

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

**Funding Opportunity Title:** Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program

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

**Funding Opportunity Number:** EPA-OW-OWOW-24-02

**Assistance Listing Number:** 66.441

**Key Dates:**

- **March 28, 2024:** The EPA will host Information Session Webinar #1 about this announcement on March 28, 2024 at 1pm Eastern Daylight Time (EDT). Webinar registration is available at: <https://www.epa.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-consortium-grants>.
- **April 9, 2024:** The EPA will host Information Session Webinar #2 about this announcement on April 9, 2024 at 2:30pm EDT. Webinar registration is available at: <https://www.epa.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-consortium-grants>.
- **April 26, 2024:** 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 April 26, 2024. Written responses will be posted on EPA's website at <https://www.epa.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-consortium-grants>.
- **May 10, 2024:** All applications must be received by electronic submission through [Grants.gov](https://www.epa.gov/grants) by **11:59 P.M. EDT, May 10, 2024**, in order to be considered for funding. Late applications will not be considered for funding.

**Note to Applicants:**

Following EPA's evaluation of applications, all applicants will be notified regarding their status. If you name subawardees/subgrantees and/or contractor(s) in your application to assist you with the proposed project, pay careful attention to the information in the CONTRACTS AND SUBAWARDS provision found in Section IV.d of the EPA Solicitation Clauses at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>.

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## I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is soliciting applications from eligible applicants to manage the Healthy Watersheds Consortium (HWC) Grant Program to continue efforts to accelerate and expand the strategic protection of healthy freshwater, estuarine, and marine ecosystems and their watersheds across the country. This grant program will advance the protection of healthy watersheds by supporting an array of projects to build watershed protection capacity and support actions to protect healthy watersheds.

### A. Background on Healthy Watersheds Program

The stated objective of the Clean Water Act (CWA) is “to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s waters” (33 U.S.C. Section 1251(a); CWA Section 101(a)). Over the past five decades, the EPA’s water programs have focused primarily on restoring impaired waters and reducing pollutant levels in waterways. The EPA launched the [Healthy Watersheds Program](#) to place a renewed emphasis on maintaining the integrity of the nation’s healthy waters and to leverage these waters to accelerate restoration successes. The EPA’s Healthy Watersheds Program aims to maintain and increase the numbers of healthy waters and watersheds across the United States.

### Key Definitions

#### Healthy Watersheds:

The EPA’s Healthy Watersheds Program considers healthy watersheds to be those in which natural land cover supports dynamic hydrologic and geomorphic processes within their natural range of variation (e.g., sediment storage and deposition); habitat of sufficient size and connectivity to support native aquatic and riparian species; and water quality that supports healthy biological communities. (US EPA, 2012. [Identifying and Protecting Healthy Watersheds: Concepts, Assessments, and Management Approaches](#). U.S. EPA, EPA-841-B-11-002).

#### Healthy Watersheds Protection:

Healthy watersheds protection refers to the suite of management activities to achieve watershed-level goals, typically centering on preserving, enhancing, or improving aquatic ecosystems and supporting natural landscape and watershed processes, such as hydrology, in largely healthy watersheds. Healthy watersheds protection projects should represent strategic priorities from an existing plan (e.g., regional, state/Tribal, basin or watershed-scale, or those covering another targeted geographic area, such as source water protection areas) or strategy intended to protect healthy watersheds.

Over the last decade, the EPA’s Healthy Watersheds Program has supported states and other partners that are implementing proactive, holistic approaches to protect healthy waters and watersheds in the following program focus areas:

- **Clean Water Act Integration:** Supporting states and other clean water partners to refine approaches to protect healthy waters and watersheds through CWA program

implementation (e.g., see protection language within the [CWA 303\(d\) Vision](#) and [CWA 319 Program Guidelines](#), as well as materials from the [July 2022 CWA 303\(d\) and 319 Protection Learning Exchange](#)).

- **Healthy Watersheds Assessments:** Providing technical resources and support for partners working to identify healthy watersheds vulnerable to degradation, based on the EPA’s Healthy Watersheds Assessment Framework (e.g., see [EPA’s Preliminary Healthy Watersheds Assessments](#)).
- **Healthy Watersheds Protection:** Investing directly in projects that demonstrate the array of techniques and approaches to protect healthy watersheds (e.g., see summaries of projects supported under the [Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grants Program](#) between 2016 and 2022).
- **Growing Protection-Based Partnerships:** Building partnerships across EPA programs and with external partners to align resources to protect healthy watersheds, as well as integrate healthy watersheds protection within broader landscape-based initiatives (e.g., see [EPA’s 2022 Watershed Protection Guide for Land Trusts](#)).

Today, healthy watersheds protection plays an increasingly critical role in achieving the CWA objective and the EPA’s mission to protect human health and the environment. Through the Healthy Watersheds Program, EPA aims to continue progress towards these goals:

1. **Mitigating the need for water quality restoration and helping ensure restoration success.** Proactive watershed planning and management can prevent or mitigate the need for water quality restoration, which frequently requires significant resource investments and sustained efforts over years to achieve success. Healthy, functioning watersheds can also provide the building blocks that anchor water quality restoration efforts.
2. **Maintaining the resilience of aquatic ecosystems to climate change.** Intact natural systems are more resilient because base flows are preserved during periods of drought, impacts of floods are mitigated through storage of surface and ground water in floodplains and wetlands, riparian corridors allow for species migration, and carbon is sequestered in the natural land cover. As a result, resilient, healthy watersheds help reduce environmental and human health impacts of climate change.
3. **Protecting healthy waters that local communities depend upon, including those disadvantaged, historically marginalized and overburdened.** There is an inextricable connection between the health of waters, their surrounding watersheds, and the communities that live in them. Healthy watersheds support healthy waters, which together provide a wide range of ecosystem services necessary for social and economic well-being, including social and health benefits provided by nature-based recreation and reduced costs associated with water treatment and flooding.

## **B. Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program Background and Objective**

The objective of the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program is to accelerate and expand the strategic protection of healthy watersheds, including freshwater, estuarine, and

marine ecosystems, across the country through a cooperative agreement and subsequent subawards. The HWC Grant Program was first launched in 2015, supported with \$3.75 million in funding from the EPA. The grant program funding supported a total of 56 subawards across approximately 25 states and 9 EPA regions. These projects demonstrated an array of new and innovative protection techniques and approaches, including implementing watershed protection plans, building organizational and social infrastructure needed for long-term protection efforts, and employing innovative, new strategies for achieving watershed protection goals. In total, these projects supported by the HWC Grant Program contributed to the protection of more than 1 million land acres and more than 5,100 stream miles, primarily via land conservation and enhanced regulatory protections. You can learn more about past subaward projects [here](#).

The EPA is providing funding under this RFA to continue to accelerate and expand the strategic protection of healthy watersheds including freshwater, estuarine, and marine ecosystems, across the country through a cooperative agreement and subsequent subawards. Subawards must be consistent with the definition of that term in 2 CFR 200.1 and comply with the [EPA's Subaward Policy](#). In their applications, applicants should demonstrate their ability, and describe an approach, for serving as an intermediary organization to manage the HWC Grant Program and build partnerships to leverage and sustain the Consortium. Applicants should specify any specialized experience and expertise developing and implementing partnership-based programs to protect healthy watersheds, including in or to benefit disadvantaged, historically marginalized and overburdened communities.

As part of their project approach in the project narrative (see Section IV.B.2.b), applicants should demonstrate their ability to:

- i. Prepare and advertise a subaward competition, establish criteria for evaluating and selecting subawardee applications, and make subawards to support healthy watershed protection high-impact demonstration projects and capacity-building projects that: (1) include a variety of partners; (2) develop or represent priorities of a plan or strategy intended to protect healthy watersheds, or some other prioritization scheme based on a healthy watersheds assessment; and (3) include a plan for tracking and communicating the successes of the subaward project;
- ii. Oversee and monitor subawardees for successful completion of subaward projects supported by the HWC Grant Program;
- iii. Provide technical support to subawardees by, for example, facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges to provide opportunities for knowledge transfer in the development and implementation of healthy watersheds protection strategies, including through conducting one in-person national meeting, one virtual national meeting, and regional-specific virtual meetings, as appropriate;
- iv. Develop a strategy to promote, grow, and sustain the HWC Grant Program over the duration of the cooperative agreement, including through program development, partnerships, and networking;
- v. Collaborate with the EPA in highlighting the HWC Grant Program in engagements with clean water partners (e.g., state and local partners implementing CWA programs) to

- increase understanding of and support for healthy watersheds protection;
- vi. Communicate the successes of the subaward projects through written materials such as fact sheets, press releases, blogs, and websites;
- vii. Qualitatively and quantitatively measure and report on the outputs and outcomes of environmental results of the healthy watersheds projects accomplished through the subawards.

Applicants may include any other activities in the subaward RFA that they believe will help promote and attain the objectives and goals described in the announcement.

#### Geographic Scope of HWC Grant Program

The competitive subaward process proposed in the project approach must be on a national scale by allowing for subaward project applications from across the 50 United States, Tribal Lands, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories (i.e., Guam, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa).

#### Subaward Project Types

Applicants should address how they will ensure that competitive subawards will support one of the following project types, as described below. In all cases, subaward projects should have the following components: (1) include a variety of partner organizations; (2) advance a new or existing plan or strategy intended to protect healthy watersheds, or some other prioritization scheme based on a healthy watersheds assessment; and (3) include a plan for tracking and communicating the successes of the subaward project. Consistent with the goals of the [Justice40 Initiative](#), applicants are strongly encouraged to describe the approach to solicit subaward applications from organizations seeking to protect healthy watersheds in or to benefit disadvantaged, historically marginalized and overburdened communities.

Subawards awarded under the cooperative agreement are anticipated to have project periods ranging from approximately two to three years. The subawards need to be completed in sufficient time for the recipient to, for example, aggregate results and ensure that subawardees have been reimbursed for all incurred costs. Funding for each subaward may range from approximately \$50,000 to \$150,000 per project. Applicants may identify a slightly different range for each subaward as part of their project narrative.

#### **Subaward Project Type #1: Healthy Watershed Protection High-Impact Demonstration**

**Projects:** Subaward funds should be provided for projects that advance components of a new or existing plan or strategy, such as leveraging funding to protect a particular property, that will directly result in the protection of a healthy watershed. These projects typically leverage a HWC Grant subaward many times over for maximum results. Additionally, these projects must demonstrate a new or experimental protection technique or approach that has the potential to be replicated and scaled to advance healthy watersheds protection regionally or nationally (e.g., a project that demonstrates the potential to unlock significant support via partnerships or financing to support healthy watersheds protection). The EPA expects that the results of the project will be disseminated so that others can benefit from

the knowledge gained from the demonstration projects. New approaches may include applications of new settings or environments that are not yet well studied. HWC Grant subaward funds cannot be used for the purchase of land or conservation easements. Partner funds that are independent of the HWC federal funding and are not part of the required non-federal cost share/match for HWC subawards may be used to purchase land or conservation easements.

**Subaward Project Type #2: Healthy Watershed Protection Capacity-Building Projects:**

Subaward funds should be provided for projects that will grow the organizational capacity needed for large-scale, long-term healthy watershed protection. These projects should identify existing or proposed funding or strategies to be deployed with increased capacity for project implementation (i.e., projects should demonstrate how the increased capacity will allow the subawardee to secure funding or implement a strategy needed to accelerate long-term watershed protection). Projects should also leverage participation from multiple agencies responsible for aquatic ecosystem, land, habitat, and water resource protection/management as well as other appropriate partners (e.g., non-governmental organizations, other federal agencies).

Applicants may include any other activities in the subaward solicitations that they believe will help promote and attain the program objective described in this announcement (see Section I.B).

Demonstration projects must involve new or experimental technologies, methods, or approaches, where the results of the project will be disseminated so that others can benefit from the knowledge gained in the demonstration project. A project that is accomplished through the performance of routine, traditional, or established practices, or a project that is simply intended to carry out a task rather than transfer information or advance the state of knowledge, however worthwhile the project might be, is not a demonstration project. That is an implementation project. **Implementation projects are not eligible for funding under this announcement.** However, implementation projects funded by partners using funds that are independent of this federal funding and are not part of the required non-federal cost-share/match are permitted. (See Section III.B of the announcement for information on leveraged funding/resources).

Project Partnerships

Effective partnerships are critical to achieving the goal of the HWC Grant program to accelerate and expand the strategic protection of healthy watersheds across the United States. Through the HWC Grant program, the EPA seeks to support opportunities to build partnerships across EPA programs and with external partners to align resources to protect healthy watersheds, as well as integrate healthy watersheds protection within broader landscape-based initiatives. In their applications for this RFA, applicants should:

- Identify and describe the entities with whom you will partner to successfully conduct the project;
- Include a clear description of the roles of the specific partners in the project's

components/tasks. Partnerships may, for example, provide technical expertise, and/or provide leveraged resources and opportunities for implementation projects; and

- Describe how these partnerships will contribute to the success of the HWC Grant.

### Leveraging

Through the HWC Grant program, the EPA seeks to leverage the total project costs (i.e., federal EPA grant funding, plus required 40% non-federal cost-share/mach) to secure additional funds/resources to accelerate and expand the strategic protection of healthy watersheds across the United States. For example, the EPA anticipates opportunities to leverage the HWC Grant program to secure support for healthy watersheds protection from recent federal historic investments via the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (e.g., [America the Beautiful Challenge program](#)) and Inflation Reduction Act (e.g., [US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service conservation programs](#)). In their applications for this RFA, applicants should detail how they will leverage EPA funding to secure assistance, including funding beyond the required non-federal cost-share/match requirement, from partner entities. Applicants should specify the type and amount of anticipated leveraged funding, how the funds will be obtained, and the likelihood that the leveraging will materialize during the grant project period. See Evaluation Factor V.A.6 in Section V of this RFA for more information.

If the applicant chooses to identify any partner entities who will receive subawards or procurement contracts (including consultants), please pay careful attention to the CONTRACTS AND SUBAWARDS provision found at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>. The EPA will not consider their qualifications unless the applicant selects them in compliance with applicable regulations and provisions.

Applicants may propose to use a portion of the assistance funds to defray transportation and subsistence expenses for non-federal attendees to attend the national meeting. The applicant is solely responsible for determining a methodology for selecting and funding reimbursement requests and providing a report on how participating non-federal attendees benefited from the meetings. The EPA will not participate in the selection or approval of individuals who receive travel assistance. Please see the [EPA Guidance on Participant Support Costs](#) for more information.

### **C. Environmental Results and Linkage to Strategic Plan**

The activities to be funded under this solicitation support the EPA's [FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan](#). Awards made under this announcement will support Goal 5 - Ensure Clean and Safe Water for All Communities: Provide clean and safe water for all communities and protect our nation's waterbodies from degradation, Objective 5.2: Protect and Restore Waterbodies and Watersheds: Address sources of water pollution and ensure water quality standards are protective of the health and needs of all people and ecosystems.

All proposed projects must demonstrate the linkage to the Strategic Plan and include specific statements describing the environmental results of the proposed project in terms of well-defined outputs, and, to the maximum extent practicable, well-defined outcomes that



demonstrate how the project will contribute to the overall goal of restoring and protecting aquatic ecosystems. Additional information regarding the EPA's Strategic Plan and discussion of environmental results can be found at: <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57007a1-epas-policy-environmental-results-under-epa-assistance-agreements>.

**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 the assistance agreement funding period.

Examples of anticipated environmental outputs from the cooperative agreement to be awarded under this announcement (including subawards awarded under the cooperative agreement) include, but are not limited to:

- Development of national consortium of partners, including co-funders, to support healthy watersheds protection efforts.
- Development of healthy watersheds protection partnerships to align and leverage resources among subawardees and partners to achieve coordinated protection goals.
- Number of projects completed that demonstrate innovative and replicable approaches for protecting healthy watersheds (e.g., via land use planning or protection demonstration/training projects).
- Number of HWC meetings hosted for subawardees and project partners to share strategies and support national and regional-based communities of practice for healthy watersheds protection.

**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. Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related or programmatic in nature, 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 environmental outcomes anticipated as a result of the assistance agreement to be awarded under this RFA (including subawards awarded under the cooperative agreement) may include but are not limited to:

- Increased number of stream miles, acres of lakes and wetlands protected (i.e., in which water quality degradation has been avoided) as a result of HWC Grant subaward projects.
- Increased understanding of and support/funding for healthy watersheds protection among clean water programs (e.g., CWA funding programs, drinking and wastewater communities).
- Accelerated protection of critical areas within healthy watersheds, identified using existing assessments, plans, and strategies.
- Establishment of enduring networks among partners that result in the sustained protection of healthy watersheds.
- Increased protection of an integrated aquatic ecological network of hubs and corridors

providing ecosystem functions at state and regional scales.

- Maintained and increased resiliency of healthy watersheds, contributing to reduced impacts of flooding and other natural hazards exacerbated by climate change.

As part of the application, applicants should describe how the project will result in the protection of water and/or wetland resources and link the anticipated outputs and outcomes to the Agency's Strategic Plan. Further information is in Section IV.B of this RFA. Additional information regarding EPA's definition of environmental results in terms of outputs and outcomes can be found at: <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57007a1-epas-policy-environmental-results-under-epa-assistance-agreements>.

#### **D. Statutory Authority**

The statutory authority for the assistance agreement and the subaward agreements to be funded under this announcement is Section 104(b)(3) of the Clean Water Act (CWA), which restricts the use of funding to the following: conducting or promoting the coordination and acceleration of research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys, and studies relating to the causes, effects (including health and welfare effects), extent, prevention, reduction, and elimination of water pollution. Projects that are demonstrations must involve new or experimental technologies, methods, or approaches where the results of demonstration projects will be disseminated so that others can benefit from the knowledge gained from the demonstration projects. A project that is accomplished through the performance of routine, traditional, or established practices, or a project that is simply intended to carry out a task rather than transfer information or advance the state of knowledge, however worthwhile the project might be, is not considered a demonstration project. Such projects are implementation projects. **Implementation projects are not eligible for funding under this announcement.**

Funds received under this announcement cannot be used for the purchase of land or conservation easements. However, partner funding that is independent of this federal funding and not part of the required non-federal cost share/match may be used for implementation projects, such as for example, the purchase of land or conservation easements.

Application tasks that are or might be required by a previous or pending permit (e.g., CWA section 404 permit, CWA section 402 permit, CWA section 401 certification) or federal, state, tribal, territory, or local government regulatory requirement(s) are not eligible for funding because they are implementation tasks. Purchase of vehicles (including boats, motor homes, etc.) and office furniture are not eligible for funding under this program. The lease of vehicles may be eligible for funding, but it is contingent on justification of need in the proposal narrative.

Projects must be performed entirely within the 50 United States, Tribal Lands, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories (i.e., Guam, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa). Proposed projects must comply with all state and federal regulations applicable to the project area. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure compliance.

### **E. 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 the [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.

## **II. AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Amount of Funding**

The EPA anticipates awarding one cooperative agreement under this announcement for approximately \$2,100,000, depending on Agency funding levels and other applicable considerations. The cooperative agreement is anticipated to be incrementally funded at an average of approximately \$350,000 per year over a six-year project period, based on funding availability, satisfactory performance, and other applicable considerations. The successful applicant should provide the EPA with a negotiated, six-year work plan covering six distinct one-year periods of performance.

In appropriate circumstances, the EPA reserves the right to partially fund an application by funding discrete portions or phases of a proposed project. If the EPA decides to partially fund an application(s), 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. 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 after the original selections are made. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than six months after the original selection decisions.

### **B. Type of Funding**

The EPA intends to award a cooperative agreement 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, review of proposed procurement;
- Approving qualifications of key personnel (EPA will not select employees or contractors employed by the award recipient);

- Review and comment on reports prepared under the cooperative agreement (the final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient);
- Review and comment on content of tasks/deliverables and reports prepared under the cooperative agreement (the final decision of the content of reports rests with the recipient);
- Review of evaluation criteria in selecting subawardees (the final decision on the evaluation criteria rests with the recipient);
- EPA staff will review the subaward RFA and may provide comments to ensure consistency with the applicant's scope of work (the recipient is responsible for the content of, and all final decisions regarding, the subaward RFA including the disposition of any EPA comments on the subaward RFA);
- EPA staff participation in the review process for selection of subawardees (federal employees must comprise substantially less than a majority of the panel, and the final decision on the selection of subawardees rests with the recipient));
- EPA review and approval of the substantive terms of subawards to verify compliance with federal requirements; and
- Upon request by the recipient and subject to the availability of personnel, the EPA will provide the recipient with access to EPA scientific expertise, sampling protocols, publicly available data, and other forms of technical assistance.

### III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

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

#### A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants under this announcement are nonprofit, non-governmental organizations, interstate agencies, and intertribal consortia. Universities and colleges and institutions of higher education are not eligible under this announcement. Individual states, U.S. Territories, Tribes, local governments, and for-profit organizations are not eligible under this announcement. 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. The EPA may ask applicants to demonstrate that they are eligible for funding under this announcement including demonstrating that they are capable of undertaking activities that advance the HWC Grant on a national basis.

The term “interstate agency” is defined in CWA section 502(2) as “an agency of two or more states established by or pursuant to an agreement or compact approved by the Congress, or any other agency of two or more states, having substantial powers or duties pertaining to the control of pollution as determined and approved by the Administrator.” An intertribal consortium is a partnership between two or more tribes that is authorized by the governing bodies of those tribes to apply for and receive assistance. (See 40 CFR 35.502.) The intertribal consortium is eligible only if the consortium demonstrates that all of its members meet the

eligibility requirements and authorize the consortium to apply for and receive assistance in accordance with 40 CFR 35.504 at the time of application submission. An intertribal consortium must submit with its application to the EPA adequate documentation of the existence of the partnership and the authorization of the consortium by its members to apply for and receive the grant. (See 40 CFR 35.504.)

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 nonprofit organization because they are separately defined in the regulation. 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.

#### **B. Cost Sharing/Match Requirements**

All applicants must describe in their application submission how they will contribute a minimum of **40% of the total project cost (*total federal share and applicant non-federal cost share/match*)** in accordance with [2 CFR Part 200.306](#). The cost share/match must be for eligible and allowable project costs and may be provided by the applicant or partner organization or institution (subawardees). The cost share/match may be provided in cash or by in-kind contributions. 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/matching funds are considered grant funds and are included in the total award amount and must 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 (examples of funding restrictions are outlined in Section I.C and III.C of this announcement) also apply to the non-federal cost share/matching funds. Other federal grants may not be used as cost share/match without specific statutory authority.

All applicants must describe in their application (Section IV.B.2.d) how they will contribute the appropriate cost share/match requirement. Applicants that do not demonstrate how they will meet the minimum 40% non-federal cost share/match requirement in their application will not be considered for funding. In addition, if an applicant cannot meet the appropriate cost share/match by the time of award, they will not be eligible to receive funding.

**Under this solicitation, applicants should not propose and include in their budget a voluntary non-federal cost share above the required 40% non-federal cost share.** Voluntary committed

cost sharing as defined at 2 CFR 200.1 is when an applicant voluntarily proposes a legally binding commitment to cover costs or provide contributions to support the project when a cost share is not required.

If the cost share/match will be provided by a subrecipient, the subrecipient's contribution must comply with [2 CFR 200.306](#). Any indirect costs included in the subrecipients' cost share contribution must be determined consistently with [2 CFR 200.332\(a\)\(4\)](#). Successful applicants are still responsible for proper accountability and documentation of Subawardee cost share contributions.

The total project cost is the sum of the total requested federal share and applicant cost share/match. The cost-share/match can be calculated as the following:

**Based on the total federal funds requested (e.g., \$2,100,000):**

- (1) Divide the total federal funds requested by the maximum federal share allowed.
- (2) Subtract the federal funds requested from the amount derived in step 1.
- (3) The amount derived from step 2 is the non-federal match.

*For example:*

- (1) If the federal funds requested = \$2,100,000 and the recipient cost-share/match is 40%, the federal share = 60% or 0.60.  $\$2,100,000$  divided by 0.60 =  $\$3,500,000$  (total project cost).
- (2)  $\$3,500,000 - \$2,100,000 = \$1,400,000$
- (3) **The non-federal match = \$1,400,000**

Leveraging

Although a 40% non-federal cost share is required as a condition of eligibility under this competition, the EPA will also evaluate applications based on a leveraging criterion (see Evaluation Factor in Section V.A.6). Leveraging is generally when an applicant proposes to provide its own additional funds/resources or those from third party sources to support or complement the project they are awarded under the competition which are above and beyond the EPA federal grant funds awarded and the required non-federal cost share/match. Leveraged funds and resources may take various forms. Leveraging may be met by funding from another federal grant, from an applicant's own resources, or resources from other third-party sources.

Any leveraged funds/resources, and their source, must be identified in the application (Section IV.B.2.f). The grant workplan should include a statement indicating that the applicant is expected to produce the proposed leveraging consistent with the terms of the announcement and the applicant's application. Leveraged funds/resources need not be eligible and allowable project costs under the EPA assistance agreement. For example, implementation projects such as purchase of conservation easements would be allowed with these leveraged funds. If applicants propose to provide this form of leveraging, the EPA expects them to make the effort to secure the leveraged resources described in their applications. If the proposed leveraging does not materialize during grant performance, then the EPA may reconsider the legitimacy of

the award and/or take other appropriate action as authorized by 2 CFR 200 and 1500, as applicable.

**Leveraged funds and resources should not be included in the budget. Additionally, while voluntary cost share is generally a form of leveraging, it will not be considered or evaluated under the Leveraging Evaluation Factor (Section V.A.6).**

### **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.

1. An applicant must meet the eligibility requirements in Section III.A of this announcement.
2. Applicants must demonstrate in their application how they will meet the required 40% non-federal cost share/match requirements in Section III.B of this announcement.
3. Applications must address how the applicant will establish and manage a competitive subaward program on a national scale by allowing for subaward applications for building watershed protection capacity-building and watershed protection demonstration projects across the 50 United States, Tribal Lands, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories.
4. Applications must be for projects that protect or improve water quality by conducting or promoting the coordination and acceleration of research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys, and studies relating to the causes, effects (including health and welfare effects), extent, prevention, reduction, and elimination of water pollution. Implementation projects are not eligible for funding under this announcement.
5. Demonstration projects must involve new or experimental technologies, methods, or approaches, where the results of the project will be disseminated so that others can benefit from the knowledge gained in the demonstration project. A project that is accomplished through the performance of routine, traditional, or established practices, or a project that is simply intended to carry out a task rather than transfer information or advance the state of knowledge, however worthwhile the project might be, is not a demonstration and all or parts of the application will be eliminated from consideration. Such projects are implementation projects and are not eligible for funding under this announcement. Individual project tasks that are for program implementation are not eligible for funding.
6. 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 with respect to the application, or parts thereof, pages in excess of the page limitation will not be reviewed. 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.
7. In addition, initial applications must be submitted through [Grants.gov](https://www.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 solicitation. 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](https://www.grants.gov) should follow the instructions provided in Section IV, which include both the requirement to contact [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and email a full application to the EPA prior to the deadline.

8. Applications submitted outside of [Grants.gov](https://www.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](https://www.grants.gov) or [SAM.gov](https://www.sam.gov). An applicant's failure to timely submit their application through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) because they did not timely or properly register in [SAM.gov](https://www.sam.gov) or [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) will not be considered an acceptable reason to consider a submission outside of [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).
9. An applicant may submit an application requesting up to the maximum federal amount specified in this announcement: \$2,100,000. If an applicant submits an application that requests more than the maximum federal amount, it will be rejected from further consideration.
10. 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.
  - a. The purchase of land or conservation easements are **not** eligible for funding because they are implementation tasks.
  - b. Application project tasks that are required by a previous or pending permit (e.g., CWA Section 404 permit, CWA Section 402 permit, CWA Section 401 certification) or federal, state, tribal, or local government regulatory requirement(s) are **not** eligible for funding because they are implementation tasks.
  - c. Purchase of vehicles (including boats, motor homes) and office furniture is **not** eligible for funding under this program. The lease of vehicles is eligible for funding under this program but must be described in the budget detail and clearly linked to project activities.
  - d. Projects must be performed entirely within the 50 United States, Tribal Lands, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories (i.e., Guam, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa).

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

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

##### **A. Form of Application Submission**

###### **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](https://www.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](#) (1) 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 a UEI only validates your organization's legal business name and address. Please review the [Frequently Asked Question](#) 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 8am - 8pm EDT.

### 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](https://www.grants.gov) and should ensure that all such requirements have been met well in advance of the application submission deadline.

Contact [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 or [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov) to resolve technical issues with [Grants.gov](https://www.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](https://www.grants.gov) representative by calling 606-545-5035. The [Grants.gov](https://www.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](https://www.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](https://www.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](mailto:support@grants.gov)

Applicants need to ensure that the Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) who submits the application through [Grants.gov](https://www.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 EPA through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) no later than **11:59 PM EDT, May 10, 2024**. 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](https://www.grants.gov) will be time and date stamped electronically. Please note that successful submission of your application through [Grants.gov](https://www.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](https://www.grants.gov) Support Center **before** the application deadline date.
2. Document the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) ticket/case number.
3. Send an email with EPA-OW-OWOW-24-02 in the subject line to [hwp-team@epa.gov](mailto:hwp-team@epa.gov) **before** the application deadline time and date and **must** include the following:
  - a. [Grants.gov](https://www.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](https://www.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](https://www.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](https://www.grants.gov) on a case-by-case basis. The EPA will only consider accepting applications that were unable to submit through [Grants.gov](https://www.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](https://www.sam.gov) or [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) is **not** an acceptable reason to justify acceptance of an application outside of [Grants.gov](https://www.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 (Project Narrative Attachment Form) prepared as described in Section IV of the announcement.

##### *Optional Documents:*

6. Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (if applicable). (Use Other Attachments Form)
7. Supporting Materials, such as letters of commitment and biographical sketches of major project managers, support staff members, or other major project participants for the proposed projects (Use Other Attachments Form)

Applications submitted through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) will be time and date stamped electronically.

If you have not received a confirmation of receipt from the EPA (not from [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)) within 30 days of the application deadline, please contact Steve Epting at 202-566-1074. Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

## **B. Content of Application Submission**

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

### **1. Application Materials**

#### **a. Standard Form 424 (SF-424), Application for Federal Assistance**

Complete the form. There are no attachments.

#### **b. Standard Form 424A (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 (i.e., a percentage), the base (e.g., personnel costs and fringe benefits), and the total indirect amount should also be indicated on line 22. In Section B: Budget Categories row 1, column (e) should be filled out for federal funds, row 1 column (f) should be filled out for any non-federal cost-share/match, and row 5 should be filled out for total project costs (federal funds, and the 40% required 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. Tips for filling out this form can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/tips-completing-epa-form-4700-4>. There are no attachments.

#### **e. Project Narrative (Project Narrative Attachment Form)**

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

#### **f. Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, if applicable**

The Indirect Cost Rate Agreement is not included in the 15-page single-spaced Project Narrative page limit. See [Indirect Cost Guidance for Recipients of EPA Assistance Agreements](#) for additional information about indirect cost rates.

#### **g. Supporting Materials (optional) (Other Attachments Form)**

Supporting materials include, for example, commitment letters from project partners and annotated resumes. Supporting materials are not included in the 15-page single-spaced Project Narrative page limit. Information under Section IV.C.2.i (Quality Assurance/Quality

Control Plans) and Section IV.C.2.j (Invasive Species Control) is considered supporting material.

## 2. Project Narrative

**The Project Narrative must include a cover page and items a – h below** and address the corresponding ranking criteria in Section V.A. It is recommended that you identify within your Project Narrative each individual ranking criterion in Section V.A. that you are addressing. **The Project Narrative (including the cover page and section a-h below) is limited to no more than fifteen (15) typewritten, single-spaced 8.5 x 11-inch pages (a page is one side of paper),** except for documents specifically excluded from the page limit as noted below. It is recommended that applicants use a standard 12-point type with 1-inch margins. Readability is important, and applicants should consider this when selecting a font for use in the Project Narrative. **Additional pages beyond the fifteen (15) page limit will not be considered.** Budget information and the milestone schedule, described below, must be included within the 15-page Project Narrative limit, and not in the supporting materials or appendix.

**Cover Page (included in the 15-page Project Narrative limit).** Include the following information in the cover page:

1. **Project Title.** The project title should reflect the main project outcome/objective and should be 15 words or less.
  2. **Abstract/Project Summary** (recommended 250 words or less). Provide a brief description of the proposed project.
  3. **Name of Applicant Applying for Funding**
  4. **List of all potential partners associated with the project**
  5. **Key Personnel and Contact Information** (i.e., name, email address and phone number).
  6. **Total Project Cost.** Specify the amount of federal funds requested, the required 40% non-federal cost share/match and the total project cost.
- a. **Project Goals, Objectives, and Anticipated Environmental Results (see also Evaluation Factor V.A.1)**
- i. Project Goals, Objectives, and link to EPA Strategic Plan – Describe the goals and objectives of the proposed project and identify the linkage to the EPA’s FY 2022 – FY 2026 Strategic Plan *Goal 5 - Ensure Clean and Safe Water for All Communities: Provide clean and safe water for all communities and protect our nation’s waterbodies from degradation specifically Objective 5.2: Protect and Restore Waterbodies and Watersheds* (see Section I.C of this announcement)
  - ii. Anticipated Environmental Outputs - List the anticipated products/results which are expected to be achieved from accomplishment of the project activities and an approach for tracking your progress toward achieving the expected project output(s) (examples of outputs can be found in Section I.C of this announcement)
  - iii. Anticipated Environmental Outcomes - List the anticipated environmental improvements to be accomplished as a result of the project activities. These improvements are changes or benefits to the environment which are a result from the

accomplishment of project outputs. Describe an approach for tracking your progress toward achieving the expected project outcome(s) (examples of outcomes can be found in Section I.C of this announcement)

**b. Project Approach (see also Evaluation Factor V.A.2)**

Describe your approach for serving as an intermediary organization to manage the HWC Grant Program (see Section I.B). The competitive subaward process described in the project approach must be national in scale by allowing for subaward applications for healthy watershed protection high-impact demonstration projects and healthy watershed protection capacity-building projects across the 50 United States, Tribal Lands, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories. The project approach should demonstrate the applicant's ability to:

- i. Prepare and advertise a subaward competition, establish criteria for evaluating and selecting subawardee applications, and make subawards to support healthy watershed protection high-impact demonstration projects and capacity-building projects that: (1) include a variety of partners; (2) develop or represent priorities of a plan or strategy intended to protect healthy watersheds, or some other prioritization scheme based on a healthy watersheds assessment; and (3) include a plan for tracking and communicating the successes of the subaward project;
- ii. Oversee and monitor subawardees for successful completion of subaward projects supported by the HWC Grant Program;
- iii. Provide technical support to subawardees by, for example, facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges to provide opportunities for knowledge transfer in the development and implementation of healthy watersheds protection strategies, including through conducting one in-person national meeting, one virtual national meeting, and regional-specific virtual meetings, as appropriate;
- iv. Develop a strategy to promote, grow, and sustain the HWC Grant Program over the duration of the cooperative agreement, including through program development, partnerships, and networking;
- v. Collaborate with the EPA in highlighting the HWC Grant Program in engagements with clean water partners (e.g., state and local partners implementing CWA programs) to increase understanding of and support for healthy watersheds protection;
- vi. Communicate the successes of the subaward projects through written materials such as fact sheets, press releases, blogs, and websites; and
- vii. Qualitatively and quantitatively measure and report on the outputs and outcomes of environmental results of the healthy watersheds projects accomplished through the subawards.

**c. Milestone Schedule (see also Evaluation Factor V.A.3)**

Provide a milestone schedule that covers each year of the total grant period request (up to six years for the cooperative agreement and two to three years for the subawards) and provides a breakout of the project activities into phases with associated tasks and a timeframe for completion of tasks. The milestone schedule should show timeframes and major milestones to complete significant project tasks including, but not limited to, major

outreach activities, release of the subaward RFA, and the approximate time of award of the subawards. Include an approach to ensure that awarded funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. The project start date will follow acceptance of the award by the successful applicant.

**d. Project Budget (see also Evaluation Factor V.A.4)**

Provide a detailed budget and estimated funding amounts for each project task. Please see the EPA's [Budget Development Guidance](#) which includes a sample budget. This section provides an opportunity for narrative description of the budget or aspects of the budget found in the SF 424A such as "other" and "contractual". All subaward funding should be located under the "other" cost category.

- i. Applicants must itemize costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, contractual costs, travel, equipment, supplies, other direct costs, indirect costs and total costs. 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 EPA and what portion of the cost will be covered by the minimum non-federal 40% cost share/match as required in Section III.B. Letters of support from partners providing cost share/match are encouraged and will not count against the page limit. Include any travel for applicant staff to attend meetings throughout the proposed project period to promote the HWC Grant Program or to increase subawardee applications in the travel cost category. All subgrant funding should be located in the "other" cost category. Describe itemized costs in sufficient detail for EPA to determine the reasonableness and allowability of costs (both federal and non-federal components). Please see [EPA's Interim General Budget Development Guidance for Applicants and Recipients of EPA Financial Assistance](#) and training on [how to develop a budget](#) for more information about preparing a project budget.

**e. Project Partnerships (see also Evaluation Factor V.A.5)**

Describe the entities with whom you will partner to successfully conduct the project (see Section I.B). Include a clear description of the roles of specific partners in the project's components/tasks. Describe how these partnerships will contribute to the success of the HWC Grant. If you choose to identify any partner entities who receive subawards or procurement contracts (including consultants), please refer to the [CONTRACTS AND SUBAWARDS](#) provision before doing so, as the EPA will not consider their qualifications unless you select them in compliance with applicable regulations and provisions. Letters of support from potential partners are encouraged and will not count against the page limit for the project narrative. If you do not plan on collaborating with other groups for this project, describe how you will be able to effectively perform and complete the project without such collaboration.

**f. Leveraging (see also Evaluation Factor V.A.6)**

Demonstrate how you will leverage the total project costs (i.e., EPA grant funding plus required 40% non-federal cost-share/match, as specified in Section III of this solicitation) to secure additional funds/resources to support the HWC Grant program objectives. Explain how these funds/resources will be used to contribute to the performance and success of

the proposed project. This includes but is not limited to funds and other resources leveraged from businesses, labor organizations, nonprofit organizations, education and training providers, and/or federal, state, tribal, and local governments, as appropriate. Describe the amount and type of leveraged resources to be provided, how you will obtain the leveraged resources, the likelihood the leveraging will materialize during grant performance, the strength of the leveraging commitment, and the role the leveraged resources will play to support the proposed project activities. Selected applicants are expected to abide by their proposed leveraging commitments during grant performance and the failure to do so may affect the legitimacy of the award. Note that voluntary cost share will not be considered under the Leveraging Evaluation Factor (Section V.A.6).

**g. Programmatic Capability (see also Evaluation Factor V.A.7)**

- i. Organizational Experience. Provide a brief description of the applicant's organization and experience related to the proposed project, and the organization's infrastructure as it relates to its ability to successfully implement the proposed project.
- ii. Staff expertise/qualifications. Provide a list of key staff and briefly describe their expertise/qualifications and knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them to successfully achieve the goals of the project. Include an estimate of the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) workers (based on 2,080 hours per year/FTE). Annotated resumes of applicant's key staff are also encouraged but not required, should be provided as attachments, and are not included in the page limit.
- iii. Specialized Experience. Include a description of your experience and expertise developing and implementing partnership-based programs to protect healthy watersheds, including within or in or to benefit disadvantaged, historically marginalized and overburdened communities (e.g., see the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#)).

**h. Past Performance (see also Evaluation Factor V.A.8)**

Briefly describe federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include federal grants and cooperative agreements but not federal contracts) similar in size (i.e., managed assistance agreements greater than \$2 to \$3 million), scope and relevance to the proposed project that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements) and:

- i. Describe whether, and how, you were able to successfully complete and manage those agreements.
- ii. Describe how you documented and/or reported on whether you were making progress towards achieving the expected results (i.e., outputs and outcomes) under those agreements. If you were not making progress, please indicate whether, and how, you documented why not.

**Note:** In evaluating applicant's past performance, the Agency will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources, including information from EPA files and from current/prior grantors (e.g., to verify and/or



supplement the information provided by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please indicate this in the application and you will receive a neutral score for these factors (a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). Failure to provide any past performance information, or to include a statement in the applications that you do not have any relevant or available past performance or reporting information, may result in a zero score for these factors (see Section V.A).

#### Coalition Coverage

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 the [EPA’s Subaward Policy](#). The pass-through entity that administers the grant and subawards will be accountable to the 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. 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.

- i. **Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC)** (not counted in page limit): If you plan to collect or use environmental data or information, explain how you will comply with the Quality Assurance/Quality Control requirements (see Section VIII.A for additional information). Note: Development of a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) is required of all EPA assistance agreements that fund data collection and assessment and information analysis. The cost of the QAPP development should be included in the proposed budget.
- j. **Invasive Species Control** (not counted in page limit): If applicable, describe how you will ensure that your project does not facilitate the introduction or spread of invasive species. Explain how you would respond if an invasive species problem occurs in relation to your project. (See Section VIII.C for additional information).

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

### C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications submitted electronically through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) must be received by **11:59 P.M. ET, May 10, 2024**. Late applications will not be considered for funding.

### D. Additional Provisions for Application 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 (usually in Section VII) to obtain the provisions.

### E. Communications with Applicants

In accordance with EPA's Assistance Agreement Competition Policy ([EPA Order 5700.5A1](#)), **EPA staff will not meet with individual applicants to discuss draft applications, provide informal comments on draft applications, or provide advice to applicants on how to respond to ranking criteria.** Applicants are responsible for the content of their applications. However, consistent with the provisions in the announcement, the EPA will respond to written 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 as soon as possible so that any questions about the solicitation language may be resolved prior to submitting an application. In addition, if necessary, the EPA may clarify threshold eligibility issues with applicants prior to making an eligibility determination. Questions about this RFA must be submitted in writing via email and must be received by the Agency Contact identified in Section VII by **April 26, 2024**. Written responses will be posted on EPA's website at <https://www.epa.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-consortium-grants>.

### F. Information Sessions

The EPA will host two national Information Sessions regarding this announcement via webinar prior to the closing date of this RFA. These webinars will be held **March 28, 2024 at 1pm EDT** and **April 9, 2024 at 2:30pm EDT**. Webinar registration is available at <https://www.epa.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-consortium-grants>. The EPA will attempt to answer any appropriate questions in these public forums. Information about these webinars, including Questions and Answers, will be posted at <https://www.epa.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-consortium-grants>.

## V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

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

**A. Ranking Criteria**

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

Criteria	Description
<p><b>1) Environmental Results &amp; Tracking Progress</b></p> <p><b>(10 points total)</b></p>	<p>The application will be evaluated based upon the extent and quality to which it clearly demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. The potential to achieve anticipated environmental outputs and outcomes, and how the outcomes are linked to the EPA’s Strategic Plan (examples of outputs and outcomes can be found in Section I.C of this announcement) <b>(5 points)</b></li> <li>ii. A sound plan for measuring and tracking progress toward achieving the anticipated outputs and outcomes. <b>(5 points)</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>2) Project Approach</b></p> <p><b>(35 points total)</b></p>	<p>Under the following sub-criteria, the application will be evaluated based upon the extent and quality to which the project approach demonstrates the applicant’s ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Prepare and advertise a national subaward competition, establish criteria for evaluating and selecting subawardee applications, and make subawards to support healthy watershed protection demonstration projects and capacity-building demonstration projects that: (1) include a variety of partners; (2) develop or represent priorities of a plan or strategy intended to protect healthy watersheds, or some other prioritization scheme based on a healthy watersheds assessment; and (3) include a plan for tracking and communicating the successes of the subaward project. <b>(10 points)</b></li> <li>ii. Oversee and monitor subawardees for successful completion of subaward projects supported by the HWC Grant Program. <b>(5 points)</b></li> <li>iii. Provide technical support to subawardees through facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges to provide opportunities for knowledge transfer in the development and implementation of healthy watersheds protection strategies. Conduct one in-person national meeting, one virtual national meeting, and regional-specific virtual meetings, as appropriate, for the purpose of providing an opportunity for subawardees to learn from each other. <b>(5 points)</b></li> <li>iv. Develop a strategy to promote, grow, and sustain the HWC Grant Program over the duration of the cooperative agreement, including through program development, partnerships, and networking. <b>(5 points)</b></li> <li>v. Collaborate with the EPA in highlighting the HWC Grant Program in engagements with clean water partners (e.g., state and local</li> </ul>

	<p>partners implementing CWA programs) to increase understanding of and support for healthy watersheds protection. <b>(5 points)</b></p> <p>vi. Communicate the successes of the subaward projects through written materials such as fact sheets, press releases, blogs, and websites. <b>(5 points)</b></p>
<p><b>3) Milestone Schedule</b> <b>(5 points total)</b></p>	<p>The application will be evaluated based upon the adequacy and completeness of the milestone schedule, including a breakout of the project activities into phases with associated timeframes and major milestones to complete significant project tasks, including, but not limited to, major annual outreach activities, release of the subaward RFA, approximate time of award of the subawards, and an approach to ensure that awarded funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. <b>(5 points)</b></p>
<p><b>4) Project Budget</b> <b>(10 points total)</b></p>	<p>The application will be evaluated based upon the extent and quality to which it demonstrates the reasonableness of the budget and includes 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. Describe the cost-effectiveness and reasonableness of all costs (both federal and non-federal components). <b>(10 points)</b></p>
<p><b>5) Project Partnerships</b> <b>(10 points total)</b></p>	<p>The application will be evaluated based upon the extent and quality to which it demonstrates appropriate and necessary partnerships to successfully conduct the project including, whether they have provided a clear description of the roles of specific partners in the project's components/tasks, and how these partnerships will contribute to the success of the HWC Grant Program. Applicants that do not plan on collaborating with other groups in this project will be evaluated based on the extent to which they demonstrate how they will be able to effectively perform and complete the project without such collaboration. <b>(10 points)</b></p>
<p><b>6) Leveraging</b> <b>(5 points total)</b></p>	<p>The application will be evaluated based on the extent to which it demonstrates how the applicant will leverage the total project costs (EPA grant funding, plus required cost share/match, as specified under Section III of the announcement) to secure additional funds/resources to support the proposed project activities, and demonstrates how these funds/resources will be used to contribute to the performance and success of the proposed project. Applicants will also be evaluated based on the amount and type of leveraged resources to be provided, how the leverage resources will be obtained, the likelihood the leveraging will materialize during grant performance, the strength of the leveraging commitment, and the role the leveraged funds/resources will play in supporting the proposed project activities. Voluntary non-federal cost share/match will not be evaluated. <b>(5 points)</b></p>

<p><b>7) Programmatic Capability</b></p> <p><b>(15 points total)</b></p>	<p>The application will be evaluated based upon the applicant’s ability to successfully manage and complete the proposed project, specifically considering the applicant’s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>Organizational experience</b> related to the proposed project, and the organization’s infrastructure as it relates to the ability to successfully implement the project. <b>(5 points)</b></li> <li>ii. <b>Staff expertise/qualifications</b>, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project. <b>(5 points)</b></li> <li>iii. <b>Specialized experience and expertise</b> developing and implementing partnership-based programs to protect healthy watersheds, including within or in or to benefit disadvantaged, historically marginalized and overburdened communities <b>(5 points)</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>8) Past Performance</b></p> <p><b>(10 points total)</b></p>	<p>The application will be evaluated based upon the applicant’s demonstrated ability to successfully manage and complete the proposed project, specifically considering the applicant’s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Past performance in successfully completing and managing (including leveraging) federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements similar in size, scope, and relevance to the proposed project performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements). <b>(7 points)</b></li> <li>ii. Extent and quality to which they documented and/or reported on their progress towards achieving the expected results (e.g. outcomes and outputs) under federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (an assistance agreement is a grant or cooperative agreement and not a contract) performed in the last three years (no more than five agreements), and if such progress was not being made, whether the applicant adequately documented why not. <b>(3 points)</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> In evaluating applicants under this criterion, the EPA will consider the information provided by the applicant in its application and may also consider relevant programmatic information from other sources including Agency files and prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information supplied by the applicant).</p> <p>Applicants who have no relevant or available past performance information must indicate that in the application and will receive a neutral score for sub-criteria (i) and (ii) (i.e., 3.5 points under sub-criterion (i) and 1.5 points under sub-criterion (ii)). Failure to provide any past performance information, or failure to include a statement in your</p>

application that you do not have any relevant or available past performance information, may result in a zero score for sub-criteria (i) and (ii).
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### **B. Review and Selection Process**

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

Eligible applications that pass the threshold eligibility review will be reviewed and scored based on the ranking criteria listed in Section V.A by a review panel(s) comprised of EPA staff, and possibly staff from other federal agencies. The ranking list 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 and may also consider other program priorities.

## **VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION**

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

### **A. Award Notices**

Following EPA's evaluation of the applications, all applicants, including those who are not selected for funding, will be notified by e-mail 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 of recommendation for award is not an authorization to begin performance, nor is it a guarantee that an award will be made. The official notification of an award will be made by the Grants and Interagency Agreements Management Division.

Applicants are cautioned that only an EPA 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, 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 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. Workplan components to be funded under the assistance agreement.

2. Estimated work years and the estimated funding amounts for each workplan component.
3. Workplan commitments for each workplan component and a timeframe for their accomplishment.
4. Performance evaluation process and reporting.
5. Roles and responsibilities of the recipient and the EPA in carrying out the workplan commitments.

#### **B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

The general award and administration process for assistance agreements are governed by the regulations at 2 CFR 200 and 1500, as applicable. A description of the Agency's substantial involvement in any cooperative agreements 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 semi-annually 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 workplan consistent with 2 CFR Part 200.329, Monitoring and Reporting Program Performance.

#### **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](#). 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](#).

### **VII. AGENCY CONTACTS**

Steve Epting  
Phone: 202-566-1074  
E-mail: [hwp-team@epa.gov](mailto:hwp-team@epa.gov)

### **VIII. OTHER INFORMATION**

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

Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) requirements apply to these grants (see 2 CFR Part 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. EPA can assist applicants in determining whether QA/QC is required for the proposed project. If QA/QC is required for the project, the applicant is encouraged to work with EPA QA/QC staff to determine the appropriate QA/QC practices for the project. See Section VII for Agency Contact information for referral to an EPA QA/QC staff.

Successful applicants must ensure that 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. When uploading data through WQX or WQXweb, data should be identified as HWC grant-related by providing project ID '**HWC**' in the data submission. More information about WQX and WQXweb, including tutorials, can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/waterdata/storage-and-retrieval-and-water-quality-exchange>.

### **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.

### **C. Invasive Species Control**

Pursuant to Executive Order 13112 (<http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/>), the recipient of EPA funds and all subcontractors shall monitor the project to insure it does not facilitate the introduction or spread of invasive species. If invasive species are detected or populations promoted in any way, the recipient will respond rapidly to control populations in an environmentally sound manner, as approved by the EPA Project Officer.