

Research for Understanding PFAS Uptake and Bioaccumulation in Plants and Animals in Agricultural, Rural, and Tribal Communities Request for Applications (RFA)

Informational Webinar Questions and Answers

October 26, 2023

Application Information

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

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

As stated in the RFA: "Multiple Investigator applications may be submitted as: (1) a single Lead Principal Investigator (PI) application with Co-PI(s) or (2) a Multiple PI application (with a single Contact PI). If you choose to submit a Multiple PI application, you must follow the specific instructions provided in Sections IV and V of this RFA. For further information, please see the EPA Implementation Plan for Policy on Multiple Principal Investigators (<https://www.epa.gov/research-grants/research-grants-guidance-and-policies>).

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

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

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

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

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

- **Can the research be conducted in other countries?**

Answer: Yes, research may be conducted in other countries and include researchers in other countries. Foreign organizations cannot be the primary applicant, but they may receive a sub-award. The research must be directly transferable to U.S. populations or environments in terms of agricultural practices.

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

Answer: You can search for funded grants under [research recipients](#) and [research results search pages](#). You can also find links to previous RFAs on our [Past Research Funding Opportunities page](#). To be notified of grant opportunities, please sign up for our [listserv](#). You can also search for other funding opportunities at [grants.gov](#).

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

Answer: No.

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

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

- **How will EPA choose awardees?**

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

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

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

- **Is cost sharing required?**

Answer: No, cost sharing is not required.

- **Do you anticipate this funding opportunity to be available in future years?**

Answer: We cannot provide information on future RFAs, but all funding opportunities and notices of intent are posted on the [Funding Opportunity Announcement Page](#). You can stay up to date by checking the site periodically or signing up for the [Research Grants Listserv](#). Additionally, you can view [all of the research opportunities that have come out of our office since 1995](#).

- Do you plan to fund one project with emphasis on each of the five areas?**
 Answer: Precedence will not be given to an application that includes all five areas. The requirement is to fulfill at least one of the five areas and there is not one category that takes priority over another category.
- How many total projects will be funded? Would more projects be considered for funding if there is enough budget?**
 Answer: EPA anticipates funding approximately five awards under this RFA, depending on the availability of funds, quality of applications received, and other applicable considerations. If there is additional funding available, it may be possible to fund more than five applications.
- Does the procurement method for the Contractual work have to be competitive? The RFA states: "List....the proposed procurement method (competitive or non-competitive)."**
 Answer: There are links in the RFA that define procurement requirements. If you have more specific questions, email Ron Josephson (josephson.ron@epa.gov).

As stated in the RFA, "Any procurement of services from individual consultants or commercial firms (including space for workshops) must comply with the competitive procurement requirements of 2 CFR Part 200.317-200.327. Please see [EPA Solicitation Clauses](#) for more details. EPA provides detailed guidance on procurement requirements in the Agency's [Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements.](#)"

- Does the proposal have to include the engagement of Tribal communities?**
 Answer: No, that is only one of the five options for research areas. It does not need to include Tribal communities.
- Is there any chance that the application period will be extended?**
 Answer: No, it is unlikely that the application deadline will be extended.

Research Projects

- Are you aware of any EPA approved methods for livestock or wildlife? Would that be a blood sample?**
 Answer: EPA does not have any officially approved methods for livestock or wildlife PFAS testing. Applicants are free to utilize any testing method they see fit. However, proposed methods must be scientifically relevant.
- Regarding food systems as it relates to Tribal agriculture, are hunting and fishing included?**
 Answer: Yes, hunting and fishing is included under food systems.
- For the user-inspired research component, is it required to have a sociologist on the team?**

Answer: It is not a requirement. A sociologist may be included if it is needed to complete a major component of the research. Depending on the application and the components of the research, it may be important to indicate that there is someone with a particular expertise included on the research team.

- **Will you prioritize grant applications that plan to study PFAS in more highly contaminated agricultural environments?**

Answer: The prioritization of review criteria is defined in Section V of the RFA. There is no prioritization for projects studying PFAS in more highly contaminated environments.

- **Regarding biosolid research, how high on the technology transfer readiness level should projects be?**

Answer: The applicant may choose the level of detail to include regarding biosolid research. Research will be judged on scalability and applicability to local producers and agriculture rather than technology transfer readiness level.

- **Is it important to include fundamental research questions or do we just need to address practical agricultural questions?**

Answer: The applicant may include fundamental research questions. More importantly, the project should aim to address the primary research areas, goals and objectives.

- **Does EPA have any wastewater modeling tools that they maintain that we could interface with?**

Answer: There is an inventory of EPA Science Models and Research Tools that applicants may find helpful at <https://www.epa.gov/research/epa-science-models-and-research-tools-smart-search>

Eligibility

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

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

As stated in the RFA: “Profit-making firms are not eligible to apply nor receive assistance agreements from the EPA under this program. For-profit colleges, universities, trade schools, and hospitals are ineligible. For-profit organizations are not eligible for subawards under this grant program but may receive procurement contracts. Any contracts for services or products funded with EPA financial assistance must be awarded under the competitive procurement procedures of 2 CFR Part 200 and/or 2 CFR Part 1500, as applicable. The regulations at 2 CFR 1500.10 contain limitations on the extent to which EPA funds may be used to compensate individual consultants. Refer to the [Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and](#)

[Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements](#) for guidance on competitive procurement requirements and consultant compensation. Do not name a procurement contractor (including a consultant) as a “partner” or otherwise in your application unless the contractor has been selected in compliance with competitive procurement requirements.”

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

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

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

- **Can international organizations apply?**

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

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

Answer: No, EPA employees are not allowed to participate in any application. In addition, letters of support or intent from EPA employees are prohibited. If a cooperative agreement is proposed, an EPA employee may collaborate with the grant recipient to the extent permitted under EPA policy.

As stated in the RFA: “In accordance with the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act, 31 U.S.C. 6301 et seq., the primary purpose of an assistance agreement is to accomplish a public purpose of support or stimulation authorized by federal statute, rather than acquisition for the direct benefit or use of the Agency. In issuing a grant, the EPA anticipates that there will be no substantial EPA involvement in the design, implementation, or conduct of the research. However, the EPA will monitor research progress through annual reports provided by grantees and other contacts, including site visits (as needed), with the Principal Investigator(s).”

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

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

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

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

Answer: Federal employees are not allowed to participate in any application.

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

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

- **Although Federal employees are NOT eligible to apply, are they still be eligible as a sub-award or collaborator?**

Answer: Federal employees may not receive salaries or augment their Agency’s appropriations through awards made under this program unless authorized by law to receive such funding.

- **Can non-federally recognized Tribal entities lead a proposal?**

Answer: No, Tribal entities must be federally recognized to apply. If the Tribe is not federally recognized, it may be possible to apply if they are a registered non-profit. Email Ron Josephson (josephson.ron@epa.gov) if you have more specific questions.

- **Can a non-federally recognized Tribe be recognized as a community partner?**

Answer: Yes, a Tribe that is not federally recognized may be a community partner.

Peer Review

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

Answer: Peer reviewers should have a depth of experience in the research areas of the RFA and in research project management and should not be applicants or have a conflict of interest with a submitted application. Peer reviewers may also not be EPA employees. If you are interested in becoming peer reviewer, please contact Aaron Wishnuff (wishnuff.aaron@epa.gov) or Meta Bonner (bonner.meta@epa.gov).

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

Answer: No. Peer reviewers may not be involved with any application or have a conflict of interest with a submitted application, including submitting a letter of support or intent. If someone else from your institution is applying for the grant, and you do not otherwise have a conflict of interest with this application, you can still be a peer reviewer; however, you will not be able to participate in discussions involving that application.

SAM.gov/Grants.gov

- **What is SAM.gov?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

timely register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov is not an acceptable reason to justify acceptance of an application outside of Grants.gov.

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

Budget

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

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

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

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

- **For the community engagement plan, is there an estimated range for budget allocation?**

Answer: The applicant may choose to allocate as much as the budget as they see fit to address the primary research areas and meet the goals of their project. Reviewers will consider the feasibility of accomplishing research and project milestones based on the proposed timeline and budget.

- **What is the correct rate for indirect costs for applicants at universities?**

Answer: There is not a maximum indirect cost (IDC) rate limit. EPA accepts IDC rates that are negotiated for each recipient on behalf of all Federal agencies by a cognizant Federal agency, which is the agency that typically provides the most direct funding to the recipient. For more information, please see the [EPA Indirect Cost Policy](#).