

**Centers of Excellence for Stormwater Control Infrastructure Technologies Grant Program
Request for Applications (RFA)**

**Questions and Answers
April 09, 2024**

EPA prepared these questions and answers to assist prospective applicants with preparing an application for the Centers of Excellence for Stormwater Control Infrastructure Technologies Grant Program. The reason questions and answers are posted on our website is to ensure that the EPA is protecting the federal competition process and giving everyone the same information as they prepare to submit applications and inadvertently avoid giving an advantage during the competition phase. Please review the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) (also referred to as the Request for Applications (RFAs)) when preparing your application. If the information in this FAQ document differs from information in the NOFO, then the NOFO will take precedence. This FAQ document will be updated periodically as we continue to receive questions.

GENERAL INFORMATION

1) Can you explain the requirement for applicants to submit only one application per Project Area, and the requirement to submit an application for Project Area 1 in order to submit an application for Project Area 2?

The EPA is soliciting applications from eligible applicants in two Project Areas; Project Area 1: Establish and maintain a regional Center of Excellence; and Project Area 2: Create and maintain a national electronic clearinghouse. Under this competition, only one application can be submitted per applicant under a Project Area. If an applicant submits an application under Project Area 1, they may then submit a separate application under Project Area 2. An applicant cannot submit an application for Project Area 2 without submitting an application for Project Area 1. Each application submitted under this announcement must address one, and only one, of the Project Areas. The cover page of each application package must clearly indicate the Project Area addressed in the application. While the EPA intends to make awards in all Project Areas, the EPA reserves the right to make more than one award in a Project Area and/or make no awards in a Project Area.

All applications must address Project Area 1 listed in Section I.B and must address all three sub-sections in Project Area 1. If an applicant submits an application for Project Area 2 but does not submit an application for Project Area 1, it will be rejected.

Under this competition, only one application can be submitted per Project Area. If an applicant submits more than one application per Project Area, the EPA will contact them before the review process begins to determine which application(s) will be withdrawn. If the applicant is not able to communicate a decision within 48 hours of being contacted, the EPA will accept the application received first by Grants.gov.

- 2) Please clarify the submission rule, "Under this competition, only one application can be submitted per Project Area." Does this mean (1) an individual cannot participate in more than one team or (2) an individual can not apply as the PI but can be a member of more than one team?**

See the answer to question 1. Eligible applicants under this competition include institutions of higher education, research institutions, and nonprofit organizations. Individuals are not eligible to apply. Additionally, only one application can be submitted per applicant under a Project Area.

- 3) The RFA states that an applicant can only submit one proposal under each Project Area. Does this mean a single applicant could not be the lead on more than one application, or does it restrict them from also being a partner on a second application?**

See the answer to question 1. Only one application can be submitted per eligible applicant (i.e., institution of higher education, nonprofit organization) under a Project Area. If an eligible applicant submits an application under Project Area 1, they may then submit a separate application under Project Area 2. An eligible applicant cannot submit an application for Project Area 2 without submitting an application for Project Area 1. In their applications, applicants should identify those partnerships necessary to successfully conduct the project. Each application submitted under this announcement must address one, and only one, of the Project Areas.

If an organization is identified as a project partner on an application(s), they are not considered the applicant. EPA awards funds to one eligible applicant as the recipient even if other organizations are named as partners. The recipient is accountable to EPA for the proper expenditure of funds. Described in Section IV.E.2 of 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")."

- 4) For an applicant to be eligible to submit under Project Area 2 they have to submit an application under Project Area 1. Can you clarify whether they need to lead an application for Project Area 1 or just be a part of the project team?**

See the answer to question 1. All applications must address Project Area 1 listed in Section I.B and must address all three sub-sections in Project Area 1. If an applicant submits an application for Project Area 2 but does not submit an application for Project Area 1, it will be rejected.

5) Is an institutional limit of one applicant, meaning the institution can submit only one application, and not a PI limit since the call defines “applicant” as an institution of higher learning?

See the answer to question 1. Eligible applicants under this competition are institutions of higher education, research institutions, and nonprofit organizations. An eligible applicant may submit only one application under a Project Area. Under this competition, individuals or principal investigators (PIs) are not eligible applicants.

6) Will the EPA have a webinar on the Request for Applications?

The EPA is not planning to host a webinar on the RFA opportunity, but is planning to host a webinar to announce the selections, introduce the new Stormwater Centers of Excellence, and provide the Stormwater Centers of Excellence with a platform to share their workplans for the upcoming years. Between now and March 18th, potential applicants can visit the EPA website (<https://www.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater-centers-excellence-grant>) to find information on the RFA, including a link to Grants.gov information about applying for EPA grants. In addition, if applicants have any specific questions regarding the RFA, they can email EPA at stormwatercenters@epa.gov. Responses to the questions received will be posted on the EPA website for everyone to see. The reason questions and answers are posted on our website is to ensure that the EPA is protecting the federal competition process and giving everyone the same information as they prepare to submit applications and inadvertently avoid giving an advantage during the competition phase.

7) This is a Cooperative Agreement rather than a standard grant. What section in EPA will be the lead in this Agreement? That is, will this project be staying with Office of Water and Office of Wastewater Management or is it envisioned that EPA’s Office of Research and Development (ORD) will be the primary contact for cooperation?

The Project Officers for awards made under this funding opportunity will be in EPA’s Office of Water.

8) For Project Area 2, will EPA host the clearinghouse or is the selected application expected to host it?

Under Project Area 2: Create and maintain a national electronic clearinghouse, the EPA is soliciting applications to create and maintain a national electronic clearinghouse. Applicants should describe how they will develop, operate, and maintain a national electronic clearinghouse that contains information relating to new and emerging stormwater control infrastructure technologies and posts information from the other Centers of Excellence. See Section I.B, Project Description, Project Area 2 for additional information.

9) Will the awardee for the national electronic clearinghouse need to purchase a new domain and URL?

See the answer to the previous question. As described in Section I.B Project Area 2, "...applications should describe how they will develop, operate, and maintain a national electronic clearinghouse that contains information relating to new and emerging stormwater control infrastructure technologies and posts information from the other Centers of Excellence."

10) Does the national electronic clearinghouse need to be branded under EPA's logo or does it need a new logo?

The applicant selected under Project Area 2: Create and maintain a national electronic clearinghouse will use their logo on the national electronic clearinghouse.

11) Must the national electronic clearinghouse be 508 compliant?

Please see [EPA's Section 508 Requirements for Grantees](#) webpage. Cooperative agreement awardees do not have to adhere to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act standards. However, awardees must comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Please review paragraph 31 of the [EPA General Terms and Conditions](#) for specific language. The EPA Grants Office has [resources for applicants and awardees](#) as well as [policy resources](#).

The Section 508 Program encourages awardees to make all electronic documentation Section 508 compliant. GSA's [Section508.gov](#) site has excellent resources on how to make [documents, spreadsheets and presentations](#) compliant.

12) For promoting the national electronic clearinghouse, are there any specific channels that need to be taken into consideration? Also, will any promotional and outreach messaging need to be approved by the EPA?

As described in Section I.B Project Area 2, the project narrative should describe how it will promote the information in the national electronic clearinghouse "...among other technical assistance providers, government and other interested parties that can help engage the broader community, including harder-to-reach portions of the community." Additionally, the section states that, "...the applicant should describe the approach they will use to reach diverse communities, of varying sizes, including urban, suburban, and rural communities to promote and amplify the national electronic clearinghouse (e.g., low-income, disproportionate environmental and public health impacts, or historically underserved populations, have permit violations, future permit limits, etc.)."

Section II.B, Type of Funding, states that “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.” Examples of the anticipated substantial federal involvement are provided in Section II.B. EPA will negotiate precise terms and conditions relating to substantial involvement as part of the award process.

13) Will there be any additional resources made available for other direct costs, media buying, search engine optimization, or advertising?

Section II.A, Amount of Funding states “Under Project Area 2, the EPA anticipates awarding one cooperative agreement. The EPA expects the award to range from a minimum of \$30,000 to no more than \$60,000. Applicants may not request more than \$60,000 in federal funding per application. Applications requesting more than \$60,000 are not eligible and will not be reviewed.” Section III.C, Threshold Eligibility Criteria states “Applications for awards under Project Area 2 cannot request more than \$60,000 in federal funds. Applications for Project Area 2 requesting more than \$60,000 in federal funds will be rejected.”

Section Section IV.E.1 of the RFA provides a description of the required documents for a complete application package, which includes SF-424A – Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs. 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). . Additionally, Section IV.E.2 of the RFA describes the elements of the Project Narrative, including the detailed budget narrative. This section provides an opportunity for a narrative description of the budget or aspects of the budget found in the SF-424A. EPA’s [Interim General Budget Development Guidance for Applicants and Recipients of EPA Financial Assistance](#) is a tool that may be used by applicants of EPA funds when preparing proposed work plans, budgets, and budget narratives for EPA assistance agreements. 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. 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.

14) Regarding the RFA’s term “regional” meaning of “two or more states”, could this be met through a multi-state footprint of an organization to realize a broader geographic region?

Section I.B Project Description in the RFA states, “For the purposes of this announcement, “regional” or “geographical region” means consisting of two or more states.”

15) If we partner with an entity from another state, does it need to be within the same EPA region?

For the purposes of this announcement, “regional” or “geographical region” means consisting of two or more states (see Section I.B Project Description, for additional information).

16) Would a state and a territory be considered a geographic region according to the RFA?

For the purposes of this announcement, the term "State" means a State, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, consistent with the Clean Water Act at 33 U.S.C. § 1362(3). For the purposes of this announcement, “regional” or “geographical region” means consisting of two or more states (see Section I.B Project Description, for additional information).

17) Are existing similar stormwater centers from eligible applicants eligible to apply, or is this funding opportunity to establish new centers only?

If the applicant is eligible as defined in Section III.A, Eligible Applicants of the RFA, they are eligible to apply to this funding opportunity. Please also see Section III.C. Threshold Eligibility Criteria of the RFA.

18) Are there limitations for state Department of Transportation (DOT) participation as a partner and/or as a funding receiver for this grant?

Section III. A of the RFA provides information in eligible applicants, which under this competition, includes institutions of higher education, research institutions, and nonprofit organizations. Additionally, Section I.C of the RFA describes project partnerships, including if the eligible applicant chooses to identify any partner entities who will receive subawards or procurement contracts.

19) What is meant by "financial needs" in Section 1.B of the RFA under Project Area 1 that reads, "...will maintain a listing of communities' stormwater infrastructure and financial needs..."?

As described in Section I.A of the RFA, “...many communities face financial challenges when trying to rectify their stormwater issues due to the costs associated with construction, operation, and maintenance of the necessary infrastructure.” Based on this, under this RFA, “financial needs” means those costs associated with construction, operation, and maintenance of stormwater infrastructure.

20) What information should to be included to meet the RFA's Section IV.E.2.C element, Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC)?

Development of a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) is required of all EPA assistance agreements that fund data collection and/or assessment and information analysis. 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. The cost of the QAPP development should be included in the project budget. 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.B, Quality Assurance/Quality Control, of the announcement for additional information). The description of QA/QC is not counted in the 12-page limit for the project narrative. Additional information on QA/QC requirements is available on the [Implementation of Quality Assurance Requirements for Organizations Receiving EPA Financial Assistance](#) site. If QA/QC is not applicable, clearly state this in the Project Narrative.

21) Will the applications for Project Area 2 be similar to those for Project Area 1?

Application materials and the contents of an application package are described in Section IV. E of the RFA. A complete application package must include the documents described in Section IV. E 1 and 2 of the RFA. If an applicant submits an application under Project Area 1, they may then submit a separate application under Project Area 2, so some elements of the application package could be similar.

22) Does this funding opportunity allow for construction?

This funding opportunity does not fund construction. See Section I of the RFA, which describes the funding opportunity project areas.

23) Should we include citations in the 12-page Project Narrative? If so, is there a limit on the number of citations?

See Section IV.E.2 of the RFA, which describes what must be included in the Project Narrative of the application. It makes a note that, "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." If an applicant chooses to include citations, the RFA states that for the Project Narrative, "Additional pages beyond the 12-page limit will not be considered."

24) Is there an explicit cost-share involved in this funding opportunity?

See Section III.B of the RFA, which states, “No cost share or match is required under this announcement.” If the application does include any non-federal cost-share match, it should be noted in the SF-424A, cover page, and detailed budget narrative as described in Section IV.E.1 and 2 of the RFA.

25) To what extent is indirect overhead negotiable?

As stated in Section IV.E.1 of the RFA, “See [Indirect Cost Guidance for Recipients of EPA Assistance Agreements](#) for additional information about indirect cost rates.”

26) What documentation does the EPA require in the application for subawards and contracts? Does each proposed sub-awardee require an SF-424?

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 <http://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>. The EPA awards funds to one eligible applicant as the recipient even if other eligible applicants are named as partners or co-applicants or members of a coalition or consortium. The recipient is accountable to EPA for the proper expenditure of funds. Funding may be used to provide subawards of financial assistance, which includes using subawards to fund partnerships, provided the recipient complies with applicable requirements for subawards including those contained in [2 CFR Part 200](#) and EPA's [Subaward Policy](#). EPA has also posted [Additional Resources](#) on Subawards for applicants to consult.

Section IV.E of the RFA describes the contents of a complete application package, including the forms and documents the applicant must include. For information on project partnerships, Section IV.E.2.C of the RFA describes the project partnerships element of the project narrative's workplan.

27) For the Detailed Budget narrative, can we simply list the position type (i.e., faculty), instead of listing each individual personnel (i.e., faculty member)?

See Section IV.E.2.C.6 of the RFA that provides a link to EPA's [Interim General Budget Development Guidance for Applicants and Recipients of EPA Financial Assistance](#), which is a tool that may be used by applicants of EPA funds when preparing proposed work plans, budgets, and budget narratives for EPA assistance agreements. The guidance document provides information on personnel costs and includes Appendix 2 – Sample Budget Detail/Narrative.

28) Should the detailed budget narrative be part of the 12-page Project Narrative or can it be submitted as a separate short document?

See section IV.E.2, which describes the contents of the project narrative. It states, “The Project Narrative must include sections A-C below. The Project Narrative (covering sections A-C below) is limited to no more than twelve (12) typewritten, single spaced 8.5x11-inch pages (a page is one side of a piece of paper) including the cover page and executive summary.” The Detailed Budget Narrative is an element of the Workplan (section C) and is included in the 12-page Project Narrative. “Additional pages beyond the 12-page limit will not be considered. Supporting materials, which are limited to no more than the Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate agreement, if applicable, and Biographical Sketches documentation, as described below, are not included within the page limit.” Section C of the Project Narrative includes the Detailed Budget Narrative.

29) Does the cover page need to be a separate page in the Project Narrative or should it be included with the rest of the Project Narrative?

The cover page is included in the Project Narrative. The Project Narrative is limited to no more than twelve (12) typewritten, single-spaced 8.5x11-inch pages, including the cover page and executive summary. See also section IV.E.2, which describes the contents of the project narrative. It states, “The Project Narrative must include sections A-C below. The Project Narrative (covering sections A-C below) is limited to no more than twelve (12) typewritten, single spaced 8.5x11-inch pages (a page is one side of a piece of paper) including the cover page and executive summary.” Section A is the Cover Page, Section B is the Executive Summary, and Section C is the Workplan.

30) Can a footnote that appears within the 12-page Project Narrative be a hyperlink to a URL, or would a hyperlink be considered outside of the 12-page limit?

See section IV.E.2 of the RFA, which states, “Additional pages beyond the 12-page limit will not be considered. Supporting materials, which are limited to no more than the Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate agreement, if applicable, and Biographical Sketches documentation, as described below, are not included within the page limit.” Additionally, see question 23 of this document that states, “If an applicant chooses to include citations, the RFA states that for the Project Narrative, “Additional pages beyond the 12-page limit will not be considered.”

31) How do I amend my application and resubmit it in Grants.gov due to the extension and increase in available federal funding under Project Area 1?

Applicants can submit a corrected or revised application as long as the re-submission is before the application deadline, April 24, 2024 at 11:59PM ET. See Section IV of the RFA for

information on application and submission information, including information on Grants.gov. For more specific information on a changed or corrected application, see the Grants.gov help page, [Submit a Workspace Application](#). Applicants can find other Grants.gov support on their [Support Center webpage](#).

See Section III.C of the RFA for information on submitting more than one application, “If an applicant submits more than one application per Project Area, the EPA will contact them before the review process begins to determine which application(s) should be reviewed.”

APPLICATION REVIEW

32) Will EPA score applications that cover a larger geographic region higher than those covering only a few states?

A panel(s) comprised of EPA staff will review the eligible applications by Project Area based on the evaluation criteria listed in Section V.A. Ranking lists will be developed based on the panel evaluations for each Project Area. The ranking lists will be provided to the Selection Official, who makes the final funding decisions. In making the final funding decisions, the Selection Official will consider the application score/ranking on each ranking list and may also take into account other factors such as geographic distribution, diversity of projects, and availability of funds.

33) Under the Past Performance criterion, how will newly-initiated EPA-funded grants (i.e., grants beginning in 2023 and 2024) that do not have any major milestones yet be compared to non-EPA projects that have been completed or are at a more advanced stage?

See Section IV.E.2.C.8 Past Performance. “Briefly describe federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements, but not contracts) that the applicant performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements). If the applicant had any EPA agreements in the last three years, those are preferred to be included.”

Under criterion 7 of Section V.A of the RFA, EPA will evaluate applications , “... based on their ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project taking into account: 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 EPA agreements).” 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).

34) Are letters of support allowed as part of the application?

Section IV. D and E of the RFA describes the application materials that are required and optional as part of the application package. Letters of support are not mandatory or optional application materials.

35) Will EPA consider letters of support from other entities besides the applicant in evaluating and scoring an application (i.e., letters have not been requested or solicited by the applicant)?

See Section V of the RFA. Any materials, including letters of support, submitted to EPA that are not part of the application package will not be reviewed or otherwise evaluated as part of the review and selection process.

AWARD INFORMATION

36) Does EPA expect there will be funding to maintain the clearinghouse after the 2-year project period is over?

We cannot provide information on potential future funding or RFAs. All funding opportunities are posted on Grants.gov.

37) While the RFA is clear that an applicant must apply for Project Area 1 in order to be eligible to apply for Project Area 2, will the award for Project Area 2 be contingent on the applicant also receiving an award for Project Area 1?

See the answer to the previous question. In order to be eligible for an award under Project Area 2, the applicant must also submit an application under Project Area 1. Selections for awards under Project Area 2 are not contingent on selections for awards under Project Area 1. Ranking lists will be developed based on the panel evaluations for each Project Area. The ranking lists will be provided to the Selection Official, who makes the final funding decisions. In making the final funding decisions, the Selection Official will consider the application score/ranking on each ranking list and may also take into account other factors such as geographic distribution, diversity of projects, and availability of funds (see Section V.C, Review and Selection Process in the RFA, for additional information).

38) When does EPA expect the awards to be announced and when agreements will be executed (and work can commence)?

The EPA anticipates that selected applicants will be announced in Summer/Fall 2024. The start date for awards will be negotiated between the applicant and the EPA as part of the final grant award package.

Following the EPA's evaluation of the applications, all applicants, including those who are not selected for funding, will be notified regarding their status. The notification will be made to the original signer of the Standard Form (SF) 424, Application for Federal Assistance or the project contact listed in the application. The 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., workplan), which must be approved by the EPA, before the assistance agreement can officially be awarded. The time between notification of selection and award of an assistance agreement can take up to 90 days or longer (see Section VI.A, Award Notices for additional information).

39) Can funding be reserved to be distributed to one of several subrecipients in year 2?

It is anticipated that the cooperative agreements funded under this announcement will have up to two-year project periods, depending on the amount requested and the overall size and scope of the project(s). Section VI. of the RFA describes award administration information, including the final work plan narrative that includes estimated funding amounts for each component and work years. See also Section IV.E.2, Project Narrative, including Project Partnerships, Milestone Schedule, and Detailed Budget.

40) If a proposal is awarded, can the budget for specific elements of the project (i.e., research) be adjusted post-award?

Post-award revisions to the budget may require prior approval and amendments to the budget. Revision of budget and project plans ([2 CFR 200.308](#)), outlines the instances where prior approval from the agency is required. UGG cost principles (see [2 CFR 200.407](#)) also contain provisions for prior approval of selected items of costs.

41) Are local government agencies eligible to receive subawards? Also, can local government agencies receive subawards from different award recipients?

Subawards must be consistent with the definition of that term in [2 CFR 200.1](#) and comply with the [EPA's Subaward Policy](#). Subrecipients are subject to the same requirements as those that apply to the pass-through entity's EPA award as required by [2 CFR 200.332\(a\)\(2\)](#).