NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

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Executive Summary

Federal Agency Name
Fisheries Habitat Conservation Program Office (HCPO)

Funding Opportunity Title
Fiscal Year 2025 NOAA Delaware Bay B-WET Funding Program

Announcement Type
Competitive

Funding Opportunity Number
NOAA-NMFS-HCPO-2025-29770

Assistance Listing Number(s)
11.008

Dates
The deadline for applications is 11:59 p.m Eastern Time on April 18, 2025, and applications must be submitted using www.grants.gov (Grants.gov). PLEASE NOTE: it may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline.

Informational webinars about the FY 2025 Delaware Bay B-WET funding announcement will be held on January 31, 2025 at 12:30 p.m. Eastern Time and February 13, 2025 at 11:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time. To register for these webinars, please visit: https://forms.gle/TaKGWo3EZnsmWrnf8. Note that NOAA B-WET staff will be available to answer questions Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time excluding federal holidays.

NOTE: We strongly encourage all prospective applicants to begin required registrations as early as possible. Completing the required registrations can take six weeks or longer. Submission due dates will not be extended because of registration delays. Submissions received after the due date will be considered late and will not be accepted.

Applicant organizations and individuals must register for three different Federal systems prior to submitting an application through Grants.gov (SAM.gov, eRA Commons, and Grants.gov).

Applicant organizations and individuals must first register with SAM.gov and obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). After you obtain your UEI, you can complete your Grants.gov and eRA Commons registrations concurrently.

See Section IV(G) for detailed instructions on registration requirements. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact the Agency Contacts listed in this NOFO for submission instructions.

Funding Opportunity Description

The Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program is a competitive grants program that provides funding for locally relevant environmental education projects for K-12 audiences. This funding opportunity supports programming throughout the Delaware Bay watershed in Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York.

Funded projects promote Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs). The MWEE is a learner-centered framework that focuses on investigating local environmental issues and leads to informed action. MWEEs are composed of multiple components that include learning both outdoors and in the classroom as students engage in issue definition, outdoor field experiences, synthesis and conclusions, and environmental action projects. MWEEs aim to increase understanding and stewardship of the Delaware Bay and local watersheds, including the rivers, upland streams, and natural habitats found throughout the region. In these experiences, the core ideas of multiple disciplines are applied to make sense of the relationships between the natural world and the communities that rely on it. MWEEs help connect students with their local environment and equip them to make decisions and take actions that contribute to stronger communities.

B-WET funding supports school districts and their partners to develop high-quality environmental education experiences for students, rigorous teacher training opportunities, and capacity-building efforts that underpin the implementation of high-quality environmental literacy programming. Projects advance regional fisheries initiatives, state and local education and environmental priorities, and the NOAA Education Strategic Plan.

The priority for this funding announcement is: *Supporting systemic and sustainable MWEEs.*

Full Text of Announcement

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The NOAA Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program is a competitive grants program that provides funding for locally relevant environmental education projects for K-12 audiences. Watersheds and the local environment are an excellent context for education providing hands-on, place-based laboratories where students can see, touch, and learn about their local watershed and the greater environment.

The goal of this funding opportunity is to support the development and implementation of K-12 environmental literacy programs that provide students with Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs) and related professional development (PD) for in-service teachers, administrators, and/or other educators serving K-12 students.

Successful B-WET projects provide formal education that directly supports state standards and local curriculum and connects to regional, state, and local environmental policies and initiatives. Many states within the Delaware Bay watershed have recently updated their learning standards or have added new aspects to these standards. Pennsylvania is in the process of implementing the new Science, Technology & Engineering, Environmental Literacy & Sustainability (https://www.pa.gov/en/agencies/education/programs-and-services/instruction/elementary-and-secondary-education/curriculum/science/science-standards.html) standards (STEELS), and New Jersey recently adopted the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (https://www.nj.gov/education/standards/) that integrate locally relevant environmental topics across the curriculum. Delaware has developed a set of environmental literacy competencies that are being integrated within career and technical education programs (https://delawarepathways.org/environmental-literacy/). Proposed projects should directly support student learning that addresses elements of these standards and initiatives.

Potential applicants are encouraged to contact the Delaware Bay B-WET Coordinator (contact information in Section VII) before submitting an application with questions about applicability of project activities to B-WET goals and objectives.

B. Program Priorities

B-WET projects funded under this announcement will support the development and implementation of systemic and sustainable MWEEs to be conducted as a part of school district curricular programs.

Systemic MWEEs reach the entire student population in one or more grades within a school district and ensure that the teachers of these students receive high-quality professional development to improve content knowledge and pedagogical skills for implementing all aspects of the MWEE. They support student learning outcomes and are formally embedded into the district curriculum either prior to or during the implementation of the project. Projects that are systemic encourage ownership from a broad range of constituents and promote long-term sustainability of the MWEE project in a school district. These programs require leadership and support from the school district, and, because of the broad reach of systemic projects, partnerships with multiple entities are often required to ensure all students receive all components of a MWEE and meaningful professional development for teachers is provided.

The program recognizes that there are school districts that face challenges in developing and implementing systemic MWEE projects in a single grant cycle. While every project faces some barrier to implementation, some districts have greater challenges due to a need to build understanding and support of the MWEE framework, a lack of local resources or partners, policies that conflict with outdoor education, or limited internal capacity. Not being able to become fully systemic over the course of the 3-year grant cycle should not discourage applications to this funding announcement. Applicants should explain why systemic implementation is not feasible in the project timeline and how they will build toward it over the course of the grant period and into the future.

Projects should help advance existing local and state education priorities such as advancing college and career readiness; supporting implementation of new standards; building connections between science, reading, and math; and teacher retention. They should also engage learners in exploring state and local conservation priorities and expose them to job opportunities in the field to encourage the development of a future workforce. Proposals should describe how the proposed work will connect to both educational and conservation priorities in their local context.

Applications for projects can come from any applicant type listed as eligible in this opportunity; however, substantial coordination and support from the school district is strongly encouraged. Official letters of commitment from superintendents, school boards, and/or school district curriculum supervisors are requested with proposals if they are not the primary applicant.

We encourage applicants to review MWEE 101 and the Facilitator's Guide to MWEE Training on www.baybackpack.com and to explain in the proposal how you will incorporate or reference aspects of these resources.

METHODS TO SUPPORT SYSTEMIC AND SUSTAINABLE MWEEs

Projects should include one or more of the methods outlined below and describe how these methods come together to build toward the development and implementation of systemic and sustainable MWEEs. (Note: Applicants are not limited to the examples detailed below.)

1. Create and Disseminate Model MWEEs: Model MWEEs clearly illustrate how all of the essential elements and supporting practices are woven together in support of standards-connected student learning. Proposals and supporting materials focusing on MWEE development and implementation should include details about where the project fits within the scope and sequence of the school district's curriculum and applicants should clearly understand and convey the primary learning objectives. Multi disciplinary programs are encouraged. Model MWEEs should follow a development cycle that includes initial development with stakeholder input, teacher PD, piloting the MWEE, and making revisions based on feedback. Every effort should be made to ensure the MWEEs are piloted and tested with the variety of student groups and schools that compose the school district. Model MWEEs must result in products (e.g. Environmental Literacy Model, curriculum guide, training guides/videos) that can be used in ongoing implementation and serve as examples for other MWEE development efforts. Examples of work that could support this method include:

- Develop, train teachers, and implement a model MWEE with multiple student audiences within a school district
- Identify existing environmental literacy programming, lessons, and field trips and develop a MWEE around these existing components
- In addition to MWEE development, support professional development focused on the MWEE framework for teachers and partners that will be responsible for MWEE implementation
- Adapt and refine existing MWEEs and develop and implement a strategy for sharing the resulting MWEE Models with regional stakeholders

2. Develop Local Networks: Support the development or strengthening of a local network that includes school district(s) and community partners focused on advancing environmental literacy through collective impact, network development principles, or other partnership/social impact models. This work includes coordination, networking, leadership, and other support structures necessary for advancing the MWEE as an approach at the local, school district, or multi-school district level. Local networks should have the ultimate goal of embedding systemic outdoor education, including MWEEs, into curriculum and/or school and district operations. Network development efforts must result in the development of tangible products such as a statement of shared vision, network governance documents, communication tools, or other tools and resources that can be used to advance future work. Examples of work that could support this method include:

- Identifying and advancing shared priorities among school districts, environmental literacy practitioners, and community partners with the applicant emphasizing MWEEs in this work.
- Improving communication between school districts and/or local community organizations to facilitate the implementation of outdoor education programs, including MWEEs, and teacher professional development.
- Engaging decision makers (e.g. superintendents, school boards, school administrators, principals) to promote and support outdoor education, including MWEEs and related teacher professional development.

3. Support Planning and Capacity for Outdoor Education and Environmental Literacy Programming: Work with partners from both within schools and the communities that support them to develop comprehensive plans that outline the strategy for integrating outdoor and environmental literacy programming and ultimately systemic MWEEs across the learners' experience from pre-kindergarten through graduation. Build capacity for agencies, organizations, or collaboratives that are working to modify or enhance existing outdoor or environmental literacy programs that will ultimately support systemic MWEEs. We encourage applicants that are submitting a proposal that supports planning and capacity aspects to review the District Environmental Literacy Planning Toolkit on Bay Backpack (https://www.baybackpack.com/district-toolkit/district-environmental-literacy-planning-toolkit). Examples of work that could support this method include:

- Supporting staff in key agencies or organizations to engage in planning and implementation of MWEEs and related efforts. An emphasis should be placed on ensuring that smaller, local organizations can meaningfully contribute to the efforts defined in the proposal. This could also include support for an environmental literacy coordinator position at the school district that leads development and implementation of MWEEs, environmental literacy plans, and/or other environmental literacy elements.
- Supporting the development of a school district environmental literacy plan or other documented strategy that includes policies, practices, and metrics for ensuring environmental literacy programming for all students and training for all involved teachers. This plan must clearly identify in which grades MWEEs currently exist and/or will be built out by the school district or cadre of schools and should include a financial sustainability component with clear strategies for sustaining programs. Applicants may refer to School District Environmental Literacy Plan Templates that have been adopted and/or created within the state and the School District Environmental Literacy Planning Toolkit (https://www.baybackpack.com/district-toolkit/district-environmental-literacy-planning-toolkit).
- Recruiting and/or training practitioners committed to advancing outdoor education, including the MWEE framework, with an emphasis on bringing new disciplines and perspectives to environmental literacy.

- Developing outdoor learning spaces on school grounds and creating support structures for their use to break down barriers to outdoor learning, including how to use the space to support MWEEs and environmental literacy programming. Note: BWET funds cannot be used for construction, but can be used for supplies often needed to resource outdoor classrooms (e.g. whiteboards, seating, shade, storage, and natural elements).

DEFINING THE MEANINGFUL WATERSHED EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE (MWEE)

All B-WET regions around the country use the MWEE as a framework for delivering high-quality environmental education (www.noaa.gov/education/explainers/noaa-meaningful-watershed-educational-experience). Additional MWEE information and resources are available on the Bay Backpack website (www.baybackpack.com), including:

1. An Educator's Guide to the Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (the MWEE Guide);
2. MWEE online trainings;
3. The Facilitator's Guide to MWEE Training
4. Evaluating a MWEE Resource; and
5. School District Toolkit.

The MWEE is a learner-centered framework that focuses on investigations into local environmental issues and leads to informed action. MWEEs are made up of multiple components that include learning both outdoors and in the classroom and are designed to increase environmental literacy by actively engaging students in building knowledge and meaning through hands-on experiences. In these experiences, the core ideas and practices of multiple disciplines are applied to make sense of the relationships between the natural world and society. MWEEs help connect students with their local environment and equip them to make decisions and take actions that contribute to stronger communities.

The MWEE consists of four essential elements and four supporting practices that build upon each other to create a comprehensive, student-centered learning experience. Throughout the MWEE, teachers provide structure, support, and encouragement as students use their curiosity and creativity to investigate and take action to address a local environmental issue. To support teacher implementation of MWEEs, B-WET has also included six characteristics that are recommended to be included in teacher professional development activities.

MWEEs are appropriate for all grade levels with content and practices growing in complexity and sophistication across the grades starting with teacher-guided investigations and progressing to student-led inquiry. Using the MWEE framework helps educators create an engaging program to achieve their learning objectives (i.e., the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students should be able to exhibit following instruction). Learning objectives should address academic standards, but might also include other objectives, such as teamwork, social-emotional learning, and civic responsibility.

1. MWEE Essential Elements

   The MWEE consists of four essential elements that describe "what students do." Issue Definition, Outdoor Field Experiences, Synthesis and Conclusions, and Environmental Action Projects. These elements, together with the supporting practices, create a learner-centered framework that emphasizes the role of the student in actively constructing meaning from the learning experiences. The essential elements are not meant to be linear. In fact, some elements, such as Synthesis and Conclusions, occur repeatedly throughout the MWEE.

1.1 Issue Definition

During Issue Definition, students learn about an environmental issue by planning and conducting background research and investigations. An environmental issue is an environmental problem, often with observable phenomena, to which community members bring a variety of perspectives. To provide structure for their exploration of the issue, students focus on a driving question that is defined by the teacher. This question is the “big picture” question that sparks curiosity and organizes student inquiry and investigations, which ultimately informs environmental actions. It should be open-ended, relevant to students’ lived experiences, and meet learning objectives. To support youth voice and deepen the learning, students are actively involved in co-developing supporting questions with teachers to better understand the driving question and environmental issue.

To explore the driving and supporting questions, students gather information by making observations, finding and reading credible sources, talking to experts, and carrying out field investigations. Students also consider environmental policies and community practices and reflect on personal, stakeholder, and societal values and perspectives to develop a comprehensive picture of the root causes of the environmental issue.

1.2 Outdoor Field Experiences

Students participate in multiple Outdoor Field Experiences to explore the driving question and strengthen their connection to the natural world. Within appropriate safety guidelines, students are actively involved in planning and conducting the field investigations, including developing supporting questions to explore the driving question in the field. Field experiences allow students to interact with their local environment and contribute to learning in ways that traditional classroom or laboratory settings may not. During field experiences, students can use their senses, scientific equipment, and technology to make observations, collect data or measurements, and conduct experiments necessary to answer their supporting questions and inform environmental action. Students who have opportunities to learn in, thrive in, and appreciate the outdoors can become informed and engaged community members.

Outdoor Field Experiences can take place on school grounds or at locations close to schools, such as streams or local parks. They can also take place at off-site locations such as state or national parks, wildlife refuges, marine protected areas, or nature centers that are often staffed by experts and may provide access to field equipment and facilities. A range of partners, including environmental educators, conservation professionals, or trained volunteers, can help facilitate field experiences; however, they should be co-developed and co-taught with teachers so that field experiences support learning objectives. Teachers and partners should ensure an accessible outdoor learning environment for all participants, including students with a range of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social abilities. They should also prepare students by providing information and discussing what students can expect to see, feel, or experience during their time outdoors to ensure students feel safe and comfortable during their field experiences.

1.3 Synthesis and Conclusions

During Synthesis and Conclusions, students reflect on each experience and investigation in relation to the issue, and share their claims and conclusions with each other. Teachers should plan for this to occur regularly throughout the MWEE. This learning and frequent reflection provide the foundation for the development of claims and environmental action that address the driving question and connect to the environmental issue. Throughout this process, students should demonstrate understanding of their investigations and conclusions with their peers or the school community. This could involve multiple disciplines and a variety of formats including discussion, journaling, presentations, graphing, performing skits or songs, or creating art.

1.4 Environmental Action Projects

As a result of their investigations, students identify solutions and develop Environmental Action Projects that directly address the issue within their school, neighborhood, or community. Students are actively engaged in and, to the extent possible, drive the decision making, planning, and implementation of the action project. Teachers facilitate this process by forming groups, moderating, and answering questions. Students reflect on the value of the action and determine the extent to which it successfully addressed the issue.

This essential element allows students to understand that they personally have the power to bring about change by taking action to address environmental issues at the personal, community, or societal level. Taking action instills confidence in students and can contribute to students becoming environmental stewards in their communities.

Environmental Action Projects can take many forms and may fall into the following types:

- Restoration or Protection: Actions that assist in the recovery or preservation of a watershed or related ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed. Examples include: plant or restore protective vegetation/trees; restore a local habitat; remove invasive plants; clean up litter at local beaches, parks, or school grounds; develop a school garden, natural history area, community garden, or other sustainable green space; install rain gardens to help manage stormwater.
- Everyday Choices: Actions that reduce human impacts on watersheds and related ecosystems and offer ways to live more sustainably. Examples include: refuse/reduce/reuse/recycle; monitor and save water in the face of potential drought or reduction in water availability; compost food or yard waste; research and implement conservation strategies or other alternatives at school and/or at home.
- Community Engagement: Actions that inform others about how to address community-level environmental issues. Examples include: give presentations to local organizations; organize community events; record or broadcast public service announcements; share information on social media; post flyers in community; share posters at community events/fairs/festivals; mentoring.
- Civic Engagement: Actions that identify and address issues of public concern. Students acting alone or together to protect societal values or make a change or difference in a student's school, neighborhood, or community. Examples include: Present to school principal or school board; attend, speak, or present at town meetings; write to local or state decision makers or elected officials.

2. MWEE Supporting Practices

The MWEE also includes four supporting practices that describe “what teachers do,” along with their partners, to ensure successful implementation with students. The supporting practices are Teacher Facilitation, Learning Integration, Sustained Experiences, and Local Context.

2.1 Teacher Facilitation

MWEEs require that teachers support student learning for the duration of the MWEE, both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers balance roles of facilitation, direct instruction, and coaching to create a student-centered learning experience where the essential elements of the MWEE come together to support goals for learning and create opportunities for students to take active roles in the learning process. Teachers provide space for student choice and voice by creating learning experiences that center on what students value. Even when activities or lessons occur at partner sites or are primarily led by partners at the school, teachers should be actively engaged. Teachers should connect these experiences to prior learning, foster critical thinking, and lead reflection after the experience so, regardless of the facilitator, the entire MWEE experience feels cohesive to the students.

To support this level of engagement, teachers should have access to professional development opportunities that support their content knowledge, understanding of the MWEE framework, and confidence and intention to implement MWEEs independently (see Teacher MWEE Professional Development Characteristics for specifics).

2.2 Learning Integration

The MWEE is an educational framework that helps teachers meet their learning objectives in an engaging way. MWEEs are not meant to be something “extra,” but rather a means of enriching lessons for deeper student learning while meeting academic standards. To achieve this vision, MWEEs should be embedded into the school curriculum to support goals for learning and student achievement. They can also provide authentic, engaging interdisciplinary learning that crosses traditional boundaries between disciplines. Finally, the MWEE essential elements can also be used by educators in out-of-school settings (for example, after school programs, clubs, or summer camps) to enrich activities and complement school-based programming.

2.3 Sustained Experience

MWEEs rely on teachers to plan and implement a series of rich and connected learning opportunities where each essential element from asking questions during Issue Definition through implementing Environmental Action Projects builds upon and reinforces the others. To accomplish this, MWEEs are incorporated into a unit or multiple units, where learning happens both in and out of the classroom. This provides adequate time for students to not only reflect on the individual lessons and experiences, but also on how all of the elements cohesively come together. While an individual lesson may occur in one class period or field experience, that lesson or experience should be explicitly connected to the larger learning sequence of the MWEE.

2.4 Local Context

MWEEs have teachers use the local environment and community as a context for learning that is relevant to students’ lives. Situating the MWEE within local contexts promotes learning that is rooted in the unique culture, history, environment, economy, literature, and art of a students’ school, neighborhood, or community.

Programming should be designed to be locally relevant and make authentic connections to students' lived experiences. Emphasizing the local context enables students and teachers to develop stronger connections to, and appreciation for, their local environments and communities. This also enables students and teachers to explore how their individual and collective decisions affect their immediate surroundings and in turn affect larger ecosystems and watersheds.

3. Teacher MWEE Professional Development Characteristics

Professional development providers play a crucial role in preparing teachers to implement successful MWEEs with their students. Professional development that includes characteristics such as: relevant content; explicit modeling of educational frameworks; collaboration, feedback, and modeling instruction such as student centered teaching; adequate time for professional development including time for ongoing support; and offering participation incentives that teachers value leads to a variety of positive outcomes. Professional development should empower teachers to confidently and competently use the MWEE framework to support standards-based learning that aligns with local education agency initiatives. Teachers should gain confidence in the value of MWEEs and strategies for conducting them so that they will be able to implement MWEEs after the professional development has ended. To set teachers up for success, the following six overarching characteristics, informed by education research and evaluation results, are recommended for inclusion in professional development to support teachers implementing MWEEs.

3.1 Increases teachers' knowledge and awareness of environmental issues

Professional development facilitators should ensure that teachers have an adequate level of content knowledge in science and specific to their grade level and discipline to support their MWEE. The content knowledge should also be connected to the interactions between natural systems and social systems, including human impacts on local watersheds and larger Earth systems. Recognizing that environmental issues often include different perspectives and opinions about the environment, teachers must also experience and build skills that enable them to address these traditionally non academic factors in their classrooms. When combined, this knowledge and these experiences often result in teachers who are more aware of, and more prepared for, the complexity of implementing MWEEs.

3.2 Models the MWEE framework

Professional development should also provide opportunities for teachers to understand the goals and rationale behind the MWEE as a framework for fostering learning and environmental stewardship. Facilitators of teacher professional development should utilize the same techniques and experiences that teachers are expected to use with their students, such as hands-on Outdoor Field Experiences, critical thinking about environmental issues, and Environmental Action Projects.

Based on current education research and B-WET evaluation results, we recommend professional development (PD) providers consider the following in the design of professional development to support change in teacher practice and the implementation of effective MWEEs.

According to evaluation data on teacher PD, between 24-30% teachers are not participating in environmental action projects, one of the MWEE essential elements, during PD. Research suggests teachers are more likely to engage their students in activities they experience themselves during professional development programs. Therefore, MWEE professional development should always include opportunities for teachers to participate in environmental action projects that connect to the watershed issue being studied, as well as the inquiry activities their students will take to plan and implement their own action projects.

Regarding the time allocated for professional development, educational research findings and evidence from the B-WET national evaluation system support the B-WET program recommendation that professional development include more than 30 hours of professional development (for example, in-person multi-day workshops, virtual lectures or demonstrations, field-based data collection, one-on-one consultations), of which more than 10 hours should be spent doing hands-on inquiry and/or engaging in action projects in the outdoors. It has been shown that these targets will change teacher practice and increase the likelihood that teachers will implement effective MWEEs. Where states and/or school districts put limits on the amount of time teachers can spend in professional development, applicants should describe those limitations and how they will maximize the professional development time that is available.

Professional development, and subsequent implementation with students, may take place on school grounds or at off-site locations. Where appropriate, professional development should include tools for teachers to implement MWEEs on their school grounds and/or adequate resources for transportation for teachers to participate in off-site PD.

For more information on effective ways to model professional development, download the Facilitator's Guide to MWEE Training from the list of resources on Bay Backpack (http://baybackpack.com/mwee/what-is-a-mwee).

3.3 Includes collaboration, feedback, and models high-quality instruction

Effective professional development includes peer collaboration, time for teachers to experience, plan for, and practice model activities and lesson plans, and opportunities for reflection and feedback. Collaborative opportunities that include observing effective teaching practices and replicating these practices with expert instruction and feedback, can result in higher likelihood that teachers will apply these practices when implementing MWEEs. Such opportunities also foster exchanging ideas and create a collaborative atmosphere for changing the culture around adopting new teaching practices at multiple levels within a school system. In addition, when teachers experience high-quality instruction, such as active learning and student-centered inquiry, they are more likely to use high-quality instruction when implementing MWEEs with their own students.

3.4 Allows for adequate instructional time and ongoing support

Professional development should be multi-day, occurring consecutively or over the course of several weeks or months and include time for ongoing support for teachers. Professional development facilitators should build in adequate time for the types of experience described above, including time to learn, practice, reflect upon, and design practices they learn during the professional development. Even in cases where teachers participate in robust multi-day workshops, such as summer or weekend courses, it is still essential that professional development providers have structures and opportunities in place for ongoing teaching support and enrichment. This can take the form of follow up meetings, web-based forums for communication and feedback, mentor teachers who can serve as points of contact, or teams of teachers from one particular school.

3.5 Offers appropriate incentives

Having appropriate incentives can increase participation in professional development programs. For example, teachers who participated in B-WET-funded professional development programs in the past reported that receiving a stipend or continuing education credits were the "most valuable" incentives enabling them to participate in those programs. While a variety of incentives can be offered to professional development program participants, it is clear that continuing education credits and stipends can enable participation in ways that other incentives might not.

3.6 Meets jurisdictional guidelines and engages leadership

Each jurisdiction has established guidance and recommendations relevant to all forms of teacher professional development. When possible, professional development opportunities for MWEEs should adhere to guidelines set forth by state and/or local education agencies. Outreach and training opportunities for school administrators will also help ensure jurisdictional alignment and increase high level support for both environmental education and continuing teacher professional development for teachers.

4. Other Considerations

4.1 Includes NOAA assets, including personnel and resources

NOAA has a wealth of applicable products, data, and services as well as a cadre of scientific and professional experts who can enhance student and teacher experiences both in the classroom and in the field. These resources complement the educator's strengths and augment the educational resources. Additionally, NOAA personnel can serve as important role models for career choices and stewardship. For more on NOAA assets for education please see: https://www.noaa.gov/education/resource-collections, NOAA in your state (https://www.legislative.noaa.gov/NIYS/), and NOAA in your backyard (https://www.noaa.gov/education/noaa-in-your-backyard).

4.2 Meaningful Engagement of Communities and Partners

NOAA seeks to support projects that are led by or collaborate with community organizations and institutions. Meaningful engagement of these partners is intended to ensure that they are integral to the visioning, decision making, and leadership for environmental education programs; to ensure that the scope of such programs are inclusive of the priorities and needs of communities; and/or to ensure that the benefits of such programs flow back to communities.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to develop and grow mutually beneficial partnerships that honor the strengths of local communities and organizations. It is recommended that these partners be actively involved in project planning as well as programmatically and financially recognized for their contributions to programming. Projects should increase organizational and technical capacity of local community organizations to lead and/or support MWEE programming.

C. Program Authority

Under 33 U.S.C. § 893a(a), the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is authorized to conduct, develop, support, promote, and coordinate formal and informal educational activities at all levels to enhance public awareness and understanding of ocean, coastal, Great Lakes, and atmospheric science and stewardship by the general public and other coastal stakeholders. In conducting those activities, the Administrator shall build upon the educational programs and activities of the agency.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Under this announcement, NOAA anticipates that up to $550,000 may be available in FY 2025 to fund new applications, subject to appropriations. NOAA anticipates making 3-4 awards during this exploratory funding phase. Projects should not exceed $75,000 annually in federal funds with a minimum request of $25,000. The performance period may be up to three years.

B. Project/Award Period

The project start date should be between September 1, 2025 and January 1, 2026. Applicants selected to receive funding may be asked to modify the project start date. It is recommended to include the flexibility of the requested start date in your project description. Applications should cover a project period of between one and three years. Projects that request multi-year funding must include in their submission a full description of the activities and estimated budget by line item (e.g. personnel, travel, supplies) for all proposed work for each year.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Applications selected for funding will be funded through a cooperative agreement under the terms of this notice. Applications funded through cooperative agreements will include substantial involvement of the Federal government, which may include, but is not limited to, collaboration on the scope of work, such as liaison activities between the grantee and NOAA personnel who are contributing data or expertise to the project. Additional forms of substantial involvement that may arise are described in Chapter 5.C of the Department of Commerce (DoC) Federal Financial Assistance Manual, which is currently available at: https://www.commerce.gov/oam/files/doc-federal-financial-assistance-manual-2024

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are K-through-12 public and independent schools and school systems, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, state or local government agencies, interstate agencies, and Indian tribal governments. Individuals, for-profit organizations, foreign organizations, and foreign public entities are not eligible to apply. However, for-profit and foreign organizations and foreign public entities may participate with an eligible applicant as a project partner. Additional guidance on subrecipient partners can be found at https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/section-200.331. Likewise, federal agencies are not eligible to receive federal assistance under this announcement, but may be project partners.

Applicants may be physically located in any U.S. state; however, education projects must support teachers, students and school districts located in the Delaware Bay watershed. School districts with more than 25% of their land mass falling in the Delaware Bay watershed are eligible.

NOTE: We strongly encourage all prospective applicants to begin required registrations as early as possible. Completing the required registrations can take six weeks or longer. Submission due dates will not be extended because of registration delays. Submissions received after the due date will be considered late and will not be accepted.

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See Section IV(G) for detailed instructions on required registrations. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact the Agency Contacts listed in this NOFO for submission instructions.

B. Cost Share or Matching Requirement

Cost-sharing is not required for this program.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Projects whose sole audience is outside the Delaware Bay watershed are not eligible, as described in Section III.A, Eligible Applicants. Projects must serve school districts with more than 25% of their land mass falling in the Delaware Bay watershed.

Applications submitted after the deadline will not be reviewed. Applications that are lacking any of the required elements of the application or do not follow the form prescribed in IV.B of this Announcement may not receive merit review as described in Section V.B.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Electronic application packages are required and are available at: http://www.grants.gov/ (Grants.gov).

If the applicant has difficulty accessing Grants.gov or downloading the required forms from the NOAA website, they should contact Bart Merrick at the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office by email at bart.merrick@noaa.gov or phone 240-627-6424. The NOAA Office does not have a direct telephonic device for the deaf; however, TDD capabilities can be accessed through the State of Maryland-supplied TDD contact number, 800-735-2258, between the hours of 8 a.m -4:30 p.m. Eastern Time.

B. Content and Form of Application

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Required Elements for Applications:

(a) At the time of application submission, all applicants shall submit the following forms with signatures of the authorized representative of the submitting institution. (Note: submission through Grants.gov results in automatic electronic signatures on these forms):

- Application for Federal Assistance: Form SF-424
- Budget Information, Non-construction Programs: Form SF-424A
- Assurances, Non-Construction Programs: Form SF-424B
- Certifications Regarding Lobbying: Form CD-511
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: Form SF-LLL (if applicable, see instructions on form)

(i) Project Summary (1 page):

- Project Title
- Organization and Partnerships: List your organization name, type of organization, and number of employees. List key partners for this grant, if applicable. Partnerships are encouraged.
- School District(s): List the school district(s) engaged in the project and their NCES District ID which can be found at: https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/
- Project duration: 12, 24, or 36 month project period starting on the first of the month and ending on the last day of the month. This project period should match your timeline and all forms (e.g. 08/01/2025-07/31/2028)
- Summary: Provide a brief statement that explains the need of your project, how the need was identified, what the program goals are, and the specific objectives. Your summary should use plain language to provide reviewers with an understanding of the purpose and expected outcomes of your educational project. A person unfamiliar with your project should be able to read this single paragraph and grasp your plan. If awarded funding, this summary will be used on the B-WET website and in other public documents.
- Audience: Describe your audience including the number and types of participants you expect to reach for each year of the project, such as the number of teachers, principals, administrators, staff, and/or students. Identify whether the entire grade band(s) will engage in MWEEs through systemic implementation, and if not, what percentage of the grade band will be reached.
- Budget Information: List the total federal funding requested each fiscal year and total non-federal match for each fiscal year (if applicable). List the total multi-year request and total multi-year match (if applicable). Please list requested amounts in whole dollars. Match is not required for this funding opportunity, will not be considered by proposal reviewers, and will not affect scoring.

(ii) Project Description (up to 10 pages): Describe in detail what your project will achieve with the following headings: What, Who, and How. Explain each aspect of your proposal clearly and address each topic below. Please address all of the following to ensure that grant reviewers can fully comprehend and score your project correctly. Specific Evaluation Criteria are defined in Section V.A.

What: Explain the goals and objectives for your project.

- Describe the overarching goal of the project. Goals are what the program or project will help achieve, which may be longer-term and extend beyond the grant.
- Describe the outcomes for your project. Outcomes are the change that is prompted as a result of the project (example: increased knowledge and skills, changes in attitudes and behaviors, streamlining processes to remove barriers for outdoor environmental literacy programs, or securing sustainable funding to ensure the longevity of environmental literacy programs).
- Describe how the project supports the regional conservation and/or educational priorities.
- Describe how NOAA resources will be used to support the project.

If your project may trigger consideration under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as described in the NOAA NEPA policy in Section VI.B. of this Announcement, applicants should provide relevant information in the project description. Any applicable supporting documents may be included as attachments and do not count toward the page limit.

Who: Identify the audience and give a precise location of the project and area(s) to be served.

- Identify the school district(s) that are being served and indicate if the schools and/or communities have indicators of need in academic performance (e.g., academic achievement, graduation rates, and attendance), socioeconomic status (e.g., low income, unemployment, high poverty, over 50% of Title I schools), and/or other areas that have shown to widen disparities in access to environmental education.
- If the project focuses on MWEE development and implementation, include how many students will receive MWEEs annually and how many teachers will receive professional development annually as a result of the project. Include the number of hours of professional development each teacher will engage in and how much of this time will be spent outdoors. Identify if the project will result in a systemic MWEE (every student in a school district across one or more grades), and, if not, how the project will build toward a systemic MWEE.
- For projects focused on network development and capacity building, describe the nature of the capacity building effort that will build toward a systemic and sustainable MWEE, including the key partners who will be engaged and the specific tangible products that will be developed to support MWEE implementation. Include the number of and kinds of school leaders and partners that will be engaged (e.g., principals, curriculum coordinators, non-profit partner organizations, traditional environmental education organizations).

This section will be scored using evaluation criteria in V.A.

How: This is the logistical work plan for your project and should be the most in-depth section of the project description.

- Clearly define the activities that will be conducted during this project to advance the goals and outcomes outlined above. Reviewers must be able to determine the duration and frequency of all activities. If multi-year, provide activities for each year.

- Detail how the project meets or supports the definition of the MWEE as defined in this funding opportunity.
- For projects supporting the development and implementation of MWEEs:
    - Describe the process by which the MWEE will be embedded, or work to become embedded, into the school district curriculum.
    - Outline how the essential elements and supporting practices are organized within the program, including the duration and frequency of MWEE activities and whether they occur in the classroom or outdoors. Outdoor field experiences should be accessible to students of all abilities and proposals should describe how accommodations will be made for a variety of learners.
    - Describe the professional development plan including the amount and type of training that each teacher will receive in each year of the project. If funding requested under this priority area is dedicated solely to providing teacher professional development (i.e., grant dollars are not directly supporting any student MWEE activities), applicants must demonstrate how trained teachers will implement student MWEEs, and what resources (funds, staff, facilities, partner organizations, etc.) exist to support student components of the MWEE.
- For network and capacity oriented projects:
    - Describe how the project will result in one or more products that codifies or supports an environmental literacy strategy that builds toward systemic and sustainable environmental literacy programs that include MWEEs. Products may also include the development of Environmental Literacy Models (https://www.baybackpack.com/mwee/step-3-putting-it-all-together) or other products that document how the elements of a MWEE will be addressed.
    - Describe how existing resources, like the District Environmental Literacy Planning Toolkit, will be used in the creation of the plan or strategy.
    - Articulate any best practices or innovative approaches that will be used to meet the stated goals.

This section will be scored using evaluation criteria in V.A. (Technical merit)

(iii) Sustainability: B-WET aims to support the student outcome of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement where every student has a MWEE at least once in elementary, middle, and high school. To this end, projects funded through B-WET should be developed with sustainability in mind to ensure that MWEEs continue into the future. MWEEs are the most sustainable when they are embedded into school curriculum and supported with school district and partner resources.

- Describe the plan for sustainability of the project beyond NOAA funding.
- List other sources of funding, aside from grants, that have been sought for the project (e.g., Title II or IV funding) and the status of those requests.
- This may include but is not limited to: integrating the MWEE into the school district curriculum, building capacity of teachers to implement all essential elements of the MWEE, ensuring that at least one field experience occurs on school grounds, and/or identifying opportunities for sustained funding in school budgets and partnerships with local funders.
- This may look like planning time for identifying future funds needed to carry out next steps toward building systemic MWEEs, creating supportive resources for using school grounds for learning, and/or developing plans for sustaining networks and partnerships.

This section will be scored using evaluation criteria in V.A. (Project Costs).

(iv) Outreach and Education: Projects should include external sharing and communication beyond the primary audience.

- Describe how school administrators, teachers, educators, and other partners will share about their experience implementing and supporting Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences and other environmental literacy activities to their colleagues through professional development opportunities, conferences, or other media outreach about the project.
- NOAA would like to encourage grantees to share educational resources (lesson plans, curricula, videos, worksheets, etc.) created as a part of your grant with other grantees and educators. Please consider discussing what products you plan to create and how you plan to make them available to others. Costs associated with producing and sharing accessible resources may be included in your project budget. You may also submit resources for inclusion in the NOAA Education resource collections or Sea to Sky database. NOAA will provide grantees with additional guidance on how to submit resources.

This section will be scored using evaluation criteria in V.A. (Outreach and Education).

(v) Project Evaluation: Evaluation here is defined as the systematic collection and documentation of information about your project's outcomes in order to improve the project's effectiveness, guide judgments about its impact, and/or inform decisions about future programming or funding. Evaluation plans may be quantitative and/or qualitative and may include, for example, evaluation tools, observation, or outside consultation. No more than 10% of the budget can be spent on the evaluation component of your application.

- Describe how you will track and measure progress on your outputs and your short term outcomes. How will your audience(s) be different after their involvement in your project and how will you measure those differences? The outcomes you measure should correlate to your goals and objectives and the B-WET program's definition of the MWEE if applicable. If your medium- and long-term outcomes can also be measured within the project period, explain your plans for that evaluation as well.
- Explain how your evaluation strategy includes a plan to periodically assess the effectiveness of the programming and at what points you will make adjustments using that information during the grant period.

This section will be scored using evaluation criteria in V.A.(Technical Merit).

If funded by NOAA, grant recipients must be willing to report evaluation results to NOAA. For detailed information on how to create an evaluation plan visit NOAA's website at https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/grantee-resources.

Some aspects of project evaluation may require institutional review board (IRB) approval. It is the applicant's responsibility to determine if this is necessary and report back to NOAA. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Human Research Protections website has resources to help you determine the necessity of IRB approval. You can find those resources at: https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/decision-charts-2018/index.html. As part of the project evaluation plan, applicants must provide, in writing, a description of whether or not IRB review will be sought and a justification if not. If the applicant determines IRB review is necessary, the applicant must include a timeline for IRB review, and no expenditures related to data collection may occur until IRB approval has been obtained.

Participation in B-WET National Evaluation:

In the past, B-WET has collected data on B-WET program grantee and participant activities and outcomes through its national evaluation system, above and beyond project-level evaluation work conducted by grantees. However, we are currently analyzing existing evaluation data and will enhance our evaluation approach based upon that analysis. Therefore, we are not currently collecting data via the B-WET National Evaluation System. Grantees may be invited to participate in future data collection activities and will be given advance notice about these opportunities so they can incorporate data collection into project and implementation plans, as appropriate.

Additional information about B-WET national evaluation work is available here: https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/grantee-resources/national-evaluation

(b) APPENDICES (not included in Project Description page limit):

(i) Budget Justification: Provide a detailed spreadsheet with narrative to support the requested items or activities (personnel/salaries, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contract costs, and indirect costs). Please list requested amounts in whole dollars. If applying for multiple years of funding, the budget should be broken down for each year requested. Applicants are encouraged to use the B-WET budget template found at https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/content/resources-prospective-chesapeake-bay-b-wet-grantees. The budget justification submitted with the application should match the dollar amounts on the required Forms SF-424 and SF-424A. This section will be scored using separate evaluation criteria in V.A. for Priority 1 and for Priority 2. (Project Costs).

Specify how much funding has been requested from the Chesapeake Bay Trust Environmental Education Grants Program to support the project, if such funding has been requested.

For multi-year projects: Ensure that there is a detailed budget narrative detailing the budget requested for each year matching each Form SF-424A.

Grant recipients may be encouraged to attend the Chesapeake Bay Program Education Workgroup's Environmental Literacy Forum or state or regional B-WET meeting once during the duration of their grant. This will be an opportunity for former and current B-WET grant recipients to share about their B-WET projects and learn from each other. This meeting may be part of an existing state environmental conference or science education conference to minimize travel expenses. Budgets should include, in the travel category, estimated funds for this meeting (such as meals, lodging, and transportation including rental car, shuttle, or taxi). No more than $1,000 should be budgeted for this expense.

The budget may include an amount for indirect costs, which are essentially overhead costs for basic operational functions (e.g., lights, rent, water, insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified specifically within a particular project. See 2 C.F.R. 200.1 and 200.412-.415 at http://go.usa.gov/SBYh and http://go.usa.gov/SBg4. An applicant may also propose all allowable project charges as direct costs.

An applicant requesting indirect costs should provide a current approved Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement established with its cognizant federal agency or an acknowledgment letter from the cognizant agency to which the applicant has submitted a proposed rate. In addition, if an award recipient does not have a current indirect cost rate with any federal agency, the recipient may request to use the de minimis rate described at 2 C.F.R. 200.414 or it may negotiate a new rate with the Department of Commerce. The negotiation and approval of a new rate is subject to the procedures required by the NOAA and the Department of Commerce. The U.S. Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/DOC%20Financial%20Assistance%20General%20Terms%20and%20Conditions%20as%20of%2001%20October%202024.pdf require that within 90 days of the award start date, recipients submit documentation (indirect cost proposal, cost allocation, plan, etc.) necessary to perform the review to establish a new rate to the address listed below.

Jennifer Jackson
NOAA Grants Management Division
1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor
Silver Spring, MD 20910
jennifer.jackson@noaa.gov

(ii) Timeline: Include a project schedule that indicates when each action, event, milestone, product development, and evaluation will occur. Timelines should be detailed enough for reviewers to ascertain the number of teachers and/or students reached for each activity and the duration of each contact. This section will be scored using separate evaluation criteria in V.A. for Priority 1 and for Priority 2. (Technical Merit).

(iii) For proposals supporting the development and implementation of *model Systemic and sustainable MWEEs* provide an Environmental Literacy Model (ELM) or other document that illustrates how the proposed project will meet the full definition of the MWEE, including identifying curricular connections of the MWEE through academic standards, issue investigation where students engage in the essential elements of issue definition, outdoor field experiences, and synthesis and conclusions, and ultimately engage in informed action through a student-directed environmental action project. The document should include brief (2-3 sentence) descriptions about how the proposed project will address the following information:

- Defining the Learning Objectives and Curriculum Connection. What are the curriculum indicators, performance expectations, and/or student learning objectives? Are there opportunities to meet academic standards in multiple disciplines or content areas?
- Describing the Local Context. What is the local and life-relevant environmental issue, problem, or phenomenon that will serve as the context for learning?
- Identifying the Driving Question. What is the open-ended, life-relevant question that meets academic standards/learning objectives?

- Asking Questions and Defining Issues. What are supporting questions that students may investigate to further explore the driving question? List the supporting questions that cover your required curriculum content and lessons. Describe how you will guide students in developing and/or co-developing their own questions.
- Planning and Conducting Investigations. How could students plan and conduct indoor and outdoor investigations to actively address the supporting questions? What kinds of data could be collected to draw conclusions and make actionable claims?
- Analyzing and Interpreting Data. How could students analyze data (graphic, models, etc.) to reveal patterns and relationships? What could the process of synthesizing evidence look like?
- Constructing and Communicating a Claim. How could you guide your students through the process of developing claims based on their evidence? How may they communicate these evidence-based claims to internal and/or external audiences?
- Identifying Solutions. How could you encourage your students to identify and explore a variety of solutions that could directly address the issue? How will students make decisions about which solution(s) to implement?
- Designing a Plan and Taking Informed Action. What resources or frameworks will students use to create their plan of environmental action? During what time period will they execute their project?
- Evaluating Action. In what ways will students reflect on the action and determine the extent to which it successfully addresses the issue?

The Environmental Literacy Model (ELM) Template can provide consistency for articulating this and can be found at: www.baybackpack.com. Examples of completed ELMs can be found on Bay Backpack under the Teaching Resources. Note: you may reference lesson plans or curriculum as part of the appendices but do not embed these resources into the proposal.

For proposals focusing on methods that *develop local networks and/or support planning and capacity for outdoor education and environmental literacy programming*: include a logic model that articulates the short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes resulting in programming that supports systemic and curriculum-embedded MWEEs.

This section will be scored using criteria in V.A. (Technical Merit).

(iv) Technical Experience and Qualifications: Attach a description of your programmatic capabilities and ability to successfully implement and manage the proposed project including staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them to successfully achieve the goals of the project, and your organizational experience and past history in performing tasks similar to the proposed project. Also include a paragraph describing qualifications of each of the key personnel conducting the project, including justification for how the project team members possess the educational, scientific, and expertise needed to carry out the project. If you send resumes for the key personnel conducting the project, please keep them to a maximum of three one-page resumes.

(v) Partnership Letters of Commitment: If the applicant organization has partners, such as school districts, state agencies, or other organizations, include letters of commitment from partners explaining their particular role in and/or funding of the proposed project. In particular, letters are requested from school district personnel that demonstrate support and commitment for environmental literacy efforts, specifically MWEEs, as well as a description of where MWEEs will align with curriculum and how they will ensure that teachers will participate in professional development. Do not include letters of endorsement from previous participants, teachers, or others not directly involved in project implementation. Letters should be received as part of application submission.

(vi) Results from prior NOAA support: If any principal investigator (PI) or co-PI identified on the project has received support from NOAA in the past five years, information on the prior award(s) is required. The following information should be provided:

- The NOAA award number, amount and period of support;
- The title of the project;
- Summary of the results of the completed work (including # of teachers/students);
- If all federal funds were not expended, a detailed explanation why funds remained;
- If the proposal is for renewed support, a description of the relation of the completed work to the proposed work.

(vii) Data Management Plan: Proposals submitted in response to this Announcement must include a Data Management Plan of up to two pages. The Data Management Plan should be aligned with the NOAA B-WET Data Management Guidance provided below and will be considered as part of proposal review. NOAA may, at its own discretion, make publicly visible the Data Management Plan from funded proposals, or use information from the Data Management Plan to produce a formal metadata record and include that metadata in a Catalog to indicate the pending availability of new data. Proposal submitters are hereby advised that the final pre-publication manuscripts of scholarly articles produced entirely or primarily with NOAA funding will be required to be submitted to NOAA Institutional Repository after acceptance, and no later than upon publication. Such manuscripts shall be made publicly available by NOAA one year after publication by the journal.

Data Management Guidance to Applicants

The NOAA B-WET program has developed this guidance to help grant applicants plan to share quality environmental data collected as part of their B-WET funded projects, where applicable. Environmental Data are defined by NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 212-15: Management of Environmental Data and Information as recorded and derived observations and measurements of the physical, chemical, biological, geological, and geophysical properties and conditions of the oceans, atmosphere, space environment, sun, and solid earth, as well as correlative data such as socioeconomic data, related documentation, and metadata. Digital audio or video recordings of environmental phenomena (such as animal sounds or undersea video) are included in this definition. Numerical model outputs are included in this definition, particularly if they are used to support the conclusion of a peer reviewed publication. Data collected in a laboratory or other controlled environment, such as measurements of animals and chemical processes, are included in this definition. Environmental data and information collected or created under NOAA grants or cooperative agreements must be made discover-able by and accessible to the general public, in a timely fashion (typically within two years), free of charge or at no more than the cost of reproduction, unless an exemption is granted by the NOAA Program. Data should be available in at least one machine-readable format, preferably a widely used or open standard format, and should also be accompanied by machine-readable documentation (metadata), preferably based on widely used or international standards.

Proposals submitted in response to this announcement must include a Data Management Plan of up to two pages describing how these requirements apply to the proposed project and will be satisfied. The Data Management Plan will be considered as part of the proposal review. Note that the Federal Program Officer may require revisions to the applicant's Data Management Plan prior to recommending the application for funding. Applicant Data Management Plans should be aligned with the following Data Management Guidance.

If environmental data collected/generated as part of the project are primarily for education and/or the practice of making observations using scientific techniques/methods (e.g., measuring pH of water with a refractometer, measuring atmospheric humidity with a sling psychrometer, measuring percent vegetative cover using a transect) and are not intended to be shared with scientists outside of the educational program, applicants may request permission not to make data publicly accessible and obtain approval from the Federal Program Officer, if funded. In this case, this element of the application should consist of a paragraph (under the heading "Data Management Plan") describing the intended use of the data and that an exemption from data sharing is requested.

If environmental data collected/generated as part of the project are for purposes beyond education and/or the practice of making observations using scientific techniques/methods, applicants should describe (up to 2 pages, under the heading "Data Management Plan") how data will be shared, based on the following guidance:

Contents: A typical Data Management Plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information expected to be created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; methods for providing data access; approximate total volume of data to be collected; and prior experience in making such data accessible. The plan should describe or reference the data quality control techniques that will be used or note that the data will not be quality controlled. Data that is not quality controlled should include a description on the limitations of the data or an indication of degree of uncertainty.

Technical recommendations: The NOAA B-WET program does not offer specific technical guidance. Applicants should describe their proposed approach. Use of open-standard formats and methods is encouraged.

Data Accessibility: The NOAA B-WET program recommends that public access to grant-produced data be enabled via an existing publicly accessible online data server at the funded institution or a public data repository appropriate to this scientific domain (describe in application). (e.g., the GLOBE Program - http://www.globe.gov/, CoCoRaHS Community - http://www.cocorahs.org/); or recipient-established data hosting capability (please describe in application's Data Management Plan).

Resources: Proposals are permitted to include the costs of data preparation, accessibility, or archiving in their budgets.

Responsible NOAA Official for questions regarding this guidance and for verifying accessibility of data produced by funding recipients:

Please contact the NOAA Federal Program Officer for the regional B-WET competition to which you are applying. Contacts are available here: https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/apply

Additional questions may be directed to:

Name: Bronwen Rice
Title: National B-WET Program Manager
Affiliation or facility: NOAA Office of Education
E-mail address: Bronwen.Rice@noaa.gov
Phone number: (202) 604-1388

(viii) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): Consistent with Section IV.B.(a)(ii) and Section VI.B. of this Announcement, if any permits, permit requests, maps, or other supporting NEPA documents are applicable to your project, they may be included as attachments.

This announcement is not seeking proposals that generate environmental data. Therefore, a Data Management Plan is not required as part of the Proposal.
No reference to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) questionnaire is required in the proposal.

C. Unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or federal awarding agency that is excepted from those requirements under 2 CFR 25.110) is required to: (i) Be registered in SAM before submitting its application; (ii) Provide a valid unique entity identifier (UEI) in its application; and (iii) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a federal awarding agency. NOAA may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time NOAA is ready to make a federal award, NOAA may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant.

D. Submission Dates and Times

Proposals must be submitted through Grants.gov and must be received by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on April 18, 2025. PLEASE NOTE: After electronic submission of the application through Grants.gov, the person submitting the application will receive within the next 24 to 48 hours two email messages from Grants.gov updating them on the progress of their application. The first email will confirm receipt of the application by the Grants.gov system, and the second will indicate that the application has either been successfully validated by the system before transmission to the grantor agency or has been rejected because of errors. Only validated applications are sent to NOAA for review. After the application has been validated, this same person will receive a third email when the application has been downloaded by the federal agency.

If Grants.gov has technical issues that prohibit submission or use of Grants.gov is otherwise not feasible, hard copy applications will be accepted. Hard copies may be submitted by postal mail or commercial delivery service. Mail hard copy applications to Bart Merrick, Cooperative Oxford Lab, 904 South Morris St., Oxford, MD 21654. Hard copy applications must be received (not postmarked) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on April 18, 2025. Hard copy applications arriving after the deadline given above will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that the application was provided to a delivery service that guaranteed delivery prior to the specified closing date and time. Hard copy applications received later than two business days following the closing date will not be accepted.

Informational webinars about the FY 2025 Delaware Bay B-WET funding announcement will be held on January 31, 2025 at 12:30 p.m. Eastern Time and February 13, 2025 at 11:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time. Eastern Standard Time. To register for these webinars, please visit: https://forms.gle/TaKGWo3EZnsmWrnf8. Note that NOAA B-WET staff will be available to answer questions Monday through Friday, 8:30a.m.-4:00p.m. Eastern Time excluding federal holidays.

IMPORTANT NOTE: NOAA has created a guide to aid applicants in formatting application packages to eRA: Tips and Tricks for Successful eRA Submissions, linked here. Recent applicants have encountered rejected applications for formatting issues, especially:

- All attachments must be in PDF form.
- Do not use “bundling” or “portfolio” features to combine PDFs into a single document. Everything must be visible in the PDF.
- Descriptive filenames may only be 50 characters or less (including spaces).
- Keep attachment file size to 100 MB or less.
- eRA won’t accept any pages larger than the U.S. standard letter paper size (8.5” x 11”).

We **strongly** recommend that applicants attempt to submit their full proposals at least a few days prior to the due date in case these or other issues impact your submission, as they are not reasons we can extend the deadline. If you have issues during the submission process, please contact the eRA Service Desk.

E. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program are not subject to Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.

F. Funding Restrictions

Allowable Costs

Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out the project. Allowable costs are determined by reference to the OMB Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (OMB Uniform Requirements), found at 2 C.F.R. Part 200 and adopted by the Department of Commerce through 2 C.F.R. 1327.101. Refer to http://go.usa.gov/SBYh and http://go.usa.gov/SBg4. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, equipment, supplies, and training, as long as these are "necessary and reasonable." Construction costs are not allowed.

G. Other Submission Requirements

All application materials should be submitted in PDF format.

Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process. In developing your submission timeline, note that validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov and other required registrations may take up to 4 weeks.

Potential funding applicants must register with Grants.gov and other required registrations before any application materials can be submitted, and first-time registration with Grants.gov can take up to three weeks or more. It is therefore strongly recommended that this registration process be completed as soon as possible to allow sufficient time to ensure applications are submitted before the closing date. Also, even if an applicant has registered with Grants.gov previously, the applicant's password may have expired or their registration may need to be renewed prior to submitting to Grants.gov. Grants.gov will not accept submissions if the applicant has not been authorized or if credentials are incorrect. Authorizations and credential corrections can take several days or longer to establish.

Registration requirements

NOTE: We strongly encourage all prospective applicants to begin required registrations as early as possible. Completing the required registrations can take six weeks or longer. Submission due dates will not be extended because of registration delays. Submissions received after the due date will be considered late and will not be accepted.

Applicant organizations and individuals must register for three different Federal systems prior to submitting an application through Grants.gov (SAM.gov, eRA Commons, and Grants.gov). See below for more detailed information on each required registration process.

1. System for Award Management (SAM.gov)

SAM.gov registration is required to do business with the U.S. government. After registering with SAM.gov, you will receive a 12-character Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) that you will use throughout the application process.

We recommend allowing at least three weeks for initial SAM.gov registrations and at least two weeks for SAM.gov registration renewals. Additional information on SAM.gov registration is available here: https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration

You must update your SAM.gov registration any time your entity's information changes. You must also renew and revalidate your entity's SAM.gov registration at least every 12 months from the date you last certified to and submitted the registration. The renewal process may take up to two weeks. Your SAM.gov account's primary point of contact will receive an email message alerting them to the renewal requirement at 60 days, 30 days, and 15 days prior to expiration. If you do not renew your registration by the deadline, it will expire.

2. eRA Commons

After completing your SAM.gov registration and receiving your Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), you must register with eRA Commons and create several required user accounts. NOAA uses eRA Commons to process grant applications and manage grant awards.

NOTE: eRA Commons requires applicants to create one ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE and two USER ACCOUNTS before submitting an application. These requirements are described in detail below.

We recommend allowing at least three weeks for eRA Commons registration. This process can be completed concurrently with your Grants.gov registration. Additional information on the eRA Commons registration process is available here: https://www.commerce.gov/ocio/programs/gems/applicant-and-grantee-training

After creating an overall account for your "institution", which may be for your organization or yourself as an individual, eRA Commons requires you to set up at least two user accounts: one Signing Official (SO) account and one Program Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) account.

- The Signing Official (SO) user account must be assigned to an individual with signature authority to legally bind the organization in grants administration matters. The SO will receive 4-5 emails throughout the registration process.
- The Program Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) account must be assigned to an individual with primary responsibility for the project(s) described in the grant application. The eRA Commons User ID (Username) for the PD/PI must also be listed on the SF-424 form for item 4 (Applicant Identifier).

Your SO and PD/PI user accounts must be active before you submit an application. Both accounts can be assigned to the same individual if appropriate.

3. Grants.Gov

After completing your SAM.gov registration and receiving your Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), you must complete a one-time registration process with Grants.gov. Grants.gov is a government-wide portal used to solicit and accept grant applications.

We recommend allowing at least two weeks for Grants.gov registration. This process can be completed concurrently with your eRA Commons registration. Additional information on the Grants.gov registration process is available here: https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-registration

Submission Validation

The Grants.gov and eRA Commons validation processes for a submitted application can take up to two business days after submission. Only validated applications are sent to NOAA to review. To ensure successful submission of an application, we strongly recommend that you submit a final and complete application at least two business days prior to the submission deadline.

Grants.gov and eRA Commons will not accept submissions if the applicant has not been authorized or if credentials are incorrect. Submissions may also be rejected if:

- The Project Director/Principal Investigator's (PD/PI) account username within eRA Commons is not provided on the SF-424 form for item 4 (Applicant Identifier).
- The Universal Entity Identifier (UEI) from SAM.gov is not provided on the SF-424 form for item 8.c (UEI).
- The Congressional District is not entered in the correct format on the SF-424 form for item 16 (Congressional Districts). The correct format is: [State Abbreviation]-[three digit district number]. For example, Virginia's 1st Congressional District would be listed as VA-001.
- PDF files are not flattened. To flatten a fillable PDF, you can use the "Print to PDF" function from any web browser or PDF reader application.
- File sizes exceed 100 MB.
- Page sizes are greater than 8.5"x11".
- File names exceed 50 characters (including spaces).
- File names include special characters.

After you submit your application, you will receive an automatic acknowledgment of receipt that contains a Grants.gov tracking number. This notification indicates receipt by Grants.gov only, not receipt by NOAA. Applications submitted through Grants.gov will be accompanied by FOUR automated responses (1-Grants.gov Submission Receipt; 2-Grants.gov Submission Validation Receipt for Application; 3-Grants.gov Grantor Agency Retrieval Receipt for Application; 4-Grants.gov Agency Tracking Number Assignment for Application).

In addition to the Grants.gov automated notification messages, you may receive automated email notifications of any errors or warnings identified by eRA Commons. You must resolve all eRA Commons errors prior to the application due date in order for the application to be processed.

Once an electronic application is accepted in eRA Commons, you will receive an additional automated notification that the completed application was received and that an application number will be assigned.

You should save and print the proof of submission messages from both Grants.gov and eRA Commons. If you do not receive an acceptance message from both Grants.gov and eRA Commons, you should follow up with the agency contact listed in VII to confirm NOAA's receipt of the complete submission.

If you experience a Grants.gov "systems issue" (technical problems or glitches with the Grants.gov website) that you believe threatens your ability to complete a submission before an applicable funding cycle deadline, please (i) print any error message received; and (ii) call the Grants.gov Contact Center at 1-800-518-4726 for immediate assistance. Ensure that you obtain a case number regarding your communications with Grants.gov. Please note: problems with an applicant organization's computer system or equipment are not considered "systems issues." Similarly, an applicant's failure to: (i) complete the required registration, (ii) ensure that a registered Authorized Organizational Representative submits the application, or (iii) receive an email message from Grants.gov validating or rejecting its application are not considered systems issues. NOAA is not required to screen applications before the submission deadline in order to identify deficiencies that would cause the application to be rejected or receive a poor evaluation. However, if deficiencies are identified by NOAA or the applicant, the applicant may correct any deficiencies in their application through resubmission before the deadline. A Grants.gov "systems issue" is an issue occurring in connection with the operations of Grants.gov system, such as the temporary loss of service by Grants.gov due to unexpected volume of traffic or failure of information technology systems, both of which are highly unlikely. In the event of a confirmed "systems issue," or a significant natural disaster affecting submission, NOAA may allow more time for applicant submission due to system problems at Grants.gov at the time of application submission that are beyond the control of the applicant.

H. Address for Submitting Proposals

Proposals must be submitted through Grants.gov and must be received by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on April 18, 2025.

If Grants.gov has technical issues that prohibit submission or use of Grants.gov is otherwise not feasible, hard copy applications will be accepted. Hard copies may be submitted by postal mail or commercial delivery service. Mail hard copy applications to Bart Merrick, Cooperative Oxford Lab, 904 South Morris St., Oxford, MD 21654. Hard copy applications must be received (not postmarked) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on April 18, 2025. Hard copy applications arriving after the deadline given above will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that the application was provided to a delivery service that guaranteed delivery prior to the specified closing date and time. Hard copy applications received later than two business days following the closing date will not be accepted.

V. Application Review Information

1. Importance/relevance and applicability of proposed projects to the program goals	**Maximum Points: 25**
1.1 Does the proposed work support the development of a model MWEE, capacity development or the development of networks and tangible environmental literacy program supports that will build toward the systemic implementation of a MWEE for a grade level in a school district(s) (i.e., reaching all students and relevant teachers in a grade level within a school district)? If this project does not reach systemic implementation, is there a clear plan describing how they propose to work toward systemic implementation? (8 points)	

1.2 Does the applicant provide data that demonstrates that the school district(s) to be served have indicators of need in academic performance (e.g. academic achievement, graduation rates, and attendance), or access to high-quality outdoor and environmental literacy programming? Does the applicant describe how they identified the needs or gaps (i.e., meetings with school district leaders, school district data, data from ELIT where available) as well as any existing programming or systemic MWEEs currently in place that the proposed work builds on?(8 points)

1.3 Does the applicant define the audience(s) that will be reached? Does the applicant demonstrate an understanding of this audience, including an in-depth understanding of current opportunities and challenges that schools face in relation to environmental literacy with specified audience(s)? (4 points)

1.4 Does the applicant demonstrate that the project will support environmental literacy, including MWEEs, being fully embedded into the district's curriculum? If not, does the applicant describe how the project is aligned with school district goals and curriculum and a commitment from school district(s) personnel to work toward sustainable and curriculum embedded MWEEs that reach every student? (5 points)

2. Technical merit	**Maximum Points: 35**

2.1. Are objectives identified in the application? Are they focused on reaching the stated outcome(s)? Does the applicant demonstrate that the objectives and outcomes can be reached within the proposed project period? (3 points)

2.2. Does the applicant include project milestones and a timeline for reaching each? Is the timeline reasonable for the award duration and components? (3 points)

2.3. Does the project use NOAA and partner assets including products, data, services, or scientific/professional experts in forming and implementing the MWEE? Does the proposal demonstrate how MWEE resources including the MWEE Guide (ELM planning tool and MWEE Audit tool), Facilitator's Guide to MWEE Training, MWEE 101/201 online courses, and/or Bay Backpack and the School District Planning Toolkit will be used in the project? (3 points)

2.4. Does the applicant discuss a plan for sustainability of the project beyond NOAA funding (e.g., plans for sustaining networks and partnerships, identification of future funds to build systemic MWEEs, etc.)? (3 points)

2.5. Does the applicant provide an effective project-level evaluation plan, appropriate to the scale of the project, to determine the project's effectiveness, document successes toward meeting the objectives, and inform decisions about future programming? Does the plan define what will be evaluated and the types of evaluation planned? Are the methods for implementing the evaluation appropriate? (3 points)

2.6. Implementing or supporting the implementation of the components of the MWEE. NOTE, each criteria has elements that will allow for scoring applications that focus on MWEE development and capacity/network development (total of 20 points as broken down below):

2.6.1 For implementation projects, will the project result in the development of a program that includes students conducting issue identification and background research? Will students engage in synthesis and conclusions throughout the MWEE? Does the MWEE provide ample opportunities for youth voice? For network or capacity building efforts, does the project support the development of tangible products that will advance student inquiry and decision making? (5 points)

2.6.2 Will the project directly or indirectly increase the number of students who participate in outdoor field experiences? For implementation projects, are the locations for student field experiences and number of times students are learning outdoors appropriate for the project? Does the applicant describe how they will ensure access for students of all abilities in MWEE activities, especially field experiences? For network or capacity-building efforts, does the project support the development of tangible products that will improve or increase student outdoor experiences? (5 points)

2.6.3 Will the project directly or indirectly result in environmental action projects that address the issue students are investigating? For implementation proposals, are students involved in the formation of project ideas and planning for the action? For network or capacity-building efforts, does the project support the development of tangible products that will improve or increase student action projects? (3 points)

2.6.4 Are formal educators meaningfully involved in the project? For implementation-focused proposals, does the project support teachers in facilitating the MWEE? Is this reflected and supported in the plan for teacher professional development? Is it clear that teachers are meaningfully engaged in and co-leading learning experiences conducted by outside providers? For network or capacity-building efforts, does the project support the development of tangible products that will support teachers ultimately leading MWEE implementation? (3 points)

2.6.5 For implementation projects, Does the proposed professional development meet the criteria set forth in the MWEE definition in this announcement? OR For network or capacity development projects, does the project educate formal and non- formal education partners on the value and definition of the MWEE at the local or sub-state level? Will this work lead to broader understanding and adoption of the MWEE framework? (4 points)

3. Overall qualifications of applicants	**Maximum Points: 18**

3.1 Does the proposal demonstrate that the applicant and/or their partners have the institutional capacity, educational and scientific expertise, and local awareness to successfully complete the project? Is this clearly described in the resumes or narrative included in the proposal? (5 points)

3.2 Does the applicant anchor their project objectives within the context of the school district interests, issues, and capacities? Does the applicant demonstrate that they have involved school district representatives in the design of the project? (4 points)

3.3 Does the applicant demonstrate a commitment to building relationships with new partners? Is there a thoughtful strategy in place to meaningfully engage these partners? (3 points)

3.4 Does the proposal increase organizational and technical capacity of partner organizations to lead and/or support the project? (2 points)

3.5 Does the proposal include letters of commitment detailing how each partner will engage in the project (as opposed to simply voicing support)? Do letters of commitment from partners, schools and school districts articulate how they will ensure that teachers will participate in professional development and administration is committed to supporting participation? (4 points)

4. Project costs	**Maximum Points: 15**

4.1 Is the budget request reasonable for the work outlined in the proposal? Is the budget going to the highest priority needs of the project, for example stipends or substitute costs for teacher professional development? (5 points)

4.2 Is the funding being used to broaden support for environmental education through the engagement of new partners? Are partners being adequately resourced to engage in the project? (3 points)

4.3 Does the applicant identify what ongoing resources specifically will be needed to maintain the program beyond the grant period? Do they identify a stable funding source or detail a strategy to pursue a stable funding source beyond grants to sustain the project after the grant period? Is there a commitment to support and sustain the work from all of the essential partners? (4 points)

4.4 Does the budget adequately detail the amount of time each individual will spend on the project and is this a reasonable amount of staff time for such a project? Are the requested funds for salaries and fringe benefits only for those personnel who are directly involved in the implementation of the proposed project? (3 points)

5. Outreach and Education	**Maximum Points: 7**

This criterion assesses whether the project involves mechanisms for significant external sharing and communication about the project by students, teachers, or project staff. This includes consideration of the Data Management Plan described in Section IV.B.(b)(vii) of this Announcement.

5.1 Does the proposal describe how partners will engage key audiences (e.g., school boards, public officials, parent-teacher associations, the media) to build excitement and encourage ongoing support? Will the project result in tangible products that help to establish a means to communicate priorities and strategies across district administrators and principals, and ensure continuity across time to build sustainability? (5 points)

5.2 Does the proposal describe opportunities for peer-to-peer sharing for the key audience(s)? (2 points)

Evaluation Criteria

Review and Selection Process

An initial administrative review is conducted on each application received by the deadline to assure that it is eligible, responsive, and complete. NOAA, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues that may be easily addressed. If NOAA identifies a non-material deficiency in an application after the deadline, applicants may be requested to make non-material changes.

Applications that are cleared for meeting minimum requirements will be moved into merit review and evaluated by a two-phase review process that comprises a preliminary technical review and a panel review meeting. Both phases are conducted by the same set of private and/or public sector expert reviewers. Each review phase is described in detail below, followed by post-merit-review procedures.

Technical Review

The purpose of the technical review is to evaluate each proposal's technical merit via individual evaluations of the proposals. Each application will be reviewed by a minimum of three reviewers. Reviewers provide comments (which can be shared with applicants after the competition has concluded) and assign scores to the applications based on the evaluation criteria in Section V.A. of this federal funding opportunity. If one or more non-federal reviewers is used, no consensus advice will be given.

Based on the results of the individually scored proposals, the Program Officer will prepare a preliminary ranked list of proposals. This preliminary rank order will be used in the subsequent panel meeting where final funding recommendations are made.

Panel Review

A panel review meeting will be held following the technical review process. The purpose of the panel meeting is to discuss the proposals in-depth and to get final funding recommendations from reviewers. This in-depth discussion may raise issues or answer questions that a reviewer did not have in the technical review, or it may clarify an issue. After discussing proposals, panelists will individually provide comments and a final score for each application, upon which a final rank order is established. If one or more non federal reviewers is used, no consensus advice will be given by the panel.

Project Selection

The Delaware Bay B-WET Coordinator may, in consultation with NOAA staff, review the ranking of the proposals and recommendations of the review panel and make recommendations to the Selecting Official, who is expected to be the Director of the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office or designee. The rank order from the review panel will be the primary consideration for the Selection Official in deciding which of the new proposals will be recommended for funding to the NOAA Grants Officer. The Selecting Official shall award in rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based on the Selection Factors described in Section V.C. of this funding opportunity. NOAA may select all, some, or none of the applications, or part of any application, ask applicants to work together or combine projects, defer applications to the future without recompetition, or reallocate funds to different funding categories, to the extent authorized.

Please note that not all activities submitted under a single proposal may be deemed appropriate for funding, and the Selecting Official may recommend alternate activities as appropriate or only partial funding, based on the selection factors and the merit and/or panel review written evaluations. For a proposal to be selected for funding, the applicant may be asked to modify objectives and activities, work plans, and budgets, and to provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award. This may result in submission of a revised application before final funding decisions are made. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and other relevant application details will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant and NOAA officials. Applicants should also note that modifications to projects may be necessary as a result of NOAA's efforts to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as described in Section VI.B. of this funding opportunity, and other legislation.

Grants Management Review

The NOAA Grants Officer will review financial and grants administration aspects of a proposed award, including conducting an assessment of the risk posed by the applicant in accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.206. An applicant, at its option, may review information in the designated integrity and performance systems accessible through SAM and comment on any information about itself that a federal awarding agency previously entered and is currently in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM. NOAA will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in §200.206 federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants.

In addition to reviewing repositories of government-wide eligibility, qualifications, or financial integrity information, the risk assessment conducted by NOAA may consider items such as the financial stability of an applicant, quality of the applicant's management systems, an applicant's history of performance, previous audit reports and audit findings concerning the applicant and the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-federal entities. Applicants should be in compliance with the terms of any existing NOAA grants or cooperative agreements and otherwise eligible to receive federal awards, or make arrangements satisfactory to the Grants Officer, to be considered for funding under this competition. All reports due should be received and any concerns raised by the agency should be timely addressed in order to receive a new award.

Upon review of these factors, if appropriate, specific award conditions that respond to the degree of risk may be applied by the NOAA Grants Officer pursuant to 2 C.F.R. 200.208. NOAA also reserves the right to reject an application in its entirety where information is uncovered that raises a significant risk with respect to the responsibility or suitability of an applicant. In addition, NOAA may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and System for Award Management requirements referenced in Section IV.C. of this Announcement, and if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time NOAA is ready to make a federal award, NOAA may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant. The final approval of selected applications and issuance of awards will be by the NOAA Grants Officer. The award decision of the Grants Officer is final.

Selection Factors

In implementing the selection process described above in Section V.B. of this announcement, the Selecting Official may select a proposal out of rank order if justified based upon the following factors:

1. Availability of funding
2. Balance/distribution of funds
    1. Geographically
    2. By type of institutions
    3. By type of partners
    4. By priority areas
    5. By project types
3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other Federal agencies
4. Applicant's prior award performance
5. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, review of proposals will occur during the three months following the date given in this announcement that the full proposals are due to NCBO and notification, and applicants may receive communications to negotiate a potential award in May 2025. Final issuance of awards or declinations are expected by September, 1 2025. No date prior to September 1, 2025 should be used as the proposed start date on proposals.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Upon completion of the review and selection process, successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been recommended for funding selection to the NOAA Grants Management Division. This notification is not an authorization to begin performance of the project, and it is not a guarantee of funding. Official notification of funding, signed by the NOAA Grants Officer, is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. This notification will be issued to the Authorizing Representative of the project either electronically or through use of Grants Online or in hard copy. Projects should not be initiated in expectation of federal funding until the Applicant's Authorized Representative has received official notice of the award from the NOAA Grants Officer and has reviewed and accepted the terms of the award.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposal was not recommended for funding or was not reviewed because it did not meet the minimum requirements described in IV.B (Content and Form of Applications). Unsuccessful paper applications will not be returned to the applicant.

Award documents provided by the Grants Officer may contain special awards conditions limiting the use of funds for activities that have outstanding environmental compliance requirements. These special award conditions may also include other compliance requirements for the award, as applicable, and will be applied on a case-by-case basis. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review award documents carefully before accepting a federal award so they are fully aware of the relevant Standard Terms and Conditions as well as any Special Award Conditions that have been placed on the award.
The Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions will apply to awards in this project. A current version of this document is available at https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/DOC%20Financial%20Assistance%20General%20Terms%20and%20Conditions%20as%20of%2001%20October%202024.pdf. These terms will be provided in the award package in eRA.

PRE-AWARD COSTS. Per 2 CFR 200.458, NOAA authorizes award recipients to expend pre award costs up to 90 days before the period of performance start date at the applicant's own risk without approval from NOAA and in accordance with the applicant's internal policies and procedures. Such costs are allowable only to the extent that they would have been allowable if incurred after the date of the Federal award. This does not include direct proposal costs (as defined at 2 CFR 200.460). In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for direct proposal preparation costs. Pre-award costs will be a portion of, not in addition to, the approved total budget of the award. Pre-award costs expended more than 90 days prior to the period of performance start date require approval from the Grants Officer. This does not change the period of performance start date.

GRANTS OFFICER SIGNATURE. Proposals submitted in response to this solicitation are not considered awards until the Grants Officer has signed the grant agreement. Only Grants Officers can bind the Government to the expenditure of funds. The Grants Officer's digital signature constitutes an obligation of funds by the federal government and formal approval of the award.

LIMITATION OF LIABILITY. Funding for programs listed in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. Applicants are hereby given notice that funds may not have been appropriated yet for the programs listed in this notice. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

UNIFORM ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS, COST PRINCIPLES, AND AUDIT REQUIREMENTS. Through 2 C.F.R. § 1327.101, the Department of Commerce adopted Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, which applies to awards in this program. Refer to http://go.usa.gov/SBYh and http://go.usa.gov/SBg4.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PRE-AWARD NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS. The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390) are applicable to this solicitation and may be accessed online at http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-30/pdf/2014-30297.pdf.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE (DOC) TERMS AND CONDITIONS. Successful applicants who accept a NOAA award under this solicitation will be bound by the DOC Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. This document will be provided in the award package in eRA at http://www.ago.noaa.gov and at https://www.commerce.gov/oam/policy/financial-assistance-policy.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA). NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6.pdf, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/NEPA-40CFR1500_1508.pdf. Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non- indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. Failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by the Grants Officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment on any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT. Department of Commerce regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. Sec. 552, are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the Department regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA. Applications submitted in response to this Notice of Funding Opportunity may be subject to requests for release under the Act. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information that should be exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information. In accordance with 15 CFR § 4.9, the Department of Commerce will protect from disclosure confidential business information contained in financial assistance applications and other documentation provided by applicants to the extent permitted by law.

NOAA SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE POLICY. NOAA requires organizations receiving federal assistance to report findings of sexual harassment, or any other kind of harassment, regarding a Principal Investigator (PI), co-PI, or any other key personnel in the award. NOAA expects all financial assistance recipients to establish and maintain clear and unambiguous standards of behavior to ensure harassment free workplaces wherever NOAA grant or cooperative agreement work is conducted, including notification pathways for all personnel, including students, on the awards. This expectation includes activities at all on- and offsite facilities and during conferences and workshops. All such settings should have accessible and evident means for reporting violations and recipients should exercise due diligence with timely investigations of allegations and corrective actions. For more information, please visit: https://www.noaa.gov/organization/acquisition-grants/noaa-workplace-harassment-training-for-contractors-and-financial.

REVIEW OF RISK. After applications are proposed for funding by the Selecting Official, the Grants Office will perform administrative reviews, including an assessment of risk posed by the applicant under 2 C.F.R. 200.206. These may include assessments of the financial stability of an applicant and the quality of the applicant's management systems, history of performance, and the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-Federal entities. Special conditions that address any risks determined to exist may be applied. Applicants may submit comments about any information concerning organizational performance listed in the Responsibility/Qualification section of SAM.gov for consideration by the awarding agency.

REVIEWS AND EVALUATION. The applicant acknowledges and understands that information and data contained in applications for financial assistance, as well as information and data contained in financial, performance and other reports submitted by applicants, may be used by the Department of Commerce in conducting reviews and evaluations of its financial assistance programs. For this purpose, applicant information and data may be accessed, reviewed and evaluated by Department of Commerce employees, other Federal employees, and also by Federal agents and contractors, and/or by non-Federal personnel, all of whom enter into appropriate conflict of interest and confidentiality agreements covering the use of such information. As may be provided in the terms and conditions of a specific financial assistance award, applicants are expected to support program reviews and evaluations by submitting required financial and performance information and data in an accurate and timely manner, and by cooperating with the Department of Commerce and external program evaluators. In accordance with §200.303(e), applicants are reminded that they must take reasonable measures to safeguard protected personally identifiable information and other confidential or sensitive personal or business information created or obtained in connection with a Department of Commerce financial assistance award.

INDIRECT COST RATE. If an applicant has not previously established an indirect cost rate with a Federal agency they may choose to negotiate a rate with the Department of Commerce or use the de minimis indirect cost rate of 15% of MTDC (as allowable under 2 C.F.R. §200.414). The negotiation and approval of a rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the Department of Commerce Standard Terms and Conditions. The NOAA contact for indirect or facilities and administrative costs is: Jennifer Jackson, NOAA Grants Management Division, 1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor, Silver Spring, MD 20910, or jennifer.jackson@noaa.gov.

C. Reporting

In accordance with 2 CFR 200.328-9 and the terms and conditions of the award, financial reports are to be submitted every six months and performance (technical) reports are to be submitted every six months. Reports are submitted electronically through eRA.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C. 6101 note, includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the FFATA Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at https://www.fsrs.gov/ on all subawards over $30,000. Refer to 2 CFR Part 170.

In addition to Evaluation Reporting described in Section IV.B.(a)(v) of this Announcement, financial and performance progress reporting requirements are described in the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions and 2 C.F.R. 200.328-.200.330, referenced above in Sections VI.A. and B. of this Announcement, and further implemented as described below.

1. Financial Reports - Information about federal financial reports is available at: http://go.usa.gov/cjE4T.
2. Performance/Progress Reports - Suggested content and guidance related to Delaware Bay B-WET performance/progress reports can be found here: https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/resources/grantee-resources

VII. Agency Contacts

Please visit the Delaware B-WET Applying for a Grant webpage: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/noaa-delaware-bay-watershed-education-and-training-program or contact Bart Merrick at the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office by email at bart.merrick@noaa.gov or by phone at or phone (240) 627-6424.

VIII. Other Information

This funding opportunity is currently a one-time initiative. Any continuation of the program is contingent on Congressional appropriations.

This initiative is similar to the NOAA Bay Watershed and Training Program. For more information on this program please consult https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet.

The applicant acknowledges and understands that information and data contained in applications for financial assistance, as well as information and data contained in financial, performance and other reports submitted by applicants, may be used by the Department of Commerce in conducting reviews and evaluations of its financial assistance programs. For this purpose, applicant information and data may be accessed, reviewed and evaluated by Department of Commerce employees, other federal employees, federal agents and contractors, and/or by non-federal personnel, all of whom enter into appropriate conflicts of interest and nondisclosure agreements covering the use of such information. As may be provided in the terms and conditions of a specific financial assistance award, applicants are expected to support program reviews and evaluations by submitting required financial and performance information and data in an accurate and timely manner, and by cooperating with Department of Commerce and external program evaluators. In accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.303(e), applicants are reminded that they must take reasonable measures to safeguard protected personally identifiable information and other confidential or sensitive personal or business information created or obtained in connection with a Department of Commerce financial assistance award.

The Government is not obligated to make any award as a result of the announcement.

Only NOAA Grants Officers can bind the Government to the expenditure of funds.