

Federal Agency Name: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Water, Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water

Funding Opportunity Title: Training and Technical Assistance to Improve Water Quality and Enable Small Public Water Systems to Provide Safe Drinking Water

Announcement Type: Request for Applications (RFA)

Funding Opportunity Number: EPA-OW-OGWDW-24-01

Assistance Listing: 66.436 and 66.424

Dates: The closing date and time for receipt of application submissions is **February 2, 2024 by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time, in order to be considered for funding.** Application packages must be submitted electronically to the EPA through Grants.gov ([Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)) no later than **11:59 p.m., Eastern Time, February 2, 2024, in order to be considered for funding.** Questions about this RFA must be submitted in writing via e-mail and must be received by the Agency contact identified in Section VII by **11:59 p.m., Eastern Time, January 18, 2024.** Written responses will be posted on the EPA’s website at: www.epa.gov/dwcapacity/training-and-technical-assistance-small-systems-funding. Please note that answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) are also available at: www.epa.gov/dwcapacity/training-and-technical-assistance-small-systems-funding. The EPA strongly recommends interested applicants refer to the FAQs webpage prior to submitting a question.

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 in your application as partners to assist you with the proposed project, pay careful attention to the information in the CONTRACTS AND SUBAWARDS provision found at www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses.

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Overview

The nation has made significant progress in addressing environmental and public health needs over the past fifty years. At the same time, the cost of facilities, programs, services, and activities needed to meet environmental challenges continues to grow. Many communities with significant drinking water system technical, managerial, and financial capacity needs have not been able to access federal funding and financing programs to address these concerns. The EPA recognizes that existing environmental gains cannot be preserved, nor further progress achieved, unless Tribes, state and local governments, utilities, and non-governmental organizations have the resources to develop and sustain water infrastructure and to pay for the growing costs of protecting the environment and public health.

As the EPA looks to support continued environmental progress, we are mindful that many communities have never been able to access safe and reliable infrastructure, and many communities are dealing with the impacts of climate change. Climate change acts as a threat multiplier, exacerbating existing stressors that impact public health, degrade the quality of our waterways, and destabilize critical water infrastructure. Disadvantaged communities are particularly vulnerable to these impacts.

The EPA provides technical assistance (TA) to help communities identify water infrastructure needs, plan for capital improvements, maintain regulatory compliance, improve resiliency, build capacity, and apply for the range of eligible projects under various grant programs. TA is provided through direct interactions with water utilities and communities. Through this grant program, the EPA seeks to support communities at the drinking water system level, including operational, environmental, and financial resource challenges they face. The funds included in this opportunity will ensure that vital services are provided and reach the drinking water systems in communities that need them most. Funding will be provided to assist small drinking water systems, small publicly-owned wastewater systems, and onsite/decentralized wastewater systems and private well owners¹.

Accordingly, with this announcement the EPA is seeking applications from organizations with a demonstrable history of providing effective, results-oriented technical assistance to public water systems. The agency's priorities include maximizing funds to provide significant benefit to drinking water systems in communities of need; tackling the climate crisis; and advancing environmental justice and equity. The EPA believes this funding plays a significant role to ensure continued access to resources to support infrastructure improvements that protect public health, safeguard the environment, and mitigate environmental justice concerns at the public water system.

It is an EPA priority to ensure there are more communities with applications for federal funding to assist in providing quality water infrastructure and reliable water services. Technical assistance can help communities and is key to supporting this priority.

TA providers are expected to collaborate with states, Tribes, and territories to facilitate dialogue with communities focused on local needs and proposed solutions. The EPA is committed to providing technical assistance to meet the needs of utilities and communities.

¹ For the purposes of this announcement, a "private well" is defined as a well owned by a homeowner or group of homeowners that supplies drinking water to fewer than 25 people and contains fewer than 15 service connections.

The EPA is working with a number of TA programs and this announcement is part of the EPA's water technical assistance (WaterTA) portfolio, as outlined at <https://www.epa.gov/water-infrastructure/water-technical-assistance-waterta>.

Section I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objectives

All communities deserve access to safe, clean, and reliable water. The EPA's priority is to support training and technical assistance to communities of need and improve public health through enhancement of technical, managerial, and financial capacity, compliance and drinking water infrastructure. The training and technical assistance will help ensure that communities that have historically struggled to access public funding receive the support they need. The EPA aims to maximize the potential for these funds to significantly benefit rural, small, or Tribal communities with training and technical assistance in their respective public waters systems. Applicants are encouraged to prioritize training and technical assistance that support environmental justice. Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys:

- The same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and
- Equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.

Awards made through this RFA are intended also to enable communities to comply with environmental regulations and build their technical, managerial, and financial capacity to sustainably operate drinking water infrastructure. Providing assistance in technical, managerial, and financial capacity building will allow communities to better protect both public health and the environment and support the Justice40 Initiative. With respect to this RFA, the benefits as described under the Justice40 Initiative include training and technical assistance that support or aid improvements to communities and private well owners experiencing limited water and sanitation access and affordability and development of critical clean water and waste infrastructure. More information on the Justice40 initiative is available at <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40-epa>.

The EPA encourages all eligible applicants to apply and recognizes that new applicants are essential to expanding the pool of service providers able to address the technical, managerial, and financial capacity needs of small drinking water systems, small publicly owned wastewater systems and onsite/decentralized wastewater systems and private well owners. New applicants may help to expand the pool and increase diversity in supporting projects that benefit rural, small, or Tribal communities. New applicants are applicants that have not received a *Training and Technical Assistance to Improve Water Quality and Enable Small Public Water Systems to Provide Safe Drinking Water* award from the EPA in the past two years.

The EPA is soliciting applications from eligible applicants for training and technical assistance projects in three National Priority Areas as discussed in further detail below. EPA expects to make at least one award in each National Priority Area, and may redistribute the awards per area based on the quality of applications received and other applicable considerations.

Infrastructure projects such as repairing water or sewer lines, adding new equipment, or upgrading, retrofitting, or rehabilitating existing equipment, are not eligible for funding under this announcement.

B. National Priority Areas

Each application submitted under this announcement must address only one of the three National Priority Areas described below. Applicants may submit more than one application package under this announcement as long as each one is submitted separately and addresses only **one** National Priority Area. The cover page of each application package must clearly indicate the National Priority Area addressed in the application. If an applicant submits an application covering more than one National Priority Area, it will be rejected.

National Priority Area 1: Training and Technical Assistance for Small Public Water Systems to Achieve and Maintain Compliance with the SDWA, including Improving Financial and Managerial Capacity

Under this National Priority Area, the EPA is soliciting applications to provide training and technical assistance for small public water systems to enable such systems to achieve and maintain compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), and to build their financial and managerial capacity to provide safe drinking water over the long term. The ability for small systems to attain and maintain financial and managerial capacity is critical to ensuring that systems can reliably and sustainably provide safe water to its customers. For purposes of this announcement, “small public water systems” means community and non-community water systems serving a population of less than 10,000 persons. These public water systems include small community water systems and small transient or non-transient non-community water systems such as hospitals, schools, and restaurants. The majority of community water systems in the nation serve fewer than 10,000 persons (91 percent). Approximately 60 percent of these systems serve 500 persons or fewer.

Many small public water systems face challenges in reliably providing safe drinking water to their customers and consistently meeting the requirements of the SDWA and the National Primary Drinking Water Regulations (NPDWRs). These challenges include, but are not limited to: (1) lack of adequate revenue or access to financing; (2) aging infrastructure; (3) retirement of experienced system operators and difficulty retaining current operators; (4) difficulty training operators; (5) managers and operators who lack the requisite financial, technical, or managerial skills; (6) lack of planning for infrastructure upgrades or the ability to respond to and recover from natural disasters (e.g., floods or tornadoes); (7) lack of planning for cybersecurity upgrades or the ability to respond to and recover from malevolent acts; and (8) lack of understanding of existing or new regulatory requirements and treatment technologies.

As a result, some small systems may experience frequent or long-term compliance challenges in reliably providing safe water to their customers, while others may currently be in compliance but lack the technical capacity to maintain compliance.

For this National Priority Area, applicants should describe their proposed approach for providing training and technical assistance for personnel who operate or manage small public water systems (including decision makers such as trustees, board members, or system owners).

Applicants should also describe how they intend to strengthen the technical capacity of personnel and enable them to comply with the regulatory requirements applicable to their system.

Applicants should describe how they will facilitate small public water systems becoming more resilient to natural disasters and malevolent acts. Additionally, applicants should describe their proposed approach to help small public water systems build their financial and managerial capacity to address current needs and to achieve long-term sustainability and plan locally driven solutions. Training and technical assistance may be provided through face-to-face trainings and site visits or through remote learning approaches, taking into consideration the benefits of face-to-face community assistance.

This assistance may also include circuit-rider and multi-state regional technical assistance programs and training.

Technical capacity refers to the physical infrastructure of the water system, including, but not limited to, the adequacy of the source water, the adequacy of the system's infrastructure (i.e., source, treatment, storage, and distribution), the resiliency to natural disasters and malevolent acts and the ability of system personnel to adequately operate and maintain the system and to apply necessary technical knowledge (e.g., certified operators, water system resiliency and security).

Financial capacity refers to the financial resources of the water system, including, but not limited to, revenue sufficiency, user rate-setting, customer water assistance programs, rate collection, creditworthiness, fiscal controls, operational budgeting, and planning. Managerial capacity refers to the management structure and practices of the water system, including, but not limited to, ownership accountability, staffing and organization, maintenance programs, and effective linkages and communication with customers and regulatory agencies.

Applicants should describe their proposed approach to making training and technical assistance available nationally in all 50 states and the U.S. territories as described under Section I.C, Providing Training and Technical Assistance on a National Basis, including how they will reach out to Tribally-owned and -operated systems, and how they will provide training and technical assistance to these systems. Applicants should describe a thorough and flexible approach that tailors the training and technical assistance techniques and resources to public water systems. Additionally, applicants should demonstrate cultural competency such as using appropriate language fluency to serve their target audience. Technical assistance should be provided in a

culturally competent manner, cognizant of community sensitivities.

The goals of the training and technical assistance activities under this priority area are to assist small public water systems in achieving and maintaining compliance with the SDWA and the NPDWRs, and to assist with their financial and managerial capabilities in order to reliably provide safe drinking water over the long term. Further, the goals involve supporting utilities in the development of customer assistance programs or providing outreach for such programs. Applicants may also provide training and technical assistance to utilities on consumer assistance programs and on how to help qualifying households obtain assistance through consumer assistance programs, such as the federal Low Income Household Water Assistance Program.

Applicants should describe how they will document and report progress toward meeting these goals as described in Section I.D, the EPA's Strategic Plan and Anticipated Environmental Results. Applicants should also describe a process whereby they will consult with the appropriate regulatory authority (such as the state or territorial primacy agency or the EPA regional direct implementation coordinators) for each state, Tribe, or territory in which the assistance is to be expended or otherwise made available prior to providing training and technical assistance in that state, Tribe, or territory. In particular, applicants should indicate how they will coordinate and collaborate with the state, Tribe, territory, or the EPA to identify the systems in greatest need of assistance and identify the training topics of greatest need to the small public water systems; how they will keep those agencies, the EPA grant project officer, and appropriate regional coordinators informed regarding the assistance provided; and how they will document these results.

Training and technical assistance activities to support financial and managerial capacity development may involve assisting system managers, decision makers, and others in understanding sustainable management practices such as asset management, maintenance programs, fiscal planning, rate-setting, workforce recruitment and retention, planning for impacts from natural disasters and malevolent acts, and water system partnership options that are necessary to promote system compliance and sustainability over the long term.

Applicants should describe how the proposed approach supports environmental justice goals when providing training and technical assistance. The EPA's commitment to providing technical assistance supports communities to identify water challenges, develop plans, build technical, financial, and managerial capacity, and develop application materials to access water infrastructure funding. The following are examples of eligible training and technical assistance activities for small public water systems that support this National Priority Area.

Example activities include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Provide operator training and technical assistance such as: (1) on how to comply with NPDWRs, with emphasis on regulatory requirements that present a particular challenge for small systems, such as the Ground Water Rule and the Disinfection and Disinfectant Byproducts Rules. Applicants should identify the specific rules that present these challenges in their applications, including any state rules that might

apply; (2) assist operators with newer regulations such as the Revised Total Coliform Rule requirements, and the Lead and Copper Rule Revisions requirements and related guidance; (3) address microbial, nitrate/nitrite, arsenic, radionuclides, lead and disinfection byproducts contamination; and (4) improve the knowledge and skill competency of drinking water system personnel in the areas of managerial and financial capacity.

- Provide training and technical assistance to identify funding sources that will support continued technical, managerial, and financial capacity at the water systems and address public health risks.
- Provide technical assistance on applications to access water infrastructure funding.
- Provide training sessions for water system managers and board members in fiscal planning, communicating effectively with system customers, asset management program implementation, development of financial assessments and rate analyses, and other sustainable management topics.
- Provide training to decision makers and board members on water infrastructure and operations as well as SDWA requirements and their responsibilities.
- Provide training and technical assistance to diagnose and trouble-shoot system operational and compliance-related problems and identify solutions.
- Provide training and technical assistance to systems to help develop and implement source water protection plans.
- Conduct energy audits and water loss analyses to recommend potential energy and water efficiencies and cost savings.
- Provide training and technical assistance to systems facing malevolent acts and earthquake impacts, drought, flooding, climate change and other weather-related challenges.
- Provide training and technical assistance to community water systems to assist them with America's Water Infrastructure Act Section 2013 risk and resilience assessments and emergency response plan requirements.
- Provide training and technical assistance to water systems that serve a population under 3,301 who voluntarily complete risk and resilience assessments and emergency response plans.
- Conduct preliminary engineering evaluations to assess treatment, storage, and distribution system issues, and identify low-cost alternative technology and management techniques.
- Provide training and technical assistance on workforce development and training for operator certification and continuing education units (CEUs). Applicants should describe how they would obtain state approval for CEU credits for their training courses.
- Work with systems to evaluate opportunities of collaboration with other systems, including shared operators and treatment; and identification, restructuring, connection and consolidation of systems to support SDWA compliance and the provision of safe water to their communities.
- Provide water systems with training on connecting and communicating with their

communities.

- Engage the broader community, including harder-to-reach portions of the community, to advance clean drinking water solutions. Provide training and technical assistance on the development of customer assistance programs or providing outreach for such programs.
- Provide training and technical assistance in water conservation program implementation.
- Provide training and technical assistance to utilities on how to help qualifying households obtain financial assistance through consumer assistance programs such as the federal Low Income Household Water Assistance Program.

The EPA also encourages applicants to propose other types of activities that may achieve the objectives of this National Priority Area.

All eligible applications will be evaluated based on the criteria in Section V including how well and thoroughly the National Priority Area is addressed (see Section V). The EPA anticipates awarding approximately two to four cooperative agreements under this National Priority Area, ranging from approximately **\$6,500,000** to no more than **\$13,000,000**, depending on the amount requested and the overall size and scope of the project(s). The total anticipated amount of federal funding to potentially be made available under this National priority area is approximately **\$26,000,000**, depending on agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations. The project period is anticipated to be two years.

National Priority Area 2: Training and Technical Assistance for Small Publicly-Owned Wastewater Systems and Onsite/Decentralized Wastewater Systems to Help Improve Water Quality and Sustainable Operations

Under this National Priority Area, the EPA is soliciting applications to provide training and technical assistance to: (a) small publicly-owned wastewater systems; and (b) communities served by onsite/decentralized wastewater systems. Under this priority area, the application must address the two elements further described below. For the purposes of this announcement, “small publicly-owned wastewater systems” are defined as wastewater systems or treatment facilities that have permitted and actual flows of less than 1 million gallons per day (MGD) and are: owned by a public entity (such as a municipality) or not-for-profit entity (such as regional sewer districts), and/or serve Tribal communities (with the exception of systems that are owned by U.S. federal entities). “Onsite/decentralized systems” are defined as: publicly-owned or privately- owned onsite or clustered systems used to collect, treat, and disperse or reclaim wastewater from a small community, Tribe, or service area that are publicly- or privately-owned and/or serve Tribal communities (with the exception of systems that are owned by U.S. federal entities).

For this National Priority Area, applicants should describe their proposed approach for providing training and technical assistance to small publicly-owned wastewater systems and to communities served by onsite/decentralized wastewater systems as described in the above paragraph. Applicants should describe how the proposed approach supports environmental justice goals when providing training and technical assistance. The EPA's commitment to providing technical assistance supports communities to identify water challenges, develop plans, build technical, financial, and managerial capacity, and develop application materials to access water infrastructure funding.

Training and technical assistance may be provided through face-to-face trainings and site visits or through remote learning approaches, taking into consideration the benefits of face-to-face community assistance. This assistance may also include circuit-rider and multi-state regional technical assistance programs and training. Assistance may include: training on long term sustainability and effectiveness of small systems and decentralized systems, evaluation of treatment and/or infrastructure alternatives, training on preliminary engineering evaluations, assessments of management approaches and their effectiveness, training on improved water and energy efficiency, developing appropriate rate structures, education of local officials, identification of funding alternatives, and/or use of green infrastructure, among other activities.

Applicants should describe their proposed approach to making training and technical assistance available as described under Section I.C, Providing Training and Technical Assistance on a National Basis, including how they will reach out to Tribally-owned and -operated systems, and how they will provide training and technical assistance to these systems. Applicants should describe a thorough and flexible approach that tailors the training and technical assistance techniques and resources to provide to public water systems. Additionally, applicants should demonstrate cultural competency such as using appropriate language fluency to serve their target audience. Technical assistance should be provided in a culturally competent manner, cognizant of community sensitivities.

The goals of the training and technical assistance activities are to assist small publicly-owned wastewater systems and onsite/decentralized wastewater systems to improve operational performance and sustainable operations over the long term, thereby improving public health and water quality. Applicants should describe how they will document and report on progress toward meeting these goals as described in Section I.D, the EPA's Strategic Plan and Anticipated Environmental Results. Applicants should also describe a process whereby they will consult with the appropriate regulatory authority (such as the state or territorial primacy agency or the EPA regional direct implementation coordinator) in each state, Tribe, or territory in which the assistance is to be expended or otherwise made available prior to providing training and technical assistance in that state, Tribe, or territory. In particular, applicants should indicate how they will work with the state, territory, or the EPA to identify the systems in greatest need of assistance; how they will keep those agencies, the EPA grant project officer, and appropriate EPA regional coordinators informed regarding the assistance provided; and how they will document these results.

All eligible applications will be evaluated based on the criteria in Section V including how well and thoroughly both elements of this National Priority Area are addressed (see Section V). Applications for awards under this National Priority Area must address both of the following two elements. Those that do not will be rejected.

Element (a): Training and Technical Assistance for Small Publicly-Owned Wastewater Systems

Small publicly-owned wastewater systems often face many common challenges including: (1) a lack of capacity to assess current operations and identify short- and long-term opportunities for improvement; (2) frequent turnover of operations personnel; (3) personnel who lack necessary technical, financial, or managerial skills; (4) limited rate bases; (5) aging infrastructure; (6) lack of knowledge of increasingly stringent discharge limits; and (7) lack of knowledge of newer techniques to reduce discharges, assess and improve operations, and analyze infrastructure alternatives to meet water quality goals.

Training and technical assistance activities for small publicly-owned wastewater systems under this element should focus on compliance, promoting the sustainable and effective management of wastewater systems, and improving system performance. Applicants should describe in detail their approach for training, for example, assisting facility managers, utility boards, and wastewater operators in sustainable utility operations (for details and examples, www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/rural-and-small-systems-guidebook-sustainable-water-and-wastewater). Topics may include, for example: assessment of the system's overall strengths and areas for improvement, asset management, energy management, rate design, improved communications with local officials, effective utility management, and identifying funding sources or other topics that help facilities maintain long-term managerial, financial, and operational success. Applicants should also describe their approach to reaching target audiences of small publicly-owned wastewater systems, especially small facilities that require additional management capacity to effectively improve the long-term sustainability of operations and/or are out of compliance with discharge permits. Additionally, applicants should describe how they will engage the broader community, including harder-to-reach portions of the community, to advance clean wastewater solutions.

Applicants should describe in detail their approach for utilizing and sharing existing information and materials on pollution prevention, facility operation and maintenance, effective utility management, wastewater treatment alternatives, infrastructure funding opportunities, and efficient water use with the communities and facilities being assisted. Applicants should describe in detail an approach for providing onsite training and technical assistance, while also providing products and assistance for a broader (e.g., nationwide) audience. These trainings or technical solutions may use existing materials, including, but not limited to, documents and tools developed by the EPA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Indian Health Service (IHS), and other federal agencies. Such trainings or technical solutions could then be developed into or incorporated into existing guidebooks or webinars or other on-line training for transfer to small wastewater systems nationwide, or supported as a "train-the-trainer" approach to increase the reach of the materials.

Applicants are encouraged to prioritize training and technical assistance that support environmental justice goals. Examples of training and technical assistance activities for small publicly-owned wastewater systems that support this element include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Perform on-site trainings or technical solutions that focus on improving performance at local facilities (e.g., training on nutrient removal technologies, rate structures, energy efficiency opportunities, and assessments of sustainability and proper management of small publicly-owned wastewater systems).
- Provide training and technical assistance to identify funding sources that will support continued technical, managerial, and financial capacity at the wastewater systems and address public health risks.
- Provide technical assistance on applications to access wastewater infrastructure funding.
- Provide training to operators, staff, and managers on the sustainable and effective management of small wastewater treatment systems.
- Provide training to help small wastewater treatment operators obtain and maintain certification.
- Conduct training visits, calls or webinars to facilitate reaching small wastewater treatment systems nationwide on topics described in this element.
- Provide technical assistance to improve the knowledge and skill of municipalities, publicly owned treatment works and decentralized wastewater treatment system personnel in the areas of technical, managerial, and financial capacity.

The EPA also encourages applicants to propose other types of activities that may achieve the objectives of Element (a) of this National Priority Area.

Element (b): Training and Technical Assistance for Onsite/Decentralized Wastewater Systems

Onsite/decentralized systems face significant maintenance and management challenges, including: (1) lack of information on system location, performance, age, and maintenance history; (2) improper design or siting; (3) lack of owner knowledge of proper preventative maintenance techniques; (4) lack of life-cycle management; and (5) lack of owner/service provider knowledge of advanced treatment and dispersal technologies.

Under this element, applicants should describe in detail their approach to providing training and technical assistance on aspects of decentralized system planning, installation, operation and maintenance, and management approaches. Applicants should also describe in detail their approach for utilizing and sharing existing information and materials on appropriate treatment and dispersal options and funding opportunities to the appropriate identified audience(s). Applicants may use documents and tools developed by the EPA for these trainings. Such trainings or technical solutions could be adapted into webinars, developed into guidebooks for transfer to communities nationwide, or supported as a "train-the-trainer" approach to increase the reach of the materials. The applicant should describe how these solutions and materials provide a level of cultural competency including appropriate language fluency to serve communities in the geographic area to be served.

Applicants are encouraged to prioritize training and technical assistance that support environmental justice goals. Examples of training and technical assistance activities for onsite/decentralized wastewater systems that support this element include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Assistance in accessing funds for communities with decentralized wastewater system projects.
- Assistance identifying funding sources.
- Development of preliminary needs analysis.
- Consideration of alternatives for wastewater treatment options, including advanced treatment, nutrient control, low-impact development, and other green infrastructure practices.
- Project planning, siting, and design.
- Development of outreach tools and materials to support facilitating regionalization and interconnection opportunities between septic owners and centralized wastewater systems.
- Development of maintenance schedules.
- Assistance forming responsible management entities ([RMES](#)) and supporting the development of a long-term business plan.
- Outreach to individual system owners and the general public on the basics of decentralized systems, such as how they function and the wastewater treatment process.
- Outreach to individual system owners and the general public on proper preventative and corrective maintenance techniques.
- Assist publicly owned treatment works and decentralized wastewater treatment systems in conducting analyses on the potential benefits of partnerships and collaboration with other systems.
- Provide technical assistance to improve the knowledge and skill of municipalities, publicly owned treatment works and/or decentralized wastewater treatment system personnel in the areas of technical, managerial, and financial capacity.
- Train community leaders, service providers, and regulatory officials to assist in consideration of funding access/ mechanisms, construction alternatives, highlighting the importance of maintenance and management, and to facilitate a properly trained workforce (e.g., certification of installers and operators).
- Develop or provide information, training, and technical assistance to organizations that work with decentralized wastewater system owners (e.g., county public health offices).

The EPA also encourages applicants to propose other types of activities that may achieve the objectives of Element (b) of this National Priority Area.

All eligible applications will be evaluated based on the criteria in Section V including how well and thoroughly the National Priority Area is addressed (see Section V). The EPA anticipates awarding approximately one cooperative agreement under this National Priority Area for no more than

\$1,250,000, depending on the amount requested and the overall size and scope of the project(s). The total anticipated amount of federal funding to potentially be made available under this National priority area is approximately **\$1,250,000** depending on agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations. The project period is anticipated to be two years.

National Priority Area 3: Training and Technical Assistance for Private Drinking Water Well Owners to Help Improve Water Quality

Under this National Priority Area, the EPA is soliciting applications to provide training and technical assistance to private drinking water well owners. For the purposes of this announcement, a “private well” is defined as a well owned by a homeowner or group of homeowners that supplies drinking water to fewer than 25 people and contains fewer than 15 service connections.

Approximately 30 million Americans receive their drinking water from private drinking water wells. Private drinking water well owners face many challenges in providing safe water. Protection of private drinking water wells does not fall under the authority of the SDWA, so these drinking water well owners often face challenges in obtaining the assistance they need to keep their drinking water wells in good working order and to protect the quality of their water supply. These challenges include where to go or whom to contact for accurate and timely information and technical assistance on all aspects of private drinking water well ownership, including well construction, operation, maintenance, well testing, local and state health and other relevant regulations or programs, local ground water quality and quantity concerns, and well emergency contacts and procedures.

For this National Priority Area, applicants should describe their approach to providing training and technical assistance to private drinking water well owners. Applicants should also describe how the proposed approach supports environmental justice goals when providing training and technical assistance.

Training and technical assistance may be provided through face-to-face meetings and site visits or through remote learning approaches, taking into consideration the benefits of face-to-face community assistance. This assistance may also include circuit-rider and multi-state regional technical assistance programs and training.

Applicants should describe their proposed approach to making training and technical assistance available nationally in all 50 states and the U.S. territories as described under Section I.C, Providing Training and Technical Assistance on a National Basis, including how they will reach out to private drinking water well owners on Tribal lands and how they will provide training and technical assistance to these private drinking water well owners. Applicants should describe a thorough and flexible approach that tailors the training and technical assistance techniques and resources to provide to public water systems. Additionally, applicants should demonstrate cultural competency such as using appropriate language

fluency to serve their target audience.

The goals of the training and technical assistance activities are to assist private drinking water well owners with information they need to protect their drinking water supply and improve water quality. Applicants should describe how they will document and report on progress toward meeting these goals as described in Section I.D, the EPA's Strategic Plan and Anticipated Environmental Results. Applicants should also describe a process whereby they will consult with the appropriate regulatory authority (such as the state or territorial primacy agency or the EPA regional direct implementation coordinators) in each state, Tribe, or territory in which the assistance is to be expended or otherwise made available prior to providing training and technical assistance in that state, Tribe, or territory. In particular, applicants should indicate how they will work with the state, territory, or the EPA to identify the drinking water well owners in greatest need of assistance; how they will keep those agencies, the EPA grant project officer, and appropriate EPA regional coordinators informed regarding the assistance provided; and how they will document these results.

Applicants are encouraged to prioritize training and technical assistance that support environmental justice goals. Examples of eligible training and technical assistance activities for private drinking water wells that support this National Priority Area include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Developing or providing online and hard copy information and materials on topics of interest to private drinking water well owners, such as well construction, well maintenance and operation, well testing, ground water quality and protection, state regulations impacting private wells, water rights, and how to respond to well contamination emergencies.
- Providing information, technical assistance, and training to other organizations with activities that affect private drinking water well owners.
- Providing assistance with identifying funding sources.
- Adequately manning a hotline with a toll-free number for private drinking water well owners to call for timely assistance and advice on private drinking water well matters.
- Providing electronic newsletters or using social media to provide topical or emergency information quickly to private drinking water well owners with internet access.
- Educating private drinking water well owners through face-to-face visits regarding potential or actual threats to their wells and whom to contact for help.
- Providing technical assistance or outreach on options for connecting private wells to public water systems.

The EPA also encourages applicants to propose other types of activities that may achieve the objectives of this National Priority Area.

All eligible applications will be evaluated based on the criteria in Section V including how well

and thoroughly the National Priority Area is addressed (see Section V). The EPA anticipates awarding approximately one to two cooperative agreements under this National Priority Area, ranging from approximately **\$1,725,000** to no more than **\$3,450,000**, depending on the amount requested and the overall size and scope of the project(s). The total anticipated amount of federal funding to potentially be made available under this National priority area is approximately **\$3,450,000**, depending on agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations. The project periods are anticipated to be two years.

C. Providing Training and Technical Assistance on a National Basis

Applications for projects under all of the National Priority Areas described above should demonstrate the applicant's ability and approach to making training and technical assistance available on a national basis. Applicants should make training and technical assistance available nationally in all 50 states and the U.S. territories (i.e., Guam, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa), including to Tribally-owned and -operated systems, through a combination of face-to-face/onsite and remote training and technical assistance approaches. The training and technical assistance may include circuit-rider and multi-state regional technical assistance, or some other program design that makes training and technical assistance available nationally. Applicants should describe how they will reach out to Tribally-owned and -operated systems and how they will provide training and technical assistance to these systems. Please note the "Providing Training and Technical Assistance on a National Basis" evaluation criteria in Section V.

Applications will be evaluated based on the criteria in Section V, including the demonstrated ability and described approach to making training and technical assistance available nationally in the maximum number of states and U.S. territories through face-to-face/onsite and/or remote training and technical assistance. The EPA will give priority consideration to applications that describe a thorough, quality, and flexible approach that tailors the training and technical assistance techniques and resources to address the specific needs of the target audience in as many states and U.S. territories as possible. A tailored approach should describe how the applicant will use the most appropriate techniques and materials to address the needs of various audiences, such as system managers versus operators or private drinking water well owners, as well as the unique needs of populations determined by geographical, socio-economic, system-type, educational, or other factors. The applicant should take into consideration how state and local regulations and policies impact the implementation of national standards. The approach should also demonstrate how the applicant would balance the use of face-to-face/onsite techniques, which often result in a high level of understanding and knowledge retention for participants, but are usually more expensive and resource-intensive, with the need to provide assistance in a maximum number of states and U.S. territories through remote techniques.

Training and technical assistance may take the following forms.

1. Face-to-face and onsite training or technical assistance, which includes, for example, classroom training, workshops and exercises, site visits, and circuit-riders or other multi-state and/or regional approaches to provide onsite technical assistance.
2. Remote training or technical assistance, which includes, for example, webcasts, video conferencing, routine conference calls, hotline and helpdesk access, online courses, and other forms of distance learning.

Training and technical assistance may also include developing and disseminating (through web posting and other means) various resources such as training and educational materials or tools that can be used nationally and/or with state or territorial-specific variations, as appropriate. Applicants should indicate in their applications an estimate as to what portion of their training and technical assistance would be face-to-face and onsite versus remote training and technical assistance.

All applications should also include a discussion of how the applicant will transfer results, effective compliance strategies and resources developed (such as tools, videos, and training materials) to interested stakeholders such as other small systems, states, territories, Tribes, local governments, and private drinking water well owners through the development and dissemination of training and educational materials, websites, or other means. Applicants should also describe how they intend to transfer results of lessons learned to the EPA and states, territories, Tribes, and/or local governments, so that others may better develop their program.

Previously, the EPA has awarded financial assistance agreements to nonprofit organizations to provide technical assistance activities that are similar to those described in this announcement. As authorized by 2 CFR 200.315, the EPA will provide data and materials developed under those agreements to successful applicants, if necessary, to avoid duplication of effort. Applications should also address how the applicant will coordinate to complement any existing technical assistance efforts and avoid duplication, support community-centered solutions, be proactive, and incorporate continuous learning in line with Principle #3 of the EPA's memorandum, [Implementation of EPA Water Technical Assistance](#).²

D. EPA's Strategic Plan and Anticipated Environmental Results

Applicants must demonstrate in their application how their project and proposed activities link to the Strategic Plan Goal and Objective identified below. This announcement is consistent with the EPA's priority to assist small systems with technical assistance and training to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and long-term system sustainability.

The activities to be funded under this solicitation support the FY 2022 – 2026 EPA Strategic Plan. Awards made under this solicitation will support Goal 5: Ensure Clean and Safe Water for All Communities, Objective 5.1: Ensure Safe Drinking Water and Reliable Water Infrastructure of the Strategic Plan (available at: www.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan).

² The EPA memorandum "Implementation of EPA Water Technical Assistance (TA)," dated March 24, 2023, is available at: <https://www.epa.gov/water-infrastructure/water-technical-assistance-waterta>.

The EPA also requires that grant applicants adequately describe environmental outputs and outcomes to be achieved under assistance agreements (see EPA Order 5700.7A1, Environmental Results under Assistance Agreements, <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57007a1-epas-policy-environmental-results-under-epa-assistance-agreements>). All proposed projects must address 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 will demonstrate how the project will contribute to the overall protection of human health and the environment by ensuring safe drinking water and preventing water pollution. For National Priority Area 1, outputs and outcomes should directly address the goal of helping small public water systems achieve and maintain compliance with the SDWA and provide safe drinking water in the long term. For National Priority Area 2 and National Priority Area 3, outputs and outcomes should address the goal of improving water quality.

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 funding period.

Examples of anticipated environmental outputs from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for *National Priority Area 1, Training and Technical Assistance for Small Public Water Systems to Achieve and Maintain Compliance with the SDWA, including Improving Financial and Managerial Capacity*, may include, but are not limited to, the following.

- An increased number of small public water system managers and operators receiving training and technical assistance in regulatory requirements, basic water system operations, and advanced treatment issues, including receiving training utilizing hands-on and other approaches which maximize understanding and knowledge retention.
- An increased number of small public water systems conducting diagnostic and troubleshooting analyses to determine factors affecting performance and compliance with applicable national primary drinking water standards.
- An increased number of small public water systems receiving technical assistance in developing and implementing assessments, response plans, and mitigation measures to address water system resiliency and threats.
- An increased number of small public water systems receiving technical assistance in developing and implementing source water protection plans, asset management programs, energy audits, and water loss analyses.
- An increased number of small public water system managers and operators receiving training and technical assistance in financial and managerial capacity concepts and practices.
- An increased number of board members and other small system decision

makers receiving training on asset management, threat mitigation, and other sustainable management and financial concepts.

- An increased number of small public water systems developing plans to implement water system partnerships or other collaboration activities with other water systems.

Examples of anticipated environmental outputs from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for National Priority Area 2, *Training and Technical Assistance for Small Publicly-Owned Wastewater Systems and Onsite/Decentralized Wastewater Systems to Help Improve Water Quality*, may include, but are not limited to, the following.

For training and technical assistance for small publicly-owned wastewater systems:

- An increased number of system managers, board members, and other decision makers receiving training on sustainable utility management, and based on an assessment of their operations, training on asset management, and other sustainable management and financial concepts.
- An increased number of small publicly-owned wastewater systems receiving or performing energy audits and taking actions to improve energy efficiency based on audit results.

For training and technical assistance for onsite/decentralized wastewater systems:

- An increased number of community leaders, system operators, or onsite/decentralized Responsible Management Entities receiving training or technical assistance on analyzing treatment alternatives, management requirements, or homeowner education.
- An increased number of onsite/decentralized wastewater systems that have been inventoried, inspected, or have maintenance schedules or manuals for new or upgraded systems.

Examples of anticipated environmental outputs from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for National Priority Area 3, *Training and Technical Assistance for Private Drinking Water Well Owners to Help Improve Water Quality*, may include, but are not limited to, the following.

- An increased number of private drinking water well owners receiving technical assistance and training on topical issues.
- An increased number of private drinking water well owners who receive information in electronic and hard copy formats.
- An increased number of private drinking water well owners who receive information on how to respond to emergencies.
- Increased information, technical assistance, and training to other organizations with activities that affect private drinking water well owners.

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 measures 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 outcomes from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for National Priority Area 1, *Training and Technical Assistance for Small Public Water Systems to Achieve and Maintain Compliance with the SDWA, including Improving Financial and Managerial Capacity*, may include, but are not limited to, the following.

- An increase in the knowledge and competency of small public water system operators in the areas of regulatory requirements and water system operations.
- A measurable improvement in the performance of small public water systems that are implementing asset management programs as part of their standard operating and management practices.
- An increase in the knowledge and competency of small public water system operators in their ability to plan for and respond to threats from natural disasters and malevolent acts.
- An increase in the knowledge of the benefits of small public water systems participating in water system partnerships or other collaboration activities with other water systems.
- An increase in the number of communities submitting applications for federal funding to improve water infrastructure.
- A measurable improvement in the number of small public water systems with improved rate structures and participating in customer assistance programs.

Examples of anticipated outcomes from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for National Priority Area 2, *Training and Technical Assistance for Small Publicly-Owned Wastewater Systems and Onsite/Decentralized Wastewater Systems to Help Improve Water Quality*, may include, but are not limited to, the following.

For training and technical assistance for small publicly-owned wastewater systems:

- A measurable improvement in the performance of small publicly-owned wastewater systems that have adopted sustainable management plans and practices, including, but not limited to, asset management programs.
- An increase in the knowledge and competency within small publicly-owned wastewater systems, leading to compliance with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit requirements or making substantial progress toward compliance as indicated by measured performance, reduced enforcement priority status, or other factors.
- A measurable improvement in the performance of small publicly-owned wastewater systems that improve their energy efficiency or achieve cost savings because of taking

efficiency actions after conducting an energy audit.

For training and technical assistance for onsite/decentralized wastewater systems:

- An increase in knowledge and competency within onsite/decentralized wastewater systems, leading to a decrease of public health-related or public nuisance-related complaints associated with malfunctioning onsite/decentralized wastewater systems.
- An increase in the knowledge and competency within onsite/decentralized wastewater systems, leading to an increase in systems managed under RMEs.
- An increase in the knowledge and competency of system owners, particularly homeowners, engaging in active management of onsite/decentralized wastewater systems.

Examples of anticipated outcomes from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for National Priority Area 3, *Training and Technical Assistance for Private Drinking Water Well Owners to Help Improve Water Quality*, may include, but are not limited to, the following.

- An increase in the knowledge of private drinking water well owners in such topics as proper well construction, well operation and maintenance, well testing, relevant state regulations or programs, or ground water protection.
- An increase in the knowledge and understanding of private drinking water well owners regarding options for connecting private wells to public water systems.
- An increase in knowledge and skills to protect private drinking water wells from contamination during emergencies.
- An improvement in the quality and quantity of ground water that supplies private drinking water wells.

As part of the Project Narrative, an applicant will be required to describe how the project results will link the outcomes to the agency's Strategic Plan and to the goal of enabling small public water systems to achieve and maintain compliance with the SDWA, or the goal of improving water quality. In addition, applicants will have to describe their plan and approach for tracking and measuring their progress towards achieving expected outputs and outcomes. Additional information regarding the EPA's discussion of environmental results in terms of "outputs" and "outcomes" can be found at: www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-03/documents/epa_order_5700_7a1.pdf (see EPA Order 5700.7, Environmental Results under Assistance Agreements).

E. Statutory Authority

The statutory authority for the awards expected to be made under this announcement is, as appropriate, Section 1442(e) of the SDWA or Section 104(b)(3) of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Section 1442(e) of the SDWA authorizes the EPA to provide grants for training personnel who manage or operate public water systems, and for training personnel for occupations involving

the public health aspects of providing safe drinking water. Section 104(b)(3) of the CWA authorizes EPA to make grants to conduct and promote the coordination and acceleration of training, surveys, and studies relating to the causes, effects (including health and welfare effects), extent, prevention, reduction, and elimination of water pollution.

F. Additional Provisions for Applicants Incorporated into the Solicitation

Additional provisions that apply to sections III, IV, V, and VI of this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation, can be found at [EPA Solicitation Clauses](#). These provisions are important for applying to this solicitation 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 contact the EPA point of contact listed in this solicitation in Section VII to obtain the provisions.

Section II. Award Information

A. Amount of Funding

The total amount of federal funding potentially available under this announcement is approximately \$30,700,000 depending on agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, agency priorities, and other applicable considerations. The EPA is prioritizing new applicants and may make at least two of these awards to high-ranking applicants that have not received a *Training and Technical Assistance to Improve Water Quality and Enable Small Public Water Systems to Provide Safe Drinking Water* award from the EPA in the past two years (see Section V.B. for additional details).

The following are the anticipated amounts of total awards in each of the three National Priority Areas.

1. Two to four awards are anticipated under the *Training and Technical Assistance for Small Public Water Systems to Achieve and Maintain Compliance with the SDWA, including Improving Financial and Managerial Capacity* National Priority Area. The total anticipated amount of federal funding to potentially be made available under this National Priority Area is approximately \$26,000,000, depending on agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations.
2. One award is anticipated under the *Training and Technical Assistance for Small Publicly-Owned Wastewater Systems and Onsite/Decentralized Wastewater Systems to Help Improve Water Quality and Sustainable Operations*, National Priority Area. The total anticipated amount of federal funding to potentially be made available under this National Priority Area is approximately \$1,250,000, depending on agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations.
3. One to two awards are anticipated under the *Training and Technical Assistance for Private Well Owners to Help Improve Water Quality* National Priority Area. The total anticipated amount of federal funding to potentially be made available under this National Priority Area is approximately \$3,450,000, depending on agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations.

It is anticipated that the cooperative agreements funded under this announcement will have two-year project periods. See Section I for more information on award ranges for each National Priority Area.

In appropriate circumstances, the EPA reserves the right to partially fund applications by funding discrete portions or phases of proposed projects. If the 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.

The EPA reserves the right to make no awards under this announcement or to make fewer awards than anticipated. While the EPA expects to make awards in each National Priority Area, the EPA reserves the right not to do so or to make more awards under a National Priority Area than estimated in this announcement. In addition, the EPA reserves the right to make additional awards under this announcement, consistent with agency policy and guidance, if additional funding becomes available. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than six months after the original selection decisions.

Awards may be fully or incrementally funded, as appropriate, based on funding availability, satisfactory performance, and other applicable considerations. The actual award amounts and number of projects awarded under each of the Priority Areas described in Section I may differ from the estimated amounts for many reasons including the number of meritorious applications received, agency priorities, and funding availability.

B. Type of Funding

The EPA intends to award cooperative agreements under this solicitation. Cooperative agreements provide for substantial involvement between the EPA Project Officer and the selected applicant(s) in the performance of the work supported. Although the EPA will negotiate precise terms and conditions relating to substantial involvement as part of the award process, the anticipated substantial federal involvement for these projects may include:

- close monitoring of the successful applicant's performance to verify the results proposed by the applicant;
- collaboration during performance of the scope of work;
- in accordance with 2 CFR 200.317 and 2 CFR 200.318, as appropriate, review of proposed procurement;
- approving qualifications of key personnel (the EPA will not select employees or contractors employed by the award recipient); and
- review and comment on reports prepared under the cooperative agreement (the final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient).

The EPA does not have the authority to select employees or contractors employed by the recipient. The final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient.

Section III. Eligibility Information

Note: Additional provisions that apply to this section can be found at the [EPA Solicitation Clauses](#).

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants under this competition are nonprofit organizations, nonprofit private universities and colleges, and public institutions of higher education.³ For-profit organizations are not eligible to apply. States, municipalities, Tribal governments, and individuals are not eligible to apply. 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. The EPA may ask applicants to demonstrate that they are eligible for funding under this announcement.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

All applicants must demonstrate in their application submission how they will contribute a minimum non-federal cost-share/match of 10 percent of the total amount of federal funding requested for the project. The non-federal cost-share/match may be provided in cash or can come from in-kind contributions, such as use of volunteers and/or donated time, equipment, expertise, etc., and is subject to the regulations governing matching fund requirements described in 2 CFR 200.306, 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. Cost-share/match must be used for eligible and 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 workplan. All grant funds are subject to federal audit. Any restrictions on the use of grant funds also apply to the use of cost-share/match. Other federal grants may not be used as cost-share/match 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.**

³ Consistent with the definition of Nonprofit organization at 2 CFR § 200.1, the term nonprofit organization means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization that is operated mainly for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purpose in the public interest and is not organized primarily for profit; and uses net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the operation of the organization. The term includes tax-exempt nonprofit neighborhood and labor organizations. Note that 2 CFR 200.1 specifically excludes Institutions of Higher Education from the definition of non-profit organization because they are separately defined in the regulation. While not considered to be a nonprofit organization(s) as defined by 2 CFR 200.1, public or nonprofit Institutions of Higher Education are, nevertheless, eligible to submit applications under this RFA. For-profit colleges, universities, trade schools, and hospitals are ineligible.

Nonprofit organizations that are not exempt from taxation under section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code must submit other forms of documentation of nonprofit status; such as certificates of incorporation as nonprofit under state or Tribal law. Nonprofit organizations exempt from taxation under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that lobby are not eligible for EPA funding as provided in the Lobbying Disclosure Act, 2 U.S.C. 1611.

C. Threshold Eligibility Criteria

All applications will be reviewed for eligibility and must meet the eligibility requirements described in Sections III.A., B., and C. to be considered eligible. 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. Applicants should confirm receipt of their application via e-mail as soon as possible after the submission deadline—failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

1. An applicant must meet the eligibility requirements in Section III.A of this announcement at the time of application submission.
2. Applications must address one, and only one, of the three National Priority Areas listed in Section I.B, although eligible organizations may submit more than one application under this competition as long as each one is separately submitted and addresses only one National Priority Area. Applications that address more than one National Priority Area in a single application will not be reviewed. In addition, applications for National Priority Area 2 must address the two elements of that priority as described in Section I.B or they will be rejected.
3. Applications for awards under National Priority Area 1 cannot exceed **\$13,000,000** in federal funds; applications for awards under National Priority Area 2 cannot exceed **\$1,250,000** in federal funds; and applications for awards under National Priority Area 3 cannot exceed **\$3,450,000** in federal funds. Applications exceeding the amount for the applicable National Priority Area it addresses will be rejected.
4. An applicant must demonstrate how it will meet the cost-share/match requirement in Section III.B of this announcement at the time of application submission.
5. Applications must **substantially comply** with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in Section IV of this announcement or else they will be rejected. However, where a page limit is expressed in Section IV.E. with respect to the application, or parts thereof, pages in excess of the page limitation will not be reviewed. Section IV.E establishes a 13-page, single-spaced Project Narrative page limit. Applicants are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in application format, including selecting a legible font type and size for use in the application.
6. Initial applications must be submitted through Grants.gov as stated in Section IV of this solicitation (except in the limited circumstances where another mode of submission is specifically allowed for 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 solicitation to ensure that their application is timely submitted. Please note that applicants experiencing technical issues with submitting through Grants.gov should follow the

instructions provided in Section IV, which include both the requirement to contact Grants.gov and email a full application to the EPA prior to the deadline.

7. Applications submitted outside of Grants.gov will be deemed ineligible without further consideration unless the applicant can clearly demonstrate that it was due to the EPA mishandling or technical problems associated with Grants.gov or SAM.gov. An applicant's failure to timely submit their 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 submission outside of Grants.gov.
8. Eligible activities include training and technical assistance only. Infrastructure projects such as repairing water or sewer lines, adding new equipment, or upgrading, retrofitting or rehabilitating existing equipment, are not eligible for funding under this announcement. 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.

Section IV. Grants.gov Submission Instructions

Note: Additional provisions that apply to this section can be found at the EPA Solicitation Clauses.

A. Requirement to Submit Through Grants.gov and Limited Exception Procedures Applicants must apply electronically through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) under this funding opportunity based on the 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 C. *Technical Issues with Submission* below.

B. Submission Instructions

1. SAM.gov (System for Award Management) Registration Instructions

Organizations applying to this funding opportunity must have an active SAM.gov registration. If you have never done business with the Federal Government, you will need to register your organization in SAM.gov. If you do not have a SAM.gov account, then you will create an account using [login.gov](https://www.sam.gov) to complete your SAM.gov registration. SAM.gov registration is FREE. The process for entity registrations includes obtaining Unique Entity ID (UEI), a 12-character alphanumeric ID assigned an entity by SAM.gov, and requires assertions, representations and certifications, and other information about your organization. Please review the [Entity Registration Checklist](#) for details on this process.

If you have done business with the Federal Government previously, you can check your entity status using your government issued UEI to determine if your registration is active.

SAM.gov requires you renew your registration every 365 days to keep it active.

Please note that SAM.gov registration is different than obtaining a UEI only. Obtaining an UEI only validates your organization's legal business name and address. Please review the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on the difference for additional details.

Organizations should ensure that their SAM.gov registration includes a current e-Business (EBiz) point of contact name and email address. The EBiz point of contact is critical for Grants.gov Registration and system functionality.

Contact the [Federal Service Desk](#) for help with your SAM.gov account, to resolve technical issues or chat with a help desk agent: (866) 606-8220. The Federal Service desk hours of operation are Monday - Friday 8a.m. - 8 p.m., ET.

2. Grants.gov Registration Instructions

Once your SAM.gov account is active, you must register in Grants.gov. Grants.gov will electronically receive your organization information, such as e-Business (EBiz) point of contact email address and UEI. Organizations applying to this funding opportunity must have an active Grants.gov registration. Grants.gov registration is FREE. If you have never applied for a federal grant before, please review the [Grants.gov Applicant Registration](#) instructions. As part of the Grants.gov registration process, the EBiz point of contact is the only person that can affiliate and assign applicant roles to members of an organization. In addition, at least one person must be assigned as an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR). Only person(s) with the AOR role can submit applications in Grants.gov. Please review the [Intro to Grants.gov- Understanding User Roles](#) and [Learning Workspace – User Roles and Workspace Actions](#) for details on this important process.

Please note that this process can take a month or more for new registrants. 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 application submission deadline.

Contact [Grants.gov](#) for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov to resolve technical issues with Grants.gov. 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. The Grants.gov Support Center is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week, excluding federal holidays.

3. Application Submission Process

To begin the application process under this grant announcement, go to Grants.gov and click the red "Apply" button at the top of the view grant opportunity page associated with this opportunity.

The electronic submission of your application to this funding opportunity must be made by an official representative of your organization who is registered with Grants.gov and is authorized

to sign applications for Federal financial assistance. If the submit button is grayed out, it may be because you do not have the appropriate role to submit in your organization. Contact your organization's EBiz point of contact or contact [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov.

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

4. Application Submission Deadline

Your organization's AOR must submit your complete application package electronically to the EPA through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) no later than **February 2, 2024 by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time**. Please allow for enough time to successfully submit your application and allow for unexpected errors that may require you to resubmit.

Applications submitted through Grants.gov will be time and date stamped electronically. Please note that successful submission of your application through Grants.gov does not necessarily mean your application is eligible for award. Any application submitted after the application deadline time and date deadline will be deemed ineligible and not be considered.

C. Technical Issues with Submission

If applicants experience technical issues during the submission of an application that they are unable to resolve, follow these procedures **before** the application deadline date:

1. Contact Grants.gov Support Center **before** the application deadline date.
2. Document the Grants.gov ticket/case number.
3. Send an email with the funding opportunity number, EPA-OW-OGWDW-24-01, in the subject line to **SmallSystemsRFA@EPA.gov** **before** the application deadline time and date and **must** include the following:
 - a. Grants.gov ticket/case number(s)
 - b. Description of the issue
 - c. The entire application package in PDF format.

Without this information, the EPA may not be able to consider applications submitted outside of Grants.gov. Any application submitted after the application deadline time and date deadline will be deemed ineligible and **not** be considered.

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

The EPA will make decisions concerning acceptance of each application submitted outside of Grants.gov on a case-by-case basis. The EPA will only consider accepting applications that were unable to submit through Grants.gov due to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) or relevant [SAM.gov](https://www.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.

D. Application Materials

The following forms and documents are required under this announcement:

Mandatory Documents:

1. Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424).
2. Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A).
3. EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54.
4. EPA Form 4700-4 – Preaward Compliance Review Report.
5. Project Narrative Attachment Form: Use this to submit your Project Narrative, prepared as described in Section IV.E.

Optional Documents:

1. Other Attachments Form – Biographic Sketches
2. Other Attachments Form – Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, if applicable
3. Other Attachments Form – Letters of Support
4. Other Attachments, if applicable

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 the EPA (not from grants.gov) within 30 days of the application deadline, please contact **Brianna Knoppow**, at **SmallSystemsRFA@epa.gov**. Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

E. Content of Application Package Submission

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

1. Application Materials

- a. Standard Form (SF) 424 – Application for Federal Assistance.** Complete the form. There are no attachments.
- b. SF-424A – Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs. Complete the form.**
The total amount of federal funding requested for the project period should be shown on line 5(e) and on line 6(k) of the SF-424A. If indirect costs are included, the amount of indirect costs should be entered on line 6(j). The indirect cost rate (a percentage), the base (e.g., personnel costs and fringe benefits), and the amount 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 (combined 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.E (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 which provides a project description for the National Priority Areas.

Biographical Sketches. Submit a biographical sketch of each major project manager, support staff member, or other major project participant (see Section IV.E.).

- f. **Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (if applicable)** – See [EPA’s Indirect Cost Guidance](#) for additional information.
- g. **Letters of Support.** Applicants may provide up to 15 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, the EPA will only consider letters that are included with the application itself. Letters of support (up to 15 maximum) do not count against the 13- page limit on the Project Narrative.

2. Project Narrative

NOTE: The Project Narrative must include sections A-C below. The Project Narrative (covering sections A-C below) is limited to no more than thirteen (13) typewritten, single spaced 8.5x11-inch pages (a page is one side of a piece of paper) including the cover page and executive summary. 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 13-page limit will not be considered.** Supporting materials, which are limited to biographical sketches and letters of support, as described below, are not included within the page limit.

The application’s Project Narrative must be typewritten and must include the information listed below. If a particular item is not applicable, clearly state this in the Project Narrative.

A. Cover Page including:

- 1. Project title;

2. National Priority Area from Section I.B addressed in the application (**applicants must address only one National Priority Area per application package**);
3. Name of applicant;
4. Key personnel and contact information (i.e., e-mail address and phone number); and
5. Total project cost (specify the amount of federal funds requested, the non-federal cost- share/match, and the total project cost).

B. Executive Summary: Provide a brief summary of the proposed project (should not exceed one page). This should include a brief description of the proposed project and the anticipated environmental outputs and outcomes.

C. Workplan: The workplan must address the following elements:

- 1) **National Priority Area:** Describe your approach for addressing one of the three National Priority Areas in Section I.B of this announcement. Applicants should also describe how the proposed approach supports environmental justice goals, benefits small and disadvantaged community(ies), and supports the Justice40 Initiative when providing training and technical assistance⁴. Highlight and describe how the proposed training and technical assistance project supports the EPA’s priorities of protecting public health, ensuring and advancing environmental justice and equity, and revitalizing communities when providing training and technical assistance.

Describe the roles and responsibilities of the applicant in carrying out the project elements. Describe the process for consulting with the appropriate regulatory authority in each state, Tribe, or territory prior to initiating training and technical assistance activities. Include a process for reporting back to those authorities, to the EPA grant project officer, and to the appropriate EPA regional coordinators regarding the assistance provided and documented results. If you are addressing National Priority Area 2, also describe your approach for addressing the two elements of that priority. Describe the plan and process for actively transferring the lessons learned, to the EPA and states, territories, Tribes and/or local governments, so that others may better develop their programs.

- 2) **Provision of Training and Technical Assistance on a National Basis:** Describe the proposed approach to making face-to-face/onsite and/or remote training and technical assistance available nationally in a maximum number of states and U.S. territories (see Sections I.B and C). The proposed approach may also include developing training materials, developing and maintaining websites, or developing and providing educational materials that can be used in each state/territory and/or with

⁴ For purposes of this announcement, disadvantaged communities are defined as: (1) Any census tract that is included as disadvantaged in Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST); (2) Any census block group that is at or above the 90th percentile for any of EJSscreen’s Supplemental Indexes when compared to the nation or state; and/or (3) Any geographic area within Tribal lands as included in EJSscreen: Alaska Native Allotments, Alaska Native Villages, American Indian Reservations, American Indian Off-reservation Trust Lands, and Oklahoma Tribal Statistical Areas.

state/territory-specific variations, as appropriate. Describe how the approach is thorough, flexible, and tailored to the specific needs of each target audience.

Describe your approach for reaching out to Tribally-owned and operated systems and how you will provide training and technical assistance to these systems. Provide a brief description of how you will transfer results, effective compliance strategies, and resources developed (such as tools and training materials) to interested stakeholders such as other small systems, states, territories, Tribes, local governments, and private drinking water well owners through the development and dissemination of training and educational materials, websites, or other means. Describe your plan to reach the intended audience.

3) Environmental Results and Measuring Progress:

- a. Stated Objective/Link to the EPA Strategic Plan - List the objective of the project and the linkage to the EPA's Strategic Plan Goal 5: Ensure Clean and Safe Water for All Communities., Objective 5.1: Ensure Safe Drinking Water and Reliable Water Infrastructure (see Section I.D of this announcement).
- b. Results of Activities (Output) - Describe the anticipated products/results which are expected to be achieved from accomplishment of the project and describe an approach for tracking and reporting your progress toward achieving the expected project output(s) (examples of outputs can be found in Section I.D of this announcement).
- c. Projected Environmental Improvement (Outcome) - List the anticipated environmental improvements that will be accomplished as a result of the project. These improvements are changes or benefits to the environment or public health which are a result of the accomplishment of the work plan commitments and outputs. Describe an approach for tracking and reporting progress toward achieving the expected project outcome(s) (examples of outcomes can be found in Section I.D of this announcement).

4) Milestone Schedule: Provide a projected milestone schedule for the proposed project period (estimated two years). The milestone schedule should provide a breakout of the project activities into phases with associated tasks and a timeframe for completion of tasks and an approach for ensuring that awarded funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. The project start date will follow award acceptance by the successful applicant.

Detailed Budget Narrative: Provide a detailed budget and estimated funding amounts for each project component/task. This section provides an opportunity for a narrative description of the budget or aspects of the budget found in the SF-424A such as "other" and "contractual."

Applicants must itemize costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, contractual costs, travel, equipment, supplies, other direct costs, indirect costs, and total cost. All subgrant funding should be located in the "other" cost category. Total costs must include both

federal and cost- share/matching (non-federal) components. For each cost category, indicate what portion of the cost will be paid by the EPA and what portion of the cost will be covered by the minimum non-federal cost-share/match as required in Section III.B. Describe itemized costs in sufficient detail for the EPA to determine the allowability of costs for each project component/task, as well as the cost-effectiveness and reasonableness of all costs (both federal and non-federal components). There is general guidance available to applicants when preparing proposed budgets which can be found on the agency's [General Budget Development Guidance for Applicants and Recipients of the EPA Financial Assistance](#) webpage and training on [how to develop a budget.](#)

5) Programmatic Capability/Experience:

- a. Organizational Experience – Provide a brief description of your organization and experience related to the proposed project, and your organization's infrastructure as it relates to its ability to successfully implement the proposed project.
- b. Staff Expertise/Qualifications – Provide a list of key staff and briefly describe their experience/expertise/qualifications, knowledge, and resources of the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the project. Describe key staff and their cultural competency expertise including appropriate language fluency to serve water systems and communities in the geographic areas to be served, and a demonstrated history of reaching disadvantaged communities and knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the project, including demonstrated knowledge of state, Tribal, and local regulations and policies relevant to the training and technical assistance. Include an estimate of the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) workers (based on 2080 hours per year/FTE).

If you choose to identify any partner organizations who will receive subawards or procurement contracts (including consultants) please refer to Section I.F., Additional Provisions for Applicants Incorporated into the Solicitation, available at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>, before doing so as the EPA will not consider their qualifications unless you select them in compliance with applicable regulations and provisions. A biographical sketch must be submitted for each major project manager, support staff member or other major project participant. Biographical sketches are not counted in the page limit.

- 6) Past Performance:** Briefly describe federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements but not contracts) that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably the 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 an 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 the EPA files and/or from current and prior federal agency 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 information, please indicate this in the application, and you will receive a neutral score for these factors under Section V. Failure to provide any programmatic past performance or reporting information, or to include a statement 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).

7) Quality Assurance/Quality Control: Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) (not included in the 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).

Note: The applicant should also provide in the Project Narrative any additional information, to the extent not already addressed above, that addresses the selection criteria in Section V.

D. Submission Dates and Times

Applications submitted electronically through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) must be **received by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time, February 2, 2024**. Late applications will not be considered for funding.

Section V. Application Review Information

Note: Additional provisions that apply to this section can be found at the EPA Solicitation Clauses.

A. Selection Criteria

All eligible applications, based on the Section III threshold eligibility review, will be evaluated based on the evaluation criteria and weights below (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 package.

<p style="text-align: center;">(22 points)</p>	<p>1) National Priority Area</p> <p>Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability and approach for effectively addressing the National Priority Area described in Section I.B of this announcement that their application addresses. In conducting this evaluation, the following factors will be taken into account.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The extent and quality of the overall approach to addressing the National Priority Area, including the degree to which the proposed project supports environmental justice goals and supports the Justice40 Initiative when providing training and technical assistance. (10 points) ii. The extent and quality to which the applicant demonstrates an effective process for consultation with the appropriate regulatory authority in each state, Tribe, or territory prior to initiating training and technical assistance activities. (4 points) iii. The extent and quality to which the applicant demonstrates an effective approach to keeping these regulatory authorities and stakeholders informed regarding the implementation and outcome of training and technical assistance activities. (4 points) iv. The extent and quality to which the applicant demonstrates an effective process for coordinating with other technical assistance providers to reduce duplication of efforts. (2 points) v. Applicants will be evaluated based on the adequacy and completeness of their plan for active transfer of lessons learned, to the EPA and: states, territories, Tribes, and/or local governments, so that others may better develop their programs. (2 points)
<p style="text-align: center;">(27 points)</p>	<p>2) Providing Training and Technical Assistance on a National Basis</p> <p>Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability and approach for making training and technical assistance available nationally in a maximum number of states and U.S. territories (see Section I.C of this announcement) taking into account the following factors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The extent and quality to which the applicant demonstrates the ability to provide training and technical assistance in a maximum number of states and U.S. territories through face-to-face/onsite training and/or through remote or other alternative means. (10 points) ii. The extent to which the applicant demonstrates an effective process for reaching out to Tribally-owned and operated systems and providing training and technical assistance to these systems. (7 points) iii. The extent and quality to which the applicant’s strategy utilizes flexibility to tailor the training and technical assistance techniques and resources to address the specific needs of the target audience in as many states and U.S. Territories as possible. (6 points) iv. The extent and quality of an approach to transfer results, effective compliance strategies, and resources developed to interested stakeholders nationally. (4 points)

<p>(11 points)</p>	<p>3) Environmental Results and Measuring Progress Applications will be evaluated based on each of these sub-criteria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The extent and quality to which the application demonstrates the potential to achieve environmental results, anticipated outputs and outcomes, and how the outcomes are linked to the EPA’s Strategic Plan described in Section I.D of this announcement. (6 points) ii. The extent and quality to which the application demonstrates a sound plan for measuring and tracking progress toward achieving the anticipated outputs and outcomes (examples of outputs and outcomes can be found in Section I.D of this announcement). (5 points)
<p>(10 points)</p>	<p>4) Milestone Schedule/Detailed Budget Applications will be evaluated based on the extent and quality to which the application addresses each of the following sub-criteria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Applicants will be evaluated based on the adequacy and completeness of the milestone schedule, including timeframes and major milestones to complete significant project tasks, a plan for timely and successfully completing the proposed project, and an approach to ensure that awarded funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. (5 points) ii. 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 cost-share/match (non-federal) components. The cost- effectiveness and reasonableness of all costs (both federal and non-federal components) will also be evaluated. (5 points)

(24 points)	<p>5) Programmatic Capability/Experience/Community Support</p> <p>Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated based on the applicant’s ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project considering their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Organizational experience related to the proposed project, and their infrastructure as it relates to the ability to successfully implement the proposed project. (7 points) ii. Staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the project, including demonstrated knowledge of state and local regulations and policies relevant to the training or technical assistance. (7 points) iii. Staff expertise/qualifications describing cultural competency, including appropriate language fluency to serve communities in the geographic area to be served and describing a demonstrated history of reaching disadvantaged communities. (5 points) iv. Degree of support from potential recipients of technical assistance that demonstrates that the applicant’s proposed approach to service delivery is responsive to the potential recipients’ needs (e.g., demonstrated through letters of support or other means). (5 points)
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<p>(6 points)</p>	<p>6) Past Performance</p> <p>Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project taking into account the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Past performance in successfully completing and managing federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements but not contracts) similar in size and scope to the proposed project performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably the EPA's agreements). (2 points) ii. History of meeting reporting requirements under assistance agreements identified in response to Section IV.E and submitting acceptable final technical reports under those agreements. (2 points) iii. Extent and quality to which they adequately documented and/or reported on their progress towards achieving the expected results (e.g., outcomes and outputs) under assistance agreements identified in response to Section IV.E and if such progress was not being made, whether the applicant adequately documented and/or reported why not. (2 points) <p>Note: In evaluating applicants under (i), (ii) and (iii) above, the EPA will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources including agency files and/or prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information supplied 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 (half of the points) for the factor (i.e., 1 point for item (i), 1 point for item (ii), and 1 point for item (iii)).</p> <p>Failure to provide any past performance information, or to include a statement that you do not have any relevant or available past performance information, may result in a zero score for the factor.</p>
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B. Review and Selection Process

All applications received via [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) by the submission deadline will first be screened by the EPA's staff against the threshold criteria in Section III.C of the announcement. Applications that do not pass the threshold review will not be evaluated further or considered for funding.

A panel(s) comprised of EPA staff will review the eligible applications by National Priority Area based on the evaluation criteria listed in Section V.A.

For selection purposes, the EPA's Office of Water will prepare ranking lists for each National Priority Area, based on the panel evaluations. The ranking lists for each National Priority Area will be provided to the Selection Official(s) who make(s) the final funding decisions. In making the final funding decisions for each National Priority Area, the Selection Official(s) will consider the application score/ranking and may also take into account geographic distribution of funds and programmatic priorities such as ensuring that small systems receive training and technical assistance that facilitates compliance with important federal and state regulations. The EPA reserves the right to select at least two high-ranking new applicants that have not received a *Training and Technical Assistance to Improve Water Quality and Enable Small Public Water Systems to Provide Safe Drinking Water* award from the EPA in the last two years (FY2020 – FY2022). As noted above, while the EPA expects to make awards in each National Priority Area, it reserves the right not to do so and to redistribute the number of awards per area.

Section VI. Award Administration Information

Note: Additional provisions that apply to this section can be found at the EPA Solicitation Clauses.

A. Award Notification

The EPA anticipates notification to successful applicants will be made via electronic or postal mail. The notification will be sent to the original signer of the application or the project contact listed in the application. This notification, which informs the applicant that its application has been selected and is being recommended for award, is not an authorization to begin work. The official notification of an award will be made by the Grants Management Branch. 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 the 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 the EPA, before the grant can officially be awarded. The time between notification of selection and award of a grant can take up to 90 days or longer.

The EPA reserves the right to negotiate and/or adjust the final grant amount and workplan narrative prior to award, as appropriate and consistent with agency policy including the

Assistance Agreement Competition Policy, EPA Order 5700.5A1. An approvable final workplan narrative is required to include:

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

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

The general award and administration process for assistance agreements are governed by 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, recipients are 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 has expired. Recipients will be required to report direct and indirect environmental results from the work accomplished through the award. In negotiating assistance agreements, the EPA will work closely with the recipient to incorporate appropriate performance measures and reporting requirements in the work plan consistent with 2 CFR Parts 200 and 1500, and 40 CFR Part 45, as appropriate.

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 [Grant Competition Dispute Resolution Procedures](http://www.epa.gov/grants/grant-competition-dispute-resolution-procedures) (available at www.epa.gov/grants/grant-competition-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.

Section VII. Agency Contact

Note to Applicants: In accordance with the 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, the EPA will respond to questions from individual applicants regarding threshold eligibility criteria, administrative issues related to the submission of the application, and requests for clarification about any of the language or provisions in the announcement. Please note that applicants should raise any questions they may have about the solicitation language to the contact identified in Section VII of this announcement as soon as possible so that any questions about the solicitation language may be resolved prior to submitting a proposal. In addition, if necessary, the EPA may clarify threshold eligibility issues with applicants prior to making a final eligibility determination.

Questions about this RFA must be submitted in writing via e-mail and must be received by the Agency Contact identified below by **11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, January 18, 2024** and written responses will be posted in FAQ format on the EPA's website at <https://www.epa.gov/dwcapacity/training-and-technical-assistance-improve-water-quality-and-enable-small-public-water-0>. The EPA strongly recommends interested applicants refer to the FAQs prior to submitting a question.

Agency Contact: Brianna Knoppow

E-mail: smallsystemsRFA@epa.gov

Section VIII. Other Information

A. Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC)

Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) requirements may apply to these grants (see 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. Environmental data include information collected directly from measurements, produced from models, and compiled from other sources such as databases or literature. Successful applicants should allow sufficient time and resources for this process. The EPA can assist successful applicants in determining whether QA/QC is required for the proposed project. If QA/QC is required for the project, the successful applicant may work with the EPA QA/QC staff to determine the appropriate QA/QC practices for the project. See Section VII, Agency Contact for Agency Contact information for referral to an EPA QA/QC staff.

Successful applicants must ensure all water quality data generated in accordance with an EPA approved Quality Assurance Project Plan, either directly or by subaward, are transmitted into the agency's Water Quality Exchange (WQX) data system (formerly known as STORET) annually or by project completion. More information about WQX and WQXweb, including tutorials, can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/waterdata/water-quality-data>.

B. Data Sharing

All recipients of these assistance agreements may be required to share any data generated through this funding agreement as a defined deliverable in the final workplan.