

# EPA Healthy Watersheds Consortium (HWC) Grant Program 2024 Request for Applications (RFA) Questions and Answers

*Please note: It is expected that this document will be updated regularly. This question-and-answer document is intended to clarify elements of the HWC Grant RFA. To the extent of any inconsistency between an answer and the RFA, the RFA takes precedence.*

The US Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) HWC Grant Request for Applications (EPA-OW-OWOW-24-02) is available at: <https://www.epa.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-consortium-grants>.

All applications must be received by electronic submission through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).

- EPA staff hosted information session webinars about the Request for Applications on March 28 and April 9, 2024. [Click here for a recording of the March 28 webinar](#).
- **Question Due Date:** Questions about this RFA must be submitted in writing via e-mail ([hwp-team@epa.gov](mailto:hwp-team@epa.gov)) and must be received by **April 26, 2024**. Written responses will be included in an updated Questions and Answers document, and posted on EPA’s website at <https://www.epa.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-consortium-grants>.
- **Application Due Date:** All applications must be received by electronic submission through Grants.gov by **11:59 PM EDT on May 10, 2024**, in order to be considered for funding.

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1. **What are the EPA’s goals in establishing the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program?**

The objective of the Healthy Watersheds Consortium (HWC) Grant Program is to accelerate and expand the strategic protection of healthy watersheds, including freshwater, estuarine, and marine ecosystems, across the country through a cooperative agreement and subsequent subawards. Through this Request for Applications, the EPA is seeking applicants interested in serving as an intermediary organization to manage the HWC Grant Program and build partnerships to leverage and sustain the Consortium.

2. **What is a healthy watershed?**

For the purposes of this grant program, healthy watersheds are those in which natural land cover supports dynamic hydrologic and geomorphic processes within their natural range of variation (i.e., sediment storage and deposition); habitat of sufficient size and connectivity to support native aquatic and riparian species; and water quality that supports healthy biological communities. ([US EPA, 2012. Identifying and Protecting Healthy Watersheds: Concepts, Assessments, and Management Approaches. U.S. EPA, EPA-841-B-11-002](#)).

3. **What does the EPA mean by “Consortium”?**

For the purposes of this program, a consortium is one entity who is linked with or in a collaborative partnership with other groups or organizations having similar healthy watersheds protection goals.

4. **How many awards will be issued under this RFA? How much funding is available?**

EPA expects to award one cooperative agreement to fund a single grantee to manage the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant program and issue subawards on a competitive basis. Up to \$2,100,000 of federal EPA funding, incrementally funded at an average of approximately \$350,000 per year, is expected to be available over a six-year project period.

5. **Is there a non-federal cost share/match requirement?**

Yes, applicants must demonstrate in their application their approach for meeting the 40% non-federal cost share/match requirement, which would equate to \$1,400,000 based on an EPA award amount of \$2,100,000. The cost share/match requirement is calculated as 40% of the total project costs.

6. **Who are eligible applicants?**

Eligible applicants of this RFA are non-profit organizations, non-governmental organizations, interstate agencies, and inter-tribal consortia - a coalition between two or more Indian tribal governments authorized by the governing bodies of those tribes to apply for and receive assistance and participate in self-governance.

7. **What applicants are not eligible to apply?**

Universities and colleges and institutions of higher education are not eligible under this announcement. Individual states, U.S. Territories, Tribes, local governments, and for-profit

organizations are also not eligible under this announcement. However, these entities would be eligible recipients of a subawards.

**8. Are applicants required to have any specialized experience?**

Under the *Programmatic Capability* evaluation criterion (15 out of 100 points), applications will be evaluated based upon the applicant's ability to successfully manage and complete the proposed project, specifically considering the applicant's:

- i. **Organizational experience** related to the proposed project, and the organization's infrastructure as it relates to the ability to successfully implement the project. **(5 points)**
- ii. **Staff expertise/qualifications**, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project. **(5 points)**
- iii. **Specialized experience and expertise** developing and implementing partnership-based programs to protect healthy watersheds, including within or in or to benefit disadvantaged, historically marginalized and overburdened communities. **(5 points)**

**9. What activities does the EPA expect the grantee to implement in managing the HWC Grant Program?**

As part of their project approach in the project narrative, applicants should demonstrate their ability to:

- i. Prepare and advertise a subaward competition, establish criteria for evaluating and selecting subawardee applications, and make subawards to support healthy watershed protection high-impact demonstration projects and capacity-building projects that: (1) include a variety of partners; (2) develop or represent priorities of a plan or strategy intended to protect healthy watersheds, or some other prioritization scheme based on a healthy watersheds assessment; and (3) include a plan for tracking and communicating the successes of the subaward project;
- ii. Oversee and monitor subawardees for successful completion of subaward projects supported by the HWC Grant Program;
- iii. Provide technical support to subawardees by, for example, facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges to provide opportunities for knowledge transfer in the development and implementation of healthy watersheds protection strategies, including through conducting one in-person national meeting, one virtual national meeting, and regional-specific virtual meetings, as appropriate;
- iv. Develop a strategy to promote, grow, and sustain the HWC Grant Program over the duration of the cooperative agreement, including through program development, partnerships, and networking;
- v. Collaborate with the EPA in highlighting the HWC Grant Program in engagements with clean water partners (e.g., state and local partners implementing CWA programs) to increase understanding of and support for healthy watersheds protection;
- vi. Communicate the successes of the subaward projects through written materials such as fact sheets, press releases, blogs, and websites;
- vii. Qualitatively and quantitatively measure and report on the outputs and outcomes of environmental results of the healthy watersheds projects accomplished through the subawards.

Applicants may include any other activities in the subaward RFA that they believe will help promote and attain the objectives and goals described in the announcement.

#### 10. What types of subaward projects does the EPA anticipate supporting through the HWC Grant Program?

Applicants should address how they will ensure that competitive subawards will support one of the following project types, as described below. In all cases, subaward projects should have the following components: (1) include a variety of partner organizations; (2) advance a new or existing plan or strategy intended to protect healthy watersheds, or some other prioritization scheme based on a healthy watersheds assessment; and (3) include a plan for tracking and communicating the successes of the subaward project. Consistent with the goals of the Justice40 Initiative, applicants are strongly encouraged to describe the approach to solicit subaward applications from organizations seeking to protect healthy watersheds in or to benefit disadvantaged, historically marginalized and overburdened communities.

**Subaward Project Type #1: Healthy Watershed Protection High-Impact Demonstration Projects** that advance components of a new or existing plan or strategy, such as leveraging funding to protect a particular property, that will directly result in the protection of a healthy watershed. These projects typically leverage a HWC Grant subaward many times over for maximum results. Additionally, these projects must demonstrate a new or experimental protection technique or approach that has the potential to be replicated and scaled to advance healthy watersheds protection regionally or nationally (e.g., a project that demonstrates the potential to unlock significant support via partnerships or financing to support healthy watersheds protection).

**Subaward Project Type #2: Healthy Watershed Protection Capacity-Building Projects** that will grow the organizational capacity needed for large-scale, long-term healthy watershed protection. These projects should identify existing or proposed funding or strategies to be deployed with increased capacity for project implementation (i.e., projects should demonstrate how the increased capacity will allow the subawardee to secure funding or implement a strategy needed to accelerate long-term watershed protection). Projects should also leverage participation from multiple agencies responsible for aquatic ecosystem, land, habitat, and water resource protection/management as well as other appropriate partners (e.g., non-governmental organizations, other federal agencies).

#### 11. How many subawards will be made under the HWC Grant Program?

This is yet to be determined and will depend on factors, such as the total project budget (EPA funding, plus required non-federal cost share/match), additional leveraged funds, and the range of funding requested in proposed subawards. There is no minimum or maximum number of subawards under this grant. As noted in the RFA, funding for each subaward may

range from approximately \$50,000 to \$150,000 per project. Applicants may identify a slightly different range for each subaward as part of their project narrative.

## 12. Who are eligible subawardees under the HWC Grant Program?

Eligible entities for the subawards include public and private nonprofit institutions / organizations, federally recognized Indian tribal governments, states, local governments, U.S. territories or possessions, and interstate agencies.

## 13. How do we obtain directions and grant application forms for this grant?

Directions on how to apply can be found in Section IV of the RFA (see pages 19-25). Applicants must apply electronically through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) under this funding opportunity based on the [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) instructions in this announcement.

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. EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54
4. EPA Form 4700-4 – Preaward Compliance Review Report.
  - a. Tips for filling out this form can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/tips-completing-epa-form-4700-4>.
5. Project Narrative (Project Narrative Attachment Form) prepared as described in Section IV of the announcement.
  - a. The Project Narrative should be no more than fifteen (15) typewritten, single-spaced 8.5 x 11-inch pages (a page is one side of paper). It is recommended that applicants use a standard 12-point type with 1-inch margins. Readability is important, and applicants should consider this when selecting a font for use in the Project Narrative. Budget information and the milestone schedule must be included within the 15-page Project Narrative limit, and not in the supporting materials or appendix.

### *Optional Documents:*

6. Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (if applicable).
  - a. The Indirect Cost Rate Agreement is not included in the 15-page single-spaced Project Narrative page limit. See [Indirect Cost Guidance for Recipients of EPA Assistance Agreements](#) for additional information about indirect cost rates. (Use Other Attachments Form)
7. Supporting Materials, such as letters of commitment and biographical sketches of major project managers, support staff members, or other major project participants for the proposed projects (Use Other Attachments Form)

Your organization must submit your complete application package electronically to EPA through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) no later than **May 10, 2024, at 11:59 PM Eastern**.

Questions received from prospective applicants via email to [hwp-team@epa.gov](mailto:hwp-team@epa.gov)

**Is there a limit on how much of the grant can be used on operations?**

No, there is no cap on the proportion of EPA grant funds (or non-federal match) that can be used on operations vs. subawards. As part of the Budget ranking criterion, EPA reviewers will review your application "...based upon the extent and quality to which it demonstrates the reasonableness of the budget and includes estimated funding amounts for each project component/task. Applicants will be evaluated based on the adequacy of the information provided in the detailed budget and whether the proposed costs are reasonable and allowable" (page 28).

**Can EPA provide input to prospective grantee applicants on other entities with whom we may apply under the 'coalition coverage' scenario?**

No, EPA is not able to weigh in on potential partner entities with whom you are considering applying under a coalition.

**Is there flexibility in the proposed payment schedule of \$350,000 year for 6 years? Nothing radical, but perhaps up to \$450,000 year in the early to mid-years with reduced payments in other years?**

Potentially, but this will be dependent on EPA funding available during the cooperative agreement.

**Is there flexibility in the proposed subrecipient award range of \$50,000 - \$150,000 and grant duration of 2-3 years? Such flexibility might be helpful in providing somewhat larger awards of longer duration to allow subrecipients additional time to implement projects.**

Yes, there is flexibility in both the subaward funding amount and duration (both are presented as approximates in the RFA). In describing your proposed approach in making subawards, please explain the rationale for your planned subaward amounts and project periods, including how this approach will help support your overall project goals.

**Are you open to a single grant cycle or perhaps two cycles early in the process that would enable subrecipients to propose strategies to act quickly to take advantage of the abundance of federal agency (USDA, DOD, EPA, etc.) funds that are available for natural resource projects? This abundance of federal funding may not be available for long and permitting subrecipients to act quickly could produce superior outcomes.**

Yes. The incremental funding schedule will again be contingent on EPA funding available annually, but we do not require a specific number or frequency of subaward solicitations. In your application please include rationale for your subaward approach.

**I am a little confused about this funding opportunity and was hoping to get some clarification. Is the funding available to be used to fund a project that implements a watershed based plan? Or is it funding an organization to manage subawards that funds individual watershed based plan projects?**

This Request for Applications is to establish a cooperative agreement with an entity to manage the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program. The selected entity (grantee) would work with EPA over a 6-year period to manage the national competition to support subawards (high-impact demonstration projects and watershed protection capacity-building projects) aimed at protecting healthy watersheds. Based on the first iteration of the program, we expect the first solicitation for

subaward applicants will be within a year of standing up the cooperative agreement - so sometime in 2025.

**Is our organization (a River Authority) eligible to apply to manage the HWC grant?**

Your organization would need to qualify as one of the following entity types in order to be an eligible application under the current solicitation: "Eligible applicants under this announcement are nonprofit, non-governmental organizations, interstate agencies, and intertribal consortia." - RFA page 12

**Questions from Information Session Webinar #1 (March 28, 2024)**

**Eligibility**

**If an organization works primarily with impaired waters, does that preclude eligibility?**

The focus of the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program is on protecting healthy waters and watersheds. It is anticipated that applicants may work across a range of watershed settings, including areas that have impaired waterbodies. This does not preclude eligibility for this opportunity. We see opportunities for protection work to happen in pristine, healthy watersheds, as well as a complement to restoration work, so we encourage applicants to think about that, including in settings where you see opportunities to, for example, protect healthy headwaters as a complement to downstream restoration work.

**If an organization already receives 319 funding, are they still eligible?**

Yes.

**My organization works in areas broader than watersheds and has a name that indicates we work in areas outside of watersheds, yet our work still applies to watersheds. Are we still able to apply?**

Yes. We encourage you to make the connection between your organization's work and how this protects watershed condition.

**My organization only works in one state, but it is a large state, and we work in all regions within the state. Is this opportunity available to us?**

It is a requirement of this program that the grantee has a national scope in terms of soliciting sub awardees from across the country. If this is outside the scope of your organization's typical focus, you can consider forming a coalition or see if there are opportunities to work in partnership with other organizations for this application. This would involve one grantee receiving the EPA funds but within partnership among other entities working together to administer the program.

**Sub-awardees**

**Do organizations already need to have planned sub awardees, or partnerships with potential sub award recipients?**

No, you don't need to have the sub awardees already selected. In your application, we will look to see if you have thought about how to approach the solicitation of sub awardees, but you should not be advertising this grant program to sub awardees at this point.

**Are universities eligible to apply for sub awards?**

Yes, colleges and universities will be eligible to apply for sub awards.



**Where will there be information about sub award applications? Will this come from EPA or the grantee?**

Sub award applicants would apply directly through the grantee, but EPA will advertise this application opportunity as well. Please refer to our [website](#) or consider joining our [email listserv](#).

**Funding**

**The federal funding provided through this RFA is lower than the previous iteration of the HWC Grant program. Does this correspond with an adjustment in expectation for number of sub awards?**

It is true that the amount of EPA funding available for this current RFA is lower than last time, and our review committee will consider how much can be accomplished and how many sub awards can be made with this lesser amount of funding. Please note that the non-federal match requirement for this RFA is larger than previously, which we hope will increase the funding available through this consortium. We would also like applicants to consider and point out potential opportunities they see available to leverage additional funds, whether with federal agencies or otherwise.

**Could you explain the 6-year cooperative agreement versus the 2-3 year time frame mentioned in the presentation?**

EPA cooperative agreements are capped at 6 years. After this 6-year period begins, it will take time for the grantee to work with EPA before soliciting sub awards, and the sub award lengths need to be shorter to ensure projects are complete by the end of the 6-year period. The previous iteration of this grant program had four annual sub award solicitations and the last round was made with enough time for those projects to finish within the 6-year period.

**Can subawards be a source of match? Can match from subawards include in-kind support? Would this all be considered leveraging?**

It is the responsibility of the grantee to find a way to contribute the 40% match. One way to provide that match, as we saw in the first iteration of the program, is by expecting sub awardees to provide the match. Your application should address how you plan to contribute the non-federal cost share match. This should be associated with your budget table and the appropriate forms (SF-424) in your application package. Please do not overmatch the 40% match requirement in your application budget. In terms of leveraging, we do want to see applicants consider other opportunities to bring in additional funding (federal or otherwise) and reflect this in their project narratives, but do not account for it in the project budgets.

**Why does EPA work with an external partner to manage this grant program? Does EPA have influence in selecting the sub awards?**

EPA will have a role in working with the grantee to review sub award applications. EPA can provide input, but grantee is responsible for the final decisions. EPA seeks to work with an external grantee to hopefully provide seed funding that can help build a consortium of funders. This will hopefully grow the funding available for sub awards. Additionally, it can be cumbersome to apply for federal grants directly, and hopefully by having prospective sub awardees apply through the grantee, the sub award application process is more streamlined than applying to a federal agency directly. This also allows the chance for a grantee to utilize specialized experience in managing this type of program which EPA might not have in-house.

## Questions from Information Session Webinar #2 (April 9, 2024)

**Does the match requirement need to be aligned by budget category. That is, if the EPA grant were used for grant administration, does the match need to be applied to that same budget line?**

Please see [page 13](#) of the RFA for information on non-federal cost share/match requirements:

“All applicants must describe in their application submission how they will contribute a minimum of 40% of the total project cost (total federal share and applicant non-federal cost share/match) in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200.306. The cost share/match must be for eligible and allowable project costs and may be provided by the applicant or partner organization or institution (subawardees).”

See EPA’s [Interim General Budget Development Guidance for Applicants and Recipients of EPA Financial Assistance](#) for guidance and examples to assist in developing a project budget.

**Does the \$2.1M we can apply for from the EPA include what we will be responsible for passing to subawards? Would EPA expect a certain amount of the required 40% non-federal match (i.e., \$1.4M) be used for subawards also? Or could these funds go primarily towards operating costs and most of the \$2.1M from the EPA go to subawards?**

There is no required minimum amount of EPA funding that must be used for subawards. As outlined on page 22-23 of the [RFA](#), applicants should reflect in their work plan narrative and project budget how they will implement each of the expected grantee activities (‘Project Approach’). Please see page 13 of the RFA for information on non-federal cost share/match requirements:

“All applicants must describe in their application submission how they will contribute a minimum of 40% of the total project cost (total federal share and applicant non-federal cost share/match) in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200.306. The cost share/match must be for eligible and allowable project costs and may be provided by the applicant or partner organization or institution (subawardees).” Applicants must identify the source(s) they will rely on to meet the non-federal cost share/match requirement.

**I think you mentioned that subawardees can help provide matching funds -- how do we present that in our budget if these subawards haven't been determined and matching funds haven't been committed yet?**

As part of your application, you are required to identify the source(s), and funding from each, you (as the grantee) will rely on to provide the required 40% non-federal cost share/match. Please see page 13 of the RFA for information on non-federal cost share/match requirements:

“All applicants must describe in their application submission how they will contribute a minimum of 40% of the total project cost (total federal share and applicant non-federal cost share/match) in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200.306. The cost share/match must be for eligible and allowable project costs and may be provided by the applicant or partner organization or institution (subawardees).” Applicants must identify the source(s) they will rely on to meet the non-federal cost share/match requirement.

See EPA’s [Interim General Budget Development Guidance for Applicants and Recipients of EPA Financial Assistance](#) for guidance and examples to assist in developing a project budget.

**Will project budgets that allocate more funds towards subawards be scored higher?**

No. As part of evaluation reviews, EPA will consider applicants' overall Project Approach (Criterion #2, 35 out of 100 points) for implementing the six project activities. Additionally, applicants will be evaluated based on their project budget (Criterion #4, 10 out of 100 points), including "the extent and quality to which it demonstrates the reasonableness of the budget and includes estimated funding amounts for each project component/task."

**How will leveraged funds be evaluated? As a tie-breaker of sorts when all other criteria are equal?**

Leveraging information is considered as part of ranking criterion #6 (5 out of 100 points): *"The application will be evaluated based on the extent to which it demonstrates how the applicant will leverage the total project costs (EPA grant funding, plus required cost share/match, as specified under Section III of the announcement) to secure additional funds/resources to support the proposed project activities, and demonstrates how these funds/resources will be used to contribute to the performance and success of the proposed project. Applicants will also be evaluated based on the amount and type of leveraged resources to be provided, how the leverage resources will be obtained, the likelihood the leveraging will materialize during grant performance, the strength of the leveraging commitment, and the role the leveraged funds/resources will play in supporting the proposed project activities. Voluntary non-federal cost share/match will not be evaluated."*

**Can you share the link for the map for sub awardees in the chat so we can look at the projects awarded in the first phase?**

A table of the subawards made through the first iterations of the HWC Grant Program is available at <https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-02/hwcg-project-table.pdf>.

**In Phase 1 of the HWC Grant Program you awarded most money to land trusts, but you awarded several to conservation districts. Do you consider conservation districts as local government, and are they eligible? CDs can vary between states on how they operate. Some, are 99% grant funded, as ours is.**

Yes, conservation districts are eligible to receive HWC subawards.

**Will there be a published list of grantees, and their sub-award programs, so that individual non-profits can seek out those sub-awards and apply?**

Yes, the EPA will post information about the HWC Grant Program, including the grantee selected to manage the HWC subaward program at: <https://www.epa.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-consortium-grants>.

**In the last round, how many applicants were there compared to the number of grants awarded? How many applications do you anticipate awarding funding for?**

In 2014 EPA received six applications from eligible entities applying to serve as grantee to manage the HWC Grant Program. During the first iteration of the HWC Grant Program, there were 367 subaward applications received over four annual solicitations, of which a total of 56 subawards were selected. We anticipated awarding one cooperative agreement through this RFA with whom EPA will work to implement the national subaward program.

**Could you say more about what you count as a "plan" when you talk about the high-impact demonstration subaward projects "advancing a new or existing plan"? Is the intention here to make sure that there is a clear way of targeting the work?**

Yes, “existing plans” refer to those serving as an effective guide for targeting management activities in areas most critical for protecting watershed health. Examples could include: watershed-based plans, local government plans (e.g., county land use plans), or state plans (e.g., state forest action plans).

**Can you describe the “Watershed Action” subaward projects from the first iteration of the HWC Grant Program and why they were removed from the allowable project types?**

EPA considers the watershed action subaward projects from the first iteration of the HWC Grant Program to be similar to the subaward project type #1 (healthy watershed protection high-impact demonstration projects), as described on page 6 of the RFA:

“Subaward funds should be provided for projects that advance components of a new or existing plan or strategy, such as leveraging funding to protect a particular property, that will directly result in the protection of a healthy watershed. These projects typically leverage a HWC Grant subaward many times over for maximum results. Additionally, these projects must demonstrate a new or experimental protection technique or approach that has the potential to be replicated and scaled to advance healthy watersheds protection regionally or nationally (e.g., a project that demonstrates the potential to unlock significant support via partnerships or financing to support healthy watersheds protection). The EPA expects that the results of the project will be disseminated so that others can benefit from the knowledge gained from the demonstration projects. New approaches may include applications of new settings or environments that are not yet well studied. HWC Grant subaward funds cannot be used for the purchase of land or conservation easements. Partner funds that are independent of the HWC federal funding and are not part of the required non-federal cost share/match for HWC subawards may be used to purchase land or conservation easements.”

**Are applicants expected to be state natural resources agencies?**

State agencies are not eligible to apply under this solicitation for grantees who will work with EPA through a cooperative agreement to manage the national HWC subaward program. State agencies are among the eligible entities that can apply for subawards under this program.

**Is there a template for the narrative document or is this something applicants should format themselves?**

No, there is no required template for the project narrative. As described on page 21 of the [Request for Applications](#), there is a 15-page, single-spaced limit on your application. We strongly encourage applicants format their 15-page application to sequentially address each of the eight ranking criteria.