FY20 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

QUESTION: Where can I view the slide deck from the Solicitation Notice webinars?

ANSWER: The slide deck is available as a PDF on our website under the 'Resources for Applicants and Grantees' section: https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/exchange-network-grant-program

QUESTION: Is there a limit to the amount of funding that can be awarded for each state?

ANSWER: For each applicant, there is a funding limit of $200,000 for an individual applicant and $400,000 for qualifying Exchange Network Partner Grants. In recent years, we have been receiving a high volume of grant applications and have been awarding one grant per state in order to achieve the maximum geographic distribution. Therefore, if a state's Department of Health and a state's Department of Natural Resources both submit an application, they may be in direct competition with each other. A few years ago, we actually had a single state submit 13 separate applications, of which only the highest scoring application was selected for funding. It may be beneficial for an applicant to coordinate across the state (or Tribe/territory) to determine who should apply for grant funding this year.

Please note that a state agency and a tribe located within the state's geographic boundaries would not be subject to geographic distribution, as tribes are separate governments.

QUESTION: Is the limit of four active grants by December 31, 2019 per state or per agency?

ANSWER: This limit is per agency.

QUESTION: You mention including key travel details, including mileage and cost per participant. What's the best way to handle travel cost estimates for the next three years (project period for the grant) when locations have often not been determined?

ANSWER: We encourage you to try your best to estimate these costs to the highest level of accuracy possible, although any discrepancy in cost will be eventually captured in a grantee's progress reports. Best practice would be to look at comparable trips that have happened in the past and base your travel estimates on this, allowing for a 10% increase per year to account for inflation.

QUESTION: Can a subawardees also be a partner?

ANSWER: Yes, a subawardees can also be an Exchange Network partner.

QUESTION: Can the entirety of an EN grant be used to fund a contractor?

ANSWER: Yes, this is allowed under the EN grant program.

QUESTION: I am applying as an Intertribal Consortia which directly involves 8 tribes, but also serves another 13 tribes who will be involved with the grant project. Under additional attachments, do you need me to collect a letter of approval from all our EN partners or just the eight tribes who our consortia serves?

ANSWER: Please collect a letter of approval from all our EN partners using AWQMS. The tribes that are going to be involved and/or benefit from the effort should be aware of the consortium's application and give their approval.

QUESTION: Do all ICR rates need to be good through September 30, 2020?

ANSWER: Yes, in order to successfully process the grants, applicants charging indirect costs need to include a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate agreement that is valid through September 30, 2020, at a minimum. Tribal applicants have the option to include a draft version of the agreement, as has been submitted to DOI, as we know this process is often delayed. Alternatively, all applicants have the option to use a De Minimus rate of 10% if your current Indirect Cost Rate is expired. You can find additional guidance on this on page E-6.

QUESTION: Our organization is interested in two projects that together would total less than $200,000. Would it be possible to submit an application for two unrelated projects? If yes, do we submit one application or two separate applications?

ANSWER: EN grant applicants can apply under one or multiple Exchange Network priorities, or one or more funding opportunities, within a single application. Applicants are encouraged to specifically state which EN priorit(ies) they are applying under within the 'Project Description' section of their project narrative, as well as in their cover letter. Please note that this combined application should address all of the information outlined in Appendix E, including what is listed under each of the Project Narrative Sections, for both projects while adhering to applicable page limits and guidance.

QUESTION: In addition to providing information on previous EN grants the agency has received, Section 8 of the Optional Project Narrative Template asks for information on all non-EN EPA assistance agreements (grants, cooperative agreements, etc.) awarded to the agency since 2017. I would like clarification of the start date for "since 2017." Does this mean any grant with an award date of January 1, 2017 or later?

ANSWER: These requirements refer to Fiscal Year 2017 which began October 1, 2016. All applicants should clearly indicate in this section whether they have received a prior non-EN EPA assistance agreements (grants, cooperative agreements, etc.) awarded to the agency since October 1, 2016.

QUESTION: How can I be added to your email list and also receive information on upcoming webinars?

ANSWER: To stay connected and receive general EN updates, including our webinar schedule, please sign up for EN Alerts at https://www.exchangenetwork.net/news/. After clicking this link, click the green box near the top right of the webpage that says '*Sign up for EN Alerts*'. Each year, once we set the dates for our webinars, we use this EN Alert feature to send out the dates, times, and connection information. We also include this information on our website: https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/exchange-network-grant-program.

QUESTION: My agency is designated as the state geologic survey. Like many other state surveys, we are under a university. We are non-regulatory, but we do provide basic research and data collection in collaboration with several of our state agencies. We also lead on a new law that requires that all state water data are shared and made interoperable. It seems that many of our goals align with priorities of the EN. But I'm not clear if we are an "instrumentality of the state"?

ANSWER: In order to qualify as an 'instrumentality of a state', applicants must provide a letter in their application from the appropriate state Attorney General certifying the applicant's status as an instrumentality of the state.

QUESTION: How can I get further clarification on the Exchange Network grant program and, specifically, determine if my agency would meet the requirements to potentially qualify for funding.

ANSWER: Perhaps the best way to familiarize yourself with our program and determine if you would qualify as an applicant would be to attend one of our Solicitation Notice webinars. In support of the FY 2020 Exchange Network (EN) Grant cycle, the EPA will host four webinars to assist interested applicants. The webinars will be held on February 24th, February 26th, March 6th, and March 17th. Each webinar will include the same presentation on the following topics: a brief overview of the EN Grants Program and FY 2020 timeline, critical elements of the Solicitation Notice, notable changes from FY 2019, an overview of new guidance materials and optional templates, and common mistakes to avoid. This will be followed by a question and answers session with participants. Connection information on the webinars can be found at: https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/exchange-network-grant-program.

Additionally, the Exchange Network website has some great information regarding the EN program, previously funded EN grant projects, and resources for potential applicants: https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/exchange-network-grant-program

Finally, the Solicitation Notice offers the most comprehensive overview of the Exchange Network grant program, and is available on our website here: https://www.epa.gov/exchangenetwork/fy-2020-exchange-network-grant-solicitation-notice. The question of applicant eligibility is addressed in Section III-A (page 18) of the notice, and threshold criteria is described in Section III-B (page 19).

QUESTION: Where can we find additional information on Identity Management, page B7 of the FY2020 NEIEN Solicitation Notice?

ANSWER: Please click the link http://www.exchangenetwork.net/EN2015_files/4.3.pdf to view the Enterprise Identity Management presentation from the EE 2015 meeting , and visit the www.exchangenetwork.net for additional information.

QUESTION: We currently submit our air data to AQS through our node using OpenNode2. I was told recently that in order to upgrade our node that we would need to upgrade from .Net2 to .Net4, which would essentially require a new server. I realize that I cannot apply for funds for maintenance of an existing flow; however, we are considering applying for a grant to flow radon data through our existing node via OpenNode2. If we apply for a grant to put a new flow into operation, can we apply for funds for a new server? I was considering using VES to flow radon data, but the VES decision flow chart does not recommend using VES if we do not already have our radon data in a relational database, which we do not.

ANSWER: This is potentially an approvable request as we have funded similar projects in the past. However, we will also take into consideration your specific proposed project goals and objectives, so we encourage you to throughly read the Solicitation Notice before drafting your application.

QUESTION: Regarding the 'Project Goals, Outputs, and Outcomes' section of the Project Narrative, and more specifically the optional template of this section on pages H-1 and H-2, the suggested text describes project goals, outputs, and outcomes, followed by Table 1 which describes the same thing, just in less detail. Are both the **Project Goals, Outputs, and Outcomes Section** *and* Table 1 required, or just one or the other?

ANSWER: Section Two: Project Goals, Outputs, and Outcomes is a required section of the Project Narrative. The table, which is provided in this section's optional template, is not mandatory but it is a recommended way to display *some of the information* that should be provided in this section. Similarly, the other language found in this section's optional template is also recommended to be included, as it incorporates other subjects/details that also factor into an applicant's score.

That said, we want to stress that using the provided templates is not mandatory; rather, these are tools provided to suggest a way in which the applicant can include and detail the information that should be covered in that section. Applicants are encouraged to read the detailed Project Narrative description on pages E-3 and E-4, as well as the Evaluation Criteria on pages 24-27 and the checklist tool on page F-1, for a full understanding of what should be covered in the project narrative.

QUESTION: Instead of using the table template as shown on page H-2, can I use the following table format instead?

Table 1. Goals, Outputs, and Outcomes		
Goal 1: [Name the Goal]		
Output	Scheduled Completion Date	Output Budget
Output 1.1: [Enter Output]	[Enter Date]	$ [ ]
Output 1.2: [Enter Output]	[Enter Date]	$ [ ]
Output 1.3: [Enter Output]	[Enter Date]	$ [ ]
		Total Goal Budget: $[XX,XXX]
Outcome(s): [Enter outcome(s) from this goal/the outputs listed]		
Goal 2: [Name the Goal]		
Output	Scheduled Completion Date	Output Budget
Output 2.1: [Enter Output]	[Enter Date]	$ [ ]
Output 2.2: [Enter Output]	[Enter Date]	$ [ ]
Output 2.3: [Enter Output]	[Enter Date]	$ [ ]
		Total Goal Budget: $[XX,XXX]
Outcome(s): [Enter outcome(s) from this goal/the outputs listed]		

ANSWER: Please note that the use of the table format on Solicitation Notice Page H-2 to display the elements of the detailed work plan is not mandatory for any applicant; however, the information contained in this table does factor into an application's score. As such, we highly recommend displaying the information as clearly as possible and have provided the table template on page H-2 to suggest a way for applicants to do that. The revised table, as displayed above, also works fine, as it includes the same information and displays it clearly and in detail.