Transcript

2014-2015 EPA ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM:
EE LOCAL GRANTS REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
FEBRUARY 10, 2015[1]

>> OPERATOR: Good afternoon. My name is Bonnie, and I will be your conference operator today. At this time, I would like to welcome everyone to the Environmental Education Local Grants conference call. All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. If you should need assistance during the call, please press star then zero, and an operator will come back online to assist you.

Thank you. I would now like to turn the call over to Ms. Karen Scott.

>> KAREN SCOTT: Hello, everybody. As Bonnie said, my name is Karen Scott, and I will be your presenter today.

Okay. We'll start with just a few notes here. Just as a disclaimer, this is just a general overview of the EE Local Grants RFP and the Environmental Education Grant application process. Please consult the RFP, the Request for Proposals, also known as the Solicitation Notice, for complete details.

The information given on this webinar today is not meant to supersede anything that is in that RFP.

The EE Local Grants RFP that we are going to be discussing today is the second of two RFPs that were issued using fiscal year 2014 funds. The deadline for proposals to this RFP, the EE Local Grants RFP, is March 6, 2015.

If you are listening to this webinar through your computer, make sure your speakers are on and the volume is turned up. If you have any trouble with the audio on your computer, click "meeting" and "audio setup wizard" in the upper left corner of your screen, or you can also call the phone line. You may also need to close your connection and try entering the room again if you are having trouble with the audio on your computer.

If you still have trouble hearing the webinar through your computer, then you may call the phone line, and we give the number there, 877-290-8017. And provide the operator the conference ID number 76122942.

If you have trouble with the phone line during the webinar, simply hit #0 and you will get the operator.

During this webinar, we are going to take questions, but only

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[1] Includes minor edits for clarity.

through the Q&A box in Adobe Connect. No questions will be taken through either the phone lines or the audio on your computer. A limited number of questions will be addressed during designated Q&A sessions. And only questions of universal interest. If you have questions unique to your situation, please send them to eegrants@epa.gov. We will do our best to answer those questions over the next few days.

The EE Grants Program has a frequently asked questions page online. Some questions posed today may be posted on that FAQ page with appropriate responses later. So what will we cover today? First we'll go over the basics of the Environmental Education Grant Program and the EE Local Grants Request for Proposals in particular. We'll cover who and what we can and cannot fund, budget and cost items, contents of proposals and the review and selection process for awards. We'll also include helpful resources and tips for success. And finally, we'll give you information about how to get more information about our program and how to ask questions after the webinar is over.

EE Grants Program Introduction and Basics of the EE Local Grants Request for Proposals:

The Environmental Education Grant Program at EPA is sponsored by the Office of Environmental Education, which is in the Office of Public Engagement and Environmental Education. We provide support for projects which design, demonstrate, and/or disseminate environmental education practices, methods, and/or techniques.

The purpose of our grant program is to increase public awareness and knowledge about the environment, to promote environmental stewardship, and to provide the public with the skills they need to weigh various sides of an issue and take responsible actions.

So the basics of the Request for Proposals that is out right now, the EE Local Grants RFP. First and foremost, the deadline is March 6, 2015. That means you have to either hand-deliver your application by close of business on March 6, you have to have your application post marked by March 6, or you have to submit it to grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on March 6.

We anticipate awarding three grants from each of EPA's ten regions. No awards will be made from Headquarters under this RFP. So that means we'll have a total of approximately 30 awards made across the country under this RFP.

The approximate amount of each award will be up to $91,000. We don't anticipate giving out awards for much less than that amount, but be sure not to ask for anything over $91,000 or you will be found ineligible. Proposals must be for locally focused environmental education programs, and I will be defining that a little more clearly in a moment. Proposals must include both educational and environmental priorities, and you'll hear me mention that frequently

throughout this presentation because it's very important to us that your proposal be both educational and focused on environmental priorities.

Finally, you are required to provide matching funds and a subgrant program. And I'll be describing those in detail in a few moments.

So locally focused projects. What do we mean by that? Locally focused projects should help develop informed, knowledgeable, and responsible citizens in the communities in which the project is located. That means that these projects should benefit the environment of the local area of the project and the environmental literacy needs of the local population.

Make sure that you look very carefully at the educational and environmental priorities that we list and define in the RFP. It's very important that you select at least one educational and one environmental priority to focus on with your project.

Partnerships in this program are not required; however, we do believe that partnerships can strengthen your recruitment plans by increasing the potential number and diversity of audiences, that they can increase the variety of and accessibility to the expertise needed to create a local project, and they can assist you in meeting the matching funds requirement.

Further, up to five points can be given to you during the review process for Partnership Letters of Commitment. If you choose not to have partners, be sure you explain how the project will be successful without them, and you can still, then, get up to five points for that explanation during the review process. And I will be explaining more about the review process and scoring a bit later.

It's very important to EPA that we continue finding ways to expand our reach. We want to fund projects that focus on a variety and range of educational and environmental priorities, geographic areas, and audiences. In addition, we recognize that dealing with environmental challenges requires a population that is diverse, informed, and environmentally literate every community needs citizens of all ages willing and able to use critical thinking skills to solve problems that will protect their local environment. We are hoping by expanding our reach we can include more low-income, minority, and tribal communities in particular. We also hope to reach more communities that are likely to be adversely affected by environmental risks.

Question and Answer Session 1:
At this point, you can start sending questions in through the Q&A box. I do have a couple of questions that have come in quite frequently during the application process that I will address first, and then we'll take some of the questions from the Q&A box.

People have said that they see in this RFP that awards will be

made in the regions, and they are asking if any awards will be made in Headquarters.

Under this particular RFP, we will only be making awards in the regions. We just had another RFP close, the EE Model Grants RFP, under which awards are going to be made at Headquarters, but as I said, that RFP has closed.

Another question I get frequently is do funded projects in this grant program need to focus on just teachers and their students, or could they include other community members as well?

And the answer to that is that in our program, we hope to reach audience members of all ages in the whole community. So any age of any audience member would qualify.

So now let's take a few questions from the Q&A box. Let's see. Is there a specific FAQ or instructions on how to fill out the SF-424? There is an appendix in the RFP, I believe it's Appendix A, that gives you detailed instructions step by step on how to fill out the SF-424. It gives you those directions line by line. So please do look at that, and if you still have any trouble filling out that form, please send a question to eegrants@epa.gov.

Okay. Another question. Are you expected to submit a logic model or timeline with your initial concept paper?

The proposal that you send in, yes, you do have to include a logic model and a timeline. If you do not include those, you are in danger of either receiving fewer points because you did not include them or even possibly being eliminated as being ineligible because of an incomplete application. So again, be sure to read the RFP carefully. In the RFP, we do say in several different places what parts you have to submit with your application in order for it to be considered complete and, therefore, eligible. In fact, we have a checklist that is one of the appendices to the RFP, and I strongly urge you to use that checklist, especially just before you send in the application, to make sure that you have included everything that is required.

Okay. I'm looking over the questions to see if we can take one more. Should we include the EPA educational and environmental priorities, goals, and objectives of the subgrantees in the project summary, and can subgrantees be considered partners?

I'll take the second question first, can subgrantees be considered partners? Yes, in some cases, they can, but be very careful that you make that distinction between a subgrantee and a partner. Partners should be integrally involved in the planning and conducting of the project itself. They shouldn't be just simply doing one of the tasks or a couple of activities. They should be really working side by side with the prime recipient to be considered a partner.

Subawardees or subgrantees are simply carrying out one or more tasks that the prime has determined is necessary in order to fulfill

the goals of the project.

Then the other part of that question was should we include the priorities, goals, and objectives of the subgrantees? You do not have to include that in your project summary as far as having to include subgrantee by subgrantee what their goals would be, but overall you should be telling us what the goal of your subgrantee program would be. What are you trying to accomplish by giving out these subgrants? So even though it doesn't have to be in your project summary subgrantee by subgrantee, you should be telling us what the subgrantee program is all about.

I will take one more quickly, and then we'll move on.

And some of the questions we are getting are probably going to be answered in other parts of the presentation, so we won't be going over those quite yet.

Let me see if there's anything more. Actually, it looks like most of these -- well, I'll take one more. It says, are you allowed to focus on more than one environmental priority? And yes, indeed, you can. You can focus on as many as you'd like. But remember, in this particular RFP for the local grants, you are supposed to be figuring out what kind of local topic or environmental topic is important to that local area. So most likely, that means you are only going to be selecting one or two for this RFP for that particular local area just because of the nature of this RFP.

Eligibility:

Okay. Let's move on. We are now going to talk about eligibility. So first, who is eligible to apply? First, I have to say that no individual person is eligible to apply. I've gotten a number of questions about that, and we do not give grants to individual people.

You have to be a local education agency, a college or university, a state education or environmental agency, or a tribal education agency would be one group of types of eligible organizations. Note, too, I have an asterisk there by tribal education agencies because we have to further define them as only the tribal education agencies that are not administered by the Bureau of Indian Education.

You can also be a nonprofit organization as long as you have a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS. You can be a noncommercial educational broadcasting entity as defined by the FCC. And lastly, you must be located in the United States or one of its territories, and the majority of the educational activities must take place in the United States or in the United States and Canada or Mexico or in the U.S. territories.

So what else would affect your eligibility? First, obviously, you must meet the March 6 deadline. You must submit a complete application, so make sure that everything from your work plan, your budget, and your appendices are with your application, and again,

I urge you to use the checklist that we include in the appendices of the RFP to help you make sure that your application and proposal are complete.

Your budget must include a request for approximately but no more than $91,000. You must have a minimum match of 25% of the total budget. And exactly 25% of EPA funds must be spent on subgrants of $5,000 or less. I am going to be going over the match and subgrant requirements in a little more detail in a couple of slides later because those are a couple of areas where a lot of people had to be ruled ineligible last year. So we are trying to make sure people really understand those requirements.

I am also getting a lot of questions about the amount and whether people can submit applications for amounts significantly less than $91,000. I urge you to try to make your application as close as possible to that $91,000 amount because that is the amount that we are expecting to be funding these proposals for.

Also be very careful that you include both an educational and environmental priority, and you can include more than one of each of those, but make sure you have at least one of each named in your proposal.

Make sure that your project has not been previously funded by the EE Grants Program, or if it has, that you have changed it, expanded it, broadened it, or enhanced it in some way that now makes it a significantly different program.

Finally, you can submit more than one proposal, as long as each proposal is for a different project and each one is separately submitted.

So what can we fund and what we cannot fund as far as the content of the proposals. Your proposals must be for environmental education projects that are based on sound science and that teach or enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills that lead to responsible actions to protect human health and the environment.

We cannot fund projects that advocate a particular viewpoint or course of action. We cannot fund lobbying or political activities. We cannot fund non-education-related research or development. We cannot fund technical training of environmental professionals. And we cannot fund construction projects.

Question and Answer Session 2:

>> EMILY SELIA: Hello, everyone. This is Emily Selia from the Office of Environmental Education. I'm here today helping Karen. We want to let you know that due to the amount of questions we are getting, we are going to switch question pods. Please stay tuned for just a moment, and you will see some slight changes on your screen in order for us to be able to sort through some of the questions you have already submitted. We are going to switch out the pod and allow

you to put your remaining questions in the chat box.

Thank you.

>> KAREN SCOTT: Okay. So while they are changing those, I am just going to go over a couple of questions that I have received quite frequently at the eegrants@epa.gov email address.

One question I get a lot is about local government agencies. The RFP says we can fund local education agencies, and it says we can fund state education and environmental agencies but does not mention local government agencies. What you can do in order to qualify as a local government agency is to provide us evidence of the fact that you have authority to conduct education programs, and that can be either by getting some documentation from your state department of education, or you can show us where in the law that governs your agency it says that you can provide educational programs. Or you can provide us with an official mission statement that says that you do educational programs or, finally, provide us evidence that you have provided educational programs in the past.

Another question I have gotten a lot is about collaborations and whether people can submit an application as a consortium of organizations. We cannot accept an application of a consortium of organizations. You will have to select one organization that is eligible as we define eligibility in the RFP, and the rest of the organizations that wanted to be in the consortium can be partners on the project. Make sure if you do it that way, though, that you do get Letters of Commitment from all of those other organizations, so you do get credit for those partnerships.

Then another question I get a lot is about training for environmental professionals. People want to know what we mean by that and whether, for example, you could do training of employees at a wastewater treatment plant or training of staff at other businesses in terms of reducing stormwater runoff from their property.

Sometimes there's a fine line here, and we have to make a call based on detailed information about the project you are anticipating conducting. Most likely, the training of staff at something like a wastewater treatment plant would be deemed ineligible, not eligible, because that would probably be most likely technical training of environmental management professionals.

Educating businesses to adopt more environmentally friendly practices could possibly qualify, but like I said, we would need to get more information from you about that project. So if you have a situation like that that you need information about, please write me at eegrants@epa.gov.

And another question that just in the last couple of days I have gotten quite frequently, I've gotten a lot of questions from people asking things like can we build a trail, or can we build a rain garden, can we build a playground or a nature center with the funds from this

program?

In most of those cases, in most of those projects, that would be deemed construction, and we would not be able to pay for it. Sometimes we have allowed small things like the building of a birdhouse or planting of trees and plants around a school yard or around a riparian zone, and as long as those kinds of things are just a small part of the budget and are part of an educational program and, in fact, necessary to the program in order to teach environmental concepts. We might be able to allow the very small building of, you know, building of, like, a birdhouse or planting of trees. But most of the time these other kinds of projects that I mentioned – digging out a trail or building a rain garden, building a playground or nature center – most of those would, indeed, be deemed as construction, and we would not be able to fund them.

Okay. Do we have questions now?

>> JAVIER ARAUJO: Hi. This is Javier, and I will read the first question. This is from Marty. It says can a tribal government entity, environmental protection office be considered the same as a governmental agency?

>> KAREN SCOTT: Unfortunately, in most cases we have not been able to fund a tribal environmental agency, but we have to take these on a case-by-case basis, so please send me a note at eegrants@epa.gov and explain your situation in more detail, and I can find out for you if you would be eligible.

>> JAVIER ARAUJO: Okay. Another question. Is the prime recipient the only organization that can receive or use more than $5,000 of the funds from the grant?

>> KAREN SCOTT: No. You could have a partner that you have selected to help you either plan for or conduct the project, and that partner could receive a subgrant for more than $5,000, and that subgrant would not count toward that requirement to spend 25% of your EPA funds on a subgrant program. So they could be considered very separate, and your partner could receive, you know, pretty much whatever sum you would think was necessary for them to carry out their part of the project.

>> JAVIER ARAUJO: Another question. Can funds be used to expand another EPA-funded non-EE outreach project?

>> KAREN SCOTT: If by that you mean you would be adding environmental education to a project that previously did not have environmental education in it and had been funded by another part of the EPA, then the answer is yes, we can do that. If you are asking if we can fund a non-environmental education project, no, we cannot. It has to be an environmental education project. But I think you probably meant the former rather than the latter.

Okay. One more question.

>> JAVIER ARAUJO: Can you clarify the restriction on advocating for a particular course of action? For example, can we educate on

waste reduction and provide tools such as composting, recycling, and reuse?

>> KAREN SCOTT: I know there's a fine line between advocacy and environmental education -- or there can be sometimes. From the brief -- very brief -- description you've given right there, that does not sound like advocacy to me. Advocacy to us would mean something more like, you know, advocating for a particular law to be passed in your community or having a writing Congress campaign or sometimes even doing something like creating brochures or pamphlets that you are going to pass out among the public. Sometimes those pamphlets or brochures can cross the line, and instead of informing the public, asks for them to do something, like call their congressman or to stop using a particular brand of light bulb or something like that. So you have to be very careful that you do not cross that line and start advocating for one particular viewpoint, one particular product or against a particular product. You certainly cannot do anything like write your congressman or lobby your local legislature using our funds.

Okay. With that, we should probably move on, and we might be able to get back to some of the other questions later.

Budget and Cost Items/ Contracts and Subgrants:

Okay. Budget and cost items. And some of the questions that have been coming in through the -- I guess it's now the chat box -- are, I think, getting into budget and cost items because I know this can be one of the most complicated parts of putting together a proposal.

Okay. First and foremost, you've got to make sure that you include both an SF-424A, which is the budget sheet, and a detailed budget. The SF-424A is a government form. We only require you to fill out part B, and that's talked about in the RFP. That's a pretty standard forthright form. The detailed budget is one in which we ask you to explain in a narrative how you are going to use the money in each of those categories you provided on the SF-424A. So we just want more detail. Instead of telling us you are going to spend $20,000 on personnel costs, in the detailed budget, we want that breakdown. Who is going to be receiving that funding? You know, what kinds of staff or management are we going to get for that kind of money? How many hours are they going to spend on the project? And so forth. So make sure you include both of those in your proposal.

Contracts versus subgrants. I get a lot of questions about this too, or I get people describing something they are going to do in their project and maybe calling it a contract when actually what they mean is a subgrant. Be very careful that you understand the difference. Contracts are for purchasing services not directly tied to the accomplishment of your goals. Say you are going to be doing

field trips with students, and you want to hire some buses and bus drivers to transport those students to the field site. That would be a contract because you are purchasing services that are simply getting people to a point at which you are actually going to start accomplishing your goal. The buses and the bus drivers are not directly contributing to the accomplishment of that goal.

And keep in mind that those contracted services generally must be competed. Subgrants, however, do not need to be competed, but you must not use them in order to avoid having to compete for contractual services.

Subgrants have to go to eligible entities, and the subgrants should be going to entities that will help plan or implement the main tasks of the project that will directly accomplish your goals.

And kind of tagging on to that same example I gave with the contract where you would contract for buses and bus drivers. But you would probably give a subgrant to a nonprofit organization who would provide naturalists and some space in order to guide students on the field studies that the buses brought them to. So be very careful that you understand the difference because, obviously, in this program, you are going to be giving out subgrants, and you need to know what kinds of activities those subgrants should be paying for.

Indirect costs. Indirect costs are things like rent, admin, office support, and those cannot be reimbursed without a federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement. If you want to charge indirect cost to your proposal and you do not currently have an indirect cost rate agreement, you need to start working with a federal agency to get that done as soon as possible. If you don't know how to go about getting a federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement, please write to me at eegrants@epa.gov, and I can put you in touch with the right people at EPA to help you get started.

Another option would be if you are a nonprofit 501(c)(3), we can allow you to use a flat 10% rate for the life of this grant. But if you are going to choose to do that, please let us know so we make sure you are eligible to use that flat 10% rate.

Matching funds and subgrant funds. This is an area, as I said, where last year we had a lot of people making mistakes in their application, and in some cases, mistakes that were so -- you know, so large that we couldn't ignore them and applications had to be found ineligible. So please feel free to ask questions if there's anything you don't understand about anything in the RFP regarding these or anything else I explained today.

So first of all, with matching funds we require that you provide a match that's the equivalent of a minimum of 25% of the total budget for your project. So for example, if you are putting in a funding request for EPA for $91,000 and your total budget is $121,333, then the minimum match would be $30,333. And you arrive at that minimum

match by dividing that total budget, $121,333, by four. So
one-fourth or 25% of that total budget would equal $30,333. That
is the amount that you must come up with as your match in order to
be found eligible.

Keep in mind that that match can include in-kind services. It
does not have to be cash. And those in-kind services, obviously,
can be provided during the life of the grant so you don't have to
have all of that up front. And the funds that you provide as match
cannot be federal funds.

So for example, referring back to a question we just had, if
you are building on a program that was previously funded with federal
grants, you cannot take some of that money that you got from a federal
entity, whether it's EPA or any other federal agency, and apply that
money toward match. You cannot do that. You have to tell us up front
how you will come up with match that is separate from any other federal
funds you receive.

Subgrants. As I've said, in this program, we require that you
spend 25% of the funds that we give you on sub-grants of $5000 or
less. So in the case of applications to this RFP, if you were to
ask for $91,000, exactly 25% of that $91,000 must be spent on
subgrants of $5,000 or less. The reason we require that is because
of the law that governs our office. That law requires us to make
sure that 25% of the funds that we give out in assistance agreements
is for awards of $5,000 or less.

So giving you an example mathematically, if you were to ask EPA
for $91,000, then exactly $22,750 would have to go to subgrants of
$5,000 or less. Note that in the matching funds, you have to provide
a minimum of 25% of the total project budget. For subgrants, you
must provide exactly 25% of the EPA funds.

In many cases last year, people got confused and mixed up their
requirements between these two, so please read it carefully, and
again, use the checklist we provide in the appendices, where we have
a spot where you can actually do the math to make sure you have figured
out your match and your subgrants correctly.

Another area of budget and cost items where people sometimes
get confused or have questions are in the areas of program income
and food and beverage costs. When we refer to program income, we
mean the money a grant recipient earns as a direct result of a
grant-supported activity. In our program, one of the most frequent
areas of program income comes from workshop fees. So you can charge
workshop fees. What we would usually, then, expect you to do is put
that money back into your grant to pay for eligible, allowable costs
that would further your goals.

You may also use program income to help finance part of the
required matching funds.

Regarding food and beverage costs, these are only allowed for
a working breakfast or lunch. By that we mean having a speaker or

having people break into groups to continue working while they are eating their breakfast or lunch, or you can provide light refreshments during breaks. But we cannot allow you to spend grant funds on evening receptions, banquets, or any events where alcohol is served, entertainment is provided, or funds are solicited.

Question and Answer Session 3:
Okay. So we can get into some questions. These are a couple of questions I receive frequently. I will read through some of those and then go through some of the questions we are receiving from the chat box.

Okay. First question that I am receiving quite frequently - is there any limit to the percentage of matching funds that can be used as in-kind contributions? And no, there is no limit. If you want, your entire match could come from in-kind contributions.

And the second question I am receiving quite frequently is about indirect cost rates, and I believe I went over this a little bit. People ask, do they have to already have an indirect cost rate agreement in place before they submit their proposal, and no, you do not have to have an indirect cost rate agreement in place, but you should start the process for getting that in place as soon as possible when you decide to apply for a grant or, at the very least, within 90 days of the date on which you are awarded a grant from this solicitation.

Also, as I mentioned before, if you are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, there is the possibility of using a flat 10% rate during the life of the grant. But please, if you have any questions about any of this, write to me at eegrants@epa.gov.

Okay. Let's take a couple questions from the chat box. Lots of questions. Okay. We will do a few of them, and like I said, if we have time at the end, I'll take some of these at the end, and I will try to answer others on our FAQ page, or if you will write me at eegrants, I can also answer questions through that.

Okay. Question. Do the subgrantees need to be identified in the grant -- must mean in the proposal -- or can they be identified later through a subapplication process?

You do not need to identify your subgrantees up front in your application. Of course, you can run an application process in order to get those subgrantees later. If you are not going to identify your subgrantees in your application, though, you do have to explain to us how you are going to go about selecting those subgrantees. So make sure you do one or the other, either tell us who they are and how you selected them up front or tell us how you are going to select them later.

Can subawardees be for-profit organizations or businesses?

No, we require that the subgrantees be eligible organizations as we define them in the RFP, and for-profit, commercial

organizations or businesses, are not allowed to receive grants from us, so they cannot receive a subgrant either.

They can receive a contract, obviously, but that's a different issue.

Would multiple schools within the same school district be eligible for subgrants, or can only one subgrant go to the school district?

Yeah, in most states, a local education agency is defined as a school district, and according to our law and our RFP, local education agencies are the eligible entity (schools and school districts are not directly mentioned). But you have to speak with your state department of education to find out how they define it because it is up to each state how they define their LEA or their local education agency. There are a few states that consider each and every school to be a local education agency. But unfortunately, if your state is one that considers a school district to be a local education agency, then that's correct, you can only give a subgrant to a school district, not to a school.

Let's see. I'll take one more. Well, it says, will grants be awarded for less than $91,000. I mentioned this before, but I think it's important to mention again that we are going to be trying to make awards for as close to $91,000 as we can. I've been getting a lot of questions through eegrants@epa.gov asking if people can submit proposals for amounts as low as $10,000, or $20,000. Honestly, those proposals would probably not be competitive under this RFP, and it's not the kind of project we are looking for. We are really looking to make awards very close to that $91,000.

With that, I think I'd better move on, but we will try to answer more questions later or on our FAQs page.

Required Forms for Applications:

Okay. So what is going to have to be in those applications or proposals? Okay. I list a lot here. I will go over those very quickly, but again, all of this is listed in the RFP, and it's on a checklist that we provide in the appendices of the RFP. It's very important that you go through that checklist and make sure that you have included all of these in your proposal before you submit it.

You have to submit a couple of standard forms, standard government forms, the SF-424, which is just the standard application form with some basic information asked for; the budget form, which is the 424A. As I mentioned before, you only have to submit Section B. Now, the work plan. There is an eight-page limit, so make sure that you are very concise, get all the details you need in your proposal, but make sure it's concise because you have an eight-page limit. That eight-page limit would include the project summary, the detailed project description, and the project evaluation.

Next to each one of these, you will see numbers of points. What

I am indicating here is the maximum number of points you can receive during the review process for each one of those in your proposal. Notice that for the detailed project description, you can get a maximum of 45 points, and that is out of a total of 100 points. So obviously, the detailed project description is very important to us. It's very important that you spend a lot of time on that, that you get all the details in it that you need to convey to us so that we understand your proposal and still stay within that page limit.

Make sure you read in detail Sections IV and V of the RFP where we indicate what we expect to see in the project summary, detailed project description, the project evaluation, as well as in the detailed budget and appendices.

The detailed budget I went over earlier. It should have the same order and categories of the 424A but with much greater detail. We want to know in detail how you are going to be spending that money. We do give you an example of a detailed budget in the RFP, so be sure to look for that in the appendices if you don't understand what we are looking for.

And then we expect you to have a number of appendices to your proposal. These would include a timeline with your major activities and milestones spread over the project period; a logic model which would show the outputs and outcomes you are expecting from this project; Partnership Letters of Commitment if you do have partners. If you don't have partners, instead of these Partnership Letters of Commitment, you should be explaining how you would conduct your project without partners. And finally, the programmatic capability and past performance section of your proposal. This is where you are going to explain to us how you think your organization would be capable of being able to complete this project and do it well. And that's based on both the organization's capability and the staff's capability.

Evaluation of Applications:

So how do we review and select applications for funding? First, all eligible applications are evaluated by a panel of reviewers assembled by each regional office, and each panel would include experts in environmental education. And notice I said "all eligible applications are evaluated." So before you can even get to that step, as I said before, you have to make sure that your application is eligible. So go over all the eligibility criteria that we have in Section III to make sure it passes through that first review of the eligibility screening. Then it can be evaluated by a panel of reviewers assembled at each regional office. So each region does their own reviews.

Section V of the RFP is where we assign points to the factors for a possible score of up to 100. So if you want to review how we are scoring everything and what kind of points we give for each one

of the sections of the proposal, read Section V very carefully.

Applications are then ranked from highest to lowest, and the Regional Selection Official is briefed on the score that each application receives, what their ranking was, and other factors that may be considered before the final funding selection is made.

On our website, we provide a number of resources that we have found helpful or applicants have found helpful in the past for conducting their projects. If you are going to be training educators, be sure to look at the "Guidelines for the Preparation and Professional Development of Environmental Educators." If you are going to be developing educational materials, make sure that you look at the "Guidelines for Excellence in EE" series. And all of these are available on our website, and we give you the URL there to access those publications.

When setting up an evaluation for your project, you might want to consult the site, My Environmental Education Evaluation Resource Assistant, or MEEERA, and we give you the URL there for accessing that particular program. All of these, the guidelines and MEEERA, have been partially paid for with EPA funds, and we consider them to be valuable resources.

Tips for Success:

Tips for success. I am not going to read all of these to you, but I will pick out a few that I think we have found to be especially important over the years. First and foremost, make sure your proposal fits the criteria of the RFP. If your program is not the kind of program that we are describing in the RFP and the kind of project you want to do does not seem to fit the criteria that we list, then it's probably not a good idea to spend a lot of time writing a proposal and sending it in. This is a highly competitive program, and your project has to fit in very well with the criteria of our RFP in order to have a chance of getting funded.

Over the years, it has become more and more important to us that we reach culturally diverse and underserved populations. So whenever possible, if you can include those audiences in your project, we consider that to be very important.

It's also, obviously, very important to demonstrate adequate match and the exact subgrant amounts that we are looking for.

And along with that, check your math before you submit your proposal and check it again. Many times we have received applications in which there was obviously a mathematical error. And in some cases, such an obvious and large discrepancy that we've had to deem those applications ineligible. So please review your application's math before you send that in.

Also, do not assume that the reviewers will know your project and the acronyms and specialized terms that you are using in it. Explain everything. And write everything simply and clearly.

Don't leave out details, but still try to stick -- or do stick to that page limit because anything beyond those eight pages may not be read.

And start early. Make sure you leave time to review and edit your proposal before you send it in. Obviously, make sure that you've read the solicitation very, very carefully and the online FAQs before you are turning in your proposal or application. Make sure if you are going to use grants.gov that you have your Authorized Organization Representative register now. Don't wait because we have found that many problems can develop at the last minute. You've got to leave time to be able to solve those problems before you submit your application.

Also make sure that your organization is current in both SAM and DUNS. We had a number of people applying for our last RFP that were not current in one or the other of those and, therefore, had problems entering or submitting their proposal to grants.gov. So check all of that out now.

And after reading the RFP and the FAQs thoroughly, if you still have questions, please do send them to eegrants@epa.gov.

Question and Answer Session 4:

Okay. So we'll take some questions. First I'll just go over a couple that I've gotten quite frequently, and then I'll look at some of the ones that have come in online.

I very often get questions that are phrased something like would it help our proposal, would it strengthen our proposal, would we be more likely to be funded if we were to do this rather than that? And what I've had to tell people over and over again is that we cannot comment on the merits of a proposal idea, especially during an open solicitation time. It would be unfair to the other applicants if we were to discuss proposal ideas with one applicant and not all the others.

Another question I get a lot is could you give some examples of programs that have been funded in the past? As I tell people who ask that question, all the projects we have funded since 1992 are listed with short descriptions on our website. So please go to our website. It's a wealth of information that will help you during your proposal writing process.

Okay. Let's look at a few questions that have come in through the chat box. Okay. A lot of questions again.

Okay. Will a recording of this presentation or the PowerPoint be available later? Yes, they are available already on our grants webpage, the slides are available. The recording of the presentation and possibly a transcript will be available within the next couple of weeks. So please do keep checking our website, and we will get those up as quickly as we can. But the slides are already up there.

Sorry, I am reading these. There are a lot of questions.

Okay. There's a question that says how exact must the project be to the selected EPA environmental goal? For example, addressing climate change and improving air quality, must we do both of those things, or can we do one or the other?

Yes, you could address climate change, for example, and not address air quality or vice versa; could you do air quality and not climate change. If you look at the description of each one of those environmental priorities, you'll see that many different topics are discussed under each of the priorities, and especially in this RFP, where we are expecting you to focus on the local project, we do expect that you will be focusing in on something that is at a much smaller level than some of these priorities are written at.

Please explain the acronyms for SAM and DUNS. Oh, let's see if I can remember them.   I think SAM is Systems for Awards Management, and DUNS is -- I believe it's part of a Dunn and Bradstreet -- you know, that's a listing for businesses, and it's just simply a way for the government to keep track of businesses and organizations. So yeah, we are looking at them online right now, and it looks like, yeah, to get an identification number, it's a nine-digit identification number. In order to go to that, if you just type in "Dunn and Bradstreet," I would imagine even if you put in "DUNS request," this particular website seems to be fedgov.dnb.com, but I am sure you can find that in a number of different ways. We just typed in DUNS and came up with lots of references. But you do have to have that nine-digit DUNS number, and you have to be registered with SAM, which is the System for Award Management. Again, it's just another way for the government to keep track of businesses and organizations that get money from the federal government. Part of it is just to make sure that there's no fraud, waste, and abuse. I'm sure there are lots of other reasons. But you do have to have those numbers, and you do have to be currently registered with SAM or you're not going to get anywhere with grants.gov.

You also have to have an Authorized Organization Representative, an AOR, who is currently registered with grants.gov or you are not going to be able to submit your application online. So please don't wait until the last minute because registering for any of those can take up to a couple weeks, especially if there's any problem at all. So here we are at February 10. Applications are due March 6.
So if I were you, I would not wait one more day to find out if you are current in SAM and in DUNS and that you also have a currently registered AOR, Authorized Organization Representative.

Somebody says they found the funds for many previously funded proposals were for much less than $91,000, even just several thousand dollars. Can you explain this?

Yes. Over the years, our priorities have changed in this

office, and the directions and goals of the office and what we are trying to accomplish have changed. So in the past we may have been looking for very small projects we wanted to fund and the funding of many projects over just a few. This particular year, the decision was made that we wanted to fund fewer projects, but we wanted them to be a little more complex and in depth, and we're hoping that they are very good projects that can be held up as examples of very good environmental education projects. So it was simply a management decision this year, and we'll see how it goes, but that's why you've seen very different funding amounts in the past. It's just been different management decisions every year.

Let's see. Maybe I can take one more, and then we can get to the last part of our presentation.

Oh, here's a good one. If you hire an outside evaluator, are they considered a partner or a subgrantee? Actually, in most cases, I would say the evaluator should be a contractor because it should be a company or an organization or even an individual who can be very objective about the project. If it what was a partner, they would have too much of a vested interest in the project to be objective in doing the evaluation. It could possibly be a subgrantee, but it would really depend on how your evaluation is written up, what you hope to accomplish by it, how you hope to do the funding, and so forth. So if you are going to be hiring an evaluator not as a contractor but as a subgrantee, please write me at eegrants@epa.gov before doing that so I make sure you are going to be doing that properly and that you are truly looking at a subgrantee rather than a contractor.

Okay. We are getting a comment. It says there are obviously many questions coming through from everyone. How will the rest be addressed that you cannot get to during this webinar? We are going to try to capture all these questions, and ones that are not already up on the FAQs page -- because a lot of the questions I see coming in actually are up on our FAQs page, maybe not word for word, you know, the way that you have phrased them, but the answers are there in the FAQs if you look through the whole selection of them, and there are over 100 questions, quite a long list, so do go through all of that before sending in a question to eegrants. But that said, I don't mind your sending questions in. I encourage you to do that. And hopefully people will do that after this webinar. But as many of those that are not answered on the FAQs, you know, as many of those as I can I will get posted to the FAQs as soon as possible.

Okay. So let's try to finish up. We have to finish at 2:30.

Helpful Resources:

Okay. Where do I find more information? I've got the URL up on the screen there. Make sure you go to that website where you can find the frequently asked questions, the helpful resources page, and the past grants that we have awarded since 1992, so that's a very

valuable website for you.

The frequently asked questions that I mentioned several times before can be found at this URL, and you can send additional questions, as I said over and over again, to eegrants@epa.gov. And I would be the one answering them, so I will get to those as quickly as possible.

And again, another disclaimer that we are intending this webinar to just be an overview of the program and the application process, but if I've said anything here today that seems to contradict anything in the RFP or the Solicitation Notice, please note that the RFP is correct. It is always the last word on what goes with this grant process.

Again, my name is Karen Scott, and I have listed my personal email address here at EPA, Scott.Karen@epa.gov, but please only use that if you have some questions about the program in general. If you have questions about this Solicitation Notice, the EE Local Grants Solicitation Notice, please write me at eegrants@epa.gov. Generally, those questions will get answered much faster at that eegrants email address.

With that, that's all the slides I have, so I am going to try to look at a few more questions and maybe answer a few of those before we have to sign off.

Question and Answer Session 5:
Where can we find more information about indirect cost rates or the 10% flat rate for nonprofits? It is on our grants page at EPA, so if you were to go to the main EPA page, I believe on that first front page that you go to, if you just go to epa.gov, I believe one of the main things you can click on just simply says "grants." If not, you can do a search on our site for grants, or you can go to our website, you know, we've given you that URL many times. The main page is epa.gov/education, and right there on our front page under Environmental Education Grants, we have a place where you can click to learn more about how to apply to grants at EPA in general. It says "learn about EE Grants and how to apply." And there that will eventually get you to the grants page at EPA, and that provides lots of resources about all aspects of grants, including indirect costs. But if you do have trouble finding that or you still have particular questions you need answered, please write to me at eegrants@epa.gov, and I can put you in touch with the person who oversees our indirect cost rate agreements here at EPA. Her name is Kysha Holliday, and if you write to me, I can give you her email address and how to get in touch with her.

Let's see. We just have a couple more minutes. There are so many questions. You are asking good questions today. It's hard to figure out which ones to take right now. Let's see. One of them says, do you need to provide detailed receipts from a subgrantee?

That question in general brings up kind of a whole line of questioning that I am getting a lot of lately about subgrantees. We here at EPA cannot dictate to you how you manage your subgrant program. I would advise strongly that you save things like receipts from the subgrantees, that you keep very good records of the money you give to them and how they spend it. We cannot tell you how to do that. We will be asking you for the results of your project, which, obviously, will include the subgrant activities because that's going to be a big chunk, 25% of your EPA funds.

So you will have to be able to tell us what was done with that money, but how you go about administering that program, managing it, and keeping track of what they are doing is up to you. We, as a federal agency, cannot dictate to you, as the primary recipient, how you run that subgrant program. But I do urge you to keep very good records for your own sake.

Let's see. Can the subgrant funds go to a partner agency to distribute instead of the primary agency distributing them directly? That's another good question. Yes, we have had grantees in the past, the prime recipient, who gave a substantial subgrant to one of their partners to actually give out the subgrants. So in this case, for the $91,000, it's, I think, $22,750, something like that, that you have to give out in subawards. So what you could do is, say, give $50,000 to a partner and tell them that it's their job to -- you know, to figure out how to award those subgrants and to administer the subgrant program and to take that $22,750 out of that $50,000 and award them to subgrantees. Yes, that's perfectly legitimate if that's what you want to do.

Just make sure that however you are going to do this, however you are going to manage that subgrant program or have a partner manage it, you explain very thoroughly in your proposal because another thing we found is a lot of proposals have gotten lower scores simply because they did not describe in much detail at all how they were going to manage that subgrant program. It's a big chunk of your money, so we do expect to see a good explanation of that in your proposal.

And with that, I think I am going to have to wrap up. We only have a couple minutes left. But you've really -- you've submitted some great questions. If you don't see the rest of these questions go up online fairly quickly, please do write to me at eegrants@epa.gov, and I would be glad to answer them for you individually. And if you want to go over the slides again, like we said, they are already posted on our site, and we'll have the audio and/or written transcript up as soon as possible.

Thank you very much for joining us today.

>> OPERATOR: This concludes today's conference call. You may now disconnect.