

Exchange Network Grants Program FY 2020 Solicitation Notice Webinar

Preparing Quality Applications


February, 2020

<https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork>



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ABSTRACT

A faint, circular seal of the United States Environmental Protection Agency is visible in the background, centered behind the text. It features a stylized flower/leaf design in the center and the words "UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY" around the perimeter.

The objective of this presentation is to help states, tribes and territories prepare successful Exchange Network grant applications.

Presentation Overview



- Overview of the EN Grants Program
- Critical Elements of the Solicitation Notice
- Notable Changes from FY 2019
- Overview of New & Updated Applicant Guidance Materials
- Top 10 Common Mistakes to Avoid
- Q&A Session



Overview of the EN Grants Program

EN Overview & Grant Funding Purpose

The EN is a collaborative partnership of EPA, states, territories, and tribes to foster better environmental management and decision making through increased access to timely, high quality environmental information.

Grant Funding Purpose

- To develop technologies to share data among partners through the EN
- Develop underlying shared or reusable services that provide the foundation of EN operations
- Make data available to partner personnel, the public or other communities of interest.

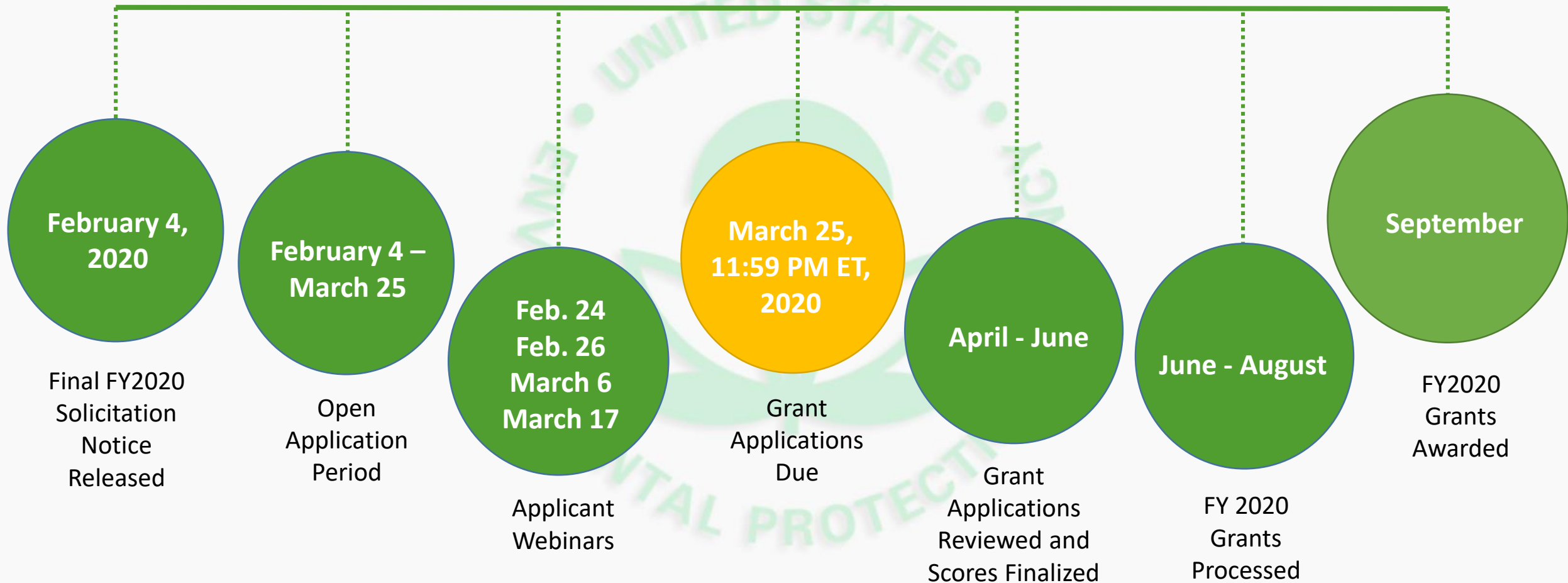
EN Grant Program Background

- **Phase 1 of the EN (2002 – 2012):** Transformed the regulatory reporting processes of eight national data flows
- **Phase 2 of the EN (2013 – 2019):** Focused on expanding the availability of published data and making the process of sharing data more efficient
- With the release of the **E-Enterprise Digital Strategy (EEDS)**, the EN is transitioning into Phase 3

EN Grant Program Funding Summary

- FY2020 is the 19th year EPA will award competitive funding to eligible applicants
- Between 2002 and 2019, EPA has made 863 grant awards and provided \$224,590,496 for state, tribal, and territorial awards
- As of October 1, 2019, all 50 states and DC, 81 tribes, and 5 territories have received EN grants
- Descriptions of previously awarded EN Grants can be found at our website: www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/previous-exchange-network-grant-projects

FY 2020 Exchange Network Grants Cycle



*Tentative timeline



Critical Elements of the Solicitation Notice

Linkage to EPA Mission

(Section I-D; Page 6)

- It is EPA policy that work supported by assistance agreements must link directly to EPA mission
- Applications must explicitly state support of [EPA's FY 2018-22 Strategic Plan](#), Goal 3: Greater Certainty, Compliance, and Effectiveness, Objective 3.4: **“Streamline and Modernize.”**
 - Not required to reflect all aspects of this strategic objective
 - Not limited to permitting projects
- Applications should establish the project's alignment with language found under this objective

EN Grant Program Priorities

(Section I-E, Page 7)

- **Priority One:** Integrate foundational EN services into environmental business processes
- **Priority Two:** Eliminate industry paper reporting and expand e-reporting among co-regulators
- **Priority Three:** Expand data access and availability
- **Priority Four:** Improve environmental management through advanced data monitoring and transmittal processes.
- **Priority Five:** Augment the information management capacity of EN partners

EN Grant Program Priorities (cont.)

(Section I-E, Page 7)

- EN grant applicants can apply under one or multiple Exchange Network priorities within a single application.
 - Proposals must commit to the completion of an activity
- Applications should state which EN priorit(ies) they are applying under and describe how their proposed project supports this priority/these priorities
- Applicants are also encouraged to name the specific funding opportunit(ies) they are applying under
 - *Example:* 'Enabling Geospatial Data: Open Data Services Individual Opportunity under EN Priority 3'

Types of Assistance

(Section II-B, Page 16 & 17)

- **Grant (Default) or Cooperative Agreement**
 - Cooperative Agreement: anticipates substantial EPA involvement
- **Direct Funding (Default) or In-Kind Services**
 - In-Kind: Awarded through an EPA contract vehicle
 - Applicants should name the contract vehicle and request and justify project efficiencies they expect from this approach
 - Applicants should specify if they are requesting direct funding, in-kind services, or a combination of both

Types of Assistance (cont.)

(Section II-B, Page 16 & 17)

- **Single Applicant or EN Partnership Grant**
 - Funding opportunities have been labeled as either ‘individual’ or ‘partnership’ opportunities within **Section I-E EN Program Priorities**
 - EPA will consider a higher funding limit of \$400,000 for projects with EN partners which meet the Partnership Eligibility criteria in **Section III-D**
 - EPA will not consider partnerships formed from Agencies within a single state, territorial, or tribal government as eligible

Types of Assistance (cont.)

(Section II-B, Page 16 & 17)

- **Performance Partnership Grants (PPGs)/Consolidated Grants**
 - States, certain interstate agencies, and tribes can choose to combine two or more environmental program grants into a single PPG
 - Territories can consolidate various environmental program grants into a single Consolidated Grant
 - Applicants should state in their Cover Letter and Project Narrative if they are using a PPG/Consolidated Grant and provide its name/PPG number
 - See **Section III-F** for additional information

Eligible Applicants

(Section III-A, Page 18)

- **Entities Eligible for Funding:**
 - States
 - U.S. Territories
 - Federally Recognized Tribes and Alaska Native Villages
 - Inter-tribal Consortia of Federally Recognized Tribes
 - Some other entities, if they are an agency or **instrumentality of a state**
 - Must include a letter from the appropriate state Attorney General certifying the applicant is an agency or instrumentality of the state

Threshold Eligibility Criteria for Applications

(Section III-B, Page 19)

- Application goals result in full implementation of:
 - Data flow(s), data publishing service, web service, or other eligible activities (e.g. pilot projects) into production
- Application to substantially comply with application submission instructions and requirements in **Section IV & Appendix E**
- Project period of no more than 3 years
- Budget not to exceed \$200,000 for single applicant and \$400,000 for qualifying partnership applications

Threshold Eligibility Criteria for Applications (cont.)

(Section III-B, Page 19)

- Limit of four active grants by **12/31/2019**
 - *Note: If an agency is a participant in an EN partnership grant, but not the lead applicant, their participation in the grant will not be counted as an active assistance agreement.*
- Applications must not request funds for activities or deliverables for which the applicant has previously received funds

Funding Restrictions

(Section III-C, Page 20)

- **Construction Costs**
- **Operations and Maintenance**, including previous EN projects and flows
- **Workshops and Conferences** not primarily benefitting the applicant/applicable partners or ones conducted primarily for EPA's benefit
- **Pre-Award Costs**
- **Management Fees**
- Development and deployment of **physical nodes**

Application and Submission Instructions

(Section IV (Page 22) & Appendix E (Page E-1))

- Submit using [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)
 - This is **mandatory** unless the applicant has obtained a waiver
- Provide **all** required documents
 - Refer to the instructions and application attachments overview provided in **Appendix E**
 - Keep an eye out for two confirmation emails that your application was received

Evaluation Criteria

(Section V-A, Page 24)

- All applications are evaluated on the following criteria:
 - Project Outputs and Outcomes Leading to Environmental Results
 - Project Feasibility and Approach
 - Exchange Network/E-Enterprise Priorities
 - Budget, Resources, and Key Personnel
 - Past Performance



Notable Changes from Solicitation Notice FY '19

Key Changes from FY 2019

Section I-A Background (Page 4)

- Expanded to include our transition into Phase III of the EN

Section I-D Environmental Results Supported by Assistance Activities (Page 4)

- EPA Strategic Goal/Objective titles have been updated

Section I-F Identifying Mentors (Page 15)

- Details our recommendation **for all first time applicants to consider identifying and utilizing mentors** for their project
 - Not a requirement for any applicant in FY2020

Key Changes from FY 2019

Section VI-B Administration and National Policy Requirements (Page 29)

- A goal of the EN is to share information about available services and reuse existing services whenever possible. To ensure that products and services are available for EN partner use and/or collaboration, Exchange Network grant applicants **must commit** to register any newly developed resources (since 2011) and the reuse of existing resources (since 2018)
 - To register, applicants should work with their RENC at the time of grant close-out to fill a provided webform in full
 - A current list of RENCs can be found on our website under [Contact Us](#)

Key Changes from FY 2019

- **Appendix A (A-1)**
 - All opportunities have been updated
 - Significant updates to the SDWIS funding opportunity
 - WQX now contains a PFAS component
 - New Opportunities include:
 - Drinking Water State Revolving Fund & Clean Water State Revolving Fund
 - Underground Injection Control (UIC) Data Availability Projects

Key Changes from FY 2019

- **Appendix B (B-1)**
 - All opportunities have been updated
 - Facility Registry Service (FRS) has been removed from this appendix (an FRS funding opportunity is still available in Appendix A)
- **Appendix D (D-1)**
 - Three resources are identified for applicants to identify resources/IT components for reuse, as well as connect with potential partners/mentors
 - E-Enterprise Community Inventory Platform ([EECIP](#))
 - Shared Services Resources Catalog ([SSRC](#))
 - [‘Previous EN Projects’](#) Section of the EN Website

Key Changes from FY 2019

- **Appendix E**
 - Provides updated attachments lists and guidance
 - **Note: the SF-424B Form is no longer required**
 - Provides a detailed overview of attachments
 - Cover Letter (E-2)
 - Project Narrative (E-3)
 - Mandatory Attachments (E-5)
 - Additional Attachments (E-6)
 - Provides detailed application submission instructions (E-8)

Key Changes from FY 2019

- Appendix E- required Project Narrative sections have been updated:
 - 1) **Project Description**
 - 2) **Project Goals, Outputs, and Outcomes**
 - 3) **Roles, Responsibilities, and Qualifications of Key Personnel & Any Project Partners** *(updated)*
 - 4) **Programmatic Involvement and Mentor Support** *(updated)*
 - 5) **Commitment to Reuse**
 - 6) **Technical Understanding** *(new section!)*
 - 7) **Overview of Project Budget** *(new name)*
 - 8) **Past Performance**

Key Changes from FY 2019

- **The FY2020 SN contains significantly expanded applicant guidance in Appendices E – H**
 - This includes optional templates for:
 - Cover Letter (Appendix G)
 - Project Narrative (Appendix H)
 - Budget Narrative (Appendix I)
- **The FY2020 Solicitation Notice has also been reformatted and hyperlinked for improved ease-of-use and navigation**



Overview of New and Updated Guidance Materials

Applicant Guidance – Appendix E

- **List of Attachments, split into Mandatory & Additional (aka ‘as applicable’)**

Mandatory Documents:

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

Additional Attachments (use ‘Other Attachments Form’ to submit), if applicable (see guidance [here](#)):

- (A) Personnel attachments, including staff resumes
- (B) Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement
- (C) Additional Information for Inter-Tribal Consortium
- (D) Formal Project Partners:
 - Roles & Responsibilities
 - Distribution of Funds
- (E) List of Exchange Network Assistance Agreements

(Page E-1)

Applicant Guidance – Appendix F

- Appendix F contains a **Pre-Submission Checklist tool** for applicants
 - Adapted from last year's version to be much more detailed and to help applicants avoid common errors
 - Please note that the use of the checklist does not guarantee a high application score or ensure grant funding
 - However, it can help applicants to create complete and accurate application packages

Budget Narrative Attachment Form:

- ☐ If applicable to your application, are subaward costs captured within the 'other' budget category (and not included under personnel or contractual costs?)
- ☐ Did you include travel costs to the National EE/EN Conference? Please note this is only allowable for tribal applicants (as this is covered by ECOS for states and territories).
- ☐ Do your budget narrative categories exactly match the budget categories (section b) on the 424A form?
- ☐ If applicable to your application, are training costs captured within the 'other' budget category (with the exception of travel costs to/from the training, which should be captured under 'travel')?

Applicant Guidance – Appendix G

- Appendix G provides an **optional cover letter template**
 - Provided template is an update from the version provided in FY19
- Other **Cover Letter helpful hints:**
 - Required for all applications
 - Submit using the 'Other Attachments Form' in [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)
 - 1 page maximum
 - Should be signed by the authorized organizational representative

Quick Note on Optional Templates (E-1)

- Black text = standard text that does not need to be edited/expanded
- [Blue text in brackets] = an area to edit/expand upon, if applicable
 - Change to regular black text once edited or remove if not applicable
- *Black italicized text* = a note/guidance provided to applicants
 - Is marked with 'Note:'
 - Should be deleted from the final application

Cover Letter
Template
Example
(Page G-1)

[Insert Organizational Letterhead]

[Date]

Erika Beasley

EN Grants Program Manager - OIM/IESD/IEPB

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Management Services

1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Mail Code 2824-T Washington, DC 20460

Dear Ms. Beasley:

I am pleased to submit the [State, Tribe or Territory Name] [Name of Department or Agency] application for a [type of assistance: grant, cooperative agreement, PPG], entitled [project name], under the FY 2020 Exchange Network Grant Program. This application is seeking [dollar amount of funds] in direct grants funding and [dollar amount of funds] in in-kind support. We have [‘no’ or number of partners] formal partners in this grant application. [Our partners are: name partners]. [Our mentor is: name mentor].

Applicant Guidance – Appendix H

- Appendix G provides an **optional project narrative template**
 - Applicants, if using the template, should feel free to expand upon, edit, and rearrange the suggested text as seems applicable to their application
- Other **Project Narrative helpful hints:**
 - Project Narratives should include all eight required section, in the order listed
 - **Project Narratives should not exceed 10 pages**
 - **Any pages past this will not be considered when scoring application**
 - Project Narratives should address and meet the evaluation criteria provided in **Section V-A Evaluation Criteria** (Pages 24 – 27)

4) Programmatic Involvement and Mentor Support

- Note: Include the proposed text under either (A) or (B), as applies to your proposal
- Note: All proposals should include the text which addresses mentors (top of page H-4)

--(A) Include the following text if programmatic involvement applies to your grant proposal--

This project will include substantive programmatic involvement from [name of involved programmatic program(s)]. [Briefly describe the program office/department mentioned and their relation to the primary applicant]. The contribution will include [describe programmatic involvement and management of the project] to address [applicable business need or knowledge gap helped by programmatic participation].

Key Programmatic Participants:

[Name] [Current Job Title] [Affiliated Organization/Department/Agency]

[Name] will be providing programmatic guidance in the role of [project role]. [He/She] was selected for this role based on [brief summary of relevant experience and qualifications].

[His/Her] ['project' and/or 'oversight'] responsibilities include:

- [Enter bulleted list of responsibilities]

-Note: Expand section as needed to include all relevant programmatic participants-

--(B) Include the following text if programmatic involvement does not apply to your grant proposal--

Applicant Guidance – Appendix I

- Appendix I provides an **optional budget narrative form template**
 - Utilizing the optional budget narrative attachment form template will help applicants to ensure they have included all mandatory budget information
 - Applicants should feel free to add additional budget information under the section headers, as seems relevant to the proposed project
- This document is required by the EPA grants office to process grant awards
- Other **Budget Narrative helpful hints:**
 - Submit using the 'Budget Narrative Attachment Form' in grants.gov
 - Additional budget narrative guidance can be found on Page E-5

Personnel:

- Include (if applicable) a bulleted list of staff positions by title with the following sub-bullets:
 - Annual salary. Give the annual salary of each person,
 - The percentage of their time devoted to the project
 - The amount of each person's salary funded by the grant

Fringe:

- Identify (if applicable) the fringe benefit rate
- Identify (if applicable) the total amount charged under this category

Travel:

- Include (if applicable) a bulleted list with planned in-state and out-of-state trip, with the following sub bullets:
 - Number of Travelers per event
 - Calculated cost per traveler
 - Mileage
 - Per diem
 - Purpose of Travel

Applicant Guidance – Appendix J

- **Appendix J provides a glossary of terms and phrases** relevant to the Exchange Network
 - This glossary has been updated and expanded from the FY19 version
- These terms have been hyperlinked throughout the FY20 Solicitation Notice to improve document readability and ease-of-use

Schema

An XML schema defines the structure of an XML document including data elements and attributes can appear in a document, how the data elements relate to one another, whether an element is empty or can include text, which types of data are allowed for specific data elements and attributes, and what the default and fixed values are for elements and attributes. A set of Network quality assurance web services is available to validate your XML documents against the schemas using a standard parser. A list of procedural and guidance documents related to schema development is available on the Exchange Network website at <http://www.exchangenetwork.net/knowledge-base/>.

Shared Service

A shared service, as defined by the Shared Services [Integrated Project Team](#) in 2016, is a service that is:

- Developed jointly.
- Usable by multiple partners/users.
- Managed centrally, meaning that some entity is overseeing the ongoing evolution and maintenance of the service. The entity might be a state, tribe, territory, EPA, or some other interested party.
- Addresses a common need/concern.



Top Ten Mistakes/ Common Errors

#10

Including Penny Amounts in your Budget (Amounts < \$1)

- Please do not include any monetary amounts **less than one dollar** in your application budget amounts
- E.g. \$13,369.67 should be \$13,370
- Round these amounts up or down to the nearest whole dollar amount and recalculate your budget(s) (in the project narrative & on all budget forms) before submitting



#9

Incorrect Period of Performance Dates

- The Exchange Network grant period of performance is three years
 - List the **project start date** as **October 1st, 2020**
 - List the **project end date** as **September 30, 2023**
- We encourage applicants to include realistic and generous **scheduled completion dates (list for each output and goal)** which stretches over the entire 3 year period of performance

#8

Budgeting for Travel, But Not Including Key Details

- Applicants who are requesting funds for travel must document:
 - **Bulleted list of all planned in-state and out-of-state travel** as will be funded by the grant, as well as:
 - Number of travelers per event
 - Calculated cost per traveler
 - Mileage
 - Per diem
 - Purpose of Travel

#7

Confusion on Contracts vs. Subawards

- With **subawards**, the subawardees(s) would get something for themselves by carrying out their portion of the proposed work.
- Subawardees take on a piece of the work plan, as if they were the applicant themselves
- By comparison, a **contract** entails the hiring of person(s) to complete a set tasks, after which they walk away from the project without specific benefits to their organization (beyond monetary compensation)



#6

Applying as Non-Eligible Partnerships

- To be eligible for the higher funding limit of \$400,000, proposed partnerships must meet all the eligibility criteria outlined in **Section III-D**.
- Non-eligible partnerships include those within a single state, territory, or tribal government
 - *Example:* a state health agency and environmental agency; a state university and a state environmental agency
 - The partnerships in these examples can still apply, but they cannot be considered for the higher funding



#5

Not Providing Enough Detail for Key Personnel

Please include the **name, current job title, organization, relevant experience/ qualifications, project role & responsibilities, and salary (if paid with grant funds)** for all key personnel within the project narrative

This includes:

- Project Manager
- Other Key (in-house) personnel
- Programmatic participants
- Partners (as applicable)
- Contractors (as applicable)
- Technology Vendors (as applicable)
- Staff not-yet hired (as applicable)
- Mentors (as applicable)

#4

Not Including Critical Information in a Detailed Project Plan

- Applicants should outline a detailed project plan, which includes
 - 1) *Each project goal & its total cost*
 - 2) *Output(s) per goal, total cost per output, & output scheduled completion date*
 - 3) *Outcome(s) affiliated with the goal/outputs*
- Applicants are encouraged to use the table template found on **Page H-2**
- Include rationales for costs and schedule dates
- Include supported business/administrative needs
- Include supported EN Program Priorities

Recommended Table Format (Example)

Goal	Output	Output Budget	Scheduled Completion Date	Outcomes
Goal One: EIS & GHG Data Flows	1.1 CERS data mapped to XML Schema	\$5,000	Jan. 1, 2021	Increased availability of timely, high quality data to other Exchange Network partners will improve environmental decision-making
Total Goal Budget: \$58,000	1.2 EIS flow to EPA becomes operational	\$7,500	Jun. 1, 2021	
	1.3 GHG flow to EPA becomes operational	\$15,000	Dec. 31, 2021	
	1.4 Improve GIS locations and geospatial metadata for air release points	\$22,000	Sept. 30, 2022	
	1.5 Add Assessment Module to evaluate air emissions near new construction projects	\$8,500	April 30, 2023	
Goal Two: WQX Implementation	2.1 Data mapped to XML schema	\$21,350	Mar. 31, 2021	Increased availability of data to other Exchange Network partners Electronic availability of standardized, timely, high quality data over the Exchange Network will improve the analysis of water quality monitoring data and lead to better decision-making
Total Goal Budget: \$44,350	2.2 Implement WQX Flow	\$7,800	Sept. 30, 2021	
	2.3 Written documentation of implementing WQX with multi-state AWQMS database	\$13,000	Jan. 31, 2022	
	2.4 Publish Web Service	\$2,200	Sept. 30, 2023	



#3

Failing to Include Required Language in the Project Narrative

Applications must do the following (as applicable):

- Explicitly state their support of Goal 3, Objective 3.4 AND identify supported language
- Include statements describing environmental results (as well-defined outputs and outcomes)
- Provide a detailed rationale for any cost estimates higher than those listed in App. A & B
- Commit to reuse existing dataflows, **and** commit to register the reuse and the use of any newly developed IT components
- *(If a new applicant)* Explicitly state that they have never received an EN grant (under Past Performance)

#2

Invalid or Incorrectly Calculated Indirect Cost Rates (ICRs)

- This ICR rate should be valid, at a minimum, through September 30, 2020
- Tribal applicants can submit a draft version of their ICR agreement, as submitted to DOI
- An applicant may also elect to use the De Minimis Rate of 10% of modified total direct cost
- Please double check your calculations
- Please reference your base rate to ensure you are only charging to appropriate categories



#1

Mismatching Budget Amounts across the Application

- **Please** ensure that the budgets captured on the following forms **match exactly** before submitting your application:
- *Project Narrative* (sections 2 & 7)
- *Budget Narrative Attachment Form*
- *424 and 424A Forms*
- Check the indirect cost rate and calculations across your budget objects

BONUS Issue

Wrong Contact Names and Addresses

- Applicable to both the **424 form** and the **Key Contacts Attachment Form** (mandatory)
- Authorized Representative (AOR)
- Payee
- Administrative Contact (POC)
- Project Manager
- If any changes in key personnel occur, please reach out to Erika Beasley ASAP with an updated Key Contact form

Stay Connected



- Subscribe to [EN Alerts](#)
- Participate in EN Stakeholder conference calls
- Visit our exchange network website for the latest information!

<http://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork>

Contact Us

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Office of Information Management

Information Exchange Partnership Branch

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Questions?

Please feel free to ask questions
over the phone

