

AGENCY: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)

TITLE: RESTORE Gulf of Mexico Conservation Enhancement Grants Program

ACTION: Request for Proposals (RFP)

RFP NUMBER: EPA-GM-2017-RESTORE-GMCEGP

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE (CFDA) NO: 66.130

DATES: Proposal packages must be submitted electronically to EPA through Grants.gov (<http://www.grants.gov>) no later than **Friday, February 23rd** in order to be considered for funding.

SUMMARY: This notice announces the availability of funds and solicits proposals to enhance private/public partnerships that support land protection and conservation across the Gulf Coast. This program will be aimed at land conservation organizations such as land trusts, NGOs, and state land preservation agencies across the Gulf region.

FUNDING/AWARDS: The total estimated funding for this competitive opportunity is approximately \$2.3 million. The amount of federal funding per award is estimated to range from approximately \$150,000 to \$500,000. EPA anticipates awarding approximately 5-12 grants from this announcement, subject to availability of funds.

Tentative Timeline

December 7th	RFP Posted
December 21st	Q&A posted at https://www.epa.gov/gmpo/ . Please submit questions to GMP-RFP@epa.gov . Q&A will be updated weekly, if new questions are received, with final Q&A posted on February 16th.
February 23rd	Proposals Due to the Gulf of Mexico Program
March 27th	EPA Issues Notice of Tentative Award
July 24th	EPA Funds Approved Application Package

The above lines (other than the proposal submission date) are anticipated dates and subject to change.

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I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Background

The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill led to passage of the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast Act (RESTORE Act) in 2012. The Act dedicates 80 percent of all Clean Water Act administrative and civil penalties related to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill to the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund (Trust Fund). The Act also created the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council).

The Council is an independent Federal agency and its membership is comprised of the Governors of the States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, as well as the Secretaries of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Army, Commerce, Homeland Security and the Interior, and the Administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The U.S. Department of Agriculture currently serves as the Chair of the Council. The Council is responsible for helping to restore the ecosystems and economies of the Gulf Coast region by developing and overseeing implementation of a Comprehensive Plan to undertake projects and programs, using the best available science, which would restore and protect the natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, coastal wetlands, and the economy of the Gulf Coast. In accordance with the Comprehensive Plan, the Council selects all projects, programs, and activities that will be funded and list them on the Council's approved Funded Priorities List (FPL)

(https://restorethegulf.gov/sites/default/files/FPL_forDec9Vote_Errata_04-07-2016.pdf).

The RESTORE Council acts through the federal and state Council members to expend Trust Funds to carry out Comprehensive Plan projects and programs. The Council enters into Interagency Agreements with EPA to expend funds to carry out EPA-assigned Comprehensive Plan projects and programs included in the Funded Priorities List (FPL). To carry out the Council assigned projects/programs, EPA then issues grants to pre-selected entities identified in the particular FPL project/program or to competitively selected, eligible entities whenever the FPL project/program requires competition.

This particular federal funding opportunity supports EPA in carrying out the following Council assigned FPL project:

- *Gulf of Mexico Conservation Enhancement Grants Program (GMCEGP)* will enhance private/public partnerships that support land protection and conservation across the Gulf Coast. This funding will enhance land protection and conservation in priority landscapes of the Gulf, improve habitats and water quality across the Gulf, and enhance the understandings of the benefit of land protection to communities through focused outreach and education supporting conservation and stewardship.

In addition to carrying out its responsibilities, the Council is committed to public engagement and coordinating with other Gulf Coast restoration initiatives, including the Natural Resource Damage Assessment for the Oil Spill, to ensure that restoration efforts are community-supported and complementary. To read more about the RESTORE Act, the Council, the Comprehensive Plan and the Funded Priorities List, just click on this link www.RestoreTheGulf.gov.

B. Scope of Work

Under this solicitation, the EPA will make RESTORE funds available to enhance private/public partnerships that support land protection and conservation across the Gulf Coast. This program will be aimed at land conservation

organizations such as land trusts, NGOs, and state land preservation agencies across the Gulf region. The RESTORE Gulf of Mexico Conservation Enhancement Grants Program has several objectives:

- Enhance land protection and conservation in priority landscapes of the Gulf;
- Improve habitats and water quality across the Gulf; and
- Enhance the understandings of the benefit of land protection to communities through focused outreach and education supporting conservation and stewardship.

Activities included in proposals submitted under this funding opportunity must be conducted within the “Gulf Coast Region”, which includes the following areas:

- In the Gulf Coast States (Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas), the coastal zones that border the Gulf of Mexico; and
- Any adjacent land, water, and watersheds within 25 miles of the coastal zones;

Applicants must provide a non-federal match of 50% of the total cost of the project. The proposal should also demonstrate coordinated efforts between land conservation groups and include projects that are *foundational* and *sustainable* to habitat protection and conservation and water quality improvement for the Gulf of Mexico. Examples of these types of projects include:

- Assistance to land conservation organizations to conduct necessary due diligence and conservation baseline assessments;
- Restoration or enhancement of previously preserved conservation lands (e.g. invasive species removal, hydrologic restoration);
- Regional assessments of conservation effectiveness;
- Economic evaluation of land conservation and restoration
- Economic evaluation of ecological services provided by the restored conservation land.

This funding CANNOT be used to purchase or to acquire easements on land for conservation.

C. EPA Strategic Plan Linkage & Anticipated Outcomes, Outputs & Performance Measures

1. Linkage to EPA Strategic Plan and Current EPA Priorities. EPA’s draft Strategic Plan is available at <http://www.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan.html>. The activities to be funded under this announcement will be linked to EPA’s strategic plan consistent with EPA’s current priorities for clean and safe water efforts focused on ensuring clean and safe water by improving water infrastructure and supporting drinking water, aquatic ecosystems, and recreational, economic and subsistence activities. Applicants must explain in their proposal how their project will further these current priorities.

2. Environmental Results. EPA also requires that grant applicants adequately describe environmental outputs and outcomes to be achieved under assistance agreements (see EPA Order 5700.7A1, Environmental Results under Assistance Agreements, https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-03/documents/epa_order_5700_7a1.pdf). Applicants must include specific statements describing the environmental results of the proposed project in terms of well-defined outputs and, to the maximum extent practicable, well-defined outcomes that will demonstrate how the project will contribute to the priorities described above.

Outputs. The term “output” means an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product related to an environmental goal and objective that will be produced or provided over a period of time or

by a specified date. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative but must be measurable during an assistance agreement funding period. Proposals would likely include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a) Acres restored/protected
- b) Linear feet of shoreline restored/protected
- c) Acres of upland habitat restored/protected
- d) Acres restored/protected by removal of invasive species
- e) Report on Enhanced or Restored Water Quality as a Result of Conservation Activities

Progress reports and a final report will also be a required output for every project, as specified in Section VI(C) of this announcement, "Reporting Requirement."

Outcomes. The term "outcome" means the result, effect or consequence that will occur from carrying out an environmental program or activity that is related to an environmental or programmatic goal or objective. Outcomes may be qualitative and environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic in nature, but must also be quantitative. Examples of outcomes for this project could include:

- a) Conservation of Habitat
- b) Enhancing land protection and conservation in priority landscapes
- c) Improving habitats and water quality on conserved lands
- d) Enhancing the understandings of the benefit of land protection through focused outreach and education supporting conservation and stewardship
- e) Developing and implementing conservation management plans
- f) Protecting critical aquatic habitat
- g) Restoring and managing critical aquatic shoreline and upland habitat utilizing hydrologic, landscape, vegetation and wildlife management actions

Additional information regarding EPA's definition of environmental results in terms of "outputs" and "outcomes" can be found at: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-03/documents/epa_order_5700_7a1.pdf.

Project Performance. During preparation of the proposal, the applicant should consider the following questions in order to develop output and/or outcome measures which document project results:

- i) What are the measureable short term and longer term results that the project will achieve?
- ii) How will the applicant measure progress in achieving the expected and measureable results?

D. Supplementary Information.

The statutory authority for this action is the Restore Act, §311(t)(2)(E)(ii)(II), which authorizes funds to be transferred by the Secretary of the Treasury for the Trust Fund through the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council to that Federal agency or Gulf Coast State to carry out projects and programs adopted in the Comprehensive Plan. EPA may award grants or cooperative agreements with these funds under RESTORE Act §311(t)(2)(E)(i).

II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. What is the amount of funding available?

The total estimated funding expected to be available for awards under this competitive funding opportunity is approximately \$2.3 million.

B. How many agreements will EPA award in this competition?

The total estimated amount available under this announcement is approximately \$2.3 million of RESTORE funds. The amount of federal funding per award is estimated to range from approximately \$150,000 to \$500,000. EPA anticipates awarding approximately 5 to 12 cooperative agreements under this solicitation, subject to the availability of funds, quality of evaluated proposals, and other applicable considerations.

In addition, EPA reserves the right to make additional awards under this announcement, consistent with Agency policy, if additional funding becomes available after the original selections. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than six months from the date of the original selections.

C. Partial Funding

In appropriate circumstances, EPA reserves the right to partially fund proposals by funding discrete portions or phases of proposed projects. If EPA decides to partially fund a proposal, it will do so in a manner that does not prejudice any applicant or affect the basis upon which the proposal was evaluated and selected for award and therefore maintains the integrity of the competition and selection process.

D. What is the project period for awards resulting from this solicitation?

The estimated project period for awards resulting from this solicitation will begin in Calendar Year 2018. Proposed project periods may be up to three years.

E. Funding Type

The funding for selected projects will be in the form of a cooperative agreement. Cooperative agreements permit substantial involvement between the EPA Project Officer and the selected applicants in the performance of the work supported. Although EPA will negotiate precise terms and conditions relating to substantial involvement as part of the award process, the anticipated substantial Federal involvement for this project will be:

- close monitoring of the successful applicant's performance to verify the results proposed by the applicant;
- collaboration during performance of the scope of work;
- in accordance with 2 CFR 317 and 2 CFR 318, review of proposed procurement;
- approving qualifications of key personnel (EPA will not select employees or contractors employed by the award recipient);
- review and comment on reports prepared under the cooperative agreement (the final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient).

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Entities

The following entities are eligible to apply for funding under this announcement unless restricted by the authorizing statute(s); State and local governments, interstate agencies, Tribes, colleges and universities, and other public or non-profit organizations.

Non-profit organization, as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative or other organization that: (1) is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable or similar purposes in the public interest; (2) is not organized primarily for profit; and (3) uses its net proceeds to maintain, improve and/or expand its operations. Note that 2 CFR Part 200 specifically excludes the following types of organizations from the definition of “non-profit organization” because they are separately defined in the regulation: (i) institutions of higher education; and (ii) state, local and federally-recognized Indian tribal governments. While not considered to be a “non-profit organization(s)” as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, Institutions of Higher Education and state, local and federally-recognized Indian tribal governments are, nevertheless, eligible to submit applications under this RFA. Hospitals operated by state, tribal, or local governments or that meet the definition of nonprofit at 2 CFR 200.70 are also eligible to apply. For-profit colleges, universities, trade schools, and hospitals are ineligible.

For-profit organizations are not an eligible entity for this funding opportunity. Additionally, non-profit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

Matching funds of 50% of the total project cost are required under this competition based on the RESTORE Council assigned Funded Priority List. Accordingly, EPA is requiring applicants to identify the non-federal match of 50% on Form 424(A). A 50% match means EPA will fund a maximum of 50% of the total project cost, which is essentially an equal cost share of the total project cost with the applicant. Matching funds can come in the form of cash and in-kind contributions, such as the use of volunteers and/or donated time, equipment, expertise, etc., consistent with the regulations governing matching fund requirements (2 CFR §200.306) from your own organization and/or your project partners. Federal funds may not be used to meet the match requirement for this grant program unless authorized by the statute governing their use.

C. Threshold Eligibility Criteria

These are requirements that if not met by the time of proposal submission will result in elimination of the proposal from consideration for funding. Only proposals from eligible entities (see above) that meet all of these criteria will be evaluated against the ranking factors in Section V of this announcement. Applicants deemed ineligible for funding consideration as a result of the threshold eligibility review will be notified within 15 calendar days of the ineligibility determination.

1. **Substantial Compliance:** Proposals must substantially comply with the proposal submission instructions and requirements set forth in Section IV of this announcement or else they will be rejected. However, where a page limit is expressed in Section IV with respect to the narrative proposal, pages in excess of the page limitation will not be reviewed.
2. **Proposal Submission:** In addition, proposals must be submitted through Grants.gov as stated in Section IV of this announcement (except in the limited circumstances where another mode of submission is specifically allowed for as explained in Section IV) on or before the proposal submission deadline published in Section IV of this announcement. Applicants are responsible for following the submission instructions in Section IV of this announcement to ensure that their proposal is timely submitted.
3. **EPA Strategic Plan:** Proposals must support the EPA Strategic Goals identified in Section I.C.

4. **Program Relevance:** Proposals must provide at least one of the following benefits to be considered:
 - a. Enhance land protection and conservation in priority landscapes of the Gulf;
 - b. Improve habitats and water quality across the Gulf;
 - c. Enhance the understandings of the benefit of land protection to communities through focused outreach and education supporting conservation and stewardship.
5. **Funding Request:** Projects requesting more than \$500,000 of federal funds will not be considered for funding.
6. **Fifty Percent (50%) Match:** Applicants must demonstrate in their proposal how they will provide a 50% match of the total project cost as described in Section III. B.
7. **Project Location:** Projects must take place in the “Gulf Coast Region,” as defined in Section I.B., or they will not be considered for funding.
8. **Ineligible Activities:** If the proposal includes the use of RESTORE funding (source of this RFP) for the purchase of land or an easement, the proposal will not be considered.

IV. PROPOSAL AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Requirement to Submit Through Grants.gov and Limited Exception Procedures

Applicants, except as noted below, must apply electronically through Grants.gov under this funding opportunity based on the grants.gov instructions in this announcement. If an applicant does not have the technical capability to apply electronically through grants.gov because of limited or no internet access which prevents them from being able to upload the required application materials to Grants.gov, the applicant must contact OGDWaivers@epa.gov or the address listed below in writing (e.g., by hard copy, email) at least 15 calendar days prior to the submission deadline under this announcement to request approval to submit their application materials through an alternate method.

Mailing Address:

OGD Waivers
c/o Jessica Durand
USEPA Headquarters
William Jefferson Clinton Building
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N. W.
Mail Code: 3903R
Washington, DC 20460

Courier Address:

OGD Waivers
c/o Jessica Durand
Ronald Reagan Building
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Rm # 51278

In the request, the applicant must include the following information:

- Funding Opportunity Number (FON)
- Organization Name and DUNS
- Organization's Contact Information (email address and phone number)
- Explanation of how they lack the technical capability to apply electronically through Grants.gov because of 1) limited internet access or 2) no internet access which prevents them from being able to upload the required application materials through Grants.gov.

EPA will only consider alternate submission exception requests based on the two reasons stated above and will timely respond to the request -- all other requests will be denied. If an alternate submission method is approved, the applicant will receive documentation of this approval and further instructions on how to apply under this announcement. Applicants will be required to submit the documentation of approval with any initial application submitted under the alternative method. In addition, any submittal through an alternative method must comply with all applicable requirements and deadlines in the announcement including the submission deadline and requirements regarding proposal content and page limits (although the documentation of approval of an alternate submission method will not count against any page limits).

If an exception is granted, it is valid for submissions to EPA for the remainder of the entire calendar year in which the exception was approved and can be used to justify alternative submission methods for application submissions made through December 31 of the calendar year in which the exception was approved (e.g., if the exception was approved on March 1, 2017, it is valid for any competitive or non-competitive application submission to EPA through December 31, 2017). Applicants need only request an exception once in a calendar year and all exceptions will expire on December 31 of that calendar year. Applicants must request a new exception from required electronic submission through Grants.gov for submissions for any succeeding calendar year. For example, if there is a competitive opportunity issued on December 1, 2017 with a submission deadline of January 15, 2018, the applicant would need a new exception to submit through alternative methods beginning January 1, 2018.

Please note that the process described in this section is only for requesting alternate submission methods. All other inquiries about this announcement must be directed to the Agency Contact listed in Section VII of the announcement. Queries or requests submitted to the email address identified above for any reason other than to request an alternate submission method will not be acknowledged or answered.

B. Submission Instructions

The electronic submission of your application must be made by an official representative of your institution who is registered with Grants.gov and is authorized to sign applications for Federal assistance. For more information on the registration requirements that must be completed in order to submit an application through grants.gov, go to Grants.gov and click on "Applicants" on the top of the page and then go to the "Get Registered" link on the page. If your organization is not currently registered with Grants.gov, please encourage your office to designate an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) and ask that individual to begin the registration process as soon as possible. Please note that the registration process also requires that your organization have a DUNS number and a current registration with the System for Award Management (SAM) and the process of obtaining both could take a month or more. Applicants must ensure that all

registration requirements are met in order to apply for this opportunity through grants.gov and should ensure that all such requirements have been met well in advance of the submission deadline. Registration on grants.gov, SAM.gov, and DUNS number assignment is FREE.

Applicants need to ensure that the AOR who submits the application through Grants.gov and whose DUNS number is listed on the application is an AOR for the applicant listed on the application. Additionally, the DUNS number listed on the application must be registered to the applicant organization's SAM account. If not, the application may be deemed ineligible.

To begin the application process under this grant announcement, go to Grants.gov and click on "Applicants" on the top of the page and then "Apply for Grants" from the dropdown menu and then follow the instructions accordingly. Please note: To apply through grants.gov, you must use Adobe Reader software and download the compatible Adobe Reader version. For more information about Adobe Reader, to verify compatibility, or to download the free software, please visit Adobe Reader Compatibility Information on Grants.gov

You may also be able to access the application package for this announcement by searching for the opportunity on Grants.gov. Go to Grants.gov and then click on "Search Grants" at the top of the page and enter the Funding Opportunity Number, EPA EPA-GM-2017-RESTORE-GMCEGP, or the CFDA number that applies to the announcement (CFDA 66.130), in the appropriate field and click the Search button.

Please Note: Applications submitted through Grants.gov beginning January 1, 2018 must be submitted through the "Workspace" feature. Information on the Workspace feature can be found at the [Grants.gov Workspace Overview](#) Page.

Application Submission Deadline: Your organization's AOR must submit your complete application package electronically to EPA through Grants.gov **no later than Friday, February 23rd 11:59 PM ET**. Please allow for enough time to successfully submit your application process and allow for unexpected errors that may require you to resubmit.

Please submit all of the application materials described below using the grants.gov application package that you downloaded using the instructions above. For additional instructions on completing and submitting the electronic application package, click on the "Show Instructions" tab that is accessible within the application package itself.

Application Materials

The following forms and documents are required under this announcement:

Mandatory Documents:

1. Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
2. Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)
3. Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)
4. Narrative Proposal (Project Narrative Attachment Form)-prepared as described in Section IV of the announcement

Applications submitted through grants.gov will be time and date stamped electronically.

Please confirm receipt from EPA (not from grants.gov) within 30 days of the application deadline by emailing gmp-rfp@epa.gov. Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

C. Technical Issues With Submission

1. Once the application package has been completed, the “Submit” button should be enabled. If the “Submit” button is not active, please call Grants.gov for assistance at 1-800-518-4726. Applicants who are outside the U.S. at the time of submittal and are not able to access the toll-free number may reach a Grants.gov representative by calling 606-545-5035. Applicants should save the completed application package with two different file names before providing it to the AOR to avoid having to re-create the package should submission problems be experienced or a revised application needs to be submitted.

2. Submitting the application. The application package must be transferred to Grants.gov by an AOR. The AOR should close all other software before attempting to submit the application package. Click the “submit” button of the application package. Your Internet browser will launch and a sign-in page will appear. Note: Minor problems are not uncommon with transfers to Grants.gov. It is essential to allow sufficient time to ensure that your application is submitted to Grants.gov BEFORE the due date identified in Section IV of the solicitation. The Grants.gov support desk operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, except Federal Holidays.

A successful transfer will end with an on-screen acknowledgement. For documentation purposes, print or screen capture this acknowledgement. If a submission problem occurs, reboot the computer – turning the power off may be necessary – and re-attempt the submission.

Note: Grants.gov issues a “case number” upon a request for assistance.

3. Transmission Difficulties. If transmission difficulties that result in a late transmission, no transmission, or rejection of the transmitted application are experienced, and following the above instructions do not resolve the problem so that the application is submitted to Grants.gov by the deadline date and time, follow the guidance below. The Agency will make a decision concerning acceptance of each late submission on a case-by-case basis. All emails, as described below, are to be sent to Rachel Houge at houge.rachel@epa.gov with the FON in the subject line. If you are unable to email, contact Rachel Houge at 228-304-7441. Be aware that EPA will only consider accepting applications that were unable to transmit due to Grants.gov or relevant www.Sam.gov system issues or for unforeseen exigent circumstances, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access. Failure of an applicant to submit timely because they did not properly or timely register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov is not an acceptable reason to justify acceptance of a late submittal.

a. If you are experiencing problems resulting in an inability to upload the application to Grants.gov, it is essential to call Grants.gov for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 before the application deadline. Applicants who are outside the U.S. at the time of submittal and are not able to access the toll-free number may reach a Grants.gov representative by calling 606-545-5035. Be sure to obtain a case number from Grants.gov. If the problems stem from unforeseen exigent circumstances unrelated to Grants.gov, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access, contact Rachel Houge at 228-304-7441.

b. Unsuccessful transfer of the application package: If a successful transfer of the application cannot be accomplished even with assistance from Grants.gov due to electronic submission system issues or unforeseen exigent circumstances, and you have already attempted to resolve the issue by contacting Grants.gov, send an email message to houge.rachel@epa.gov prior to the application deadline. The email message must document the problem and include the Grants.gov case number as well as the entire application in PDF format as an attachment.

c. Grants.gov rejection of the application package: If a notification is received from Grants.gov stating that the application has been rejected for reasons other than late submittal and it is too late to reapply, promptly send an email to Rachel Houge at gmp-rfp@epa.gov with the FON in the subject line within one business day of the closing date of this solicitation. The email should include any materials provided by Grants.gov and attach the entire application in PDF format.

D. Content of Proposal Submission

Applicants must include the information outlined below in their proposals. The proposal narrative section as described below must be no longer than ten (10) pages in total; pages in excess of this page limitation will not be reviewed. Applicants must also ensure that the proposal narrative provides information addressing all of the proposal evaluation criteria identified in Section V.A. and the threshold eligibility criteria identified in III.C. Forms 424, 424(A), 424(B), a map, and letters of support DO NOT count toward the 10-page limit.

□ Standard Form (SF) 424, Application for Federal Assistance

Complete the form (available at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-grantee-forms>). For form instructions see, <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/form-instructions/sf-424-instructions.html> **Please be sure to include organization email address in Block 5 of the Standard Form SF 424.**

Please note that the organizational Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number must be included on the SF-424. Organizations may obtain a DUNS number at no cost by calling the toll-free DUNS number request line at 1-866-705-5711.

□ Standard Form (SF) 424A, Budget Information

Complete the form (available at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-grantee-forms>). For form instructions see, <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/form-instructions/sf-424a-instructions.html>.

□ Standard Form (SF) 424B, Assurances for non-construction forms

Complete the form (available at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-grantee-forms>).

□ Attachments. These are not included in **the ten-page limit**.

- a. Letters of Support (REQUIRED). Please attach letters of support for partnerships and fifty percent match.
- b. Biographical Sketch (optional – will not be considered during evaluation). If desired, provide biographical sketch of Principal Investigators and/or any other key personnel.
- c. If applicable, approval letter to use alternate means to submit application.

□ Narrative Proposal

The Narrative Proposal (**sections 1-3 below**) cannot exceed a maximum of **ten single-spaced** typewritten pages. EPA recommends that proposals be in 12-point font or larger and readability is of paramount importance.

1) Proposal Information Page (one page only – included in ten-page limit)

- a. Project Title
- b. Applicant Information. Include applicant (organization) name, address, contact person, phone number, fax, e-mail address and DUNS number.
- c. Total Project Cost. Specify total cost of the project, percentage of funds requested from EPA, percentage of matching funds and brief description of source of matching funds.
- d. Briefly describe how your project meets the EPA priorities (See Section I.C for more information)
- e. Project Description. Please summarize your project.

- f. Measurable Outputs. Provide a brief description of the major outputs of your project.
- g. Place of Performance. Please describe the area(s) where your project will take place.
- h. Project period. Provide anticipated project start date and anticipated project completion date.

2) Narrative Proposal (included in ten-page limit)

The narrative proposal must explicitly describe how the proposed project meets the guidelines established in Sections I-III of this announcement (including the threshold eligibility criteria in Section III.C), and must address each of the evaluation criteria set forth in Section V.

a) **Project Description/Approach:** The summary shall contain the following components:

- i. Detailed project information, including demonstrating coordinated efforts that are foundational and sustainable to habitat protection and conservations and water quality improvement, description of specific actions and methods to be undertaken and the responsible institutions, including estimated time line for each task. Enough detail should be provided to assess project success without requiring more information from applicant.
- ii. Explanation of project benefits to the public, and specifically the potential audience(s) served.
- iii. Describe your project partners' involvement in carrying out your project. To the extent applicable, identify partnerships that will contribute to project success and ongoing implementation beyond the grant period. Provide specifics as to each partner's activities. Provide letters of support (which do not count towards the page limit) from partners to document their role. Describe how project partners will contribute to the project's stated environmental outcomes.
- iv. For awards under this competition that are expected to exceed \$200,000 in federal funding **AND** involve the generation or use of environmental data, please provide a statement acknowledging 1) your need to demonstrate competency prior to beginning work and 2) your understanding that a Quality Management Plan (QMP) and/or a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) may be required.
- v. Additional information regarding EPA's definition of environmental results in terms of "outputs" and "outcomes" can be found at: <https://www.epa.gov/grants/linking-assistance-agreements-environmental-results>. For a logic model of environmental outputs and outcomes, please see the following: <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/draft-envresults-forsfbaywebsite-revisedfinal.pdf>.

b) **Environmental Results—Outcomes, Outputs and Project Performance**

Identify the expected quantitative and qualitative outcomes and outputs of the project (**See Section I**), including what timeline of milestones, or other means will be used to track and measure your progress towards achieving the expected outcomes and outputs and how the results of the project will be evaluated. Outputs such as semi-annual and final reports and other deliverables should also be included.

It is expected that the description of project performance will include the following:

- Target numbers associated with the outputs and how the project will support achieving them
- oversight of project partners, subgrantees, and/or contractors and vendors;
- tracking and reporting actual accomplishments versus proposed outputs/outcomes and proposed timelines/milestones;

c) Applicant Capability and Past Performance

- i. Submit a list of federally and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include federal grants and cooperative agreements but not federal contracts) similar in size, scope and relevance to the proposed project that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than 5 agreements and preferably EPA agreements), and describe how you were technically able to successfully complete and manage those agreements. For the grants listed above, also describe your history of meeting the reporting requirements under those agreements, including whether you timely reported progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes of those agreements (and if not, explain why not) and whether you submitted acceptable final technical reports.

Note: In evaluating applicants under these factors in Section V, EPA will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources, including information from EPA files and from current/prior grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information provided by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please indicate this in the proposal and you will receive a neutral score for these factors (a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). If you do not provide any response for these items, you will receive a score of 0 for these factors.

- ii. Organizational experience- Provide information on your organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project.
- iii. Staff experience- Provide information on your staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project.

d) Expenditure of Awarded Funds

Please identify the approach and controls in place in your organization to ensure that awards are expended in a timely and efficient manner.

3) Detailed Budget Narrative (included in 10-page limit)

Using a table format, clearly explain how EPA funds will be used. This section also provides an opportunity for a narrative description of the budget found in the SF 424(A). Applicants must itemize costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, contractual costs, travel, equipment, supplies, other direct costs, indirect costs, and total costs. **Explanations of the costs associated with each project task, including match amounts in full or in part from project partners, should be provided.** Description

of costs should correspond to figures presented in the SF 424(A). A table highlighting key tasks and/or outputs for the length of the project with the associated budget breakdown is required.

E. Submission Dates and Times

The closing date and time for submission of proposals is **Friday, February 23rd, 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time (ET)**. **Proposals submitted after the closing date and time will not be considered for funding.**

F. Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into The Solicitation

Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation, including but not limited to those related to confidential business information, contracts and subawards under grants, and proposal assistance and communications, can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>. **These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing proposals for this solicitation.** If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

Only eligible entities whose proposals meet the threshold criteria in Section III of this announcement will be reviewed according to the evaluation criterion set forth below. Applicants should explicitly address these criteria as part of their proposal package submittal. Each proposal will be rated under a points system, with a total of 100 points possible.

A. Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Points
<p>1. <u>Project Description/Approach:</u></p> <p>Under this criterion, proposals will be evaluated using the following factors:</p> <p>i. (20 pts) the quality to which the project specific narrative addresses activities that are foundational and sustainable to habitat protection and conservation and water quality improvement (see Section I.B), the relevance or importance of the project (including how the project will benefit the Gulf of Mexico region); and, how the project specifically supports EPA Strategic Plan and Current EPA Priorities (see Section I. C.).</p> <p>ii. (20 pts) the extent to which the proposal contains sufficiently detailed information on the project approach including, but not limited to, details on the “how and when”, the applicant’s ability to perform the proposal work; and, who will be working together and how these partnerships will benefit the project. Letters of support will be considered under this evaluation criteria</p>	40
<p>2. <u>Environmental Results—Outcomes, Outputs and Performance Measures:</u></p> <p>Under this criterion, proposals will be evaluated using the following factors:</p> <p>i. (10 pts) The extent to which the proposal clearly defines outputs throughout the project timeframe</p> <p>ii. (10 pts) The extent to which the proposal clearly describes habitat and water quality results that are specific, quantified and significant</p> <p>iii. (10 pts) The extent to which the proposal demonstrates an effective plan for tracking and measuring progress toward achieving expected project outputs and outcomes, including a detailed written narrative plan identifying partner responsibilities and a tracking tool (such as a milestone or GANTT chart)</p>	30
<p>3. <u>Applicant Capability and Past Performance</u></p> <p>Under this criterion, proposals will be evaluated using the following factors:</p> <p>i. (5 pts) The applicant’s history of meeting the reporting requirements and past performance in successfully completing and managing the assistance agreements identified in the proposal narrative as described in Section IV.C of the announcement. This includes whether the applicant submitted acceptable final technical reports under those agreements and the extent to which the applicant adequately and timely reported on their progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes under those agreements and if such progress was not being made whether the applicant adequately reported why not.</p> <p>ii. (5 pts) The applicant’s organizational experience and plan (including staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources) for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project.</p> <p>Note: In evaluating applicants under the first item of this criterion, EPA will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other</p>	10

sources including agency files and/or prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information supplied by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or reporting information, please indicate this in the proposal and you will receive a neutral score for this subfactor (the first item above-a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). If you do not provide any response for these items, you will receive a score of 0 for these factors.	
4. Budget: Under this criterion, the Agency will evaluate the reasonableness of the budget with respect to how it supports the priorities and activities described in Section I and the extent to which the applicant has provided both a detailed narrative which describes the project budget by categories; and, a breakout of the approximate dollar amount of funding, including matching funds , for each major activity. Budget categories include: Personnel, Fringe, Travel, Equipment, Supplies, Contractual, Other and Indirect Costs.	15
5. Expenditure of Awarded Funds: Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their approach, procedures, and controls to ensure that awarded funds are expended in a timely and efficient manner.	5

B. Review and Selection Process

Proposals will first be evaluated against the threshold factors listed in Section III. Only those proposals which meet all of the threshold factors will be evaluated using the evaluation criteria listed above. Eligible proposals will be evaluated by an EPA Gulf of Mexico Review Panel(s). If a large number of proposals is received, EPA may convene more than one review panel. The review panel(s) will consist of EPA staff and may also include representatives from other Federal agencies. The panel(s) will score and rank the eligible proposals using the evaluation criteria identified in Section V.A. Each proposal will be given a numerical score and will be rank-ordered according to the numerical score. Preliminary funding recommendations will be provided to the Selection Official based on this ranking.

C. Other Factors

Final funding decisions will be made by the Selection Official based on the rankings and preliminary recommendations of the evaluation team. In making the final funding decisions, the Selection Official may also consider programmatic priorities, funding availability, and geographic diversity of funds. Once final decisions have been made, a funding recommendation will be developed and forwarded to the EPA Award Official.

D. Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into The Solicitation:

Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation including the clause on Reporting and Use of Information Concerning Recipient Integrity and Performance can be found on the [EPA Solicitation Clauses page](#). These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing proposals for this solicitation. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions

VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Award Notices

Following evaluation of proposals, all applicants will be notified regarding their status.

Proposal Notifications (*allow for review time, usually 45-60 days after closing date*)

1. EPA anticipates notification to successful applicants will be made via e-mail. The notification will be sent to the original signer of the proposal or the project contact listed in the proposal. *This notification, which informs the applicant that its proposal has been selected and is being recommended for award, is not an authorization to begin work. The official notification of an award will be made by the Region 4 Grants Management Officer.* Applicants are cautioned that only a grants officer is authorized to bind the Government to the expenditure of funds; selection does not guarantee an award will be made. For example, statutory authorization, funding or other issues discovered during the award process may affect the ability of EPA to make an award to an applicant. The award notice, signed by an EPA grants officer, is the authorizing document and will be provided through electronic or postal mail. The successful applicant may need to prepare and submit additional documents and forms (e.g., narrative), which must be approved by EPA, before the grant can officially be awarded. The time between notification of selection and award of a grant can take up to 90 days or longer.

2. EPA anticipates notification to unsuccessful applicant(s) will be made via email or postal mail. *The notification will be made to the original signer of the Standard Form (SF) 424, Application for Federal Assistance.*

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirement

A listing and description of general EPA Regulations applicable to the award of assistance agreements may be viewed at: <https://www.epa.gov/grants/policy-regulations-and-guidance-epa-grants>

C. Reporting Requirement

Semi-annual progress reports and a detailed final technical report will be required. Semi-annual reports summarizing technical progress, planned activities for the next half of the year and a summary of expenditures are required. The final technical report shall be completed within 90 calendar days of the completion of the period of performance. The final technical report should include: summary of the project or activity, advances achieved, and costs of the project or activity. In addition, the final technical report should discuss the problems, successes, and lessons learned from the project or activity that could help overcome structural, organizational or technical obstacles to implementing a similar project elsewhere. The schedule for submission of semi-annual reports will be established by EPA, after award.

D. Disputes

Assistance agreement competition-related disputes will be resolved in accordance with the dispute resolution procedures published in 70 FR (Federal Register) 3629, 3630 (January 26, 2005) which can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/grant-competition-dispute-resolution-procedures>. Copies of these procedures may also be requested by contacting Gerry Martin at martin.gerry@gmail.com.

E. Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into The Solicitation

Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation, including but not limited to those related to DUNS, SAM, copyrights, disputes, and administrative capability, can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>. ***These, and the other provisions that can be found at the***

website link, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing proposals for this solicitation. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions.

VII. AGENCY CONTACTS

For further information, contact:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Gulf of Mexico Program
ATTN: Rachel Houge
2510 14th Street – Suite 1212
Gulfport, MS 39501
GMP-RFP@epa.gov

Please send all questions to gmp-rfp@epa.gov. Initial questions and answers will be posted at the GMP home page <https://www.epa.gov/gmpo/> by December 21st and will be updated weekly if new questions are received, with the final Q&A posted on February 16th.