AGENCY: **U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)**

Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO)

TITLE: **Promoting Readiness and Enhancing Proficiency to Advance Reporting and Data (PREPARED)**

ACTION: **NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY (NOFO)**

TYPE: **INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NO: EPA-I-R-OCFO-02

ASSISTANCE LISTING NO: 66.203

KEY DATES:

JUL 29, 2024 NOFO CLOSES – APPLICATIONS DUE BY 11:59 P.M., EASTERN TIME

OCT 3, 2024 ANTICIPATED FINAL SELECTIONS OF AWARDS

DEC 31, 2024 ANTICIPATED AWARD ANNOUNCEMENT

APPLICATION SUBMISSION DEADLINE: Application packages must be submitted electronically to the EPA through Grants.gov (www.grants.gov) no later than July 29, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. (ET) to be considered for funding. Applications received after the closing date and time will not be considered for funding.

The Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) will post a recorded webinar titled "Supporting Grant Recipient Capacity for Data, Reporting, and Evidence-building" to assist potential applicants under this competitive funding opportunity. The recorded webinar will review the funding opportunity, key sections of the application, and the application process. Furthermore, OCFO will host weekly office hours during the duration of the NOFO's open period to answer questions regarding eligibility, clarify questions on the NOFO content, and the process. OCFO/EPA cannot answer questions on specific applications (e.g., Should I do this; do you want this, is this a good project, etc.). Potential applicants seeking funding under this competitive announcement (**EPA-I-R-OCFO-02**) are encouraged to view the recording and participate in the office hours. Dates for the office hours can be found at https://www.epa.gov/evaluate/prepared.

Note - Prior to naming a contractor (including consultants) or subrecipient in your application as a "partner", please carefully review Section IV.d, of EPA's Solicitation Clauses that are incorporated by reference in this announcement and included here. 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. Applicants are not required to identify subrecipients and/or contractors (including consultants) in their application. However, if they do, the fact that an applicant selected for award has named a specific subrecipient, contractor, or consultant in the application EPA selects for funding does not relieve the applicant of its obligations to comply with subaward and/or competitive procurement requirements as described in Section IV.d, of EPA's Solicitation Clause. **Please note that applicants may not award sole source contracts to consulting, engineering or other firms assisting applicants with the application solely based on the firm's role in**

preparing the application or based on an assertion that the individual or firm has "unique qualifications". 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 expects recipients of funding to comply with competitive procurement contracting requirements as well as EPA's rule on Participation by Disadvantaged Business Enterprises in EPA Programs in 40 CFR Part 33. **The Agency does not accept justifications for sole source contracts for services or products available in the commercial marketplace such as consulting, data analysis, or project management.**

EPA reserves the right to increase or decrease the total number of grants awarded or reject all applications and make no awards under this announcement. Such changes may be necessary as a response to the quality of applications received by EPA or the amount of funds available.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

EPA expects to issue up to 50% of awards to new applicants who have either never received funding from EPA or who received EPA funding for the first time in FY23 or FY24, provided the new applicants submit proposals that are meritorious.

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SECTION I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

Through this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is seeking additional applications from eligible public and private nonprofit entities (see eligibility described in Section III.A of this announcement) to assist current or prospective EPA grant recipients (herein referred to as grant recipients) more effectively address their grant progress and performance requirements of their EPA-funded grant agreements. Reporting requirements involve gathering data, administering reports, and addressing evidence-building metrics.

Applicants may place special emphasis on aiding EPA-funded recipients and subrecipients of Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water programs, as well as grant recipients representing small, underserved, and/or tribal communities that are applying for or receiving EPA grant funding, including but not limited to funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Public Law 117-58 [also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)] funding and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Public Law 117-169. See Section I.H for scope of work requirements.

A. Executive Orders and Definitions

The EPA, as well as other federal government agencies/departments as part of a government-wide effort are seeking to address environmental, public health, and energy challenges affecting communities, and specifically those adversely and disproportionately affected by environmental, climate, and human health harms and risks. This includes communities historically underserved and adversely impacted by persistent poverty, inequality, and lack of funding/resources.

In furtherance of this effort, this NOFO is being issued to support Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity And Support For Underserved Communities Through The Federal Government, issued on January 20, 2021, which expressed Administration policy that the federal government should pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. The Executive Order defines "***underserved communities"*** as "populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life…" As described further in the Executive Order, "underserved communities" may include communities of color such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality. For purposes of this NOFO, "underserved communities" has the meaning set forth in Executive Order 13985 and includes "environmentally overburdened communities" (that is, communities adversely and disproportionately affected by environmental, climate and human health harms and risks including remote, rural, and urban communities).

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

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

Meaningful involvement means that: People have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health; The public's contribution can influence the regulatory agency's decision; Community concerns will be considered in the decision-making process; and Decision makers will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.

Energy justice as defined by the Department of Energy (DOE or Department) is "the goal of achieving equity in both the social and economic participation in the energy system, while also remediating social, economic, and health burdens on those disproportionately harmed by the energy system" (Initiative for Energy Justice, 2019). At its core, energy justice applies the basic principles of civil rights to the climate space.

Capacity building is support, investment, or training used to bring an eligible beneficiary to the next level of operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational maturity, so it may more effectively and efficiently implement its mission. It is a process in which eligible beneficiaries improve and retain skills, knowledge, tools, and other resources needed to improve environmental conditions for low- and moderate- income families in local communities. It is not a one-time effort to improve short-term effectiveness, but a continuous improvement strategy with the eligible beneficiary toward the creation of a sustainable and effective organization that serves its community.

Evaluation - "An assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of one or more programs, policies, and organizations intended to assess their effectiveness and efficiency." Evidence Act § 101 (codified at 5 U.S.C. § 311). Credible program evaluation activities are implemented with relevance and utility, rigor, independence and objectivity, transparency, and ethics (OMB Circular A-11, Part 6 Section 290).

Outcomes - Results achieved, or benefits derived from the capacity building activity conducted, typically demonstrated by the eligible beneficiary.

Outputs - Deliverables such as products, grants made, individuals served, or trainings delivered that are usually quantified by number produced, number delivered, number of attendees, etc. Outputs do not measure a change in a beneficiary's capacity or capabilities.

For a complete list of definitions, see Appendix A.

B. Background

For EPA grant programs, evaluating data, administering reports, and sharing evidence-building metrics of grant-funded work are vitally important components for tracking the grant recipients' progress and performance. However, many EPA grant recipients face capacity challenges for engaging in these activities and many small, underserved, and/or tribal communities that are eligible for EPA grants sometimes

choose to pass on funding opportunities because they anticipate that they will have problems with data and reporting requirements. The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (https://www.epa.gov/evaluate/evidence-act) provides a framework for federal agencies, like EPA, to gather and examine data for the purpose of managing performance, addressing areas for continuous improvement and modes of learning, and influence decision-making using the best available evidence. Consistent with the Evidence Act, BIL and IRA funded programs are being asked by EPA to collect and use data, or use existing data, for measuring progress and building evidence on program effectiveness, including implementation activities, performance reporting, and program evaluation. This includes collecting feedback from programs' grant recipients and beneficiary communities, as well as collecting data or using existing data to assess program effectiveness and equitable delivery.

BIL and IRA funded grants provide an excellent opportunity to identify effective strategies as well as to design new strategies that support and improve grant recipient data and reporting capacity. Many EPA grant recipients representing small, underserved, and tribal communities targeted for EPA grant opportunities lack robust capacity for data, reporting, and for evidence-building. In 2022, EPA held a roundtable with various federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and foundations to learn more about the challenges around grant recipient capacity building for managing data and reporting requirements, as well as using data and reporting for evidence-building. Roundtable participants cite a wide range of capacity issues ranging from staffing, lack of user-friendly systems for data and reporting, and competing (sometimes conflicting) data and reporting requirements of different funders. For example, a key capacity challenge is staff turnover, i.e., retaining knowledge and skills in managing data and fulfilling reporting requirements, especially for grant agreement activities that take several years to complete. Also, many grant recipients do not have the capacity to effectively use and report data in ways that help them conduct program evaluations or other empirical studies (such as data analysis or statistics) on their own. The EPA continues to reach out to funders and organizations to better exchange information on Promoting Readiness and Enhancing Proficiency to Advance Reporting and Data (PREPARED) and share technical assistance opportunities.

C. Project Goals

EPA is committed to implementing strategies designed to help small and underserved communities, including those with environmental justice concerns, address data and reporting requirements, and build the evidence-building capacity of these communities. Under this NOFO, EPA is seeking applications that address any of the following project goals:

Provide technical assistance and increase capacity for small, underserved, and tribal communities. Project assistance may include but is not limited to: steps to enhance EPA grant recipients' and funded-program beneficiaries' evidence-building capacity, including tools for data analysis, statistics, and program evaluation designed to generate high-quality information that supports learning and improvement of outcomes and impacts. EPA grant recipients are entities that receive direct funding from the EPA, while program beneficiaries are individuals, communities, and/or organizations that benefit from an EPA funded grant/program. For example, technical assistance can include tools to help grant recipients measure the benefits of projects in ways that are minimally burdensome, including tools to help quantify climate change and equity benefits. Additionally, the Agency recognizes that writing a proposal in response to an announcement requires considerable effort, and that doing so is itself an undertaking that can require pre-award capacity for data and reporting, as well as an understanding of evidence-building. In recognition of this type of capacity need, and to share the knowledge gained from the process with small, underserved, and tribal communities' applications should emphasize widely sharing lessons learned and best practices with the general public so that knowledge transfer is open and accessible to all interested

parties. Consistent with principles defined under the EPA Policy for the Administration of Environmental Programs on Indian Reservations, the EPA is committed to working with federally recognized tribes in building capacity to carry out program responsibilities affecting tribal communities and the health and welfare of the populace, including capacity for data, reporting, and evidence-building. As such, applications will be expected to incorporate qualitative data such as community voices, alternative sources of knowledge, indigenous knowledge (IK) and lived experiences as components of the overall picture. Applicants that incorporate these methodologies) demonstrate an adherence to cultural competency that should be prioritized and reflected in work with communities, specifically small, underserved, and/or tribal communities. By working together to build capacity, and combining multiple sources of data alongside technical assistance, greater inclusivity can be achieved while maintaining focus on the overall mission and deliverables.

Provide communities that receive EPA grant funding with tools and strategies for evidence-building that leverages data and reporting requirements. Communities understandably focus on data and reporting required by funders such as EPA, but this can unintentionally limit their ability to engage in evidence-building, i.e., to produce high-quality and timely quantitative and qualitative information that help improve outcomes and results for their communities. To address these issues, EPA is interested in receiving applications that target and provide resolutions on capacity issues found in small, underserved, and/or tribal communities. Applications should also address and provide resolutions on issues related to the relative lack of experience with data collection, data management, and post-award reporting among the smaller/newer grant recipients compared to larger/more established grant recipients.

Support technical assistance on water and wastewater funding investments. EPA is strengthening its water technical assistance programs to support communities in assessing their water needs and apply for their fair share of a historic investment in water and wastewater infrastructure improvements across the country between FY 2022 and FY 2026. As a result, anticipated awards under this NOFO may include projects that provide technical assistance and/or training to small, underserved and/or tribal communities that apply for, but do not receive, grant funding from EPA as direct recipients of EPA funding or as program beneficiaries who participate in the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water programs, with the opportunity to take part in "*Learning Cohorts*" that focus on addressing challenges to data, reporting, and evidence-building through selected technical assistance activities. Further, EPA may also hold a national networking workshop(s) to support such learning cohorts. For more information on the state-by-state allocation of 2024 funding and information, see the Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment.

D. Partnerships

Eligible applicants should work with local governments, states, tribes, and non-governmental organizations to support capacity building, technical assistance, training, reports/studies, tools, and other eligible activities to protect human health and the environment. See Section I.H.2 for a complete list of eligible services and activities, and Section III.A for eligible entities.

Below is a list of several terms defining the multiple relationships that will be managed through the PREPARED awards. Applicants should integrate these terms in their applications to define the types of relationships and collaborations that will play a part in their work as a grant recipient.

- **Collaborative Pass-through Relationships**: These relationships are subawards to other nonprofits, units of government, institutions of higher education, and/or federally recognized tribes and Intertribal Consortia that meet the requirements of 40 CFR 35.504. The grant recipient

will utilize these collaborative pass-through relationships to assist in the direct development and implementation of the PREPARED program.

- **Procurement Relationships:** These relationships are for the acquisition of goods and services from for-profit firms and individual consultants. All procurement relationships will be required to be established in compliance with the competitive requirements in 2 CFR Part 200 and 2 CFR Part 1500 as interpreted in the Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements.

- **Program Participants**: These are individuals receiving stipends, travel assistance, or other participant support cost payments as authorized in 2 CFR 1500.1 and the EPA Guidance on Participant Support Costs or compensation as advisory council members as described in the EPA Office of Grants and Debarment Guidance on Selected Items of Cost for Recipients. Workshop participants and focus groups are examples of program participants as are representatives of community-based organizations who participate in the governance process where one or more community-based nonprofit organizations is involved in the design and decision-making of the subgrants program. Example participatory governance activities could include advisory bodies composed of community-based nonprofit organizations that oversee and provide advice on the development of the subaward process. The participatory governance framework should describe controls for ensuring that representatives of community-based nonprofit organizations involved in the design and decision-making for the subgrants program do not have relationships with organizations competing for subgrants or receiving noncompetitive funding that create actual or apparent conflicts of interest. Note that grant recipients may compensate representatives of community-based organizations who participate in the governance process with stipends to the extent permissible in the above referenced EPA guidance documents.

- **Collaborative In-Kind Relationships**: These relationships are agreements between entities to cooperate to achieve common goals/objectives that do not involve transfers of EPA funds.

The applicant should demonstrate experience in working with communities and/or demonstrate experience in the application of community-engaged participatory work. To demonstrate this experience appropriately, the following areas should be addressed in the application:

- How has the applicant built trusting relationships with communities that they have partnered with?
- How has the applicant prioritized the community in the design of outreach strategies, education, interventions, evaluation efforts, projects, and/or program development?
- How has the applicant ensured community involvement, centered community challenges, lived experiences, and/or indigenous knowledge in their work from conception to dissemination?

Applicants without experience working with the intended beneficiaries mentioned in Section I.B should describe how their application can effectively perform and address the stated goals of this announcement.

E. EPA Strategic Plan Linkage

The capacity building, administrative support, technical assistance, training, outreach, reports/studies, tools, and other eligible activities to be funded under this announcement support the following Strategic Goals and Objectives of EPA's FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan:

- Goal 1: Tackle the Climate Crisis;
- Goal 2: Take Decisive Action to Advance Environmental Justice and Civil Rights;
- Goal 3: Enforce Environmental Laws and Ensure Compliance
- Goal 4: Ensure Clean and Healthy Air for All Communities;
- Goal 5: Ensure Clean and Safe Water for All Communities;
- Goal 6: Safeguard and Revitalize Communities;
- Goal 7: Ensure Safety of Chemicals for People and the Environment;

This announcement also supports key priorities of the Administration as detailed in Executive Order 13985 signed by President Biden on January 20, 2021, titled, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, and Executive Order 14008 signed by President Biden on January 27, 2021, titled Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. Specifically, the projects selected under this NOFO will support the federal government's efforts to advance racial equity and environmental and energy justice, address health outcome disparities and support underserved communities.

In addition, pursuant to Section 6a of EPA Order 5700.7A1, "Environmental Results under EPA Assistance Agreements," EPA must link assistance agreements to the Agency's Strategic Plan. EPA's current Strategic Plan for 2022-2026 is available at: https://www.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan.

The activities to be funded under this NOFO support the FY 2022-2026 EPA Strategic Plan: Strategy 1 - Ensure Scientific Integrity and Science-Based Decision Making; Strategy 2 - Consideration of Health of Children at All Stages and Other Vulnerable Populations; Strategy 3 - Advance EPA's Organizational Excellence and Workforce Equity; Strategy 4 - Strengthen Tribal, State, and Local Partnerships and Enhance Engagement; or more specifically Goal 2 (Take Decisive Action to Advance Environmental Justice and Civil Rights), Objective 2.1, (Promote Environmental Justice and Civil Rights at the Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Levels) of the Strategic Plan which states that "Building Community Capacity and Climate Resilience and Maximizing Benefits to Overburdened and Underserved Communities: EPA will increase support for community-led action by providing unprecedented investments and benefits directly to communities with environmental justice concerns and by integrating equity throughout Agency programs." Applicants should explain in their application how their project will further these strategies and they will be evaluated on this under the evaluation criteria in Section V.A.

EPA Order 5700.7 also requires that applicants adequately describe environmental outputs and outcomes to be achieved under assistance agreements. Applicants must include specific statements describing the environmental results of the proposed project in terms of well-defined outputs and, to the maximum extent practicable, well-defined outcomes that will demonstrate how the project will contribute to the goals and objectives described above.

- ***Outputs:*** The term "output" refers to an activity, effort, and/or associated work product related to an environmental goal and objective that will be produced or provided over a period or by a specified date.
- ***Outcomes.*** The term "outcome" means the result, effect or consequence that will occur from carrying out an environmental program or activity that relates to an environmental or programmatic goal or objective.

Details are further detailed in *Section I.H. Scope of Work and Program Specific Requirements, 3. Performance Measures.*

The FY 2022-2026 EPA Strategic Plan prioritizes "building community capacity and climate resilience and maximizing benefits to overburdened and underserved communities. In this effort, EPA will increase support for community-led action by providing unprecedented investments and benefits directly to communities with environmental justice concerns and by integrating equity throughout Agency programs." Consistent with this Strategic Plan priority, BIL, IRA and other EPA grant programs will strive to address climate resilience and environmental justice in communities, especially in underserved communities that have, and continue to be, plagued by environmental pollution and health, and environmental justice challenges. These communities often need technical assistance and training to enhance their opportunities to access EPA's financial assistance opportunities and then subsequently to support effective grants management and performance reporting. Building increased capacity for data, reporting, and evidence-building, can help EPA grant recipients representing small, underserved, and tribal communities better address community needs and solutions, and improve their climate resilience and environmental justice outcomes. See Appendix A for definitions relevant to environmental justice and capacity building.

F. Authority

Congress provided EPA with both funding and authority to support communities' capacity for data, reporting, and evidence-building through the following authorities:

- Clean Water Act, Section 104(b)(3), as amended
- Safe Drinking Water Act, Section 1420
- Solid Waste Disposal Act, Section 8001(a)
- Clean Air Act, Section 103(b)(3)
- Toxic Substances Control Act, Section 10, as amended
- Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act, Section 20, as amended
- Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act, Section 203
- Safe Drinking Water Act, Section 1442(c)(3), as amended

Additional and future funding for awards under this NOFO is contingent on the availability of future appropriations.

G. Minority Serving Institutions

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

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

1. Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1061(2)). A list of these schools can be found at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

2. Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1059c(b)(3) and (d)(1)). A list of these schools can be found at Tribal College or University

3. Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1101a(a)(5)). A list of these schools can be found at Hispanic-Serving Institutions

4. Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions; (AANAPISIs), as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1059g(b)(2)). A list of these schools can be found at Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions; and

5. Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs), as defined by the Higher Education Act of 2008, 20 U.S.C. 1059e(b)(6). A list of these schools can be found at Predominately Black Institutions

H. Scope of Work and Program Specific Requirements

Through the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018[1] and GPRA Modernization Act of 2010[2] and consistent with the Presidential Memorandum, Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking[3], this funding enhances community capacity and their ability to collect appropriate, high-quality data that can be used to achieve better community-based programmatic outcomes.

For FY2025, there is approximately $2,000,000 available to carry out eligible activities related to capacity building. Activities should relate to advancing awareness of best practices related to program evaluation with an emphasis on "learning", rather than trying to "fix" an environmental concern. The applicant should clearly explain how the methods and approaches used will engage community stakeholders.

In general, the cooperative agreement proposals should:

- Include a clear description of the planned effort, project, strategy, intervention and how it would address the Project Goals as described in Project Goals, Section I.C. and Scope of Work – detailed under this section.
- Identify major goals, and clearly defined objectives and outcome measures of the project.
- Explain how the project would be implemented and discuss its sustainability and transferability.
- Include plans for an evaluation component.
- Describe the type of Eligible Services and Activities the applicant will provide, how they will implement the eligible services and activities, and how program participants, especially small, underserved, and/or tribal communities, will be made aware of, and can access the Eligible Services – see Eligible Services and Activities, Section I.H.1. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to design their capacity building activities around the types of Eligible Services described or other similar services to meet the objectives of this Cooperative Agreement. Applications will be evaluated on these approaches, see Evaluation Criteria, Section V.A.

1. Eligible Services and Activities.

The Eligible Services to be provided by recipients operating under this NOFO should be based on accomplishing the following objectives related to training, capacity development, planning, technical assistance, and evaluation activities to assist small, underserved, tribal grant recipient communities with information, tools, and assistance.

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[1] Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529 (2019), available at https://www.epa.gov/evaluate/evidence-act

[2] GPRA Modernization Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-352, available at https://www.congress.gov/111/plaws/publ352/PLAW-111publ352.pdf

[3] See https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/memorandum-on-restoring-trust-in-government-through-scientific-integrity-and-evidence-based-policymaking/

- **Capacity Development and Technical Assistance.** Building the capacity of local governments –especially in disadvantaged communities –is essential to ensure compliance with environmental regulations and effective utilization of federal investment from the EPA. Recipients will provide technical assistance and/or research to support communities in a range of activities, such as positioning communities to demonstrate their success so they can apply for funding that bolsters their ability to obtain state and federal support. A significant emphasis will be on supporting communities in preparing for, accessing, and implementing the $50 billion in funding that the EPA will distribute from the BIL through the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) programs.

- **Tools and Resources.** Recipients will work collaboratively with the EPA (as part of the Agency's substantial involvement) to identify the tools, research needs, data, and other technical information to support local, state, and tribal partners to effectively implement environmental regulations and infrastructure investments.

It is anticipated that up to 4 entities will be selected for these functions. Under the anticipated cooperative agreements issued in this funding opportunity, recipients will provide eligible services to assist communities, specifically disadvantaged, rural, and/or tribal communities, with environmental evidence and capacity building projects to address environmental, energy justice, and other environmental challenges such as clean water, drinking water, and stormwater needs. **Applicants should list specific services in their application designed to achieve the NOFO's objective of providing technical assistance related to access to BIL funding. BIL services may include, but are not limited to:**

- Supporting personnel and data infrastructure needs related to performance management and program evaluation needs associated with their application, such as supporting pre-application development and coordination for infrastructure project delivery, that builds capacity to help disadvantaged communities implement capital funding.
- Preparing potential grant recipients for success in data collection and management, as well as post-award reporting inclusive of quality assurance project planning (i.e., Quality Assurance Project Plans and Quality Management Plans); the identification and assessment in the utility of existing data/information; and any other activities related to project design and measurement activities.
- Creating and maintaining user-friendly data that community grantees can use to help with basic post-award reporting into EPA systems.
- Creating a connection between programmatic efforts and desired outcomes through logic modeling.
- Supporting evidence informed decision-making for communities, including positioning disadvantaged communities to demonstrate their success and then equipping them with the ability to access funding through direct EPA grants or participation in state CW and DWSRF programs.
- Supporting capacity for community-based program evaluation using qualitative and/or quantitative methods.
- Incorporating mixed methods evaluation, research methods, and analyses inclusive of surveys and qualitative data.
- Dissemination and translation of mixed methods, statistical analyses, and findings for lay audience/community understanding.

- Other similar activities applicants propose to build community capacity to employ approaches to program evaluation and other evidence-building, such as:
  - Creating opportunities for community to better define concerns and set priorities for discussion and action;
  - Developing workshops, training, and other skills development opportunities;
  - Extending networks, partnerships, and developing coalitions (see Section I.D for partnership definitions);
  - Building databases and accessing existing databases;
  - Community engagements and relationship building linked to data, reporting, and evidence-building; and
  - Identify opportunities to streamline data collection processes, including cross-agency, intergovernmental, and private funding source data sharing.
- Development of other similar activities the applicant determines to be necessary and appropriate to carry out their proposed projects.
- Pilots to assist with any of the above.

Consistent with these parameters, applicants should design their capacity building activities to provide, at a minimum one of the Eligible Services described above. Applicants may also propose approaches to addressing eligible services that differs from or supplements what is described and may propose other types of technical assistance activities that meet the objectives of this NOFO as long as the activities are eligible for funding under the appropriate statutory authorities.

2. <u>Performance Measures.</u>

a) Technical Assistance Activities

Applicants should describe how they will provide these services to grant recipients through the most efficient and effective means practicable. In providing the Eligible Services under this Cooperative Agreement, applicants should design an approach intended to assist program participants with assistance and information on:

- Understanding and complying with administrative and programmatic post-award grant functions and responsibilities and federal grant regulations (e.g., 2 CFR Part 200, as adopted and amended by 2 CFR Part 910 and 2 CFR Part 1500, 2 CFR Part 35, 40 CFR Part 35) as well as applicable state regulations and private funding governance.
- Any other similar activities they believe will be effective in providing technical assistance, training, and support to grant recipient to facilitate their participation in funding programs for environmental and energy justice and in the environmental and/or energy decision making process.

b) Collaboration and Engagement Activities

Applicants should design their capacity building activities to assist grant recipients in identifying and building partnerships/coalitions (*see Section I.D. for partnership-type examples)* to advance the sustainability and transferability of their projects. Collaborations are essential to effective community work, especially among small, underserved, and tribal communities. This may include coordination and/or facilitation services and similar activities for meetings and communications between grant recipients and their stakeholders to address and discuss environmental concerns and inform program development and implementation. This approach

to collaborations can also include a cohort approach (e.g., supporting communities with shared objectives and/or characteristics as a group through delivering curated capacity building, training, peer learning and support). This activity may also require performing analyses, assisting in the generation of reports, identifying additional needs and/or challenges affecting certain communities, as well as proposing recommendations to address them.

Collaboration and engagement may be exemplified thorough activities that demonstrate having experience in working with communities and/or experience in the application of community-engaged participatory methods. The applicant can demonstrate this experience appropriately by addressing areas detailed in the Evaluation Criteria Guidance Section V.A.

c) Evaluation Activities related to the community grant recipients

The evaluation component of this Cooperative Agreement is essential. Applicants should demonstrate expertise in the design, development, and implementation of program evaluation and other evidence-building (*see Evaluation Criteria Section V.A.*). Applicants should demonstrate that they have the appropriate staff resources, knowledge, and administrative or programmatic infrastructure necessary to provide the Eligible Services described above, either through their own organization and/or through the ability to obtain it through properly procured contracts, authorized subawards, or other appropriate non-financial partnerships and collaborative mechanisms. This also includes the technical competency and knowledge of how to use government grant systems and the ability to interpret and translate grant requirements, policies and procedures into plain language and other languages besides English as necessary.

For assistance in the development of the evaluation component, the following publications can be referenced:

- OMB M-20-12: Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices
- OMB's M-22-12 - Advancing Effective Stewardship of Taxpayer Resources and Outcomes in the Implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
- GAO-12-208G, Designing Evaluations 40 (rev. 2012), available at https://www.gao.gov/assets/590/588146.pdf
- American Evaluation Association, *An Evaluation Roadmap for a More Effective Government* (Sept. 2019), *available at* https://www.eval.org/Portals/0/Docs/AEA%20Evaluation%20Roadmap%202019%20Update%20FINAL.pdf

1) Evaluation Type

There are four types of program evaluations commonly used to assess community-engaged programmatic efforts. **Formative evaluations** are used when the goal is to learn from improvement and establish feasibility, appropriateness, and acceptability of activities prior to full implementation. **Process or implementation evaluations** provide detailed descriptive information on the way a program operates, or an intervention is implemented. In alignment with program objectives, **outcome evaluations** are used to measure the immediate effect of the program and assess how well the objectives have been achieved. **Impact evaluations** are concerned with the long-term effects of programmatic activities and are designed to estimate how well overarching goals have been achieved.

2) Project Design

Applicants should include their plan to work with and/or partner with small, tribal, and/or underserved communities that are applying for or receiving funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Public Law 117-58 [also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)] funding and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Public Law 117-169 and/or other environmental grant funding from EPA as direct recipients of EPA funding or communities that participate as program beneficiaries in the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water programs. If a partnership is proposed in the application, this partnership does not need to be fully executed (e.g., MOU) by the time the application is submitted in order to receive project funding.

(a) A program logic model: The use of a logic model or theory of change is required for the design of infrastructure programs to document the intended program theory and desired outcomes. See Appendix B for optional template.

(b) Evaluation Questions: Each objective of the project design must include specific questions that will be answered during the evaluation (e.g., Does the proposed project improve knowledge or skills and if so, by how much?).

(c) Measures: For each evaluation question, discuss specific measures that you will use (e.g., participation reports by age and other demographics, surveys of participants and /or staff, etc.). Discuss any related strengths and weaknesses of the proposed measures.

(d) Methods: Discuss the methods that will be used to answer the evaluation questions, including:

- Sampling plan(s) and expected sample size(s).
- Data collection methods (how, by whom, how often, when).
- Data analysis methods (how and by whom).
- Data translation and dissemination methods
- Identify related strengths and weaknesses of these methods.

(e) Outputs and Outcomes

- ***Outputs:*** Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative, they must be measurable during the cooperative agreement funding period and are not to include assessments of change in a beneficiary's capacity or capabilities. Examples of expected outputs may include the following:
  - Documented outreach efforts undertaken to ensure underserved communities, remote communities, and tribal communities are aware of PREPARED cooperative agreement services.
  - The number of program participants, including small, underserved and/or tribal communities and communities in remote and rural areas, accessing the services of a PREPARED cooperative agreement.
  - Documented community engagement and relationship building efforts (e.g., webinars, in-person workshops, conference presentations) undertaken by a

PREPARED grant recipient linked to data, post-award reporting, and evidence building.

- The number of individuals served/trainees attending an in-person workshop, webinar, presentation, or trainings.
- Development of tools and/or tracking system to ensure that community participants (small, underserved and/or tribal communities and communities in remote and rural areas) are able to access services.
- Reports generated for measuring success of methods and strategies for enhancing basic post-award reporting.
- Development of streamline data collection process
- Development of pilot program to demonstrate utility of TA strategies implemented.
- Process evaluation findings and reports on feedback received from community participants to improve the operability of the PREPARED initiative.
- Reports on program evaluations for measuring the success of a PREPARED cooperative agreement in meeting the objectives of this NOFO as described above.
- Any other appropriate and relevant outputs identified by applicants that contribute to the objectives of this NOFO.

- ***Outcomes.*** Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic in nature; and may be quantitative or qualitative by design. Additionally, outcomes should be organized by expected time period (short-term, intermediate, and long-term). Short-term outcomes refer to changes in knowledge or attitudes and usually occur during the project period. Intermediate outcomes refer to changes in behaviors and actions due to the knowledge acquired and may be measured during the scope of a project period or after the end of the project. Long-term outcomes refer to changes in conditions and are typically measured a year or several years after project completion. Short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes are related and build on one another. EPA encourages recipients to identify outcomes wherever possible because they lead to environmental and/or public health improvement more clearly than outputs. Examples of expected outcomes from projects may include the following:

- Support grant recipient capacity for data and post award reporting.
- Availability of help for grantees.
- Improved understanding for data and reporting.
- Awareness of evidence building questions and evaluation.
- Awareness of Evidence Act, goals, and requirements.
- Increased grantee use of evaluation tools such as logic modeling, etc.
- Increased grantee participation and/or leadership in more robust evidence building.
- Compliance with EPA guidance and policies relating to financial assistance.
- Increased grantee capacity for evaluation and evidence building activities.
- More efficient and effective grant administration, performance, and management by program participants resulting in fewer questioned costs, audits, and performance issues.

- Any other appropriate and relevant outcomes identified by applicants contributing to the goals of this NOFO.

I. Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into The Solicitation

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

SECTION II. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

A. Amount of Funding Available

The total estimated amount of federal funding available under this announcement is approximately $2 million, depending on Agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, Agency priorities, and other applicable considerations.

EPA is prioritizing applicants who have experience with program evaluation and working with program beneficiaries, which include, recipients of grant funding from EPA as direct recipients of EPA funding and sub recipients who can participate in the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water programs, particularly for those representing small, underserved, and/or tribal communities that are applying for or receiving EPA grant funding. See II.B for anticipated award ranges.

B. Number and Amounts of Awards

The total estimated funding for this competitive opportunity is approximately **$2 million**. EPA expects to make 4 awards with periods of performance of three years with total funding of approximately up to $500,000 per award depending on funding availability, the quality of applications, satisfactory progress, and other applicable considerations. The specific number of awards and the amounts may vary from these estimates. The awards for selected projects will be in the form of cooperative agreements as it is expected that there will be substantial involvement and interaction between the applicant and EPA. EPA anticipates making at least 1 award to a high- ranking applicant that works directly with a tribal community.

For application submission purposes, applicants should prepare budgets for up to approximately $500,000 over three years with up to approximately $167,000 budgeted for each year.

C. New Applicant Set-Aside

EPA plans to issue up to 50% of awards to new applicants who have either not received funding in the last 5 years from EPA or who received EPA funding for the first time in FY23 or FY24, provided the new applicants submit applications that are meritorious.

D. Additional Awards

EPA reserves the right to make additional awards under this solicitation, consistent with Agency policy and guidance if additional funding becomes available after the original selections are made. Additional funds may include but are not limited to recaptured funds, the use of carryover funds, or appropriated funding related to the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than 6 months after the original selection decisions.

E. Award Funding and Incremental/Full Funding

Awards may be fully or incrementally funded, as appropriate, based on funding availability, satisfactory performance, and other applicable considerations.

F. Funding Type

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

- close monitoring of the successful applicant's performance to verify the results proposed by the applicant;
- collaboration during performance of the scope of work;
- review of proposed procurements to the extent permitted by 2 CFR 200.325;
- approving qualifications of key personnel (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).

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.

G. Partial Funding

In appropriate circumstances, 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, or portion thereof, was evaluated and selected for award, and therefore maintains the integrity of the competition and selection process.

SECTION III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

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

A. Eligible Applicants

Consistent with the Assistance Listing 66.203, eligible applicants for this funding opportunity have been limited to the following:

- Public nonprofit institution/organization (includes institutions of higher education and hospitals)
- Private nonprofit institution/organization (includes institutions of higher education and hospitals)

Consistent with the definition of Nonprofit organization at 2 CFR 200.1, the term "nonprofit organization means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization that is operated mainly for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purpose in the public interest and is not organized primarily for profit; and uses net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the operation of the organization. Note that 2 CFR 200.1 specifically excludes Institutions of Higher Education from the definition of non-profit organization because they are separately defined in the regulation. While not

considered to be a nonprofit organization(s) as defined by 2 CFR 200.1, public or nonprofit Institutions of Higher Education are, nevertheless, eligible to submit applications under this NOFO. For-profit colleges, universities, trade schools, and hospitals are ineligible. Eligible nonprofit organizations may, but are not required to be, exempt from taxation under section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code provided the organizations is recognized as nonprofit under state or tribal law. Workforce Investment Boards and organized Labor Unions that meet these criteria may be eligible nonprofit organizations.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Funds

No cost sharing or matching is required as a condition of eligibility under this competition.

C. Threshold Eligibility Criteria

All applications will be reviewed for eligibility and must meet the eligibility requirements described in Sections III. A. and C. to be considered eligible for award. 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. Applications must substantially comply with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in Section IV of this NOFO or else they will be rejected. However, where a page limit is expressed in Section IV with respect to the application, or parts thereof, pages in excess of the page limitation will not be reviewed. Applicants are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in application format, including selecting a legible font type and size for use in the application.

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

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

   DO NOT WAIT! Register in SAM.gov and Grants.gov as soon as possible. Finalizing these registrations could take a month or more. You do not want a late registration to prevent you from being able to properly and timely submit your application through Grants.gov.

D. Additional Threshold Criteria

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

1. Applications must be written in English only. Applications written in languages other than English will be deemed ineligible for funding.

2. Applicants must demonstrate that they are addressing the scope of work requirements under Section I.H and that they are partnering with, working with, or plan to work with small, tribal, and/or underserved communities as described in Section I.H.3.b. (detailing collaboration and engagement activities) and in accordance with the Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity And Support For Underserved Communities Through The Federal Government, issued on January 20, 2021.

3. All proposed projects must address the Agency's Strategic Plan Strategic Goals in Section I.E and include specific statements describing the environmental results of the proposed project in terms of well-defined outputs and, to the maximum extent practicable, well-defined outcomes that demonstrate how the project will contribute to the overall protection of human health and the environment.

4. Current PREPARED grant recipients who apply to this opportunity must identify and describe working with a beneficiary community distinct from their currently funded project (e.g., not use a verbatim application that was previously submitted to increase funding for their current project).

5. *Ineligible Activities*: If an application is submitted that includes any ineligible tasks or activities, including but not limited to those described in Section IV.C.10, 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. Funds awarded under this Cooperative Agreement may not be used to support lobbying activities as provided in 2 CFR 200.450. Subawards made to 501(c)(4) nonprofit organizations that lobby are not allowed.

Applicants who fail to meet any of the preceding threshold eligibility requirements will be deemed ineligible. Applicants from ineligible applications will not be evaluated for this award opportunity.

D. Encouraging Minority Serving Institutions To Compete

EPA recognizes that it is important to engage all available minds to address the environmental challenges the nation faces. EPA also recognizes that scientific, technical, engineering and mathematical (STEM) competence is essential to the Nation's future well-being in terms of national security and competitive economic advantage. For instance, the health and vitality of the economy is predicated, in part, on the availability of an adequate supply of scientists, technicians, engineers and mathematicians, to develop innovative technologies and solutions. In other words, this country must engage all available minds to address the challenges it faces. Minorities, women, and persons with disabilities historically have been under-represented in the STEM fields. EPA seeks to expand the environmental conversation by including members of communities which may have not previously participated in such dialogues to participate in EPA programs. For this reason, EPA strongly encourages all eligible applicants identified in Section III, including minority serving institutions (MSIs), to apply under this opportunity.

For this reason, EPA strongly encourages all eligible applicant entities including eligible applicants comprised of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities to apply.

SECTION IV. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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

A. Grants.gov Instructions

Please follow the below instructions for submitting your application.

1. Requirement to Submit Through Grants.gov and Limited Exceptions Procedures

Applicants must apply electronically through Grants.gov under this funding opportunity based on the Grants.gov Instructions in this announcement. If your organization has no access to the internet or access is very limited, you may request an exception for the remainder of this calendar year by following the procedures outlined here. Please note that your request must be received at least 15 calendar days before the application due date to allow enough time to negotiate alternative submission methods. Issues with submissions with respect to this opportunity only are addressed in Section IV.A.3: Technical Issues with Submission located below.

2. Submission Instructions

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

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

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

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

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

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

b) Grants.gov Registration Instructions

Once your SAM.gov account is active, you must register in Grants.gov. Grants.gov will electronically receive your organization information, such as e-Business (EBiz) point of contact email address and UEI. Organizations applying to this funding opportunity must have an active Grants.gov registration. Grants.gov registration is FREE. If you have never applied for a federal

grant before, please review the Grants.gov Applicant Registration instructions. As part of the Grants.gov registration process, the EBiz point of contact is the only person that can affiliate and assign applicant roles to members of an organization. In addition, at least one person must be assigned as an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR). Only person(s) with the AOR role can submit applications in Grants.gov. Please review the Intro to Grants.gov-Understanding User Roles and Learning Workspace – User Roles and Workspace Actions for details on this important process. Please note that this process can take a month or more for new registrants. Applicants must ensure that all registration requirements are met in order to apply for this opportunity through Grants.gov and should ensure that all such requirements have been met well in advance of the application submission deadline.

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

c) Application Submission Process

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

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

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

d) Application Submission Deadline

Your organization's AOR must submit your complete application package electronically to the EPA through Grants.gov no later than **July 29, 2024, at 11:59 PM ET**. Please allow for enough time to successfully submit your application and allow for unexpected errors that may require you to resubmit.

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

e) Releasing Copies of Applications

In concert with the EPA's commitment to conducting business in an open and transparent manner, copies of applications submitted under this solicitation may be made publicly available

on the EPA website or other public website for a period of time after the selected applications are announced. The EPA recommends that applications not include trade secrets or commercial or financial information that is confidential or privileged, or sensitive information, if disclosed, that would invade another individual's personal privacy (e.g., an individual's salary, personal email addresses, etc.). However, if such information is included, it will be treated in accordance with 40 CFR Part 2.203.

Clearly indicate which portion(s) of the application you are claiming as confidential, privileged, or sensitive information, or state 'n/a' or 'not applicable' if the application does not have confidential, privileged, or sensitive information. As provided at 40 CFR § 2.203(b) if no claim of confidential treatment accompanies the information when it is received by the EPA, it may be made available to the public by the EPA without further notice to the submitter.

3. 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 the "**EPA-I-R-OCFO-02**" in the subject line to EvidenceandEvaluation@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.

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

Training opportunities related to grants management can be found on the EPA's Grants Website.

4. Application Materials

The following forms and documents are required under this NOFO:

Mandatory Documents

a) Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)

b) Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)

c) EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54

d) EPA Form 4700-4 Pre-award Compliance Review Report (Please see these Useful Tips for completing this form)

e) Project Narrative Proposal (Project Narrative Attachment): Use this to submit your Workplan, prepared as described in Appendix D. Please note the 20-page limit that applies to the Workplan.

f) Use the Other Attachments Form for the following additional mandatory documents:

- *Itemized Budget Sheet/Budget Narrative Attachment Form* (See below in Section IV.B.4 and optional template with instructions/example in Appendix C). The budget narrative should include a spreadsheet that itemizes each year's cost for the salaries, fringe benefits, total salaries/wages, travel expenses, equipment, supplies, contractual expenses, other cost, and indirect cost. Please refer to EPA's Office of Grants and Debarment's budget detail guidance and IDC guidance.
- *Partnership Letters of Commitment* (unless you are proposing a project with no partners; *see Funding Opportunities Section I.D. for partnership-type examples)*
- *Resumes* of the Project Manager (PM) and other key personnel (see Section IV.B.5 below)

Other Documents

The *Other Attachments Form* may also be used to include references/works cited, documentation demonstrating competitive procurement, and other documentation as deemed necessary.

Note: The "Other Attachments Form" is listed under the mandatory documents but should be used to attach both the mandatory documents listed above in 4 as well as any optional documents under 4.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

The forms and documents required as part of the application submission are described in Section IV.A.4 above. Below are the instructions for the Workplan and several other application documents.

1. **Workplan:** The Workplan is the most important part of the application package and describes the work to be performed during the performance period. Under this NOFO, applicants must submit a Workplan for a federal award that addresses how the applicant will meet the objectives of this NOFO, perform the activities and provide the services described in Section I of the NOFO (the Eligible Services), the applicant's experiences working with the intended program beneficiaries (as outlined in Section I.D), and ensure that it addresses the evaluation criteria in Section V.A and any applicable threshold eligibility criteria in Section III. The Workplan must not exceed (20) single-spaced typewritten pages and be on letter size pages (8 1/2 X 11 inches). Any pages beyond twenty (20) pages will not be read by the review panel. It is recommended that applicants use a standard font (e.g., Times New Roman, Calibri, and Arial) and a 12-point font size. While these guidelines establish the acceptable type size requirements, applicants are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in selection of an appropriate font for use in the application. Other attachments such as resumes, partnership letters, itemized budget template, and information on endowment size and/or yearly organizational budget can be submitted as attachments and are not included in the 20-page Workplan limit.

Workplans must address the information described above. Applicants should reference the numbers and titles of the evaluation criteria in their workplan to help identify where the criteria are being addressed. Make sure your workplan also includes the Project Summary Page which is not part of the 20-page Workplan page limit:

Project Summary Page – Recommended not to exceed one page and include:

a. Project Title
b. Project Geographic Area
c. Applicant Information (name, address, main contact information)
d. Brief Description of Applicant Organization -- Provide a brief description of the applicant's organization, including its mission and key ongoing projects/activities in which it is involved.
e. List of Project Partners -- include partner name and stakeholder group. For example, State University (academic); County commissioner (local government); Local church (faith-based), Local supplier (business/industry), etc.).
f. Project Abstract -- Brief description of the main objective, activities, and outputs/outcomes of the project, including the specific geographic areas of focus.

2. **Partnerships, Collaboration, and Letters of Commitment (See evaluation factor V.A.4.c)-** Partnerships and collaboration with other interested stakeholders in performance of the project are integral to the success of the PREPARED cooperative agreement but must comply with regulatory requirements described below if federal funds will be used to compensate partners. Given the nature of this program, failure to demonstrate effective partnerships or collaboration with other stakeholders may adversely impact the applicant's scoring under the relevant evaluation criteria in Section V.A and may render the application less competitive than others that include partnerships and collaboration. If an applicant does not demonstrate such partnerships or collaboration, they must be able to convincingly demonstrate in their application how they can effectively perform under the requirements of the PREPARED cooperative agreement, without any partners or collaboration.

   Applicants should also describe how they would collaborate with other EPA funded technical assistance providers (e.g., Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers, EPA Environmental Finance Centers and Technical Assistance for Brownfields recipients) to avoid duplication of effort and share best practices and lessons learned.

All letters of commitment for partnerships and collaborations must be submitted by the applicant with its application package by the submission deadline. The letters of commitment must be included as other attachments in the grants.gov application package (Section IV.A.4) and are not subject to the 20-page Workplan limit. The letters of commitment should include information about the role and activities each partner will play in the PREPARED cooperative agreement, as well as any resources the partner will provide. The letters of commitment must be signed by the partnering organizations. **Do not include generic letters of support or recommendation**. Regardless of the source, generic letters of support will not be considered in evaluating applications. If no letters of commitment are included, then it will be assumed the applicant has no partners and they must demonstrate how they can effectively perform the

project activities under the PREPARED cooperative agreement without partners or collaboration.

In addition, groups of two or more eligible applicants may choose to form a coalition and submit a single application under this NOFO; however, one entity must be responsible for the grant. Coalitions must identify which eligible organization will be the recipient of the grant and which eligible organization(s) will be subrecipients of the recipient (the "pass-through entity"). Subawards must be consistent with the definition of that term in 2 CFR 200.1 and comply with EPA's Subaward Policy. The pass-through entity that administers the grant and subawards will be accountable to EPA for proper expenditure of the funds and reporting and will be the point of contact for the coalition. As provided in 2 CFR 200.332, subrecipients are accountable to the pass-through entity for proper use of EPA funding.

For-profit organizations are not eligible for subawards under this grant program but may receive procurement contracts. Any contracts for services or products funded with EPA financial assistance must be awarded under the competitive procurement procedures of 2 CFR Part 200 and/or 2 CFR Part 1500, as applicable. The regulations at 2 CFR 1500.10 contain limitations on the extent to which EPA funds may be used to compensate individual consultants. Refer to the Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements for guidance on competitive procurement requirements and consultant compensation. Do not name a procurement contractor (including a consultant) as a "partner" or otherwise in your application unless the contractor has been selected in compliance with competitive procurement requirements.

Note: If you intend to fund a named or unnamed partner's participation in the project your application must describe how the proposed financial transaction complies with applicable requirements in 2 CFR Part 200, EPA's Subaward Policy, the Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements or EPA Guidance on Participant Support Costs. Note that naming a contractor (including a consultant) as a "partner" does not relieve the applicant from complying with competitive procurement requirements. EPA does not accept sole source contract justifications for professional services (including environmental consulting services and consulting services on preparing grant applications) that are available in the commercial marketplace.

3. Programmatic Capability and Past Performance

Submit a list of federally and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include Federal grants and cooperative agreements but not Federal contracts) that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than 5 agreements, and preferably EPA agreements) and describe:

1. whether, and how, you were able to successfully complete and manage those agreements; and
2. your history of meeting the reporting requirements under those agreements including whether you adequately and timely reported on your progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes of those agreements (and if not, explain why not) and whether you submitted acceptable final technical reports under the agreements; and

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

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

Itemized Budget (optional template available in Appendix C): Provide a detailed budget and estimated funding amount for each project component/activity. Identify the requested federal dollars. Applicants should budget for up to $500,000 of funding over three years at approximately $167,000 per year (keep in mind that EPA reserves the right to partially fund applications by funding discrete portions of the proposed projects). Clearly explain how the funds will be used. Applicants must itemize costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, contractual costs, travel, equipment, supplies, other direct costs, indirect costs, and total costs. All subaward and participant support, and advisory council compensation funding must be located under the "other" category. This section provides an opportunity for narrative description of the budget or aspects of the budget such as "other" and contractual. Provide itemized costs with sufficient detail for EPA to determine the reasonableness and allowability of costs for each workplan component/activity. Where necessary, your itemized budget sheet should include a budget narrative to make it clear how you determined/calculated the costs for each budget category. In addition, demonstrate the cost effectiveness of the project in terms of maximizing to the greatest extent practicable the delivery of the Eligible Services to program participants, including underserved, rural, and remote communities, as described in Section I.

In accordance with the changes in 2 CFR 200.414(f) that will be effective October 1, 2024, recipients and subrecipients that do not have a current negotiated indirect cost rate under 15% may be eligible for a de minimis rate of up to 15% of modified total direct costs for all Federal awards Please see applicable guidance: https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2024-07496/p-2832. .

Total estimated costs in the itemized budget template should reflect federal funding only. Applicants are permitted to attach the itemized budget template as an "Other Attachment" to their application and it will not count against the 20-page workplan limit. Applicants will not be penalized if they choose not to use the budget template.

4. **Resumes of the Project Manager (PM) and Other Key Personnel:** Applicants should attach a resume or curricula vitae (CV) for the PM and other key personnel named on the Key Contacts List. These are not subject to the Workplan page limit although individual resumes should not exceed 2 pages in length.

5. **Information on Endowment Size and/or Yearly Organizational Budget:** Applicants should attach documentation (no more than 2 pages) providing details related to the size of the organization's total endowments (if any) and/or the total yearly budget for the organization. The information submitted should provide endowment and organizational budget information for the three most recent full fiscal years for the applying entity. EPA may consider this information under the organizational diversity other factor described in Section V.B of this NOFO. Applicants should attach this documentation as an "Other Attachment" to their application as described in Section IV.A.4 and it will not count against the workplan page limit.

6. **Logic Model/Theory of Change**- The use of a logic model or theory of change is required for the design of infrastructure programs to document the intended program theory and desired outcomes. See Appendix B for optional template.

   EPA Order 5700.7A1 requires that applicants adequately describe environmental outputs and outcomes to be achieved under assistance agreements. Applicants must include specific statements describing the environmental results of the proposed project in terms of well-defined outputs and, to the maximum extent practicable, well-defined outcomes that will demonstrate how the project will contribute to the goals and objectives described above.

7. **Performance Measurement Plan**- Applicants should describe how they plan to track and monitor their project performance and progress throughout the project period including their success in meeting the expected outputs and outcomes. Outputs and outcomes are critical components of an applicant's overall plan for measuring their project's performance. Applicants will be evaluated on the quality of their overall performance measurement plan including the proposed outputs, outcomes, and associated timeframes for achieving those results. Generally, higher quality performance measurement plans include specific target metrics where possible for both outputs and outcomes. The applicant's performance measurement plan will help gather insights, will be the mechanism to track successful progress, output and outcome strategies, and will provide the basis for developing lessons learned to inform future recipients. The following questions are also useful to consider when developing output and outcome measures of quantitative and qualitative results:
   - What are the measurable short term and longer-term expectations of this cooperative agreement?
   - How will this cooperative agreement measure progress in achieving the expected results (including outputs and outcomes) and how will the approach use resources effectively and efficiently?
   - Are the projected outputs and outcomes specific and detailed? Are specific target measures included where possible? Are target measures reasonable and achievable within the project period and for the funding amount?

8. **Evaluation Activities related to this Cooperative Agreement**- To facilitate program effectiveness, applicants should describe an approach for documenting and measuring the success of their capacity building efforts, which may include information on success stories attesting to the Eligible Services provided to grant recipients and make this information available to EPA upon request. A success story is generally one that demonstrates an effort to help a grant recipient that generated a new grant or other financial award, engagement that informed programmatic decision-making, or similar successes or benefits to the recipient community. Applicants should also describe an approach for seeking feedback related to their

capacity building activities from participating grant recipients, that includes their satisfaction with the support provided, ideas on ways to make it more effective and additional types of assistance it should consider providing (e.g., technical assistance should be a "two-way street"), and any steps that will be taken to address the feedback to improve the operation of this award. These activities are expected to align with Order 1000.33 03/25/2022 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Policy for Evaluations and Other Evidence-Building Activities, including timely publication of information and findings. If the applicant intends to use EPA funds to develop and administer surveys or other information collections subject to 5 CFR Part 1320 for feedback, compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act by EPA may be necessary.

9. **Ineligible Activities-** The following are examples of ineligible activities under the awards to be made from this Cooperative Agreement:
   - General business training or financial assessments including assistance with business plans or marketing. For example, training, advice, or assistance on topics such as human resources, hiring, retention, health care, quality certifications, Lean, Six Sigma, or manufacturing, except where the assistance specifically relates to compliance with grant requirements.
   - Applicants acting as the community grant representatives (e.g., recipients cannot call federal or state personnel and assert that they speak for a grant community or call a help desk and act as if they are the primary community grant recipient).
     - Applicants under this Cooperative Agreement must maintain their role as providing assistance, training, and support/resources to grant communities participants and not act as their representatives in communications with other parties.
   - Training (e.g., vocational type training) unrelated to the purpose of this capacity building Cooperative Agreement.
   - Assistance in establishing a new organization, business, entity
   - Legal advice, services, or representation
   - Funding from EPA may not be used by recipients of this Cooperative Agreement for the writing and/or submittal of individual grant applications for, or on behalf of, program participants to a requesting entity. EPA funds, however, *may be used* by cooperative agreement recipients to aid community grantees with preparing applications for funding which includes providing assistance or "tips" to strengthen an application to enhance its competitiveness and responsiveness to funding opportunity announcements.

D. Pre-Application Assistance

In accordance with the EPA's Assistance Agreement Competition Policy (EPA Order 5700.5A1), EPA staff 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/applications. However, consistent with the provisions in the announcement, the 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. Please note that applicants should raise any questions they may have about the solicitation language to the contact identified in Section VII: Agency Contacts as soon as possible so that any questions about the solicitation language may be resolved prior to submitting an application. In addition, EPA will respond to questions

about whether a proposed project appears to meet the criteria for eligibility for consideration for these awards.

OCFO will post a recorded webinar titled "Supporting Grant Recipient Capacity for Data, Reporting, and Evidence-building" to assist potential applicants under this competitive funding opportunity. The recorded webinar will review the funding opportunity, key sections of the application, and the application process. Furthermore, OCFO will host weekly office hours during the duration of the NOFO's open period to answer questions regarding eligibility, clarify questions on the NOFO content, and the process. OCFO/EPA cannot answer questions on specific applications (e.g., Should I do this; do you want this, is this a good project, etc.). Potential applicants seeking funding under this competitive announcement (**EPA-I-R-OCFO-02**) are encouraged to view the recording and participate in the office hours. Dates for the office hours can be found at https://www.epa.gov/evaluate/prepared.

SECTION V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

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

A. Evaluation Criteria Guidance

Applicants will be evaluated based on the extent and quality to which they demonstrate that they have the capabilities, staff, resources, and equipment to successfully perform the project as described in Section I of this NOFO.

Eligible entities whose applications meet the threshold criteria in Section III: Eligibility Information of this announcement will be reviewed according to the evaluation criterion set forth below. Eligible applications will be reviewed and scored by Review Panels organized by EPA staff. Review panels may include internal EPA and external technical and subject matter experts.

Applicants must directly and explicitly address these criteria in their application package. The information provided must be easily identifiable and clearly described to ensure the content of the application is clearly laid out for reviewers. Each application will be rated under a points system, with individual criterion that has corresponding points detailed below. The score for each criterion will be based on how well each criterion is addressed and please note that certain sections are given greater weight than others. The maximum total number of points is 130.

The application will be scored on the following Evaluation Criteria:

Criteria	Category	Evaluation Criteria	Total Points 130
1.	***Program Objectives***	Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated based on the extent and quality to which they address program objectives by demonstrating the following:	**39**
a.	*Logic Model /Theory of Change*	**(i)** the logic model or theory of change details the design of the program(s), including specifics on relevant inputs, activities, etc. **(ii)** the logic model/theory of change links proposed activities, outputs, and customers to the desired programmatic short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes.	10
b.	*Project Activities & Capacity-*	**(i)** a clearly articulated plan and approach for establishing community buy-in and detailed the activities related to authentic community engagement in the development of project strategies described in Section I.	25

	Building Elements	**(ii)** capacity building activities that provide, at a minimum, one of the Eligible Services (or related activity) described in Section I. **(iii)** Eligible Services that will be provided to grant recipients through the most efficient and effective means practicable. **(iv)** capacity building activities that help communities be better positioned to prepare for, access, implement and demonstrate their success with the utilization of federal investment from EPA. **(v)** how they would collaborate with other EPA funded technical assistance providers (e.g., Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers, EPA Environmental Finance Centers and Technical Assistance for Brownfields recipients) to avoid duplication of effort and share best practices.	
c.	*Project Linkages*	the proposed project activities support and advance EPA Strategic Plan: Strategy 1 - Ensure Scientific Integrity and Science-Based Decision Making; Strategy 2 - Consideration of Health of Children at All Stages and Other Vulnerable Populations; Strategy 3 - Advance EPA's Organizational Excellence and Workforce Equity; Strategy 4 - Strengthen Tribal, State, and Local Partnerships and Enhance Engagement; or more specifically Goal 2 (Take Decisive Action to Advance Environmental Justice and Civil Rights), Objective 2.1, (Promote Environmental Justice and Civil Rights at the Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Levels). Refer to the below link for specifics on the EPA's Strategic Plan https://www.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan	4
2.	***Milestone Schedule / Detailed Budget Narrative***	Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated based on the extent and quality to which they demonstrate:	**10**
a.	*Milestone Schedule*	**(i)** a clearly articulated and realistic milestone schedule, including timeframes and major milestones to complete significant project activities (3 points). **(ii)** sufficient detail on their approach, procedures, and controls for ensuring that awarded grant funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner (1 points).	4
b.	*Itemized Budget Sheet*	**(i)** a properly categorized Budget Sheet/Budget Narrative with all line items calculated (1 point). **(ii)** The reasonableness of the budget and allowability of the costs for each component/activity of the project (5 points)	6
3.	***Evaluation Plan***	Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated on the extent and quality to which they demonstrate:	**40**
a.	*Performance Measurement*	**(i)** the evaluation plan is linked to proposed objective, activities, and timeline. **(ii)** the measured results by defining the specific and detailed measurable short term and longer-term expectations, describing how the cooperative agreement will measure progress of the expected results (including outputs and outcomes), and explaining how the approach will effectively and efficiently use resources. If included, the specified target measures are reasonable and achievable. **(iii)** a sufficient plan for collecting the data required to measure progress towards the required objective. **(iv)** a sound plan for tracking progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes and specified the associated timeframes for achieving those results.	10
b.	*Activity Monitoring*	an evaluation plan that clearly describes how activities will be monitored and at what frequency evaluation/monitoring activities will occur.	10
c.	*Evaluation Capabilities/ Personnel*	**(i)** their organization's experience conducting similar program evaluations with knowledge and expertise in addressing federal requirements in data and reporting; extensive knowledge of conducting program evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative methods; expertise in strategically collecting, framing,	10

		and communicating program benefits, evaluation and other evidence for community decision-making and communication; expertise in collecting and sorting complex and disparate data and statistics on sites and communities using public, EPA, tribal, state, or local data as well as census block group data; expertise in statistics and data visualization; expertise in developing and using performance measures, metrics, and indicators; strong expertise in developing materials to communicate studies results and other analytical evidence; and expertise in other subject matters as needed via technical direction. **(ii)** who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating activities (e.g., contractors, current staff member, etc.).	
d.	*Incorporating Community Feedback*	an evaluation plan that thoroughly describes how feedback from the participating community will be included in the program evaluation.	10
4.	***Partnerships***	Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated on the extent and quality to which they demonstrate:	**29**
a.	*Experience Working with Program Beneficiaries*	their experience working with this program's intended beneficiaries as described in Section I.	10
b.	*Experiences with Community-Engagement and Participatory Methods*	experience in working with communities and/or demonstrates experience in the application of community-engaged participatory methods. The applicant can demonstrate this experience appropriately by addressing the following areas: **(i)** How has the applicant built trusting relationships with communities that they have partnered with? **(ii)** How has the applicant prioritized the community in the design of outreach strategies, education, interventions, evaluation efforts, projects, and/or program development? **(iii)** How has the applicant ensured community involvement, centered community challenges, lived experiences, and/or indigenous knowledge in their work from conception to dissemination?	14
c.	*Partnerships with Program Beneficiaries*	partnerships with the specific underserved communities to provide technical assistance to enhance EPA grant recipients' and program beneficiaries' evidence-building capacity, as described in Section I.D.	5
5.	***Past Performance and Programmatic Capability***	Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project considering their:	**12**
a.	*Previously Performed Assistance Agreements*	(i) past performance in successfully completing and managing the assistance agreements identified in response to Section IV.B.3 of the solicitation (3 points), (ii) history of meeting the reporting requirements under the assistance agreements identified in response to Section IV.B.3 of the solicitation including whether the applicant submitted acceptable final technical reports under those agreements and the extent to which the applicant adequately and timely reported on their progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes under those agreements and if such progress was not being made whether the applicant adequately reported why not (2 points),	5
b.	*Programmatic Capability*	(i) organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project, (4 points) and (ii) staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project (3 points).	7

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

B. Review and Selection Process

Applications will be reviewed and scored under the following process:

1. **Threshold Eligibility Review –** All applications will be evaluated for eligibility using the threshold eligibility criteria described in Section III.A and Section III.C.

2. **Review Panel and Evaluation Process** - EPA will convene a review panel(s) to review, score, and rank all eligible applications based on the merit evaluation criteria listed above. The review panel(s) will include EPA staff and may also include staff from other federal agencies. After the evaluation process, the review panel(s) will participate in a conference call with the Selection Official (EPA's Evaluation Officer) before final selection recommendations, rankings, and evaluation results are presented to the Selection Official, in EPA's Immediate Office of the Office of Chief Financial Officer. Any changes that result to the evaluations or scoring as a result of the call will be documented and will only be based on the evaluation criterion above.

3. **Final Selection Process and Other Factors** - The review panel will present final rankings and selection recommendations to the Selection Official, who will then make the final selections for award. As described in Section II.C. New Applicant Set Aside, EPA plans to make up to 50% of awards to new applicants who have either never received funding from EPA or who received EPA funding for the first time in FY23 or FY24, provided the new applicants submit proposals that are meritorious.

   In addition to this information, the Selection Official may also consider any of the following "other factors" in making final selection decisions from among the high-ranking applications:
   - Diversity of community grant recipients being serviced by the selected applications
   - EPA Programmatic Priorities
   - Organizational diversity in terms of applicant type, geographic location, and size (e.g., endowment, organizational budget) in order to ensure a broad representation of applicants receiving awards to improve program effectiveness.

In addition, because the objectives of this NOFO are part of a government-wide effort to address environmental and energy justice concerns and challenges as illustrated by Executive Orders 13985 and 14008, information pertaining to proposed selection recommendations may be shared with other governmental departments or agencies before selections are made in order to determine whether potential selections: (1) are expected to be funded by another department or agency to minimize the possibility of duplicate funding, (2) could be affected by permitting, regulatory or other issues involving another department or agency, and/or (3) will complement or can be used to leverage funding by another department or agency to maximize value. Accordingly, in making the final funding decisions, the Selection Official will consider the review panel rankings and recommendations and staff input based on their call with the review panel(s) and may also consider the other factors identified above including input from other government agencies and departments as described

above. The "other factors" may only be considered by the Selection Official when determining final selections after the scoring and ranking process is complete.

C. Anticipated Announcements and Award Dates

Below is a tentative schedule of important dates for this NOFO. Please note that the dates are tentative and subject to change.

Date	Activity
See PREPARED webpage for dates	PREPARED Webinars (https://www.epa.gov/evaluate/prepared)
July 29, 2024	Open competition closes.
July 2024	EPA will review applications for threshold eligibility purposes (Section III.A and Section III.C). Ineligible applicants will be notified via email with details regarding ineligibility. Notification to ineligible applicants will be sent via email to the contact identified on the submitted SF-424 providing brief explanations on the reason(s) for ineligibility. Ineligible applicants may request a debriefing within 15 days of receipt of the correspondence.
August-October 2024	EPA review panel(s) review, score, and rank eligible applications. EPA will make the final selections for awards. All applicants will be notified of the selection results by mail and/or email.
October-December 2024	Headquarters/Regional offices will request any additional application documentation from selected applicants. Awards will be made by headquarters and/or regional grant offices as determined to be appropriate.
Late December 2024	Anticipated award announcement.

SECTION VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

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

A. Award Notification

EPA anticipates notification of selected applicants will be made via telephone or electronic or postal mail by the end of October 2024. The notification will be sent to the original signer of the application, or the project contact listed in the application. This notification, which informs the applicant that its application has been selected and is being recommended for award, is not an authorization to begin work. The official notification of an award will be made by the appropriate EPA Award Official. 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 be requested to prepare and submit additional documents and forms 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.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Awards issued under this NOFO are subject to the requirements of the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards; Title 2 CFR, Parts 200 and 1500. EPA also has programmatic regulations located in 40 CFR Chapter 1 Subchapter B. A listing and description of general EPA regulations applicable to the award of assistance agreements may be viewed at: https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-policies-and-guidance-grants. As provided in **EPA's**

General Terms and Conditions "Copyrighted Material and Data" (a link to which can be found in Section VI. of **EPA Solicitation Clauses**), EPA may authorize the successful applicant to use copyrighted works or other data developed with Agency funds by other Federally funded technical assistance providers, or to require that the successful applicant allow other Federally funded technical assistance providers to use works or data developed with EPA funds, when such use promotes efficient and effective use of Federal grant funds. General Terms and Conditions may be found at https://www.epa.gov/grants/grant-terms-and-conditions.

C. Period of Performance

Applicants should plan for the period of performance of three years with awards to begin on or about January 1, 2025.

D. Reporting and Plans

1. Progress Reports/Final Report Requirement

The applicant's project manager will be required to submit quarterly progress reports within thirty days after each reporting period throughout the duration of the agreement to update the EPA Project Officer on project progress. The project manager will also be required to have, at a minimum, quarterly calls/meetings with the EPA Project Officer to discuss progress. These reports shall cover work status, work progress, difficulties encountered, preliminary data results and a statement of activity anticipated during the subsequent reporting period. A discussion of expenditures along with a comparison of the percentage of the project completed to the project schedule and an explanation of significant discrepancies shall be included in the report. The report shall also include any changes of key personnel concerned with the project.

The project manager will also be required to submit a Final Technical Report for EPA approval within 120 calendar days of completion at the end of the 36-month project period. The final technical report shall include a summary of the project or activity, advances or goals achieved, a financial status update related to costs of the project or activity. In addition, the final technical report should discuss the problems, successes, and lessons learned during the project period. The EPA Project Officer will provide a quarterly and final report template once an award is made.

The EPA may collect, review, and disseminate those final reports that can serve as models for future projects. Many applicants may find it useful to document their progress using various media. This may include, but is not limited to the use of videos, blogs, and other forms of social media.

2. Funding Reporting

As noted herein, awards are expected to be funded by EPA, accordingly recipients must therefore have financial and programmatic management systems in place to track funds. Other reporting or tracking requirements may apply. The award will include appropriate terms and conditions to this effect.

E. Post-award meetings and Cooperative Agreement Coordination

Once awards have been made, EPA intends to meet with all the recipients to confirm the coverage of each Cooperative Agreement and identify opportunities to collaborate with each other (and any other EPA technical assistance providers as appropriate) to maximize the value of the program to attain its broadest impact, and to avoid duplication of coverage and effort. In addition, EPA intends to host regular post-award meetings with recipients to provide a forum for them to exchange ideas and best practices to

strengthen the technical assistance program with a special emphasis on underserved communities and communities in rural and remote areas. Recipients can use these forums to identify technical assistance areas that would benefit from harmonization and coordination, explore joint workshops and similar informational sessions, and share expertise and experiences. EPA project officers will participate in these discussions as appropriate.

F. Conflicts of Interest

The awards will include terms and conditions requiring that the recipient ensure that Eligible Services provided under the award are performed in a manner that prevents conflicts of interest from tainting procurements financed with public or private funding. For example, if a consultant hired by one of these cooperative agreement awards provides technical assistance on preparing an application for federal funding, then the consultant may not participate in the development of procurement specifications or other activities that violate the provisions in 2 CFR 200.319 on full and open competition for federally funded contracts. Consultants may not receive sole source contracts based on their role in preparing the application for federal funding. Award terms and conditions will also include restrictions that prevent consultants from marketing their services or those of affiliated firms to applicants or recipients of federal grants while providing EPA funded technical assistance.

SECTION VII. AGENCY CONTACTS

Main Contacts	Email
EPA Evidence and Evaluation Team	EvidenceandEvaluation@epa.gov

APPENDIX A – DEFINITIONS

Evidence, as applied in the context of the Federal Performance Framework for improving organizational and agency performance, is viewed broadly as the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid. As such, evidence can be quantitative or qualitative and may come from a variety of sources, including foundational fact finding (e.g., aggregate indicators, exploratory studies, descriptive statistics, and other research), performance measurement, policy analysis, and program evaluation. Evidence has varying degrees of credibility, and the strongest evidence generally comes from a portfolio of high quality, credible sources rather than a single source.

Title I of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act), Pub. L. No. 115-435 (2019) urges federal awarding agencies and federal assistance recipients and subrecipients to use program evaluation as a critical tool to learn, to improve equitable delivery, and to elevate program service and delivery across the program lifecycle.

M-20-12 – Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices

M-22-12 – Advancing Effective Stewardship of Taxpayer Resources and Outcomes in the Implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

OMB's M-20-12 – Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices

OMB's M-22-12 – Advancing Effective Stewardship of Taxpayer Resources and Outcomes in the Implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

See EPA's Program Evaluation Glossary which contains words that reflect the contextual meaning of the language from both the social scientist and practitioner's point of view.

Capacity building is support, investment, or training used to bring an eligible beneficiary to the next level of operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational maturity, so it may more effectively and efficiently implement its mission. It is a process in which eligible beneficiaries improve and retain skills, knowledge, tools, and other resources needed to serve low- and moderate- income families in local communities with increased or improved affordable housing and community development. It is not a one-time effort to improve short-term effectiveness, but a continuous improvement strategy with the eligible beneficiary toward the creation of a sustainable and effective organization that serves its community.

Evaluation – "an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of one or more programs, policies, and organizations intended to assess their effectiveness and efficiency." Evidence Act § 101 (codified at 5 U.S.C. § 311). Credible program evaluation activities are implemented with relevance and utility, rigor, independence and objectivity, transparency, and ethics (OMB Circular A-11, Part 6 Section 290).

Outcomes – Results achieved, or benefits derived from the capacity building activity conducted, typically demonstrated by the eligible beneficiary.

Outputs – Deliverables such as products, grants made, individuals served, or trainings delivered that are usually quantified by number produced, number delivered, number of attendees, etc. Outputs do not measure a change in a beneficiary's capacity or capabilities.

Underserved communities – "populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life…". As described further in the Executive Order, "underserved communities" include communities such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality. For purposes of this Cooperative Agreement, "underserved communities" has the meaning set forth in Executive Order 13985 and includes "environmentally overburdened communities" (that is, communities adversely and disproportionately affected by environmental, climate and human health harms and risks including remote, rural, and urban communities), and underserved communities.

Environmental justice as defined by the EPA is the *fair treatment* and *meaningful involvement* of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This is implemented in agency decision-making and other Federal activities that affect human health and the environment so that people:

> (i) are fully protected from disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects (including risks) and hazards, including those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers; and
> (ii) have equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment in which to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices. (Executive Order on Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All, Sec. 2. Definitions.)

Fair treatment means that no one group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal environmental programs and policies.

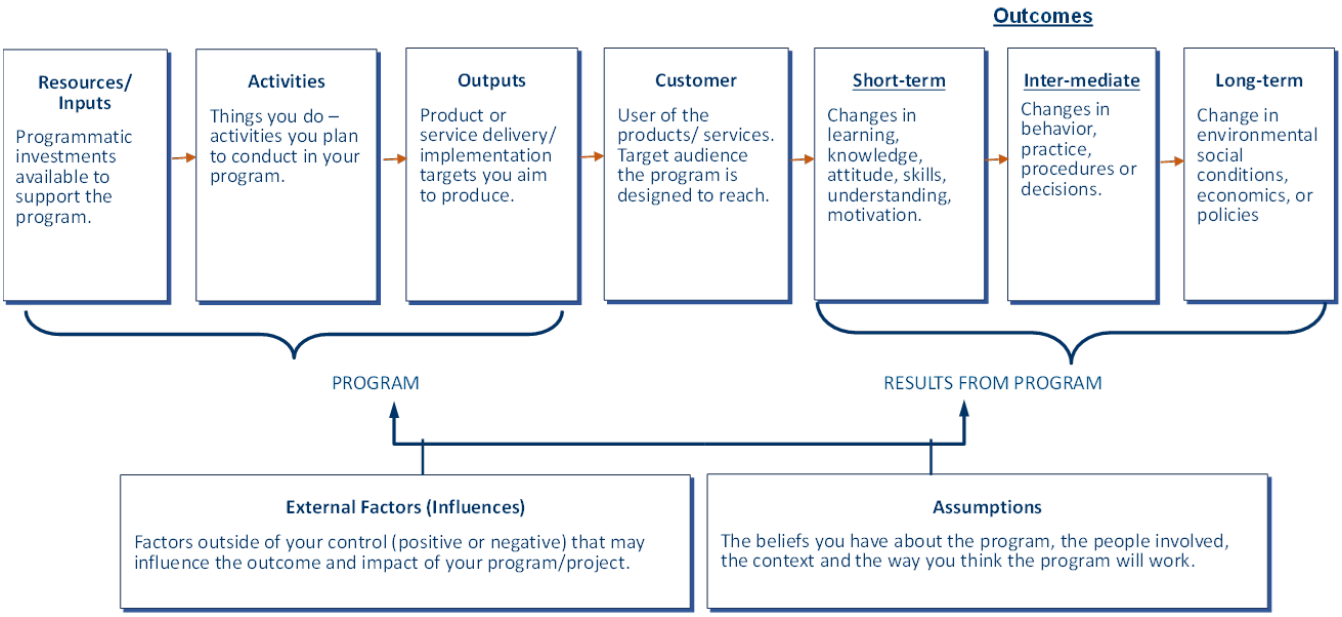
Meaningful involvement means that: People have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health; the public's contribution can influence the regulatory agency's decision; community concerns will be considered in the decision-making process; and decision makers will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.

Energy justice as defined by the Department of Energy (DOE or Department) is "the goal of achieving equity in both the social and economic participation in the energy system, while also remediating social, economic, and health burdens on those disproportionately harmed by the energy system" (Initiative for Energy Justice, 2019). At its core, energy justice applies the basic principles of civil rights to the climate space1.

APPENDIX B – LOGIC MODEL

The logic model is a picture that represents the intended relationship between your program efforts/investments and your program results. It helps to display your program and make obvious the connections between different facets of the same program.

An optional template is provided below.



Useful logic model terminology

Inputs are the resources that go into the program – these are the tangible or intangible resources that are needed in order to make activities possible. Examples of intangible resources include dedicated time, unique expertise, or access to something or someone you need. Examples of tangible resources include money, people, program space, and materials (handouts, books, clothing, equipment, etc.) facilities, volunteers, staff, and time.

Inputs translate to activities – these are the necessary actions that must be undertaken in order to accomplish your desired objectives. You can also think of activities as what the program does with its resources, these are the processes, tools, events, technology, and actions that are an intentional part of the program implementation.

Outputs are products generated from the inputs or goods and services delivered. These are the tangible product of program activities. So, as far as logic models are concerned, this usually includes the services that have been provided or the materials that have been produced as a result of the activity.

Outcomes are the desired results of program activities. Results can be divided into *short term* and *long term*. *Short-term* results are immediate outcomes (within 1-3 years) and represent the desired changes in program participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as a direct result of their participation in program activities. *Long-term* results are Impacts (realized over 5-10 years) and include the way in which the larger world eventually benefits from the mere existence of a program. Think ripple effect.

External Factors are all of the influences that may be beyond your control that can greatly impact your program.

Assumptions are beliefs you have about the program, the people involved, the context and the way you think the program will work.

APPENDIX C – OPTIONAL ITEMIZED BUDGET NARRATIVE EXAMPLE AND DEFINITIONS

Applicants are not required to use this optional template. It is provided as a tool to assist applicants in preparing their applications.

Note—EPA provides detailed guidance on how to characterize costs for budgeting purposes as well as a budget detail example in the agency's Interim General Budget Development Guidance for Applicants and Recipients of EPA Financial Assistance. For a sample Itemized Budget Sheet refer to: https://www.epa.gov/grants/rain-2019-g02

Budget Narrative/Sheet Definitions and Example

This section of the work plan is a detailed description of the budget found in the SF-424A and must include a detailed discussion of how EPA funds will be used. Applicants must itemize costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual costs, other direct costs, indirect costs, and total costs. Applicants should use the following instructions, budget object class descriptions, and example table to complete the Budget Detail section of the work plan. Additional information can be found at https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-05/documents/applicant-budget-development-guidance.pdf

A. Personnel - List all staff positions by title. Give annual salary, percentage of time assigned to the project, and total cost for the budget period. This category includes only direct costs for the salaries of those individuals who will perform work directly for the project (generally, paid employees of the applicant organization). Personnel costs do not include: (1) costs for services of consultants, contractors, consortia members, or other partner organizations, which are included in the "Contractual" category; (2) compensation for program participants (e.g., stipends or other allowances) such as interns and fellows (other than individual fellowships under 40 CFR Part 46) who are not employees of the recipient organization are participant support costs as provided in must be classified as "Other". Additional information is available in the EPA Guidance on Participant Support Costs. (3) costs for employees of subrecipients under subawards, which are included in the "Other" category; or (4) effort that is nor directly in support of the proposed project, which may be covered by the organization's negotiated indirect cost rate. The budget detail must identify the personnel category type by Full Time Equivalent (FTE), including percentage of FTE for part-time employees, number of personnel proposed for each category, and the estimated funding amounts.

B. Fringe Benefits – Identify the percentage used, the basis for its computation, and the types of benefits included. Fringe benefits are allowances and services provided by employers to their employees as compensation in addition to regular salaries and wages. Fringe benefits include, but are not limited to the cost of leave, employee insurance, pensions, and unemployment benefit plans.

C. Travel – Specify the mileage, per diem, estimated number of trips in-State and out of-State and international (include specific international locations), number of travelers, and other costs for each type of travel. Travel must be integral to the purpose of the proposed project (e.g., inspections) or related to proposed project activities (e.g., attendance at meetings). Travel costs do not include: (1) costs for travel of consultants, contractors, consortia members, or other partner organizations, which are included in the "Contractual" category; (2) travel costs for employees of subrecipients under subawards, which are included in the "Other" category.

D. Equipment - Identify each item to be purchased which has an estimated acquisition cost of $5,000 or more per unit and a useful life of more than one year. Equipment also includes accessories necessary to make the equipment operational. Equipment does not include: (1) equipment planned to be leased/rented, including lease/purchase agreement; or (2) equipment service or maintenance contracts. These types of proposed costs should be included in the "Other" category. Items with a unit cost of less than $5,000 should be categorized as supplies, pursuant to 2 CFR Part 200 and or 2 CFR Part 1500. The budget detail must include an itemized listing of all equipment proposed under the project.

E. Supplies – "Supplies" means all tangible personal property other than "equipment". The budget detail should identify categories of supplies to be procured (e.g., laboratory supplies or office supplies). Non-tangible goods and services associated with supplies, such as printing service, photocopy services, and rental costs should be included in the "Other" category.

F. Contractual – Identify each proposed contract and specify its purpose and estimated cost. Contractual/consultant services are those services to be carried out by an individual or organization, other than the applicant, in the form of a procurement relationship. Leased or rented goods (equipment or supplies) should be included in the "Other" category. The applicant should list the proposed contract activities along with a brief description of the scope of work or services to be provided, proposed duration, and proposed procurement method (competitive or noncompetitive), if known.

G. Other – List each item in sufficient detail for EPA to determine the reasonableness and allowability of its cost. This category should include only those types of direct costs that do not fit in any of the other budget categories. Examples of costs that may be in this category are: insurance, rental/lease of equipment or supplies, printing or photocopying, rebates, subaward, participant support costs, and advisory council compensation. Subawards (e.g., subgrants) are a distinct type of cost in this category. The term "subaward" means an award of financial assistance (money or property) by any legal agreement made by the recipient to an eligible subrecipient. This term does not include procurement purchases, technical assistance in the form of services instead of money, or other assistance in the form of revenue sharing, loans, loan guarantees, interest subsidies, insurance, or direct appropriations. Subcontracts are not subawards and belong in the contractual category. Applicants must provide the aggregate amount they propose to issue as subaward work and a description of the types of activities to be supported. See the EPA's guidance and policy documents on subawards for more information.

H. Indirect Charges – If indirect charges are budgeted, indicate the approved rate and base. Indirect costs are those incurred by the grantee for a common or joint purpose that benefit more than one cost objective or project and are not readily assignable to specific cost objectives or projects as a direct cost. For indirect costs to be allowable, the applicant must have a federal or state negotiated indirect cost rate (e.g., fixed, predetermined, final or provisional), or must have submitted a proposal to the cognizant federal or state agency. Please see the *Indirect Cost Policy for Recipients of EPA Assistance Agreements* for more information on Indirect Charges.

Examples of Indirect Cost Rate calculations are shown below:

- o Personnel (Indirect Rate x Personnel = Indirect Costs)
- o Personnel and Fringe (Indirect Rate x Personnel & Fringe = Indirect Costs)
- o Total Direct Costs (Indirect Rate x Total direct costs = Indirect Costs)
- o Direct Costs minus distorting or other factors such as contracts and equipment
- o (Indirect Rate x (total direct cost – distorting factors) = Indirect Costs)

EXAMPLE Itemized Budget Narrative (NOTE: Include separate table for each of the 3 years of the award. This information does not count toward the 20-page limit. See Section IV.B.4)

Budget Category	Itemized Description	Total
Personnel	* Project Manager @ $60,000 annual salary X 60% of time on project = $36,000 * Evaluator @ $50,000 annual salary X 40% of time on project = $20,000 * Community Engagement Leader @ $30,000 annual salary X 50% of time on project = $15,000	$71,000
Fringe Benefits	* Project Manager benefits cost 10% of salary (includes medical, dental, life insurance, and leave) = $3,600 * Evaluator benefits cost 10% of salary (includes medical, dental, life insurance, and leave) = $2,000 * Community Engagement Leader 10% of salary (includes medical, dental, life insurance, and leave) = $1,500	$7,100
Travel	* Local mileage for Project Manager for partner meetings: 25 miles @ $0.55/mi. X 32 meetings = $440.00 * Local mileage for Evaluator for capacity building activities: 30 miles @ $0.55/mi. X 5 times per month X 12 months = $990 * Local mileage for Community Engagement Leader for capacity building activities and community outreach/feedback: 30 miles @ $0.55/mi. X 5 times per month X 12 months = $990 * Travel to remote community for Project Manager, Evaluator, and Community Engagement Leader: Per diem – 3 employees x $30 per day X 3 days = $270; Airfare = 3x $1,360 per ticket= $4080	$6,770
Equipment	* None	$0
Supplies	* 40 reams of copy paper @ $4.00 for capacity building activity materials = $160 * 3 laptop computers for Project Manager, Evaluator, and Community Engagement Leader to work off-site in community @ $2,000 per computer = $6,000 * Outreach materials/postage = $2,100 * Miscellaneous office supplies for staff on this project = $1,750	$9,010
Contractual	* Bookkeeper/Accountant $20/hr. @ 3 hrs./week @ 52 weeks = $3,120 * Meeting logistics = $6,000	$9,120
Indirect Costs	* Negotiated IDC Rate Agreement of 10% of Personnel and Fringe ($50,000 X 10%)	$5,000
Other	* Sub-award = $58,000 (*include additional details below the table*) * Printing Cost = $1,000	$59,000
		Total year 1 = $167,000

APPENDIX D – OPTIONAL PROJECT NARRATIVE TEMPLATE

Applicants are not required to use this optional template. It is provided as a tool to assist applicants in preparing their applications.

Project Summary Page – Recommended not to exceed one page (not counted towards 20-page workplan limit) and include:

a. Project Title
b. Project Geographic Area
c. Applicant Information (name, address, main contact information)
d. Brief Description of Applicant Organization -- Provide a brief description of the applicant's organization, including its mission and key ongoing projects/activities in which it is involved.
e. List of Project Partners -- include partner name and stakeholder group. For example, State University (academic); County commissioner (local government); Local church (faith-based), Local supplier (business/industry), etc.).
f. Project Abstract -- Brief description of the main objective, activities, and outputs/outcomes of the project, including the specific geographic areas of focus.

The 20-page work plan should contain the following components (items 1.0-5.0 below) and should be identified by the headings in the order listed below. Also ensure that the workplan addresses all the evaluation criteria in Section V and any necessary threshold eligibility criteria in Section III:

1.0 PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

a. Logic Model/Theory of Change

i. As a figure, attach a logic model or theory of change that details the design of the program(s). Use the "Other Attachment Form" in Grants.gov. This is not included in 20-page limit. (Use of the logic model template provided in Appendix B is not required).
ii. Link the proposed activities, outputs, and customers to desired programmatic short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes.

b. Project Activities & Capacity-Building Elements

i. Describe a clearly articulated plan and approach for establishing community buy-in and activities related to authentic community engagement in the development of project strategies described in Section I.

ii. Describe the capacity-building elements (Eligible Services) to be provided to underserved communities. Eligible Services (referenced in Section I) include, but are not limited to:
   - Supporting personnel and data infrastructure needs related to performance management and program evaluation needs associated with their application, such as supporting pre-application development and coordination for infrastructure project delivery, that builds capacity to help disadvantaged communities implement capital funding.
   - Preparing potential grant recipients for success in data collection and management, as well as post-award reporting inclusive of quality assurance project planning (i.e.,

Quality Assurance Project Plans and Quality Management Plans); the identification and assessment in the utility of existing data/information; and any other activities related to project design and measurement activities.

- Creating and maintaining user-friendly data that community grantees can use to help with basic post-award reporting into EPA systems.
- Creating a connection between programmatic efforts and desired outcomes through logic modeling.
- Supporting evidence informed decision-making for communities, including positioning disadvantaged communities to demonstrate their success and then equipping them with the ability to access funding through direct EPA grants or participation in state CW and DWSRF programs.
- Supporting capacity for community-based program evaluation using qualitative and/or quantitative methods.
- Incorporating mixed methods evaluation, research methods, and analyses inclusive of surveys and qualitative data.
- Dissemination and translation of mixed methods, statistical analyses, and findings for lay audience/community understanding.
- Other activities applicants propose to build community capacity to employ approaches to program evaluation and other evidence-building, such as:
    - Creating opportunities for community to better define concerns and set priorities for discussion and action.
    - Developing workshops, training, and other skills development opportunities.
    - Extending networks, partnerships, and developing coalitions (see Section I.D. for definitions).
    - Building databases and accessing existing databases.
    - Community engagements and relationship building linked to data, reporting, and evidence-building.
    - Identify opportunities to streamline data collection processes, including cross-agency, intergovernmental, and private funding source data sharing.
- Development of other activities the applicant determines to be necessary and appropriate to carry out their proposed projects.
    - Pilots to assist with any of the above.

iii. Describe how these services will be provided to grant recipients through the most efficient and effective means practicable.

iv. Describe how the capacity building activities will help communities be better positioned to prepare for, access, implement and demonstrate their success with the utilization of federal investment from EPA.

v. Describe how your organization would collaborate with other EPA funded technical assistance providers (e.g., Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers, EPA Environmental Finance Centers and Technical Assistance for Brownfields recipients) to avoid duplication of effort and share best practices.

c. Project Linkages

- Describe the extent and quality to which the proposed project activities support and advance the EPA Strategic Plan Strategy 1: Ensure Scientific Integrity and Science-Based Decision Making; Strategy 2: Consideration of Health of Children at All Stages and Other

Vulnerable Populations; Strategy 3: Advance EPA's Organizational Excellence and Workforce Equity; Strategy 4: Strengthen Tribal, State, and Local Partnerships and Enhance Engagement; and more specifically Goal 2 (Take Decisive Action to Advance Environmental Justice and Civil Rights), Objective 2.1, (Promote Environmental Justice and Civil Rights at the Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Levels) (refer to link for EPA Strategic Goals and Objective specifics https://www.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan)

2.0 Milestone Schedule/Detailed Budget Narrative

a. Milestone Schedule

i. Include a clearly articulated/organized milestone schedule, detailing timeframes and major milestones to complete significant project activities. It is recommended that you insert a table in your workplan/project narrative to help organize your milestone schedule. Your milestone schedule should support and/or supplement the clear descriptions you provide in the Project Activities subsection.

ii. Describe your approach, procedures, and controls for ensuring that any awarded grant funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner and applicants must describe this in the workplan.

b. Itemized Budget Sheet/Budget Narrative

i. Attach a Budget Sheet/Budget Narrative as described in Section IV.B.4. (use Other Attachment Form in Grants.gov; not included in 20-page limit). Use of the Itemized Budget Sheet template provided in Appendix C is not required. Ensure all line items in the budget sheet/narrative (Personnel, Fringe Benefits, Travel, etc.) are properly categorized as defined in Appendix C.

ii. Clearly demonstrate the reasonableness of the budget and allowability of the costs for each component/activity of the project.

3.0 Evaluation Plan

a. Performance Measurement

i. Link your evaluation plan to your proposed objective, activities, and timeline.

ii. Describe the results to be measured. Questions to consider include:

   a. What are the measurable short-term and longer-term expectations of this cooperative agreement?
   b. How will this cooperative agreement measure progress in achieving the expected results (including outputs and outcomes) and how will the approach use resources effectively and efficiently?
   c. Are the projected outputs and outcomes specific and detailed? Are specific target measures included where possible? Are target measures reasonable and achievable within the project period and for the funding amount?

iii. In detail, describe your plan for collecting the data required to measure progress towards your objective(s).

iv. Demonstrate a sound plan for tracking progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes. Specify the associated timeframes for achieving those results.

b. Activity Monitoring

- Describe a clear plan detailing how activities will be monitored and at what frequency evaluation activities will occur.

c. Evaluation Capabilities/Personnel

i. Explain your organization's experience conducting similar program evaluations. Areas to address and consider include:
   - Knowledge and expertise in addressing federal requirements in data and reporting.
   - Extensive knowledge of conducting program evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative methods.
   - Expertise in strategically collecting, framing, and communicating program benefits, evaluation and other evidence for community decision-making and communication.
   - Expertise in collecting and sorting complex and disparate data and statistics on sites and communities using public, EPA, tribal, state, or local data as well as census block group data.
   - Expertise in statistics and data visualization.
   - Expertise in developing and using performance measures, metrics, and indicators.
   - Strong expertise in developing materials to communicate studies results and other analytical evidence.
   - Expertise in other subject matters as needed via technical direction.

ii. Identify who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating activities, along with their qualifications/previous experience (e.g., contractors, current staff member, etc.).

d. Incorporating Community Feedback

- Thoroughly describe how feedback from the participating community will be included in your program evaluation.

4.0 Partnerships

a. Experience Working with Program Beneficiaries

- Describe the extent and quality of your organization's experience working with this program's intended beneficiaries which include, recipients of grant funding from EPA as direct recipients of EPA funding and sub recipients who can participate in the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water programs, particularly for those representing small, underserved, and/or tribal communities that are applying for or receiving EPA grant funding, including but not limited to funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Public Law 117-58 [also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)] funding and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Public Law 117-169. If you do not have this experience, you should be able to convincingly demonstrate in your application how you

can effectively perform under the requirements of the PREPARED cooperative agreement, without experience in working with the intended beneficiaries.

b. Experiences with Community-Engagement and Participatory Methods

Demonstrate your experience in working with communities and/or demonstrate experience in the application of community-engaged participatory methods. To demonstrate this experience appropriately, the following areas need to be addressed:

i. How has your organization built trusting relationships with communities that they have partnered with?
ii. How has your organization prioritized the community in the design of outreach strategies, education, interventions, evaluation efforts, projects, and/or program development?
iii. How has your organization ensured community involvement, centered community challenges, lived experiences, and/or indigenous knowledge in their work from conception to dissemination?

c. Partnership with Program Beneficiaries

- Describe/identify the specific underserved communities the applicant will partner with to provide technical assistance to enhance EPA grant recipients' and program beneficiaries' evidence-building capacity, as required in Section I.D.

5.0 Past Performance and Programmatic Capability

a. Previously Performed Assistance Agreements

List any federally and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include Federal grants and cooperative agreements but not Federal contracts) that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than 5 agreements, and preferably EPA agreements) and describe:

i. Your organization's past performance in successfully completing and managing the assistance agreements identified in response to Section IV.B.3 of the solicitation.
ii. Your history of meeting the reporting requirements under the assistance agreements identified in response to Section IV.B.3 of the solicitation including whether your organization submitted acceptable final technical reports under those agreements and the extent to which you adequately and timely reported on the progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes under those agreements, and if such progress was not being made whether you adequately reported why not.

b. Programmatic Capability

i. Describe your organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project.
ii. Explain how your organization's staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, will help to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project. Resumes of the Project Manager and key personnel should be included as an attachment (not included in the work plan's 20-page limit).

Note: In evaluating applicants under items 5.a and 5.b of this criterion, the Agency will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources including agency files and prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information supplied by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please indicate this in the application and you will receive a neutral score for these subfactors (items 5.a and 5.b 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.