

Air Quality Information Funding Opportunity Questions and Answers

April 22, 2024

1. Is the solicitation limited to outdoor air quality sensing or will this funding opportunity allow proposals that collect indoor air quality?

Answer: The research focus is on outdoor air quality, but collection of indoor air quality data is allowed if it supports the project objectives.
2. Is EPA expecting university researchers to be part of the grantees research team?

Answer: The research team does not necessarily need to include university researchers, but this funding opportunity is for scientific research, and the research team needs to involve qualified researchers (either academic or other professional) to carry out the research described in the application since this is an evaluation criterion.
3. Is there a minimum amount one can ask for?

Answer: There is no minimum, you may request an amount equal to or lower than \$1.25 million.
4. Will proposals that have substantive research questions in non-air quality fields (e.g., data science education) be peer reviewed by folks with expertise in those fields as well?

Answer: Yes, we ensure that we have peer reviewers with the appropriate expertise assigned to evaluate the applications submitted.
5. If we are not submitting a proposal to this solicitation, how can we apply to serve on the peer review panel?

Answer: Please contact Mirtha Cápiro (capiro.mirtha@epa.gov) if you would like to serve on the peer review team.
6. What is the definition of underserved communities i.e., does this include the aging/elderly populations?

Answer: "Underserved communities" is defined in Section I.A of the funding opportunity: "...for purposes of this funding opportunity, underserved communities are 'populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate equitably in aspects of economic, social, and civic life...'" Some aging/elderly populations could be considered underserved communities if they fall under the above definition.
7. Do non-profit think-tanks (that have FFRDC / non-FFRDC divisions) qualify as primary applicant?

Answer: Non-profits are eligible as long as they are not lobbying organizations. This is also defined in our funding opportunity under section III.A. FFRDCs may be proposed as subaward institutions, though their personnel may not be listed as PIs/coPIs. Please contact us if there are specific questions on your situation.
8. Can a postdoc fellow that will be an assistant professor at the start of the grant period apply?

Answer: Eligibility is determined by the institution or organization, not by the principal investigator. It is not uncommon for universities to apply with an incoming assistant professor as the principal investigator, so check with the sponsored research office, dean, and/or department chair of the institution, college, or department, respectively.

9. Can principal investigators in the current EPA community projects apply? Also, does this funding opportunity allow adding other components to our existing project?

Answer: Current grantees can apply. Being part of existing EPA-funded projects has no bearing on eligibility for this funding opportunity. This funding opportunity is not designed for adding new components to an existing project; however, one can propose an entirely new research based on existing project as long as the project is substantially different.

10. Will we be deemed ineligible if our response to form 4700-4 shows we are not in 100% compliance with the CFR?

Answer: Response to form 4700-4 is not part of the eligibility review. If an eligible application is selected for funding based on the combination of peer review scores, relevancy review ratings, and other applicable considerations as described in Section V.G of the funding opportunity, EPA's Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights will review the 4700-4 form to determine if any issues will need to be addressed before an award can be made. Please follow up with us if you have more questions.

11. Is system to system (S2S) allowed? Our system is linked to grants.gov and is how we submit any grant for agencies that use grants.gov.

Answer: Yes, there is no preference for submitting through S2S as long as we receive the complete application by the deadline. Grants.gov will notify the applicant if it has been accepted. Please look out for this confirmation.

12. The funding opportunity says "criteria" and "hazardous" air pollutants specifically. Is noise pollution excluded from this grant?

Answer: Noise pollution is not excluded, but the main focus should be on ambient air pollution for this funding opportunity.

13. Does your application portal have a limit (in MB) to upload?

Answer: Grants.gov recommends keeping file attachment sizes less than 100 Mb. Grants.gov will convert large files to.zip to be decompressed when downloaded. Contact the Grants.gov helpline (1-800-518-4726) for more information.

14. How will coalition proposals be evaluated (e.g., if eligible member institution is an MSI/HBCU but others are not?)

Answer: All applications will be evaluated according to the process and criteria description in Section V. If you have a coalition or various community partners, consider submitting a letter or letters of support in your application.

15. Can an individual with deep connections to various community organizations apply as a primary or co-investigator if they are not employed by any of these organizations?

Answer: Individuals cannot apply. You should be part of the eligible organization applying. Separate individuals can be listed as consultants.

16. Can the project products be geared towards individual and/or household decision-making instead of community public decision-making?

Answer: No, this funding opportunity is focused on community decision-making so resulting products should focus on the community-level.

17. Would EPA consider supporting qualitative research (interviews, focus groups) to address Research Area 1?

Answer: Yes, as long as it is responsive to the funding opportunity. Note in section V.A.1.a of the funding opportunity that peer reviewers will evaluate “the degree to which the application demonstrates that the project (and its approach) is defensible and technically feasible, and uses appropriate and adequate research methods.”

18. Can someone working at an African/international University be eligible to apply?

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

19. Does research have to take place in the U.S.?

Answer: The research should focus on underserved communities in the U.S., including Tribal nations and U.S. territories, that are overburdened by air pollution. Activities outside of the U.S. are allowed as long as they support the research objectives that are responsive to the funding opportunity.

20. What is the funding rate for this funding opportunity?

Answer: The percent of applications that will be funded depends on the number of applications we will receive. We anticipate funding eight applications for \$1.25 million each (total over four years).

21. Is preliminary data essential or otherwise considered for review?

Answer: Preliminary data are not essential but, if included, will be considered by the reviewers.

22. What will be the main subjects of air quality monitoring? Are these PM2.5 or gases like ozone, NO2 or multiple pollutants?

Answer: The research can be on any combination of [criteria air pollutants](#) and/or [hazardous air pollutants](#). Your research should focus on community-identified concerns, taking into account what data and technologies are available for monitoring and measuring these pollutants.

23. If there are multiple co-investigators, which organization/group should take the lead on submissions via grants.gov?

Answer: There can be only one lead PI on the application. The PI from the primary institution should take the lead for submitting the application. Other investigators who are considered to be key personnel can be listed as co-PIs or Investigators.

24. Is there a required time that the projects start by? Will projects be downgraded if they do not start for around 2 years?

Answer: The start date is not part of the evaluation process. The estimated time of award from the close of the announcement is generally 9-10 months. We have some flexibility to negotiate the start date if an application is selected for funding.

25. Can we suggest reviewers with expertise in our field during the submission process?

Answer: Applicants cannot serve as peer reviewers or recommend specific reviewers to evaluate their application.

26. Are air quality emissions and modeling data streams less responsive than projects focusing on ambient or satellite air quality data?

Answer: The focus is on multiple streams of data. Research Area 1 in Section I.E specifically mentions air sensor data, data from permanent and temporary monitoring networks, satellite-based observations, mobile monitoring, and modeling results; therefore, applications that include the use of these data streams would be considered more responsive.

27. Can the budget cover equipment (e.g., parts to build instruments) as well as salaries or only salaries?

Answer: The budget is not limited to salaries. The Budget Justification in Section IV.C.5.iv of the Notice of Funding Opportunity has examples for how to enter salaries, travel, equipment, supplies, contractors, and other expenses.

28. Do we use the executive level II salary amounts or is the full salary used in the budget? What is EPA indirect cost rate?

Answer: There is no cap on investigators' salaries. For consultant salaries, as stated in section IV.C.5.iii.f, salary rate (excluding overhead) paid to individual consultants retained by recipients or by a recipient's contractors or subcontractors is limited to the maximum daily rate for a Level IV of the Executive Schedule, to be adjusted annually. The Executable Schedule is available at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>.

Indirect cost rate is usually based on an organization's or institution's federally negotiated rates. For organizations that do not have federally negotiated rates, 10% de minimis rate might be applicable. For additional information pertaining to indirect costs, please see the IDC Competition Clause at [EPA Solicitation Clauses](#).

29. Is this opportunity expected to recur in future cycles?

Answer: We cannot predict research topics for future funding opportunities because they depend on Administration and Congressional priorities. Our [Research Funding Opportunity page](#) includes a "Notice of Intent" section that lists upcoming funding opportunities. To be notified of when funding opportunities are announced for solicitation, please sign up for our [listserv](#).

30. Can new surface measurements that engage communities via citizen science be proposed or does this funding opportunity mainly focus on existing data?

Answer: Yes, new measurements that engage communities can be proposed. As stated in Section I.E of the funding opportunity, "...this solicitation is intended to support research that utilizes data from existing community air monitoring efforts and/or satellite data; additional field measurements campaigns and deployment of air sensors are allowed provided that the activities

address one or both of the research areas ...”. Those efforts may encompass existing data and/or new data depending on the effort.

31. Can the funds be used to organize workshops to bring community users' together (in addition to the research components)?

Answer: Yes. Please note the following excerpts from the funding opportunity.

From Section IV.C.5.iii.e on page 34 on the community engagement plan:

“Budgets should be designed in consultation with community partners and be attentive to issues of equity. Examples include:

- i. travel/stipends for partners and community members to participate in advisory group meetings, workshops, and focus groups,
- ii. subawards to eligible organizations for their involvement in the proposed research.”

From Section IV.C.5.iv.g on page 38 on Budget Justification:

“The “Other” budget category also includes participant support costs for community members to participate in workshops, focus groups, or similar activities and stipends or travel assistance for trainees (e.g., interns or fellows).”

32. Can an application be focused on ultrafine particles as long it is not an exclusive focus and also includes regulated criteria pollutants?

Answer: Yes.

33. Is change a focus topic? The funding opportunity seems to focus on Criteria and Hazardous pollutants and includes change to eliminate pollution as an afterthought.

Answer: This funding opportunity is for research projects and is only a small part of EPA work on environmental protection. EPA does have other grant programs that provide funding for more on-the-ground efforts. [Specific EPA Grant Programs webpage](#) provides links to information on other EPA grant programs.

The Science to Achieve Results (STAR) is a program for research grants. The goal is to support the development and translation of the science needed to inform decisions in pursuit of EPA’s mission to protect human health and the environment. As stated in Section I.E of this Notice of Funding Opportunity: “Particularly of interest is participatory research that aims to inform structural changes, as discussed in Section I.B., that improve air quality in underserved communities overburdened by air pollution.”

34. Can you have community partners across your state (i.e., in another state from where the PIs are located)?

Answer: Yes.