AGENCY: **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)**

TITLE: **Gulf of Mexico Program Farmer to Farmer Cooperative Agreements**

ACTION: **Request for Proposals (RFP)**

RFP NUMBER: **EPA-GM-2017-FARMER**

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE (CFDA) NO: 66.475

DATES: Proposal packages must be submitted electronically to EPA through Grants.gov (http://www.grants.gov) no later than September 22th at 11:59 EDT in order to be considered for funding.

SUMMARY: This notice announces the availability of funds and solicits proposals to improve water quality, habitat and environmental education through the demonstration of improved crop or land management involving new, novel, or experimental technologies, methods, approaches or techniques. The project is designed to support farmer-led organizations in the Mississippi River watershed.

FUNDING/AWARDS: The total estimated funding for this competitive opportunity is approximately $2 million. EPA anticipates awarding two grants from this announcement, subject to availability of funds.

Tentative Timeline

August 10th	RFP Posted
August 24th	Initial Q&A posted at https://www.epa.gov/gmpo/. Please submit questions to GMP-RFP@epa.gov. Q&A will be updated weekly with new questions received.
September 22nd	Proposals Due to the Gulf of Mexico Program at 11:59pm EDT
October 31st	EPA Issues Notice of Tentative Award
January 26th	EPA Funds Approved Application Package

The above lines (other than the proposal submission date) are anticipated dates and subject to change.

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I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Background

The Gulf of Mexico Program (GMP) is a non-regulatory program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) founded to facilitate collaborative actions to protect, maintain, and restore the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico in ways consistent with the economic well-being of the Region. To carry out its mission, GMP continues to maintain and expand partnerships with State and Federal agencies, federally recognized tribes, local governments and authorities, academia, regional business and industry, agricultural and environmental organizations, and individual citizens and communities. For more information, please see https://www.epa.gov/gulfofmexico.

B. Scope of Work

EPA will award funds to improve water quality, habitat and environmental education in the Mississippi River Basin. This project will support farmer-led organizations with a proven track record of implementing demonstration projects through outreach with area farmers and obtaining measureable results, including improved water quality and/or an increase in farmer to farmer education and outreach. Demonstration projects must entail novel or innovative techniques, methods, or approaches that should collect data on the results of each approach and provide results to the landowner to inform future farming decisions and to better understand (or ground truth) how different management practices affect water quality and quantity, yields and farming costs. Applicants will be asked to demonstrate how these funds will be leveraged to improve the reach of the project. This project will be considered successful if farmers demonstrate and inspire other farmers to implement similar management changes. Applicants should demonstrate a successful history of working with farmers to implement novel or innovative demonstration projects with results.

The project must also include at least one of the following outputs:

Water Quality Improvement:

- The project must demonstrate a minimum of 5% improvement in at least one water quality parameter in a water body and/or segment by the end of the project period as compared to the initial baseline. Examples of water quality parameters that could be demonstrated in a water quality improvement project include but are not limited to: dissolved oxygen, pH, turbidity, bacteria, nutrients, temperature, and garbage/trash (e.g. trash traps; cleanups coupled with prevention outreach; implementing creative prevention methods).

Protect, Enhance or Restore Habitat

- Identify the expected number of habitat acres that will be enhanced, restored and/or protected and provide a report at the end of project period of the actual number of acres enhanced, restored, and/or protected.

Only projects that take place in HUC 07 (Upper Mississippi) and HUC 08 (Lower Mississippi) will be considered. The agency intends to fund one project in the Upper Mississippi (HUC 07) and one in the Lower Mississippi (HUC 08).
Please also identify the six-digit or eight-digit Hydrologic Unit Code(s) (HUC) in which activities will occur.

C. EPA Strategic Plan Linkage & Anticipated Outcomes, Outputs & Performance Measures

Pursuant to Section 6a of EPA Order 5700.7, "Environmental Results under EPA Assistance Agreements," EPA must link proposed assistance agreements to the Agency's Strategic Plan. EPA also requires that grant applicants and recipients adequately describe environmental outputs and outcomes to be achieved under assistance agreements (see EPA Order 5700.7, Environmental Results under Assistance Agreements, http://www.epa.gov/ogd/grants/award/5700.7.pdf).

1. Linkage to EPA Strategic Plan. All proposals must support progress towards the following EPA 2014-2018 Strategic Plan Goals:

a) Goal 2: Protecting America's Waters. "Objective 2.2: Protect and Restore Watersheds and Aquatic Ecosystems," which states "protect, restore, and sustain the quality of rivers, lakes, streams, and wetlands on a watershed basis, and sustainably manage and protect coastal and ocean resources and ecosystems."

b) Cross Agency Strategy: Working Toward a Sustainable Future, which states, "expand the conversation on environmentalism by engaging and empowering stakeholders, including groups with which EPA has not traditionally worked, using multiple forms of outreach, collaboration, and information."

Please read EPA's FY 2014-2018 Strategic Plan for more information.

Outputs. 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 of time or by a specified date. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative but must be measurable during an assistance agreement funding period. **Progress reports and a final report will also be a required output for every project, as specified in Section VI(C) of this announcement, "Reporting Requirement."** The project must include at least one of the outputs stated in Section IB, above.

Additionally, the project must account for the number of expected audiences and/or individuals to be served. The recipient must track and report the actual number of individuals reached and method applied.

2. Outcomes. The term "outcome" means the result, effect or consequence that will occur from carrying out an environmental program or activity that is related to an environmental or programmatic goal or objective. Outcomes may be qualitative and environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic in nature, but must also be quantitative.

3. Additional information regarding EPA's definition of environmental results in terms of "outputs" and "outcomes" can be found at: https://www.epa.gov/grants/linking-assistance-agreements-environmental-results. For a logic model of environmental outputs and outcomes, please see the following: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/draft-envresults-forsfbaywebsite-revisedszdrfinal.pdf.

4. Project Performance. During preparation of the proposal, the applicant should consider the following questions in order to develop output and/or outcome measures which document project results:
i) What are the measureable short term and longer term results that the project will achieve?
ii) How will the applicant measure progress in achieving the expected and measureable results?

D. Supplementary Information.

The statutory authority for this action is the Clean Water Act, §104(b)(3), which authorizes the award of cooperative agreements to conduct and promote the coordination and acceleration of research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys and studies relating to the causes, effects, extent, prevention, reduction, and elimination of pollution. Demonstrations must involve new or experimental technologies, methods, or approaches, where the results of the project will be disseminated so that others can benefit from the knowledge gained in the demonstration project. A project that is accomplished through the performance of routine, traditional, or established practices, or a project that is simply intended to carry out a task rather than transfer information or advance the state of knowledge, however worthwhile the project might be, is not a demonstration.

II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. What is the amount of funding available?

The total estimated funding expected to be available for awards under this competitive funding opportunity is approximately $2.0 million.

B. How many agreements will EPA award in this competition?

EPA anticipates awarding two grants under this announcement, with each award being no more than $1,000,000 subject to the availability of funds, quality of evaluated proposals, and other applicable considerations.

In addition, EPA reserves the right to make additional awards under this announcement, consistent with Agency policy, if additional funding becomes available after the original selections. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than six months from the date of the original selections.

C. Partial Funding

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

D. What is the project period for awards resulting from this solicitation?

The estimated project period for awards resulting from this solicitation will begin in Calendar Year 2018. Proposed project periods may be up to three years.

E. Funding Type

The funding for selected projects will be in the form of a cooperative agreement. Cooperative agreements permit substantial involvement between the EPA Project Officer and the selected applicants 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 this project will be:

- 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 317 and 2 CFR 318, review of proposed procurement;
- approving qualifications of key personnel (EPA will not select employees or contractors employed by the award recipient);
- review and comment on reports prepared under the cooperative agreement (the final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient).

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Entities

The following entities are eligible to apply for funding under this announcement unless restricted by the authorizing statute(s); State and local governments, interstate agencies, Tribes, colleges and universities, and other public or non-profit organizations.

Non-profit organization, as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative or other 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 its net proceeds to maintain, improve and/or expand its operations. Note that 2 CFR Part 200 specifically excludes the following types of organizations from the definition of "non-profit organization" because they are separately defined in the regulation: (i) institutions of higher education; and (ii) state, local and federally-recognized Indian tribal governments. While not considered to be a "non-profit organization(s)" as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, Institutions of Higher Education and state, local and federally-recognized Indian tribal governments are, nevertheless, eligible to submit applications under this RFA. Hospitals operated by state, tribal, or local governments or that meet the definition of nonprofit at 2 CFR 200.70 are also eligible to apply. For-profit colleges, universities, trade schools, and hospitals are ineligible.

For-profit organizations are not an eligible entity for this funding opportunity. Additionally, non-profit 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.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

No matching funds are required under this competition. Although cost-sharing/matching is not required as a condition of eligibility under this competition, under Section V of this announcement EPA will evaluate proposals based on a leveraging criterion.

Leveraging is generally when an applicant proposes to provide its own additional funds/resources or those from third party sources to support or complement the project they are awarded under the competition which are above and beyond the EPA grant funds awarded. Any leveraged funds/resources, and their source, must be identified in the proposal (See Section IV of the announcement). Leveraged funds and resources may take various forms as noted below.

--*Voluntary cost share is a form of leveraging*. Voluntary cost sharing is when an applicant voluntarily proposes to legally commit to provide costs or contributions to support the project when a cost share is not required. Applicants who propose to use a voluntary cost share must include the costs or contributions for the voluntary cost share in the project budget on the SF-424. If an applicant proposes a voluntary cost share, the following apply:

- A voluntary cost share is subject to the match provisions in the grant regulations (2 CFR 200.306).
- A voluntary cost share may only be met with eligible and allowable costs.

- 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.
- The recipient is legally obligated to meet any proposed voluntary cost share that is included in the approved project budget. If the proposed voluntary cost share does not materialize during grant performance, then EPA may reconsider the legitimacy of the award and/or take other appropriate action as authorized by 2 CFR 200.

--*Other leveraged funding/resources that are not identified as a voluntary cost share.* This form of leveraging may be met by funding from another federal grant, from an applicant's own resources, or resources from other third party sources. This form of leveraging should not be included in the budget and the costs need not be eligible and allowable project costs under the EPA assistance agreement. While this form of leveraging should not be included in the budget, the grant workplan should include a statement indicating that the applicant is expected to produce the proposed leveraging consistent with the terms of the announcement and the applicant's proposal. If applicants propose to provide this form of leveraging, EPA expects them to make the effort to secure the leveraged resources described in their proposals. If the proposed leveraging does not materialize during grant performance, then EPA may reconsider the legitimacy of the award and/or take other appropriate action as authorized by 2 CFR Parts 200 or 1500.

C. Threshold Eligibility Criteria

These are requirements that if not met by the time of proposal submission will result in elimination of the proposal from consideration for funding. Only proposals from eligible entities (see above) that meet all of these criteria will be evaluated against the ranking factors in Section V of this announcement. 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.

1. **Substantial Compliance:** Proposals must substantially comply with the proposal submission instructions and requirements set forth in Section IV of this announcement or else they will be rejected. However, where a page limit is expressed in Section IV with respect to the narrative proposal, pages in excess of the page limitation will not be reviewed.

2. **Proposal Submission:** In addition, proposals must be submitted through Grants.gov as stated in Section IV of this announcement (except in the limited circumstances where another mode of submission is specifically allowed for as explained in Section IV) on or before the proposal submission deadline published in Section IV of this announcement. Applicants are responsible for following the submission instructions in Section IV of this announcement to ensure that their proposal is timely submitted.

3. **EPA Strategic Plan:** Proposals must support the EPA Strategic Goals identified in Section I.C.

4. **Program Relevance:** Proposals must provide farmer to farmer novel or innovative demonstration and education to be considered.

5. **Program outputs:** Proposals must demonstrate how the project meets at least one of the outputs in Section I.B. If the project does not address at least one of the outputs listed in I.B. it will not be considered.

6. **Geographic Location:** Proposals must only include projects carried out in either HUC 07 or HUC 08, as identified in Section 1.B. Proposals that include projects outside of HUC 07 or 08, or include projects in both HUCs, will not be considered. Applicants that wish to apply for projects in both HUCs must submit separate proposals for each HUC.

IV. PROPOSAL AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Requirement to Submit Through Grants.gov and Limited Exception Procedures

Applicants, except as noted below, must apply electronically through Grants.gov under this funding opportunity based on the grants.gov instructions in this announcement. If an applicant does not have the technical capability to apply electronically through grants.gov because of limited or no internet access which prevents them from being able to upload the required application materials to Grants.gov, the applicant must contact OGDWaivers@epa.gov or the address listed below in writing (e.g., by hard copy, email) *at least 15 calendar days prior to the submission deadline under this announcement* to request approval to submit their application materials through an alternate method.

Mailing Address:
OGD Waivers
c/o Barbara Perkins
USEPA Headquarters
William Jefferson Clinton Building
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N. W.
Mail Code: 3903R
Washington, DC 20460

Courier Address:
OGD Waivers
c/o Barbara Perkins
Ronald Reagan Building
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Rm # 51267
Washington, DC 20004

In the request, the applicant must include the following information:

- Funding Opportunity Number (FON)
- Organization Name and DUNS
- Organization's Contact Information (email address and phone number)
- Explanation of how they lack the technical capability to apply electronically through Grants.gov because of 1) limited internet access or 2) no internet access which prevents them from being able to upload the required application materials through Grants.gov.

EPA will only consider alternate submission exception requests based on the two reasons stated above and will timely respond to the request -- all other requests will be denied. If an alternate submission method is approved, the applicant will receive documentation of this approval and further instructions on how to apply under this announcement. Applicants will be required to submit the documentation of approval with any initial application submitted under the alternative method. In addition, any submittal through an alternative method must comply with all applicable requirements and deadlines in the announcement including the submission deadline and requirements regarding proposal content and page limits (although the documentation of approval of an alternate submission method will not count against any page limits).

If an exception is granted, it is valid for submissions to EPA for the remainder of the entire calendar year in which the exception was approved and can be used to justify alternative submission methods for application submissions made through December 31 of the calendar year in which the exception was approved (e.g., if the exception was approved on March 1, 2017, it is valid for any competitive or non-competitive application submission to EPA through December 31, 2017). Applicants need only request an exception once in a calendar year and all exceptions will expire on December 31 of that calendar year. Applicants must request a new exception from required electronic submission through Grants.gov for submissions for any succeeding calendar year. For example, if there is a competitive opportunity issued on December 1, 2017 with a submission deadline of January 15, 2018, the applicant would need a new exception to submit through alternative methods beginning January 1, 2018.

Please note that the process described in this section is only for requesting alternate submission methods. All other inquiries about this announcement must be directed to the Agency Contact listed in Section VII of the announcement. **Queries or requests submitted to the email address identified above for any reason other than to request an alternate submission method will not be acknowledged or answered.**

B. Submission Instructions

The electronic submission of your application must be made by an official representative of your institution who is registered with Grants.gov and is authorized to sign applications for Federal assistance. For more information on the registration requirements that must be completed in order to submit an application through grants.gov, go to Grants.gov and click on "Applicants" on the top of the page and then go to the "Get Registered" link on the page. *If your organization is not currently registered with Grants.gov, please encourage your office to designate an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) and ask that individual to begin the registration process as soon as possible.*

Please note that the registration process also requires that your organization have a DUNS number and a current registration with the System for Award Management (SAM) and the process of obtaining both could take a month or more. 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 submission deadline. Registration on grants.gov, SAM.gov, and DUNS number assignment is FREE.

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

To begin the application process under this grant announcement, go to Grants.gov and click on "Applicants" on the top of the page and then "Apply for Grants" from the dropdown menu and then follow the instructions accordingly. Please note: To apply through grants.gov, you must use Adobe Reader software and download the compatible Adobe Reader version. For more information about Adobe Reader, to verify compatibility, or to download the free software, please visit Adobe Reader Compatibility Information on Grants.gov

You may also be able to access the application package for this announcement by searching for the opportunity on Grants.gov. Go to Grants.gov and then click on "Search Grants" at the top of the page and enter the Funding Opportunity Number, EPA-GM-2017-FARMER, or the CFDA number that applies to the announcement (CFDA 66.475), in the appropriate field and click the Search button.

Please note that Grants.gov is strongly encouraging users to sign up for and use their "Workspace" feature when applying for opportunities. Grants.gov will be phasing out the "legacy" application process, so EPA recommends that all applicants begin using Workspace as soon as possible so they are prepared when the "legacy" application process is no longer available. Please see the following link and instructional video for training and additional information regarding the "Workspace" feature: https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-tools-and-tips.html

Application Submission Deadline: Your organization's AOR must submit your complete application package electronically to EPA through Grants.gov no later than September 22th, 2017 at 11:59 pm EDT. *Please allow for enough time to successfully submit your application process and allow for unexpected errors that may require you to resubmit.*
Please submit all of the application materials described below using the grants.gov application package that you downloaded using the instructions above. For additional instructions on completing and submitting the electronic application package, click on the "Show Instructions" tab that is accessible within the application package itself.

Application Materials

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. Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)
4. Narrative Proposal (Project Narrative Attachment Form)-prepared as described in Section IV of the announcement

Applications submitted through grants.gov will be time and date stamped electronically. ***Applicants should confirm EPA receipt of their proposal with an email to gmp-rfp@epa.gov as soon as possible after the submission deadline, but no later than within 15 days of the application deadline. Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.***

C. Technical Issues With Submission

1. Once the application package has been completed, the "Submit" button should be enabled. If the "Submit" button is not active, please call Grants.gov for assistance at 1-800-518-4726. 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. Applicants should save the completed application package with two different file names before providing it to the AOR to avoid having to re-create the package should submission problems be experienced or a revised application needs to be submitted.
2. Submitting the application. The application package must be transferred to Grants.gov by an AOR. The AOR should close all other software before attempting to submit the application package. Click the "submit" button of the application package. Your Internet browser will launch and a sign-in page will appear. **Note: Minor problems are not uncommon with transfers to Grants.gov. It is essential to allow sufficient time to ensure that your application is submitted to Grants.gov BEFORE the due date identified in Section IV of the solicitation.** The Grants.gov support desk operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, except Federal Holidays. A successful transfer will end with an on-screen acknowledgement. For documentation purposes, print or screen capture this acknowledgement. If a submission problem occurs, reboot the computer – turning the power off may be necessary – and re-attempt the submission.
   Note: Grants.gov issues a "case number" upon a request for assistance.

3. Transmission Difficulties. If transmission difficulties that result in a late transmission, no transmission, or rejection of the transmitted application are experienced, and following the above instructions do not resolve the problem so that the application is submitted to Grants.gov by the deadline date and time, follow the guidance below. The Agency will make a decision concerning acceptance of each late submission on a case-by-case basis. All emails, as described below, are to be sent to GMP-RFP@epa.gov with the FON in the subject line. If you are unable to email, contact Rachel Houge at 228-304-7441. Be aware that EPA will only consider accepting applications that were unable to transmit due to Grants.gov or relevant www.Sam.gov system issues or for

unforeseen exigent circumstances, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access. **Failure of an applicant to submit timely because they did not properly or timely register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov is not an acceptable reason to justify acceptance of a late submittal.**

a. If you are experiencing problems resulting in an inability to upload the application to Grants.gov, it is essential to call Grants.gov for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 before the application deadline. 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. **Be sure to obtain a case number from Grants.gov.** If the problems stem from unforeseen exigent circumstances unrelated to Grants.gov, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access, contact GMP-RFP@epa.gov.

b. Unsuccessful transfer of the application package: If a successful transfer of the application cannot be accomplished even with assistance from Grants.gov due to electronic submission system issues or unforeseen exigent circumstances, and you have already attempted to resolve the issue by contacting Grants.gov, send an email message to GMP-RFP@epa.gov prior to the application deadline. The email message must document the problem and include the Grants.gov case number as well as the entire application in PDF format as an attachment.

c. Grants.gov rejection of the application package: If a notification is received from Grants.gov stating that the application has been rejected for reasons other than late submittal and it is too late to reapply, promptly send an email to GMP-RFP@epa.gov with the FON in the subject line within one business day of the closing date of this solicitation. The email should include any materials provided by Grants.gov and attach the entire application in PDF format.

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

D. Content of Proposal Submission

The proposal package ***must*** include all of the following materials:

☐**Standard Form (SF) 424, Application for Federal Assistance**

Complete the form (available at https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-grantee-forms. For form instructions see, https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/form-instructions/sf-424-instructions.html **Please be sure to include organization email address in Block 5 of the Standard Form SF 424.**

Please note that the organizational Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number must be included on the SF-424. Organizations may obtain a DUNS number at no cost by calling the toll-free DUNS number request line at 1-866-705-5711.

☐**Standard Form (SF) 424A, Budget Information**

Complete the form (available at https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-grantee-forms). For form instructions see, https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/form-instructions/sf-424a-instructions.html.

☐**Standard Form (SF) 424B, Assurances for non-construction forms**

Complete the form (available at https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-grantee-forms).

☐**Narrative Proposal *(See Appendix B Narrative and Budget Sample)***

The Narrative Proposal **(sections 1-3 below)** cannot exceed a maximum of **ten single-spaced** typewritten pages. EPA recommends that proposals be in 12-point font or larger and readability is of paramount importance. Supporting materials, such as resumes, can be submitted as attachments and are not included in the **ten-page limit**.

1) Proposal Information Page (one page only – included in ten-page limit)

- **a)** Project Title
- **b)** Applicant Information. Include applicant (organization) name, address, contact person, phone number, fax, e-mail address and DUNS number.
- **c)** Total Project Cost. Specify total cost of the project, percentage of funds requested from EPA, percentage of leveraged funds (if applicable).
- **d)** Briefly describe how your project meets following EPA Strategic Goal (Protecting America's Waters and Cross Agency Strategy: Working Toward a Sustainable Future, See Section I.C for more information)
- **e)** Project Description. Please summarize your project.
- **f)** Measurable Outputs. Provide a brief description of the major outputs of your project.
- **g)** Place of Performance. Please identify the regional as well as the six-digit or eight-digit HUC where your project will take place.
- **h)** Project period. Provide anticipated project start date and anticipated project completion date.

2) Narrative Proposal (included in ten-page limit)

The narrative proposal must explicitly describe how the proposed project meets the guidelines established in Sections I-III of this announcement (including the threshold eligibility criteria in Section III.C), and must address each of the evaluation criteria set forth in Section V.

- **a) Project Description/Approach:** The summary shall contain the following components:
  - i. Detailed project information, description of specific actions and methods to be undertaken and the responsible institutions, including estimated time line for each task. Enough detail should be provided to assess project success without requiring more information from applicant.
  - ii. Explanation of project benefits to the public, and specifically the potential audience(s) served.
  - iii. Describe your organization's history and experience with implementing demonstration projects through outreach with area partners and identify how it will contribute to project success and ongoing implementation beyond the grant period. Provide letters of support (which do not count towards the page limit) or other documentation to support that track record.

For awards under this competition that are expected to exceed $200,000 in federal funding **AND** involve the generation or use of environmental data, please provide a statement acknowledging 1) your need to demonstrate competency prior to beginning work and 2) your understanding that a Quality Management Plan (QMP) and/or a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) may be required. Please see the following link for more information: https://www.epa.gov/measurements/documents-about-measurement-competency-under-assistance-agreements

b) Environmental Results—Outcomes, Outputs and Project Performance

Identify the expected quantitative and qualitative outcomes and outputs of the project **(See Section I)**, including what timeline of milestones, or other means will be used to track and measure your progress towards achieving the expected outcomes and outputs and how the results of the project will be evaluated. Outputs such as semi-annual and final reports and other deliverables should also be included.

It is expected that the description of project performance will include the following:

- Target numbers associated with the outputs and how the project will support achieving them
- oversight of project partners, subgrantees, and/or contractors and vendors;
- tracking and reporting actual accomplishments versus proposed outputs/outcomes and proposed timelines/milestones;

c) Applicant Capability and Past Performance

i. Submit a list of federally and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include federal grants and cooperative agreements but not federal contracts) similar in size, scope and relevance to the proposed project that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than 5 agreements and preferably EPA agreements), and describe how you were technically able to successfully complete and manage those agreements. For the grants listed above, also describe your history of meeting the reporting requirements under those agreements, including whether you timely reported 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.

Note: 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 proposal 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 will receive a score of 0 for these factors.

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

d) Leveraging: Demonstrate how you will coordinate the use of EPA funding with other Federal and/or non-Federal sources of funds/resources to leverage additional resources beyond the grant funds awarded to carry out the proposed project(s) and/or that EPA funding will complement activities relevant to the proposed project(s) carried out by the applicant with other sources of funds or resources. Describe the type and amount of leveraging proposed, how you will obtain the leveraged resources, the likelihood the leveraging will materialize during grant performance, the strength of the leveraging commitment, and the role the leveraged funds/resources will play in the overall project. Selected applicants are expected to abide by their proposed leveraging commitments during grant performance and the failure to do so may affect the legitimacy of the award.

e) Expenditure of Awarded Funds
Please identify the approach and controls in place in your organization to ensure that awards are expended in a timely and efficient manner.

3) Detailed Budget Narrative (included in 10-page limit)

Note: The indirect cost rate assessed by organizations will be considered in the evaluation of budget narrative.

a. Description of the budget and estimated funding amounts for each work component/task which should include an approximation of the cost allocated for each major activity over the project's expected timeline and describe the project budget by categories (e.g. Personnel, Fringe, Travel, Equipment, Supplies, Contractual). Budget resources necessary for completing a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP), if applicable, sharing project information broadly, and reporting progress, are expected to be included.

b. Applicants must itemize costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, contractual costs, travel, equipment, supplies, other direct costs, indirect costs, and total costs. There are several guidelines used for federal budgets. Page 8-11 of this EPA presentation provides an overview of budget categories and links to the cost principles EPA utilizes. If you want to hear audio of the presentation, please go here.

4) Attachments. These are not included in **the ten-page limit**.

a. Letters of Support Please attach letters of support or other documentation necessary to identify prior success with farmer to farmer demonstration projects and to support leveraging commitments.
b. Biographical Sketch (optional – will not be considered during evaluation). If desired, provide biographical sketch of Principal Investigators and/or any other key personnel.
c. If applicable, approval letter to use alternate means to submit initial application.

E. Submission Dates and Times

The closing date and time for submission of proposals is September 22th**, 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time (ET)**. Proposals submitted after the closing date and time will not be considered for funding.

F. Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into The Solicitation

Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation, including but not limited to those related to confidential business information, contracts and subawards under grants, and proposal assistance and communications, can be found at https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses. ***These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing proposals for this solicitation.*** If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

Only eligible entities whose proposals meet the threshold criteria in Section III of this announcement will be reviewed according to the evaluation criterion set forth below. Applicants should explicitly address these criteria as part of their proposal package submittal. Each proposal will be rated under a points system, with a total of 100 points possible.

A. Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Points
1. <u>Project Description/Approach:</u> Under this criterion, proposals will be evaluated using the following factors: i. (20 pts) the quality to which the project narrative addresses activities in Section I.B, the relevance or importance of the project (including how the project will benefit the Gulf of Mexico region); and, how the project specifically supports EPA Strategic Goals (see Section I. C.). ii. (20 pts) the extent to which the proposal contains sufficiently detailed information on the project approach including, but not limited to, details on the "how and when", the applicant's ability to perform the proposal work; and, demonstrates a successful history of working with farmers to implement demonstration projects with results. *Letters of support or other documentation will be considered under this evaluation criterion*	**40**
2. <u>Environmental Results—Outcomes, Outputs and Performance Measures:</u> Under this criterion, proposals will be evaluated using the following factors: i. (10 pts) The extent to which the proposal clearly defines outputs throughout the project timeframe ii. (10 pts) The extent to which the proposal clearly describes results that are specific, quantified and significant for at least one of the outputs listed in Section I.B. iii. (10 pts) The extent to which the proposal demonstrates an effective plan for tracking and measuring progress toward achieving expected project outputs and outcomes, including a detailed written narrative plan identifying partner responsibilities and a tracking tool (such as a milestone or GANTT chart)	**30**
3. <u>Applicant Capability and Past Performance</u> Under this criterion, proposals will be evaluated based on the applicant's: • past performance in successfully completing and managing the assistance agreements identified in the proposal narrative as described in Section IV.D.c.of the announcement. (3 pts) • history of meeting the reporting requirements under the assistance agreements identified in the proposal narrative as described in Section IV.D.c of the announcement 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. (2 pts)	**10**

• organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project and staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project. (5 pts) Note: In evaluating applicants under the first two items of this criterion, EPA will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources including agency files and/or 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 reporting information, please indicate this in the proposal and you will receive a neutral score for these subfactors (the first two items 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 will receive a score of 0 for these factors.	
4. <u>Budget</u>: Under this criterion, proposals will be evaluated based on the applicant's: • level of detailed budget information provided in a narrative and table format as described in Section IV. (7 pts) • the extent to which the project costs and the various components are cost-effective and reasonable in furthering future implementation of similar activities. (3 pts) Note: The indirect cost rate assessed by organizations will be considered in the evaluation of budget summary	**10**
5. <u>Leveraging</u>: Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on the extent they demonstrate how they will coordinate the use of EPA funding with other Federal and/or non-Federal sources of funds/resources to leverage additional resources beyond the grant funds awarded to carry out the proposed project(s). Applicants will also be evaluated based on the type and amount of leveraging proposed, how the applicant will obtain the leveraged resources, the likelihood the leveraging will materialize during grant performance, the strength of the leveraging commitment, and the role the leveraged resources will play to support the proposed project activities. *Letters of support or other documentation will be considered under this evaluation criterion*	**5**
5. <u>Expenditure of Awarded Funds</u>: Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their approach and the controls proposed to ensure that awarded funds are expended in a timely and efficient manner.	**5**

B. Review and Selection Process

Proposals will first be evaluated against the threshold factors listed in Section III. Only those proposals which meet all of the threshold factors will be evaluated using the evaluation criteria listed above. Proposals meeting the threshold criteria will be evaluated by an EPA Gulf of Mexico Review Panel. The Review Panel will consist of EPA staff and may also include representatives from other Federal agencies. The panel will score and rank the eligible proposals using the evaluation criteria identified in Section V.A. Each proposal will be given a numerical score and will be rank-ordered according to the numerical score and geographic location. The agency will fund one grant in the Upper Mississippi River

Basin and one in the Lower Mississippi River Basin (as identified in Section I.B). Preliminary funding recommendations will be provided to the Selection Official based on this ranking.

C. Other Factors

Final funding decisions will be made by the Selection Official based on the rankings and preliminary recommendations of the evaluation team. In making the final funding decisions, the Selection Official may also consider programmatic priorities, funding availability and geographic diversity of funds.

D. Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into The Solicitation: Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation including the clause on Reporting and Use of Information Concerning Recipient Integrity and Performance can be found on the EPA Solicitation Clauses page. These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing proposals for this solicitation. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions.

VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Award Notices

Following evaluation of proposals, all applicants will be notified regarding their status.

Proposal Notifications ***(allow for review time, usually 45-60 days after closing date)***

1. EPA anticipates notification to successful applicants will be made via e-mail. The notification will be sent to the original signer of the proposal or the project contact listed in the proposal. *This notification, which informs the applicant that its proposal 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 by the Region 4 Grants Management Officer*. 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., narrative), 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.
2. EPA anticipates notification to unsuccessful applicant(s) will be made via email or postal mail. *The notification will be made to the original signer of the Standard Form (SF) 424, Application for Federal Assistance.*

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirement

A listing and description of general EPA Regulations applicable to the award of assistance agreements may be viewed at: https://www.epa.gov/grants/policy-regulations-and-guidance-epa-grants

C. Reporting Requirement

Semi-annual progress reports and a detailed final technical report will be required. Semi-annual reports summarizing technical progress, planned activities for the next half of the year and a summary of expenditures are required. The final technical report shall be completed within 90 calendar days of the completion of the period of performance. The final technical report should include: summary of the project or activity, advances achieved, and costs of the project or activity. In addition, the final technical report should discuss the problems, successes, and lessons learned from the project or activity that could help overcome structural, organizational or technical obstacles to implementing a similar project elsewhere. The schedule for submission of semi-annual reports will be established by EPA, after award.

D. Disputes

Assistance agreement competition-related disputes will be resolved in accordance with the dispute resolution procedures published in 70 FR (Federal Register) 3629, 3630 (January 26, 2005) which can be found at https://www.epa.gov/grants/grant-competition-dispute-resolution-procedures. Copies of these procedures may also be requested by contacting Gerry Martin at martin.gerry@gmail.com.

E. Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into The Solicitation

Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation, including but not limited to those related to DUNS, SAM, copyrights, disputes, and administrative capability, can be found at https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses.**These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing proposals for this solicitation.** If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions.

VII. AGENCY CONTACTS

For further information, contact:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Gulf of Mexico Program
ATTN: Rachel Houge
2510 14th Street – Suite 1212
Gulfport, MS 39501
GMP-RFP@epa.gov

Please send all questions to gmp-rfp@epa.gov. Initial questions and answers will be posted at the GMP home page https://www.epa.gov/gmpo/ by August 24th and will be updated weekly as new questions are received.