

National Priorities: Water Innovation, Science, And Engagement to Advance Water Reuse Request for Applications (RFA)

Informational Webinar Questions and Answers (Q&As) August 5, 2021

1. This is a very multidisciplinary initiative. How do people with relevant expertise in one discipline (e.g., I am a social scientist who has done reuse and drinking water research) connect with those in other disciplines who might wish to collaborate on a proposal?

Answer: EPA cannot be involved in the forming of collaborations. Applicants may form collaborations through whatever networks they have available.

2. Can you clarify if the funding is 25 percent of federal grant or 25 percent of total project cost and the 25 percent non-federal cost share/match?

Answer: The required 25 percent cost share is calculated from the amount of federal funds requested. For example, the minimum 25 percent non-federal cost share/match if the maximum federal funds of \$3,246,000 are requested would equal to a minimum of \$811,500. Applicants may include more than the required 25 percent cost share in their budgets. Please see pages 3 and 20 in the RFA for more information on cost sharing.

3. Are government/municipal entities eligible to apply?

Answer: No.

4. Can foreign entities be a named partner on an application?

Answer: A foreign entity may be named as a Subawardee institution if it would be eligible as an American one. Otherwise, a foreign organization could serve as a consultant.

5. Can for-profit entities be involved as subcontractors or collaborators if a university is the prime?

Answer: Yes, as a consultant or contractor. Please see the funding notice, section IV.C.7.b.(6).

EXCERPT:

*Contractual: List the proposed contractual activities along with a brief description of the scope of work or services to be provided, the proposed duration of the contract/procurement, the estimated cost, and the proposed procurement method (competitive or non-competitive). **Any procurement of services from individual consultants or commercial firms (including space for workshops) must comply with the competitive procurement requirements of 2 CFR Part 200.317-200.326. Please see [EPA Solicitation Clauses](#) for more details. EPA provides detailed guidance on procurement requirements in the Agency's [Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements](#).***

Examples of Contractual costs include:

- i. Consultants – Consultants are individuals with specialized skills who are paid at a daily or hourly rate. EPA's participation in the salary rate (excluding overhead) paid to individual

consultants retained by recipients or by a recipient's contractors or subcontractors is limited to the maximum daily rate for a Level IV of the Executive Schedule (formerly GS-18), to be adjusted annually.

ii. Speaker/Trainer Fees – Information on speakers should include the fee and a description of the services they are providing.

***Please note also that contractors should not be listed as Key Personnel or co-PIs.*

6. Can you discuss more about the collaboration potential between innovation/sustainability and industries?

Answer: To the extent practicable, research applications must embody innovation and sustainability. Innovation for the purposes of this RFA is defined as the process of making changes, a new method, custom or device. Innovative research can take the form of wholly new applications or applications that build on existing knowledge and approaches for new uses. Research applications must include a discussion on how the proposed research is innovative (see Section IV.C.6.a). The goal of sustainability, derived from the U.S. National Environmental Policy Act 16 of 1969 (NEPA), is to “create and maintain conditions, under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations.” Research applications must include a discussion on how the proposed research will seek sustainable solutions that protect the environment and strengthen our communities (see Section IV.C.6.a). Reviewers will draw from all the above-mentioned innovation and sustainability definitions in the review/evaluation process of research applications (see Section V.A).

7. How many awards will you be making for this round?

Answer: Up to two grants may be awarded (see Section II).

8. How is the RFA interpret "at a national scale"? As an example, technologies that can be applicable nationally, or representation on the team from communities/researchers across the US, etc.

Answer: The RFA is intended to benefit communities across the U.S. The proposals are encouraged to identify research questions that would be widely applicable to multiple regions of the U.S., including water-scarce western states currently in drought and eastern U.S. facing higher than average climate-induced precipitation and flooding. The expectation is a clear recognition of the varied reuse drivers across different regions, use cases, and community size, and a thoughtful assessment of the technological and social solutions for different regional contexts. Researchers from across the U.S. within the team may provide such regional context in the proposed research but the team composition on its own would not be considered fulfilling the “national scale” requirement nor are the research teams required to have a national distribution.

9. In requesting for both types of research, what proportion does the program want new research and to what extent greater connectivity/cross-communication across the practitioner/research network across the US?

Answer: This is up to the researchers.

10. Are Federally Funded Research Development Centers (FFRDCs) eligible to still apply as a sub-awardee to another party or not at all?

Answer: Not eligible.

11. How and what type of innovation is appropriate for the RFA? As an example, could multi-faceted modeling (hydrodynamics, ecosystem and human health risk assessment model, socioeconomics model, water resources management model), decisions support system combined with education/communication modules, and treatment technologies be considered an innovation in technology for adopting water reuse.

Answer: The examples given in the above question would qualify as innovative research. The key expectation for Topic B is that the innovation is at a high Technology Readiness Level upon completion of the research project so it can be readily deployed to address real-world challenges to the adoption of water reuse as a climate adaptive solution. Specifically, for Topic B, innovation could mean taking a proven technology in one context and applying it to a new context such as scaling treatment units down from centralized treatment to on-site, deploying monitoring or sensor technologies to a reuse application, or improving existing technologies to address a market need. Please refer to page 15 in the RFA for more information.

12. Can foreign entity be a cost share partner?

Answer: The RFA has no restrictions listed in this regard.

13. What happens if there is overlap in the submissions if they come from the same institution? Are they evaluated independently?

Answer: The proposals will be evaluated individually.

14. Is the RFA considering social science research as part of the innovation or is the RFA asking for standard social science best practices to be applied to better understand the barriers, etc?

Answer: Standard social science best practices and methods are a minimum threshold, and innovative collaboration between social science research and the technical science and engineering disciplines can also be viewed as innovative. New social science practices and methods will also be considered innovative.

15. Does the proposal have to specifically address each of the topics (A-E) listed in RFA?

Answer: The proposal must have equal treatment of Research Areas 1 and 2, but there may be unequal emphasis on the topics within each Research Area if all topics A-E are addressed to some degree.

Additionally, proposals are not required to address all water sources and reuse applications but may identify specific water source and end-use combinations and build a cohesive multi-disciplinary research proposal around those specific use cases. Per the RFA, examples of sources of waters include municipal wastewater, industrial sources, agriculture runoff and return flows, and stormwater. Examples of reuse applications include agriculture and irrigation, potable water supplies, groundwater storage and recharge, industrial processes, onsite non-potable use, saltwater intrusion barriers, and environmental restoration.

16. Can more than one proposal be submitted from same institution?

Answer: Yes

17. When the RFA speaks of "health" is that to be interpreted as human health or could environmental health be the focus instead? In other words, must human health be part of the proposed work?

Answer: The focus on environmental health versus human health will depend on the water source and end use chosen by the researchers. Potable water end uses would require the considerations to the protection of human health, while certain agricultural or non-potable end uses etc. may consider more environmental health impacts.

18. What are the examples of non-federal cost share/match, other than in-kind contributions?

Answer: The cost share/match may be provided in cash or can come from in-kind contributions, such as the use of volunteers and/or donated time, equipment, faculty salary, etc., subject to the regulations governing matching fund requirements at 2 CFR §200.306. Cost share/matching funds are considered grant funds and are included in the total award amount.

All contributions, including cash and third party in-kind, shall be accepted as cost sharing or matching when such contributions meet all of the following criteria: (1) Are verifiable from the non-Federal entity's records; (2) Are not included as contributions for any other Federal award; (3) Are necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient accomplishment of project or program objectives; (4) Are allowable under Subpart E—Cost Principles of 2 CFR Part 200; (5) Are not paid by the Federal Government under another Federal award, except where the Federal statute authorizing a program specifically provides that Federal funds made available for such program can be applied to matching or cost sharing requirements of other Federal programs; (6) Are provided for in the approved budget when required by the Federal awarding agency; and (7) Conform to other provisions of 2 CFR Part 200, as applicable. Any restrictions on the use of grant funds (examples of funding restrictions are described in Section IV.E of this announcement) also apply to the use of cost share/matching funds.

For further questions about the RFA and processes, please contact:

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