National Estuary Program Watersheds Grant Program
2022 Request for Proposals
Issuance Date: December 30, 2022

Deadlines
1. Letters of Intent: due by 5:00 p.m. PT/8:00 p.m. ET on Friday, February 10, 2023
2. Full proposals by invitation only: due by 5:00 p.m. PT/8:00 p.m. ET on Friday, April 28, 2023

For all inquiries related to this solicitation, please contact Suzanne Simon, Restore America's Estuaries, at ssimon@estuaries.org. For additional information about the program, please visit https://estuaries.org/nep-watershed-grants/.

Contents:
- A. Program Overview
- B. Letter of Intent Requirements and Limits
- C. Full Proposal Requirements and Limits
- D. Evaluation Frameworks
- E. Submitting a Proposal
- F. Documentation of Timely Submittals and Problems with Submittals
- G. Award Timeline

A.   Program Overview

The National Estuary Program (NEP) Watersheds Grant (WG) Program is a nationally competitive grants program designed to support projects that address urgent, emerging, and challenging issues threatening the well-being of estuaries within the 28 NEP location boundary areas. Restore America's Estuaries (RAE) will be administering the NEP WG Program in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a pass-through entity with funding provided under Cooperative Agreement 84044301. Grant agreements under this Request for Proposals (RFP) will be "subawards" for the purposes of 2 CFR 200. RAE will establish and manage the subawards in compliance with 2 CFR 200.331 and the terms of EPA Cooperative Agreement 84044301.

Program Goals

The goals of the WG Program are to:
- Implement Priority Actions identified in one of the 28 EPA-approved NEP Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans (CCMP), which can be accessed at https://www.epa.gov/nep/comprehensive-conservation-and-management-plans;

- Execute and demonstrate on-the-ground and tangible quantifiable improvements to conditions of estuarine waters and the health of habitats and living resources completely within one or more of the 28 NEP areas;
- Provide results of monitoring and assessment that generate new understanding of systems under stress in one or more of the 28 NEP areas and lead to additional improvements on the ground;
- Achieve advances in new approaches, practices, methods, or techniques such as nature-based solutions and green infrastructure for preventing and addressing threats to estuaries and their habitats, especially adapting and bolstering resilience to the impacts of climate change in NEP areas;
- Establish or improve sustainable local capacity, particularly in disadvantaged or underserved communities, to prevent and address urgent, emerging, and challenging issues that affect the NEP areas; and
- Build partnerships with a diversity of stakeholders on project teams that address urgent, emerging, and challenging environmental issues within the NEP areas.

This program encourages meaningful, on-the-ground impact via thoughtful, strategic decisions regarding projects. In addition, the program encourages partnerships to build stronger, more resilient communities, particularly with respect to climate change, sea level rise, and nature-based solutions. We encourage and allow projects that are innovative and have the potential to catalyze change on local, regional, and national levels.

Threats to Estuary Ecosystems

This grant program funds projects within the 28 NEP areas and addresses the following urgent and challenging issues:
- Loss of key habitats resulting in significant impacts on fisheries and water quality such as seagrass, mangroves, tidal and freshwater wetlands, forested wetlands, kelp beds, shellfish beds, and coral reefs;
- Coastal resilience and extreme weather events including flooding and coastal erosion related to sea level rise, changing precipitation, warmer waters, or salt marsh, seagrass, or wetland degradation or loss and accelerated land loss;
- Impacts of nonpoint source pollution, excess nutrients and warmer water temperatures on aquatic life and ecosystems, including low dissolved oxygen conditions in estuarine waters;
- Stormwater runoff which not only can erode stream banks but can carry nutrients, sediment, and trash into rivers and streams that flow into estuaries;
- Recurring harmful algal blooms;
- Unusual or unexplained marine mammal mortalities; and
- Proliferation of invasive species that limit recreational uses, threaten wastewater systems, or cause other ecosystem damage.

Priorities for this Request for Proposals

To address the critical issues facing our nation's estuaries, each RFP round in the WG Program will identify a unique combination of priorities. For this RFP, projects must address one or more of the following priorities:

- Loss of key habitats;
- Coastal resilience and extreme weather events including flooding and coastal erosion; and
- Impacts of nutrients and warmer water temperatures.

Geographic Boundaries

Projects must occur in their entirety within one or more of the 28 NEP areas. See https://gispub.epa.gov/NEPmap/index.html for an interactive map. Efforts adjacent to, upstream of, or as a tributary to waterbodies to these areas will not be funded. Projects occurring outside of these areas will not be considered, nor will the geographic boundaries change. Supporting activities, such as laboratory analysis, may occur outside of the NEP areas but all fieldwork and anticipated ecosystem improvements must occur within them.
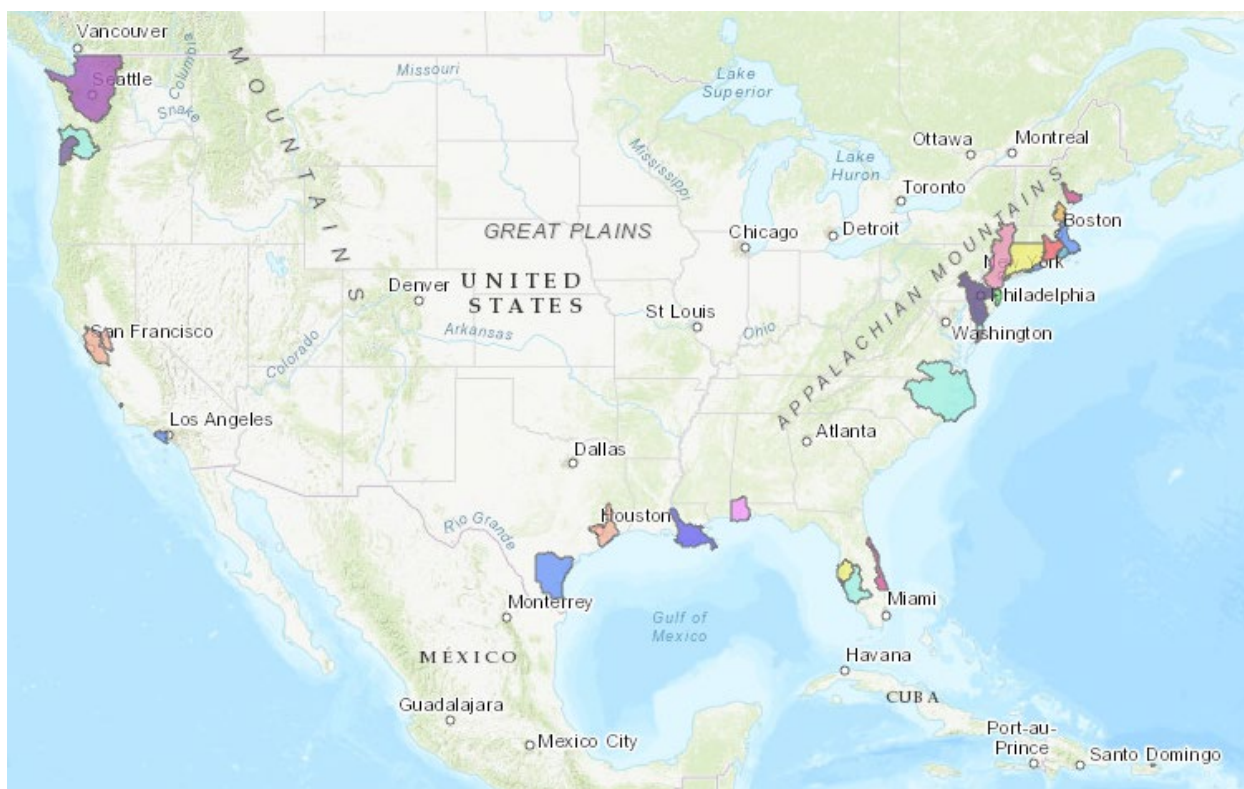

Figure 1. NEP WG eligibility areas, which align with the 28 NEP areas.

Technical Assistance and Applicant Support

Prospective applicants are encouraged to participate in one of two informational webinars, which will describe this new program, including eligibility aspects, and provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions:
- January 11, 2023, 1:00 p.m. ET/ 10:00 a.m. PT: to participate, please register via https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83454119642?pwd=Qm82aHVLNy8vSWRzV1k5UEF4cjNyQT09; and
- January 19, 2023, 1:00 p.m. ET/10:00 a.m. PT: to participate, please register via https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82404990274?pwd=aThMWThwMllodjNjL2RDcCtiNmNJUT09. .

The webinars will be recorded and posted online for those unable to participate live.

Applicants are encouraged to set up one-on-one discussions with the Program Director, Suzanne Simon, via email [ssimon@estuaries.org] or Calendly on the RAE 2022 NEPWG webpage: https://estuaries.org/nep-watershed-grants/. This scheduling app is user friendly and allows prospective applicants to find time to get feedback on aspects of their project and application. To prepare for these discussions we recommend potential applicants review the RFP completely and come with project ideas or key questions to make effective use of the time.

Process and Schedule

RAE will select projects through a two-step process: 1) letters of intent (LOI); and 2) full proposals by invitation only. Both steps are competitive and a request for full proposal does not guarantee funding. LOIs are due on Friday, February 10, 2023, and must be submitted online via the submittal portal, which may be accessed via https://estuaries.org/nep-watershed-grants/.

LOIs and full proposals will be evaluated by an independent panel comprised of individuals with expertise in the priorities for this RFP, in accordance with the criteria in Sections B and C. Following consultation with the review panel regarding the LOIs, RAE will invite a subset of applicants to submit full proposals. In some cases, RAE may suggest changes or clarifications for inclusion in full proposals. RAE will notify applicants of the status of LOIs on March 24, 2023. Full proposals, if invited, must be received by Friday, April 28, 2023, and should be submitted online through the portal, which can be accessed via https://estuaries.org/nep-watershed-grants/.

RAE expects to notify applicants regarding selection of proposals for funding by Friday, June 9, 2023. RAE will then work with selected applicants to finalize subawards and agreements with the goal of executing agreements in Summer 2023. Projects may be funded for a period up to 48 months from the date of the subaward. Section G provides RAE's anticipated grant-making schedule through subawards.

Funding and Project Period of Awards

All 2022 NEP WG subawards will be administered by RAE with federal funding from EPA. Each subaward will range approximately between $200,000 and $500,000 for the entire project period. Projects must be completed within a four-year period.

Match

Funded projects must provide an additional 30% of the requested amount in nonfederal matching funds or 23% of the total project cost. For example, a request of $100,000 must be accompanied by a commitment of at least $30,000 in non-federal match, for a total project cost of $130,000. Matching funds may be cash or in-kind. The expected source or sources of matching funds must be identified in the LOI, while final full proposals must document match commitment. Match must be expended within the approved budget period of the grant and in compliance with the requirements in 2 CFR 200.306.

Funds from the RESTORE Act, Natural Resources Damages Assessment (NRDA), and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) may not be used to meet the non-federal match requirement, except in the case of Gulf Environmental Benefit Funds or other NFWF resources that are not derived from Federal financial assistance agreements. If you have questions regarding the origin of NFWF funds, you will need to ask NFWF and request clarification as to whether funds they receive are derived from a federal grant.

Non-federal salary and related fringe may be used as match. Funds may not be used toward paying for tuition, nor can tuition or tuition-related expenses provided in-kind be used to satisfy the non-federal match requirement. Please contact Suzanne Simon at ssimon@estuaries.org if you would like additional feedback regarding specific sources of match.

Budget figures, including match, may be preliminary for the LOI and are expected to be finalized at the time of full proposal submittal. If the status of match source will not be known until after the LOI deadline, provide the best figures available, along with an explanation. For example, match may be anticipated to be provided by a municipal budget or other grant funding, but the final decision(s) will not be made until later. In this case, submit the LOI with the match shown in the budget and include details regarding the source and timing of match. Match must be available and used during the project timeline.

To reduce barriers to application and project implementation, organizations may request a full or partial waiver from the non-federal match requirement as part of the submittal process. Note that requesting a waiver does not guarantee that it will be granted, nor will asking for a waiver impact the competitiveness of the proposal. In addition, RAE may choose to offer a partial waiver. Applicants requesting a waiver should provide, at a minimum, the following information as part of the submittal via the online portal: organization's budget for current fiscal year; what community/ies the organization serves and engages; and impact of waiver on likelihood of project implementation. Applicants are welcome to provide additional details that will help decision makers better understand the organization and why a waiver is warranted.

Use of Funds

NEP WG funding may be used for most project costs, including salary, fringe, contractual support, equipment, supplies, project-related travel, and indirect costs. Expected costs must be outlined in the LOI and detailed in the full proposal – see Sections B and C for budget format and related details. Costs under this grant must be reasonable, allowable, allocable, and necessary to the supported project in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart E and must adhere to the general procurement standards set forth in 2 CFR 200.318 and "Consultant Fee Cap" set forth in 2 CFR 1500.9. Awarded funds may not be used to purchase land; however, land purchase costs may be used as match.

Procurement Requirements

The source of the WG Program is federal funding. Therefore, funded projects must adhere to federal requirements regarding contracting, including contracts with consultants, and purchases of supplies and equipment. These include multiple bids for procurements above $10,000 (2 CFR 200.320), good-faith efforts to employ Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (40 CFR 33.301; also see https://www.epa.gov/grants/disadvantaged-business-enterprise-program-requirements), and Davis-Bacon prevailing wage requirements for construction activities (2 CFR 200).

For more information on procurement requirements associated with this funding, applicants should refer to *Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements* (November 2022), available online at: https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/documents/best-practice-guide-for-procuring-services-supplies-equipment.pdf. Guidance on budget categories is available in *EPA's Interim General Budget Development Guidance for Applicants and Recipients of EPA Financial Assistance*, which is available at https://www.epa.gov/grants/rain-2019-g02. RAE will reimburse reasonable indirect costs incurred as part of 2022 WG Program projects. Details regarding indirect costs are available in the "budget" section – B(4).

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants under this announcement include state, interstate, tribal, inter-tribal consortia and regional water pollution control agencies and entities, state coastal zone management agencies, and other public or nonprofit private agencies, institutions, and organizations. Eligible public agencies include state, county, and local governments. Academic institutions and NEPS are also eligible. Non-profit organizations must be able to demonstrate their non-profit status.

Federal agencies, for-profit corporations, and private individuals are not eligible applicants, but may be included as partners in proposals submitted by eligible recipients. Public-private partnerships are encouraged, consistent with the competitive procurement requirements. For-profit partners, including consultants, who will receive grant funding must be selected in compliance with the competitive procurement requirements.

Multiple Applications and Projects

Organizations may submit up to three grant applications either as a lead organization, or as a team member on another organization's application. Multiple applications must be submitted separately and will be evaluated independent of other proposals.

Organizations are considered to be a team member if they are included in the budget, whether they are slated to receive funding or are providing match. Any participation in a team counts toward the three-proposal limit. The proposal limit is based on an organizational, not personal or individual, basis. The limit applies to both LOIs and full proposals.

National organizations with chapters are limited to three proposals in their area of jurisdiction. For example, if XYZ national organization has a chapter in Florida, then XYZ-FL may be on a total of three proposals that occur in Florida.

Universities are limited to three proposals each by state, regardless of the number of campuses. For example, if University ABC has five campuses, the University system as a whole is limited to three submittals total, not fifteen (five campuses at three submittals each).

If an entity is hosted by another organization for fiscal or administrative purposes, then the LOIs submitted by the entity is not subject to or counted toward the hosting organization's submittal limits. For example, if a non-profit is hosted by a university and the university is submitting three LOIs, then the non-profit may also submit up to three LOIs.

Ineligible Activities

Certain types of projects and efforts will not be considered under this program. Research activities and studies are not eligible for funding. However, assessment monitoring efforts are eligible, so long as they directly address one or more of the RFP priorities *and* result in or inform actionable, on-the-ground activities that result in improvements in estuarine conditions and functions. Assessment or monitoring that do not have direct, demonstrable linkages to improved estuarine conditions are not eligible.

Standalone education and outreach efforts are not eligible for funding. Education and outreach may be eligible as part of a larger on-the-ground implementation project. For example, efforts to inform resource managers or members of the public in order to facilitate or better implement the overall project or program would be eligible. In contrast, creating an outreach program about topic XYZ in and of itself would not be eligible. The key difference is that the outreach and education in the former example is part of the larger effort, as opposed to being the sole deliverable in the latter.

Every project must clearly define and explain what outputs and outcomes will result. Environmental outputs (or deliverables) refer to an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product related to an environmental goal or objective, which will be produced or provided over a period of time or by a specified date. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative but must be measurable during an assistance agreement project period. Examples of anticipated environmental outputs may include, but are not limited to, the following:
- New partnerships are formed or existing partnerships strengthened that contribute to the ecological and economic well-being within one or more of the 28 NEP areas;
- Develop new approaches, practices, or methods for preventing and addressing threats to estuaries or improving conditions;
- Extent of habitat created, re-established, rehabilitated, or enhanced using metrics such as, but not limited to, acres and/or linear feet;
- Pollutant load reductions to estuarine waters using metrics such as, but not limited to, pounds of sediment, nitrogen, and/or floatable debris removed or avoided.

Environmental outcomes are the result, effect, or consequence that will occur from carrying out an environmental program or activity that is related to an environmental or programmatic goal or objective and are used to gauge a project's performance. Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic in nature. Outcomes must be quantitative and may not necessarily be achieved within an award period. Outcomes may be short term (e.g., changes in learning, knowledge, attitude, skills), intermediate (e.g., changes in behavior, practice, or decisions), or long-term (e.g., changes in condition of the natural resource). Example of anticipated outcomes may include, but are not limited to:

- Change(s) made to regulations, codes, and/or ordinances to promote estuarine watershed-based protection and restoration;
- Increased capacity among state and local governments and underserved communities to address urgent, emerging, and challenging estuarine issues;
- Improvement in the function of estuarine, near-shore, wetland, and upland habitat communities and quantified in acres of habitat impacted;
- Increase in the quality of habitat that was impaired by non-native invasive species as quantified in acres;
- Implementation of innovative watershed-based nutrient reduction strategies which can result in quantified reductions in nutrient pollutants by pounds, tons, etc.;
- Protection or creation of a corridor or improvement of a corridor for coastal wetlands for landward migration in response to sea level rise; and
- Change in behavior of community members that results in improved conditions in estuarine waters or bolsters resilience to climate change which can be quantified through acres.

Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Justice

We urge projects and their teams to reflect and meaningfully engage the communities in which they are working, particularly with respect to communities that have experienced, or continue to experience, disproportional environmental health and climate change burdens. Such projects should demonstrate that engagement and outreach have occurred prior to submittal. This demonstration may take a variety of forms including, but not limited to: incorporating community members or groups on the team formally [e.g., providing match or receiving funds]; and/or community members or groups providing letters of support and/or participation. The intent is to ensure that project applicants have engaged these communities in advance and that the communities are aware and supportive of the project.

In an effort to encourage a diverse pool of projects and applicants, organizations may request a full or partial waiver of the non-federal match requirement if it is a barrier to project implementation. Please see the "Match" section above for details.

Tools and Equipment

Under this solicitation, RAE will consider funding tools and equipment such as hardware, software, monitoring devices, and durable equipment where such investments support the implementation of WG Program goals and objectives.

Surveys and Questionnaires

RAE will not fund social surveys or questionnaires under the WG Program, nor may the costs of such instruments be included as match. If your project utilizes social surveys or similar instruments, please ensure they are not included in the proposed budget, with all costs paid by entirely separate funding sources.

Land Purchase, Permissions, and Private Property

Final proposals must demonstrate sufficient authority to perform the work proposed. If the applicant is not the sole property owner, this authority may be shown with partnership commitments, letters of

permission, or similar documentation. WG Program funds may not be used toward land acquisition, but land acquisition may be used to satisfy the match requirement so long as it occurs within the award time period.

Permits and access agreements do not need to be completed prior to award, but the applicant must demonstrate a clear understanding of permitting and access requirements and schedules. RAE will fund work on private property where there is a clear public benefit and where the applicant can provide an assurance of lasting impact – for example, through a conservation easement, deed restriction, or other agreement with the private landowner. As with projects on publicly owned property, project sites on private land must include signage recognizing WG funding.

Partial Awards

In general, RAE will seek to fund proposals in their entirety. In some cases, however, RAE may elect to partially fund proposals, or may request other project or budget modifications prior to finalizing awards.

Reporting Requirements

Subrecipients must submit semi-annual (six month) progress and quarterly financial reports as well as a final report, in accordance with the programmatic conditions of EPA Cooperative Agreement 84044301. RAE will provide subrecipients with the format of semi-annual and final reports upon award. Information included in the final report will be used by RAE and EPA in public communication materials and performance reports. In addition to semi-annual reports, subrecipients will also be required to provide supporting visuals such as pictures, graphics, and/or videos to tell a compelling story of their project.

Outreach and Technology Transfer

Outreach and technology transfer will be critical components of the WG Program. Applicants must demonstrate how they will publicize the project approach and results, both to a general/lay audience and to resource managers on the local and national level. As part of this effort, subrecipients will be required to participate in an annual tech transfer webinar to share best practices and lessons learned with other subrecipients. Subrecipients are encouraged to participate in regional and national events aimed at sharing progress and results with organizations and resource managers. Applicants are encouraged to include registration and travel funds in their budgets to facilitate attendance at such gatherings.

Sharing of Data and Results

If environmental data will be collected by subrecipients, they will be required to ensure these data are transmitted into the Storage and Retrieval Data Warehouse annually or upon project completion using WQX or WQXweb. Continuous water quality data are not required to be transmitted into the STORET Data Warehouse. More information about WQX, WQXweb, and the STORET Warehouse, including tutorials, can be found at www.epa.gov/waterdata/water-quality-data-wqx. Additionally, applicants are expected to share project information and results at the collaboration and technology transfer meetings described above.

Quality Assurance

Subrecipients will be required to comply with Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) requirements and develop a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) as a deliverable. Draft QAPPs must be submitted at least 60 days prior to beginning data collection or use in order to provide sufficient time for review. No data collection/use activities may occur until the QAPP has been reviewed and approved by EPA. As a result, applicants are strongly advised to include a QAPP submittal as a deliverable within the first quarter of the project. Grant recipients are responsible for development of an approved QAPP and must identify within the full proposal the means by which they plan to complete the QAPP (for example, through contract support or in-house). RAE will assist subrecipients in coordinating QAPP submittals to EPA. Applicants unfamiliar with the QAPP development and approval process are encouraged to contact RAE for assistance in QAPP planning and development prior to proposal submittal.

Payment

Subrecipients will be paid in compliance with the standards in 2 CFR 200.305. Subrecipients will be paid on a reimbursement basis. Project costs will be reimbursed on the basis of documented, incurred expenses. Reimbursement requests shall be submitted at least quarterly and at most monthly. RAE will provide reimbursement within 30 calendar days of receipt of the subrecipient's payment request unless there are questions regarding the propriety of all or part of the reimbursement request.

Acknowledgement of Funding

Any reports, documents, publications, or other materials developed for public distribution supported by this assistance agreement shall contain the following statement:
> "This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under cooperative agreement 84044301 to Restore America's Estuaries. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does the EPA endorse trade names or recommend the use of commercial products mentioned in this document."

Invasive Species

Subrecipients and all team partners, including subcontractors, must monitor their project to ensure it does not facilitate the introduction or spread of invasive species.

B.   Letter of Intent Requirements and Limits

Letters of intent (LOI) allow RAE to provide preliminary review of project ideas to determine whether a full proposal will be requested and to provide comments to applicants. Please adhere to the LOI submittal format, word limits, and deadlines as described below.

All materials must be submitted via the online submittal portal, which may be accessed at https://estuaries.org/nep-watershed-grants/. Applicants are strongly encouraged to develop all the materials and text prior in a separate document, with particular attention to word limits, and then input the required information to the site. The following information is required for the LOI:

1. General information
    - Applicant organization name and address;
    - Point of contact name, email address, and phone number;
    - Project lead name and contact information, if different from LOI point of contact;
    - Applicant organization System Award Management (SAM) registration status and current expiration date - a SAM account can be created for free at sam.gov;
    - Applicant organization Unique Entity ID (UEI) – the UEI will be automatically generated as part of developing or maintaining a SAM account;
    - Applicant organization EIN (Employer Identification Number)
    - Name of project
    - Location of project: state, city, zip code, and street address (if applicable), and name of water body (if applicable);
    - Project cost: total amount of WG funds requested, total amount of non-federal matching funds (or waiver for non-federal match); and
    - Signature and role of authorized organizational representative (e.g., executive director, board chair, town manager, etc.) – note that this signature needs to come from someone with authority to approve the project and the needed administrative support and/or staffing but does not necessarily to be the head of the entire organization. For example, a department chair at a university will suffice and the president's signature is not needed.

2. Project details

    [2A] Project Purpose: What threat(s) to our nation's estuaries does this proposed project seeks to solve? How will this project, specifically, contribute to solving the problem? What is the long-term vision of the project? 200 word maximum.

    [2B] Project Description: Summarize the overall project approach and provide a brief workplan, including principal tasks, major deliverables, and realistic schedule, including the duration of the project period. Specify which RFP priority or priorities will be addressed and solved. 350 word maximum

    [2C] Impact: Describe the anticipated impact of the project on local, regional and/or national levels. Also detail the outcomes of the project (ecological, institutional, etc.) and how they will be measured. 200 word maximum.

    [2D]. Relevance to local priorities: detail how the project relates to and carries out the priority actions in one or more of the 28 NEP CCMPs. A list of NEP CCMPs is available at https://www.epa.gov/nep/comprehensive-conservation-and-management-plans. 200 word maximum.

[2E]: Project team: list project partner(s) and briefly describe the role of each. Note that these entities are contributing materially and will be included in the budget, whether as a recipient of funds or as one providing non-federal match. Please differentiate between sub-awards and contractors. For more information, see https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-02/documents/gmc_subaward_policy_appendix_a_subrecipient_v_contractor_distinction_0.pdf Teams should reflect the community or communities in which the project will occur and ideally be included in the budget in some capacity, either by receiving funds or providing match. 200 word maximum.

[2F] Outreach and Technology Transfer: Include a brief outreach plan, which should describe how you will publicize and share the project approach and its results, both to a general/lay audience and to resource managers on the local and national levels. 200 word maximum.

[2G]. Map: include a map of the location and clearly demonstrates how the project occurs within the WG Program delineated geographic areas. One page maximum. You are welcome to use a mapping tool to facilitate the creation of a project boundary map. The tool is available via https://epa.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=90cce5112230401b994b06eaa784e5ad. Follow the instructions in the user guide and you will be able to develop a PDF to include in your proposal.

3. Letter of Acknowledgement from Local NEP

If one of the 28 NEPs is not a project team member, LOIs must include a letter from the NEP within the identified geographic boundary acknowledging the project proposal. To determine the closest NEP, use the map available at https://gispub.epa.gov/NEPmap/index.html and zoom function. Once you have determined which NEP site is closest, download the file entitled "NEP Contacts" available at https://www.epa.gov/nep/nep-coastal-watersheds-award-overview to get the name and email of the appropriate site director. Please reach out to the NEP director well in advance of when you plan to submit your proposal to allow sufficient time for them to provide the letter. It is incumbent on the applicant to meet the required deadlines.

The letter does not need to endorse the project, nor would the letter be seen as support of the application (e.g., general backing and/or commitment of resources such as staff time or match). Rather, the intent is to ensure that the local or closest NEP is aware of the project proposal with the goal of increasing transparency and partnering opportunities to address the urgent and challenges issues identified in the RAE subaward.

4. Budget

The budget will be entered by federal cost category via the online form. The LOI requires only the budget amounts, while the full proposal requires a budget narrative to provide additional information on project costs. LOIs and proposals that provide clear, complete, and defensible information on project costs are much more likely to be selected for funding. It is expected that figures in the LOI budget will be preliminary, while the full proposal should include final costs and cost estimates. The budget must provide justification for all costs, including those for partners. Round all costs to the nearest dollar – do not include cents.

Applicants should devise the budget separately to ensure correct categories, totals, etc. Table 1 provides an example budget table format that includes the budget categories for both LOIs and full proposals. Please use the federal cost categories as shown.

Please note that there is no "Construction" category. Construction costs should be listed under "Contractual" if contracted out; or if performed directly by a subrecipients or partner, labor costs may be listed under "Personnel," and equipment under "Equipment."

Note all sources of match and whether cash or in-kind. Total non-federal match percentage must be at least 30% of request (or 23% of total project cost), unless a match waiver has been requested. Proposals providing a greater match percentage will receive no additional benefit in scoring. Match percentage is calculated as follows: ((non-federal match)/(request)) x 100 = match percentage. Do not include letters of commitment or other match documentation with LOIs; this type of supporting document is required for full proposals only. If a waiver for the non-federal match is requested, please provide the information in the online portal as required.

WG Program funding will reimburse subrecipients for reasonable indirect costs related to the execution of funded projects. The calculation of indirect costs and amount of reimbursement depends on the type of organization, and whether it has an approved NICRA (negotiated indirect cost rate agreement) on file with a federal agency. The following bullets summarize the process for calculating indirect costs for several types of organizations and cost-rate approvals. Please contact Suzanne Simon at ssimon@estuaries.org for additional information.

- Organizations with a current, approved NICRA: Organizations with a current federally-approved NICRA may charge their full federally approved indirect rate to the base (modified total direct costs (MTDC) or otherwise) in their indirect cost rate agreement. Applicants may, but are not required to, propose to use a lower rate and apply unrecovered indirect costs to their match requirement.
- Organizations without an approved NICRA: For applicants that have never had a NICRA with a federal agency, the applicant may use the de minimis indirect cost rate of 10% of MTDC. MTDC (as defined under 2 CFR §200.68) means all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and the first $25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs (i.e., lab space), tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs, and the portion of each subaward in excess of $25,000. Note: Organizations with an approved NICRA need not calculate MTDC if the base for distributing indirect costs in their rate agreement with the cognizant federal agency differs from MTDC. Rather, show the calculated NICRA indirect cost below "Total Direct".

Calculation and Presentation of Costs
- The "Personnel" category should only include employees of the applicant organization (I.e., those receiving W-2s from the applicant organization). All other team members would go under the "Contract" or "Other" category depending on the nature of the relationship – specifically, if the arrangement will be one of a contract or subrecipient. For more information on the differentiating between contracts and subrecipients, please see https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-

[02/documents/gmc_subaward_policy_appendix_a_subrecipient_v_contractor_distincti on_0.pdf](02/documents/gmc_subaward_policy_appendix_a_subrecipient_v_contractor_distinction_0.pdf).

- Salaries and fringe may be calculated on an hourly or percentage basis and must show cost calculations per employee and not a lump sum. If cost rates are expected to increase over the period of the grant (e.g., annual pay increases), factor in such increases so that total cost reflects actual cost over the period of the grant. Please provide employee's title for each employee listed.
- Fringe amounts cannot be included in the salary line and must be listed separately.
- Funds listed on the travel line should only include travel performed by employees of the applicant. Travel by other team members should be included in "other" or "contracts."
- RAE recognizes that cost estimates will be necessary in some instances, for example construction contracts that will be competitively bid. Please note cost estimates where used.
- Contracts or sub-contracts awarded by subrecipients with WG funding must be selected through competitive bidding procedures consistent with federal requirements (2 CFR 200) as well as the subrecipient's 's own purchasing procedures.
- Include sufficient budget for QAPP development if your project will require one. QAPPs may be developed in-house or through a consultant contract – contact RAE for assistance in QAPP planning.
- Funds may not be used to purchase food or beverages.
- Tuition and tuition-related costs may not be funded nor offered to satisfy the non-federal match requirement.
- Vehicle mileage should be calculated at the IRS-approved per-mile rate. This rate is currently $0.625/mile but may change depending on economic conditions.
- Equipment is generally durable property valued at more than $5,000 per unit – see 2 CFR 200 for guidance.
- If you anticipate earning program income as part of your project, show the source, estimated amount, and how it will be used. All funds generated must be used toward the project.

Table 1. Example budget table showing a project proposal for the imaginary "Friends of the Estuary (FOTE)." In this example, the in-kind contribution as percent of the funding request is 41% and 29% of the overall project total. Federal procurement requirements must be followed as described earlier.

Cost Item or Category	Cost Basis	WG Funding Request	Total Non-Federal Match	Match Source	Total Cost
Personnel					
Zoe Spartina, FOTE Senior Scientist	2,496 hours @ $37.50/hr	$ 73,600	$ 20,000	Mackerel Fund	$ 93,600
Neveah Ostrea, FOTE Communications Manager	1,600 hours @ $30/hr	$ 40,000	$ 8,000	FOTE unrestricted	$ 48,000
Total Personnel		$ 113,600	$ 28,000		$ 141,600
Fringe					
Fringe, FOTE Staff	25% of FOTE	$ 28,400	$ 7,000	As above	$ 35,400
Total Fringe		$ 28,400	$ 7,000		$ 35,400
Travel					
Mileage to outreach meetings	239 miles @ $0.585/ mile	$ -	$ 140	FOTE unrestricted	$ 140
Travel to national conference	See narrative	$ 2,000	$ -		$ 2,000
Total Travel		$ 2,000	$ 140		$ 2,140
Equipment					
ACME water quality probe	See narrative	$ 7,000	$ -		$ 7,000
Total Equipment		$ 7,000	$ -		$ 7,000
Supplies					
Office Supplies		$ 500	$ -		$ 500
Total Supplies		$ 500	$ -		$ 500
Contractual					
BMP Marine Contractors	See narrative	$ 7,500	$ -		$ 7,500
Zachary Panopea, Oystertown Town Planner	160 hours @ $35/hr	$ -	$ 5,600	Oystertown General Fund	$ 5,600
Total Contractual		$ 7,500	$ 5,600	$ -	$ 13,100
Other					
Boat Rental	See narrative	$ 5,000			$ 5,000
FOTE volunteers	891 hours @ $28.54	$ -	$ 25,430	In-kind	$ 25,430
Total Other		$ 5,000	$ 25,430		$ 30,430
Total Direct		$ 164,000	$ 66,170		$ 230,170
Indirect					
NICRA *or* MTDC	MTDC in this Example (excludes equipment)	$ 157,000	$ 66,174		$ 223,170
Allowable Indirect Cost	Non-NICRA: up to 10% of MTDC	$ 15,700	$ 6,617		$ 22,317
Grand Total (Direct + Indirect)		$ 179,700	$ 72,787		$ 252,487

C. Full Proposal Requirements and Limits, if invited to submit

1. General information
   - Applicant organization name and address;
   - Point of contact name, email address, and phone number;
   - Project lead name and contact information, if different from LOI point of contact;
   - Applicant organization System Award Management (SAM) registration status and current expiration date - a SAM account can be created for free at sam.gov;
   - Applicant organization Unique Entity ID (UEI) – the UEI will be automatically generated as part of developing or maintaining a SAM account;
   - Applicant organization EIN;
   - Name of project;
   - Project summary (50 word maximum);
   - Location of project: state, city, zip code, and street address (if applicable) and name of water body (if applicable);
   - Project cost: total amount of WG funds requested, total amount of non-federal matching funds (or waiver for non-federal match);
   - Signature and role of authorized organizational representative (e.g., executive director, board chair, town manager, etc.) – note that this signature needs to come from someone with authority to approve the project and the needed administrative support and/or staffing but does not necessarily to be the head of the entire organization. For example, a department chair at a university will suffice and the president's signature is not needed.

2. Project details

   [2a] Project Purpose: What threat(s) to our nation's estuaries does this proposed project seeks to solve? How will this project, specifically, contribute to solving the problem? What is the long-term vision of the project? 500 word maximum.

   [2B] Project Description and Timeline: Summarize the overall project approach and provide a brief workplan, including principal tasks, major deliverables/outputs, and realistic schedule. Provide a brief description, by quarter from the grant agreement start date, for anticipated project activities and deliverables, along with which entity(ies) will be responsible. E.g., "Quarter 1 – initiate team meetings, submit permit applications – XYZ organization." Please note any critical timing that may change due to external restrictions, such as activity windows related to federal or state listed species. Ensure that the QAPP is a deliverable for the first quarter to allow sufficient time for development and EPA review and approval. Specify which RFP priority or priorities will be addressed and solved. 1000 word maximum

   [2C] Impact: Describe the anticipated impact of the project, on local, regional and/or national levels. Also detail the outcomes of the project (ecological, institutional, etc.) and how they will be measured. Provide information on how effort will be maintained or sustained once the project funding has ended. 500 word maximum.

[2D]. Relevance to local priorities: detail how the project relates to and carries out the priority actions in one of the 28 NEP CCMPs. 500 word maximum.

[2E]: Project team: list project partner(s) and briefly describe the role of each. Note that these entities are contributing materially and will be included in the budget, whether as a recipient of funds or as one providing non-federal match. Please differentiate between sub-awards and contractors. For more information, see https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-02/documents/gmc_subaward_policy_appendix_a_subrecipient_v_contractor_distinction_0.pdf Teams should reflect the community or communities in which the project will occur and ideally be included as a recipient of funds or providing match. Applicants must demonstrate meaningful engagement and community support of the project. 500 word maximum.

[2F] Outreach and Technology Transfer: Include a brief outreach plan, which should describe how you will publicize and share the project approach and its results, both to a general/lay audience and to resource managers on the local and national levels. 500 word maximum.

[2G]. Map: include map of the location and clearly demonstrates how the project occurs within one or more of the 28 NEP areas. One page. You are welcome to use a mapping tool to facilitate the creation of a project boundary map. The tool is available via https://epa.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=90cce5112230401b994b06eaa784e5ad. Follow the instructions in the user guide and you will be able to develop a PDF to include in your proposal.

3. Letter of Acknowledgement from local NEP – see LOI requirements. The same letter may be used for both the LOI and full proposal.

4. Supporting Documents: photos, schematics, letters of support, etc. The full proposal provides the opportunity to include additional supplementary information, such as photos, site drawings, or brief supporting documents, with the intent of providing reviewers more context and information regarding the project. Maximum file size of 50 MB.

5. Budget – see LOI section for details and information regarding cost categories and prohibitions. Please note that the full proposal budget is expected to be as close to final as possible and include a detailed budget narrative explaining the costs, expenditures, and non-federal match.

D. Evaluation Frameworks

Proposals that omit required elements or that do not adhere to specified page limits will not be accepted or evaluated. RAE reserves the right to accept or reject any proposal on the basis of its sole determination that the proposal meets, or does not meet, program goals and objectives.

LOIs will be evaluated in their entirety on a four-point scale as follows:
1 – Fails to meet WG Program goals and priorities and/or does not contain one or more required elements– non-qualifying application.
2 – Adequately meets program goals and priorities but needs strengthening – qualifying application.
3 – Meets program goals and priorities well – qualifying application.
4 – Strongly meets program goals and priorities – outstanding project potential.

The review panel will judge the quality of full proposals using the scoring system described in Table 2. Proposals that do not adhere to the specified application format and requirements will not be evaluated. In choosing the final projects, the review panel will also take geographic diversity into account to ensure that funding goes to a number of different areas or regions.

Table 2. Full proposal evaluation framework.

Proposal Section	Point Range
1. General information	n/a
2. Project Details	
2.A. Purpose	0-3
2.B. Project Description & Timeline	0-7
2.C. Impact	0-7
2.D. Map	0-1
2.E. Relevance	0-3
2.F. Project Team	0-3
2.G. Outreach and Technology Transfer	0-3
3. Letters of Acknowledgement from local NEP	0-1
4. Supporting Documents	n/a
5. Budget	0-7
Total	0-35

E. Submitting a Proposal

Develop the application elements and submit them online via the submittal portal, which is available via https://estuaries.org/nep-watershed-grants/ by 8:00 p.m. ET/5:00 p.m. PT on Friday, February 10, 2023, for LOIs and by 8:00 p.m. ET/5:00 p.m. PT on Friday, April 28, 2023 for invited full proposals.

Applicants are encouraged to submit early to avoid transmittal delays and provide time to rectify any problems prior to the deadline. All information must be submitted via the submittal site and not by email or other means.

Applications may include internet hyperlinks to supporting information (organizational websites, supporting documents, etc.). However, the application should be self-contained for purposes of review and reviewers should be able to fully evaluate your proposal regardless of whether s/he chooses to follow the links. Do not include references, footnotes, or endnotes unless you choose to include them as supplementary information.

F. Documentation of Timely Submittals and Problems with Submittals

As noted above, the LOI or full proposal information must be submitted online via the submittal portal, which can be accessed at https://estuaries.org/nep-watershed-grants/. Submittal deadlines are listed above. When you submit your application, you will receive an email acknowledging receipt of the submittal. Save or print the email for your records, in the event there is a problem with the transmittal. If you do not receive an email confirmation shortly after your submittal, please check your spam/junk

folder and then contact Suzanne Simon as soon as possible at ssimon@estuaries.org to ensure acceptance of your application.

All applications must meet the deadlines listed above and must be complete as directed at the time of submittal. In the event of documented transmittal problems, corrupted files, or other technology problems, RAE will make every effort to accept applications that were submitted correctly, but not received due to problems outside the control of the applicant. However, to minimize the chance that a proposal cannot be accepted, we encourage applicants to submit proposals with sufficient time to rectify these kinds of problems prior to deadlines.

G. Award Timeline

- December 30, 2022: RFP release date
- January 11 and January 19, 2023: informational webinars for interested applicants
- February 10, 2023: LOIs due
- March 24, 2023: Notify LOI applicants regarding status (i.e., if they have been invited to submit a full proposal or not)
- April 28, 2023: Full proposals due if invited to do so
- June 9, 2023: Notify applicants of selection status
- Summer 2023: final work plan and budget development with RAE and EPA; subaward agreement finalization