

RFP Q&A: Puget Sound Action Agenda – Implementation Strategies and Actions for Vital Sign Recovery Assistance Program

Below are answers to questions EPA received following our informational webinar on the RFP for Strategic Initiative Leads (R10-PS-2015-001).

1. What is the role of the SI Transition Teams in the process of recommending the next Vital Sign to develop Implementation Strategies?

The current suite of six Vital Signs for implementation strategy development have been selected through a PSP work group and Leadership Council selection process. The SI Transition Teams did not have a specific role in recommending the next Vital Signs to develop Implementation Strategies.

2. What is the role of PSP in the SI Lead-run Implementation Strategy technical workgroups?

EPA sees PSP performing a supporting role to the SI Leads and the technical workgroups by advising on the methodology for developing the Implementation Strategies. PSP's support will help ensure that implementation strategy development is consistent with existing ISs and across the SI groups, and that they incorporate all the necessary elements endorsed by the Science Panel. PSP may also assist in efforts alongside the SI leads, to engage the right experts in the wider recovery community for each Vital Sign in sequence.

3. What role, generally, does EPA envision that PSP will have in the SI Teams?

The primary roles of leading, coordinating, and facilitating the teams will be performed by the Strategic Initiative Leads. EPA envisions that PSP would continue to have a staff person participate on the SI Teams for coordination on how the SI Team work feeds into the Action Agenda, performance management, etc.

4. Is there a centralized vision/plan to synchronize, consolidate and streamline the sub-award process? Does EPA envision PSP coordinating that effort among the SITTs?

At present, no, there is not a centralized vision / plan around these objectives. EPA would be the central coordinating body to work with the SI Leads as direct recipients of EPA funds, to work towards these objectives. PSP has committed to EPA that they are ready and willing to help where they can.

5. What is the process for ranking the NTAs? Will PSP facilitate that among the SI Teams? Will they be ranked by Strategic Initiative?

Yes, PSP will facilitate ranking of NTAs among the SI Transition Teams, using criteria established and published in the NTA solicitation. This will be reviewed by SI Leads. Additional considerations for ranking if necessary will be established in collaboration with PSP representing the Management Conference and with EPA, and communicated to the SI Transition teams. It makes sense that NTAs will be ranked by Strategic Initiative as appropriate so that SI Transition team ranking can help inform later SI Lead funding decisions among the three areas of work- however a single combined ranked list of NTAs will be created for use by the PSP to report to the state legislature. Cross-cutting NTAs may not fit this grouping by Strategic Initiative, so a different way to incorporate cross

cutting NTAs into the ranking / funding decision process will need to be worked out. EPA expects that this decision process for Cross cutting NTAs will be worked out in collaboration with PSP and EPA and provided as guidance to the SI Transition teams. (If this cross-cutting NTA ranking issue persists beyond the duration of the SI Transition teams, then EPA expects collaboration between the selected SI Leads, PSP and EPA to address this.)

6. **Who evaluates the progress toward Vital Sign targets?** *Page 9 says that “For each Strategic Initiative, Leads will lead the identification of actions to be accomplished right away (Near Term Actions), development of longer term sequences of actions, and recommend allocations of funding and other resources to implement the specific strategies and actions and evaluations of progress toward identified targets. Please let us know what the expectation is for the SI Teams.*

The PSP will continue to facilitate tracking, reporting, and PSEMP assessment of the Vital Signs. EPA expects that SI Leads will monitor performance of NTAs and Implementation Strategies that SI Leads fund through subawards, and provide the data from subaward monitoring to the Management Conference so that it can be used in consideration of progress towards the Vital Sign targets. EPA envisions that PSP and SI Leads will be partners, along with EPA, in identifying and implementing a more formal adaptive management process. There is the vision of transitioning to an implementation strategy based workplan for Action Agenda updates and the SI Leads would be central to the partnering work with PSP and EPA to accomplish this.

7. **The SI Teams have been asked to rank NTAs within the Action Agenda. What is the relationship between ranking NTAs and EPA’s expectation for NEP funding decisions?**

EPA expects that the ranked list of NTAs will be the basis for EPA Puget Sound (e.g. NEP) funding decisions. Any deviations from that ranked list will be need explained in the context of overall funding strategies including sources other than EPA Puget Sound funds, or in rare cases for technically justified variances. Identification of additional potential funding sources for approved NTA’s will be considered by the SI leads in evaluating funding decisions.

8. **The EPA solicitation describes funding awards both competitively and non-competitively. What, in this model, qualifies as non-competitive vs. competitive?**

Under the new funding model and the Partnership’s complimentary planning model, future Action Agendas will include technically reviewed NTAs included in a 2-year implementation plan. In general these NTAs are eligible for direct awards provided that there is an identified and legally eligible entity who will be fiscally responsible for the EPA funding through subawards from the SI Leads. Some NTAs, more regional in scope might best distributed through a competitive process. There may be other NTA characteristics that would make direct awarding not feasible or desirable. There may be critical gaps, not addressed by adopted NTAs, or critical science and monitoring needs which may be addressed through competitive solicitations for actions. The criteria for determining competitive subawards versus direct subawards will be part of the workplan drafting and approval process between the selected SI leads and EPA.