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NOTE TO APPLICANTS: We are able to respond to questions from individual applicants regarding threshold eligibility criteria, administrative issues related to the submission, of the proposal, and requests for clarification about the announcement. We are unable to respond to questions requesting input on a project idea, format of a project or proposal, nor other project specific questions that may compromise the competitive process.

In addition, if you have not successfully been awarded an EPA grant previously, you may want to review the recorded webinar and/or presentation found here: <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-grants-award-process-webinars>

New FAQ's

Q. Are you only looking for proposals that deal with delivering practical, applied results? We have an idea for a project that would explore certain causes of water quality problems. We do think we can provide fundamental new insight into mechanisms that will be of interest to EPA and other coastal managers, and that will ultimately result in improvement of water quality and protection of habitat through application of this new insight. However, there's no way our proposed work could directly improve water quality by 5% or protect a specific number of acres of habitat since we can't apply new insights that we haven't yet developed.

A. As stated in Section I.B, "The project must address one or more of the priority areas listed and demonstrate how it will result in meeting an output."

The Gulf of Mexico Program will only fund projects that address one or more of the priority areas and achieve measurable outputs as stated in the RFP.

Q. Does the EPA consider the entire Mississippi River Basin as an "...out-of-geographic region contributory watershed?" Thus, would any appropriate project within the Mississippi River Basin be eligible?

A. The Mississippi River Basin is considered as an out-of-geographic region contributory watershed.

Q. Do projects need to be regional in scope (or benefit the entire region/multiple communities/multiple states), or can they be focused on an individual town or city (perhaps with recommendations that would apply to the region more broadly)?

A. Section I.B of the RFP states, "... the project's place of performance must be in the Gulf of Mexico region (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida) and its watersheds, including their out-of-geographic region contributory watersheds." Projects can be more focused on individual towns and cities if it meets the criteria above.

Q. We applied for the grant last summer but didn't receive it. We would like to reapply this year. However, we would like to discuss any feedback from last year's proposal so that we can make improvements for this year.

A. We offer debriefings within a short timeframe after evaluation of the proposals. We definitely cannot assist with them while a similar Request for Proposals is open for applications as it may result in an unfair advantage to that applicant.

Q. May EPA grant recipients enter into agreements with federal agencies to carry out tasks/activities under the grant work plan?

A. Reimbursable Agreement - Grant recipients may enter into reimbursable agreements with federal agencies as long as those federal agencies are authorized under applicable federal laws to enter into such agreements with federal grant recipients. This is the mechanism by which a grant recipient can work with a federal agency as a partner. Reimbursable agreements do not have to be competed, but grant recipients must provide a brief explanation as to why they are selecting a federal agency to carry out the work. Grant recipients MAY NOT enter into sub grants with federal agencies as part of their project activities. The only way to partner with a federal agency is through the reimbursable agreements described above, which is a type of contract.

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Overview

Q. What are the Gulf of Mexico Program funding priorities?

A. Gulf of Mexico Funding priorities for this Request for Proposals are:

- water quality improvement (measured by obtaining a minimum of 5% improvement in at least one water quality parameter);

- protect, enhance, and/or restore habitat (measured in number of acres restored or protected);
- environmental education and outreach (measured by # of expected audience(s) and/or individuals served); and
- community resilience (measured by resulting # of communities with improved resiliency)

Q. How much funding is available this year?

A. The total estimated funding expected to be available is approximately \$5 million unless additional funding (e.g. FY 2019 funding) becomes available.

Q. Will there be more funding available in the future?

A. Funding for the Gulf of Mexico Program is dependent each year on allocations in the federal budget approved by Congress.

Q: When will this grant opportunity be made available again?

A. The GMP allocation is part of EPA's annual budget. Thus, typically, the grant funds would be offered annually in an RFP. From page 7 of the RFP, "EPA does reserve to make additional awards under this announcement, consistent with Agency policy, if additional funding (e.g. FY 2019 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." This provision has been used previously resulting in an RFP being released biannually instead of annually.

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Submitting a Proposal

Q. Where do I start?

A. You should start by closely reading the funding announcement. Determine your eligibility by reviewing Section III, Eligibility Information. Carefully consider the Program Elements (Section I.B) and Evaluation Criteria (Section V.A) to develop your proposed activities to achieve specific outputs and outcomes in a manner that will address the evaluation criteria.

Q. What kind of materials do I need to submit for the proposal?

A. To be considered for a GMP Cooperative Agreement, EPA requires that each submission contain a set of common elements that are described in Section IV.B (Content of Proposal Submission.) The materials that must be included in the proposal package include: Application for Federal Assistance Standard Form 424, Standard Form 424A, Standard Form 424B, Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B), EPA Form 6600-06 Certification Regarding Lobbying Form, EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54, EPA Form 4700-4 – Preaward Compliance Review Report, Letters of support from partners to support description of project involvement (if applicable), Map of the Project, Proposal Information Page (1 page limit), Proposal Narrative (8 pages or less), and Proposal Budget (3 pages or less).

Q. What is the proposal submission deadline?

A. 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.A) on or before the proposal submission deadline of **11:59 ET on July 31, 2018**.

Q. How will EPA review proposals?

A. 1. Proposals meeting the threshold criteria will be evaluated by an EPA Gulf of Mexico Review Panel. One Review Panel will be developed for each priority area. The Review Panel(s) will score and rank the eligible proposals by priority area (as identified by the applicant) using the evaluation criteria in Section V.A. Four ranking lists (one for each priority area) will be developed. Each proposal will be given a numerical score and will be rank-ordered according to the numerical score. Preliminary funding recommendations for each priority area will be provided to the Selection Official based on this ranking. 2. Final Selections and Awards. 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 R4 Award Official.

Q. Are applicants required to follow the format detailed in section IV.C. of the RFP under Proposal Submission Content?

A. The format in section IV.C. of the RFP is provided as guidance intended to be a helpful organizational tool to the applicant and is not a requirement for submission.

Q. Can someone be PI on one proposal and co-PI on another? Are multiple submissions from one organization generally encouraged or discouraged?

A. There is no limit to the number of proposals an individual can be involved in nor the number of proposals an organization can submit. We do, however, receive a high volume of proposals and are only able to fund a small percentage. Last cycle we received over 60 applications and only funded 15.

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Eligibility/Project Eligibility

Q. How can I tell if I am eligible to apply for a grant?

A. The following entities are eligible to apply for funding under this announcement; State and local governments, interstate agencies, Tribes, colleges and universities, and other public or non-profit organizations.

Non-profit organizations must have documentation of non-profit status from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service or their state of incorporation. 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.

Q. What is ineligible for funding?

A. III.C in the RFP identifies ineligible activities. EPA also conducts a threshold eligibility review of all proposals (Section III.D). 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.

Q. A funding idea was submitted and GMP was asked for input and/or requested a phone call to discuss project. The following response was provided to all potential applicants who requested input on their specific project idea or design.

A. In order to ensure a fair competitive process, the EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program does not provide specific input on project ideas to applicants. The project must meet at least one of the outputs and one of the activities under Section 1.B. of the RFP (as well as the threshold criteria in Section III.C) to be considered.

Q. Are preaward costs eligible?

A. In certain circumstances, costs incurred within 90 days prior to the grant award may be eligible for reimbursement. However, this does not include any costs associated with responding to this solicitation or in finalizing the application package. If costs are incurred before the award, they are incurred at the applicant's own risk.

Q. Is land acquisition eligible as a project type if it meets the RFP criteria?

A. Land acquisition is not explicitly prohibited, thus it is an eligible project activity. We would stress, however, that the land acquisition would have to be directly linked to or demonstrated to be a key factor in protecting, restoring or enhancing habitat and/or improving water quality conditions. Additionally, the acquisition must comport with the purpose of CWA §104(b)(3) grants, which is to conduct and promote the coordination and acceleration of research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys and studies relating to the causes, effects, extent, prevention, reduction and elimination of pollution.

Q. Would a "plan" be considered under Priority Area IV: Strengthen Community Resilience?

A. A plan would be considered under Strengthen Community Resilience as long as it meets the output and the activities under Strengthen Community Resilience as defined on page 4 of the RFP.

Q. What happens if the min 5% improvement is not demonstrated but all other aspects of the projects are considered successful?

A. We expect the applicants to propose a project that will result in a 5% improvement in at least one WQ parameter. We do understand, however, that there may be circumstances beyond a recipients control that may result in the 5% improvement not being met by the end of the project period. Under this circumstance, we work with the recipient to determine why the 5% improvement was not attained and what options might be available to accomplish the 5% improvement.

Q. Should the Gulf of Mexico regions' watersheds be selected as the study area for the grant proposal?

A. As stated in the RFP, the projects place of performance must be in the Gulf of Mexico region (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida) and its watersheds, including their out-of-geographic region contributory watersheds. The place of performance should identify where the project will take place.

Q. Should activities be restricted to a single HUC 8 watershed? Or can we combine a number of HUC 8 watersheds? If the latter, is there a limit to the number?

A. The HUC8 needs to be identified if there is a water quality output as part of the project. The project does not have to be restricted to one HUC 8 watershed. There is no limit to the number of HUC8 watersheds that can be identified/combined, just be sure to identify in the project which HUC 8 watersheds are included in/affected by the project proposal.

Q. Under Priority III: Environmental Education and Outreach, is it necessary to designate a specific HUC where the training will be focused?

A. HUCs do not need to be identified unless there is a water quality output associated with the project. If there is no water quality output associated, a map showing the place of performance is sufficient.

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Environmental Outputs and Outcomes

Q. What are "Outputs and Outcomes"?

A. Outputs and outcomes are explained in Section I.C.2 of the RFP. The terms outputs and outcomes are derived from the EPA's increased focus on environmental results (EPA Policy Order 5700.7 Environmental Results). Therefore, EPA's priority is to support projects that are likely to achieve quantifiable outputs and outcomes. Applicants must include specific statements describing the environmental results of the proposed project in terms of well-defined "outputs" and "outcomes".

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Project Monitoring

Q: Does a detailed QAPP need to be submitted as part of the proposal?

A. No, if selected for funding, a detailed QAPP will be requested to be submitted to EPA for approval. Your proposal should include the expected tasks of preparing the QAPP in your workplan, budget and timeline. Only awards expected to exceed \$200,000 in federal funding AND involve the generation or use of environmental data will need to submit a QAPP if selected for funding.

Q: How long does EPA approval of a QAPP usually take?

A. EPA's GMP Office estimates two weeks for an individual QAPP's approval.

Q. We are currently working on our application for the GMP-RFP, and have run into a question about the Environmental Data Statement. Based on the information provided in the RFP and links, we have drafted the following statement:

"We acknowledge that if funded for this project, we will be required and are prepared to demonstrate competency to assess the quality of work to meet project requirements, and acknowledge that a Quality Management Plan (QMP) and/or Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) may be required."

Is this what this section is requiring, or do we need to provide further demonstration of competency (ex. provide current accreditation or certification certificate with scope of accreditation and accrediting body plus contact information) attached to the proposal?

A. A statement, such as what is written, is all that is needed. It is a step designed to ensure that the applicant is fully aware that if data collection is planned and the award is over \$200k, that a QAPP will be required. In addition, as per the example on page 25, please schedule time for QAPP development and approval.

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Watershed and Habitat Plans

Q. Why is EPA emphasizing that projects be based on watershed plans, CCMPs and other quantitative water quality assessments and plans and baseline monitoring?

A. EPA's national experience has led us to conclude that significant environmental results are more likely where assessments and plans provide detailed information to identify priority activities to achieve water quality and habitat improvement objectives within a specific time frame. For this reason, proposed activities in response to this announcement are encouraged to be based on data, analysis and information contained in already existing watershed plans and data.

Q: What are examples of "existing plans" that the RFP encourages projects to draw from?

A. There are many types of plans that projects can be built on, e.g. NEP Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), a local watershed restoration plan, a local green infrastructure plan...

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Match Requirement

Q. Is there a match requirement?

A. No.

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Contracts and Subawards

Q. Can grant funding be used by the applicant to make subawards, acquire contract services, or fund partnerships?

A. Yes, funds can be used for contracts and subawards in accordance with the Contracts and Subawards/Subgrants requirements in Section IV.F of the announcement. EPA awards funds to one eligible applicant as the "recipient" even if other eligible applicants are named as "partners" or "co-applicants" or members of a "coalition" or "consortium." The recipient is accountable to EPA for the proper expenditure of funds and reporting requirements.

Q. How will an applicant's proposed subawardees/subgrantees and contractors be considered during the evaluation process described in Section V of the announcement?

A. Section V of the announcement describes the evaluation criteria and evaluation process that will be used by EPA to make selections under this announcement. During this evaluation, except for those criteria that relate to the applicant's own qualifications, past performance, and reporting history, the review panel will consider, as appropriate and relevant, the qualifications, expertise, and experience of named subawardees/subgrantees and/or named contractors during the proposal evaluation process as long as the applicant complies with the requirements in Section IV.F.

Q. May EPA grant recipients enter into agreements with federal agencies to carry out tasks/activities under the grant work plan?

A. Reimbursable Agreement- Grant recipients may enter into reimbursable agreements with federal agencies as long as those federal agencies are authorized under applicable federal laws to enter into such agreements with federal grant recipients. This is the mechanism by which a grant recipient can work with a federal agency as a partner. Reimbursable agreements do not have to be competed, but grant recipients must provide a brief explanation as to why they are selecting a federal agency to carry out the work.

Grant recipients MAY NOT enter into subgrants with federal agencies as part of their project activities. The only way to partner with a federal agency is through the reimbursable agreements described above, which is a type of contract.

Q. We would like to partner with a local NGO and include them as a sub-award in our proposal. In turn, this NGO would like to contract with a third party to perform part of the restoration work. Is this allowed? Or would we as lead need to list the third party contractor as such in our proposal?

A. To ascertain information regarding contracts and subawards and other solicitation clauses, refer to Section IV, Part F of the RFP. A link is provided (<https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>). Click on the link and then select Contracts and Subawards.

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Standard Form (SF) 424 and SF 424 A

Q. Please provide examples of expenses that would be included under the "construction" line of the SF-424 A if construction goes on the "contractual" line.

A. The "construction" line of the SF 424 A should remain blank. If you are doing the construction in-house, i.e. with your own staff, then that should be reflected under "personnel." Otherwise, construction should be listed under contractual.

Q. I am filling out the online budget form for this grant application. We are applying for 2 years of funding. As I understand the directions, I am to include costs for Year 1 in Section A. Does the same apply to Sections B or C, or should I include amounts for the full 2 years? I have one more question (which may be obvious to most), in Section A, is the Grant Program Function the same as the name of the program for which we are requesting funding?

A. Include the total amount for 2 years in Section A. This should be the cumulative amount for both years. Do not separate the years. In Section A, for the Grant Program Function or Activity, use the title of the RFP: "Gulf of Mexico Program Cooperative Agreements 2017".

Q. How do we answer question 19 in the SF 424?

A. Please follow this link: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/SPOC-Feb.-2018.pdf>. If your state is listed on this link, your project will need to be submitted to your state for review and select a or b as applicable. If your state is not listed, please select C.

Q: If the grant request is a small part of a larger project, how should that be reflected in the budget?

A. Budget Form 424A should only reflect the cooperative agreement request. If other funding is contributing to the successful completion of your project, please provide that information narratively in your project description. It may also be information added to the detailed budget table and narrative, but should be kept in separate column from activities identified as being funded by the grant or match.

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Budget

Q. What are indirect or overhead costs?

A. Indirect costs represent the expenses of doing business that are not readily identified with a particular grant, contract, project function or activity, but are necessary for the general operation of the organization and the conduct of activities it performs (source: Indirect Cost Overview, Dept. of Education). In order to charge indirect costs to the grant, the applicant must have an up-to-date approved indirect cost rate agreement with its cognizant agency (the federal agency the applicant receives the most funding from). EPA does recognize indirect cost agreements negotiated with other federal agencies.

Q. How do I ensure I'm putting the costs in the correct budget categories?

A. There are several guidelines used for federal budgets. The recorded webinar and presentation found here <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-grants-award-process-webinars> provides an overview of the grant application process, including what should be included in the budget categories and the cost principles EPA utilizes. If you have a question about a particular item, please feel free to email the question to gmp-rfp@epa.gov.

Q. Can these projects fund international travel?

A. It depends on the relevance of the travel to the project. In any case where international travel is requested, however, the award will need to go through an additional layer of review and approval which may cause delays to the project.

Q. Is tuition for a graduate student assistant an allowable cost under either "personnel" or "other"?

A. Tuition is an allowable cost if it meets the guidelines set here:

§ 200.466 Scholarships and student aid costs. (a) Costs of scholarships, fellowships, and other programs of student aid at Institutes of Higher Education are allowable only when the purpose of the Federal award is to provide training to selected participants and the charge is approved by the Federal awarding agency. However, tuition remission and other forms of compensation paid as, or in lieu of, wages to students performing necessary work are allowable provided that: (1) The individual is conducting activities necessary to the Federal award; (2) Tuition remission and other support are provided in accordance with established policy of the IHE and consistently provided in a like manner to students in return for similar activities conducted under Federal awards as well as other activities; and (3) During the academic period, the student is enrolled in an advanced degree program at a non-Federal entity or affiliated institution and the activities of the student in relation to the Federal award are related to the degree program; (4) The tuition or other payments are reasonable compensation for the work performed and are conditioned explicitly upon the performance of necessary work; and (5) It is the IHE's practice to similarly compensate students under Federal awards as well as other activities. (b) Charges for tuition remission and other forms of compensation paid to students as, or in lieu of, salaries and wages must be subject to the reporting requirements in §200.430 Compensation—personal services, and must be treated as direct or indirect cost in accordance with the actual work being performed. Tuition remission may be charged on an average rate basis. See also §200.431 Compensation—fringe benefits.

The cost would be identified under Other.

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Other Questions

Q. We are finalizing our proposal and are wondering how you define "similar scope" in the applicant capabilities section. Are you looking for us to list up to three awards of a similar dollar amount AND topic area or similar dollar amount AND complexity? Any clarification of this aspect is appreciated.

A. On page 15 of the RFP, it requests "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." Scope refers to complexity and relevance refers to topic area. If you have awards that only meet two of the three (ie. Size and scope vs size and relevance), it is up to the applicant to determine which grants/cooperative agreements would rank best against the evaluation criteria in Section V.A.4.

Q. The application has this statement about 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."

Does this mean that a grant application can be submitted for a project if it is for the engineering and studies needed to design a project (what we refer to as Phases 1 and 2) which has the ultimate goal of meeting one of the priorities stated in the project after construction (Phase 3)? Or is this grant only for projects which can go straight into construction?

A. The partial funding clause (referred to above) enables EPA to fund a portion of an applicant's proposal, but is not intended to enable a phased funding approach for a project. A "construction" project in the traditional term of building construction cannot be funded with this RFP. In addition, in order for a proposal to meet the threshold criteria for evaluation it must result in meeting an output for at least one priority area during the term of the project (as identified in III.D.2. of the RFP).

Q. Can you please clarify what should be included in the Expenditure of Awarded Grant Funds section? What is meant by applicant's approach, procedures and controls? Is it safe to assume that this is referring to a timeline and benchmarks for the timely use of the funds over the course of the funding period?

A. It is not referring to a timeline and benchmarks for the timely use of the funds over the course of the funding period but rather it is referring to the internal controls and procedures already established by your organization to monitor and track expenditures ensuring that awarded grant funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner.

Q. Are letters of support encouraged or required?

A. Letters of support from partners are required to support description of partner involvement. Letters of support are not included in the 8-page limit.

Q. Can references cited be added as supporting material or must literature cited fit into the 8-page proposal narrative limit?

A. A references cited page may be added as supporting material and would not be included in the 8-page proposal narrative limit.

Q. Is there a 2018 or 2019 target for habitat acres restored/enhanced/protected under this RFP?

A. There is not a target for habitat acres restored/enhanced/protected under this RFP. EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program has an annual target per fiscal year for habitat acres restored/enhanced/protected and the target is typically met by a combination of RFP funded projects and other projects, but there is no cap or target for RFP funded habitat acres.

Q. Where can I find information on previously funded grant proposals?

A. For information on projects funded during our last two RFP cycles, please see our website <https://www.epa.gov/gulfofmexico>. Once you're on the website, scroll down until you get to the map. On the map, there are several colors of tags. The red tags identify the cooperative agreements funded during our last two RFP cycles, in 2013 and 2015.

Q. Is it a disadvantage for the lead organization to be one that has a current GMP award?

A. It is neither an advantage or disadvantage. All proposals will be evaluated based on the criteria identified in the RFP.

Q. Where should the Indirect Cost Rate Agreement be uploaded into the Grants.gov package?

A. The Indirect Cost Rate Agreement can go in the "Optional Attachments Form" section.

Q. How do I submit an additional question that has not been addressed in this document?

A. We are able to respond to questions from individual applicants regarding threshold eligibility criteria, administrative issues related to the submission, of the proposal, and requests for clarification about the announcement. You may submit your questions via email to gmp-rfp@epa.gov. This document will be updated weekly to include additional Q&As.

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