

Notice of Funding Opportunity

Applications Due: **Monday, October 5, 2026**



Office of Water

Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant

Funding Opportunity Number: **EPA-OW-OWM-26-03**



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1. Basic Information

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Office of Water, Office of Wastewater Management

Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant Program

For more information visit our website [here](#).

A. Executive Summary

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is soliciting applications under the authority of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) section 1459E to accelerate career pipelines in the water utilities sector and provide access to water utility workforce opportunities. This action advances the Administration's priorities, including the goals of Make America Healthy Again, by focusing on building the nation's water workforce which is critical to ensuring public health and environment protection. Consistent with the law, this action will help inform people about the role of water and wastewater utilities in their communities and increase the awareness of water utility career opportunities.

The purpose of this funding opportunity is to support expanding career opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector and elevating public awareness about jobs in the water workforce. Eligible applicants under this funding opportunity are Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), nonprofit organizations, and public works departments and agencies. Eligible activities include apprenticeship and internship programs, education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students, regional industry collaborations, and training programs designed to support decentralized workforce. Efforts should aim for measurable results and clearly show tangible benefits for water systems and communities. The proposed activities support the Agency's [Powering the Great American Comeback Initiative](#)'s Pillar 1: Clean Air, Land, and Water for Every American. Examples include training individuals through an apprenticeship program and placing them into water sector jobs, training individuals for industry accreditation, and developing collaborations with community colleges, technical schools, utilities to address the water utility employment needs.

B. Key Information:

Opportunity Number:

EPA-OW-OWM-26-03

Assistance Listing:

66.445

Announcement Type:

Initial

Funding Available:

Up to \$10,800,000

Number of Awards:

Up to 15

C. Key Dates:

September 14, 2026 11:59 pm ET NOFO Questions Submission Deadline

October 5, 2026 11:59 pm ET Application Submission Deadline

January 2027

Anticipated Notification of Selection

April 2027

Anticipated Award Notification

D. Funding Details:

It is anticipated that up to **15 awards** will be made under this announcement. The amount of funding is expected to be between \$1,000,000 and \$7,800,000 per award for Project Area 1, and between \$250,000 and \$1,000,000 per award for Project Area 2-4, depending on Agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, agency priorities, and other applicable considerations. Awards funded under this opportunity are expected to have a **three year** project period.

E. Agency Contact Information:

Further information, if needed, may be obtained from the EPA contact(s) indicated below.

Technical Contact: **Hana Abate; WaterWorkforceNOFO@epa.gov**

Eligibility Contact: **Hana Abate; WaterWorkforceNOFO@epa.gov**

Electronic Submissions Contact: **Grants.gov: support@grants.gov; 1-800-518-4726**

Note to Applicants: EPA will respond to questions from individual applicants regarding threshold eligibility criteria, administrative issues related to the submission of the application, and requests for clarification about any of the language or provisions in the announcement. EPA will not meet with individual applicants to discuss draft applications, provide informal comments on draft applications, or provide advice to applicants on how to respond to ranking criteria. Applicants are responsible for the contents of their applications. Applicants should raise any questions they may have about this funding opportunity to the contact identified above as soon as possible so that any questions may be clarified prior to submitting a proposal. In addition, if necessary, EPA may clarify threshold eligibility issues with applicants prior to making a final eligibility determination.

Questions about this funding opportunity must be submitted in writing via e-mail and must be received by the Agency Contact identified above by 11:59 PM Eastern Time, September 14, 2026, and written responses will be posted on [EPA's website](#). This funding opportunity will be open for 45 days. Please note answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs), including relevant definitions, are available at [the same website](#). EPA strongly recommends interested applicants refer to the FAQs webpage prior to submitting a question.

Project Area	# Of Awards Anticipated	Funding Range/Award	Funding Available
Project Area 1: Targeted internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship	1-8 awards	\$1,000,000-\$7,800,000	\$7.8 million
Project Area 2: Education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students	1-4 awards	\$250,000 -1,000,000	\$1 million

Project Area 3: Regional industry and workforce development collaborations	1-4 awards	\$250,000 -1,000,000	\$1 million
Project Area 4: Training programs for decentralized workforce	1-4 awards	\$250,000 -1,000,000	\$1 million

F. Other Funding Considerations

Up to \$10,800,000 may be awarded under this NOFO, depending on Agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, agency priorities, satisfactory performance of work, and other applicable considerations. Funding each year is not guaranteed. See the table below for anticipated funding levels by project area.

EPA reserves the right to partially fund applications by funding discrete portions or phases of proposed projects. If EPA decides to partially fund an application, it will do so in a manner that does not prejudice any applicants or affect the basis upon which the application was evaluated and selected for award to maintain the integrity of the competition and selection process.

Selection or award of funding under this funding opportunity is not a guarantee of future funding. EPA reserves the right to make additional awards under this announcement if additional funding becomes available after the original selections are made. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than 6 months after the original selection decisions.

2. Eligibility

A. Eligible Applicants

Only these types of organizations may apply:

- [Institutions of Higher Education \(IHEs\)](#)
- Public works departments and agencies
- [Nonprofit organizations](#)
 - Nonprofit professional or service organizations
 - Nonprofit labor organizations
 - Nonprofit community colleges
 - Other nonprofit training and educational institutions

Nonprofit organization, as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, means any organization that: (1) is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest; (2) is not organized primarily for profit; and (3) uses net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the organization's operations. Note that 2 CFR Part 200 specifically excludes the following types of organizations from the definition of nonprofit organization because they are separately defined in the regulation: (i) institutions of higher education - Institutions of Higher Education are defined at 20 U.S.C. 1001. Nonetheless, institutions of higher education who otherwise qualify as nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply as indicated in the Office of Management and Budget's July 2017 Frequent Questions on

the Uniform Grant Guidance. Nonprofit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in prohibited lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply. For profit organizations and hospitals are not eligible.

(1) Other Eligibility Requirements

Applications must meet the following threshold criteria to be considered eligible:

- An applicant must meet the eligibility requirements in Section 2.A of this announcement at the time of application submission.
- Applications must address only one of the four Project Areas listed in Section 3. Applications that address more than one Project Area will not be reviewed.
- Under this NOFO, only **one application can be submitted per applicant**. If an applicant submits more than one application, EPA will contact them before the review process begins to determine which application(s) will be withdrawn. If the applicant is not able to communicate a decision within 48 hours of being contacted by EPA, EPA will accept the application received by Grants.gov most recently. Additional information regarding the one application per applicant requirement may be found in the FAQ document available at <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/innovative-water-infrastructure-workforce-development-program>.
- Applications must address all three required elements described in [Section 3.A](#); Project Area, Geographic Area, and Innovative Approach.
- 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. Applicants who have any questions about the eligibility of activities proposed should clarify the issue with the [agency point of contact](#) prior to submitting their application.
- Applications must **substantially comply** with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in [Section 4](#) of this announcement or else they will be rejected.

Please see [Section 6](#) for additional threshold criteria.

B. Cost Sharing

Any cost share proposed by an applicant is voluntary. Applicants will not be scored or evaluated solely on the inclusion of voluntary committed cost share if they choose to propose cost share.

Voluntary committed cost sharing is a binding requirement of Federal award. Applicants who propose voluntary cost share must include the costs/contributions on the SF-424, SF-424A Budget Information form, and Budget Detail.

If an applicant proposes voluntary cost share the following apply:

1. A voluntary committed cost share is subject to the match provisions in the grant regulations ([2 CFR 200.306](#)).
2. A voluntary committed cost share may only be met with eligible and allowable costs.
3. The recipient may not use other sources of federal funds to meet a voluntary cost share unless the statute authorizing the other federal funding provides that the federal funds may be used to meet a cost share requirement on a federal grant.

4. The recipient is legally obligated to meet any proposed voluntary cost share that is included in the approved budget.

3. Program Description

A. Purpose, Priorities, and Activities

Purpose: EPA is soliciting applications from eligible applicants for projects in four Project Areas as discussed in further detail below. While EPA expects to make at least one award in each area, there is no guarantee that this will be done, and EPA may redistribute the awards per area based on the quality of applications received and other applicable considerations. Currently, water utilities face challenges in recruiting, training, and retaining employees. These challenges are exacerbated with roughly one-third of the water sector workforce eligible to retire in the next 10 years. Additionally, as the technologies that are used in the water sector become more advanced (e.g., state of the art water reuse technology), there is a growing need to train and employ water protection specialists with specialized technical skills.

This program is aimed at funding workforce development programs through an increased collaboration among Federal, State, and local governments; and institutions of higher education to accelerate career pipelines and provide access to workforce opportunities. It aims to address the challenges faced by the water workforce in several key areas to help develop the next generation of water workers. A particular focus of this NOFO is to support water workforce development in rural, small, and tribal communities.

The proposed activities support the Agency's Powering the Great American Comeback Initiative's Pillar 1: Clean Air, Land, and Water for Every American.

Program Office Priorities: Ensuring that all Americans have safe water to drink and essential wastewater services is a top priority for EPA and the Office of Water. The grant program supports the missions of both the Office of Wastewater Management (OWM) and the Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water (OGWDW). OWM's mission is to protect public health and the environment by supporting the Clean Water Act and related statutes. OWM promotes effective and responsible wastewater treatment, disposal, infrastructure, and management and by encouraging the protection and restoration of watersheds. OGWDW protects public health by supporting the Safe Drinking Water Act and related statutes and promotes the safety of the nation's drinking water. Awards made through this funding opportunity will increase the number of trained water professionals and provide more opportunities for future water professionals to meet the demands of the water industry.

Activities will support the development of a sustainable workforce dedicated to maintaining drinking water and wastewater systems, ensuring the protection of public health and the environment. These efforts should aim for measurable results, clearly showing tangible benefits in communities.

This funding opportunity is being offered under Federal Assistance Listing 66.445.

Required Elements: Each application narrative must address the following three elements.

- **1. Project Areas:** Each application must explicitly identify and thoroughly address one and only one of the Project Areas listed in Section 3.A.(1).
- **2. Geographic Area:** Applicants must describe their proposed plan to share (or make available to geographically diverse areas) the Project Area, the results of the Project Area, and the lessons learned. For the purposes of the Project Areas, an example of “results” mean: (1) developing and providing targeted internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, or post-secondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades; and (2) an evaluation of how these programs have helped expand public awareness about the job opportunities in the water sector and addressed the workforce needs of drinking water and wastewater utilities. For the purposes of this announcement, “geographically diverse” means in different areas of the country.

EPA is asking applicants to specifically provide information on how they intend to expand awareness to individuals from rural, small, and tribal communities. The application should describe the applicant’s proposed community outreach strategies and cultural competencies, particularly if the project will include work with tribes and/or limited resource communities.

- **3. Innovative Approach:** Applicants must include innovative approaches to address the workforce needs of drinking water and wastewater utilities. For the purposes of this announcement, “innovative” means new ideas and methods that are original and creative in approach. The applicant should demonstrate how these innovative approaches have the potential to effectively reach the intended audience. As an example, this could mean a proposed approach to share the project activity, results, and lessons learned at workforce specialty conference(s) that include water utilities that are geographically diverse, of varying sizes, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations. Applicants may also propose innovative approaches that have proved to be successful in other sectors and may have a high degree of transferability to the water sector.

EPA is particularly interested in results produced through this grant program that are scalable and have potential to be utilized by the broader water sector, including water utilities.

All applications submitted under Project Areas 1-4 must address the Section 4.B. Project Narrative Components. All eligible applications under the specific Project Areas 1-4 will be evaluated based on the criteria in Section 6 including how well and thoroughly the Project Area is addressed.

(1) Project Areas

Project Area 1: Targeted internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and postsecondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades.

Under Project Area 1, EPA is soliciting applications to expand public awareness about job opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector and address the workforce needs of drinking water and wastewater utilities. This may be achieved by developing and implementing, for example, but not limited to, targeted internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs for priority water utility trades through:

- (1) On-the-job training, including registered apprenticeships;

- (2) Skills development;
- (3) Test preparation, including developing test materials for skilled trade apprenticeships;
- (4) Advance training in the water utility sector relating to construction, utility operations treatment and distribution, infrastructure, customer service, maintenance, and engineering; or
- (5) Other supportive services and participant support costs (e.g., apprenticeship stipend and training materials, reasonable costs for transportation, childcare subsidies) to facilitate post-secondary success.

Project Area 2 - Education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students.

Under Project Area 2, EPA is soliciting applications to expand student awareness about the job opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector and to address the workforce needs of drinking water and wastewater utilities by developing education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students and providing training opportunities for secondary and higher education students that:

- (1) Inform students about the value of water and water infrastructure and the role of drinking water and wastewater utilities in their communities;
- (2) Increase student awareness of career opportunities in the water sector, and increase student exposure to water utility careers through various work-based learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom;
- (3) Connect students to career pathways related to water utilities;
- (4) Provide hands-on contextualized learning opportunities;
- (5) Offer dual enrollment credit for post-secondary education and training programs;
- (6) Create a direct connection to water utility and industry employers; and/or
- (7) Build integrated learning laboratories in secondary educational institutions.

For the purposes of this announcement, “secondary education” means education beyond the elementary grades and “higher education” means education beyond the secondary level (e.g., community colleges, vocational schools and/or university level).

For the purposes of this announcement, “contextualized learning” means relating subject matter content to meaningful situations that are relevant to students.

Project Area 3: Regional industry and workforce development collaborations to address water utility employment needs and coordinate candidate development, particularly in small and rural areas, areas of high unemployment or for water utilities with a high proportion of retirement eligible employees.

Under Project Area 3, EPA is soliciting applications to expand public awareness about job opportunities in the water sector and address the workforce needs of utilities by establishing regional industry and workforce development collaborations that will address drinking water and wastewater utility recruitment and retention issues. Small and rural utilities face distinct workforce challenges, including difficulty attracting and retaining qualified operators and an aging workforce nearing retirement. Strengthening workforce pipelines in rural areas is essential to ensuring reliable water services, protecting public health, and sustaining critical infrastructure. Applications should describe water utility

employment needs in rural areas and provide information on if and how candidate development will occur in areas with high unemployment or for water utilities with high proportion of retirement eligible employees in the water utility community. States are beginning to encounter critical staffing shortages in areas of high unemployment and where water utilities have a high proportion of retirement eligible employees or forceable workforce vacancies. Under this activity, applications should demonstrate a proposed approach to further the goal of building a stronger and more effective water utility workforce through collaboration opportunities with school systems, technical colleges, universities, labor organizations, community-based organizations, and other utilities.

For the purposes of this project area, “results” mean (1) developing and implementing collaborative initiatives with school systems, technical colleges, universities labor organizations, community-based organizations, and/or other utilities; and (2) an evaluation of how these initiatives addressed (will address) the recruitment and retention needs of water and wastewater utilities.

Project Area 4: Education and training programs, including internship or apprenticeship programs, designed for decentralized water workers (i.e., private well and/or septic system service professionals) to support public health outcomes for communities that rely on private wells for drinking water or decentralized systems for adequate treatment and disposal of wastewater.

Under Project Area 4, EPA is soliciting applications to expand public awareness about job opportunities in the decentralized drinking water (i.e., private wells) and/ or wastewater (i.e., septic systems) sectors, and address the workforce needs of the decentralized water workforce (such as inspectors, operation and maintenance [O&M] providers, designers, installers, etc.) through supporting public health outcomes of communities that rely on these systems. This may be achieved by developing and implementing, for example, but not limited to, education and training programs at higher education institutions, or internship/apprenticeship programs that prioritize decentralized water skilled trades through:

- (1) New training program(s) at higher education institutions (i.e., community colleges);
- (2) Growth of existing training program(s) at higher education institutions;
- (3) On-the-job training, including registered apprenticeships;
- (4) Skills development;
- (5) Test preparation for state level licensing requirements;
- (6) Advanced training in the decentralized water sector relating to site evaluation, design, installation, inspection/monitoring, and operations/maintenance of systems; or,
- (7) Other supportive services and participant support costs (e.g., apprenticeship stipend and training materials, reasonable costs for transportation, childcare subsidies) to facilitate growth potential of decentralized water workers.

For the purposes of this announcement, “higher education” means education at the technical college, community college, or university level. For the purposes of this announcement, “Private well” is defined as a well owned by a homeowner or group of homeowners that supplies drinking water to fewer than 25 people and contains fewer than 15 service connections. “Decentralized wastewater systems” are defined as: septic or onsite or clustered systems used to collect, treat, and disperse or reclaim wastewater from a

small community, tribe, or service area that are publicly or privately-owned and/or serve tribal communities (except for systems owned by U.S. federal entities). For further details regarding decentralized wastewater systems refer to the EPA “Overview of Clean Water State Revolving Fund Eligibilities” decentralized chapter at: <https://www.epa.gov/cwsrf/overview-clean-water-state-revolving-fund-eligibilities>.

(2) Project Partnerships

Effective partnerships are important for the success of projects solicited under this announcement. In their applications, applicants should identify appropriate and necessary partnerships to successfully conduct the project. Applicants should also include a clear description of the roles of specific partners, or planned partners, in the project’s components and/or tasks. If you choose not to partner, applications will be evaluated based on how the applicant demonstrates how it will successfully conduct the project and meet the objectives described in Section 3 without the use of partners.

(3) Transfer of Results

The application should include a description of the applicant’s proposed approach for active transfer of project results, and methods and/or effective strategies to water utilities, states, tribes, and/or other interested stakeholders so that others may better build their water workforces. This should include a detailed explanation of how the proposed results will or could be scaled for the broader water sector, along with the proposed approaches that will or could be utilized to support such wider adoption by the water sector. Examples of ways to transfer results include: i. Sharing the results with relevant drinking water and/or wastewater utilities and other relevant organizations and stakeholders; ii. Conducting webinars or other outreach efforts, that address workforce needs, to drinking water and wastewater utilities; and/or iii. Sharing the results at conference(s) that include water utilities.

(4) Environmental Results

Applicants are required to describe how funding will help EPA achieve outputs and outcomes under Pillar 1: Clean Air, Land, and Water for Every American, in their responses to the criteria in Section 6. Outputs and outcomes specific to each project will be identified as deliverables in the negotiated workplan if the application is selected for award. Recipients will be expected to report progress toward the attainment of expected project outputs and outcomes during the project performance period. Outputs and outcomes are defined as follows:

Outputs are an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product related to an environmental goal or objective that will be produced or provided over time or by a specified date. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative but must be measurable during the project period. The expected outputs for the grants awarded under these guidelines may include, but are not limited to:

Examples of anticipated outputs for Project Area 1, Targeted internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An increased number of participants in existing or new internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, post-secondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades, including programs addressing emerging water workforce needs.

- An increased number of available recruitment strategies, materials, and partnerships to inform potential applicants of internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and postsecondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades.

Examples of anticipated outputs for Project Area 2, Education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Establishment of new partnerships with community and technical colleges to provide classroom, online, and/or on the job training experiences for elementary, secondary, or higher education students.
- Development, distribution, and use of age-appropriate educational materials for elementary, secondary, or higher education students to raise awareness about opportunities in the drinking water or wastewater utilities sector.
- Development of an innovative program or strategy in a secondary educational institution to recruit to the water utility sector workforce.
- Development of new learning laboratories in secondary educational institutions for student awareness about drinking water and wastewater job skills.

Examples of anticipated outputs for Project Area 3, Regional industry, and workforce development collaborations to address water utility employment needs and coordinate candidate development, particularly in small and rural areas, areas of high unemployment or for water utilities with a high proportion of retirement eligible employees, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Development of a new and/or increased number of regional collaboration program(s) or expansion of an existing collaboration program(s) amongst organizations to address regional water workforce needs in areas of high unemployment or for water utilities facing potentially high retirement rates.
- Establishment of new and/or increased number of partnerships with community organizations, educational institutions, labor organizations, utilities, or other organizations to address the workforce needs of water utilities.

Examples of anticipated outputs for Project Area 4, Education and training programs, including internship or apprenticeship programs, designed for decentralized water workers (i.e., private well and/or septic system service professionals) to support public health outcomes for communities that rely 14 on private wells for drinking water or decentralized systems for adequate treatment and disposal of wastewater, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An increased number of participants in existing or new education and training programs, including internship or apprenticeship programs designed for skilled decentralized water trades.
- An increased number of existing or new education and training programs, including internship or apprenticeship programs designed for skilled decentralized water trades.
- An increased number of available recruitment strategies, materials, and partnerships to inform potential applicants of education and training programs, including internship or apprenticeship programs designed for skilled decentralized water trades.
- Establishment of new partnerships with community and technical colleges to provide classroom, online, and/or on the job training experiences for higher education students.

- Development, distribution, and use of age-appropriate educational materials to raise higher education student awareness about opportunities in the decentralized water sector.

Outcomes are the result, effect, or consequence that will occur from carrying out the activities under the grant and may gauge a project's performance. Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic; must be qualitative or quantitative; and may not necessarily be achievable during the project period. The expected outcomes for the grants awarded under these guidelines may include, but are not limited to:

Examples of anticipated outcomes for Project Area 1, Targeted internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An increased number of individuals that have completed internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs and been placed in water and wastewater utility jobs.
- An increased number of individuals that have completed internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs and received industry credentials that qualify them for utility jobs.
- An increased number of individuals from limited resource communities that have been placed in water and wastewater utility jobs and/or received industry credentials that qualify them for utility jobs.

Examples of anticipated outcomes for Project Area 2, Education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Increased number of students with awareness about career opportunities in the water and wastewater sector as documented by program assessments on knowledge acquisition.
- Integration of educational program into school's science, technology, engineering, and math activities and programs.
- An increased number of students entering the utility workforce or entering postsecondary training or education programs that support the water and wastewater utility workforce.
- Increased program availability, and student participation in programs that support individuals in limited resource communities gain knowledge about, or skills toward, careers in the water and wastewater sector.

Examples of anticipated outcomes for Project Area 3: Regional industry and workforce development collaborations to address water utility employment needs and coordinate candidate development, particularly in small and rural areas, areas of high unemployment or for water utilities with a high proportion of retirement eligible employees, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Increased number of strengthened regional collaborations that support the long-term water utility workforce needs.
- Increased number of individuals in high areas of unemployment being recruited into the water sector.
- Decreased time to backfill for retiring employees or other vacancies to sustain the

workforce.

- Increase in the collective skillset of water utility employees that would meet specific requirements in career advancement (e.g., shifts in staff trained to increased levels of expertise).

Examples of anticipated outcomes for Project Area 4, Education and training programs, including internship or apprenticeship programs, designed for decentralized water workers (i.e., private well and/or septic system service professionals) to support public health outcomes for communities that rely on private wells for drinking water or decentralized systems for adequate treatment and disposal of wastewater, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Increased number of individuals that have completed decentralized water education and training programs, including internship or apprenticeship programs, and been placed in decentralized water jobs.
- Increased number of individuals that have completed decentralized water education and training programs, including internship or apprenticeship programs, and been placed in decentralized water jobs.
- Increased number of individuals from communities with limited resources or access who are aware of the career opportunities in the decentralized water sector.
- Integration of educational program into school's science, technology, engineering, and math activities and programs.
- Increased number of students from limited resource communities entering the utility workforce or entering post-secondary training or education programs that support the decentralized water workforce.

B. Program Goals and Objectives

The activities to be funded under this funding announcement support Pillar 1: Clean Air, Land, and Water for Every American. All applications must be for projects that support that pillar. As utilities make critical investments in infrastructure, drinking water and wastewater utilities should also invest in the development of a strong local workforce to strengthen communities and ensure a steady pipeline of skilled workers for today and tomorrow. In addition to the drinking water and wastewater utility workforce, the workforce that designs, installs, repairs, and maintains decentralized water systems (i.e., private wells and septic systems) are of critical importance in communities and homes that are not served by a drinking water and/or wastewater utility. Drinking water and wastewater utilities, as well as decentralized water systems, provide workers with unique opportunities for access to stable, rewarding, and high-quality careers that protect and support public health and safety.

As part of the Project Narrative, applicants should describe how the project results will link the outcomes to [support Pillar 1](#) and to the goals of:

- (i) increasing educational and training opportunities for water workforce careers through mechanisms like apprenticeships and educational engagement;
- (ii) expanding the public's awareness about the different job opportunities in the water sector: and/or

- (iii) connect individuals to careers in the water sector.

In addition, applicants should describe their plan and approach for tracking and measuring their progress towards achieving expected outputs and outcomes. Additional information regarding the EPA's discussion of environmental results in terms of "outputs" and "outcomes" can be found at [Linking Assistance Agreements to Environmental Results](#) (see [EPA Order 5700.7A1](#), Environmental Results under Assistance Agreements).

C. Statutory Authority

The statutory authority for the awards expected to be made under this funding opportunity is Section 1459E of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), as amended, (42 U.S.C. Section 300j-19e). SDWA 1459E authorizes EPA to award grants to assist in the development and use of innovative activities relating to workforce development and career opportunities in the water utility sector, and to expand public awareness about water utilities and connect individuals to careers in the water utility sector.

D. Funding Type

It is anticipated that cooperative agreements will be funded under this funding opportunity.

Cooperative agreements provide for substantial involvement between the EPA Project Officer and the selected applicant(s) in the performance of the work supported. Although the 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 CFR 200.317](#) and [2 CFR 200.318](#), review of proposed procurement;
- approving qualifications of key personnel (the EPA will not select employees or contractors employed by the award recipient); and
- review and comment on reports prepared under the cooperative agreement (the final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient).

The EPA does not have the authority to select employees or contractors employed by the recipient. The final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient.

4. Application Contents and Format

A. Application Forms

The following forms and documents are required under this announcement:

Mandatory Documents:

1. Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
2. Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)
3. EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54
4. EPA Form 4700-4 Preaward Compliance Review Report

5. Project Narrative Attachment Form: use this to submit your Project Narrative

Optional Documents:

- Other Attachments Form- Biographical Sketches
- Other Attachments Form- Negotiated Indirect Cost Agreement, if applicable

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.

The Project Narrative must include the sections described in Section 4.B of this announcement. The Project Narrative is limited to no more than twenty (20) typewritten, single spaced 8.5x11-inch pages (a page is one side of a piece of paper) including the cover page and executive summary. Pages should be consecutively numbered for ease of reading. It is recommended that applicants use a standard 12-point type with 1-inch margins. While these guidelines establish the minimum type size recommended, applicants are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in selection of an appropriate font for use in the Project Narrative. Do not use a “double column” (aka newspaper) format. Do not include more than one application in any file. Additional pages beyond the 20-page limit will not be considered. Please note that supporting materials, which are limited to biographical sketches and full resumes as described below, are not considered part of the Project Narrative and are not included within the page limit.

B. Project Narrative Description

The application’s Project Narrative must be typewritten and must include the information listed below, making sure to address the review criteria in Section 6. If a particular item is not applicable, clearly state this in the Project Narrative.

1. **Cover Page** (included in the page limit):
 - i. Project title and Project Area;
 - ii. Name of applicant;
 - iii. Key personnel and contact information (i.e., e-mail address and phone number); Total project cost (specify the amount of federal funds requested and the total project cost). The Project Area addressed in the application. (If an applicant submits more than one application it will be rejected.); and
 - iv. The Geographic Scope of the Project
2. **Executive Summary**: Provide a brief summary of the proposed project (should not exceed one page). This should include a brief description of the proposed project and the anticipated environmental outputs and outcomes.
3. **Workplan**: The workplan must address the following sections, for a more detailed description of each section please refer to Section 3.B of this NOFO.
 - i. Project Area
 - ii. Geographic Area
 - iii. Innovative Approach

4. **Project Partnerships:** Effective partnerships are important for the success of projects under this announcement. In their applications, applicants should identify appropriate and necessary partnerships to successfully conduct the project. Applicants should also include a clear description of the roles and responsibilities of specific partners, or planned partners, in the project's components/tasks. If you choose not to partner, applications will be evaluated based on how the applicant demonstrates how it will successfully conduct the project and meet the objectives described in Section 3.A without partners.
5. **Transfer of Results:** The application should include a description of the applicant's plan for active transfer of project results (as defined under each Project Area in Section 3A, methods and/or effective strategies to water utilities, states, tribes, and/or other interested stakeholders, so that the other entities may better build their drinking water and wastewater workforce. Reference Section 3.A of this announcement for additional information. This should include a detailed explanation of how the proposed results will or could be scaled to the broader water sector, along with the proposed approaches that will or could be utilized to support such wider adoption by the water sector.
6. **Environmental Results and Measuring Progress:** Stated Objective/Link to EPA's Pillars
List the objective of the project and the linkage to support Pillar 1: Clean Air, Land, and Water for Every American
 - a) **Results of Activities (Outputs):** Describe the anticipated products/results which are expected to be achieved from accomplishment of the project and describe an approach for tracking and reporting your progress toward achieving the expected project output(s); (examples of outputs can be found in Section 3.A.(2). of this announcement).
 - b) **Projected Environmental Improvement (Outcomes):** List the anticipated environmental improvements that will be accomplished because of the project. These improvements are changes or benefits to the environment or public health which are a result of the accomplishment of the work plan commitments and outputs. Describe an approach for tracking and reporting progress toward achieving the expected project outcome(s); (examples of outcomes can be found in Section 3.A.(2). of this announcement).
7. **Milestone Schedule:** Provide a projected milestone schedule for the proposed project period (up to three years). The milestone schedule should provide a breakout of the project activities into phases with associated tasks, number of training and technical assistance activities projected to be completed per quarter, and a timeframe for completion of tasks and an approach for ensuring that awarded funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. The project start date will follow award acceptance by the successful applicant.
8. **Detailed Budget Narrative:** Provide a detailed budget and estimated funding amounts for each project component/task. This section provides an opportunity for a narrative description of the budget or aspects of the budget found in the SF-424A such as "other" and "contractual."

Applicants must itemize costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, contractual costs, travel, equipment, supplies, other direct costs, indirect costs and total costs. All subawardee funding should be in the “other” cost category. Describe itemized costs in enough detail for the EPA to determine the allowability of costs for each project component/task, as well as the cost-effectiveness and reasonableness of all costs. Please see the EPA’s [Budget Development Guidance](#) for additional information on preparing budget narratives, including a sample budget (Appendix 2), and the [Indirect Cost Guidance](#). [Please also reference the EPA’s training modules on how to develop a budget.](#)

9. Programmatic Capability/Experience:

- a) Organizational Experience - Provide a brief description of your organization and experience related to the proposed project, and your organization’s infrastructure as it relates to its ability to successfully implement the proposed project.
- b) Staff Expertise/Qualifications - Provide a list of key staff and briefly describe their experience/expertise/qualifications, cultural competency including appropriate language fluency to serve communities in the geographic areas to be served, and knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the project,. Include an estimate of the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) workers (based on 2080 hours per year/FTE). A biographical sketch must be submitted for each major project manager, support staff member or other major project participant. Biographical sketches are not counted in the page limit. Full resumes may be included as an appendix to the application narrative and are not counted in the page limit.

10. Past Performance: Briefly describe federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements but not contracts) that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably the EPA agreements). Please describe:

- a) Whether, and how, you were able to successfully complete and manage those agreements.
- b) Your history of meeting the reporting requirements under those agreements include submitting acceptable final technical reports.
- c) How you documented and/or reported on whether you were making progress towards achieving the expected results (i.e., outputs and outcomes) under those agreements. If you were not making progress, please indicate whether, and how, you documented why not.

In evaluating an applicant’s past performance, the Agency will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources, including information from the EPA files and/or from current and prior federal agency grantors/cooperative agreements (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information provided by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance information, please indicate this in the application, and you will receive a neutral score for these factors under Section 6.B. (a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). Failure to provide any programmatic past performance or reporting information, or to include a statement that you do not have any relevant or available past performance or reporting information, may result in a zero score for these factors (see also Section 6.B).

Note: The applicant should also provide in the Project Narrative with any additional information, to the extent not already addressed above, that addresses the selection criteria in Section 6.B.

C. Applicants Using Contractors

Applicants must compete contracts for services and products, including consultant contracts, and conduct cost and price analyses, to the extent required by the [procurement provisions](#) of the regulations at 2 CFR Part 200.

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. If an applicant selected for award has named a specific subrecipient, contractor, or consultant in the application, it does not relieve the applicant of its obligations to comply with subaward and/or competitive procurement requirements.

The EPA will not consider the qualifications, experience, and expertise of named subrecipients and/or named contractor(s) during the application evaluation process unless the applicant provides documentation that it has complied with these requirements.

For additional guidance, applicants should review [EPA’s Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements](#), [EPA’s Subaward Policy](#), and [EPA’s Subaward Policy Frequent Questions](#). The EPA expects recipients of funding to comply with competitive procurement contracting requirements in 2 CFR Parts 200 and 1500, as well as the requirements in 2 CFR Part 200.321 and 40 CFR Part 33 Subpart C.

D. Release Copies of Applications

EPA recommends that applicants do not include confidential business information (CBI) in applications. However, if CBI is included, it will be treated in accordance with 40 CFR Part 2, Subpart B. Applicants must clearly indicate which portion(s) of their application they are claiming as CBI. EPA will evaluate such claims in accordance with 40 CFR Part 2. If no claim of confidentiality is made, information may be made available to the public by EPA without further notice to the applicant. See 40 CFR 2.203(a), 41 Fed. Reg. 36,907.

E. Coalition Coverage

A coalition is formed when two or more eligible applicants coordinate to submit a single application. Coalitions must identify which single eligible organization will be the recipient of the grant and which eligible organization(s) will receive subawards from the recipient (the “pass-through entity”). The pass-through entity that administers the grant and subawards will be accountable to the EPA for proper expenditure of the funds and reporting and will be the point of contact for the coalition. Subawards must be consistent with the definition of that term in [2 CFR 200.1](#) and comply with the [EPA’s Subaward Policy](#).

5. Submission Requirements and Deadlines

A. Submission Dates and Times

October 5, 2026 11:59 pm ET

Application Submission Deadline

October 5, 2026 11:59 pm ET

Application Submission Deadline (Local Time)

Grants.gov creates a date and time record when it receives the application. If you submit the same application more than once, we will accept the last on-time submission.

B. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM.gov)

SAM.gov

You must have an active account with SAM.gov. SAM.gov will provide a UEI for your organization, which is required to apply for grants using Grants.gov. To register, go to [SAM.gov Entity Registration](#) and click Get Started. From the same page, you can also click on the [Entity Registration Checklist](#) for the information you will need to register. Make sure you are current with SAM.gov and UEI requirements before applying for the award.

SAM.gov registration can take several weeks. [Begin that process today.](#)

Grants.gov

You must also have an active account with [Grants.gov](#). You can see step-by-step instructions at the Grants.gov [Quick Start Guide for Applicants](#).

Please visit [How to Register to Apply for Grants](#) for additional information.

C. Submission Instructions

You must submit your application through Grants.gov. See Section 5.B. above for information on getting registered.

Important tips:

- 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.
- See the Quick Start Guide for Applicants for instructions on how to submit.
- Make sure your application passes the Grants.gov validation checks.
- Do not encrypt, zip, or password protect any files.
- Your application must be submitted by an official representative of your organization who is registered with Grants.gov and is authorized to sign applications for Federal financial assistance.
- If you receive an error or the 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.
- See Grants.gov Errors for information on other Grants.gov errors.
- 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.

D. 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 Funding Opportunity Number (FON): **EPA-OW-OWM-26-03** in the subject line to **WaterWorkforceNOFO@epa.gov** before the application deadline time and date and must include the following:
 - Grants.gov ticket/case number(s)
 - Description of the issue
 - The entire application package in PDF format.

Without this information, the EPA may not be able to consider applications submitted outside of Grants.gov. Any application submitted after the application deadline time and date deadline will be deemed ineligible and **not** be considered.

Please note that successful submission through Grants.gov or email does not necessarily mean your application is eligible for award.

E. Intergovernmental Review

The application is not subject to Intergovernmental Review.

6. Application Review Information

A. Responsiveness Review

Applications must meet the eligibility requirements described in [Section 2](#) to be evaluated. Applicants not meeting these requirements will be deemed ineligible and will be notified within 15 calendar days of the determination.

- Applications must adhere to the page limit requirements. Any pages over the limit(s) in [Section 4](#) will not be reviewed.
- Initial applications must be submitted *on or before* the application deadline through Grants.gov or through limited circumstances as expressed in [Section 5](#). The EPA will not evaluate applications that are not submitted on time.
- *Technical difficulties applying:* Applicants having technical difficulties applying must contact the Grants.gov hotline at 1-800-518-4726 *and* then must email a PDF of the full application to the EPA contact listed in [Section 1](#). The submission must be received prior to the application deadline for consideration.
- Applicants should explicitly address these criteria as part of their application package submittal in the project narrative. Each application will be rated using a point system. Applications will be evaluated based on a total of 100 possible points.

B. Review Criteria

Points	Evaluation Criteria
(25 points)	1) Project Area Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability and approach for effectively addressing the Project Area in Section 3.A.(1) of the NOFO that the application focuses on. In conducting this evaluation, the following factors will be considered: i. The extent and quality of the overall approach to addressing the Project Area described in the application and the proposed community outreach strategies, particularly if the project will involve and benefit rural, small, and tribal communities. (10 points) ii. The extent to which the applicant describes the proposed approach to share (or make available) the project activities, the results of the project activities, and the lessons learned to geographically diverse areas. (7 points) iii. The extent to which the applicant includes innovative approaches in addressing the workforce needs of drinking water and wastewater utilities. (8 points)
(10 points)	2) Project Partnerships Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability to demonstrate appropriate and necessary partnerships to successfully conduct the project, including whether they have provided a clear description of the roles, or planned roles, of each partner in the project's component/ tasks, and how these partnerships will contribute to the success of the project. If the applicant does not intend to have partners, then the applicant will be evaluated based on how they demonstrate they will be able to successfully conduct the project and meet the objectives described in Section 3.A.2 without the use of partners. (See Section 3.A.2 of this announcement)
(10 points)	3) Transfer of Results Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated based on how well they demonstrate the applicant's plan for active transfer of project results, and methods and/or effective strategies to other water utilities, as well as states, tribes, and/or other interested stakeholders to assist them with building their drinking water and wastewater utility workforce (see Section 3.A.3. of this announcement)

(10 points)	4) Environmental Results and Measuring Progress Applications will be evaluated on the extent and quality to which the application demonstrates: i. The potential to achieve environmental results, anticipated outputs and outcomes, and how the outputs and outcomes are linked to Pillar 1: Clean Air, Land, and Water for Every American described in Section 3.B. of this announcement. (5 points) ii. A sound plan for measuring and tracking progress toward achieving the anticipated outputs and outcomes (examples of outputs and outcomes can be found in Section 3.A.2. of this announcement). (5 points)
(15 points)	5) Milestone Schedule/Detailed Budget Applications will be evaluated based on the extent and quality to which the application addresses each of the following sub-criteria. i. The adequacy and completeness of the milestone schedule, including timeframes and major milestones to complete significant project tasks, and an approach to ensure that awarded funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. (7.5 points) ii. The reasonableness of the budget and estimated funding amounts for each project component/task. Applicants will be evaluated based on the adequacy of the information provided in the detailed budget and whether the proposed costs are cost effective, reasonable, and allowable, including consideration of indirect/administrative costs. (7.5 points)
(20 points)	6) Programmatic Capability/Experience Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated based on the applicant's ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project considering the following. i. Organizational experience related to the proposed project, and their infrastructure as it relates to the ability to successfully implement the proposed project. (10 points) ii. Staff expertise/qualifications, cultural competency to effectively work with communities in the geographic area to be served, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the project. (10 points)
(10 points)	7) Past Performance 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 federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements but not contracts) performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements). (4 points) (ii) History of meeting reporting requirements under federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements but not contracts) performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements) and submitting acceptable final technical reports under those agreements. (2 points) (iii) Extent and quality to which the applicant adequately documented and/or reported on their progress towards achieving the expected results (e.g., outcomes and outputs) under federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements but not contracts) performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements), and if such progress was not being made, whether the applicant adequately documented and/or reported why not. (4 points) Note: In evaluating applicants under items i, ii, and iii of this criteria, 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 for these subfactors (items i, ii, and iii 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.
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C. Review and Selection Process

All applications will first be screened by EPA staff against the threshold criteria in Section 2.A.1 of the announcement. Applications that do not pass the threshold review will not be evaluated further or considered for funding.

Panels comprised of EPA staff will review the eligible applications by each Project Area based on the evaluation criteria listed in Section 6.B. Four separate ranking lists, one per Project Area, will be developed based on the panel evaluations. The ranking list for each Project Area will be provided to the Selection Official(s) who make(s) the final funding decisions

While the EPA intends to make awards in each Project Area it reserves the right not to do so and to redistribute the number of awards per area. The ranking lists will be provided to the Selection Official, who makes the final funding decisions.

Other Evaluation Factors

Final funding decisions will be made by the selection official. In making the final funding decisions, the selection official may also consider the following factors: the application score/ranking on each ranking list and may also consider other factors such as geographical distribution of funds, program priorities, and whether an applicant has received Innovative Water Workforce funding in the past.

D. Risk Review

The EPA will consider any comments by the applicant, along with information available in the responsibility/qualification records in SAM.gov., when doing the risk review as required by [2 CFR 200.206](#).

7. Award Notices

The EPA anticipates notification to successful applicants will be made by the Office of Wastewater Management. The notification will be sent to the original signer of the application or the project contact listed in the application. This notification is not an authorization to begin work. The official notification of an award will be made by Grants Management Division. Selection does not guarantee an award will be made. Statutory authorization, funding, or other issues during the award process may affect the ability of the EPA to make an award. 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, which must be approved by the 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.

8. Post-Award Requirements and Administration

A. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

The recipient and any sub-recipient must comply with the applicable [General Terms and Conditions](#). These terms and conditions are in addition to the assurances and certifications made as part of the award, terms and conditions, and restrictions reflected on the official assistance award document.

Awards issued as a result of this funding opportunity are subject to the requirements of the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards; Title [2 CFR Part 200](#) and [2 CFR Part 1500](#).

B. Reporting

[EPA's General Terms and Conditions](#) in the Notice of Award will have information on performance and financial reports, including:

- How often you will report.
- Any required form or formatting.
- How to submit them.

C. Subaward and Executive Compensation Reporting

The Federal Financial Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) requires:

- Data entry at SAM.gov for all subawards and subcontracts issued for \$30,000 or more.
- Reporting executive compensation for both recipient and subaward organizations.

9. Other Information

A. Additional Provisions for Applicants

Additional provisions that apply this funding opportunity and/or awards made under this funding opportunity, can be found at [EPA NOFO Clauses](#). If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please contact the EPA point of contact to obtain the provisions.

Termination:

Consistent with 2 CFR 200.340, EPA may terminate awards made under this NOFO in part or its entirety:

- (a) If a recipient or subrecipient fails to comply with the terms and conditions of the award, including statutory or regulatory requirements;
- (b) With the consent of the recipient when both the recipient and the EPA agree upon the termination conditions, which include the effective date and, in the case of partial termination, the portion to be terminated;
- (c) If a recipient sends the EPA a written notification of the reasons for such termination, the effective date, and in the case of partial termination, the portion to be terminated; however, if the EPA determines that the remaining portion of the Federal award will not accomplish the purposes for which the Federal award was made, the EPA may terminate the award in its entirety; or
- (d) Pursuant to the terms and conditions specified in the Federal award.
- (e) By the EPA or pass-through entity to the extent authorized by law, if an award no longer effectuates the program goals or agency priorities.