U.S. EPA GREAT LAKES NATIONAL PROGRAM OFFICE
Great Lakes Coastal Wetland Monitoring Program
2015 Request for Applications

Federal Agency Name: Environmental Protection Agency
Funding Opportunity Title: Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Request for Applications
Announcement Type: Request for Applications
Funding Opportunity Number: EPA-R5-GL2015-2
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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This Request for Applications (RFA) solicits applications from eligible entities for a cooperative agreement to be awarded pursuant to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan II (http://glri.us/actionplan/pdfs/glri-action-plan-2.pdf). Applications are requested for a project to continue monitoring and assessment of Great Lakes coastal wetlands. This RFA is one of several funding opportunities available through federal agencies under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative ("GLRI" or "Initiative) for FY2015.

Funding/Awards: Approximately $10 million may be awarded for one cooperative agreement to be incrementally funded at approximately $2 million annually over a five-year period.. The awarding of this cooperative agreement is contingent upon funding availability, the quality of applications received and other applicable considerations. However, EPA expressly reserves the right to make no awards under this RFA. Proposed projects **must** be limited to the specified project duration. All incrementally funded awards will be subject to the availability of funding, future appropriations, satisfactory performance of work, and other applicable considerations.

Authorization for GLRI funding is contained in applicable appropriations acts, including the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, Public Law 113-235. EPA has authority to award grants and cooperative agreements for planning, research, monitoring, outreach and implementation projects in furtherance of the GLRI and the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Nonfederal governmental entities, including state agencies, interstate agencies, federally-recognized Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and local governments as defined in 2 C.F.R. 200 and or 2 C.F.R. 1500; institutions of higher learning (*i.e.*, colleges and universities); and non-profit organizations are eligible to apply for funding under this RFA. Individuals, foreign organizations and governments, nonprofit organizations exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying, and "for-profit" organizations are not eligible.

Important Dates:

- July 31, 2015 - Applications **must** be submitted via Grants.gov by 5:00 p.m. Central Daylight Time / 6:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time. See Section IV for further submission information.
- September 2015 – EPA expects to notify finalist.
- October 2015 – EPA expects to make award.

Other Application Information: For your convenience, an RFA web page has been created at http://www2.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/great-lakes-coastal-wetland-monitoring-program-rfa where you will find information relating to the RFA process as well as a link to frequently asked questions (FAQs). We encourage all applicants to sign up for our mailing list and register with us at http://www.epa.gov/greatlakes/maillist. Further submittal information is described in Section IV.

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U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
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I. APPLICATION INFORMATION

Background, Authority, and Funded Activities:

The President, Congress, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in conjunction with other federal departments and agencies, have made restoring the Great Lakes a national priority. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative ("GLRI" or "Initiative") builds on the prior efforts of federal, state, and local agencies; Indian tribes; businesses; public interest groups; interested citizens; and others to develop a collaborative and comprehensive approach to restoring the Great Lakes. Information about the Initiative can be found at http://greatlakesrestoration.us/.

This RFA is expected to result in the award of a cooperative agreement to help implement the GLRI. Cooperative agreements are assistance agreements in which EPA expects to have substantial involvement in completing the project. Authorization for GLRI funding is contained in applicable appropriations acts, including the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, Public Law 113-235.

EPA has authority to award grants and cooperative agreements for planning, research, monitoring, outreach and implementation projects in furtherance of the GLRI and the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA). The statutory authority to take action to implement the U.S. responsibilities under GLWQA is contained in Section 118(c) of the Clean Water Act. The principal goal of GLWQA is the restoration and maintenance of the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Great Lakes ecosystem.) Funded activities **must** advance protection and restoration of the Great Lakes ecosystem in support of: (i) the GLRI Action Plan II (see http://greatlakesrestoration.us/pdfs/glri_actionplan.pdf) and (ii) EPA's Strategic Plan**.**[1] For projects with international aspects, the above statutes are supplemented, as appropriate, by the National Environmental Policy Act, Section 102(2)(F).

This RFA solicits applications from eligible entities for a cooperative agreement to be awarded pursuant to the statutory authorities referenced above and the GLRI Action Plan **II**. Up to approximately $10 million may be awarded incrementally over a five-year period (approximately $2 million per year) under this RFA for one project contingent on the quality of applications received, funding availability and other applicable considerations.

[1] See EPA's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2014-2018; Goal 2*: Protecting Americas Waters;* Objective 2: *Protect and Restore Watersheds and Aquatic Ecosystems (Protect, restore, and sustain the quality of rivers, lakes, streams, streams, and wetlands on a watershed basis, and sustainably manage and protect coastal and ocean resources and ecosystems*). The Plan is available at: http://www2.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan .

All eligible projects will be evaluated as described in Section V, which also highlights factors that may result in more favorable evaluations, including:

- the ability to annually assess Great Lakes coastal wetlands by lake and wetland type while maintaining continuity with previous sampling protocols and statistical designs;

- the ability to include coastal wetland sites not previously sampled in an existing long-term monitoring program;

- the ability to identify coastal wetland restoration sites and evaluate impacts of restoration projects as well as sensitivity of monitoring protocols and associated wetland communities; and

- the ability to demonstrate a method to widely and frequently circulate results and information to the Great Lakes community and coastal wetland mangers/practitioners

Minority Academic Institutions:

All eligible applicants, as defined in Section III, including Minority Academic Institutions (MAIs) as described below, are encouraged to apply for funding under this competition. For purposes of this solicitation, the following are considered MAIs:

1. Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1061). A list of these schools can be found at: http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/whhbcu/one-hundred-and-five-historically-black-colleges-and-universities/;
2. Tribal Colleges and Universities, as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1059(c)). A list of these schools can be found at: http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/whiaiane/tribes-tcus/tribal-colleges-and-universities/;
3. Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec.1101a(a)(5). There is no list of HSIs. HSIs are institutions of higher education that, at the time of application submittal, have an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25% Hispanic students at the end of the award year immediately preceding the date of application for this grant; and
4. Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), as defined by the Higher Education Act [20 U.S.C. Sec. 1059g(a)(2)]. There is no list of AANAPISIs. AANAPISIs are institutions of higher education that, at the time of application submittal, have an enrollment of undergraduate students that is not less than 10 % students who are Asian American or Native American Pacific Islander.

Subawardees and/or Contractors:

If you name subawardees/subgrantees and/or contractor(s), including individual consultants, in your application as partners to assist you with the proposed project, pay careful attention to the

information in Section III regarding "Coalitions" and to the "Contracts and Subawards" provisions at: http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/solicitation_provisions.htm (incorporated by reference in Section IV.J).

RFA Terms:

For purposes of this RFA:

1. The term "**output**" means an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product related to an environmental goal and objective that will be produced or provided over a period of time or by a specified date. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative, but **must** be measurable over the term of the cooperative agreement funding period. An output for a coastal wetland monitoring project would be, *e.g.*, the number of existing and newly identified coastal wetlands included in a basin-wide monitoring program, or the establishment of a trends in wetland quality based on previous and a proposed monitoring program, identification of key monitoring protocol elements most sensitive to overall coastal wetland quality.

2. The term "**outcome**" means the result, effect or consequence that will be achieved by carrying out an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product that is related to an environmental or programmatic goal or objective. Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic in nature, **must** be quantitative, and may not necessarily be achievable within a cooperative agreement funding period. As an example, an outcome for a coastal wetland monitoring project would be the incorporation of monitoring information into 50% of coastal wetland restoration projects between 2016-2017 in the state of Michigan.

Funding Opportunity for the Great Lakes Coastal Wetland Monitoring Program:

General Background: Coastal wetlands serve as important elements of a healthy and fully functioning Great Lakes ecosystem. Coastal wetlands are critical habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species during their life cycles, providing spawning, nursery, feeding, and resting opportunities. Coastal wetlands sequester nutrients and sediment. Coastal wetlands protect shoreline property against erosion and wave damage. Nevertheless, greater than 50% of Great Lakes coastal wetlands have been lost relative to historic levels due to agricultural practices (*e.g.*, diking, ditching) and industrial activities. Approximately 500,000 acres of coastal wetlands still exist today in the Great Lakes and the overall quality of these remaining habitats is only beginning to be understood.

The lack of a standardized and robust monitoring protocol to determine the quality of coastal wetlands across the Great Lakes was highlighted by the EPA Great Lakes National Program Office (EPA-GLNPO) and the greater scientific community approximately 20 years ago. In response, the Great Lakes Coastal Wetlands Consortium (GLCWC) was created in 2000 with support from EPA-GLNPO and the Great Lakes Commission. The GLCWC developed and evaluated metrics and protocols for measuring ecosystem health of Great Lakes coastal wetlands. These protocols included the quantification of amphibian, bird, invertebrate, fish, and plant

communities as well as the determination of water quality and surrounding landscape characteristics at sampled locations. More information on the development of these protocols can be viewed at: http://glc.org/projects/habitat/coastal-wetlands/. This effort resulted in the definition of coastal wetlands as wetlands whose water level fluctuations, either surface or subsurface, were influenced by changing water levels in the Great Lakes. The development of these protocols for the first time enabled federal, state, and non-governmental entities to begin to assess coastal wetlands across the basin in a standardized way and inform future management.

Following development of these protocols, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) provided funding necessary for EPA-GLNPO and a consortium of academic and government entities to begin a long-term comprehensive monitoring program to determine the status and trends of coastal wetlands across all the Great Lakes. To achieve this goal, a statistical design was chosen to optimize both one-time and repeat sampling of approximately 1,000 known coastal wetlands greater than >4 hectares (approximately >10 acres) in size with a surface water connection to the Great Lakes. The sample population of coastal wetlands chosen for this effort can be viewed at: http://www.greatlakeswetlands.org/map/. The GLRI provided support for the first five years (field years 2011-2015) of this long-term program. Beginning in 2015, data generated by this program has been disseminated to project managers and stakeholders. For example, site data has been provided to applicants proposing new restoration and management activities in coastal wetlands to the Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGL) competitive grant program.

During the first five years of this long-term monitoring program, a separate but coordinated effort using remote sensing techniques and field verification was undertaken to provide an updated analysis of the location and distribution of those vegetation types typically found to occur in coastal wetlands. This effort resulted in a new, updated map of likely coastal wetland locations. This effort was completed in 2014, covered both the U.S. and Canadian sides of the Great Lakes, and analyzed land use and vegetation within 5 km of the shorelines of the Great Lakes. Results from this mapping effort (including a link to request data) can be found at: http://geodjango.mtri.org/coastal-wetlands/.

The first five years of this EPA-GLNPO monitoring program have resulted in a greatly improved understanding of the status of Great Lakes coastal wetlands. However, it is important to note that this improved understanding was developed during a time period of historic changes due to significant federal investments in restoration and enhancement of coastal habitats, as well as changing lake levels. The implementation of restoration projects and the ongoing fluctuation of lake levels may be changing the trends applicable to coastal wetlands in ways not yet understood. Finally, these advances in our understanding of coastal wetlands occurred contemporaneously with the creation of new maps of coastal wetland locations, resulting in the identification of a larger universe of important coastal habitat not yet characterized by standardized sampling protocols or targeted by restoration programs.

Information to Assist with Program Continuity:
Applications submitted for this funding opportunity need to demonstrate the capability and intent to modify and/or use existing coastal wetland monitoring protocols in order to maintain continuity between the historical data and data collected in the future. Past monitoring protocols can be viewed at: https://beaver.nrri.umn.edu/glrimon/qapp-sops/. A Quality Assurance Project

Plan (QAPP) containing additional controls relied on for field and lab protocols to meet past study objectives can be viewed at https://beaver.nrri.umn.edu/glrimon/qapp-sops/.

Applicants may provide suggestions for changes and/or improvements to the established protocols with appropriate rationale. However, the applicant must demonstrate how different protocols will still maintain continuity between the historical data and data collected in the future.

Goals and Objectives: EPA expects to provide up to approximately $10 million for one cooperative agreement over a 5-year period, consisting of incremental funding of about $2 million per year, to support: 1) the continued documentation of the status of and trends applicable to coastal wetlands by lake, year, and at least three wetland types identified during the first five years of this program; 2) the development of a database of coastal wetlands that incorporates recent remote sensing data of coastal wetland vegetation; and 3) the documentation of the ecological benefits attributable to recent, ongoing, and future coastal wetland restoration and enhancement projects.

These goals are to be accomplished through the following project objectives which applicants should address in their proposals:

- an assessment of the annual status and trends of riverine, lacustrine, and barrier-protected coastal wetlands (see http://glc.org/projects/habitat/coastal-wetlands/ for wetland type definitions) across all five Great Lakes, U.S. and Canadian sides, including connecting channels while maintaining continuity with previous coastal wetland monitoring;
- the maintenance of a spatial database of previously sampled coastal wetlands and newly sampled sites and associated sampling data;
- an assessment of coastal wetlands not previously captured by the program's sampling efforts and/or newly identified, considering additional categories of coastal wetlands not included in the previous design;
- the refinement (if necessary) and implementation of protocols that best document the effectiveness of restoration activities in coastal wetlands across a range of Great Lakes settings and geographies;
- the identification of specific elements (*e.g.*, sampled taxa groups, seasons, wetland zones) of existing protocols that are sensitive to the gradients of existing coastal wetland quality as well as impacts of restoration activities;
- the annual reporting on coastal wetland indicators consistent with previous State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference requirements; and
- the engagement and collaboration with local, state and tribal environmental managers, academia and/or other interested stakeholders seeking to use collected data for on-the-ground management of coastal wetlands.

In order for applicants to successfully demonstrate how they will maintain continuity with previous coastal wetland monitoring, applicants should consider monitoring protocols based on those as described in https://beaver.nrri.umn.edu/glrimon/qapp-sops/.

Outputs of the award should include one or more of the following (and any additional ones identified by the applicant) and link to the GLRI Action Plan's **II** Measures of Progress or goals and objectives:

- a quantification of Great Lakes coastal wetland quality with attention to continuity and consistency of those measurements with previous protocols, so that trend data are not biased by changes in program operations or personnel;
- an evaluation of the spatial and temporal trends of coastal wetland quality in the Great Lakes using both raw and summarized data by lake, year, and wetland type;
- an evaluation of elements of the protocols that are most sensitive to representing coastal wetland quality and changes due to anthropogenic perturbations and targeted restorations activities;
- documentation and verification of newly identified coastal wetlands not previously identified by the GLCWC;
- sample collection, sample analysis, data management, data interpretation, statistical analysis, and report writing;
- development of Great Lakes scientists through the education of graduate and undergraduate students in Great Lakes ecosystem science;
- dissemination of results via peer-reviewed journal articles and other media' or
- development of coastal wetland indicator reports consistent with previous State of the Lake Ecosystem Conference formats

Applicants must also demonstrate how their proposed project will achieve one or more (and any additional ones identified by the applicant)of the following outcomes:

- increased understanding of structure and function of Great Lakes coastal wetlands across a gradient of geographies and human impacts including degradation and restoration;
- increased understanding of efficient and cost-saving sampling methods to continue to track Great Lakes coastal wetland quality long-term (e.g., >10 years); or
- increased understanding of the impacts of current restoration activities in Great Lakes coastal and nearshore zones.

II. AWARD INFORMATION

Amounts and Number of Projects: Approximately $10 million in EPA funding is expected to be awarded under this RFA for one project over five years, consisting of incremental funding of about $2 million per year. Project funding under this RFA will be based on the quality of applications received, the availability of funding, and other applicable considerations. **Please note that the specified maximum amount in Section I that will be awarded for a project establishes the limit for the EPA funding; applications seeking funding in excess of that amount will be rejected. In addition, an application for a multi-phase project will be treated as a request for the full amount for all phases. If that combined amount exceeds the specified maximum, the application will be rejected.**

EPA reserves the right to reject all applications and make no awards pursuant to this RFA.

Anticipated Project Start and End Dates: Applications should specify a start date on or around October 1, 2015 and **must** specify an end date no later than September 30, 2020.

Award Funding: The award will be funded incrementally and is based on funding availability, future appropriations, satisfactory performance of work, program priorities, and other applicable considerations.

EPA reserves the right to make additional awards under this announcement, consistent with Agency policy and guidance, if additional funding becomes available after the original selections are made. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than 6 months after the original selection decisions.

Funding Type: A successful applicant will be awarded a cooperative agreement[2]. A cooperative agreement is an assistance agreement that is used when there is substantial federal involvement with the recipient during the performance of an activity or project. EPA awards cooperative agreements for those projects in which it expects to have substantial interaction with the recipient throughout the performance of the project. EPA will negotiate the precise terms and conditions of "substantial involvement" as part of the award process. Federal involvement may include close monitoring of the recipient's performance; collaboration during the performance of the scope of work; review of proposed procurements in accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200 and or 2 C.F.R. 1500; reviewing qualifications of key personnel; and/or review and comment on the content of printed or electronic publications prepared. EPA does not have the authority to select employees or contractors employed by the recipient. The final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient.

Future Funding: Selection or award of funding under this RFA is not a guarantee of future funding.

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

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

Applicant Eligibility (CFDA 66.469): Non-federal governmental entities, including state agencies, interstate agencies, federally-recognized Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and local governments as defined in 2 C.F.R. Section 200.64; institutions of higher learning; and nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply for funding under this RFA. Individuals, foreign organizations and governments, nonprofit organizations exempt from taxation under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying, and "for-profit" organizations

[2] While the award being offered pursuant to this RFA will be a cooperative agreement, throughout the remainder of the RFA the terms "grant" and "cooperative agreement" are synonymous.

are not eligible. A "nonprofit organization," as defined at 2 C.F.R. Section 200.70, is any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization that: (1) is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest; (2) is not organized primarily for profit; and (3) uses its net proceeds to maintain, improve, and/or expand its operations.

Coalitions: Groups of two or more eligible applicants may choose to form a coalition and submit a single application under this RFA; however, one entity **must** be responsible for the grant. Coalitions **must** identify which eligible organization will be the recipient of the grant and which eligible organization(s) will be subawardees of the recipient. Subawards and subgrants **must** be consistent with the definitions of those term**s** in 2 C.F.R. 200 and/or 2 C.F.R. 1500. The recipient **must** administer the grant, will be accountable to EPA for proper expenditure of the funds and reporting, and will be the point of contact for the coalition. As provided in 2 C.F.R. 200 and/or 2 C.F.R. 1500, subrecipients or subgrantees are accountable to the recipient or grantee for proper use of EPA funding.

Coalitions may not include for-profit organizations that will provide services or products to the successful applicant. For-profit organizations are not eligible for subawards. For-profit organizations are eligible to receive contracts. Any contracts for services or products funded with EPA financial assistance **must** be awarded under the competitive procurement procedures of 2 C.F.R. 200 and/or 2 C.F.R. 1500, as applicable. The regulations also contain limitations on consultant compensation. (Please see 2 C.F.R. 200 and 2 C.F.R. 1500, as applicable.) For additional information, please review the following Federal Register: http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2004/pdf/04-7867.pdf .

Eligible Activities: Unless specifically excluded under this RFA, assistance is available to eligible applicants for planning, research, monitoring, outreach, and implementation of the GLRI and GLWQA. In order to be eligible under this solicitation, proposed projects **must** also: (i) protect, enhance, and/or restore the Great Lakes, including projects impacting connecting waterways such as Lake St. Clair and the St. Lawrence River (at or upstream from the point at which the St. Lawrence River becomes the international boundary between Canada and the United States); or (ii) protect Great Lakes ecosystem health, including human health. Information about the GLRI can be found at http://www.epa.gov/greatlakes/glri. Applications for other activities will be rejected**.**

Ineligible Activities: Sampling and analysis of coastal wetland habitats for the purpose of listing/delisting criteria and generation of Area of Concern (AOC) Beneficial Use Impairment data.

If an application is submitted that includes any ineligible activities, including, but not limited to, those listed above, that portion of the application will be ineligible for funding and may, depending on the extent to which it affects the application, render the entire application ineligible.

Match or Cost-Share: There is no cost-sharing or matching requirement as a condition of eligibility under this RFA. However, see Section IV.C.2.b.iii and Section V for additional

information regarding applicants who propose voluntary matches and additional funds/resources to support the project.

Although cost-sharing/matching is not required as a condition of eligibility under this competition, pursuant to Section V of this RFA, EPA will consider voluntary cost-sharing/matching and other leveraging as a part of the criterion for collaboration and plans.

Leveraging generally refers to situations where an applicant proposes to provide its own additional funds/ resources or those from third party sources to support or complement the project they are awarded under the competition which are above and beyond the EPA grant funds awarded. Any leveraged funds/resources, and their source, **must** be identified in the proposal (See Section IV of the RFA). A letter of support should also be included in the application package to document any proposed leveraging. Leveraged funds and resources may take various forms as noted below.

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

- A voluntary cost share is subject to the match provisions in the grant regulations (2 C.F.R. Section 200.306);
- A voluntary cost share **must** be eligible and allowable;
- The recipient may not use other sources of federal funds to meet a voluntary cost share unless the statute authorizing the other federal funding provides that the federal funds may be used to meet a cost share requirement on a federal grant; and
- The recipient is legally obligated to meet any proposed voluntary cost share that is included in the approved project budget. If the proposed voluntary cost share does not materialize during grant performance, then EPA may reconsider the legitimacy of the award and/or take other appropriate action as authorized by 2 C.F.R. 200 and/or 1500.

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

Threshold Eligibility Criteria: These are requirements that if not met by the applicant by the time of application submission will result in elimination of the application from consideration for funding. Only applications for eligible activities from eligible entities (see above definitions of **applicant eligibility**, **eligible activities**, and **ineligible activities**) that meet these criteria by the time of application submission will be evaluated against the ranking factors in Section V of this RFA. Applicants deemed ineligible for funding consideration as a result of the threshold eligibility review will be notified by e-mail within 15 calendar days of the ineligibility determination.

1. Applications that do not determine Great Lakes coastal wetland status and trends across all five Great Lakes, U.S. and Canadian sides, including connecting channels will be rejected.

2. a. Applications seeking EPA funding in excess of $10 million will be rejected. In addition, an application for a multi-phase project will be treated as a request for the full amount for all phases. If that combined amount exceeds $10 million, the application will be rejected.

   b. Applications **must** substantially comply with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in Section IV of this RFA or else they will be rejected. Where a page limit is stated for the Narrative Proposal in Section IV, pages in excess of the limitation will not be reviewed.

   c. In addition, applications must be submitted through www.grants.gov as stated in Section IV of this announcement (except in the limited circumstances where another mode of submission is specifically allowed for as explained in Section IV) on or before the application submission deadline published in Section IV of this announcement. Applicants are responsible for following the submission instructions in Section IV of this announcement to ensure that their application is timely submitted.

   d. Applications submitted after the submission deadline will be considered late and deemed ineligible without further consideration unless the applicant can clearly demonstrate that it was late due to EPA mishandling or because of technical problems associated with Grants.gov or relevant SAM.gov system issues. An applicant's failure to timely submit their application through Grants.gov because they did not timely or properly register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov will not be considered an acceptable reason to consider a late submission. Applicants should confirm receipt of their application with T. Kevin O'Donnell (odonnell.thomas@epa.gov) as soon as possible after the submission deadline—failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

3. Applicants may submit more than one application under this RFA so long as each application is for a different project and is separately submitted.

4. Applications for projects exceeding the maximum end date of September 30, 2020 will be rejected.

Applicants should contact the applicable individual listed in Section VII with any questions about the threshold eligibility requirements.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Mode of Application Submission:

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

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

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

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

Funding Opportunity Number (FON)

Organization Name and DUNS

Organization's Contact Information (email address and phone number)

Explanation of how they lack the technical capability to apply electronically through Grants.gov because of 1) limited internet access or 2) no internet access which prevents

them from being able to upload the required application materials through www.Grants.gov.

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

If an exception is granted, it is valid for submissions to EPA for the remainder of the entire calendar year in which the exception was approved and can be used to justify alternative submission methods for application submissions made through December 31 of the calendar year in which the exception was approved (e.g., if the exception was approved on March 1, 2015, it is valid for any competitive or non-competitive application submission to EPA through December 31, 2015). Applicants need only request an exception once in a calendar year and all exceptions will expire on December 31 of that calendar year. Applicants must request a new exception from required electronic submission through Grants.gov for submissions for any succeeding calendar year. For example, if there is a competitive opportunity issued on December 1, 2015 with a submission deadline of January 15, 2016, the applicant would need a new exception to submit through alternative methods beginning January 1, 2016.

Please note that the process described in this section is only for requesting alternate submission methods. All other inquiries about this announcement must be directed to T. Kevin O'Donnell (312-886-0813). Queries or requests submitted to the email address identified above for any reason other than to request an alternate submission method will not be acknowledged or answered.

B. Submission Instructions

The electronic submission of your application must be made by an official representative of your institution who is registered with Grants.gov and is authorized to sign applications for Federal assistance. For more information on the registration requirements that must be completed in order to submit an application through grants.gov, go to http://www.grants.gov and click on "Applicants" on the top of the page and then go to the "Get Registered" link on the page. If your organization is not currently registered with Grants.gov, please encourage your office to designate an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) and ask that individual to begin the registration process as soon as possible. Please note that the registration process also requires that your organization have a DUNS number and a current registration with the System for Award Management (SAM) and the process of obtaining both could take a month or more. Applicants must ensure that all registration requirements are met in order to apply for this opportunity through grants.gov and should ensure that all such requirements have been met well

in advance of the submission deadline. Registration on grants.gov, SAM.gov, and DUNS number assignment is FREE.

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

You may also be able to access the application package for this announcement by searching for the opportunity onhttp://www.grants.gov. Go to http://www.grants.gov and then click on "Search Grants" at the top of the page and enter the Funding Opportunity Number, EPA-R5-GL2015-2, in the appropriate field and click the Search button. Alternatively, you may be able to access the application package by clicking on the Application Package button at the top right of the synopsis page for the announcement on http://www.grants.gov. To find the synopsis page, go to http://www.grants.gov and click "Browse Agencies" in the middle of the page and then go to "Environmental Protection Agency" to find the EPA funding opportunities.

Application Submission Deadline: Your organization's AOR must submit your complete application package electronically to EPA through Grants.gov (http://www.grants.gov) no later than 5:00 p.m. Central Daylight Time / 6 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, on July 31, 2015. Please allow for enough time to successfully submit your application and allow for unexpected errors that may require you to resubmit.

Please submit *all* of the application materials described below using the grants.gov application package that you downloaded using the instructions above. For additional instructions on completing and submitting the electronic application package, click on the "Show Instructions" tab that is accessible within the application package itself.

Application Materials

The following forms and documents are required under this announcement:

A. Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
B. Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)
C. Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)
D. Grants.gov Lobbying Form
E. EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54
F. EPA Form 4700-4 – Preaward Compliance Review Report
G. Narrative Proposal prepared as described in Section IV.D of the announcement (attach with project narrative attachment form)
H. Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL), if applicable

Applications submitted through grants.gov will be time and date stamped electronically.

If you have not received a confirmation of receipt from EPA (not from grants.gov*)* within 30 days of the application deadline, please contact T. Kevin O'Donnell, at 312-886-0813. Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

C. Technical Issues with Submission

1. Once the application package has been completed, the "Submit" button should be enabled. If the "Submit" button is not active, please call Grants.gov for assistance at 1-800-518-4726. Applicants who are outside the U.S. at the time of submittal and are not able to access the toll-free number may reach a Grants.gov representative by calling 606-545-5035. Applicants should save the completed application package with two different file names before providing it to the AOR to avoid having to re-create the package should submission problems be experienced or a revised application needs to be submitted.

2. Submitting the application. The application package must be transferred to Grants.gov by an AOR. The AOR should close all other software before attempting to submit the application package. Click the "submit" button of the application package. Your Internet browser will launch and a sign-in page will appear. ***Note: Minor problems are not uncommon with transfers to Grants.gov. It is essential to allow sufficient time to ensure that your application is submitted to Grants.gov BEFORE the due date identified in Section IV of the solicitation.*** The Grants.gov support desk operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, except Federal Holidays. A successful transfer will end with an on-screen acknowledgement. For documentation purposes, print or screen capture this acknowledgement. If a submission problem occurs, reboot the computer – turning the power off may be necessary – and re-attempt the submission.

Note: Grants.gov issues a "case number" upon a request for assistance.

3. Transmission Difficulties. If transmission difficulties that result in a late transmission, no transmission, or rejection of the transmitted application are experienced, and following the above instructions do not resolve the problem so that the application is submitted to www.Grants.Gov by the deadline date and time, follow the guidance below. The Agency will make a decision concerning acceptance of each late submission on a case-by-case basis. All emails, as described below, are to be sent to T. Kevin O'Donnell with the FON in the subject line. If you are unable to email, contact T. Kevin O'Donnell at 312-886-0813. Be aware that EPA will only consider accepting applications that were unable to transmit due to www.Grants.gov or relevant www.Sam.gov system issues or for unforeseen exigent circumstances, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access. Failure of an applicant to submit timely because they did not properly or timely register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov is not an acceptable reason to justify acceptance of a late submittal.

a. If you are experiencing problems resulting in an inability to upload the application to Grants.gov, it is essential to call www.Grants.gov for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 before the application deadline. Applicants who are outside the U.S. at the time of submittal and are not able to access the toll-free number may reach a Grants.gov representative by calling 606-545-

5035. Be *sure* to obtain a case number from Grants.gov. If the problems stem from unforeseen exigent circumstances unrelated to Grants.gov, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access, contact T. Kevin O'Donnell at 312-886-0813

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

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

For technical questions about electronic submittal of applications via http://www.grants.gov contact the Grants.gov Contact Center at 1-800-518-4726 or email Grants.gov at support@grants.gov. For calls from outside the United States, please dial 606-545-5035 to speak with a Contact Center representative. For questions regarding EPA's receipt of your application, see the general RFA contact information in Section VII of this RFA.

D. Narrative Proposal:

Narrative Proposals (including the **Summary Information Page and Workplan**) must be no more than **twenty** single-spaced pages in length and include the items below in the requested order**. Excess pages will not be reviewed.** Each Narrative Proposal must be formatted for 8½" x 11" paper and should use no smaller than an 11-point Times New Roman font with 1" margins. Do not use a "double column" (aka newspaper) format. Readability is of paramount importance. Do not include more than one application in any file. Please do not zip the file or use a zip extension for your file because it will not be accepted.

Summary Information Page (should not exceed one page):

i. **Project Title.** Please limit to 60 characters. EPA reserves the right to change the project title for its administrative convenience.

ii. **Applicant Information.** Include applicant (organization) name, address, contact person, phone number, and e-mail address. *Do not include private information.*

iii. **Proposed Funding Request.** The total dollar amount requested from EPA-make sure it is within the limits specified or your application will be rejected.

iv. **Project Duration.** Provide beginning and ending dates. See "Anticipated Start and End Dates" in Section II.

v. **Brief Project Description.** Summarize the proposed project in 100 words or less in a clear and succinct manner in PLAIN LANGUAGE, including expected outputs, outcomes and environmental benefits resulting from implementation of the project. Include environmental KEY TERMS that could be used as search terms (*e.g.*, wetlands, coastal, water quality, *etc*.). Do not use acronyms. Should the proposal be selected and a grant awarded, this description may be posted to the EPA Web. EPA reserves the right to make unilateral changes to conform to posting requirements. See http://greatlakesrestoration.us/projects/index.html for examples.

Work Plan:

The Work Plan for the proposed project **must** explicitly describe how the proposed project meets the guidelines established in Sections I-III of this RFA (including the threshold eligibility criteria in Section III) and **must** address each of the evaluation criteria set forth in Section V. Each Work Plan should be organized in the order and with the headings and information requested below. Details and associated point values for each section of the workplan are described in RFA Section V.A (Application Review) below.

1. Project Summary and Approach

Describe with specificity the nature of the proposed project including what will be done, by whom, how, and when it will be accomplished. Outline the steps to be taken and the significant milestones to be achieved to complete the proposed project as well as the estimated dates of these achievements, including the submittal of the final report.

Include a statement of the project's relevance to the Great Lakes, particularly (1) the needs and priorities of the GLRI Action Plan II (http://glri.us/actionplan/pdfs/glri-action-plan-2.pdf), or (2) Great Lakes protection and restoration pursuant to Objective 2.2 (Protect and Restore Watersheds and Aquatic Ecosystems) of the Fiscal Year 2014-2018 EPA Strategic Plan (http://www2.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan). It is sufficient for the purpose of clause (ii) to include a general statement of how the project will protect and restore the Great Lakes ecosystem without specifying a connection to the strategic measures for the Great Lakes that are included in the EPA Strategic Plan.

2. Technical Process and Study Design

Describe the process by which the applicant will implement a monitoring and assessment approach as well as any needed supplementary data collection.

a. Monitoring Approach to Maximize Coastal Wetland Characterization and Maintain Historical Data Continuity

Document a basin-scale monitoring program that allows for the greatest incorporation of individual coastal wetland sites and types into a monitoring approach that determines status and trends by lake, year, and wetland type. Document impacts of restoration activities while maintaining continuity with previous sampled sites and protocols. Discuss how key elements of the protocol will be identified based on their sensitivity to characterizing overall quality and changes over time due to degradation or restoration. Identify specific coastal wetland restoration projects and/or activities to be included in the monitoring approach.

b. Incorporation of Newly Identified Coastal Wetlands into Study Design

Document an approach to identify new coastal wetlands and ground-truth presence as well as spatial extent (*i.e.*, boundary). Outline a systematic and repeatable process of incorporating new coastal wetland sites identified from various information sources (*e.g.*, remote sensing, state surveys) as well as well as new coastal wetland types into an ongoing monitoring program while not comprising overall study objectives, study designs, and data quality.

c. Special Studies and Applied Research

Discuss how additional special studies and/or enhancements to the long-term monitoring program will implemented. As an example, applicants may discuss how the monitoring design will be implemented to coincide with the Coordinated Science and Monitoring Initiative lake schedule. Applied research activities are not required for a successful application; however, applicants may score higher in the Technical Ability and Study Design criteria to the extent they demonstrate an appropriate rationale and workplan for the proposed additional research. Research topics may include an expansion, testing, refinement etc. of new or supplementary protocols; measurement of biota/abiota condition in areas immediately outside coastal wetlands but important to understanding status or trends within coastal wetlands; or other research. Discuss how these activities will contribute to the Great Lakes Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI).[3]

3. Data Management, Interpretation, and Dissemination

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) directs the United States and Canada to "establish and maintain comprehensive, science-based ecosystem indicators to assess the state of the Great Lakes, to anticipate emerging threats and to measure progress…" Identify a detailed plan and ability to manage large data sets including spatial/GIS data. Demonstrate how you will work with the EPA Project Officer to report on the status and trends of coastal

[3] The Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI) is a joint United States and Canadian effort to provide environmental managers with needed information on each Great Lake. The lakes are visited one per year in a five-year rotation. In 2015, CSMI will be focused on Lake Michigan. In subsequent years (2016-2020), CMSI will focus on Lake Superior, Lake Huron, Lake Ontario, and Lake Erie.

wetlands in the Great Lakes in a timely fashion and provide indicator reports. Applicants are expected to discuss project elements and processes that allow field and lab data to be efficiently managed and interpreted year-to-year.

A key project component is to ensure that the information generated is disseminated to the Great Lakes community in a wide variety of formats, including journals, conference and meeting presentations, and internet products. Applicants are expected to discuss how this dissemination will occur using data collected year-to-year. Demonstrate how data will be provided annually to restoration practitioners and land management entities to aid in informed on-the-ground decisions.

4. Results

Please describe with specificity your plan for achieving high quality and timely results for the project.

a. Outputs

Specify the estimated quantitative outputs of the proposed project including but not limited to those specifically identified in Section I, any other applicable objectives or measures from the GLRI Action Plan II, and the approach and measurements that will be used to track and measure your progress towards achieving the applicable outputs. Demonstrate how the project will achieve the desired results.

b. Outcomes

Specify the estimated qualitative outcomes of the proposed project and how the outcomes factor into the goals of the GLRI Action Plan II, the 2012 GLWQA, and EPA's goal of protecting human health and the environment. Please identify how progress towards achieving the project outcomes can be measured, assessed and tracked. Demonstrate how the project will achieve the desired results.

5. Collaboration and Plans

Applicants will be evaluated on their approach for promoting and/or obtaining collaboration and support from local, state and tribal environmental managers, academia, and/or other interested stakeholders in performing the project. Applicants should list the proposed groups that will be involved in the project and any related projects and studies, and what each of the groups' roles will be in the project's staffing, funding, design and implementation. Describe the type of collaboration/support proposed, how you will ensure that it will materialize during project performance, and what role it will play in the overall project. Any letters demonstrating evidence of collaboration and support from the public or private sector should be attached as a separate submittal document and will not count towards the narrative proposal page limit. Describe how you will coordinate activities of the project with related or complementary projects and studies. IF YOU INTEND TO PROVIDE EPA FUNDS TO ANY COLLABORATING ORGANIZATION, PLEASE CAREFULLY REVIEW PROVISIONS ON "CONTRACTS AND SUBAWARDS" at:

http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/solicitation_provisions.htm. If you do not plan on collaborating with other groups in project performance demonstrate how you will be able to effectively perform and complete the project without such collaboration.

Applicants will also be evaluated on how well they demonstrate that the project will effectively disseminate data and reports for use by local, state and tribal environmental managers, academia and/or other interested stakeholders. The applicant must also specify plans for timely information transfer, including annual interpretive reports, presentations at meetings and conferences, journal articles, textbooks, Internet postings, and peer-reviewed publications.

Applicants proposing to provide a voluntary cost-match or other form of leveraging to demonstrate collaboration and support for the project should describe that in this section in accordance with the voluntary cost share requirements in Section III of this announcement.

6. Programmatic Capability and Past Performance

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

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

7. Education/Outreach

Describe how project results will be disseminated to interested stakeholders; your demonstrated track record of outreach to citizens on environmental issues; and the potential

of the project for transferability and applicability to other places in accordance with the application review criteria in Section V.A.6.

8. **Detailed Budget Narrative**

Clearly explain how EPA funds will be used. Use this section to provide a narrative description of the budget found in the SF-424A. Applicants must itemize costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, contractual costs, travel, equipment, supplies, other direct costs, indirect costs, and total costs. Applicants should use whole dollar amounts. Applicants should include costs for quality system documentation (*i.e.*, quality assurance project plans or quality management plans) and environmental and regulatory compliance (*e.g.*, costs for assisting EPA with compliance by conducting surveys and analysis to identify whether protected resources are in the project location and, if so, whether there will be any effects; costs associated with potential mitigation measures; *etc.*). Applicants that do not include such costs may have to fund these and other overlooked costs out of their own funds.

As part of the detailed budget narrative, applicants should explain their approach, procedures, and controls for ensuring that awarded grant funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. Please include an explanation of expenditure projections, with quarterly fiscal projections and milestones, for the life of the grant.

E.. **Other Attachments**

Additional attachments not part of the Narrative Proposal may be submitted (*e.g.*, resumes, letters of support, maps, charts) and are not included in the 20 page limit.

F.. **Notification**

Within two weeks after the application due date, EPA intends to post a link to project information (including title and identification number) to: http://www2.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/great-lakes-coastal-wetland-monitoring-program-rfa . ALL APPLICANTS SHOULD CHECK THIS POSTING TO VERIFY THAT THEIR SUBMISSIONS HAVE BEEN INCLUDED IN EPA'S DATABASE. See Section VII for contact information if you do not receive a confirmation or if your project is not posted. All applicants will be contacted following selections to tell them whether or not they have been selected. Selection information will also be posted to a page linked to: http://www2.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/great-lakes-coastal-wetland-monitoring-program-rfa.

G. **Information provided to EPA**

Before applying for an award, applicants should be aware that under Public Law No. 105-277, data produced under an award, and any information provided to EPA, is subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

H. **Communications**

See: http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/solicitation_provisions.htm for general provisions regarding communications with applicants. Submit questions using the form available from http://www2.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/great-lakes-coastal-wetland-monitoring-program-rfa. EPA will respond to questions received through July 27, 2015, but cannot guarantee that it will respond to questions received thereafter.

I. Intergovernmental Review

Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs, may be applicable to awards resulting from this announcement. Applicants selected for funding may be required to provide a copy of their application to their State Point of Contact (SPOC) for review, pursuant to Executive Order 12372. This review is not required before submitting an application and not all states require such a review. A listing of State Point of Contacts (SPOC) may be viewed at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc.

J. **Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into RFA**. Additional provisions that apply to this RFA and/or awards made under this RFA, including but not limited to those related to confidential business information, application assistance and communications, management fees, contracts and subawards under grants, and duplicate funding can be found at: http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/solicitation_provisions.htm.

These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants **must** review them when preparing proposals for this RFA. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in this RFA to obtain the provisions.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

A. Application Review:

Applications meeting the threshold eligibility criteria in Section III will be evaluated based on the criteria set forth below. Applicants should directly and explicitly address these criteria as part of their Narrative Proposal and application submission. Each submittal will be rated under a point system, with a total of 100 points possible. Applicants will be evaluated based on the quality and extent to which the work proposed will address the criteria; the failure to provide applicable information in the application may affect the score assigned for a criterion.

1) **Project Summary and Approach (5 points)**

   Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which a comprehensive and systematic monitoring approach that advances knowledge of Great Lakes coastal wetlands is proposed. Applicants will also be evaluated based on the ability of the proposed project to ultimately inform the protection and restoration of these important Great Lakes habitats.

2) Technical Process and Study Design (30 points)

a) Monitoring Approach to Maximize Coastal Wetland Characterization and Maintain Historical Data Continuity (20 points)

Applicants will be evaluated based on how well they demonstrate a study design and monitoring protocols that continue to determine status and trends of Great Lakes coastal wetlands while maintaining continuity with past efforts and protocols.

b) Incorporation of Newly Identified Coastal Wetlands into Study Design (5 points)

Applicants will be evaluated on how well they design an approach to identify and document new coastal wetland sites, then incorporate those coastal wetlands into an existing monitoring program.

c) **Special Studies and Applied Research (5 points)**

Applicants will be evaluated on the quality of proposed monitoring activities that supplement and support the Coordinated Science and Monitoring Initiative lake schedule, test new protocols important to understanding the quality and impacts of coastal wetlands restoration, and/or refine existing protocol based on components most sensitive to coastal wetland quality.

3) Data Management, Interpretation, and Dissemination (10 points)

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated on the extent to which a detailed and proactive plan is proposed to manage and disseminate large data sets, reports, presentations, and other media on an annual frequency to multiple stakeholder groups seeking to manage and restore Great Lakes coastal wetlands.

4) Results (15 points)

a) Outputs (10 points)

Applicants will be evaluated based on how well their project will achieve the expected outputs listed in Section I and demonstrates how it will achieve relevant objectives and measures of the GLRI Action Plan II. In addition, the applicants approach for tracking and measuring its progress towards achieving the outputs will be evaluated.

b) Outcomes (5 points)

Applicants will be evaluated based on the how well they demonstrate a proposed monitoring plan will achieve relevant long-term goals of GLRI Action Plan II, the 2012 GLWQA, and EPA's goal of protecting human health and the environment. Applicants will also be evaluated on the extent to which they demonstrate how the project outcomes including those identified in Section I will be achieved and how progress towards achieving the project outcomes can be measured, assessed and tracked in detail over the project period.

5) **Collaboration (10 points)**

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on how well they demonstrate that their project will involve a diverse collaboration of academic, monitoring institutions and/or other interested stakeholders as described in Section IV.D.5 assembled to complete this project and contribute to the study design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of results to a broad Great Lakes audience. If the applicant's project will not involve collaboration with others then it will be evaluated based on the quality and extent to which it demonstrates how well the applicant can effectively complete and perform the project without such collaboration.

6) **Programmatic Capability and Past Performance (10 points-2.5 points each for items i-iv)**

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project taking into account the applicant's: (i) past performance in successfully completing and managing the assistance agreements identified in response to Section IV.D of the announcement, (ii) history of meeting the reporting requirements under the assistance agreements identified in response to Section IV.D of the announcement including whether the applicant submitted acceptable final technical reports under those agreements and the extent to which the applicant adequately and timely reported on their progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes under those agreements and if such progress was not being made whether the applicant

adequately reported why not, (iii) organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project, and (iv) staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project. Note: In evaluating applicants under items i and ii of this criterion, the Agency will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources including agency files and prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information supplied by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please indicate this in the proposal and you will receive a neutral score for these subfactors (items i and ii above-a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). If you do not provide any response for these items, you may receive a score of 0 for these factors.

7) **Education/Outreach (5 points)**

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on the quality and diversity of project dissemination methods proposed including the range of audiences targeted for dissemination, plans and flexibility to summarize various data in formats appropriate for intended use by audiences, and the immediacy of information dissemination.

8) Budget (15 points)

a) **Detailed Budget Narrative (5 points): (Also see Appendix I, Budget Sample).**

Under this criterion, proposals will be evaluated based on the extent and quality to which they demonstrate the adequacy of the information provided in the detailed budget and whether the proposed costs are reasonable and allowable.

b) Expeditious Spending and Sufficient Progress in the use of GLRI Funds (10 points)

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on how well they demonstrate a plan to expend project funds in a timely and efficient manner.

B. Selection Process:

1. **Evaluation:**

Applications will first be evaluated against the threshold factors listed in Section III. Only those applications which meet all of the threshold factors will be evaluated using the evaluation criteria listed above. There will be a review panel, composed of federal agency staff, established to assess an applicant's ability to perform the proposed project successfully based on the criteria above. Eligible applications will be evaluated by the review panel members independently based on the criteria above. Following independent assessment by review panel members, the panel

will be convened to discuss the merits of each proposal and develop rankings and a preliminary funding recommendation for the selection official.

Final funding decisions will be made by the selection official. In making the final funding decision, the selection official will consider the review panel rankings and recommendations and may also consider program priorities including the extent of current unliquidated obligations on previous EPA grants. Unliquidated obligations are considered to be EPA grant funds obligated to an applicant but not expended.

VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. Award Notices and Status: Following evaluation of applications, all applicants will be notified regarding their status, as follows:

EPA anticipates that notification to *finalists* will be made via email to the original signer of the application or the project contact listed in the application. The notification will advise them that their proposed project has been evaluated and forwarded to the EPA approving official for further consideration and possible award. This notification, which advises finalists that their proposed project has been forwarded to the approving official, **is not and should not be considered as** an authorization to begin performance. Applicants are cautioned that only the EPA award official is authorized to bind the Government to the expenditure of funds; selection does not guarantee an award will be made. For example, statutory authorization, funding, or other issues discovered during the award process may affect the ability of EPA to make an award to an applicant. The award notice signed by the EPA award official is the authorizing document and will be provided through postal mail. The applicant may need to prepare and submit additional documents and forms, which **must** be approved by EPA, before the grant can officially be awarded. The time between notification to finalists and award of a grant can take up to 90 days or longer.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirement: The successful applicants will be required to adhere to federal grants requirements, particularly those found in 2 C.F.R. 200 and/or 2 C.F.R. 1500 on Cost Principles (A-21, A-87, or A-122), Administrative Requirements (A-102 or 110), and Audit Requirements (A-133) available from http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants. This includes government-wide requirements pertaining to accounting standards, lobbying, minority or woman business enterprise, publication, meetings, construction, and disposition of property. EPA regulations governing assistance programs and recipients are codified in Title 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations. A listing and description of general EPA regulations applicable to the award of assistance agreements may be viewed at: http://www.epa.gov/ogd/AppKit/applicable_epa_regulations_and_description.htm.

C. Quality System Documentation: Quality system documentation (*i.e.*, quality assurance project plans or quality management plans) is required for grants involving the use or collection of environmental data. EPA **must** have this documentation within 90 days of award and it **must** be approved **before grantees commence activities associated with the use or collection of environmental data**. Applicants should budget time and resources for developing quality

system documentation. **Applicants that do not do so may have to fund the quality system documentation and any necessary project changes out of their own funds.** A significant percentage of EPA's previously awarded GLRI grants required quality system documentation. For specific guidance on GLNPO's quality requirements please see http://www.epa.gov/greatlakes/quality/index.html.

E. Reporting Requirements: Applicants selected for funding shall provide narrative technical progress reports addressing financial and work progress. Applicants may be required to input data directly into an online Great Lakes Accountability System database that was developed for the purpose of collecting and reporting information about GLRI. Special conditions requiring financial and progress reporting and a detailed final technical report, will be added to awards. Applicants should budget time and resources for these activities.

PLEASE NOTE: If selected, applicants may be asked to revise their anticipated fiscal expenditure projections on a quarterly basis in order to monitor the progress of the awarded project. These projections should be submitted as a part of the fiscal and technical reporting.

F. Other Programmatic Requirements: Additional applicable programmatic terms and conditions will be included in grant agreements, including provisions for: signage for on-the ground projects, and EPA pre-approval of subcontracting and of conference participation. Applicants should budget time and resources for these activities.

J. Issuance of Awards: EPA reserves the right to negotiate appropriate changes in project terms and amounts (*i.e.*, changes that do not affect the integrity of the competition or materially change the application) consistent with EPA Order 5700.5A1 and other applicable policies, before making final decisions and awards. EPA reserves the right to reject all applications and make no awards. Applicants may be asked to include greater detail and specificity for their work plans before final awards are issued. Applicants may also be requested to satisfy data quality or peer review requirements before or shortly after the awarding of grants.

K. Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into RFA. Additional provisions that apply to this RFA and/or awards made under this RFA, including but not limited to those related to data access and information release, nonprofit administrative capability, subaward and executive compensation reporting, SAM and DUNS requirements, unliquidated obligations, website references, tax liabilities and felony convictions, unfair competitive advantage, exchange network, disputes, copyrights, restrictions on use of federal funds, and competency of organizations generating environmental measurement data, can be found at: http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/solicitation_provisions.htm.

These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants **must** review them when preparing proposals for this RFA. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with T. Kevin O'Donnell (312-886-0813) to obtain the provisions.

VII. AGENCY CONTACTS

RFA Contact: (For administrative, eligibility, technical, and other general RFA questions):

- T. Kevin O'Donnell, 312-886-0813 / odonnell.thomas@epa.gov

VIII. OTHER INFORMATION

GLNPO will send an e-mail announcement of these and any of its funding opportunities to all who register at http://www.epa.gov/greatlakes/maillist.

Appendix I
Budget Sample

Budget Narrative

This section of the work plan is a detailed description of the budget found in the SF-424A, and **must** include a detailed discussion of how EPA funds will be used. Applicants **must itemize** costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual costs, other direct costs, indirect costs, and total costs.

If the project budget includes any voluntary cost share, the Budget Detail portion of the narrative proposal **must** include a detailed description of how the applicant will obtain the cost-share and how the cost-share funding will be used. If EPA accepts an offer for a voluntary cost-share, applicants **must** meet their sharing commitment as a legal condition of receiving EPA funding. If the proposed cost-share is to be provided by a third-party, a letter of commitment is required. Any form of cost-share included in the Budget Detail **must** also be included on the SF 424 and SF 424A. Please see Sections III and Section IV.C.2.B.iii of this RFA for more detailed information on cost-share.

Applicants should use the following instructions, budget object class descriptions, and example table to complete the Budget Detail section of the work plan. Use only whole dollar amounts.

1. **Personnel - List all staff positions by title. Give annual salary, percentage of time assigned to the project, and total cost for the budget period.** This category includes only direct costs for the salaries of those individuals who will perform work directly for the project (generally, paid employees of the applicant organization). If the applicant organization is including staff time (in-kind services) as a cost share, this should be included as Personnel costs. Personnel costs do not include: (1) costs for services of consultants, contractors, consortia members, or other partner organizations, which are included in the "Contractual" category; (2) costs for employees of subrecipients under subawards, which are included in the "Other" category; or (3) effort that is nor directly in support of the proposed project, which may be covered by the organization's negotiated indirect cost rate. The budget detail **must** identify the personnel category type by Full Time Equivalent (FTE), including percentage of FTE for part-time employees, number of personnel proposed for each category, and the estimated funding amounts.

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

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

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

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

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

7. **Other - List each item in sufficient detail for EPA to determine the reasonableness and allowability of its cost.** This category should include only those types of direct costs that do not fit in any of the other budget categories. Examples of costs that may be in this category are: insurance, rental/lease of equipment or supplies, equipment service or maintenance contracts, printing or photocopying, rebates, and subaward costs. Subawards (*e.g.*, subgrants) are a distinct type of cost in this category. The term "subaward" means an award of financial assistance (money or property) by any legal agreement made by the recipient to an eligible subrecipient. This term does not include

procurement purchases, technical assistance in the form of services instead of money, or other assistance in the form of revenue sharing, loans, loan guarantees, interest subsidies, insurance, or direct appropriations. Subcontracts are not subawards and belong in the contractual category. Applicants **must** provide the aggregate amount they propose to issue as subaward work and a description of the types of activities to be supported.

8. **Indirect Charges - If indirect charges are budgeted, indicate the approved rate and base.**

   Indirect costs are those incurred by the grantee for a common or joint purpose that benefit more than one cost objective or project, and are not readily assignable to specific cost objectives or projects as a direct cost. In order for indirect costs to be allowable, the applicant **must** have a federal or state negotiated indirect cost rate (*e.g.*, fixed, predetermined, final or provisional), or **must** have submitted a proposal to the cognizant federal or state agency. Examples of Indirect Cost Rate calculations are shown below:

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

Example Budget Table

	EPA Funding	Cost-Share
Personnel		
(1) Project Manager @ $40/hr x 10 hrs/week x 52 wks		$20,800
(5) Project Staff @ $30/hr x 40 hrs/week x 40 wks	$244,000	
TOTAL PERSONNEL	$244,000	$20,800
Fringe Benefits		
20% of Salary and Wages	20%($244,000)	20%(20,800)
- Retirement, Health Benefits, FICA, SUI	$48,800	$4,160
TOTAL FRINGE BENEFITS	$48,800	$4,160
Travel		
In State travel for Project Manager and staff: 500 mi/mo @ $0.55/mi x 12 mos.	$3,300	
Out of State (IL, WI, IA)Travel for Project Staff: 20 trips per month x $2,500 per trip	$600,000	
SOLEC Meeting (Toronto, Canada) Travel for Project Manager: 2 trips/year x $3,500 each	$7,000	
TOTAL TRAVEL	$610,300	
Equipment		
Sample Bottles (8600 x $2.98 each)	$25,700	
Fish Sampling Nets (300 x $50each)	$15,000	
1 Project Vehicle	$25,000	

1 Project Boat	$15,000	
TOTAL EQUIPMENT	81,100	
Supplies		
Office and related supplies to support training	$400	
Office computer and printer	$2,500	
TOTAL SUPPLIES	$2,900	
Contractual		
ABC Support Services Contract	$100,000	
XYZ Land & Water Conservation	$66,400	
TOTAL CONTRACTUAL	$166,400	
Other		
Travel for 3 representatives to attend workshop training – 100 trips x $1,000 each	$100,000	
Travel for 4 representatives to attend workshop training – 200 trips x $2,000 each	$400,000	
TOTAL OTHER	$500,000	
Indirect Charges		
Federal Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate = 10% (Indirect Rate x Personnel = Indirect Costs; as negotiated)	$26,480	
TOTAL INDIRECT	$26,480	
TOTAL FUNDING	$1,679,580	$24,960
TOTAL PROJECT COST	$1, 704,540	

** Any voluntary cost-share funds, while not required under this RFA, **must** also be included on the SF-424A as detailed in Section IV.C.2.B.iii of this RFA. Federal funds are not allowed to be used for cost share; please identify the source of the cost share in your budget narrative.

Expeditious Spending and Sufficient Progress in the use of GLRI Funds: Include an explanation of how, if the applicant is awarded a grant, they will ensure that the funding will be used expeditiously.