

Federal Agency Name: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Office of Water, Office of Wastewater Management

Funding Opportunity Title: Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant Program

Announcement Type: Request for Applications (RFA)

Funding Opportunity Number: EPA-OW-OWM-20-01

Assistance Listing Number: 66.445

Dates: The closing date and time for application submissions is **March 26th, 2021 by 11:59 PM, Eastern Time (ET) in order to be considered for funding.** Application packages must be submitted electronically to EPA through Grants.gov ([Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)) no later than **11:59 PM ET March 26th, 2021, in order to be considered for funding.** Questions about this RFA must be submitted in writing via e-mail and must be received by the Agency contact identified in Section VII before **March 8th, 2021.** Written responses will be posted on EPA’s website at: <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/innovative-water-infrastructure-workforce-development-program>.

Note to Applicants: Following EPA’s evaluation of applications, all applicants will be notified regarding their status. 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 the CONTRACTS AND SUBAWARDS provision found at <http://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>.

COVID-19 Update: EPA is providing flexibilities to applicants experiencing challenges related to COVID-19. Please see the **Flexibilities Available to Organizations Impacted by COVID-19** clause in Section IV of [EPA’s Solicitation Clauses](#).

Summary:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is soliciting applications from eligible applicants as described in Section III.A to (1) assist in the development and use of innovative activities relating to water workforce development and career opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector, and (2) expand public awareness about drinking water and wastewater utilities and to connect individuals to careers in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector.

The proposed activities support progress toward the Agency’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 – 2022 Strategic Plan for the following goal and objective:

- Goal 1 - A Cleaner, Healthier Environment: Deliver a cleaner, safer, and healthier environment for all Americans and future generations by carrying out the Agency’s Core

Mission.

- Objective 1.2 - Provide for Clean and Safe Water: Ensure waters are clean through improved water infrastructure and, in partnership with states and tribes, sustainably manage programs to support drinking water, aquatic ecosystems, and recreational, economic, and subsistence activities.

EPA's Strategic Plan is available at: <https://www.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan>.

Eligible applicants under this competition are nonprofit professional or service organizations, nonprofit labor organizations, nonprofit community colleges, institutions of higher education, or other nonprofit training and educational institutions. Individuals and for-profit organizations are not eligible to apply. Nonprofit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in prohibited lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply.

The total estimated amount of federal funding potentially available under this announcement is approximately \$1,000,000 depending on Agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, Agency priorities, and other applicable considerations. It is anticipated that up to five cooperative agreements will be awarded under this announcement, each with a project period of up to three years, depending on the amount requested and overall size and scope of the projects(s).

EPA expects each award to range from a minimum of \$200,000 to no more than \$500,000. Applicants may not request more than \$500,000 in federal funding per award. Applications requesting more than \$500,000 in federal funds are not eligible and will not be reviewed.

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SECTION I – FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Background

Drinking water and wastewater utilities provide a unique opportunity for access to stable, rewarding, and high-quality careers. As utilities make critical investments in infrastructure, drinking water and wastewater utilities can also invest in the development of a strong local workforce to strengthen communities and ensure a strong pipeline of skilled and diverse workers for today and tomorrow. To further the goal of ensuring a strong pipeline of skilled and diverse

workers in the water utilities sector, Congress authorized EPA to develop a grant program that will accelerate career pipelines and provide access to water utility workforce opportunities. As outlined in Section 4304 of America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018¹, eligible activities are referenced in Section I.B of this announcement. These project activities must address the workforce needs of water utilities.

EPA is soliciting applications from eligible applicants for projects as described in Section I.B., Project Areas. These projects must address the workforce needs of water utilities. Applications must address only one primary Project Area

B. Project Areas

EPA is soliciting applications from eligible applicants for projects in five Project Areas, as described below. While EPA intends to make awards in as many Project Areas as possible, the Agency reserves the right to make more than one award in a Project Area and the right to make no awards in a Project Area. Under this competition, only one application can be submitted per applicant. Applications must identify *only* one Project Area described below that is the primary focus of the application. If an applicant submits more than one application under this competition, EPA will contact them before the review process begins to determine which application(s) will be withdrawn. If the applicant is not able to communicate a decision within two business days of being contacted by EPA, EPA will accept the application which was submitted first through Grants.gov. All eligible applications will be evaluated based on the criteria in Section V including how well and thoroughly the Project Area is addressed (see Section V). Additional information regarding the one application per applicant requirement may be found in the FAQ document available at <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/innovative-water-infrastructure-workforce-development-program>.

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

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

- (1) On-the-job training;
- (2) Skills development;
- (3) Test preparation, including developing test materials for skilled trade apprenticeships;
- (4) Advance training in the water utility sector relating to construction, utility operations treatment and distribution, green infrastructure, customer service, maintenance, and engineering; or
- (5) Other supportive services to facilitate post-secondary success.

¹ Section 1459E of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), as amended, (codified at 42 U.S.C. Section 300j-19e).

Targeted internships, apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs will result in training and developing the next generation of water professionals and will help address the workforce needs of drinking water and wastewater utilities.

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

Applicants should include innovative approaches to address the workforce needs of drinking water and wastewater utilities. For the purposes of this announcement, “innovative” means new ideas and methods that are original and creative in approach. The applicant should demonstrate how these innovative approaches have the potential to more effectively reach the intended audience. As an example, this could mean a proposed approach to share the project activity, results, and lessons learned at workforce specialty conference(s) that include water utilities that are geographically diverse, of varying sizes, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations. There may be other applicable and creative examples to share the information with water utilities that are geographically diverse, vary in size, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations.

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

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

- (1) Inform students about the role of drinking water and wastewater utilities in their communities;
- (2) Increase student awareness of career opportunities, and increase student exposure to water utility careers through various work-based learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom;
- (3) Connect students to career pathways related to water utilities.

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

Applicants should describe their proposed approach to share (or make available) the Project Area, the results of the Project Area, and the lessons learned to geographically diverse areas. For the purposes of this announcement and this Project Area, “results” mean (1) developing and

providing education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students; and (2) an evaluation of how these education programs can help expand student awareness about the job opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector and/or can help address the workforce needs of water and wastewater utilities. For the purposes of this announcement, “geographically diverse,” means in different areas of the country.

Applicants should include their proposed plan to incorporate innovative approaches that will address the workforce needs of water and wastewater utilities. For the purposes of this announcement, “innovative” means new ideas and methods that are original and creative in approach. The applicant should demonstrate how these innovative approaches show the potential to more effectively reach the intended audience. As an example, this could mean a proposed approach to share the project area, results, and lessons learned at workforce specialty conference(s) that includes water utilities that are geographically diverse, of varying sizes, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations. There may be other applicable and creative examples to share the information with water utilities that are geographically diverse, vary in size, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations.

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

Under Project Area 3, EPA is soliciting applications to expand public awareness about job opportunities in the water sector and address the workforce needs of utilities by establishing regional industry and workforce development collaborations that will address drinking water and wastewater utility recruitment and retention issues. Applications should describe water utility employment needs and provide information on if and how candidate development will occur in areas with high unemployment or for water utilities with high proportion of retirement eligible employees in the water utility community. States are beginning to encounter critical staffing shortages in areas of high unemployment and where water utilities have a high proportion of retirement eligible employees or forceable workforce vacancies. It is estimated that 30 to 50 percent of these workers will be eligible to retire within the next 5 to 10 years (Dickerson and Butler, 2018). The 2018 Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Brookings Institution reports² both have come to these conclusions and utility leaders are echoing this concern. Under this activity, applications should demonstrate a proposed approach to further the goal of building a stronger and more effective water utility workforce through collaboration opportunities with school systems, technical colleges, universities, community-based organizations, and other utilities.

Applicants should describe their proposed approach to share (or make available) the Project Area, the results of the Project Area, and the lessons learned to geographically diverse areas. For the purposes of this announcement and this project area, “results” mean (1) developing and

² These two reports include “Water and Wastewater Workforce: Recruiting Approaches Helped Industry Hire Operators, but Additional EPA Guidance Could Help Identify Future Needs” (GAO, January 2018) and “Renewing the Water Workforce: Improving Water Infrastructure and Creating a Pipeline to Opportunity” (Brookings Institution, June 2018).

implementing collaborative initiatives with school systems, technical colleges, universities, community-based organizations, and/or other utilities; and (2) an evaluation of how these initiatives addressed (will address) the recruitment and retention needs of water and wastewater utilities. For the purposes of this announcement, “geographically diverse,” means in different areas of the country.

Applicants should include their proposed plan to incorporate innovative approaches that will address the workforce needs of water and wastewater utilities. For the purposes of this announcement, “innovative” means new ideas and methods that are original and creative in approach. The applicant should demonstrate how these innovative approaches show the potential to more effectively reach the intended audience. As an example, this could mean a proposed approach to share the project area, results, and lessons learned at workforce specialty conference(s) that includes water utilities that are geographically diverse, of varying sizes, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations. There may be other applicable and creative examples to share the information with water utilities that are geographically diverse, vary in size, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations.

Project Area 4: Integrated learning laboratories in secondary educational institutions.

Under Project Area 4, EPA is soliciting applications to expand student awareness about the job opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector and address the workforce needs of water utilities via integrated learning laboratories in secondary educational institutions that provide students with:

- (1) Hands-on contextualized learning opportunities;
- (2) Dual enrollment credit for post-secondary education and training programs; and/or
- (3) Direct connection to water utility and industry employers.

For the purposes of this announcement, “contextualized learning” means relating subject matter content to meaningful situations that are relevant to students. For the purposes of this announcement, “secondary education” means education beyond the elementary grades and “higher education” means education beyond the secondary level, for example college or university level.

Applicants should describe their proposed approach to share (and make available) the project area, results, and lessons learned in geographically diverse areas. For the purposes of this announcement and this Project Area, “results” mean (1) establishing integrated learning laboratories in secondary educational institutions that provide students hands-on contextualized learning opportunities, dual enrollment credit, and/or a direct connection to drinking water and wastewater utility and industry employers; and (2) an evaluation of how these initiatives addressed the recruitment and retention needs of drinking water and wastewater utilities. For the purposes of this announcement, “geographically diverse,” means in different areas of the country.

Applicants should include their proposed plan to incorporate innovative approaches that will address the workforce needs of water utilities. For the purposes of this announcement, “innovative” means new ideas and methods that are original and creative in approach. The

applicant should demonstrate how these innovative approaches show the potential to effectively reach the intended audience. As an example, this could mean plans to share the project area, results, and lessons learned at workforce specialty conference(s) that includes water utilities that are geographically diverse, of varying sizes, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations. There may be other applicable and creative examples to share the information with water utilities that are geographically diverse, vary in size, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations.

Project Area 5: Leadership development, occupational training, mentoring, or cross-training programs that ensure incumbent drinking water and wastewater utility workers are prepared for higher level supervisory or management-level positions.

Under the Project Area 5, EPA is soliciting applications to expand public awareness about the job opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector, and address the workforce needs of water utilities through leadership development, occupational training, mentoring, or cross-training programs that prepares incumbent drinking water and wastewater utility workers for supervisory or management-level positions. This is intended to support retention of water utility workforce employees through skills development opportunities.

Applicants should describe their proposed approach to share (and make available) the project area, results, and lessons learned in geographically diverse areas. For the purposes of this announcement and this project area, “results” mean (1) establishing leadership development, occupational training, mentoring, or cross-training programs that prepares incumbent water and wastewater utility workers for supervisory or management-level positions; and (2) an evaluation of how these programs supported the retention of water utility workforce employees. For the purposes of this announcement, “geographically diverse,” means in different areas of the country.

Applicants should include their proposed plan to incorporate innovative approaches that will address the workforce needs of water utilities. For the purposes of this announcement, “innovative” means new ideas and methods that are original and creative in approach. The applicant should demonstrate how these innovative approaches show the potential to more effectively reach the intended audience. As an example, this could mean plans to share the project area, results, and lessons learned at workforce specialty conference(s) that includes water utilities that are geographically diverse, of varying sizes, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations. There may be other applicable and creative examples to share the information with water utilities that are geographically diverse, vary in size, and serve urban, suburban and rural populations.

C. Project Partnerships

In Section 1459E of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), as amended (42 U.S.C. Section 300j-19e), Congress urges increased collaboration among federal, state, and local governments, and institutions of higher education, apprentice programs, high schools, and other community-based organizations to align workforce training programs and community resources with water and wastewater utilities to accelerate career pipelines and provide access to workforce opportunities.

Effective partnerships are important for the success of projects solicited under this announcement. In their applications, applicants should identify appropriate and necessary partnerships to successfully conduct the project. Applicants should also include a clear description of the roles of specific partners, or planned partners, in the project's components/tasks. If you choose not to partner, applications will be evaluated based on how the applicant demonstrates how it will successfully conduct the project and meet the objectives described in Section I.B without the use of partners. If the applicant chooses to identify any partner entities who will receive subawards or procurement contracts (including consultants), please pay careful attention to the information to the CONTRACTS AND SUBAWARDS provision found at <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses> before doing so as EPA will not consider their qualifications unless the applicant selects them in compliance with applicable regulations and provisions. Partnerships between organizations can greatly benefit from one another's experience and expertise.

D. Transfer of Results

The application should include a description of the applicant's proposed approach for active transfer of project results (as defined under each Project Area), methods and/or effective strategies to water utilities, states, tribes, and/or other interested stakeholders so that others may better build their water workforce. Examples of ways to transfer results include:

- i. Sharing the results with relevant organizations through a website;
- ii. Sharing the results with relevant drinking water and/or wastewater utilities and other relevant stakeholders;
- iii. Conducting webinars or other outreach efforts, addressing workforce needs, to drinking water and wastewater utilities; and/or
- iv. Sharing the results at conference(s) that includes water utilities.

E. EPA's Strategic Plan Linkage and Anticipated Environmental Results

Applicants must demonstrate in their application how their project and proposed activities link to the Strategic Plan Goal and Objective identified below. This announcement is consistent with EPA's priority to provide for clean and safe water.

The activities to be funded under this announcement support EPA's FY 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, (available at: <https://www.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan>). Awards made under this announcement will support progress toward Goal 1: A Cleaner, Healthier Environment: Deliver a cleaner, safer, and healthier environment for all Americans and future generations by carrying out the Agency's core mission, Objective 1.2: Provide for Clean and Safe Water: Ensure waters are clean through improved water infrastructure and, in partnership with states and tribes, sustainably manage programs to support drinking water, aquatic ecosystems, and recreational, economic, and subsistence activities, of EPA's Strategic Plan.

EPA also requires that grant applicants adequately describe environmental outputs and outcomes to be achieved under assistance agreements (see EPA Order 5700.7A1, Environmental Results under Assistance Agreements, <https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57007a1-epas-policy-environmental-results-under-epa-assistance-agreements>). All proposed projects must address the

Strategic Plan Goal 1, Objective 1.2, and include specific statements describing the environmental results of the proposed project in terms of well-defined outputs and, to the maximum extent practicable, well-defined outcomes that will demonstrate how the project will contribute to the overall protection of human health and the environment by ensuring safe drinking water and preventing water pollution.

Outputs and outcomes are defined as follows:

Outputs: Environmental outputs (or deliverables) refer to an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product related to an environmental goal or objective that will be produced or provided over a period of time or by a specified date. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative but must be measurable during the project period.

Examples of anticipated outputs from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for Project Area 1, *Targeted internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades*, may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An increased number of participants in existing or new internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, post-secondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades.
- An increased number of internships, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, or post-secondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades.
- An increased number of available recruitment strategies, materials, and partnerships to inform potential applicants of internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades.

Examples of anticipated outputs from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for Project Area 2, *Education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students*, may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Establishment of new partnerships with community and technical colleges to provide classroom, online, and/or on the job training experiences for elementary, secondary, or higher education students
- Development, distribution, and use of age-appropriate educational materials to raise elementary, secondary, or higher education student awareness about opportunities in the drinking water or wastewater utilities sector.

Examples of anticipated outputs from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for Project Area 3, *Regional industry and workforce development collaborations to address water utility employment needs and coordinate candidate development, particularly in areas of high unemployment or for water utilities with a high proportion of retirement eligible employees*, may include, but are not limited to, the following:

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

utilities.

Examples of anticipated outputs from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for Project Area 4, *Integrated learning laboratories in secondary educational institutions*, may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Development of an innovative program or strategy in a secondary educational institution to recruit diverse populations to the water utility sector workforce.
- Development of new learning laboratories in secondary educational institutions for student awareness about drinking water and wastewater job skills.

Examples of anticipated outputs from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for Project Area 5, *Leadership development, occupational training, mentoring, or cross-training programs that ensure that incumbent drinking water and wastewater utility workers are prepared for higher level supervisory or management-level positions*, may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An increased number of drinking water or wastewater utility workers receiving leadership training and mentoring.
- An increased number of utility programs to train incumbent workers for management positions.

Outcomes: Environmental outcomes are the result, effect, or consequence that will occur from carrying out an environmental program or activity that is related to the environmental or programmatic goal or objective. Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic in nature. Outcomes should be quantitative and may not necessarily be achieved within the assistance agreement funding period.

Examples of anticipated outcomes from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for Project Area 1, *Targeted internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs for skilled water utility trades*, may include, but are not limited to, the following:

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

Examples of anticipated outcomes from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for Project Area 2, *Education programs designed for elementary, secondary, and higher education students*, may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Increased student awareness about career opportunities in the water and wastewater sector as documented by program assessments on knowledge acquisition.
- Integration of educational program into school's science, technology, engineering, and math activities and programs.

Examples of anticipated outcomes from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded

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

- Enhanced sustainable regional collaborations that support the long-term water utility workforce needs.
- An increased number of individuals in high areas of unemployment being recruited into the water sector.
- Prompt ability to backfill for retiring employees to sustain the workforce.
- An increase in the skillset of water utility employees that would meet specific requirements in career advancement.

Examples of anticipated outcomes from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for Project Area 4, *Integrated learning laboratories in secondary educational institutions*, may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Increased student awareness about career opportunities in the water and wastewater sector as documented by program assessments on knowledge acquisition.
- Increased student involvement in programs that offer dual enrollment.
- An increased number of students entering the utility workforce or entering post-secondary training or education programs that support the water and wastewater utility workforce.

Examples of anticipated outcomes from the cooperative agreements expected to be awarded under this announcement for Project Area 5, *Leadership development, occupational training, mentoring, or cross-training programs that ensure that incumbent drinking water and wastewater utility workers are prepared for higher level supervisory or management-level positions*, may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An increase in the number of internal promotions.
- An increase in candidate development opportunities that formally qualify incumbents to be considered for management and supervisory positions.

As part of the Project Narrative, an applicant will be required to describe how the project results will link the outcomes to the Agency's Strategic Plan and to the goal to provide clean and safe water and increase workforce development opportunities for drinking water and wastewater utilities and increase public awareness of these workforce opportunities. In addition, applicants will have to describe their plan and approach for tracking and measuring their progress towards achieving expected outputs and outcomes. Additional information regarding EPA's discussion of environmental results in terms of "outputs" and "outcomes" can be found at:

https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-03/documents/epa_order_5700_7a1.pdf (see EPA Order 5700.7, Environmental Results under Assistance Agreements).

F. Statutory Authority

The statutory authority for the awards expected to be made under this announcement is Section 1459E of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), as amended, (42 U.S.C. Section 300j-19e). SDWA 1459E authorizes EPA to award grants to assist the development and use of innovative

activities relating to workforce development and career opportunities in the water utility sector, and to expand public awareness about water utilities and connect individuals to careers in the water utility sector.

SECTION II – AWARD INFORMATION

A. Amount of Funding

The total estimated amount of federal funding available under this announcement is approximately \$1,000,000, depending on Agency funding levels, the quality of applications received, Agency priorities, and other applicable considerations. EPA expects each award to range from a minimum of \$200,000 to no more than \$500,000. Applicants may not request more than \$500,000 in federal funding per application. Applications requesting more than \$500,000 are not eligible and will not be reviewed. It is anticipated that up to five awards will be made under this announcement. While EPA expects to make up to five awards, there is no guarantee that this will be done, and EPA may award fewer awards based on the quality of applications received. Cooperative agreements funded under this announcement will have up to three-year project periods, depending on the amount requested and the overall size and scope of the project(s).

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

EPA reserves the right to make no awards under this announcement or to make fewer awards than anticipated. While EPA intends to make awards in as many Project Areas as possible, the Agency reserves the right to make more than one award in a Project Area and the right to make no awards in a Project Area. In addition, EPA reserves the right to make additional awards under this announcement, consistent with Agency policy and guidance, if additional funding becomes available. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than six months after the original selection decisions.

B. Type of Funding

It is anticipated that cooperative agreements will be funded under this announcement and that EPA will have substantial involvement with the project work plan and budget. Although EPA will negotiate precise terms and conditions relating to substantial involvement as part of the award process, the anticipated substantial federal involvement may include the following:

1. Close monitoring of the recipient's performance to verify the results proposed by the applicant.
2. Collaboration during performance of the scope of work, including participation in project activities, such as attending specific trainings.

3. Review of qualifications of key personnel (EPA does not have the authority to select employees or contractors employed by the recipient).
4. Review and comment on tasks/deliverables and reports prepared under the cooperative agreement(s) (the final decision on the content of these reports rests with the recipient).

Section III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants under this competition are nonprofit professional or service organizations, nonprofit labor organizations, nonprofit community colleges, institutions of higher education, or other nonprofit training and educational institutions.³ Nonprofit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in prohibited lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply. For-profit organizations and individuals are not eligible to apply. EPA may ask applicants to demonstrate that they are eligible for funding under this announcement.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

No cost share or match is required under this announcement.

C. Threshold Eligibility Criteria

These are requirements that if not met by the time of application submission will result in the elimination of the application from consideration for funding. Only applications that meet all of these criteria will be evaluated against the ranking factors in Section V of this announcement. Applicants deemed ineligible for funding consideration as a result of the threshold eligibility review will be notified within 15 calendar days of the ineligibility determination.

1. An applicant must meet the eligibility requirements in Section III.A of this announcement at the time of application submission.
2. Applicants must address **one, and only one, of the five Project Areas** listed in Section I.B as the primary focus for their application. Applications that address more than one Project Area as the primary focus will not be reviewed.
3. Under this competition, **only one application can be submitted per applicant.** If an

³Nonprofit organization, as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative or other organization that: (1) is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable or similar purposes in the public interest; (2) is not organized primarily for profit; and (3) uses its net proceeds to maintain, improve and/or expand its operations. Note that 2 CFR Part 200 specifically excludes the following types of organizations from the definition of nonprofit organization because they are separately defined in the regulation: (i) institutions of higher education. Institutions of Higher Education are defined at 20 U.S.C. 1001. While not considered to be a non-profit organization(s) as defined by 2 CFR 200.70, public or nonprofit Institutions of Higher Education are, nevertheless, eligible to submit applications under this RFA

applicant submits more than one application, EPA will contact them before the review process begins to determine which application(s) will be withdrawn. If the applicant is not able to communicate a decision within 48 hours of being contacted by EPA, EPA will accept the application received by Grants.gov first. Additional information regarding the one application per applicant requirement may be found in the FAQ document available at <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/innovative-water-infrastructure-workforce-development-program>.

4. Applications for awards cannot request more than \$500,000 in federal funds. Applications requesting more than \$500,000 in federal funds will be rejected. Additional information regarding funding levels is available in Section II.A.
5. Applications must **substantially comply** with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in Section IV of this announcement or else they will be rejected. Where a page limit is expressed in Section IV.D.2 with respect to the Project Narrative, pages in excess of the page limitation will not be reviewed. Section IV.D.2 establishes a 15-page, single-spaced Project Narrative page limit.
6. Applications must be submitted through [Grants.gov](https://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.
7. 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](https://www.grants.gov) or relevant System for Award Management (SAM) (<https://www.sam.gov/SAM/>) system issues. An applicant's failure to timely submit their application through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) because they did not timely or properly register in SAM.gov or [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) will not be considered an acceptable reason to consider a late submission. Applicants should confirm receipt of their application via e-mail with Hana Abate at WaterWorkforceRFA@epa.gov within five business days after the submission deadline—failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.
8. If an application is submitted that includes any ineligible tasks or activities, that portion of the application will be ineligible for funding and may, depending on the extent to which it affects the application, render the entire application ineligible for funding.

Section IV. Application and Submission Information

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

Applicants, except as noted below, must apply electronically through [Grants.gov](https://www.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](https://www.grants.gov), the applicant must contact OMS-ARM-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.

<p>Mailing Address: OGD Waivers c/o Jessica Durand USEPA Headquarters William Jefferson Clinton Building 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N. W. Mail Code: 3903R Washington, DC 20460</p>	<p>Courier Address: OGD Waivers c/o Jessica Durand Ronald Reagan Building 1300 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W. Rm # 51278 Washington, DC 20004</p>
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In the request, the applicant must include the following information:

- Funding Opportunity Number (FON)
- Organization Name and Unique Entity Identifier (e.g., DUNS)
- Organization's Contact Information (email address and phone number)
- Explanation of how they lack the technical capability to apply electronically through Grants.gov because of 1) limited internet access or 2) no internet access which prevents them from being able to upload the required application materials through [Grants.gov](https://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 application 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, 2020, it is valid for any competitive or non-competitive application submission to EPA through December 31, 2020). 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, 2020 with a submission deadline of January 15, 2021, the applicant would need a new exception to submit through alternative methods beginning January 1, 2021. Please note that the process described in this section is only for requesting alternate submission methods. All other inquiries about this announcement must be directed to the Agency Contact listed in Section VII of the announcement. Queries or requests submitted to the email address identified above for any reason other than to request an alternate submission method will not be acknowledged or answered.

B. Submission Instructions

The electronic submission of your application must be made by an official representative of your institution who is registered with Grants.gov and is authorized to sign applications for Federal assistance. For more information on the registration requirements that must be completed in order to submit an application through grants.gov, go to [Grants.gov](https://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 Unique Entity Identifier (e.g. DUNS number) and a current registration with the System for Award Management (SAM) and the process of obtaining both could take a month or more. Applicants must ensure that all registration requirements are met in order to apply for this opportunity through grants.gov and should ensure that all such requirements have been met well in advance of the submission deadline. Registration on grants.gov, SAM.gov, and DUNS number assignment is FREE.

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

To begin the application process under this grant announcement, go to [Grants.gov](https://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 [Adobe Reader Compatibility Information on Grants.gov](https://www.adobe.com/reader/compatibility)

You may also be able to access the application package for this announcement by searching for the opportunity on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). Go to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and then click on "Search Grants" at the top of the page and enter the Funding Opportunity Number, **EPA-OW-OWM-20-01**, or the Assistance Listing number that applies to the announcement (**66.445**), in the appropriate field and click the Search button.

Please Note: All applications must now be submitted through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) using the "Workspace" feature. Information on the Workspace feature can be found at the [Grants.gov Workspace Overview Page](https://www.grants.gov/workspace).

Application Submission Deadline: Your organization's AOR must submit your complete application package electronically to EPA through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) no later than **March 26th, 2021 11:59 PM ET**. Please allow for enough time to successfully submit your application and allow for unexpected errors that may require you to resubmit.

Please submit *all* of the application materials described below using the Grants.gov application package accessed using the instructions above.

Application Materials

The following forms and documents are required under this announcement:

Mandatory Documents:

1. Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
2. Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)
3. EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54
4. EPA Form 4700-4 - Preaward Compliance Review Report
5. Narrative Proposal (Project Narrative Attachment Form)-prepared as described in Section IV.D.2 of the announcement

Optional Documents:

6. Other Attachments Form - Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, if applicable
7. Other Attachments Form - Biographical Sketches

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 **Hana Abate** at **202-564-2844**. Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

c. Technical Issues with Submission

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

2. Submitting the application. The application package must be transferred to Grants.gov by an AOR. The AOR should close all other software before attempting to submit the application package. Click the "submit" button of the application package. Your Internet browser will

launch, and a sign-in page will appear. **Note: Minor problems are not uncommon with transfers to Grants.gov. It is essential to allow sufficient time to ensure that your application is submitted to Grants.gov BEFORE the due date identified in Section IV of the solicitation.** The Grants.gov support desk operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, except Federal Holidays.

A successful transfer will end with an on-screen acknowledgement. For documentation purposes, print or screen capture this acknowledgement. If a submission problem occurs, reboot the computer turning the power off may be necessary and re-attempt the submission. Note: Grants.gov issues a "case number" upon a request for assistance.

3. Transmission Difficulties. If transmission difficulties that result in a late transmission, no transmission, or rejection of the transmitted application are experienced, and following the above instructions do not resolve the problem so that the application is submitted to [Grants.gov](https://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 **WaterWorkforceRFA@epa.gov** with the FON in the subject line. If you are unable to email, contact **Hana Abate** at **202-564-2844**. Be aware that EPA will only consider accepting applications that were unable to transmit due to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) or relevant <https://www.sam.gov/SAM/> system issues or for unforeseen exigent circumstances, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access. Failure of an applicant to submit timely because they did not properly or timely register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov is not an acceptable reason to justify acceptance of a late submittal.

a. If you are experiencing problems resulting in an inability to upload the application to Grants.gov, it is essential to call [Grants.gov](https://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 **Hana Abate** at **202-564-2844**.

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

c. Grants.gov rejection of the application package: If a notification is received from Grants.gov stating that the application has been rejected for reasons other than late submittal and it is too late to reapply, promptly send an email to **WaterWorkforceRFA@epa.gov** with the FON in the subject line within one business

day of the closing date of this solicitation. The email should include any materials provided by Grants.gov and attach the entire application in PDF format.

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

D. Content of Application Package Submission

Applicants should read the following section very carefully. A complete application package must include the following documents described below.

1. Application Materials

- a. **Signed Standard Form (SF) 424 – Application for Federal Assistance.** Complete the form. There are no attachments. The organizational Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number must be included in the SF-424. Organizations may obtain a DUNS number at no cost by calling the toll-free DUNS number request line at 1-866-705-5711.
- b. **SF-424A – Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs.** The total amount of federal funding requested for the project period should be shown on line 5(e) and on line 6(k) of the SF-424A. If indirect costs are included, the amount of indirect costs should be entered on line 6(j). The indirect cost rate (a percentage), the base (e.g., personnel costs and fringe benefits), and the total amount of indirect cost should also be indicated on line 22. If indirect costs are requested, a copy of the Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement must be submitted as part of the application package. In Section B, Budget Categories column (1) should be filled out for federal funds, column (2) should be filled out for any non-federal cost- share/match, and column (5) should be filled out for total project cost (combined federal funds and any non-federal cost-share/match).
- c. **EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54.** Complete the form. Attach additional forms as needed.
- d. **EPA Form 4700-4, Pre-Award Compliance Review Report.** Complete the form. There are no attachments.
- e. **Project Narrative.** See Section IV.D.2 (Project Narrative) for details on specific information that must be included. When developing the Project Narrative, applicants should refer to Section I.B, I.C., and I.D of the announcement for the project description.
- f. **Biographical Sketches.** Submit a biographical sketch of each major project manager, support staff member, or other major project participant for the proposed project.
- g. **Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement** (if indirect costs are included in your proposed project budget). Complete this form if indirect costs are included in the proposed project budget. You must submit a copy of your organization's Indirect Cost Rate Agreement as part of the application package if your proposed project budget includes indirect costs.

2. Project Narrative

NOTE: The Project Narrative must include sections A-C below. The Project Narrative (covering sections A-C below) is limited to no more than fifteen (15) typewritten, single spaced 8.5x11-inch pages (a page is one side of a piece of paper) including the cover page and executive summary. Pages should be consecutively numbered for ease of reading. It is recommended that applicants use a standard 12-point type with 1-inch margins. While these guidelines establish the minimum type size recommended, applicants are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in selection of an appropriate font for use in the Project Narrative. **Additional pages beyond the 15-page limit will not be considered.** Supporting materials, which are limited to no more than the Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate agreement, if applicable and Biographical Sketches documentation, if necessary, as described below, are not included within the page limit.

The application's Project Narrative must be typewritten and must include the information listed below. If a particular item is not applicable, clearly state this in the Project Narrative.

A. Cover Page (included in the page limit)

1. Project title;
2. Project Area from Section I.B addressed in the application;
3. Name of applicant;
4. Key personnel and contact information (i.e., e-mail address and phone number); and
5. Total project cost (specify the amount of federal funds requested, any non-federal cost-share/match, and the total project cost).

B. Executive Summary: Provide a brief summary of the proposed project (should not exceed one page). This should include a brief description of the proposed project and the anticipated environmental outputs and outcomes.

C. Workplan: The workplan must address the following elements:

1. **Project Area:** Describe the proposed approach for addressing one of the five Project Areas described in Section I.B of this announcement (*i.e.*, the Project Area identified as the primary focus). Describe the proposed approach to share (or make available) the project activities, the results of the project activities, and the lessons learned to geographically diverse areas. Describe the proposed innovative approaches that will address the workforce needs of drinking water and wastewater utilities.
2. **Project Partnerships:** Effective partnerships are important for the success of projects under this announcement. In their applications, applicants should identify appropriate and necessary partnerships to successfully conduct the project. Applicants should also include a clear description of the roles and responsibilities of specific partners, or planned partners, in the project's components/tasks. If you choose not to partner, applications will be evaluated based on how the applicant demonstrates how it will successfully conduct the project and meet the objectives described in Section I.B without partners.

3. **Transfer of Results**

The application should include a description of the applicant's plan for active transfer of project results (as defined under each Project Area in Section I.B), methods and/or effective strategies to water utilities, states, tribes, and/or other interested stakeholders, so that the other entities may better build their drinking water and wastewater workforce. Reference Section I.D. of this announcement for additional information.

4. **Environmental Results and Measuring Progress:**

a. Stated Objective/Link to EPA Strategic Plan - List the objective of the project and the linkage to FY 2018 – FY 2022 EPA Strategic Plan Goal 1: A Cleaner, Healthier Environment: Deliver a cleaner, safer, and healthier environment for all Americans and future generations by carrying out the Agency's core mission, Objective 1.2: Provide for Clean and Safe Water (see Section I.D of this announcement).

b. Results of Activities (Outputs) - Describe the anticipated products/results which are expected to be achieved from accomplishment of the project, and describe an approach for tracking and reporting your progress toward achieving the expected project output(s) (examples of outputs can be found in Section I.D of this announcement).

c. Projected Environmental Improvement (Outcomes) - List the anticipated environmental improvements that will be accomplished as a result of the project. These improvements are changes or benefits to the environment or public health which are a result of the accomplishment of the work plan commitments and outputs. Describe an approach for tracking and reporting progress toward achieving the expected project outcome(s) (examples of outcomes can be found in Section I.D of this announcement).

5. **Milestone Schedule:** Provide a projected milestone schedule for the proposed project period (up to three years). The milestone schedule should provide a breakout of the project activities into phases with associated tasks and a timeframe for completion of tasks, and an approach for ensuring that awarded funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. The project start date will follow award acceptance by the successful applicant.

6. **Detailed Budget Narrative:** Provide a detailed budget and estimated funding amounts for each project component/task. This section provides an opportunity for a narrative description of the budget or aspects of the budget found in the SF-424A such as "other" and "contractual."

a. Applicants must itemize costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, contractual costs, travel, equipment, supplies, other direct costs, indirect costs and total cost. All subgrant funding should be located in the "other" cost category. Describe itemized costs in sufficient detail for EPA to determine the allowability of costs for each

project component/task, as well as the cost-effectiveness and reasonableness of all costs.

7. Programmatic Capability/Experience:

- a. Organizational Experience - Provide a brief description of your organization and experience related to the proposed project, and your organization's infrastructure as it relates to its ability to successfully implement the proposed project.
- b. Staff Expertise/Qualifications - Provide a list of key staff and briefly describe their experience/expertise/qualifications and knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the project.

8. Past Performance: Briefly describe federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements but not contracts) similar in size, scope, and relevance to the proposed project that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements). If you had any EPA agreements in the last three years, those are preferred to be included. Please provide the following information.

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

Note: In evaluating an applicant's past performance, the Agency will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources, including information from EPA files and/or from current and prior federal agency 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 information, please indicate this in the application, and you will receive a neutral score for these factors under Section V. Failure to provide any programmatic past performance or reporting information, or to include a statement that you do not have any relevant or available past performance or reporting information, may result in a zero score for these factors (see also Section V).

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

D. Submission Dates and Times

Applications submitted electronically through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) must be **received by 11:59 PM ET March 26th, 2021**. Late applications will not be considered for funding.

E. Additional Provisions for Applicants Incorporated into the Solicitation

Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation, including but not limited to those related to confidential business information, contracts and subawards under grants, and application assistance and communications, can be found at [EPA Solicitation Clauses](#). These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing applications for this solicitation. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions.

SECTION V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

A. Selection Criteria

All eligible applications, based on the Section III threshold eligibility review, will be evaluated based on the evaluation criteria and weights below (100 total point scale). Points will be awarded based on how well and thoroughly each criterion and/or sub-criterion is addressed in the application package.

(25 points)	<p>1) Project Areas</p> <p>Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability and approach for effectively addressing in their application <i>one</i> of the Project Areas in Section I.B of this announcement (<i>i.e.</i>, the Project Area identified as the primary focus). In conducting this evaluation, the following factors will be taken into account.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The extent and quality of the overall approach to addressing the Project Area described in the application. (10 points) ii. The extent to which the applicant includes innovative approaches in addressing the workforce needs of drinking water and wastewater utilities. (8 points) iii. The extent to which the applicant describes the proposed approach to share (or make available) the project activities, the results of the project activities, and the lessons learned to geographically diverse areas. (7 points)
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(10 points)	<p>2) Project Partnerships Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability to demonstrate appropriate and necessary partnerships to successfully conduct the project, including whether they have provided a clear description of the roles, or planned roles, of each partner in the project’s component/ tasks, and how these partnerships will contribute to the success of the project. If the applicant does not intend to have partners, then the applicant will be evaluated based on how they demonstrate they will be able to successfully conduct the project and meet the objectives described in Section I.B without the use of partners. (see Section I.C. of this announcement). (10 points)</p>
(10 points)	<p>3) Transfer of Results Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated based on how well they demonstrate the applicant’s plan for active transfer of project results, methods, and/or effective strategies to other water utilities, as well as states, tribes, and/or other interested stakeholders to assist them with building their drinking water and wastewater utility workforce (see Section I.D. of this announcement). (10 points)</p>
(10 points)	<p>4) Environmental Results and Measuring Progress Applications will be evaluated based on each of these sub-criteria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The extent and quality to which the application demonstrates the potential to achieve environmental results, anticipated outputs and outcomes, and how the outputs and outcomes are linked to EPA’s Strategic Plan described in Section I.E of this announcement. (5 points) ii. The extent and quality to which the application demonstrates a sound plan for measuring and tracking progress toward achieving the anticipated outputs and outcomes (examples of outputs and outcomes can be found in Section I.E of this announcement). (5 points)
(15 points)	<p>5) Milestone Schedule/Detailed Budget Applications will be evaluated based on the extent and quality to which the application addresses each of the following sub-criteria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The adequacy and completeness of the milestone schedule, including timeframes and major milestones to complete significant project tasks, and an approach to ensure that awarded funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. (7.5 points) ii. The reasonableness of the budget and estimated funding amounts for each project component/task, and the adequacy of the information provided in the detailed budget, and whether the proposed costs are reasonable and allowable. The cost-effectiveness and reasonableness of all costs will be evaluated. (7.5 points)

(20 points)	6) Programmatic Capability/Experience Under this criterion, applications will be evaluated based on the applicant's ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project considering their: <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. Organizational experience related to the proposed project, and the organizational infrastructure as it relates to the ability to successfully implement the proposed project (10 points)ii. Staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the project. (10 points)
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(10 points)	<p>7) Past Performance</p> <p>Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project taking into account their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Past performance in successfully completing and managing federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements but not contracts) similar in size and scope to the proposed project performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements). (4 points) ii. History of meeting reporting requirements under federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements but not contracts) similar in size and scope to the proposed project performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements) and submitting acceptable final technical reports under those agreements. (2 points) iii. Extent and quality to which the applicant adequately documented and/or reported on their progress towards achieving the expected results (e.g., outcomes and outputs) under federally funded and/or non-federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include grants and cooperative agreements but not contracts) performed within the last three years (no more than five agreements, and preferably EPA agreements), and if such progress was not being made, whether the applicant adequately documented and/or reported why not. (4 points) <p>Note: In evaluating applicants under (i), (ii) and (iii) above, EPA will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources including Agency files and/or prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information supplied by the applicant). Applicants with no relevant or available past performance information or reporting history must indicate that in the application and they will receive a neutral score for the factor (i.e., 2 points for item (i), 1 points for item (ii), and 2 points for item (iii)).</p> <p>Failure to provide any past performance information, or to include a statement that you do not have any relevant or available past performance information, may result in a zero score for the factor (i.e., 0 points for item (i), 0 points for item (ii), and 0 points for item (iii)).</p>
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C. Review and Selection Process

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

A panel(s) comprised of EPA staff will review the eligible applications by Project Area based on the evaluation criteria listed in Section V.A. Ranking lists will be developed based on the panel evaluations for each Project Area. The ranking lists will be provided to the Selection Official, who makes the final funding decisions. In making the final funding decisions, the Selection Official will consider the application score/ranking on each ranking list and may also take into account other factors such as geographical distribution of funds and diversity of projects. As noted above, while EPA expects to make up to five awards and one for each Project Area, it reserves the right not to do so and to reconsider the number of awards. While EPA intends to make awards in as many Project Area areas as possible, the Agency reserves the right to make more than one award in a Project Area and the right to make no awards in a Project Area.

D. Additional Provisions Incorporated by Reference

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

Section VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Following EPA's evaluation of the applications, all applicants, including those who are not selected for funding, will be notified regarding their status. The notification will be made to the original signer of the Standard Form (SF) 424, Application for Federal Assistance or the project contact listed in the application. The notification, which informs the applicant that its application has been selected and is being recommended for award, is not an authorization to begin work. The official notification of an award will be made by the Grants and Interagency Agreements Management Division.

Applicants are cautioned that only an 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 an EPA Award Official, is the authorizing document and will be provided through electronic or postal mail. The successful applicant may need to prepare and submit additional documents and forms (e.g., workplan), which must be approved by EPA, before the assistance agreement can officially be

awarded. The time between notification of selection and award of an assistance agreement can take up to 90 days or longer.

EPA reserves the right to negotiate and/or adjust the final assistance agreement amount and work plan narrative prior to award, as appropriate and consistent with Agency policy including the Assistance Agreement Competition Policy, EPA Order 5700.5A1. An approvable final work plan narrative is required to include:

1. Components to be funded under the assistance agreement;
2. Estimated work years and the estimated funding amounts for each component;
3. Commitments for each component and a timeframe for their accomplishment;
4. Performance evaluation process and reporting schedule; and
5. Roles and responsibilities of the recipient and EPA (for cooperative agreements only) in carrying out the commitments.

B. Additional Provisions for Applicants Incorporated into The Solicitation

Additional provisions that apply to this solicitation and/or awards made under this solicitation, including but not limited to those related to DUNS, SAM, copyrights, disputes, and administrative capability, can be found at the [EPA Solicitation Clauses](#). These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants must review them when preparing applications for this solicitation. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with EPA contact listed in this solicitation to obtain the provisions.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

The general award and administration process for assistance agreements are governed by regulations at 2 CFR 200 and 1500, as applicable.

D. Reporting

In general, recipients are responsible for managing the day-to-day operations and activities supported by the assistance funding, to assure compliance with applicable federal requirements, and for ensuring that established milestones and performance goals are being achieved. Performance reports and financial reports must be submitted quarterly and are due 30 days after the reporting period. The final report is due 90 days after the assistance agreement has expired. Recipients will be required to report direct and indirect environmental results from the work accomplished through the award. In negotiating assistance agreements, EPA will work closely with the recipient to incorporate appropriate performance measures and reporting requirements in the work plan consistent with 2 CFR 200 and 1500.

E. Disputes

Assistance agreement competition-related disputes will be resolved in accordance with the dispute resolution procedures published in 70 FR (Federal Register) 3629, 3630 (January 26, 2005) which can be found at [Grant Competition Dispute Resolution Procedures](#). Copies of these procedures may also be requested by contacting the person listed in Section VII of the

announcement. Note, the FR notice references regulations at 40 CFR Parts 30 and 31 that have been superseded by regulations in 2 CFR parts 200 and 1500. Notwithstanding the regulatory changes, the procedures for competition-related disputes remains unchanged from the procedures described at 70 FR 3629, 3630, as indicated in 2 CFR Part 1500, Subpart E.

Section VII. Agency Contact

A. Note to Applicants: In accordance with EPA’s Assistance Agreement Competition Policy (EPA Order 5700.5A1), EPA staff will not meet with individual applicants to discuss draft applications, provide informal comments on draft applications, or provide advice to applicants on how to respond to ranking criteria. Applicants are responsible for the contents of their applications. However, consistent with the provisions in the announcement, EPA will respond to questions from individual applicants regarding threshold eligibility criteria, administrative issues related to the submission of the application, and requests for clarification about any of the language or provisions in the announcement. Please note that applicants should raise any questions they may have about the solicitation language to the contact identified in Section VII of this announcement as soon as possible so that any questions about the solicitation language may be resolved prior to submitting an application. In addition, if necessary, EPA may clarify threshold eligibility issues with applicants prior to making a final eligibility determination.

Questions about this RFA must be submitted in writing via e-mail and must be received by the Agency Contact identified below by **March 8th, 2021**. Written responses will be posted on EPA’s website at <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/innovative-water-infrastructure-workforce-development-program>.

Agency Contact: Hana Abate
WaterWorkforceRFA@epa.gov

Section VIII. Other Information

A. Data Sharing

All recipients of these assistance agreements may be required to share any data generated through this funding agreement as a defined deliverable in the final work plan.