SOUTHEAST NEW ENGLAND PROGRAM

2023 Request for Proposals for the Southeast New England Program Opportunity to Advance Resilience (SOAR) in Disadvantaged Communities

Federal Agency Name: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, EPA Region 1

Funding Opportunity Title: Southeast New England Program (SNEP) Opportunity to Advance Resilience in Disadvantaged Communities (SOAR)

Announcement Type: Request for Proposal (RFP)

Funding Opportunity Number: EPA-I-R1-SNEP-2023C

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 66.129

Important Dates

Informational Webinar	Mid to Late August (Information to be posted to the SNEP website https://www.epa.gov/snep/funding-and-technical-assistance-southeast-new-england-program)
Last day to Ask Questions	September 1, 2023; 11:59PM EDT
RFP Closing Date and Application Deadline	September 15, 2023; 11:59PM EDT
Anticipated Applicant Notification	October 2023
Anticipated Deadline for Recipients to Submit Remaining Required Application Materials	Within 30 days of selection notice
Anticipated Award of Funds	Winter 2023/2024

Dates: Proposal must be received by electronic submission through Grants.gov on or before **11:59 P.M. EDT 09/15/2023.** Late applications will not be considered for funding. Questions about this RFP must be submitted in writing via e-mail (SECoastalNE@epa.gov) and must be received by the Agency Contact identified in **Section VII** by **09/1/2023.** EPA will post written responses on EPA's website at: http:/www.epa.gov/snep. Following evaluation of proposals, EPA will notify all applicants regarding their application status.

Note to Applicants: If the applicant names sub-awardees/sub-grantee and /or contractor(s) in their proposal to assist with the proposed project, please pay careful attention to the information in the CONTRACTS AND SUBAWARDS provision founds at https://www.epa.gov/grants/grants-policy-issuance-gpi-16-01-epa-subaward-policy-epa-assistance-agreement-recipients.

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I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A) Executive Orders and Definitions

For this RFP:

- The "applicant" refers to the organization applying.
- "We" refers to EPA
- "SNEP" refers to the Southeast New England Program. The term "SNEP geographic boundaries" refers to the area within Massachusetts and Rhode Island that includes the south-facing coastal watersheds between Westerly, Rhode Island and Chatham, Massachusetts, the watersheds of the Narragansett Bay and Buzzards Bay National Estuary Programs (NEPs), and the offshore

islands of Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Elizabeth Islands (Town of Gosnold, MA), and Block Island (Town of New Shoreham, RI). Projects must occur within this geographic area to be eligible to be considered for funding. A high-resolution map of the SNEP aera is found in Appendix A and at https://www.epa.gov/snep/background-information-southeast-new-england-program.

- The term "SNEP disadvantaged communities" or "priority areas" refers to the areas within the SNEP geographic region that meets at least one of the criteria in Section I.A. An interactive web application detailing these areas is included here: https://epa.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=35aa363ddd574202bc12dcf01ede86ca
- For the purposes of this RFP, the term "resilience" is defined as a community's ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from significant multi-hazard climate-related threats.
- "Meaningful Involvement" means that: (1) potentially affected community residents have an appropriate opportunity to participate in decisions about a proposed activity that will affect their environment; (2) the public's contribution can influence the regulatory agency's decision; (3) the concerns of all participants involved will be considered in the decision-making process; and (4) the decision-makers seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected. To qualify, applicants must provide a description of the characteristics of the population and challenges facing the community, neighborhood, or Tribe benefitting from the proposed activity, an identification of the potential environmental burdens experienced, and an explanation of how the proposed project will address the identified burdens to demonstrate that their project will provide fair treatment and meaningful involvement to members of communities, neighborhoods, or Tribes in New England that potentially have been disproportionately affected by environmental burdens.
- "Coastal Area" refers to surface waters and land in the SNEP geographic boundary within the Cape Cod, Buzzards Bay, and Islands watersheds, and within the state of Rhode Island.
- The Mission of the SOAR Fund is to improve and support the resilience of disadvantaged communities throughout the SNEP region with meaningful community involvement as it relates to the design and implementation of projects to address the anticipated effects of climate change and the historic, long-term impacts of environmental and social injustices.
- "Watershed" refers to the direct surface water drainage/runoff and/or ground water recharge area to a receiving water.
- "Shall" means "must."

This RFP is being issued to support Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, issued on January 20, 2021, which expressed Administration policy that the Federal government should pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. For the purposes of this RFP, a "disadvantaged community" or "SNEP disadvantaged community" as defined by SNEP refers to any community (identified at the block group or census tract-level, where specified) that meets **at least one** of the following criteria:

- Any census block group **greater than or equal to the 50th percentile** in current and future iterations of EPA's EJScreen tool with respect to the National Supplemental Demographic Index, which is an average of:
  Percent low-income;

Percent limited English speaking;
Percent less than high school education;
Percent unemployed; and where data is available,
Communities with low average life expectancy.

- Any census tract defined as disadvantaged in current and future iterations of the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool;
- Any current or future federally recognized Tribal Land; and
- Any census block that meets current and future state-level criteria for disadvantaged communities **other than** those included due to explicit consideration of race-based indicators.

For easy reference, a complete map of disadvantaged communities in the SNEP region that meet this definition is included in the following web mapping application.

This RFP also supports Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, issued on January 27, 2021, which deepened the Administration's commitment to advancing environmental justice by creating the Justice40 Initiative. The Justice40 Initiative establishes a goal that 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments—including those in climate change; clean energy and energy efficiency; clean transit; affordable and sustainable housing; training and workforce development; the remediation and reduction of legacy pollution; and the development of critical clean water infrastructure—flow to disadvantaged communities. Increased technical assistance and community engagement of disadvantaged communities was included as a benefit under Justice40 per the Interim Implementation Guidance for the Justice40 Initiative (M-21-28).

"Environmental justice" as defined by the EPA is the ***fair treatment*** and ***meaningful involvement*** of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. ***Fair treatment*** means that no one group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal environmental programs, and policies.

B) Background of the Southeast New England Program (SNEP)

The objective of the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) is to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters." Despite continuing progress in achieving these goals, coastal ecosystems are recognized as particularly vulnerable to upstream pollution sources, fragmented management, and the impacts of climate change. The coastal watersheds of southeast New England are prime examples of this vulnerability.

Led by EPA Region 1, SNEP is a geographically based program intended to serve as a collaborative framework for advancing ecosystem and community resiliency, protecting, and restoring water quality, habitat, and ecosystem function, and developing and applying innovative policy, science, and technology to environmental management. The program was created to help communities, Tribes, municipalities, government agencies and private organizations improve ecosystem health and build resilience to the unique water quality, habitat and climate stressors faced within southeast coastal New England watersheds, recognizing that the region's economy and community health are vulnerable and directly tied to the health of its ecological systems. Stressors include but are not limited to nutrient and bacteria

pollution; loss of healthy habitat and natural land; vulnerability to sea level rise, changing groundwater levels, and extreme weather patterns; the continued impacts of past industrial uses; and the national legacy of environmental injustice and systematic racism, which has resulted in increased pollution and an historic lack of resources to communities most in need throughout the SNEP region and beyond.

The health, wealth, and wellness of communities throughout the region are directly tied to the region's unique ecological systems. Traditionally, these problems have been addressed independently, separated by jurisdictions, institutional identities, and sometimes parochial interests. It has become clear, however, that the scope and scale of these environmental stressors calls urgently for a more holistic approach to protecting aquatic ecosystems and sustaining local communities. Created by Congress to take this approach, EPA-SNEP's role as a partnership facilitator among multiple organizations is central to its mission to empower collective action in these areas, and its focus on the region's ecosystems offers an opportunity to address complex common issues while also working at the local scale to align restoration and management efforts more broadly to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiency. SNEP's priorities and goals for the coming years have been laid out in its Five-Year Strategic Plan (https://www.epa.gov/snep/snep-strategic-plan).

C) SNEP Strategic Plan

SNEP's Strategic Plan includes three overarching program goals and their outcomes

Goal 1: Safe and Healthy Waters
Desired Outcomes: • Coastal waters support healthy seagrass and benthic communities, fisheries, and shellfisheries. • Coastal waters and ponds are free from algal blooms, hypoxia, and pathogen pollution above natural levels. • Coastal waters and ponds support safe water-based recreation (swimming, boating, fishing/shellfishing, etc.).

Goal 2: Thriving Watersheds and Natural Lands
Desired Outcomes: • Watersheds and landscape components maintain diverse natural lands and habitats; support native species diversity and inhibit the introduction, spread, and impact of invasive and nuisance species; and provide critical services such as pollution attenuation, air purification, flood protection, carbon sequestration, and pollination. • Habitat can adapt and/or migrate in response to the climate change impacts of sea level rise, storm surge, higher temperature, and altered precipitation patterns. • Major rivers discharging to Narragansett Bay, and streams discharging to embayments sustain aquatic habitat with adequate stream flow, appropriate temperature, riparian buffer, and stream connectivity.

Goal 3: Sustainable Communities
Desired Outcomes: • Secure sustainable water-based resources to foster local economies in the key areas of tourism, property values, and locally significant industries. • Communities support and implement resilient development that protects populated areas and vulnerable infrastructure through nature-based solutions and climate adaptation approaches. • Communities ensure widespread access to local greenspace to support mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. • The region develops a locally sustainable food production framework that provides access to healthy foods in the region. • The region establishes policies to foster social/climate equity and eliminate disproportionate harmful impacts to Environmental Justice (EJ) and underserved communities in the region.

In support of these goals, SNEP has outlined the following priority actions:

- Increase local capacity to complete projects and adopt new policies
- Increase available solutions
- Ensure diverse representation in program decision-making
- Demonstrate ways to address common challenges; and
- Increase community leaders' understanding of the benefits of restoration projects

D) SNEP Opportunity to Advance Resilience (SOAR) in Disadvantaged Communities

The Mission of the SOAR Fund is to improve and support the resilience of disadvantaged communities throughout the SNEP region with meaningful community involvement as it relates to the design and implementation of projects to address the anticipated effects of climate change and the historic, long-term impacts of environmental and social injustices. Through this initiative, SNEP plans to fund a host of planning, implementation, outreach, training, capacity, and staff-building projects that correspond with the goals, objectives and priorities outlined in SNEP's Five-Year Strategic Plan.

Project Categories:

To support the above goals, applicants should propose projects that broadly address **at least one** of the following categories:

Planning: Planning projects are those that engage subject matter experts and/or local input on the development of technical solutions to address the effects of short-, mid-, to long-term environmental challenges.

Planning Project Example: The applicant's community is threatened by sea-level rise, extreme storms, or other climate impacts. The applicant applies to the SOAR to find ways to address short-term issues related to these impacts, like flooding. The project includes a community-driven process to hear about community concerns and to identify solutions. A climate resilience strategy is developed that prioritizes short-, mid-, and long-term hazards, includes solutions that address resident concerns, and establishes a pathway to gain financing to address these hazards.

Implementation: Implementation projects are "shovel-ready" projects that stem from previously completed planning and design efforts. These can include the development of a floodable park, the restoration of a marsh with improved access to recreational spaces, etc.

Implementation Project Example: The applicant's community has identified the issue of frequent neighborhood flooding due to insufficient stormwater control measures and previously completed a community-driven planning effort to identify solutions. The applicant requests funding to complete one or more of those solutions. Solutions provide both environmental and community benefits, for example using available space in the neighborhood to build a pocket park that is designed to hold flood waters and can also be used for public gatherings and to support a community garden. Alternatively, available vacant land is used to install raingardens to lessen flooding, while including adjacent tree shading to reduce air pollution and provide a relaxing space for residents. The applicant and community partners apply to the SOAR to implement the proposed design plans in partnership with residents and their city/town, which offers to provide additional funds in support of the project.

Outreach: Outreach projects can be completed jointly with planning and implementation work. Outreach projects work to gather community input and involvement in the design, support, or understanding of a specific environmental challenge or proposed solution.

Outreach Project Example: The accessibly of a local pond to allow monitoring of water quality to access the impacts of climate change, which also provides the sole access to green space in an otherwise developed landscape, is poor to nonexistent. A local environmental organization applies to the SOAR to involve residents in a project to help with restoring walking trails, restoring native plants, increasing the tree canopy, and improving stormwater management and decreased runoff around this important community resource. However, the organization wants to make sure that the project is designed and implemented through a community-driven design process that prioritizes the input of residents. The organization applies to the SOAR Fund to hire professional facilitators and host three community meetings where residents are compensated for their time.[1] The goal of these community meetings is to walk residents through several design charettes to ensure that the project meets the needs of the community. The grant will additionally support the development of a steering committee of regional partners that will develop a resilience plan, and a vision for the pond that includes community events.

Training: Projects that focus on the provision of new skillsets to local organizational members or paid volunteers to support environmental restoration practices to improve climate resiliency. Ideally, the training and skillsets provided will have a lasting benefit to recipients of the training and can be used to support environmental protection and career growth.

Training Project Example: A well-established community organization has been working for decades to restore and protect an urban river that had been previously polluted by years of industrialization and climate change. Their work has been successful in revitalizing the surrounding neighborhood, which has since seen a rapid development of affordable housing and urban green space. The community organization applies to the SOAR to develop a training program for local high schoolers to become climate resiliency stewards and educators – to participate in the maintenance of the riverbanks, to train and mentor younger volunteers, and to educate their communities on the history of the green space and the importance of its protection to improve climate resiliency. The training program is designed in a way to provide meaningful, hands-on skills, and expertise that can help participants enter the job market with experience as climate resiliency stewards and advocates.

Capacity building/staffing: Grant funds for capacity building and staffing would be applied towards increasing the administrative capacity of an organization to support climate change related projects in underserved and disadvantaged areas. These funds could be used to hire a paid intern or full/partially fund the hiring of a full-time staff person. Ideally, anyone hired with these capacity-building grants will be retained following the end of the grant cycle. Alternatively, grants funded under this category could be used to improve or modernize an organization's capacity to engage in climate change related work in disadvantaged communities (DACs).

Capacity building/staffing Project Example: A local municipality recently received an influx of grant funding to support projects in underserved and disadvantaged sections of their city/town. The capacity of the municipality is limited; and the funding received, while generous, is not enough to cover the hiring and training of a new staff person to oversee the implementation of planned climate change related projects. The municipality applies to the SOAR to help pay for the hiring and training of a new staff person to oversee the implementation of climate resilience projects over the lifetime of the grant,

[1] Compensation for attending community meetings should be included in the budget as a participant support cost (PSC). For more information on EPA's PSC policy, please reference **Appendix C.** and/or visit: https://www.epa.gov/grants/rain-2018-g05-r1

after which point, the municipality will have had enough time to secure funds to keep their new hire on staff full-time.

Examples of Subpar Projects and How to Improve Them:

The following are examples of projects – organized by project category - that are subpar and not immediately well-suited to the mission of the SOAR Fund. Following each example is an explanation of how each example could have been improved.

Planning: *A municipality that is partially identified as disadvantaged applies to the SOAR Fund for help in developing a Climate Action Plan for their entire town. The project does not have an explicit impact or focus on the disadvantaged areas of their town and does not include any specific involvement of DAC community members.*

To make this project more competitive and in line with the mission of the SOAR Fund, this applicant could have worked explicitly with the DACs in their municipality to design a project that meets the needs of that community.

Implementation: *A well-known wetlands restoration organization applies to the SOAR Fund to transition a retired cranberry bog back into a natural wetland. The bog is located just upstream of a DAC; but is not easily accessible to community members and does not have any history of being used as recreational space. Further, the proposed project does not include any plans to provide public access; and does not include any mention or evidence of meaningful community support or involvement in the project.*

Because the applicant has not demonstrated any direct ties or benefit to an EJ community, this type of restoration project might not be the best fit for the SOAR Fund, even though it's located upstream from a DAC. However, if the applicant could have demonstrated strong interest from DAC residents for restoration of the bog and improved recreational access, then this project would have been more competitive.

Outreach: *A local community organization applies to the SOAR Fund for help designing and implementing a Trash-Free Waters campaign. SOAR Funds would be used to pay stipends to local community members to educate their community on the importance of minimizing single-use plastics, properly disposing trash, and refraining from littering. The campaign would be held over a 12-week period in the summer and then disband.*

The primary focus of the SOAR Fund is to improve climate resilience in DACs throughout the SNEP region. In this example, the applicant makes no mention of benefits to DACs with this campaign; and while this project has merit on its own, a trash free campaign does not have strong ties to climate resilience. This applicant might instead have considered an outreach campaign to solicit community input on siting and designing pocket parks or cooling centers throughout a DAC to increase community resilience and to counteract the effects of a warmer climate.

Training: *A local restoration organization is working on a project to minimize beach erosion through the planting of native beach grasses. The organization applies to the SOAR Fund for materials and funds to provide stipends to community volunteers who will be trained on how to plant and stabilize native beach grasses along the shore. The beach is in a DAC block group but is primarily used by waterfront property owners nearby the beach and is not readily accessed by DAC members. There is not strong community support within the DAC block group for the project.*

To improve this project, the applicant might instead have considered developing community support for beach improvement and increased access to the waterfront for other members of the community. The projects that are most well-suited to the SOAR Fund are those that have community support and tie directly to an increase in climate resiliency for DACs.

Capacity building/staffing: *A municipality with several DACs received an influx of funding but has limited capacity to manage that funding. They apply to the SOAR to hire an administrative staff person to manage routine administrative tasks in their office so that they can assign their more experienced staff persons to oversee the implementation of climate resiliency projects in DACs.*

To improve this application, the person hired via the SOAR grant should be the person to oversee climate resiliency projects in DACs. The SOAR grant cannot fund persons not directly related to the improvement of climate resiliency in DACs.

Funding

Funding amounts can vary. The SOAR Fund is designed to fund projects in the $50k-$300k range. It is our intent to fund a range of project proposals, which could include up to three (3) $300k projects with the remaining funds allocated to smaller awards.

The SOAR Fund is inclusive of both new applicant and CEJST set asides with commitments of 40% and 70% of projects funded, respectively. For more information, please reference Section II.B.

EPA intends to issue a similar funding opportunity annually for the next four years. Each year, the SNEP-SOAR Fund intends to compete up to $1,250,000 plus any remaining unused funds from the year prior, if available. All funding decisions are subject to funding availability, quality of proposals, and other applicable considerations, such as the geographic distribution of project awards and the impact of each project on the coastal area, as previously defined.

SOAR-funded projects will be funded in full. No incremental awards will be provided via this funding opportunity. However, because the SNEP-SOAR Fund is expected to be competed annually over the next four years, prospective applicants might consider developing scalable projects. For example, an applicant could apply under this funding opportunity to fund a 1-year project to develop a green infrastructure plan for their community. Once complete, the applicant could then apply to the SOAR in a subsequent year to implement the plan that they've previously designed.

Reporting

Selected applicants will be expected to report on program and environmental metrics as the award progresses. Because each project will likely address differing environmental issues, specific metrics will be finalized by EPA and the applicant at the time of award, but generally are expected to be selected from a list of common SNEP metrics (see **Appendix D**). Applicants should include anticipated reporting costs in their budget. SNEP staff will be available to assist all recipients and will work with grantees to ensure that reporting burdens are commensurate with funding levels.

Community Involvement

It is critical for applications to clearly demonstrate how applicants plan to meaningfully engage, partner with, and embolden disadvantaged communities, and to clearly describe how their proposed project can scale up to support long-term climate change resilience in disadvantaged communities. The strongest projects are those that work to address an explicit environmental concern identified by the surrounding community and address climate resiliency, those that have the clear backing of the community and

benefit from a community-driven design process, and those that are also consistent with the goals and priority actions outlined in the SNEP Strategic Plan.

Additional Information

Any applicant not funded is encouraged to schedule a meeting with the SNEP Team to review the feedback provided by the review panel to gain further insight on how to improve their idea and reapply in the following year.

D) EPA Strategic Plan Linkage

Section 6a of EPA Order 5700.7 requires EPA to link proposed assistance agreements to the EPA Strategic Plan. EPA also requires grant applicants and recipients to adequately describe environmental outputs and outcomes to be achieved under assistance agreements. See EPA Order 5700.7, Environmental Results under Assistance Agreements (www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-03/documents/epa_order_5700_7a1.pdf).

The activities to be funded under this solicitation must support the FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. Awards made under this solicitation will support Goal 5 "Ensure Clean and Safe Water for All Communities," Objective 5.2 – Protect and Restore Waterbodies and Watersheds; Goal 2 "Take Decisive Action to Advance Environmental Justice and Civil Rights," Objective 2.2 – Embed Environmental Justice and Civil Rights into EPA's Programs, Policies, and Activities; and Goal 1 "Tackle the Climate Crisis," Objective 1.2 – Accelerate Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Change Impacts of the EPA Strategic Plan.

E) Expected Outputs and Outcomes

For this RFP:

- The term "outcome" means the result, effect or consequence that will be achieved by carrying out an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product that is related to an environmental or programmatic goal or objective. Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic in nature, must be quantitative, and may not necessarily be achievable within a grant funding period. ***For this RFP, "Desired Outcomes" describe the project outcomes that we aim to achieve for the SNEP region that are found in the SNEP Strategic Plan. Efforts to achieve these outcomes will steer the actions necessary to meet specific five-year targets*** *(see* ***Section I.C.****).*
- The term "output" means an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product related to an environmental goal and objective that will be produced or provided over a period or by a specified date. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative but must be measurable over the term of the grant funding period. ***For this RFP, "Outputs (Actions)" are detailed activities that SNEP and our partners will undertake during each five-year period in order to meet quantitative targets, work towards accomplishing desired outcomes, and ultimately achieve the 2050 regional vision and goals.***

Applicants should consider the following questions when developing output and outcome measures of quantitative and qualitative results:

- What are the measurable short-term and longer-term results the projects funded will achieve?
- How will progress be measured in achieving the expected results (including outputs and outcomes) and how will their proposed approach use resources effectively and efficiently?

- Are there ways to incorporate social and/or economic benefits as part of a broader environmental improvement effort?

F) Statutory Authorization for Award

The SNEP program is authorized by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Public Law 117-328). This authority allows EPA to award grants and cooperative agreements to carry out the SNEP, including planning, research, monitoring, outreach, and implementation projects within the SNEP geographic area.

G) Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Linkage

Funding for this award will come from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA or Bipartisan Infrastructure Law or BIL), Public Law 117-58. SNEP has received a $15 million investment over five years from the IIJA to address infrastructure and environmental injustices throughout the SNEP region. To meet the commitments of the IIJA, SNEP has created the SOAR Fund, which will allow the program to meet a significant portion of Justice40 commitments under the IIJA, which requires federal agencies to allocate at least 40% of IIJA funding to disadvantaged communities.

H) Additional Provisions for Applicants Incorporated into the Solicitation

Additional provisions that apply to sections III, IV, V, and VI of this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation, can be found at EPA Solicitation Clauses. These provisions are important for applying to this solicitation and applicants must review them when preparing applications for this solicitation. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please contact the EPA point of contact listed in this solicitation (usually in Section VII) to obtain the provisions.

I) Minority Serving Institutions

EPA recognizes that it is important to engage all available minds to address the environmental challenges the nation faces. At the same time, EPA seeks to expand the environmental conversation by including members of communities which may have not previously participated in such dialogues to participate in EPA programs. For this reason, EPA strongly encourages all eligible applicants identified in Section III, including minority serving institutions (MSIs), to apply under this opportunity.

For purposes of this solicitation, the following are considered MSIs:

1. Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1061(2)). A list of these schools can be found at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
2. Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1059c(b)(3) and (d)(1)). A list of these schools can be found at American Indian Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities.
3. Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1101a(a)(5)). A list of these schools can be found at Hispanic-Serving Institutions .
4. Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions; (AANAPISIs), as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1059g(b)(2)). A list of these schools can be found at Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions; and
5. Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs), as defined by the Higher Education Act of 2008, 20 U.S.C. 1059e(b)(6). A list of these schools can be found at Predominately Black Institutions.

II. AWARD INFORMATION

A) Funding Amount and Expected Number of Awards

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has provided opportunities across federal and state government to begin addressing environmental injustices. Subject to the availability of appropriated funds and Agency priorities, the total estimated funding available under this competitive opportunity is $1,250,000.

For 2023, EPA expects to award five (5) to ten (10) cooperative agreements for activities under this RFP in amounts *most likely* ranging from $50,000-$300,000. The total estimated funding available for cumulative awards under this competitive opportunity is $1,250,000.

EPA reserves the right to reject all proposals and make no award under this announcement. Consistent with Agency policy and guidance, EPA also reserves the right to make additional awards under this announcement if additional funding becomes available after the original selections are made. Any additional selection for awards will be made no later than six months after the original selection decision.

B) New Applicant and CEJST Set Aside

To encourage the submissions from new applicants (defined as entities who have not received an EPA grant in the past five (5) years), EPA-SNEP will rank new applicants separately from those who have received EPA funding in the past five (5) years from the posted date of this award. For this RFP, EPA-SNEP intends to allocate up to 40% of awards to new applicants. For example, if EPA-SNEP only plans to award ten cooperative agreements but receives ten highly graded applications from repeat applicants and ten highly graded applications from new-applicants, EPA-SNEP will fund a minimum of four proposals submitted by new applicants.

Additionally, EPA-SNEP is working to prioritize the most at-need communities as identified by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool. To this end, EPA-SNEP has set a goal to fund 70% of projects either located within or directly benefiting CEJST communities. For a detailed map, please see **Appendix A**. Communities shown in red are those identified as disadvantaged by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool whereas the remaining communities are identified as disadvantaged by state definitions and EJScreen.

The actual award amounts and number of projects awarded under each of the set-asides described in above may differ from the estimated amounts for many reasons including the number of meritorious applications received, agency priorities, and funding availability. In addition, EPA reserves the right to increase or decrease (including decreasing to zero) the total number and amount of awards under each set-aside or change the ratio of assistance agreements it awards among the set-asides.

C) Award Type

EPA-SNEP intends to award cooperative agreements under this solicitation. Cooperative agreements provide for substantial involvement between the EPA Project Officer and the selected applicant(s) in the performance of the work supported. Although EPA will negotiate precise terms and conditions relating to substantial involvement as part of the award process, the anticipated substantial federal involvement for these projects may include:

- close monitoring of the successful applicant's performance to verify the results proposed by the applicant;
- collaboration during performance of the scope of work;
- in accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.317 and 2 C.F.R. § 200.318, review of proposed procurements;

- approving qualifications of key personnel; and
- review and comment on reports prepared under the cooperative agreement (the final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient).

EPA does not have the authority to select employees or contractors employed by the recipient. The final content of project final reports rests with the recipient, though a template for semi-annual and final reports will be provided and may be used (see **Section VI.C.**).

D) Award Funding and Partial Funding Provision

Awards will be fully funded, as appropriate, based on funding availability, satisfactory performance, and other applicable considerations. Recipients have discretion to spend awarded funds over the course of the project period.

The actual award amounts and number of projects awarded under each of the set-asides described in Section I may differ from the estimated amounts for many reasons including the number of meritorious applications received, Agency priorities, and funding availability. In addition, EPA reserves the right to increase or decrease (including decreasing to zero) the total number and amount of awards under each set-aside or change the ratio of assistance agreements it awards among the set-asides.

In appropriate circumstances, EPA reserves the right to partially fund applications by funding discrete portions or phases of proposed applications. If EPA decides to partially fund an application, it will do so in a manner that does not prejudice the applicant or affect the basis upon which the application, or portion thereof, was evaluated and selected for award, and therefor maintains the integrity of the competition and selection process.

D) Expected Project Period

The expected project period for these assistance agreements is one to five years, with five years serving as an absolute maximum. The expected starting period for the awards resulting from this RFP is Winter 2023/2024

E) Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Signage Requirement

The creation of publicly viewable signage is required for all construction and infrastructure solicitations and contracts, or any projects which contain a substantial component of construction or are viewable by the public, that is funded in whole or in part by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act or the American Rescue Plan, in excess of the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT).

Signs shall be in place before beginning any physical work on the site and shall remain displayed and in good condition for the duration of the project. Signage should be made of recycled material whenever possible.

As such, applicants that intend to fund construction/infrastructure projects or projects viewable to the public should include the time and cost of creating and installing signage in their proposal. This is an eligible expense. For more about EPA signage requirements, go to https://www.epa.gov/invest/investing-america-signage.

More specifics about signage design and requirements will be included in the Terms & Conditions of final awards.

Please direct questions about this requirement to Londa Scott-Forte (202-564-1504; scott-forte.londa@epa.gov) and/or Jini Ryan (202-564-1075; ryan.jini@epa.gov).

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

Note: Additional provisions that apply to this section can be found at EPA Solicitation Clauses.

A) Eligible Applicants

EPA has limited eligibility for this funding opportunity under Assistance Listing 66.129 to the following eligible entities as permitted by the applicant eligibility section of the listing which allows EPA to limit eligibility to a subset of eligible applicants: state, local and tribal governments, public and private universities and colleges, public and private nonprofit institutions/organizations (includes institutions of higher education such as community colleges, and philanthropic organizations), interstate agencies, and Intertribal Consortia (*a coalition between two or more Indian tribal governments authorized by the governing bodies of those tribes to apply for and receive assistance and participate in self-governance).* Hospitals operated by state, tribal, or local governments or that meet the definition of nonprofit at 2 C.F.R. § 200.1 are also eligible to apply as nonprofits or as instrumentalities of the unit of government depending on the applicable law.

Consistent with the definition of *Nonprofit organization at* 2 C.F.R. § 200.1, the term "nonprofit organization means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization that is operated mainly for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purpose in the public interest and is not organized primarily for profit; and uses net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the operation of the organization. Note that 2 C.F.R. § 200.1 specifically excludes Institutions of Higher Education from the definition of non-profit organization because they are separately defined in the regulation. While not considered to be a nonprofit organization(s) as defined by 2 C.F.R. § 200.1, public or nonprofit Institutions of Higher Education are, nevertheless, eligible to submit applications under this RFA. For-profit colleges, universities, trade schools and hospitals are ineligible. Eligible nonprofit organizations may, but are not required to be, exempt from taxation under section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code.

Nonprofit organizations that are not exempt from taxation under section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code must submit other forms of documentation of nonprofit status, such as certificates of incorporation as nonprofit under state or tribal law. Nonprofit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply.

The following entities are **INELIGIBLE** to receive an award under this RFA, but applicants may work with these organizations, as appropriate and provided any financial transactions comply with applicable regulatory and policy requirements for competition (see Contracts and Subawards announcement clause referenced in Section IV.d. of EPA's Solicitation Clauses which are referenced in Section I.H.):

- for-profit hospitals;
- for-profit businesses;
- for-profit universities, colleges and trade schools
- quasi-governmental entities (e.g., water districts, utilities);
- international organizations;

- individuals;
- 501(c)(4) organizations; and
- federal agencies.

B) Cost Sharing/Match Requirements

No matching funds are required under this competition.

C) Threshold Eligibility Criteria

Only proposals from eligible entities (see **Section III.A**) that meet the following threshold eligibility criteria will be evaluated. Applicants deemed ineligible for funding consideration as a result of the threshold eligibility review will be notified within 15 calendar days of the ineligibility determination.

(a) Applications must substantially comply with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in Section IV of this solicitation or else they will be rejected. However, where a page limit is expressed in Section IV with respect to the application, or parts thereof, pages in excess of the page limitation will not be reviewed. Applicants are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in application format, including selecting a legible font type and size for use in the application.

(b) In addition, applications must be submitted through Grants.gov as stated in Section IV of this solicitation (except in the limited circumstances where another mode of submission is specifically allowed for as explained in Section IV) on or before the application submission deadline published in Section IV of this solicitation. Applicants are responsible for following the submission instructions in Section IV of this solicitation to ensure that their application is timely submitted. Please note that applicants experiencing technical issues with submitting through Grants.gov should follow the instructions provided in Section IV, which include both the requirement to contact Grants.gov and email a full application to EPA prior to the deadline.

Applications submitted outside of Grants.gov will be deemed ineligible without further consideration unless the applicant can clearly demonstrate that it was due to EPA mishandling or technical problems associated with Grants.gov or SAM.gov. An applicant's failure to timely submit their application through Grants.gov because they did not timely or properly register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov will not be considered an acceptable reason to consider a submission outside of Grants.gov.

(c) Ineligible activities: If an application includes any ineligible project tasks or activities, that portion of the application will be ineligible for funding and may, depending on the extent to which it affects the application, render the entire application ineligible for funding.

(d) Applicants need to ensure that the Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) who submits the application through Grants.gov and whose UEI is listed on the application is an AOR for the applicant listed on the application. Additionally, the UEI listed on the application must be registered to the applicant organization's SAM.gov account. If not, the application may be deemed ineligible.

(e) The proposed project must be located within or demonstrate direct benefits to at least one disadvantaged community as identified by the SNEP Priority Areas Web Application.

D) Ineligible Activities

If an application is submitted that includes any ineligible tasks or activities, that portion of the application will be ineligible for funding and may, depending on the extent to which it affects the application, render the entire application ineligible for funding.

E) Encouraging Minority Serving Institutions to Compete

EPA recognizes that scientific, technical, engineering and mathematical (STEM) competence is essential to the Nation's future well-being in terms of national security and competitive economic advantage. For instance, the health and vitality of the economy is predicated, in part, on the availability of an adequate supply of scientists, technicians, engineers and mathematicians, to develop innovative technologies and solutions. In other words, this country must engage all available minds to address the challenges it faces. Minorities, women, and persons with disabilities historically have been under-represented in the STEM fields. For this reason, EPA strongly encourages all eligible applicants including, women, minorities, and persons with disabilities to apply.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION FOR RFP

Note: Additional provisions that apply to this section can be found at EPA Solicitation Clauses.

A) Programmatic Capability and Past Performance

Submit a list of federally and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include Federal grants and cooperative agreements but not Federal contracts) that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than 5 agreements, and preferably EPA agreements) and describe: (i) whether, and how, you were able to successfully complete and manage those agreements; and (ii) your history of meeting the reporting requirements under those agreements including whether you adequately and timely reported on your progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes of those agreements (and if not, explain why not) and whether you submitted acceptable final technical reports under the agreements; and (iii) your organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project, and your staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project. In evaluating applicants under these factors in Section V, EPA will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources, including information from EPA files and from current/prior grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information provided by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please indicate this in the application and you will receive a neutral score for these factors (a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). If you do not provide any response for these items, you may receive a score of 0 for these factors.

In addition, provide information on your organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project, and your staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project.

B) Coalition Coverage

Groups of two or more eligible applicants may choose to form a coalition and submit a single application under this RFP; however, one entity must be responsible for the grant. Coalitions must identify which eligible organization will be the recipient of the grant and which eligible organization(s) will be subrecipients of the recipient (the "pass-through entity"). *Subawards* must be consistent with the definition of that term in 2 C.F.R. § 200.1 and comply with EPA's Subaward Policy. The pass-through entity that administers the grant and subawards will be accountable to EPA for proper expenditure of the funds and reporting and will be the point of contact for the coalition. As provided in 2 C.F.R. § 200.332, subrecipients are accountable to the pass-through entity for proper use of EPA funding. For-profit organizations are not eligible for subawards under this grant program but may receive procurement contracts. Any contracts for services or products funded with EPA financial assistance must be awarded under the competitive procurement procedures of 2 C.F.R. Part 200 and/or 2 C.F.R. Part 1500, as applicable. The regulations at 2 C.F.R. § 1500.10 contain limitations on the extent to which EPA funds may be used to compensate individual consultants. Refer to the Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements for guidance on competitive procurement requirements and consultant compensation. Do not name a procurement contractor (including a consultant) as a "partner" or otherwise in your application unless the contractor has been selected in compliance with competitive procurement requirements.

C) Requirement to Submit Through Grants.gov and Limited Exception Procedures

Applicants must apply electronically through Grants.gov under this funding opportunity based on the grants.gov instructions in this announcement. If your organization has no access to the internet or access is very limited, you may request an exception for the remainder of this calendar year by following the procedures outlined here. Please note that your request must be received at least 15 calendar days before the application due date to allow enough time to negotiate alternative submission methods. Issues with submissions with respect to this opportunity only are addressed in section e. Technical Issues with Submission below.

D) Submission Instructions

1. SAM.gov (System for Award Management) Registration Instructions

Organizations applying to this funding opportunity must have an active SAM.gov registration. If you have never done business with the Federal Government, you will need to register your organization in SAM.gov. If you do not have a SAM.gov account, then you will create an account using login.gov (1) to complete your SAM.gov registration. SAM.gov registration is FREE. The process for entity registrations includes obtaining Unique Entity ID (UEI), a 12-character alphanumeric ID assigned an entity by SAM.gov, and requires assertions, representations and certifications, and other information about your organization. Please review the Entity Registration Checklist for details on this process.

If you have done business with the Federal Government previously, you can check your entity status using your government issued UEI to determine if your registration is active. SAM.gov requires you renew your registration every 365 days to keep it active.

Please note that SAM.gov registration is different than obtaining a UEI only. Obtaining an UEI only validates your organization's legal business name and address. Please review the Frequently Asked Question on the difference for additional details.

Organizations should ensure that their SAM.gov registration includes a current e-Business (EBiz) point of contact name and email address. The EBiz point of contact is critical for Grants.gov Registration and system functionality.

Contact the Federal Service Desk for help with your SAM.gov account, to resolve technical issues or chat with a help desk agent: (866) 606-8220. The Federal Service desk hours of operation are Monday - Friday 8am - 8pm ET.

2. Grants.gov Registration Instructions

Once your SAM.gov account is active, you must register in Grants.gov. Grants.gov will electronically receive your organization information, such as e-Business (EBiz) point of contact email address and UEI. Organizations applying to this funding opportunity must have an active Grants.gov registration. Grants.gov registration is FREE. If you have never applied for a federal grant before, please review the Grants.gov Applicant Registration instructions. As part of the Grants.gov registration process, the EBiz point of contact is the only person that can affiliate and assign applicant roles to members of an organization. In addition, at least one person must be assigned as an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR). Only person(s) with the AOR role can submit applications in Grants.gov. Please review the Intro to Grants.gov-Understanding User Roles and Learning Workspace - User Roles and Workspace Actions for details on this important process.

Please note that this process can take a month or more for new registrants. Applicants must ensure that all registration requirements are met in order to apply for this opportunity through Grants.gov and should ensure that all such requirements have been met well in advance of the application submission deadline.

Contact Grants.gov for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov to resolve technical issues with Grants.gov. Applicants who are outside the U.S. at the time of submittal and are not able to access the toll-free number may reach a Grants.gov representative by calling 606-545-5035. The Grants.gov Support Center is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week, excluding federal holidays.

3. Application Submission Process

To begin the application process under this grant announcement, go to Grants.gov and click the red "Apply" button at the top of the view grant opportunity page associated with this opportunity.

The electronic submission of your application to this funding opportunity must be made by an official representative of your organization who is registered with Grants.gov and is authorized to sign applications for Federal financial assistance. If the submit button is grayed out, it may be because you do not have the appropriate role to submit in your organization. Contact your organization's EBiz point of contact or contact Grants.gov for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov

Applicants need to ensure that the Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) who submits the application through Grants.gov and whose UEI is listed on the application is an AOR for the applicant listed on the application. Additionally, the UEI listed on the application must be registered to the applicant organization's SAM.gov account. If not, the application may be deemed ineligible.

4. Application Submission Deadline

Your organization's AOR must submit your complete application package electronically to EPA through Grants.gov no later than 09/15/2023 11:59 PM ET. Please allow for enough time to

successfully submit your application and allow for unexpected errors that may require you to resubmit.

Applications submitted through Grants.gov will be time and date stamped electronically. Please note that successful submission of your application through Grants.gov does not necessarily mean your application is eligible for award. Any application submitted after the application deadline time and date deadline will be deemed ineligible and not be considered.

E) Technical Issues with Submission

If applicants experience technical issues during the submission of an application that they are unable to resolve, follow these procedures before the application deadline date:

- Contact Grants.gov Support Center before the application deadline date.
- Document the Grants.gov ticket/case number.
- Send an email with EPA-I-R1-SNEP-2023C in the subject line to SECoastalNE@epa.gov before the application deadline time and date and must include the following:
    - Grant.gov ticket/case number(s)
    - Description of the issue
    - The entire application package in PDF format

Without this information, EPA may not be able to consider applications submitted outside of Grants.gov. Any application submitted after the application time and date deadline will be deemed ineligible for that application cycle and not be considered, however applicants that miss an application cycle are encouraged to reapply the following year. Please note that successful submission through Grants.gov or email does not necessarily mean your application is eligible for award.

EPA will make decisions concerning acceptance of each application submitted outside of Grants.gov on a case-by-case basis. EPA will only consider accepting applications that were unable to submit through Grants.gov due to Grants.gov or relevant SAM.gov system issues or for unforeseen exigent circumstances, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access. Failure of an applicant to submit prior to the application submission deadline date because they did not properly or timely register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov is not an acceptable reason to justify acceptance of an application outside of Grants.gov.

Application Submission Deadline: Your organization's AOR must submit your complete initial application package electronically to EPA through Grants.gov no later than **09/15/23 11:59 PM ET.** Please allow for enough time to successfully submit your application and allow for unexpected errors that may require you to resubmit.

Please submit *all* the application materials described below using the Grants.gov application package accessed using the instructions above.

F) RFP Application Guidelines

Applicants are asked to please include the following information in their proposals:

Project Narrative (Maximum of 5,000 words):

- Demonstrate baseline eligibility for the SOAR

    - If a proposed project is not located within a predetermined DAC, the applicant should include a justification for why the project should be considered.
- Provide detailed background on the environmental challenges and community needs to be addressed through this funding opportunity.
- Describe the project and how the proposed project and outcomes (see **Section I.D.**) link to the SNEP Strategic Plan goals and objectives, and how the proposed project will address an important environmental need in the DAC.
- Describe how the proposed project will address an important need of residents in the DAC.
- Describe anticipated project benefits to residents in the DAC and how the project will lead to increased ecosystem and/or community resilience.
- Describe any available baseline data that supports the need for the proposed project (if applicable).
- Describe community support and/or involvement in the proposed project; and how the project will address community and resident needs in the DAC.
    - Include written letters of commitment describing how local project partners will be involved in the proposed project (if applicable).
- Describe the anticipated project outcomes/benefits to residents in the DAC(s) and how the project will support improved resilience in the SNEP region.
- Describe how the applicant(s) plan(s) to determine project success over time.
- Describe project monitoring parameters (if applicable). **NOTE:** Any proposed monitoring will additionally require the development and approval of a Quality Assurance Project Plan before monitoring can begin. While it is expected that this plan will be written and approved during the project period, prospective applicants must include an appropriate timeline in their application to allow for the development, review, and approval of a QAPP. EPA QAPP reviews average approximately 60 days plus any time necessary to address the reviewer's feedback.
- Describe anticipated project outcomes.
- Describe how project outcomes could contribute to future efforts; and/or next steps. following project completion.

Project Budget Narrative (Approximately 1,000-2,000 words):

- Include a detailed project timeline by year (if applicable) and task.
- Provide an estimated budget for each task in addition to a total budget summary.

NOTE: In addition to the Project and Budget Narratives, applicants will only need to submit an SF-424 Form with their applications. Once award recipients are selected, recipients will have 30 days to successfully complete and submit outstanding supplementary materials, including: Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A), EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54, and EPA Form 4700-4 Preaward Compliance Review Report. See **Appendix C** for additional information.

G) Application Materials

The following forms and documents are required under this announcement:
Required with initial RFP submission:

1. Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
2. Narrative Proposal (Project Narrative Attachment Form)-prepared as described in **Appendix B** of the announcement (refer to Section I.B for required content)
3. Budget Detail (Budget Narrative Attachment Form) – See **Appendix C** for information

4. Letters of support/commitment from any partners identified in the proposal to confirm their partnership.
5. List documenting past or ongoing federal and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements administer by the applicant, including documentation supporting grant performance and meeting of reporting requirements.
6. Documents of non-profit status if appropriate.

Applications submitted through grants.gov will be time and date stamped electronically. If you have not received a confirmation of receipt from EPA (not from Grants.gov) within 30 days of the application deadline, please contact Adam Reilly (Reilly.Adam@epa.gov ; 617-918-1712). Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

F) Partnerships

Community-level partnerships and support are critical for the design and implementation of successful projects supported by the SOAR Fund.

i. Identify and describe all partners involved, including those partnerships that may be under development. Include the following details about each of your partners. If you are not planning on collaborating with other stakeholders or having partners for project performance, you must describe how you can effectively perform the project without such collaboration or partnerships:
    1. Planned roles of each partner listed in your Project Summary.
    2. What resources each partner brings to the partnership.
    3. How the partner has a vested interest in working with this partnership [other than just getting income from a sub-award or contract].
    4. How the applicant plans to maintain and sustain these relationships on into the future.

Applicants working with partners must submit letters of commitment from partners for those partnerships to be evaluated (See **Section V** for the evaluation criteria on partnerships). Letters should be from partners representing different stakeholder groups. The letters must be submitted by the applicant with the other application documents by the submission deadline. The letters of commitment should include information about the role and activities each partner or stakeholder organization will perform as well as any resources the partner or stakeholder will provide. **If no letters of commitment are included, then it will be assumed the applicant has no partners.** Partnerships and collaboration with other interested stakeholders in performance of the project are integral to the success of this program. If an applicant does not demonstrate such partnerships or collaboration as described above, they must be able to convincingly demonstrate in their application how they can effectively perform the project without any partners or collaboration. Given the nature of this program, failure to demonstrate effective partnerships or collaboration with other stakeholders will likely adversely impact the applicant's scoring under the relevant evaluation criteria in Section V and render the application less competitive than others that include partnerships and collaboration. All letters of commitment must be submitted by the applicant with its application package by the submission deadline.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

Note: Additional provisions that apply to this section can be found at EPA Solicitation Clauses.

Proposals will be reviewed and scored based on the following evaluation criteria by a panel of experts with substantial community knowledge of Rhode Island and Massachusetts environmental and community needs (the panel will be determined based on the types of applications received).

A) Evaluation Process and Criteria

After we review applications for threshold eligibility as described in Section III, eligible applications will be reviewed by a team of professionals from EPA and EPA partners with a working knowledge of the technical and programmatic aspects needed to rigorously evaluate these SOAR Fund proposals. All reviewers will sign a conflict-of-interest statement indicating there is no real, or perceived, conflict of interest.

B) Evaluation Criteria for RFP - Maximum Score 150 Points

Background and Baseline Conditions (20 points)

Under this criterion, EPA will evaluate the extent and quality to which the application:

- identifies appropriate DACs. **(6 points)**
- describes the baseline environmental challenges associated with the proposed project. **(7 points)**
- describes the needs of the community to be impacted by the proposed project. **(7 points)**

Project Description and Strategic Plan Linkage (20 points)

Under this criterion, EPA will evaluate the extent and quality to which the application:

- describes their proposed project. **(8 points)**
- demonstrates a realistic project given the number of tasks involved and the amount of funding requested. **(8 points)**
- links to the SNEP Strategic Plan. **(4 points)**

Community Support and Involvement (30 points)

Under this criterion, EPA will evaluate the extent to which the application:

- demonstrates community support for the project. **(10 points)**
- demonstrates community involvement in the project (design, implementation, maintenance, etc.). **(10 points)**
- includes quality letters of community support or commitment. If no letters of community support or commitment are provided, the application will be evaluated on the how well it justifies the lack of letters of support or commitment. **(10 points)**

Mission (10 points)

Under this criterion, EPA will evaluate the extent to which the application addresses the mission of the SOAR Fund.

Benefits (20 points)

Under this criterion, EPA will evaluate how well the applicant describes the environmental and community benefits associated with the anticipated outcomes of their proposed project and the anticipated benefits of the project contribute to the long-term climate resiliency of the identified DAC.

Project Timeline and Budget (8 points)

Under this criterion, EPA will evaluate:

- the level of detail included in the proposed project timeline. **(3 points)**
- that the proposed project timeline is clear and realistic. **(3 points)**
- the extent to which the roles of each project partner are included and clearly defined. **(2 points)**

Project Successes, Outcomes, and Monitoring (10 points)

Under this criterion, EPA will evaluate the extent which the application:

- describes the plan to evaluate and determine project success throughout the duration of their work plan. **(4 points)**
- identifies appropriate SNEP project metrics (**Appendix D**) to track throughout the duration of their project. **(4 points)**
- identifies the need for a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) and has budgeted the appropriate time and expense in their project timeline and budget to successfully complete their QAPP, if applicable. **(2 points)**

Programmatic Capability and Environmental Results Past Performance (12 points)

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project considering their:

i) past performance in successfully completing and managing the assistance agreements identified in response to **Section IV.A.** of the solicitation, **(3 points)**
ii) history of meeting the reporting requirements under the assistance agreements identified in response to **Section IV.A.** of the solicitation including whether the applicant submitted acceptable final technical reports under those agreements and the extent to which the applicant adequately and timely reported on their progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes under those agreements and if such progress was not being made whether the applicant adequately reported why not, **(3 points)**
iii) organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project, and **(3 points)**
iv) staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project. **(3 points)**

NOTE: In evaluating applicants under items i and ii of this criterion, the Agency will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources including agency files and prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information supplied by the applicant). **If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please indicate this in the application and you will receive a neutral score of 6 points for these subfactors** (items i and ii above-a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). **If you do not provide any response for these items, you may receive a score of 0 for these factors.**

Cost Effectiveness (10 points)

Under this criterion, EPA will evaluate the extent which the proposed project is logical, appropriate, and that detailed cost estimates for the work described are cost effective.

Timely Expenditure of Grant Funds (10 points)

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their approach, procedures, and controls for ensuring that awarded grant funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner.

C) Review and Selection Process

Eligible proposals will be evaluated and ranked using the criteria stated in Section V.B above by a panel of reviewers from EPA and EPA partners with a working knowledge of the technical and programmatic aspects needed to rigorously evaluate SOAR proposals. The review team will then forward their rankings and evaluation to the selection official for final selections.

The selection official intends to make selections that will allocate up to 40% of awards to new applicants and 70% of projects located within or directly benefiting CEJST communities. For more information, please reference **Section II.B.** and **Section V.B.**

The selection official may also consider the following other factors: anticipated impact on resilience in the DAC(s), longevity of community impact of project outcomes, quality of community-driven design approach, number of partners, degree of community support provided, balance of funding allocated between Massachusetts and Rhode Island, linkage with SNEP Strategic Plan, and programmatic goals and priorities.

VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

Note: Additional provisions that apply to this section can be found at EPA Solicitation Clauses.

A) Award Notification

We anticipate notification to successful applicants will be made via telephone or electronic or postal mail by October 2023. The notification will be sent to the original signer of the application, or the project contact listed in the application. This notification, which informs the applicant that its application has been selected and is being recommended for award, is not an authorization to begin work. The official notification of an award will be made the EPA Region 1 Grant's Office. Applicants are cautioned that only a grants officer is authorized to bind the Government to the expenditure of funds; selection does not guarantee an award will be made. For example, statutory authorization, funding, or other issues discovered during the award process may affect the ability of EPA to make an award to an applicant. The award notice, signed by an EPA grants officer, is the authorizing document and will be provided through electronic or postal mail. The successful applicant may need to prepare and submit additional documents and forms (e.g., work plan), which must be approved by EPA, before the grant can officially be awarded. The time between notification of selection and award of a grant can take up to 90 days or longer.

Once notified of selection, the applicant has 30 days to submit the remaining documentation. **Failure to submit all remaining application materials will result in forfeit of award.**

Required within 30 days following notice of selection:

1. Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)
2. EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54
3. EPA Form 4700-4 Preaward Compliance Review Report
4. Support Materials (Other Attachment Form)
    a. Confirmation (or process to confirm) access to private property by their owner(s) required to carry out Project activities.
    b. Verification of proposed sources of leveraging to the application, if applicable. See Appendix B for additional details.

B) Administrative and National Policy Requirements

The following information will be helpful in preparing the application. A listing and description of general EPA regulations applicable to the award of assistance agreements may be viewed at: http://www.epa.gov/ogd/AppKit/applicable_epa_regulations_and_description.htm.

Federal Requirements: An applicant selected for federal funding may need to adjust their forms prior to award (see Appendix B for the list of required materials). We reserve the right to negotiate and/or adjust the final cooperative agreement amount and work plan content prior to award consistent with agency policies.

Indirect Costs: Indirect costs are those costs incurred by an organization for common or joint objectives and that cannot be readily identified with a particular final cost objective, project or program but are, nevertheless, necessary to the general operation of its activities. Indirect costs generally include, but are not limited to, facilities operation and maintenance costs, depreciation, and administrative expenses. If a recipient wishes to include indirect costs in the assistance application, it must follow requirements based on whether it is a non-profit organization, educational institute, local government, or state government.

If a non-profit organization or educational institute does not have a previously established indirect cost rate, it may prepare and submit an indirect cost rate proposal and/or cost allocation plan in accordance with the appropriate federal cost principle, 2 C.F.R. Part 220 (OMB Cost Principles for Educational Institutions) and 2 C.F.R. Part 230 (OMB Cost Principles for Non-profits) within 90 days from the effective date of the award. Alternatively, and in accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.414(f), any non-Federal entity that has never received a negotiated indirect cost rate, except for those non-Federal entities described in Appendix VII to Part 200—States and Local Government and Indian Tribe Indirect Cost Proposals, paragraph D.1.b, may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs which may be used indefinitely. Costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the non-Federal entity may apply to do at any time.

If a local government does not have a previously established indirect cost rate, it will need to prepare its indirect cost rate proposal and/or cost allocation plan in accordance with 2 C.F.R. Part 225 (OMB Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments). The local government recipient whose cognizant federal agency has been designated by OMB must develop and submit its indirect cost rate proposal to its cognizant agency within six months after the close of the governmental unit's fiscal year. If the cognizant federal agency has not been identified by OMB, the local government recipient must still develop (and when required, submit) its proposal within that period.

If a state government agency does not have a previously established indirect cost rate, it agrees that it will prepare its indirect cost rate proposal in accordance with 2 C.F.R. Part 225. The state government agency must send its proposal to its cognizant federal agency within six months after the close of the governmental unit's fiscal year.

Incurred Costs: Funding eligibility begins and ends on the date specified in the award. The time expended and costs incurred in either the development of the proposal or the final assistance application, or in any subsequent discussions or negotiations prior to the award, are neither reimbursable nor recognizable as part of the recipient's cost share.

Allowable Costs: EPA project officers and grant specialists have been provided guidance on determining the allowability and reasonableness of certain cost items under assistance agreements. The guidance indicates that the use of EPA grant funds for evening banquets, evening receptions or for light refreshments and meals at meetings, conferences, training workshops, and outreach activities (events) must be justified by the assistance recipient, identified in the budget detail, must be allowable under the OMB Cost Principles, and approved by the EPA Award Official. Further, EPA will not approve the use of grant funds for any portion of an event where alcohol is served, purchased, or otherwise available even if grant funds are not used to purchase the alcohol.

EPA Requirements for Quality Management Plans and Quality Assurance Plans: In accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 1500.12, projects that include the generation or use of environmental data are required to submit a Quality Management Plan (QMP) or Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP).

The QMP must document quality assurance policies and practices that are sufficient to produce data of adequate quality to meet program objectives. The QMP should be prepared in accordance with EPA QA/R-2: EPA Requirements for Quality Management Plans (refer to https://www.epa.gov/quality/epa-qar-2-epa-requirements-quality-management-plans, Chapter 2). The recipient's QMP should be reviewed and updated annually as needed. The QMP must be submitted to the EPA project officer at least 45 days prior to the initiation of data collection or data compilation.

The recipient must develop and implement quality assurance and quality control procedures, specifications and documentation that are sufficient to produce data of adequate quality to meet project objectives. The QAPP is the document that provides comprehensive details about the quality assurance/quality control requirements and technical activities that must be implemented to ensure that project objectives are met. The QAPP should be prepared in accordance with EPA QA/R-5: EPA Requirements for Quality Assurance Project Plans. The QAPP must be submitted to the EPA project officer at least 30 days prior to the initiation of data collection or data compilation. Requirements for QAPPs can be found at https://www.epa.gov/quality/guidance-quality-assurance-project-plans-epa-qag-5.

C) Reporting

Semi-annual reports sent via email to the Project Officer will be required as a condition of this award. The reports must be in Microsoft Office Suite (i.e., Word, Excel) format. Semi-annual reports should include information on expenditures, project progress, SNEP project metrics, outreach, collaborative efforts, and any other information that will inform the Project Officer of the nature of the recipient's work. SNEP will provide a template that may be used for reporting.

Upon completion of the grant period the recipient will also need to submit a final report to the Project Officer no later than 90 days after the end of the grant period.

VII. AGENCY CONTACTS

For administrative and technical issues regarding this RFP, please contact SNEP via email at SECoastalNE@epa.gov. All questions must be received in writing via email with the reference line referring to this RFP (RE: EPA-I-R1-SNEP-2023C) by **09/1/2023**. All questions and answers will be posted on http://www.epa.gov/snep. In addition, information about the informational webinars will also be posted on this same website.

A. Feedback on the RFP Application Process

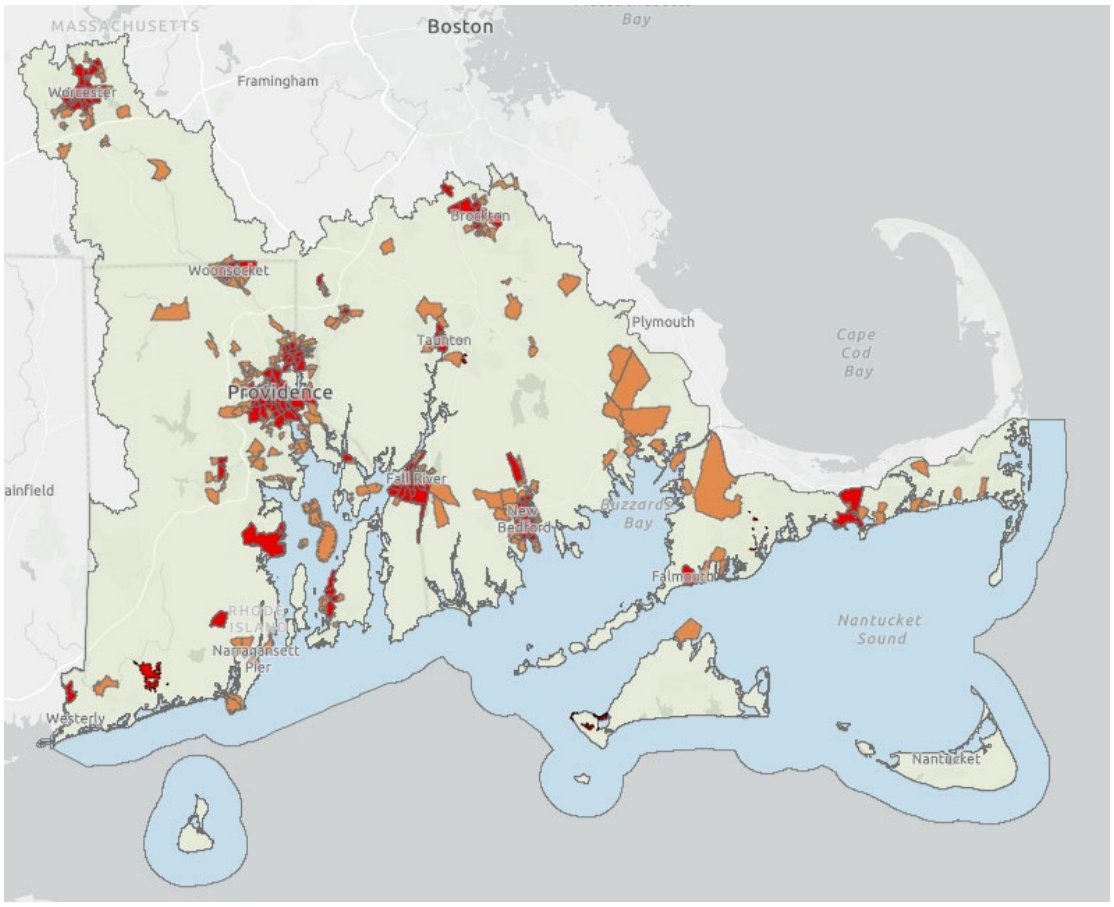
EPA-SNEP is releasing this funding opportunity as a Request for Proposals (RFP), instead of the Request for Applications (RFA), which requires fewer forms with the initial application. EPA is interested in applicant feedback on the RFP process to inform future opportunities. **If you have feedback on the RFP process or have suggestions on how to further increase the accessibility of future EPA-SNEP funding opportunities, please email your suggestions to SECoastalNE@epa.gov with "RFP Feedback" in the email heading.**

VIII. OTHER INFORMATION

In developing the proposal, the applicant may find the following documents helpful:

- Southeast New England Program Website https://www.epa.gov/snep
- EPA Requirements for Quality Management Plans and Quality Assurance Plans https://www.epa.gov/quality
- EPA Strategic Plan http://www.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan
- Please visit the EPA Grants website (http://www.epa.gov/ogd) for questions about grant issues such as costs or eligibility.
- SNEP 5-Year Strategic Plan: https://www.epa.gov/snep/snep-strategic-plan

APPENDIX A. SNEP Map of Disadvantaged Communities



The SNEP geographic region includes land areas in Massachusetts and Rhode Island including the south-facing coastal watersheds between Westerly, Rhode Island and Chatham, Massachusetts, the watersheds of the Narragansett Bay and Buzzards Bay National Estuary Programs (NEPs), and offshore islands of Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Elizabeth Islands (Town of Gosnold, Mass) and Block Islands (Town of New Shoreham, RI). An interactive map identifying the areas that meet EPA's definition for Disadvantaged Communities in the SNEP region can be found at: https://epa.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=35aa363ddd574202bc12dcf01ede86ca Disadvantaged communities are shaded orange on the map.

APPENDIX B. Checklist of Required Materials and Description of Proposal Content

Please note checklist is for application preparation purposes only, please do not submit.

Required Materials (as outlined in Section IV.A)

Mandatory Documents for initial RFP Submission:

1. Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
2. Narrative Proposal (Project Narrative Attachment Form)-prepared as described in **Appendix B** of the announcement (refer to Section I.B for required content)
3. Budget Detail (Budget Narrative Attachment Form) – See **Appendix C** for information.
4. Letters of support/commitment from any partners identified in the proposal to confirm their partnership, if applicable.
5. List documenting past or ongoing federal and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements administer by the applicant, including documentation supporting grant performance and meeting of reporting requirements.
6. Documents of non-profit status if appropriate.

Recommended Format for Project Narratives

Project narratives must be no longer than 5,000 words and must address the evaluation criteria in **Section V.B.** The first page should include applicant contact information and the proposal's title. The word limit does not include photos or diagrams.

For this funding opportunity, EPA-SNEP has developed an optional project narrative template that can be accessed via Grants.gov opportunity under the Related Documents tabor via the SNEP website. This template can be used by the applicant to develop their project narrative.

The application should include the following information:

- Demonstrate baseline eligibility for the SOAR
    - Include an image of your project location using the SNEP DAC Map (Appendix A). If a project location is outside of the priority areas listed, your project is not eligible for the SNEP-SOAR Fund. Applicants must provide locational information at a scale that allows EPA to determine if it is in a DAC-area.
- Background and Baseline Conditions
    - Provide detailed background on the environmental challenges and community needs to be addressed through this funding opportunity.
- Project Description and Strategic Plan Linkage
    - Describe the project, environmental challenges and how the project will address goals and objectives in the SNEP Strategic Plan.
- Describe anticipated project outcomes/benefits to residents in the DAC and how it will support improved resilience in the SNEP region
    - What do you hope to achieve as the result of your project? What will be the direct benefits to the surrounding community? How will these project benefits support community resilience to climate change?
- Community Support and Involvement

- Describe how the proposed project will address an important need identified by residents in the DAC.
- Describe community support and/or meaningful community involvement in the proposed project
  - **Include written letters of support or commitment describing how local project partners will be involved in the proposed project (if applicable). Letters of support are written by community members, groups, organizations, elected representatives, businesses, etc. that support the project going forward. Letters of Commitment are written by community groups/organizations that are committing to help as project partners.**

- SOAR Mission
  - Describe how the proposed project ties into the mission of the SOAR Fund
- Benefits
  - Describe anticipated project benefits to residents in the DAC and how the project will lead to increased ecosystem and/or community resilience.
- Project Timeline
  - Include a detailed project timeline. How long will your project take? What aspects of your project will be completed over the specified project period?
- Project Success, Outputs and Outcomes, and Monitoring
  - Describe any available baseline data that supports the need for the proposed project (if applicable)
  - Describe how the applicant(s) plan(s) to determine project success over time
  - Describe project monitoring parameters (if applicable) **NOTE:** Any proposed monitoring will additionally require the development and approval of a Quality Assurance Project Plan before monitoring can begin. While it is expected that this plan will be written and approved during the project period, prospective applicants must include an appropriate timeline in their application to allow for the development, review, and approval of a QAPP. EPA QAPP reviews average approximately 60 days plus any time necessary to address the reviewer's feedback.
  - Describe anticipated project outputs and outcomes
  - Describe how project outputs and outcomes could contribute to future efforts; and/or next steps following project completion.

Recommended Format for Budget Narratives

Budget narratives are useful to demonstrate to SNEP-SOAR reviewers that you, the applicant, have a well-establish timeline for all the tasks included in your application**.** Your budget narrative should include the total cost breakdown of your project organized by year (if applicable) and task. It should also include an additional budget summary. Level of detail can vary; but project tasks should be most detailed for the first year of project implementation. Following that year, grantees will be asked to submit an annual workplan for each subsequent year until the project is completed.

APPENDIX C. General Budget Development Guidance

For this funding opportunity, EPA-SNEP has developed an optional budget narrative template that can be accessed via the Grants.gov opportunity under the Related Documents tab. This template can be used by the applicant to develop their budget narrative.

Please use the following link for guidance on budget development: https://www.epa.gov/grants/rain-2019-g02.

Please use the following link for guidance on participant support costs: https://www.epa.gov/grants/rain-2018-g05-r1

EPA's Indirect Cost Policy can be found here: https://www.epa.gov/grants/rain-2018-g02-r

Appendix 2 in the following document contains a sample budget the applicant might find useful: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2019-05/documents/applicant-budget-development-guidance.pdf.

Note to Applicants: If the applicant names sub-awardees/sub-grantee and/or contractor(s) in their proposal to assist with the proposed project, please pay careful attention to the information in the CONTRACTS AND SUBAWARDS provision founds at https://www.epa.gov/grants/grants-policy-issuance-gpi-16-01-epa-subaward-policy-epa-assistance-agreement-recipients.

APPENDIX D. Project Metrics

Southeast New England Program

Potential Project Level Metrics

SNEP Watershed Implementation Grants

2023

Preface: Since its formation in 2012, the Southeast New England Program (SNEP) has funded numerous projects to protect and restore the water quality, habitat, and resilience of the region. However, to date the overall impact of these projects on the regional environment has not been quantified, in part because each grantee reports the impact of their project in their own way. To better quantify and report on the impact of individual projects, as well as the Program as a whole, SNEP has developed a standardized set of metrics for grantee reporting.

Only a subset of metrics related to a grantee's project will be required to be reported on. Reporting will not be required until the end of a project. The grant recipient and EPA SNEP staff will come to an agreement on which metrics are applicable to a given project. The grantee can reach out to EPA at any time should they require assistance with calculating any metrics.

It should be noted that employee time used for reporting is an eligible grant expense.

Instructions: Please review the metrics below based on the type of project proposal you are submitting and put a check mark next to the metrics you believe may be applicable to your proposed project. Please submit this checklist with your full proposal. Your selected metrics will not be used in evaluating your proposal but will rather serve as a starting point for metric selection should your proposal be accepted.

Potential Metrics by Project Type:

General Project Metrics (Required for All Projects)	
Metric	Applicable?
$ provided to disadvantaged communities (DACs)	☒
# of DACs receiving SNEP assistance	☒
# of government entities participating	☒
# of volunteers participating	☒
# of partner organizations on the project	☒
$ funding leveraged (including match, over-match, and non-match eligible leveraged funds	☒

Education, Outreach, and Training	
Metric	Applicable?

# of webinars	☐
# of workshops or courses	☐
# of enhanced training opportunities made available to municipalities, Tribes, and/or NGOs	☐
% of people demonstrating a minimum level of knowledge, attitudes, or skills after a training/event/workshop/webinar etc.	☐
# of Tribes and/or communities receiving technical assistance to plan and design site level remediation	☐

Planning and Policy	
Metric	Applicable?
# of plans developed	☐
# of municipalities and Tribes that adopt bylaws, ordinances, or regulations	☐

Stormwater Management	
Metric	Applicable?
# square feet of green infrastructure installed	☐
# stormwater infiltration technologies capable of reducing nitrogen released to ground water or surface water.	☐
# square feet of impervious surface removed, disconnected, or retrofitted	☐
# acres of impervious cover area treated with green infrastructure	☐
# gallons (volume) of stormwater prevented or reduced from directly entering waterway annually	☐
# pounds of nitrogen discharge avoided per year	☐
# pounds of phosphorus discharge avoided per year	☐
# pounds of sediment discharge avoided per year	☐
% bacterial colonies reduced from directly discharging to waterway per year based on pre-BMP loading rates (fecal indicator bacteria: e. coli (fresh water) or Enterococci (saline water)	☐
# bacterial colonies (Billion MPN/year) reduced or prevented from directly discharging to waterway annually (fecal indicator bacteria: e. coli (fresh water) or Enterococci (saline water)	☐

Wastewater Management

Metric	Applicable?
# pounds reduced phosphorus load from wastewater treatment facilities (pounds/year)	☐
# pounds reduced nitrogen load from wastewater treatment facilities (pounds/year)	☐
# onsite wastewater treatment systems providing improved nutrient reduction (ex. innovative/alternative septic systems, composting toilets, etc.)	☐
# pounds reduced nitrogen load from improved onsite wastewater systems (pounds/year)	☐
# towns that include use of nitrogen-reducing IA onsite septic systems as means to reduce their nitrogen impacts.	☐

Fertilizer and Fertigation	
Metric	Applicable?
# acres with reduced use of lawn fertilizers that include phosphorus and nitrogen	☐
# acres of land area fertilized through fertigation well(s).	☐

Permeable Reactive Barriers	
Metric	Applicable?
# linear feet of permeable reactive barrier for nitrogen mitigation in ground water	☐

Habitat Restoration	
Metric	Applicable?
# pounds of phosphorus discharge avoided per year	☐
# pounds of nitrogen discharge avoided per year	☐
# technologies or approaches to reduce nitrogen from cranberry bogs and wetlands	☐
# acres of aquaculture to reduce nutrients and sustain the seafood economy	☐
# acres of coastal habitat restored	☐
# acres of restored saltmarsh	☐
# acres with installed technologies or approaches to protect saltmarshes from sea level rise.	☐
# acres of new eelgrass habitat	☐
# waterbodies using in situ (in surface water) treatment technology(ies) to reduce HABs	☐

# acres of restored water buffer area (non-riverine)	☐
# linear shoreline of riparian habitat restored	☐
# acres of floodplain restored	☐

Invasive Species	
Metric	Applicable?
# acres managed to treat invasive plants	☐

Land Protection	
Metric	Applicable?
# acres of land protected	☐
# acres of inland wetland permanently protected beyond that afforded by state and federal wetland regulation	☐
# acres of protected saltmarsh	☐
# acres of accessible open space created or conserved	☐

Trash and Microplastics	
Metric	Applicable?
# pounds of floatable debris reduced or prevented from entering the waterway per year	☐

Monitoring and Research	
Metric	Applicable?
# applied research studies completed with findings reported to management	☐
# projects that include valuation of project's contribution to ecosystem services	☐
$ aquatic or terrestrial monitoring programs	☐