **three** of the **four** research areas.

- **Is it preferred that researchers focus on regions where they are located, or can they consider regions outside their area or multiple areas?**

Answer: You can partner with other institutions in other locations and work in their regions. You can also work with partners in multiple regions or sites. There are no restrictions on where you can conduct research.

- **Can the project focus on one EAR site? Or are multiple sites also acceptable?**

Answer: Yes, one or more sites are acceptable. Research results should be applicable on a broad scale to the US.

- **Would this funding support project seek to identify areas where EAR would be successful, but not currently present?**

Answer: Yes, the outcome of the research under this RFA may include new locations where EAR should be implemented as part of the research areas. The research should address **three** of the **four** research areas, and applicants are not expected to develop new EAR infrastructure and/or operations. Rather, applicants should seek opportunities to partner with states, municipalities, or other interested parties to leverage, to the extent possible, existing infrastructure, models, data, and other available resources at existing EAR operations. If your project doesn't involve partnering with existing EAR infrastructure, you will need to describe how you will achieve the objectives without those partnerships.

- **Can the project be more lab/modeling based and not directly connected to a current EAR site?**

Answer: The reason for asking applicants to work with existing infrastructure is due to the concern that most of the effort (both funding and time) may be used to build infrastructure vs. conducting the research. Thus, if the project is not connected to existing EAR infrastructure to the extent possible, it may not be rated as highly by peer review. Applicants should seek opportunities to partner with states, municipalities, or other interested parties to leverage, to the extent possible, existing infrastructure, models, data, and other available resources at existing EAR operations. Proposed research can include bench scale (e.g., column studies), mechanistic modeling and field-based sampling and data analysis, but must ultimately advance the practical application, knowledge transfer and safe use of EAR. If your project doesn't involve partnering with existing EAR infrastructure, you'll need to describe how you will achieve the objectives without those partnerships.

- **Would the EAR site have to be a complete operational system currently in use, or can it be only a pilot facility?**

Answer: This would depend on the system. Peer review will evaluate your proposal on responsiveness to the research areas. If using the pilot facility would offer the same results as an existing system, your application may be rated more favorably than if not. The application

should justify why you choose a pilot facility and why it best answers the research questions. It should also address how it advances practical application of EAR. You should be sure to explain any perceived differences between an operational system and a pilot system so peer reviewers can assess its relevance.

- **Can an EAR "site" be considered as an area of distributed green infrastructure infiltration, or must it be identified as a concentrated EAR location?**

Answer: As described in this RFA, EAR does not include small-scale projects designed primarily for stormwater management such as green infrastructure (this was addressed in a previous RFA). However, green infrastructure demonstrated at a larger, community or regional scale can be considered as a component of larger EAR systems. Multiple, smaller, and distributed practices such as GI are considered, in combination, to be an "EAR site" if as a group they are intended to achieve a common goal (replenishing a specific aquifer, addressing a common water quality impairment problem). However, rather than being located at one location, they are operating in the landscape in a distributed fashion where the cumulative effects are significant. A dispersed group of green infrastructure would need to be enhancing the recharge to the same aquifer and successfully monitoring impacts to the aquifer as a whole from a dispersed infiltration structure, within the project period and budget of the award.

- **What if the region does not have any existing EAR infrastructure but has huge potential to conduct research, and in that case how much budget can be allocated to building some infrastructure?**

Answer: The RFA encourages applicants to work on existing EAR infrastructure and operations, but it is not an eligibility requirement. The reason for asking applicants to work with existing infrastructure is due to a concern that most of the funding, effort, and time may be used to build infrastructure vs. conducting the research. Thus, the application may not be rated as highly in peer review if it is not using an existing site. We would expect applicants not proposing work with existing infrastructure to justify any proposed infrastructure costs, and how the work outlined in the research objectives could be accomplished. We do not specify how much of the budget should be used for various categories, but you must justify your costs, address three research areas, and the project period of work should last for three years. The RFA also requires a collaboration and engagement plan.

Eligibility

- **Are small businesses or for-profit firms eligible to apply? Are they eligible to receive subawards?**

Answer: No, small businesses are not eligible to apply and may not be a subawardee. Small businesses should consider applying for the Small Business Innovation Research Program (SBIR) (<https://www.epa.gov/sbir>). If you are interested in doing business with EPA, please read [Resources for Small Businesses](#).

As stated in the RFA: "Profit-making firms and individuals are not eligible to apply. For-profit colleges, universities, trade schools, and hospitals are ineligible. For-profit organizations are not eligible for subawards under this grant program but may receive procurement contracts. Any

contracts for services or products funded with EPA financial assistance must be awarded under the competitive procurement procedures of 2 CFR Part 200 and/or 2 CFR Part 1500, as applicable. The regulations at 2 CFR 1500.10 contain limitations on the extent to which EPA funds may be used to compensate individual consultants. Refer to the [Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements](#) for guidance on competitive procurement requirements and consultant compensation. Do not name a procurement contractor (including a consultant) as a “partner” or otherwise in your application unless the contractor has been selected in compliance with competitive procurement requirements.”

- **Can a single state agency or group of agencies apply?**

Answer: State and local government agencies may apply and may serve as subawardee organizations. There is no limit to the number of state and local government agencies that may receive subawards.

As stated in the RFA: “Public and private nonprofit institutions/organizations, public and private institutions of higher education (IHEs), and hospitals located in the U.S. and its territories or possessions; state and local governments; Federally Recognized Indian Tribal Governments; and U.S. territories or possessions are eligible to apply. Profit-making firms and individuals are not eligible to apply.”

- **Can international organizations apply?**

Answer: Foreign entities are not eligible to apply to this funding opportunity. However, foreign universities and non-profit organizations may be subawardees to an eligible U.S.-based institution.

- **Are international students eligible to apply for EPA's research funding?**

Answer: Universities not located in the U.S. cannot apply for this research grant. However, funding awarded to eligible U.S. institutions through this RFA can be used to support the research of students enrolled in a university outside the U.S. if they are a subawardee listed on the application. Foreign students legally present in the United States and enrolled in an eligible U.S. institution may be supported by research funds if their university is awarded a grant.

- **Can researchers outside the U.S. participate by partnering with U.S.-based PIs?**

Answer: Yes, universities outside the U.S. can participate as a subawardee.

- **Can an EPA employee be part of the application as a co-PI or advisor?**

Answer: No, EPA employees are not allowed to participate in any application. In addition, letters of support or intent from EPA employees are prohibited; however, Federal employees from other agencies may submit letters of support or intent.

- **Can individuals from academia partner with other consultants?**

Answer: A lead institution from academia may propose consultants in their application, but the grant recipient must follow the competitive procurement procedures described in the RFA. Consultants are not to be listed as PIs or co-PIs.

As stated in the RFA: “Any procurement of services from individual consultants or commercial firms (including space for workshops) must comply with the competitive procurement requirements of 2 CFR Part 200.317-200.327. Please see <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses> for more details. EPA provides detailed guidance on procurement requirements in the Agency’s [Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements](#).”

- **Can research university employees with federal government affiliation serve as key personnel on a project?**

Answer: No, Federal employees are not allowed to participate as PIs or co-PIs in any application.

As stated in the RFA: “Federal employees are not eligible to serve in a principal leadership role on an assistance agreement. Federal employees may not receive salaries or augment their Agency’s appropriations through awards made under this program unless authorized by law to receive such funding.

The applicant institution may enter into an agreement with a Federal Agency to purchase or utilize unique supplies or services unavailable in the private sector to the extent authorized by law. Examples are purchase of satellite data, chemical reference standards, analyses, or use of instrumentation or other facilities not available elsewhere. A written justification for federal involvement must be included in the application. In addition, an appropriate form of assurance that documents the commitment, such as a letter of intent from the Federal Agency involved, should be included.”

Peer Review

- **Are there any minimum requirements for a peer reviewer?**

Answer: Peer reviewers should have a depth of experience in at least one of the research areas of the RFA. The panel will be composed of experts with a variety of expertise and cannot be directly or financially involved or have certain other types of conflict of interest with a submitted application. Peer reviewers also cannot be EPA employees. If you are interested in becoming peer reviewer, please contact Julie Wanslow (wanslow.julie@epa.gov).

- **Can we be involved with an application as well as be involved in peer-review?**

Answer: No. Peer reviewers cannot be directly or financially involved with any application for this RFA (you can still be on this peer review panel if involved with an application submitted to another EPA RFA) or have a certain type of conflict of interest with a submitted application, including submitting a letter of support or intent. If someone else from your institution is applying for the grant, and you do not otherwise have a conflict of interest with this application, you can still be a peer reviewer; however, you cannot participate in discussions involving that application.

SAM.gov/Grants.gov

- **What is SAM.gov?**

Answer: The System for Award Management (SAM.gov) is an official website of the U.S. Government. There is no cost to use SAM.gov. You can use this site to:

- Register to do business with the U.S. Government
- Update, renew, or check the status of your entity registration
- Search for entity registration and exclusion records
- Search for assistance listings (formerly CFDA.gov), wage determinations (formerly WDOL.gov), contract opportunities (formerly FBO.gov), and contract data reports (formerly part of FPDS.gov).
- View and submit BioPreferred and Service Contract Reports
- Access publicly available award data via data extracts and system accounts

All applicant institutions must have SAM.gov registration “Active” prior to submitting applications via Grants.gov. Otherwise, Grants.gov will not accept the application. Not having a SAM.gov registration active is not considered a valid reason to have a late submission to our grant programs.

- **Are SAM.gov registrations required for individual PIs or their institutions?**

Answer: For the purposes of this funding opportunity, applicant institutions are required to be registered in Sam.gov, not individuals. If you have further questions or need assistance with the SAM.gov registration process, please contact the Federal Service Desk (www.fsd.gov/gsafsd_sp) and the phone number at 866-606-8220.

- **If non-governmental organizations are co-PIs, do they need to be registered at SAM.gov?**

Answer: No, organizations of co-PIs do not have to be registered. Only the lead institution submitting the application needs to be registered at SAM.gov.

- **What if I have technical difficulties with submitting my application through Grants.gov?**

Answer: All applications must be submitted through Grants.gov. EPA will make decisions concerning acceptance of each application submitted outside of Grants.gov on a case-by-case basis. EPA will only consider accepting applications that were unable to submit through Grants.gov due to Grants.gov or relevant SAM.gov system issues or for unforeseen exigent circumstances, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access. Failure of an applicant to submit prior to the application submission deadline date because they did not properly or timely register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov is not an acceptable reason to justify acceptance of an application outside of Grants.gov.

If you are experiencing problems resulting in an inability to upload the application to Grants.gov, it is essential to call Grants.gov for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov before the application deadline. Be sure to obtain a case number from Grants.gov. Report this information to Debra Jones (jones.debram@epa.gov) before the close of the funding opportunity.

Budget

- **What can the budget go towards? How does budget justification work?**

Answer: Grant funds can be used to cover costs for personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual support, other, and indirect costs. The budget justification should identify the amount requested for each of the above budget category (i.e., categories in Section B of SF-424A) and describe the basis for calculating the total request in each budget category. Please refer the RFA or contact the Technical Contact listed in the RFA for more guidance.

- **How can the budget go towards subawards?**

Answer: Subawards, such as those with other universities or nonprofit research institutions for members of the research team, should be included in the “other” category. The budget justification should provide the total costs proposed for subawards as a separate line item in the budget justification and brief description of the activities to be supported for each subaward or types of subawards if the subrecipients have not been identified. Subawards may not be used to acquire services from consultants or commercial firms.