

Fiscal Year 2024 NOAA Gulf of Mexico Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET)
Program

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Funding Opportunity Description.....	4
A. Program Objective.....	4
B. Program Priorities.....	14
C. Program Authority.....	18
II. Award Information.....	19
A. Funding Availability.....	19
B. Project/Award Period.....	20
C. Type of Funding Instrument.....	20
III. Eligibility Information.....	20
A. Eligible Applicants.....	20
B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement.....	21
C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility.....	21
IV. Application and Submission Information.....	21
A. Address to Request Application Package.....	21
B. Content and Form of Application.....	22
C. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM).....	29
D. Submission Dates and Times.....	30
E. Intergovernmental Review.....	30
F. Funding Restrictions.....	31
G. Other Submission Requirements.....	32
V. Application Review Information.....	33
A. Evaluation Criteria.....	33
B. Review and Selection Process.....	39
C. Selection Factors.....	41
D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates.....	41
VI. Award Administration Information.....	42
A. Award Notices.....	42
B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.....	42
C. Reporting.....	48
VII. Agency Contacts.....	48
VIII. Other Information.....	49

NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: Fiscal Year 2024 NOAA Gulf of Mexico Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) Program

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-SE-2024-2008255

Federal Assistance Listings Number: 11.008, NOAA Mission-Related Education Awards

Dates: Applications must be received by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on February 5, 2024 to be considered for funding. Applicants should apply online through Grants.gov.

Informational webinars about the FY 2024 Gulf of Mexico B-WET funding announcement will be held on November 16, 2023 from 1-2 pm CT or 2-2 (https://meet.google.com/mke-sjtv-dek) and on December 6, 2023 from 9-10 am CT or 10-11 am ET (https://meet.google.com/kik-qtem-ezz). Please join the webinars at the Google Meet Video call links listed for each.

The NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET Coordinator will be available to answer questions Monday through Friday, 8 am - 4:30 pm CT excluding federal holidays.

Funding Opportunity Description: The National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office (Southeast Regional Office) is seeking proposals under the Gulf of Mexico Bay Watershed Education and Training (Gulf of Mexico B-WET) Program:
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/noaa-gulf-mexico-bay-watershed-education-and-training-gulf-b-wet-program>.

The B-WET program is an environmental education program that promotes place-based experiential learning for K–12 students and related professional development for teachers. BWET fosters the growth of new, innovative programs and encourages capacity-building and environmental education partnerships.

The primary delivery of B-WET is through competitive grants that promote Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs). The MWEE is a learner-centered framework that focuses on investigations into local environmental issues and leads to informed action. MWEEs are composed of multiple components that include learning both outdoors and in the classroom,

and are designed to increase the environmental literacy by actively engaging students in building knowledge and meaning through hands-on experiences. In these experiences, the core ideas of multiple disciplines are applied to make sense of the relationships between the natural world and society. MWEEs help connect students with their local environment and equip them to make decisions and take actions that contribute to stronger, sustainable, and equitable communities.

This Gulf of Mexico B-WET funding announcement focuses on the following priority areas: 1) Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences, 2) Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development with Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their students, and 3) Systemic Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience Implementation.

Again this year, the Gulf of Mexico B-WET funding announcement emphasizes our strong commitment to expanding the participation of marginalized communities in watershed education and is interested in projects that partner specifically with organizations and institutions that serve marginalized groups, particularly minority communities. And, it suggests that the MWEE framework can contribute to one of the most pressing economic, social and environmental issues of today - climate change - by directly fostering climate knowledge and competencies to contribute to climate solutions.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

a. Overview

Every year, the NOAA B-WET Program supports environmental education programs for thousands of students and teachers. These programs engage youth in meaningful watershed educational experiences (MWEEs) that provide memorable hands-on, experiential learning that are not typically available within traditional classrooms. It also plays a significant role in providing professional development to classroom teachers nationwide that increases their content knowledge, skills, and pedagogical expertise. Lastly, it supports the expansion of environmental literacy in a systemic manner throughout the region, including providing support for state-level capacity building.

Additionally, the K-12 education system is a well-positioned venue for instilling comprehensive knowledge, skills, competencies, and resilience around one of the most pressing economic, social and environmental issues of today: climate change. According to the 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report and most recent National Climate Assessment (NCA, 2018), communities in the U.S. are experiencing changes in climate that are resulting in severe storms, flooding, hurricanes, extended drought, change in ocean chemistry and sea level rise, presenting growing challenges to human health and safety, quality of life, and the rate of economic growth. Currently, educational institutions, researchers and policy makers are calling for climate change education that goes beyond knowledge acquisition and formal classroom teaching to efforts that reach audiences of all demographics and incorporate the social, political, economic, and justice elements of climate change. Education has the power to help students develop meaningful personal connections to climate solutions, a sense of personal agency and empowerment, and ultimately impact their behaviors and decision-making in relation to climate change (Kwauk, 2021; K12 Climate Action Commission, 2021). The MWEE educational framework can directly foster climate knowledge, skills, and competencies to address climate change, climate impacts, and the opportunities to contribute to climate solutions in their own communities. Therefore, the B-WET program strongly encourages the purposeful incorporation of education about climate change into programming.

In order to be effective, sustainable, and equitable, environmental education must be integrated within organizations that understand and support the needs of their community. In addition, challenges like the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change will be felt disproportionately by historically marginalized groups, particularly students of

color and students from low-income families that are more likely to lose environmental education within their local school districts. Therefore, the NOAA B-WET Program is interested in projects that partner specifically with organizations and institutions that serve marginalized groups, particularly minority communities. Projects are strongly encouraged to develop meaningful and mutually-beneficial partnerships that honor the strengths of community organizations. In successful partnerships, organizations have shared goals and work together to share resources, communicate effectively, collaborate on decision-making, and competently engage members of diverse cultures and expertise.

b. Defining the Bay Watershed Education And Training Program

The NOAA Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program is an environmental education program that promotes locally-relevant, authentic experiential learning focused on K–12 audiences. B-WET was established in 2002 in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and currently exists in seven regions: Chesapeake Bay, Gulf of Mexico, New England, California, Pacific Northwest, Hawaii, and Great Lakes. The primary delivery of B-WET is through competitive funding that promotes Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs).

Gulf of Mexico B-WET advances the goals of NOAA's Education Strategic Plan (<https://www.noaa.gov/education/explainers/noaa-education-strategic-plan>). It also addresses NOAA's Long Term Goal of Healthy Oceans: Marine fisheries, habitats, and biodiversity are sustained within healthy and productive ecosystems and NOAA's Engagement Enterprise Objective for An engaged and educated public with an improved capacity to make scientifically informed environmental decisions.

Gulf of Mexico B-WET also addresses environmental literacy principles such as the Ocean Literacy (<http://www.coexploration.org/oceanliteracy/documents/OceanLitChart.pdf>) and Climate Literacy (http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/education/literacy/climate_literacy.pdf) Principles and Concepts. More information about the national B-WET program can be found at <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet>. Information on the Gulf of Mexico B-WET program, including examples of currently supported projects, can be found on NOAA's website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/noaa-gulf-mexico-bay-watershed-education-and-training-gulf-b-wet-program>.

c. Defining the Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience

The Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE) is a learner-centered framework that focuses on investigations into local environmental issues and leads to informed action. MWEEs are made up of multiple components that include learning both outdoors and in the classroom and are designed to increase environmental literacy by

actively engaging students in building knowledge and meaning through hands-on experiences. In these experiences, the core ideas and practices of multiple disciplines are applied to make sense of the relationships between the natural world and society. MWEEs help connect students with their local environment and equip them to make decisions and take actions that contribute to stronger, sustainable, and equitable communities.

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

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

More information about the MWEE can be found at the following link:
<https://www.noaa.gov/education/explainers/noaa-meaningful-watershed-educational-experience>.

1. MWEE Essential Elements

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

1.1. Issue Definition

During Issue Definition, students learn about an environmental issue by planning and conducting background research and investigations. An environmental issue is an environmental problem, often with observable phenomena, to which community members bring a variety of perspectives. To provide structure for their exploration of the issue, students focus on a driving question that is defined by the teacher. This question is the “big

picture” question that sparks curiosity and organizes student inquiry and investigations, which ultimately informs environmental actions. It should be open-ended, relevant to students’ lived experiences, and meet learning objectives. To support youth voice and deepen the learning, students are actively involved in co-developing supporting questions with teachers to better understand the driving question and environmental issue. To explore the driving and supporting questions, students gather information by making observations, finding and reading credible sources, talking to experts, and carrying out field investigations. Students also consider environmental policies and community practices and reflect on personal, stakeholder, and societal values and perspectives to develop a comprehensive picture of the root causes of the environmental issue. Through this exploration of the local issues, students will understand their connection to the greater marine or estuarine environment and watershed system; and how their actions within that system can affect the environment.

1.2. Outdoor Field Experiences

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

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

1.3. Synthesis and Conclusions

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

1.4. Environmental Action Projects

As a result of their investigations, students identify solutions and develop Environmental Action Projects that directly address the issue within their school, neighborhood, or community. Students are actively engaged in and, to the extent possible, drive the decision-making, planning, and implementation of the action project. Teachers facilitate this process by forming groups, moderating, and answering questions. Students reflect on the value of the action and determine the extent to which it successfully addressed the issue. This essential element allows students to understand that they personally have the power to bring about change by taking action to address environmental issues at the personal, community, or societal level. Taking action instills confidence in students and can contribute to students becoming environmental stewards in their communities. Environmental Action Projects can take many forms and may fall into the following types:

- a. Restoration or Protection: actions that assist in the recovery or preservation of a watershed or related ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed. Examples include: plant or restore protective vegetation/trees; restore a local habitat; remove invasive plants; clean up litter at local beaches, parks, or school grounds; develop a school garden, natural history area, community garden, or other sustainable green space; install rain gardens to help manage storm-water.

- b. Everyday Choices: actions that reduce human impacts on watersheds and related ecosystems and offer ways to live more sustainably. Examples include: refuse/reduce/reuse/recycle; monitor and save water in the face of potential drought or reduction in water availability; compost food or yard waste; research and implement energy efficient strategies or energy alternatives at school and/or at home.

- c. Community Engagement: actions that inform others about how to address community-level environmental issues. Examples include: give presentations to local organizations; organize community events; record or broadcast public service announcements; share information on social media; post flyers in community; share posters at community

events/fairs/festivals; mentoring.

d. Civic Engagement: actions that identify and address issues of public concern. Students acting alone or together to protect societal values or make a change or difference in a student's school, neighborhood, or community. Examples include: present to school principal or school board; attend, speak, or present at town meetings; write to local or state decision makers or elected officials.

2. MWEE Supporting Practices

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

2.1. Teacher Facilitation

MWEEs require that teachers support student learning for the duration of the MWEE, both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers balance roles of facilitation, direct instruction, and coaching to create a student-centered learning experience where the essential elements of the MWEE come together to support goals for learning and create opportunities for students to take active roles in the learning process. Teachers provide space for student choice and voice by creating learning experiences that center on what students value. Even when activities or lessons occur at partner sites or are primarily led by partners at the school, teachers should be actively engaged. Teachers should connect these experiences to prior learning, foster critical thinking, and lead reflection after the experience so, regardless of the facilitator, the entire MWEE experience feels cohesive to the students. To support this level of engagement, teachers should have access to professional development opportunities that support their content knowledge, understanding of the MWEE framework, and confidence and intention to implement MWEEs independently (see Teacher MWEE Professional Development Characteristics for specifics).

2.2. Learning Integration

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

2.3. Sustained Experience

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

2.4. Local Context

MWEEs have teachers use the local environment and community as a context for learning that is relevant to students' lives. Situating the MWEE within local contexts promotes learning that is rooted in the unique culture, history, environment, economy, literature, and art of a students' school, neighborhood, or community. To enrich MWEEs, local resources (e.g. partners, expertise, field sites) should be incorporated. Partnerships, such as those with local community-based organizations, create opportunities for students to engage with members of their community of diverse cultures, values, and expertise that can create a more equitable and inclusive experience. Emphasizing the local context enables students and teachers to develop stronger connections to, and appreciation for, their local environments and communities. This also enables students and teachers to explore how their individual and collective decisions affect their immediate surroundings and in turn affect larger ecosystems and watersheds.

3. Teachers MWEE Professional Development Practices

Professional development providers play a crucial role in preparing teachers to implement successful MWEEs with their students. Professional development that includes characteristics such as: relevant content; explicit modeling of educational frameworks; collaboration, feedback and modeling instruction such as student-centered teaching; adequate time for professional development including time for ongoing support; and offering participation incentives that teachers value leads to a variety of positive outcomes.

Professional development should empower teachers to confidently and competently use the MWEE framework to support standards-based learning that aligns with local education agency initiatives. Teachers should gain confidence in the value of MWEEs and strategies for conducting them so that they will be able to implement MWEEs after the professional development has ended. To set teachers up for success, the following six overarching characteristics, informed by education research and evaluation results, are recommended for

inclusion in professional development to support teachers implementing MWEEs.

3.1. Increases Teachers' Knowledge and Awareness of Environmental Issues

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

3.2. Models MWEE Framework

Professional development should also provide opportunities for teachers to understand the goals and rationale behind the MWEE as a framework for fostering learning and environmental stewardship. Facilitators of teacher professional development should utilize the same techniques and experiences that teachers are expected to use with their students, such as hands-on Outdoor Field Experiences, critical thinking about environmental issues, and Environmental Action Projects. Of note regarding Environmental Action Projects: According to evaluation data on teacher PD, 30% teachers are not participating in Environmental Action Projects, one of the MWEE essential elements, during PD. Research suggests teachers are more likely to engage their students in activities they experience themselves during professional development programs. Therefore, MWEE professional development should always include opportunities for teachers to experience Environmental Action Projects that connect to the watershed issue being studied, as well as the inquiry activities their students will take to plan and implement their own action projects.

3.3. Includes Collaboration, Feedback, and Models High-Quality Instruction Effective

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

Of note regarding quality instruction: Where appropriate, professional development should include tools for teachers to implement MWEs on their school grounds. Resources exist to support the effective hands-on implementation of MWEs and the development and continued use of integrated, sustainable indoor and outdoor environmental learning projects that provide substantial benefit to both students and the school environment.

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

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

3.5. Offers Appropriate Incentives

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

3.6. Meets Jurisdictional Guidelines and Engages Leadership

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

d. Resources For Implementing The Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience

The following resources explain the Meaningful Watershed Education Experience (MWEE) and provide guidance on implementing a MWEE.

1. MWEE Description: The full definition of the MWEE is provided online in an easy to use online format. <https://www.noaa.gov/education/explainers/noaa-meaningful-watershededucational-experience>.

2. NOAA MWEE Resources: This website, <https://www.noaa.gov/officeeducation/bwet/resources/mwee-resources>, provides links to resources that will help educators find the tools they need to implement student MWEEs. Resources here include: the MWEE definition, the MWEEs in action video series, MWEE implementation guides, student outcomes for environmental literacy, MWEE training courses, and an online resource that supports hands-on environmental learning titled Bay Backpack. Of special note is the new national guide, titled “An Educator’s Guide to the Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE)”, found here: <https://www.noaa.gov/officeeducation/bwet/resources/mwee-guide>.

3. EPA’s “How’s My Waterway?” Tool: This tool provides watershed boundaries, definitions, and a comprehensive overview of water quality data and information within those boundaries. How’s My Waterway? pulls in data from several sources with the goal of answering questions about aquatic life, eating fish, swimming, drinking water, restoration and protection. <https://mywaterway.epa.gov/>.

4. Tools for Implementing MWEEs on School Grounds: School Grounds for Learning lists instructions and resources for 100+ educational green projects on school premises. <https://maeoe.org/environmental-literacy/school-grounds-for-learning>.

5. NOAA Assets: We encourage applicants to use NOAA assets, such as data, resources, expertise, or places, in forming and implementing the MWEE. NOAA has a wealth of

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

B. Program Priorities

a. Gulf of Mexico Alliance Priorities

The NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program responds to regional education and environmental priorities through local implementation. Therefore, applications are asked to employ MWEs that address the priorities outlined by the area's Regional Ocean Partnerships, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. The Gulf of Mexico Alliance is a partnership of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, with the goal of significantly increasing regional collaboration to enhance the ecological and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. The five U.S. Gulf States have identified six priorities that are regionally significant and can be effectively addressed through increased collaboration at local, state, and federal levels.

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance priority issues are: Coastal Community Resilience, Data and Monitoring, Education and Engagement, Habitat Resources, Water Resources, and Wildlife and Fisheries. The Gulf of Mexico Alliance cross-cutting issues are: Human Benefits of Nature, Integrated Planning, and Marine Debris. For more information about these priorities please visit the Gulf of Mexico Alliance website at: <http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org/> and the Governors' Action Plan IV at: <https://gulfofmexicoalliance.org/what-we-do/governors-action-plan/>. Applicants should describe how they address one, or more, of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance priorities.

b. B-WET Priority Areas

Proposals MUST address one of the following B-WET priority areas: (1) Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences; (2) Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development with Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their students; or (3) Systemic Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences Implementation. Each of these three B-WET priority areas are described below. Applicants must indicate which B-WET Priority they are applying under.

1. Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences

The NOAA B-WET Program seeks applications for projects that provide teachers opportunities for professional development in the area of environmental education. Professional development should empower teachers to confidently and competently use the MWEE approach to support standards-based learning that aligns with local education agency initiatives. Long-term professional development opportunities will reinforce a teacher's ability to teach, inspire, and lead young people in exploring current critical issues that impact the watershed resulting in thoughtful stewardship of our natural resources. In order to gain and maintain environmental education competencies, teachers benefit from sustained, high quality professional development that includes ongoing support and feedback. Projects should be designed so that teachers are capable of conducting a MWEE and provide the resources and technical support needed to implement an experience in their classroom. Proposals submitted under this area should be designed so that teachers not only understand what a MWEE is, but why this type of pedagogy is important. The goal is to ensure that professional development experiences for the teacher ultimately benefit the student. Proposals submitted under this area should address the specific elements and types of activities that define Teachers MWEE Professional Development Practices (see section I.A.c.3.).

2. Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development and Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their Students

The NOAA B-WET program seeks applications for exemplary projects that combine Teacher Professional Development with MWEEs for their Students. Professional development for teachers coupled with multiple MWEEs for students that are fully supported in the classroom by their teachers will ensure that the concepts of watershed education are fully reinforced throughout the school year. Exemplary projects should have a 24-month project period. Projects should focus on teacher professional development in year one, and implementation of student MWEEs in year two. Proposals submitted under this area should address the specific elements and types of activities that define MWEE Essential Elements, MWEE Supporting Practices, and Teacher MWEE Professional Development Practices (see section I.A.c.).

3. Systemic Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience Implementation

The NOAA B-WET program seeks applications that develop and implement systemic MWEEs in school districts throughout the Gulf of Mexico states. Systemic MWEE projects reach the entire student population in one or more grades within a school district, with teacher-supported MWEEs and ensure that the teachers of these students receive high quality professional development to give them the content knowledge and pedagogical skills for

outdoor learning to support all aspects of the MWEE as defined in section I.A.c.

Systemic projects should have a 24-month project period. Projects should focus on teacher professional development in year one, and implementation of student MWEEs in year two. Projects that are systemic encourage ownership from a broad range of constituents and promote long-term sustainability of the MWEE project in a school district. These programs require leadership and support from the school district, however, because of the broad reach of systemic projects, partnerships with multiple partners are often required to ensure all students receive all components of a MWEE and meaningful professional development for teachers is provided.

For systemic projects, students should participate in all MWEE essential elements as defined in section I.A.c (Issue Definition, Outdoor Field Experiences, Synthesis and Conclusions, and Environmental Action Projects). Student MWEEs should be organized around a driving question that has students focus on a locally relevant environmental issue, problem, or phenomenon.

For systemic projects, teacher professional development should be offered for all teachers whose students will be engaged in MWEEs so they can support learning integration in the classroom. Projects should deliver training on both content and instruction in the outdoors, include year-long support for teachers, and include a plan for how teachers will be involved in implementing watershed education with their students. This kind of in-depth professional development reinforces a teacher's ability to teach, inspire, and lead young people toward thoughtful stewardship of our natural resources. Where appropriate, teacher professional development should include tools for teachers to implement MWEEs on their school grounds. Teacher professional development under this priority area should address all components of the MWEE as defined in section I.A.c.

For systemic projects, proposals should include details about where the project fits in the scope and sequence of school district curriculum, and applicants should clearly understand and convey the primary learning objectives. Multi-disciplinary objectives are encouraged. Letters of support from curriculum supervisors and science, social studies, and other relevant subject coordinators at the district level can be effective in communicating such details.

Whenever possible, MWEEs should be embedded across an entire grade level or levels in a district, or be part of a broader systemic program in a school district to reach every student. For example, projects may reach only half of a grade level's teachers and students if the application includes documentation from the school district and other partners that the proposed project is a component of a larger systemic effort that reaches the entire grade

level. If this is not feasible, applicants should explain why it is not feasible and how they will build toward systemic implementation over the course of the grant and into the future.

Applications for projects can come from any eligible applicant, however, substantial coordination and support from the school district is required. To document the appropriate level of support and engagement from school districts, official letters from superintendents, school boards, and/or school district curriculum supervisors are requested with applications.

Per the eligibility information in section III., projects must target teachers and/or students located in any part of the five Gulf of Mexico states which are Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

c. Special Interest Areas

Any application to this announcement must meet Priority Areas as described in the previous section (I.B.). Additionally, NOAA also has two Special Interest Areas, which are: Climate Education and Gulf of Mexico Fisheries. More information on these special interest areas is provided below. While applicants are not required to address a NOAA Special Interest Area, applicants are encouraged to address one or more of them as they capitalize on NOAA resources and issue areas that are a priority to the NOAA Southeast Regional Office.

1. Climate Education: The K-12 education system is a well-positioned venue for instilling comprehensive knowledge, skills, competencies, and resilience around one of the most pressing economic, social and environmental issues of today: climate change. According to the 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report and most recent National Climate Assessment (NCA, 2018), communities in the U.S. are experiencing changes in climate that are resulting in severe storms, flooding, hurricanes, extended drought, change in ocean chemistry and sea level rise, presenting growing challenges to human health and safety, quality of life, and the rate of economic growth. Currently, educational institutions, researchers and policy makers are calling for climate change education that goes beyond knowledge acquisition and formal classroom teaching to efforts that reach audiences of all demographics and incorporate the social, political, economic, and justice elements of climate change. Education has the power to help students develop meaningful personal connections to climate solutions, a sense of personal agency and empowerment, and ultimately impact their behaviors and decision-making in relation to climate change (Kwauk, 2021; K12 Climate Action Commission, 2021). The MWEE educational framework can directly foster climate knowledge, skills, and competencies to address climate change, climate impacts, and the opportunities to contribute to climate solutions in their own communities. Therefore, the B-WET program strongly encourages the purposeful incorporation of education about climate change into programming.

For applicants seeking to address the Climate Change special interest area, NOAA provides data, tools, and information to understand and prepare for climate variability and change. Many resources exist that can support teachers and students including but not limited to: Climate.gov (<https://climate.gov/teaching>), the U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit (<https://toolkit.climate.gov/>), Climate Explorer (<https://crt-climate-explorer.nemac.org/>), CLEAN Portal (<https://cleanet.org/index.html>), National Network for Ocean and Climate Change Interpretation (NNOCCI, <https://nnocci.org/>), National Climate Assessment (<https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/>), NOAA Environmental Literacy Program Resilience Hub (<https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/elp/resilience-hub>), NOAA's Climate Resource Collection (<https://www.noaa.gov/education/resource-collections>), Yale's Climate Communication For Educators site (<https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/for-educators/>), and the Chesapeake Exploration Teaching Climate Change on line course (<https://cbexapp.noaa.gov/course/view.php?id=5581>). An additional list of relevant assets (<https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/elp/resilience-assets>) provide links to NOAA datasets, potential NOAA partners, and other resilience-related assets from federal and nonfederal organizations.

2. Gulf of Mexico Fisheries: The Southeast Regional Office is an office under the National Marine Fisheries Service. We work with partners to ensure sustainable fishing opportunities, protection for endangered species and marine mammals and the conservation of the habitat needed to support marine life. Given these commitments, NOAA is interested in B-WET projects that develop student understanding around the ecological, economic, or cultural importance of Gulf of Mexico fisheries and protected resources including but not limited to shrimp, snapper, grouper, sturgeon, sawfish, sea turtles, coral, or marine mammals; and the habitats that support them. Projects addressing this special interest area have fisheries or protected resources as the main issue student's investigate, and include student action to protect or restore the species and/or its habitat. For more information, visit: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/about/southeast-regional-office>.

C. Program Authority

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

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

It is anticipated that approximately \$800,000 will be available in FY 2024 to fund eligible applications. NOAA anticipates making approximately four to eight new awards, subject to the availability of appropriations.

For applications to B-WET priority areas 1 and 2, the total Federal amount that may be requested from NOAA should not exceed \$100,000. For applications to B-WET priority area 3, the total Federal amount that may be requested from NOAA should not exceed \$150,000 per award. In all cases, the minimum Federal amount to request from NOAA is \$25,000. Awards will be made with one allotment of funding that can be accessed over the 2-year award period.

The distribution of funding will depend on the Selection Factors in section V.C. of this announcement. Awards will be made with one allotment of funding that can be accessed over the 2-year award period.

If there are no funds available or if funding for new projects is very limited in FY 2024, Gulf of Mexico B-WET may carry applications recommended for funding forward until funding does become available. In that case, the results of this competition, including the results of the application review and rankings, will be carried over for FY 2025. So while we anticipate funding four to eight applications in FY 2024, additional applications from this competition may be selected for funding in the next fiscal year should funds be available.

The possibility of carrying the results of this competition over to FY 2025 depends on determining that the project applications received under this funding opportunity for FY 2024 funds remain relevant to NOAA priorities in the Gulf of Mexico in FY 2025.

This alternative to developing another, new funding opportunity for FY 2024 acknowledges the great effort required by applicants to develop a strong application as well as the work required by the B-WET Program Office and reviewers to conduct panel reviews. If we select applications from this FY 2024 competition for possible funding in FY 2025, the standard practice of considering the remaining projects from this FY 2024 solicitation in rank order will be followed.

Future opportunities for submitting applications to the B-WET competitive process are anticipated, but will depend on funding levels and resources available to support new projects.

B. Project/Award Period

The project start date should not begin before August 1, 2024. Awards made will be single-year awards (one allotment of funding) with an award period of up to 2 years. Applications must include a project description and a budget for the entire award period. Applicants selected to receive funding may be asked to modify the project start date. It is recommended to include the flexibility of the requested start date in your project description.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Applications selected for funding will be funded through a grant or cooperative agreement depending upon the amount of collaboration, participation, or involvement of NOAA in the management of the project. A cooperative agreement will be used if the NOAA B-WET program shares responsibility for management, control, direction, or performance of the project with the recipient. Additional forms of substantial involvement that may arise are described in Chapter 5.C of the Department of Commerce (DoC) Grants and Cooperative Agreements Manual, which is currently available at: <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2021-04/Department%20of%20Commerce%20Grants%20%20Cooperative%20Agreements%20Manual%20%2820%20April%202021%29.pdf>. Specific terms regarding substantial involvement will be contained in special award conditions.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are K-12 public and independent schools and school systems, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, state or local government agencies, interstate agencies, and Indian tribal governments. For profit organizations, foreign organizations, and foreign public entities are not eligible to apply; however, for-profit and foreign organizations and foreign public entities may participate with an eligible applicant as a project partner. Additional guidance on sub-recipient partners can be found at <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/section-200.331>. Likewise, Federal agencies are not allowed to receive funds under this announcement but may serve as collaborative project partners and may contribute services in kind.

Applicants may be physically located in any U.S. state; however, education projects must target teachers and/or students located in any part of the five Gulf of Mexico states which are Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Consideration will be given to applicants who show prior experience in working in the five Gulf of Mexico states or who show prior experience with the environmental issues of those states.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

No cost sharing is required under this program. Cost sharing is not considered in the evaluation criteria or selection factors.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

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

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

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Applicants should apply online through Grants.gov. If it is not feasible to apply online through Grants.gov, application packages may be requested from: Amy Clark, Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program Manager, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 1021 Balch Blvd., Stennis Space Center, MS 39529, (727) 466-8586, amy.clark@noaa.gov. The NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET Coordinator will be available to answer questions Monday through Friday, 8 am - 4:30 pm CT excluding federal holidays.

B. Content and Form of Application

Applications should follow the content and format described below. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of the Southeast Regional Office or the reviewers as to the relative merits of the project described in the application.

a. Format Requirements

All pages should be single-spaced and should be composed in at least 11 point font with one inch margins on 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper. The project description should not exceed 15 pages, exclusive of project summary, literature cited, budget information, resumes of investigators, letters of support, data sharing plan, National Environmental Policy Act questionnaire, and federal forms. Any attachment included in an electronic application should meet the above format requirement when printed out. All documents submitted as electronic application elements should be PDF (rather than MS Word, Excel, MOV, or other files types).

b. Content Requirements

1. Federal Forms: The following Federal Forms are required and must be submitted with applications with signatures of the authorized representative of the submitting institution. (Note: submission through Grants.gov results in automatic electronic signatures on these forms.)

- 1.1. Application for Federal Assistance: SF-424
- 1.2. Budget Information, Non-construction Programs: SF-424A
- 1.3. Assurances, Non-Construction Programs: SF-424B
- 1.4. Certifications Regarding Lobbying: CD-511

Additionally, the following Department of Commerce forms may be required:

- 1.5. Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: SF-LLL (if applicable, see instructions on form)

2. Project Summary (1-page limit): It is critical that the project summary accurately describes the project being proposed and conveys all MWEE components and objectives of the activities. A person unfamiliar with your project should be able to read the summary and grasp your plan. The project summary should include: organization title; principal investigator(s); address, telephone number, and email address of principal investigator(s); the

B-WET priority area to be addressed as described in section I.B.b. (Professional Development for Teachers related to MWEEs, Exemplary MWEE Programs, Systemic MWEE Implementation, or Capacity Building for Expanded Statewide K-12 Environmental Literacy Initiatives); the Gulf of Mexico Alliance issue to be addressed in section I.B.a.; the Special Interest area(s) addressed if any in section I.B.c.; project title; project duration (12 to 24 month project period starting on the first of the month and ending on the last day of the month); project objectives; total federal funding requested (whole dollars only); cost-sharing to be provided from non-federal sources if any (match is not required for this funding opportunity and will not affect scoring); organization and partnerships (briefly describe your organization and list your key partners for this grant, if applicable); succinct description of work to be performed during the project period; audience description (describe the demographics of your audience including the state or region(s) and the number and types of participants you expect to reach, such as school district administrators, environmental educators, principals, etc.), and delivery methods to be used (e.g. workshops, field experiences, interactive programs, summer institutes, classroom outreach, planning meetings, webinars, etc.).

3. Project Description (15-page limit): The project description should describe and justify the project being proposed and address the elements of the evaluation criteria as described in section V.A. A high quality project description includes specificity regarding the purpose of the project in plain language, project goals and milestones, expected deliverables and outcomes, activities to be performed, and intended beneficiary or target audiences.

3.1. Goals, Objectives, and Need: The project description should include the goals, objectives, and purpose of the project. Include information about the need of the target audience and schools to be reached. Include information about how the project contributes to greater understanding and stewardship of the Gulf of Mexico watershed and human elements. Describe the need for your project and cite timely studies or sources, where appropriate, that verify the need for your project.

3.2. Target Audience and Contact Time: The project description should provide a discussion of the target audience(s) that will be served. Specifically, project descriptions should include a precise location of the project and area(s) to be served and the number of teachers and/or students to be reached each year of the proposed project. Demonstrate an understanding of the needs of that audience, including anything that makes your target audience unique. Applicants should indicate whether the project will reach marginalized communities, particularly minority communities, or their students; describe the demographics and vulnerabilities of their target audience(s), and use data to support these assertions. Applicants to B-WET Priorities 1, 2, or 3 should clearly show total anticipated contact time with project

participants (teachers in professional development or students), and indicate how much of this time will be spent doing hands-on inquiry or engaging in action projects outdoors.

3.3 Alignment With National And Regional Principles: Applicants should include information on how their project addressed one or more of the
> environmental literacy principles such as the Ocean Literacy (<http://www.coexploration.org/oceanliteracy/documents/OceanLitChart.pdf>) and the Climate Literacy (http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/education/literacy/climate_literacy.pdf) Principles and Concepts.

> the goals of the NOAA Education strategic plan (<https://www.noaa.gov/education/explainers/2021-2040-noaa-education-strategic-plan>)
> the priorities of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (<https://gulfofmexicoalliance.org/>)

3.4. Community-Based Partnerships that Lead with Equity: In order to be effective, sustainable, and equitable, environmental education must be integrated within organizations that understand and support the needs of their community. Therefore, the NOAA B-WET Program is interested in projects that partner specifically with organizations and institutions that serve marginalized groups, particularly minority communities. Projects are strongly encouraged to develop meaningful and mutually beneficial partnerships that honor the strengths of community organizations. In successful partnerships, organizations have shared goals and work together to share resources, communicate effectively, collaborate on decision-making, and competently engage members of diverse cultures and expertise. Adequate compensation should be provided for community-based organization partners and community members for the effort they are contributing to the project. Applicants are encouraged to apply NAAEE's Community Engagement Guidelines for Excellence in developing their project plans for engagement of target audiences (NAAEE 2017).

Community partnerships may look different across proposals but may include: Organizations and institutions that serve marginalized groups, particularly minority communities; Partnerships that help to address a watershed challenge, problem, or phenomenon by bringing in local expertise on existing environmental issues and creating innovative solutions; Partnerships that enhance the local context, cultural relevance, and cultural competence in professional development for all teachers.

3.5. Methods: Project descriptions should include a timeline of expected deliverables, outcomes, and milestones and should describe how the planned activities will address the project goals and objectives. Timelines should be included and should be detailed enough for reviewers to ascertain the number and duration of teacher and student contacts.

Project descriptions should outline the methods, activities to be performed, and approaches to be used to ensure the project implements each component of a MWEE (defined in section I.A.c.). Include specific approaches to achieving project objectives and expected outcomes. In addition, project descriptions should detail how the project will address the factors described in the selected B-WET priority area (section I.B.b.1-3.).

3.6. Outreach and Sharing: The project description should include significant external sharing and communication. Projects should include a mechanism that encourages target audiences to share their experiences with peers and with the environmental education community. Applicants should describe how they will communicate and disseminate information from the project to ensure broader MWEE adoption and implementation. This could include conference presentations or strands, in-person or virtual convenings, sharing of white papers, or other media outreach about the project. Project-related materials should include the NOAA logo and cite B-WET as a funder.

3.8. Sustainability: Discuss a plan for sustainability of the project beyond NOAA funding. Applicants may develop plans for sustaining networks and partnerships or identify future funds needed to carry out next steps toward building systemic MWEEs across the state. List other sources of funding that have been sought for the project and the status of those requests.

3.9. Evaluation:

Project-level Evaluations - For all priorities, project descriptions should also identify and document the results or benefits to be derived from the proposed activities via a description of the project-level evaluation. Up to 10% of the budget can be spent on the evaluation component of your proposal.

For this funding opportunity, project-level evaluation is defined as the systematic collection and documentation of information about your project's short-term outcomes in order to improve the project's effectiveness, document successes towards meeting project objectives, and inform decisions about future programming. It informs those who design, manage, and implement the project to make refinements and introduce improvements into future efforts.

Project-level evaluations should be rigorous and well planned, with a clear articulation of how the evaluation results will be used (e.g. what questions will they answer). They should be appropriate for the kind of project proposed, the capacity of the applicant, and the size of project (e.g. new start up project vs. long standing program, new applicant vs. repeat applicant). They may be quantitative and/or qualitative and may include, for example,

evaluation tools and surveys, observation, or outside consultation. They should result in not only data, but interpretations of the data.

Proposals should provide a project-level evaluation plan for short-term outcomes. If your medium- and long-term outcomes can also be measured within the project period, explain your plans for that evaluation as well. The evaluation plan should include:

- > How will the evaluation be used and what do you hope to gain (e.g. information to determine the success of the project; information on how to improve the project's effectiveness.)
- > What will be evaluated (e.g. changes in participants' knowledge or attitudes related to watersheds)
- > The type(s) of evaluation that is planned (e.g. needs assessment, formative evaluation, process evaluation, outcome evaluation, etc.)
- > The methods for implementing the evaluation (e.g. what will be measured, how it will be measured, when will evaluation data be gathered, and how will results be analyzed and delivered?)

Resources for Project evaluation:

- > B-WET Evaluation resources: <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/resources/mwee-resources>
- > The "Evaluate" section of the Chesapeake Bay MWEE Guide: <https://www.baybackpack.com/mwee/step-3-evaluate>
- > California B-WET Project Evaluation Guidance: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/education/evaluation/welcome.html>

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

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval - Some aspects of project evaluation may require institutional review board (IRB) approval. It is the applicant's responsibility to determine if this is necessary and report back to NOAA. The U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services' Office for Human Research Protections website has resources to help you determine the necessity of IRB approval. You can find those resources at: <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/decision-charts-2018/index.html>. As part of the project evaluation plan, applicants must provide, in writing, a description of whether or not IRB review will be sought and a justification if not. If the applicant determines IRB review is necessary, the applicant must include a timeline for IRB review, and no expenditures related to data collection may occur until IRB approval has been obtained.

4. Appendices (not included in the Project description 15-page count)

4.1. Environmental Literacy Model (ELM): Provide an Environmental Literacy Model (ELM) or other document that illustrates how the proposed project will meet the full definition of the MWEE, including identifying curricular connections of the MWEE through academic standards, issue investigation where students engage in the essential elements of issue definition, outdoor field experiences, and synthesis and conclusions, and ultimately engage in informed action through a student-directed environmental action project. The Environmental Literacy Model (ELM) Template can provide consistency for articulating this and can be found at: <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/resources/mwee-guide>.

4.2. Literature Cited: If references are cited, applications should include a literature cited list.

4.3. Letters of Support and Partnership: Letters of support from each partner that is making a significant contribution to the project should be included with the application. Applications should include partnerships with school divisions, the state department of education, or capacity building network partners (if the applicant is not one of these entities). Applicants should describe the nature and makeup of the proposed community-based partners (if the applicant is not one themselves), including the partners' expertise in competently engaging members of diverse cultures, providing expertise on existing environmental issues, creating innovative solutions to the challenges, and/or enhancing the local context/cultural relevance throughout the proposed programming. See definition of community-based partnerships in Section IV.B.b.3.(3.4.) Community-Based Partnerships that Lead with Equity.

4.4. Technical Experience, Qualifications, and Resumes: Applicants should provide a description of the applicant's ability to successfully implement and manage the proposed project including staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them to successfully achieve the goals of the project, and your organizational experience and past history in performing tasks similar to the proposed project. Also include a paragraph describing qualifications of each of the key personnel and partner conducting the project, including justification for how the project team members possess the educational,

scientific, and cultural expertise needed to carry out the project. Provide resumes for the key personnel conducting the project (limit two pages per resume). Technical experience, qualifications, and resumes do not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

4.5. Data Sharing: Please see section VI.B.h. for information on the data sharing section of the application. The data sharing plan does not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit. The data shared plan do not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

4.6. NEPA: NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Consequently, if your project may trigger consideration under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), identify any impact the proposed work will have on the quality of the environment by completing the NOAA NEPA Questionnaire at the following link (<https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-11/NOAA-Grants-Questionnaire-final.pdf>) and include it as an appendix to your application. Please see section VI.B.e. for information the NEPA section of the application. The NEPA responses do not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

5. Budget and Budget Justification: In addition to the SF-424A Budget Information form, applicants should include a detailed budget justification, or budget narrative. Please list requested amounts in whole dollars. Applicants are encouraged to use the B-WET budget template found at https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/budgettemplate_91418.zip. All budget information submitted with the application should mirror the dollar amounts on required SF-424 and SF-424A forms. The budget documentation does not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

The budget justification should explain the need for all budget items in sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested in relation to the project description. To ensure equitable participation by community members, applicants are encouraged to include participant support costs (e.g., direct financial compensation, covering travel expenses and meals, providing lodging).

Grant recipients may be asked to attend a two to three-day B-WET conference during the award period. The conference will be an opportunity for current B-WET grant recipients to learn from each other and from NOAA experts. Your budget should include, in the travel category, estimated funds for these trips (such as meals, lodging, airfare and/or other transportation including rental car, shuttle, or taxi). Although this is considered an outreach and education opportunity, it should not be the sole justification to meet the outreach and

education criteria; local, regional or national communication is required as well.

The budget may include an amount for indirect costs, which are essentially overhead costs for basic operational functions (e.g., lights, rent, water, insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified specifically within a particular project. See 2 C.F.R. 200.1 and 200.412-.415 at <http://go.usa.gov/SBYh> and <http://go.usa.gov/SBg4>. An applicant may also propose all allowable project charges as direct costs. An applicant requesting indirect costs should provide a current approved Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement established with its cognizant Federal agency or an acknowledgement letter from the cognizant agency to which the applicant has submitted a proposed rate. In addition, if an award recipient does not have a current indirect cost rate with any Federal agency, the recipient may request to use the de minimis rate described at 2 C.F.R. 200.414 or it may negotiate a new rate with the Department of Commerce. The negotiation and approval of a new rate is subject to the procedures required by the NOAA and the Department of Commerce. The U.S. Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/DOC%20Standard%20Terms%20and%20Conditions%20-%2012%20November%202020%20PDF_0.pdf, require that within 90 days of the award start date, recipients submit documentation (indirect cost proposal, cost allocation, plan, etc.) necessary to perform the review to establish a new rate to: Raishan Adams, Grants Officer, NOAA Grants Management Division 1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor Silver Spring, MD 20910.

C. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

As required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C.6101 note, to the extent applicable, any applicant awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the System for Award Management (SAM), which may be accessed online at <https://www.sam.gov/SAM/>.

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or Federal awarding agency that is excepted from those requirements under 2 CFR §25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the federal awarding agency under 2 CFR §25.110(d)) is required to: (i) Be registered in SAM before submitting its application; (ii) provide a valid unique entity identifier in its application; and (iii) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a federal awarding agency. A federal awarding agency may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the federal awarding agency is ready to make a federal

award, the federal awarding agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant.

Applicants should allow a minimum of thirty days to be registered in SAM. Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through www.grants.gov.

D. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on February 5, 2024 to be considered for funding. Applications should be submitted through Grants.gov. For applications submitted through Grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication is included and will be the basis of determining timeliness.

When developing your submission timeline, keep in mind that it may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject the application and that an advance registration process is required that may take a few days or several weeks.

If Grants.gov has technical issues that prohibit submission or use of Grants.gov is otherwise not feasible, hard copy applications will be accepted. Hard copies may be submitted by postal mail or commercial delivery service. Mail hard copy applications to Amy Clark, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 1021 Balch Blvd, Suite 1003, Stennis Space Center, MS 39529. Hard copy applications must be received (not postmarked) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on February 5, 2024. Hard copy applications arriving after the deadline given above will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that the application was provided to a delivery service that guaranteed delivery prior to the specified closing date and time. Hard copy applications received by Southeast Regional Office later than two business days following the closing date will not be accepted.

Informational webinars about the FY 2024 Gulf of Mexico B-WET funding announcement will be held on November 16, 2023 from 1-2 pm CT or 2-2 (<https://meet.google.com/mke-sjtv-dek>) and on December 6, 2023 from 9-10 am CT or 10-11 am ET (<https://meet.google.com/kik-qtem-ezz>). Please join the webinars at the Google Meet Video call links listed for each.

The NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET Coordinator will be available to answer questions Monday through Friday, 8 AM-4 PM Central Time excluding federal holidays.

E. Intergovernmental Review

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

F. Funding Restrictions

a. Indirect Costs: The budget may include an amount for indirect costs if your organization has an established indirect cost rate with the Federal government. If indirect costs are requested, indirect-cost-rate agreements must be included for the applicant organization and the negotiated rate must be requested. If an applicant does not have an indirect cost rate and wants to include indirect costs, the applicant has up to 90 days after the award start date to submit an indirect cost proposal or cost allocation plan. Indirect-cost-rate agreement documentation is not required for sub-awardees, however indirect cost rates at the negotiated levels should be paid by the primary awardee.

Under 2 C.F.R. § 200.414 Indirect (F&A) Costs, any applicant that does not have a current negotiated indirect cost rate may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs which may be used indefinitely. Costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs, but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 200.403 Factors affecting allowability of costs. If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a cooperator chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the non-Federal entity may apply to do at any time. The negotiation and approval of a rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the Department of Commerce Standard Terms and Conditions Section B.06. The NOAA contact for indirect or facilities and administrative costs is: Raishan Adams, Grants Officer; NOAA Grants Management Division; 1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor; Silver Spring, Maryland 20910; raishan.adams@noaa.gov.

b. Construction: B-WET cannot fund projects with the primary purpose of construction. This includes the construction of new buildings, completion of shell space in existing buildings, renovation or rehabilitation of existing buildings, and construction or development of real property infrastructure improvements (e.g., site preparation, utilities, streets, curbs, sidewalks, parking lots, other streetscaping improvements, etc.). Alteration activities in support of an education project, such as the renovation of an educational exhibit or installation of a schoolyard garden space, would likely not be considered construction.

c. Allowable Costs: All costs must be reasonable, allowable, allocable and necessary. Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out the project. Allowable costs are determined by reference to the OMB Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (OMB Uniform Requirements), found at 2 C.F.R. Part 200 and adopted by the

Department of Commerce through 2 C.F.R. 1327.101. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/SBYh> and <http://go.usa.gov/SBg4>. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, equipment, supplies, and training, as long as these are necessary and reasonable.

G. Other Submission Requirements

Applications should be submitted through Grants.gov. For applications submitted through Grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication is included and will be the basis of determining timeliness.

When developing your submission timeline, keep in mind that it may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject the application and that an advance registration process is required that may take a few days or several weeks.

If Grants.gov has technical issues that prohibit submission or use of Grants.gov is otherwise not feasible, hard copy applications will be accepted. Hard copies may be submitted by postal mail or commercial delivery service. Mail hard copy applications to Amy Clark, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 1021 Balch Blvd, Suite 1003, Stennis Space Center, MS 39529. Hard copy applications must be received (not postmarked) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on February 5, 2024. Hard copy applications arriving after the deadline given above will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that the application was provided to a delivery service that guaranteed delivery prior to the specified closing date and time. Hard copy applications received by Southeast Regional Office later than two business days following the closing date will not be accepted.

Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through Grants.gov. Validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission. Because first-time registration with Grants.gov can take up to three weeks or more, it is strongly recommended that this registration process be completed as soon as possible. Also, even if an applicant has registered with Grants.gov previously, the applicant's password may have expired or their registration may need to be renewed prior to submitting to Grants.gov. Grants.gov will not accept submissions if the applicant has not been authorized or if credentials are incorrect. Authorizations and credential corrections can take several days to establish. Please consider these notes in developing your submission timeline.

If you experience Grants.gov technical problems or glitches with the Grants.gov website that you believe threatens your ability to complete a submission before an applicable funding cycle deadline, please print any error message received; and call the Grants.gov Contact Center at 800-518-4726 for immediate assistance. Ensure that you obtain a case number

regarding your communications with Grants.gov. Please note: problems with an applicant organization's computer system or equipment are not considered Grants.gov technical problems. Similarly, an applicant's failure to: complete the required registration, ensure that a registered Authorized Organization Representative submits the application, or receive an email message from Grants.gov are not considered Grants.gov technical problems. A Grants.gov technical problem occurs in connection with the operations of Grants.gov system, such as the temporary loss of service by Grants.gov due to unexpected volume of traffic or failure of information technology systems, both of which are highly unlikely. In the event of a confirmed technical problem, NOAA may allow more time for applicant submission due to system problems at Grants.gov at the time of application submission that are beyond the control of the applicant.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

A. Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria For Priorities 1, 2, AND 3: (1) Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences, (2) Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development with Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their students, and (3) Systemic Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience Implementation

1. Importance, Relevance, And Applicability Of Application To The Program Goals (15 points)

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program, this includes the following questions:

1.1. Project Need (4 points): Does the applicant provide data that demonstrates that the schools to be served have indicators of need in academic performance (e.g. academic achievement, graduation rates, and attendance), socioeconomic status (e.g. low income, unemployment, high poverty, title 1 schools) and/or other areas that have shown to widen disparities in access to environmental education?

1.2. Target Audience (4 points): Does the applicant describe the target audience using specific demographics? Does the applicant target historically marginalized communities, students of color, students from low-income families, or those that are more likely to lose environmental education within their local school districts? Does the applicant include data

to justify and support their description of the targeted communities?

1.3. Connection to Watershed (3 points): Does the project make a direct connection to the greater marine or estuarine environment and watershed system; and does it address how actions within that system can affect the environment? Does the applicant include information about how the project contributes to greater understanding and stewardship of the Gulf of Mexico states' watersheds and human elements?

1.4. Alignment with National and Regional Principles and Priorities (1 point): Does the applicant illustrate alignment with national and regional principles and priorities such as Ocean Literacy Principles, Climate Literacy Principles, NOAA Education Strategic Plan goals, and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Priorities?

1.5. Special Interest Areas (3 points): Does the applicant address one or both of the stated Special Interest Areas defined in section I.B.c. – Climate Education and Gulf of Mexico Fisheries – which are needs of the Gulf of Mexico states?

2. Technical Merit (45 points)

This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program, this includes the following questions.

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

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

2.3. NOAA Assets (3 points): Does the project use NOAA and partner assets including products, data, services, or scientific/professional experts in forming and implementing the MWEE; and did the applicant include a completed Environmental Literacy Model?

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

2.5 Evaluation (3 points): Does the applicant provide an effective project-level evaluation

plan, appropriate to the maturity and scale of the project, to determine the project's effectiveness, document successes towards meeting the objectives, and inform decisions about future programming? Does the plan describe how the evaluation will be used? Does the plan define what will be evaluated and the types of evaluation planned? Are the methods for implementing the evaluation appropriate?

2.6. Implementing the Components of the MWEE (total of 30 points as broken down below): Applicants will be scored on the evaluation criteria noted below that correspond to the priority under which the application is submitted.

- > For applications to Priority 1, per the description in section I.B.b.1., does the application fully address the characteristics of teacher MWEE professional development? Specifically:
 - Is the application likely to increase teachers' knowledge and awareness of environmental issues? (5 points)
 - Does the project require teachers to model the MWEE framework by allowing them to define a local watershed issue? (2 points)
 - Does the project require teachers to model the MWEE framework by participating in outdoor field experiences? (2 points)
 - Does the project require teachers to model the MWEE framework by synthesizing their results and drawing conclusions? (2 points)
 - Does the project require teachers to model the MWEE framework by describing how teachers will be engaged in Environmental Action Projects during the professional development program? (2 points)
 - Does the project include opportunity for collaboration, feedback, and high-quality instruction? Where appropriate, does the professional development include tools for teachers to implement MWEEs on their school grounds? (4 points)
 - Does the application allow for adequate instructional time and ongoing support? Does the project include more than 30 hours of professional development time? Is more than 10 hours of professional development time spent doing hands-on inquiry or engaging in action projects? (5 points)
 - Does the project describe adequate incentives that support teachers' abilities to attend professional development activities? (4 points)
 - Does the application meet jurisdictional guidelines and engage leadership? (4 points)

OR

- > For applications to Priority 2, per the description in section I.B.b.2. (exemplary), does the application address the characteristics of teacher MWEE professional development and the MWEE essential elements for students? Specifically:

- Is the application likely to increase teachers' knowledge and awareness of environmental issues? (2 points)
- Does the project require teachers to model the MWEE framework by allowing them to define a local watershed issue? (2 points)
- Does the project require teachers to model the MWEE framework by participating in outdoor field experiences? (2 points)
- Does the project require teachers to model the MWEE framework by synthesizing their results and drawing conclusions? (2 points)
- Does the project require teachers to model the MWEE framework by describing how teachers will be engaged in Environmental Action Projects during the professional development program? (2 points)
- Does the project include opportunity for collaboration, feedback, and high-quality instruction? Where appropriate, does the professional development include tools for teachers to implement MWEEs on their school grounds? (2 points)
- Does the application allow for adequate instructional time and ongoing support? Does the project include more than 30 hours of professional development time? Is more than 10 hours of professional development time spent doing hands-on inquiry or engaging in action projects? (2 points)
- Does the project describe adequate incentives that support teachers' abilities to attend professional development activities? (2 points)
- Does the application meet jurisdictional guidelines and engage leadership? (2 points)
- Does the application guide students to identify a local environmental issue? (3 points)
- Does the application provide outdoor field experiences for students? (3 points)
- Does the application support students in synthesizing their results and drawing conclusions? (3 points)
- Does the application illustrate a pathway for students to complete environmental action projects as a result of their investigations? (3 points)

OR

- > For applications to Priority 3, per the description in section I.B.b.3. (systemic), does the application address the characteristics of Systemic teacher MWEE professional development and the MWEE essential elements for students? Specifically:
 - Consistent with the definition of the MWEE defined in section I.A.c., does the application address the characteristics of teacher MWEE professional development? (10 points)
 - Consistent with the definition of the MWEE defined in section I.A.c., does the application address the MWEE essential elements for students? (10 points)
 - Does the application develop and implement programming that reaches the entire teacher and student population in one or more grades within a district? (4 points)

--Is there demonstrated support from the school district leadership via official letters from superintendents, school boards, and/or school district curriculum supervisors? (3 points)

--Does the applicant clearly document that the proposed project is part of building or supporting a broader systemic program in a school district? (3 points)

3. Overall Qualification Of Applicant (15 points)

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program, this includes the following questions:

3.1. Organizational Capacity (3 points): Has the applicant organization managed similar programs or grants (e.g. projects with similar funding source, dollar amounts, project team size, project duration, and audience size) or does the applicant justify the capacity of the project leads and organization to be well positioned to manage the proposed project?

3.2. Knowledge of K-12 Landscape (3 points): Does the applicant show capability and experience in successfully completing similar K-12 projects? Does the applicant demonstrate knowledge of the Content Standards for their state? Does the applicant document collaboration with schools or school systems (if they are not such an organization)?

3.3. Knowledge of Local Watershed (3 points): Does the applicant show prior experience in working in the Gulf of Mexico states, show prior experience with environmental issues of the Gulf of Mexico states, or demonstrate partnerships with local organizations in the Gulf of Mexico states on proposed projects? Does the applicant demonstrate knowledge of watershed issues?

3.4 Content Expert Partners (3 points): Does the applicant describe the nature and makeup of the proposed partners and relate each partners' expertise to the objectives or elements of the proposed project? Did all subject matter expert partners needed to execute the proposed project (e.g. watershed and other subject matter experts, curriculum supervisors, school districts, etc.) provide letters of support?

3.5. Community-based Partners (3 points): Are organizations with expertise in reaching marginalized communities such as community-based partners included and did they provide letters of participation? Does the applicant describe how the partners' expertise positions them to ensure equity and inclusion in environmental literacy planning activities? Does the applicant describe their partners' qualifications and experience related to competently engaging members of diverse cultures, providing expertise on existing environmental issues, creating innovative solutions to the challenges, and/or enhancing the local context/cultural

relevance throughout the proposed programming?

4. Project Costs (20 points)

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program, this includes the following questions:

4.1. Reasonable (7 points): Does the applicant adequately justify the proposed budget request and is the budget request reasonable for the number of students, teachers, and/or participants being reached and represent a good return on investment? Is the proposed budget suitable to the cost of material and services in the targeted geographic area?

4.2. Direct Programming (7 points): Is a significant percentage of the budget directly related to bringing students, teachers, and/or participants in contact with the environment? Are requested funds for salaries and fringe benefits only for those personnel who are directly involved in implementing the project? Does the applicant budget for a Gulf of Mexico BWET conference? Did the applicant include a completed Gulf of Mexico B-WET Excel Budget table in addition to the budget narrative?

4.3 Partner and Participant Compensation (6 points): Are partners adequately compensated for their expertise and contribution to the project? Does the project describe adequate incentives that support teachers' abilities to attend professional development activities?

5. Outreach And Education (5 points)

This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program, this includes the following questions:

5.1. Outreach (3 points): Does the application describe opportunities for outreach and education around the value of MWEs and environmental education at events that engage school boards, public officials, parents, community organizations, other schools, or the media? Does the project have plans for supporting target audiences in sharing their conclusions and watershed protection knowledge with a school board audience? Is a commitment made to acknowledge NOAA B-WET as the funder in these outreach products?

5.2. Data Management (2 points) Did the applicant include a plan for collecting and managing data. Did the applicant discuss how data gathered from the project (environmental data, science knowledge gain, attitudinal change, etc.) will be shared?

B. Review and Selection Process

After the application period has closed, we will screen received applications to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see IV.D. Submission Dates and Times); include SF 424 authenticated by an authorized representative; were submitted by an eligible applicant (see III.A. Eligibility Information); address one of the B-WET priority areas (see I.B.b.); and include required content (see IV.B.). If your application does not conform to the requirements and the deadline for submission has passed, the application will be rejected without further consideration. NOAA, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues that may be easily rectified or cured.

Applications responsive to this solicitation will be evaluated by a two-part review process; a technical review and a panel review. Both phases are conducted by the same set of private and/or public sector expert reviewers. Each review phase is described in detail below.

a. Technical Review:

The purpose of the technical review is to evaluate each proposal's technical merit via individual evaluations of the proposals. Each application will be reviewed by a minimum of 3 reviewers. Reviewers provide comments (which are shared with applicants after the competition has concluded) and assign scores to the applications based on the evaluation criteria in section V.A. of this federal funding opportunity. If one or more non-Federal reviewer is used, no consensus advice will be given.

The Program Officer will use these scores to create a preliminary ranked list of proposals. This preliminary rank order will be used in the subsequent panel meeting where final funding recommendations are made.

b. Panel Review:

A virtual panel review will be held following the technical review process. The purpose of the panel meeting is to discuss in-depth the proposals that ranked highly in the technical review process and to get final funding recommendations from reviewers. This in-depth discussion may raise issues, answer questions, or clarify an issue. Panel members individually consider the significance of the problem addressed in the project proposal, along with technical evaluation scores, and the need for funding.

Both the ranking, and the scores from individual reviewers, inform which proposals are discussed at the review panel meeting. If a proposal ranks in the bottom half of all proposals, and it did not rank in the top two for any individual reviewers, it is not considered for discussion or funding.

After discussing a particular proposal, the individuals on the panel will provide comments and rate each proposal as either Recommended for Funding or Not Recommended for Funding. If one or more non-Federal reviewer is used, the Panel will give no consensus advice. Using the recommendation on each discussed proposal, the Program Manager will calculate a percent recommended for each discussed proposal. This establishes a final rank order for funding that is provided to the Selecting Official.

In the event that there are two or more projects tied in the final rank order that are competing for the final available funds, the technical review scores will determine the rank order. If a tie persists beyond this, all tied projects will be given equal consideration by the Selecting Official. The Selecting Official will resolve any ties by selecting projects based on the selection factors listed in section V.C. of this federal funding opportunity.

NOAA may select all, some, or none of the applications, or part of any application, ask applicants to work together or combine projects, defer applications to the future, or reallocate funds to different funding categories, to the extent authorized. Applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans or budgets, and provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and NOAA program staff.

The NOAA Grants Officer will review financial and grants administration aspects of a proposed award, including conducting an assessment of the risk posed by the applicant in accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.206. In addition to reviewing repositories of government-wide eligibility, qualifications or financial integrity information, the risk assessment conducted by NOAA may consider items such as the financial stability of an applicant, quality of the applicant's management systems, an applicant's history of performance, previous audit reports and audit findings concerning the applicant and the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-federal entities.

Applicants may submit comments to the Responsibility/Qualification in SAM.gov about any information included in the system about their organization for consideration by the awarding agency. Upon review of these factors, if appropriate, specific award conditions that respond to the degree of risk may be applied by the NOAA Grants Officer pursuant to 2 C.F.R. 200.208. In addition, NOAA reserves the right to reject an application in its entirety where information is uncovered that raises a significant risk with respect to the responsibility or suitability of an applicant. The final approval of selected applications and issuance of

awards will be by the NOAA Grants Officer. The award decision of the Grants Officer is final.

C. Selection Factors

The Gulf B-WET panel ratings will be provided in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official shall recommend awarding in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based on the following factors:

- a. Availability of funding;
- b. Balance/distribution of funds:
 - 1. geographically
 - 2. by type of institutions
 - 3. by type of partners
 - 4. by research areas
 - 5. by project types
- c. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA/federal agencies;
- d. Program priorities and policy factors as set out in sections I.A., I.B., and I.C.;
- e. Applicant's prior award performance;
- f. Partnerships with/Participation of targeted groups;
- g. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

The Selecting Official may negotiate the funding level of the proposal. The Selecting Official makes final recommendations for awards to NOAA's Grants Management Division who is authorized to obligate funds.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, successful applications are usually recommended within 240 days from the date of publication of this notice. The project start date should not begin before August 1, 2024.

The exact amount of funds awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project are determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and the NOAA Program Office. Recipients must not initiate projects until an approved award is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been approved for funding by the NOAA Grants Management Division with the issuance of an award signed by a NOAA Grants Officer. This is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. The official notice of award is the Standard Form CD-450, Financial Assistance Award, which the NOAA Grants Officer will typically issue electronically through NOAA's grants management system. The authorizing document, the CD-450 award cover page, is provided to the authorized representative identified by the applicant on the SF-424, typically via an email from NOAA's grants management system, and the principal investigator may receive a copy. Unsuccessful applicants will receive notification from the Program Office indicating that their proposals were not recommended for funding and including technical reviewers' comments.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

a. Pre-Award Notification - The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390) are applicable to this solicitation. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/cXC7A>.

b. Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements at 2 C.F.R. 200 (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/textidx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr200_main_02.tpl), implemented by the Department of Commerce at 2 C.F.R. 1327.101, apply to awards in this program.

c. The Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions will apply to awards in this program. See https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/DOC%20Standard%20Terms%20and%20Conditions%20-%202012%20November%202020%20PDF_0.pdf. In addition, award documents provided by NOAA may contain special award conditions, including those limiting the use of funds for compliance activities such as outstanding environmental compliance requirements, which will be applied on a case-by-case basis.

d. Limitation of Liability - Funding for potential projects in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. NOAA and the Department of Commerce are not responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

e. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA Web site at www.nepa.noaa.gov, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA at <https://www.noaa.gov/organization/administration/nao-216-6a> and the Council on Environmental website at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq>.

Consequently, applicants may be asked to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, number and species expected to be caught, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required.

Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by the grants officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment of any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

If your project may trigger consideration under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), identify any impact the proposed work will have on the quality of the environment by completing the NOAA NEPA Questionnaire at the following link <https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-11/NOAA-Grants-Questionnaire-final.pdf> and include it as an appendix to your application. This NEPA appendix does not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

f. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. 552. Department of Commerce regulations implementing FOIA are found at 15 C.F.R. part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the Department regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA. Applications submitted in response to this FFO may be subject to requests for release under FOIA. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information which is exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified,

bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information. Based on these markings, the confidentiality of the contents of those pages will be protected to the extent permitted by law.

g. NOAA Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response Policy

Applicable to Financial Assistance Awards - If NOAA-operated, leased, or owned facilities are involved in any awards funded under this announcement, such awards are subject to the NOAA Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response Policy Applicable to Financial Assistance Awards Involving NOAA-Operated Facilities (May 2018) found at: <https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/document/2020/Feb/NOAA%20Sexual%20Assault%20and%20Sexual%20Harassment%20Prevention%20and%20Response%20Policy%20Applicable%20to%20Financial%20Assistance%20Awards%20Involving%20NOAA-Operated%20Facilities%20%28May%202018%29%20%281%29.pdf>.

h. Required Use of American Iron, Steel, Manufactured Products, And Construction

Materials - If applicable, and pursuant to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act ("IIJA"), Pub.L. No. 117-58, which includes the Build American, Buy American (BABA) Act, Pub. L. No. 117-58, §§ 70901-52 and OMB M-22-11, recipients of an award of Federal financial assistance from the Department of Commerce (DOC) are hereby notified that none of the funds provided under this award may be used for a project for infrastructure unless: 1) all iron and steel used in the project are produced in the United States—this means all manufacturing processes, from the initial melting stage through the application of coatings, occurred in the United States; 2) all manufactured products used in the project are produced in the United States—this means the manufactured product was manufactured in the United States; and the cost of the components of the manufactured product that are mined, produced, or manufactured in the United States is greater than 55 percent of the total cost of all components of the manufactured product, unless another standard for determining the minimum amount of domestic content of the manufactured product has been established under applicable law or regulation; and 3) all construction materials¹ are manufactured in the United States—this means that all manufacturing processes for the construction material occurred in the United States. The Buy America preference only applies to articles, materials, and supplies that are consumed in, incorporated into, or affixed to an infrastructure project. As such, it does not apply to tools, equipment, and supplies, such as temporary scaffolding, brought to the construction site and removed at or before the completion of the infrastructure project. Nor does a Buy America preference apply to equipment and furnishings, such as movable chairs, desks, and portable computer equipment, that are used at or within the finished infrastructure project but are not an integral part of the structure or permanently affixed to the infrastructure project. WAIVERS. When necessary, recipients may apply for, and DOC may grant, a waiver from these requirements. DOC will notify the

recipient for information on the process for requesting a waiver from these requirements. 1) When DOC has made a determination that one of the following exceptions applies, the awarding official may waive the application of the domestic content procurement preference in any case in which DOC determines that: a. applying the domestic content procurement preference would be inconsistent with the public interest; b. the types of iron, steel, manufactured products, or construction materials are not produced in the United States in sufficient and reasonably available quantities or of a satisfactory quality; or c. the inclusion of iron, steel, manufactured products, or construction materials produced in the United States will increase the cost of the overall project by more than 25 percent. A request to waive the application of the domestic content procurement preference must be in writing. DOC will provide instructions on the format, contents, and supporting materials required for any waiver request. Waiver requests are subject to public comment periods of no less than 15 days and must be reviewed by the Made in America Office. There may be instances where an award qualifies, in whole or in part, for an existing waiver described at whitehouse.gov/omb/management/made-in-america. DEFINITIONS. “Construction materials” includes an article, material, or supply—other than an item of primarily iron or steel; a manufactured product; cement and cementitious materials; aggregates such as stone, sand, or gravel; or aggregate binding agents or additives²—that is or consists primarily of: non-ferrous metals; plastic and polymer-based products (including polyvinylchloride, composite building materials, and polymers used in fiber optic cables); glass (including optic glass); lumber; or drywall. “Domestic content procurement preference” means all iron and steel used in the project are produced in the United States; the manufactured products used in the project are produced in the United States; or the construction materials used in the project are produced in the United States. “Infrastructure” includes, at a minimum, the structures, facilities, and equipment for, in the United States, roads, highways, and bridges; public transportation; dams, ports, harbors, and other maritime facilities; intercity passenger and freight railroads; freight and intermodal facilities; airports; water systems, including drinking water and wastewater systems; electrical transmission facilities and systems; utilities; broadband infrastructure; and buildings and real property. Infrastructure includes facilities that generate, transport, and distribute energy. “Project” means the construction, alteration, maintenance, or repair of infrastructure in the United States. -- 1 Excludes cement and cementitious materials, aggregates such as stone, sand, or gravel, or aggregate binding agents or additives. 2 IIJA, § 70917(c)(1).

i. Data Management

1. Data Management Plan: Proposals submitted in response to this announcement must include a Data Management Plan of up to two pages. This Data Management Plan does not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit. The Data Management Plan should be aligned with the NOAA B-WET Data Management Guidance provided below and will be

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

2. Data Management Guidance to Applicants: The NOAA B-WET program has developed this guidance to help grant applicants plan to share quality environmental data collected as part of their B-WET funded projects, where applicable. Environmental Data are defined by NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 212-15: Management of Environmental Data and Information as recorded and derived observations and measurements of the physical, chemical, biological, geological, and geophysical properties and conditions of the oceans, atmosphere, space environment, sun, and solid earth, as well as correlative data such as socio-economic data, related documentation, and metadata. Digital audio or video recordings of environmental phenomena (such as animal sounds or undersea video) are included in this definition. Numerical model outputs are included in this definition, particularly if they are used to support the conclusion of a peer-reviewed publication. Data collected in a laboratory or other controlled environment, such as measurements of animals and chemical processes, are included in this definition.

Environmental data and information collected or created under NOAA grants or cooperative agreements must be made discoverable by and accessible to the general public, in a timely fashion (typically within two years), free of charge or at no more than the cost of reproduction, unless an exemption is granted by the NOAA Program. Data should be available in at least one machine-readable format, preferably a widely-used or open-standard format, and should also be accompanied by machine-readable documentation (metadata), preferably based on widely-used or international standards.

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

Applicant Data Management Plans should be aligned with the following Data Management Guidance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Questions Regarding This Guidance: Responsible NOAA Official for questions regarding this guidance and for verifying accessibility of data produced by funding recipients: Amy Clark, Gulf of Mexico B-WET Coordinator, NOAA Fisheries, amy.clark@noaa.gov; or Bronwen Rice, B-WET National Coordinator, NOAA Office of Education, bronwen.rice@noaa.gov.

C. Reporting

Unless otherwise specified by terms of the award, performance and financial reports are to be submitted semi-annually in accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.328-.330 and the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, and must be submitted no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period. Reports shall be submitted electronically via the NOAA's grants management system.

Reports include:

a. Financial Reports

b. Performance/Progress Reports - Suggested content and guidance related to B-WET performance/progress reports can be found under "progress reports" here: <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/resources/grantee-resources>

c. The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C. 6101 Note, includes a requirement for awardees of applicable federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under federal assistance awards. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all subawards of \$30,000 and over.

Also, NOAA would like to encourage grantees to share educational resources (lesson plans, curricula, videos, worksheets, etc.) created as a part of your grant with other grantees and educators. You may submit resources for inclusion in the NOAA Education resource collections (<https://www.noaa.gov/education/resource-collections>) or Sea to Sky database (<https://www.noaa.gov/education/resources>). NOAA will provide grantees with additional guidance on how to submit resources.

VII. Agency Contacts

For questions regarding Gulf of Mexico B-WET program or the application process, you may contact: Amy Clark, Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program Manager, Amy.Clark@noaa.gov,

(727) 466-8586, or view <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/noaa-gulf-mexico-bay-watershed-education-and-training-gulf-b-wet-program>.

VIII. Other Information

References:

Fourth National Climate Assessment. Volume II: Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States. (2018) U.S. Global Change Research Program. Washington, DC. <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/>

Kwauk, C. and R. Winthrop. (2021) “Unleashing the creativity of teachers and students to combat climate change: An opportunity for global leadership.” The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unleashing-the-creativity-of-teachers-and-students-to-combat-climate-change-an-opportunity-for-global-leadership/>

K12 Climate Action Commission. (2021). K12 Climate Action Plan 2021. The Aspen Institute: Washington, DC. <https://www.k12climateaction.org/blog/climate-action-plan-2021>.

NAAEE’s Community Engagement Guidelines for Excellence, NAAEE 2017, <https://naaee.org/eeopro/publication/community-engagement-guidelines>