

Exchange Network Grants Program FY 24 Applicant Webinar

Office of Mission Support (OMS)

Office of Information Management (OIM)

Data Interoperability Partnership Branch (DIPB)

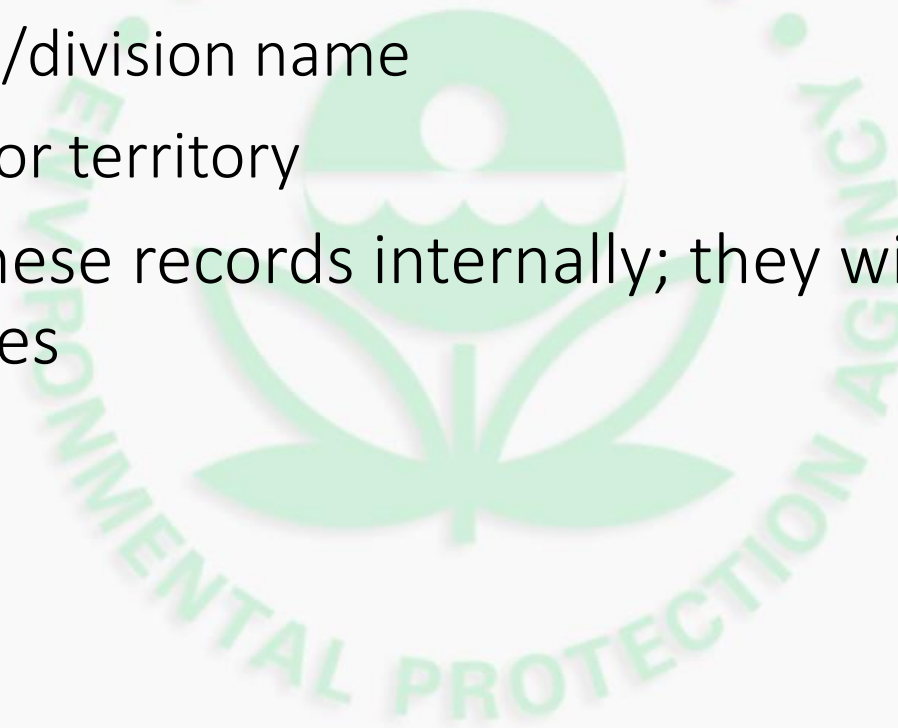
April 2024

www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork



Notes for Participants

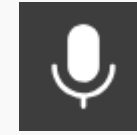
- If you did not pre-register for this session by emailing Aimee Awad, please enter the following into the TEAMS chat:
 - Your organization/division name
 - Your tribe, state, or territory
- EPA will maintain these records internally; they will not be shared with any third parties



Notes for Participants



= Muted



= Unmuted

- To maintain audio quality for all participants, **please keep yourself muted during the presentation**
 - *Note:* the webinar hosts may mute all or specific participants if background noise is present
- If you have a question about a particular slide or topic during the presentation portion, please type it into the TEAMS chat
 - These questions will be addressed in the 'Q & A' session
- During the 'Q & A' session, you may unmute yourself to ask a question or use the TEAMS chat feature
- All questions/answers will be added to our FAQs on the [EN Website](#)

Agenda

- I. EN Grant Program: The Basics
- II. What's Changed in FY24
- III. What To Include In Your Application
 - I. Mandatory and Additional Attachments Overview
- IV. Available Guidance
 - I. Optional Templates/Tools Demo
- V. Top 10 Applicant Errors/Mistakes to Avoid
- VI. Question and Answer (Q&A) Session



EN Grant Program: The Basics



When Are FY24 EN Applications Due?

Applications are Due in Grants.gov

NO LATER THAN

May 23rd, 2024, at 11:59 PM ET.

Note: This due date is one business day later than the original published application due date, as grants.gov will be undergoing scheduled system maintenance from May 18 – 21, 2024. Applications cannot be submitted during this maintenance period.

Who Can Apply For an EN Grant?

Entities Eligible for Funding (see [SN Section III-A](#)):

- States
- U.S. Territories
- Federally Recognized Tribes and Alaska Native Villages
- Inter-tribal Consortia of Federally Recognized Tribes
- Instrumentalities of a State or Tribe

What is an Instrumentality of a State or Tribe?

Definition: An instrumentality is an organization created by or pursuant to state or tribal statute and operated for public purposes. Generally, an instrumentality performs governmental functions, but does not have the full powers of a government, such as police authority, taxation, and eminent domain.

- States and Territories *must*: Provide a signed attorney general letter certifying this status.
- Tribes *must*: Provide a certification and supporting documentation from the tribal council or other appropriate tribal government official certifying this status.

What Can I Do If My Organization Isn't Eligible?

Ineligible entities have the option partner with an eligible entity, provided that:

- The lead applicant (formal EN partner) meets the specifications outlined in Sections III-A, III-D, and IV-B.
- The partnership is not formed from agencies within a single state, territorial, or tribal government.

The eligible entity could then share funds with your organization via a subaward.

- See additional subaward information under Section II-A.

How Much Can I Ask For in FY24?

- EN grant program expects to award approximately \$10,500,000 in 25-35 assistance agreements.
- *Single Applicants* can request up to \$300,000.
- *Eligible EN Partnerships (Coalition Applications)* can request up to \$500,000
- *'Individual Capacity Building with Mentorship'* applicants can request up to \$315,000.
 - Up to \$300,000 in project costs & \$15,000 in mentorship costs.
 - Open to tribes, intertribal consortia, and territories only.
 - All requirements must be met (see SN Appendix C, Page C3).

What Can I Propose As a Project?

All projects must support one or more Exchange Network Funding Areas:

- *EN Funding Area 1*: Increased Data Access and Innovative Business Processes
- *EN Funding Area 2*: Eliminate paper submittals and expand e-reporting
- *Funding Area 3*: Augment the information management capacity of EN partners

Projects may fall under one or more EN project opportunities.

- Applicants can also propose projects that do not have a specific EN project opportunity write-up if they support one or more of the EN funding areas listed above.

What are EN Project Opportunities?

Definition: specific project write-ups that provide potential applicants with the information needed to design a proposal for a particular data exchange, data service, or project type

These write-ups are available in SN Appendices A-C.

- Each includes a description, suggested project activities, estimated costs, and helpful links/resources.

EN Project Opportunities in Appendix A support EN Funding Area 1.

..... in Appendix B support EN Funding Area 2.

..... in Appendix C support EN Funding Area 3.

What Are the Other Project Requirements?

- 1) Must meet all threshold eligibility criteria for applications outlined in Section III-B.
- 2) Must support one or more business and/or administrative need(s) of the applicant organization.
- 3) Must support one or more strategic goal(s) and objective(s) from [EPA's FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan](#).
- 4) Must list specific anticipated environmental outputs and outcomes which are supported by the proposed project.
- 5) Must identify a project manager and provide an overview of the project manager's qualifications in project and financial management.
- 6) Must reflect the applicant's research on technologies (IT Components) available for reuse (either identifying items to be reused in the project or providing a justification on why reuse is not appropriate).

What Are the Other Project Requirements?

- 7) Must include a commitment to register both the development and the reuse of IT Components at grant close-out, per the Terms and Conditions of EN Grants.
- 8) Must include a description of how the project enhances data sharing and availability for immediate stakeholders and organizations across the EN.
- 9) Must align with each of the three (3) principles of the [E-Enterprise Digital Strategy](#) (EEDS), as well as enhance data sharing and availability specifically in the context of the 1st EEDS principle and/or an API-first approach.
- 10) Must demonstrate budget appropriateness.
- 11) Must include a statement on the # of prior EN grants OR explicitly state that no prior EN grant has been awarded.

Are There Any Unallowable Costs?

- Applicants can not request EN grant funds for:
 - *Construction Costs.*
 - *Operations and Maintenance*, including previous EN projects and flows.
 - *Workshops and Conferences* not primarily benefitting the applicant or ones conducted primarily for EPA's benefit.
 - *Pre-Award Costs.*
 - *Management Fees.*
 - *Development and deployment of physical nodes* implementing the Exchange Network protocol and specification.

Can I Request The Use of a Performance Partnership Grant (PPG) or Consolidated Grant (CG)?

States, certain interstate agencies, and tribes can choose to combine two or more environmental program grants into a single PPG.

- Local governments are not eligible for PPGs.

Territories can consolidate various environmental program grants into a single Consolidated Grant (CG).

Applicants who wish to include awarded grant funds in a PPG/CG must:

- Clearly state this in the cover letter and the 'Project Description' section of the project narrative.
- Include the PPG/CG number.

What's Changed in FY24



Changes to the FY24 EN Solicitation Notice (Part I)

- **Section I-B.** EN Assistance Activities and Funding Areas: VES was removed as an EN Project Opportunity; details are provided in a paragraph on SN page 5; remaining references to VES are linked to this paragraph.
- **Section V-A Evaluation Criteria – 4B:** The appropriate budgeting criterion was simplified from FY23's version; applicants are now asked to write a two-part cost rationale for each project output.
- **Section V-A Evaluation Criteria – 5:** The 'historical drawdowns' consideration was removed, as many projects are delayed due to COVID-19 and related staffing/turnover issues. This reduced the overall points under past performance.

Changes to the FY24 EN Solicitation Notice (Part II)

- **VI-B. Administration and National Policy Requirements:** QA language was updated to reflect the new business process and QA Term and Condition developed in FY23.
- Standard annual updates to EN project opportunities in Appendices A-C.
- Minimal changes to applicant guidance in Appendices D, E, F, and G.

Note on Quality Assurance (QA)

- Successful applicants whose projects include environmental information operations will need to submit the appropriate QA documentation as part of their EN Terms and Conditions.
 - EI operations are defined as “the collection, production, evaluation, or use of environmental information” and are applicable to most EN assistance agreements

The EN Grant Program highly recommends that applicants include the preparation of QA documentation as a project goal and/or output and budget for associated costs.

What To Include In Your Application



What Attachments are Required for All Applicants?

- (1) Cover Letter (see optional template [here](#))
- (2) Project Narrative Attachment Form (see optional template [here](#))
- (3) Budget Narrative Attachment Form (See optional template [here](#))
- (4) Application for Federal Assistance (Standard Form ([SF-424](#)))
- (5) Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs ([SF-424A](#))
- (6) Key Contacts Form ([EPA Form 5700-54](#))
- (7) Pre-award Compliance Review Report ([EPA Form 4700-4](#))

What Additional Attachments May Be Required?

- (A) Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement
- (B) Additional Information for Inter-Tribal Consortium
- (C) Formal Project Partners:
 - Including Support Letter(s); Roles & Responsibilities; & Distribution of Funds & Overview of Subaward Budget.
- (D) Formal Project Mentor(s):
 - Including Support Letter(s); Roles & Responsibilities; & Distribution of Funds & Overview of Subaward Budget.
- (E) List of Prior Exchange Network Assistance Agreements
- (F) Documentation Certifying Applicant Status as an Instrumentality of the State or Tribe

- All the above attachments are mandatory if they are applicable to your project -

Project Narrative: Tips & Tricks I

Application reviewers will score up to 10 pages of the project narrative against the evaluation criteria as listed in SN Section V-A.

Application reviewers will not review any part of the project narrative after the tenth page, single spaced.

TRICK: Preview your document under the 'print' function to ensure your formatting isn't causing your document to exceed 10 pages.

TIP: Consider using the optional table templates to save space and help ensure critical elements are included (see Appendix E).

TIP: Use EN terminology as written in the Solicitation Notice and associated guidance.

Project Narrative: Tips & Tricks II

TIP: Be sure to include all 8 sections as identified in Appendix E's 'Mandatory Attachment 2: The Project Narrative'; clearly mark with section headers

TIP: When in doubt, always opt for detailed explanations and rationales.

TIP: Take the time to explain when something is unapplicable or complicated in the context of your proposed project – don't simply ignore the section and/or the prompt (unless the instructions explicitly say to do this).

TRICK: Use the optional pre-submission checklist in Appendix F as a final step to help avoid common errors and omissions.

TRICK: Search the SN using 'ctrl-F' for the phrase 'project narrative', to ensure you have read all relevant information and captured all requirements.

Budget Narrative Attachment Form: Tips & Tricks

Applicants must use this form to itemize and detail project costs across cost categories, as applicable to the proposed project.

This form is a requirement from the Office of Grants and Debarment (OGD), to be used during award processing.

Information on this form is not considered during application scoring; therefore, it may duplicate information provided in other attachments.

Any calculation or categorization errors on this form must be corrected before award processing.

Budget Narrative Attachment Form: Tips & Tricks

TIP: Read the budget section of Appendix D carefully before compiling your project budget, especially sections on contract and indirect costs.

TIP: Do not use any penny amounts in your budget, either during the calculations or in the total amounts per cost category.

TIP: Use the exact calculation formulas, as described in the budget guidance in Appendix D of the Solicitation Notice.

TRICK: Double check your math before submitting this form using the optional Self-Calculating Budget Tool.

Available Resources/Guidance



Project Ideas & Reusability Resource: IT Component Form and Project Registration Web-Area

- Accessible at: <https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/searchable-it-component-and-project-registration-forms>
- Hosts the completed IT Component and Project Registration forms, as required in accordance with the EN Term and Condition:

Grantees must register any newly developed resources (required since 2011) and the reuse of any existing resources (required since 2018).
- Users can search for specific applicant or project types by selecting one or more filters as provided in the field options of this page and view available forms.

Project Ideas & Reusability Resource: Previous EN Projects – EN Website

- Accessible at: <https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/previous-exchange-network-grant-projects>.
- This link provides records of all prior EN grant awards, listed by fiscal year.



Project Ideas & Reusability Resource: E-Enterprise Community Inventory Platform (EECIP)

- Accessible at <https://www.eecip.net>.
- EECIP is an online community and living project inventory for employees of federal, tribal, territorial and state environmental agencies to enter information about agency projects, technical environment and the professional interests of users.
- Users can learn from and collaborate with colleagues and experts and discover, reuse or repurpose the work of others.
- Site search includes projects, agencies, discussion topics and staff.

Appendix D: E-Enterprise Digital Strategy (EEDS) Guidance

- The three principles of the EEDS are the:
 - The 'Information Centric Approach', including an emphasis on 'API-First';
 - The 'Shared Platform Approach'; and
 - The 'Customer Centric Approach'.
- Appendix D of the Solicitation Notice provides an overview of each principle, as well as EN grant relevant examples for each.
- Access the EEDS full text at: [Interim E-Enterprise Digital Strategy V 2.0 \(e-entprisefortheenvironment.net\)](https://www.e-entprisefortheenvironment.net)

Appendix D: Budget Guidance (Across Application Attachments)

- Applicants are highly encouraged to review this SN section in detail.
- Provides guidance on composing a project budget, including:
 - WHERE budget information should be captured.
 - WHAT information (budget and related) should be captured.
 - HOW to correctly capture and calculate budget costs across direct and indirect cost categories.

Other Applicant Resources

- Appendix E of the Solicitation Notice contains:
 - An overview of mandatory application attachment (pages E2 – E10)
 - Includes an overview of the project narrative (see pages E2 – E9).
 - An overview of additional attachments (mandatory if applicable) (see pages E11 – E12).
 - Detailed instructions for submitting applications through Grants.gov (see pages E13 – E14).
- Appendix F of the Solicitation Notice contains an optional pre-submission checklist for applicants.
- The EN website contains detailed applicant FAQs (see <https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/exchange-network-grant-program#Resources>).

Optional, Fillable Templates

- Optional, fillable templates are available to applicants for:
 - the Cover Letter;
 - the Project Narrative; and
 - the Budget Narrative Attachment Form.
- Available as Word documents for ease of applicant access and editing.
- The use of these templates is not required, nor do they guarantee a high application score and/or funding.
 - These tools have been provided to applicants to help ensure all required information is appropriately captured in these required attachments.

Optional, Fillable Templates (Continued)

- Available at: <https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/exchange-network-grant-program#Resources>.
- Applicants using the optional templates should feel free to expand and edit the suggested text as needed/desired.
- Blue text enclosed in brackets signifies text to expand/edit:
 - Change all text to black and remove brackets before submitting; and
 - Remove any sections of blue bracketed text that are not applicable to you.
- Delete all template notes (1st page of each template doc), any in-document notes, and all endnotes before submitting.

Optional, Self-Calculating Budget Tool

- This tool canNOT:
 - Replace any mandatory budget documents like the 424, the budget narrative attachment form, or section 7 of the Project Narrative workplan.
- This tool CAN:
 - Help plan and distribute the budget across categories
 - Correctly categorize and keep track of costs
 - Correctly calculate costs using formulas and proper rounding
 - Keep costs consistent across various parts of the application

Top 10 Applicant Errors/Mistakes to Avoid





#10

Submitting Application Documents in 'Locked' Format

Please be sure that all documents submitted to EPA are unlocked and without password protections.

UNITED STATES



#9

**Not Including
Critical
Information in a
Detailed Project
Plan**

- (1) each project goal and its cost;
- (2) a descriptive title for all output(s) associated with that project goal;
- (3) each output cost;
- (4) a scheduled completion date for each output;
- (5) anticipated outcome(s) affiliated with each project goal;
- (6) the business and/or administrative need(s) which will be supported by each project goal;
- (7) the (one) EPA strategic goal and objective which is most supported by each project goal; and
- (8) a brief general rationale for how output dates were selected and deemed appropriate.



#8

Incorrect Period of Performance Dates

- The EN grant period of performance is 3 years.
 - List the **project start date** as **October 1st, 2024**.
 - List the **project end date** as **September 30, 2027**.
- We encourage applicants to include realistic and generous **scheduled completion dates**

Note: Any applicant can complete their project earlier than the 3-years, if preferred.

Note: Any applicant can request one year no-cost extensions, if needed after the 3-year period of performance.

- This can be requested up to 4 times.

#7

Including Penny Amounts in your Budget and Calculations

Do not include any monetary amounts **less than one dollar anywhere** in your application, including:

- (1) in the budget calculation tables; OR
- (2) in any budget totals.

Round these amounts up or down to the nearest whole dollar amount (unless rounding up exceeds an allowable cost amount).

- *Example:* \$13,369.67 → \$13,370
- *Example:* \$9,898.26 → \$9,898



#6

**Not Calculating
Personnel and
Fringe Costs over
3-Year Period of
Performance**

Annual personnel costs and annual fringe costs should reflect the 3-year period of performance.

UNITED STATES

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

#6

PERSONNEL COSTS EXAMPLE:

Staff Position (Project Role)	Staff Name (If Known)	Annual Salary	% of Time	Annual Cost	Period of Performance (Years)	3- Year Personnel Cost
Project Manager	Neal XXX	\$78,123	10%	\$7,812	3	\$23,436
IT Specialist	Diana XXX	\$64,322	15%	\$9,648	3	\$28,944
Environmental Specialist	Karen XXX	\$53,992	15 %	\$8,099	3	\$24,297
Environmental Specialist	Carlos XXX	\$49,982	10%	\$4,998	3	\$14,994
Total Personnel Costs						\$91,671

FRINGE COSTS EXAMPLE:

Staff Position	Staff Name	3-Year Personnel Cost	Fringe Benefit Rate	3-Year Fringe Cost
Project Manager	Neal XXX	\$23,436	22%	\$5,156
IT Specialist	Diana XXX	\$28,944	12%	\$3,473
Env. Specialist	Karen XXX	\$24,297	25%	\$6,074
Env. Specialist	Carlos XXX	\$14,994	17%	\$2,549
Total Fringe Costs				\$17,252

#5

**Budget Items
Incorrect
Categorized or
'Lumped'
(Not Itemized)**

- Subawards – EN Partnership or Formal Mentor projects only
 - Correctly categorized as 'Other'
- Participant Support Costs
 - Correctly Categorized as 'Other'
- Food and Light Beverages
 - Categorized as 'Other' if provided by applicant
 - Categorized as 'Contract' if included as part of a contractual rental agreement.
- Supply and equipment costs must be itemized

#4

Expired or Incorrectly Calculated Indirect Cost Rates (ICRs)

- Your ICR rate should be valid, at a minimum, through September 30th, 2024; the rate agreement must be submitted with the application.
 - Tribal applicants can submit a draft version of their current year ICR agreement, as submitted to DOI.
 - Tribal applicants may also request a Regulatory Exception to continue to use an expiring/expired fixed rate with carry-forward.
 - All applicants may also elect to use the De Minimis Rate of 10% of modified total direct cost.
- * Please reference your base rate to ensure you are only charging to appropriate categories.

#4

Must be valid until at least September 30, 2024.

Section I: Rates

Type	Effective Period		Rate	Locations	Applicable To
	From	To			
Fixed Carryforward	07/01/19	06/30/20	19.20%*	All	1/
Fixed Carryforward	07/01/19	06/30/20	10.68%**	All	2/

1/ All Other Programs except Fire Suppression

2/ Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants

*Base: Total direct salaries and wages, including fringe benefits. The rate applies to all programs administered by the non-federal entity. To determine the amount of indirect costs to be billed under this agreement, direct salaries and wages and related fringe benefits should be summed and multiplied by the rate. All other program costs should be eliminated from the calculation.

Must be sure to apply the correct rate; EN would be 'all other programs' and therefore Rate 1 (19.20%) applies.

Must be careful to only include in the base amount what is allowable per the agreement. In this case, the base would be the sum of Personnel Costs and Fringe Costs.



#3

Mismatching or Miscalculated Budget Amounts across the Application

- Please ensure that the budgets captured on the following forms **match exactly** before submitting your application:
- *Project Narrative* (sections 2 & 7)
- *Budget Narrative Attachment Form*
- *424 and 424A Forms*
- Triple check the calculations across your budget objects, using the guidance outlined in Appendix D.



#2

Exceeding the Individual Consultant Rate

- An individual consultant is defined as: an individual with specialized skills selected to provide consultation services at a daily or hourly rate that is subject to the consultant cap, as provided in 2 CFR 1500.10.
 - This is charged under the cost category 'contractual'.
- Individual Consultant hourly rates cannot exceed \$91.95.

#1

Using Non-Competitive Procurement Without Allowable Circumstances/ Adequate Justification

Sole-procurement or non-competitive procurement is unallowable in most cases.

Applicants must provide a detailed justification when using this procurement method. (see 2 CFR 200.320(C))

An existing relationship or a history of prior work completed by a contractor or vendor does not justify the use of non-competitive procurement.

Proximity of a contracting firm to an applicant's organization is not sufficient reasoning.

B O N U S

Not Utilizing
the
Guidance as
Listed in
Appendices
D-F

The SN is your friend!

- Appendix D stands for **DEPEND** on it!– Reusability, EEDs and Budget Guidance
- Appendix E stands for **EVERYTHING** you need! -Detailed Instructions of Preparing and Submitting Applications
- Appendix F is the **FINAL** step!- An Optional Pre-Submission Check List to help make sure your application package is complete

Contact Us

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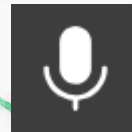
Questions?

Please feel free to ask questions over the phone or through the TEAMs chat

Click the microphone icon to unmute yourself



Muted



Unmuted