

# Webinar Applicant Questions & Answers

## *Coastal Habitat Restoration and Resilience for Tribal and Underserved Communities Grants*

**2023 Webinar Dates:** September 15, September 20, and September 26

**Competition Manager:** Julia Royster; [julia.royster@noaa.gov](mailto:julia.royster@noaa.gov) or 301-427-8686

### Acronyms/Short-hand used in this document:

- ★ NoFO: Notice of Funding Opportunity
- ★ Tribal and Underserved: NOAA's Coastal Habitat and Resilience for Tribal and Underserved Communities Grants, under BIL and IRA.
- ★ RC: Restoration Center

*Will the possible government shut down impact the timeline of this opportunity (or the other 3 NOAA opportunities that are open?)*

- **Answer:** As of today, the deadlines of funding opportunities remain as published. Should a decision be made to alter any of these deadlines, we will update those dates across applicable platforms, including our [funding opportunity website](#), and Grants.gov.

*If I have questions, should I contact the Competition Manager or a regional contact? How do I determine my local regional contact?*

- **Answer:** Contact the Competition Manager, Julia Royster, at [underserved.community.grants@noaa.gov](mailto:underserved.community.grants@noaa.gov), or 301-427-8686.
  - She is a great resource for questions related to the funding opportunity, and will connect you with a regional point of contact once she understands the project geography, and/or the type of activities to be proposed.
  - If you have questions, the simplest way to have them answered is to set up a time to discuss the competition process, and/or your idea.
  - The Competition Manager is happy to talk through how your idea might connect to the evaluation criteria in the funding opportunity.

### **Project Type/Eligibility**

- *Are nature-based solutions eligible for this competition, e.g. raingarden, bioswales, constructed stormwater wetlands, or urban forests, and similar practices?*
  - **Answer:** Yes. The term “nature-based solutions” refers to actions that protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use, and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems. These solutions effectively and adaptively address social, economic, and environmental challenges, while simultaneously providing benefits for human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience, and biodiversity.

- *Is habitat/land acquisition as an option to enhance resiliency, and/or to implement nature-based solutions allowable?*
  - **Answer:** The acquisition of real property as a component of a proposed project is allowable.
    - A proposal that is focused SOLELY on the acquisition of real property, such as land is not eligible. Please review Section III.C. for project eligibility information.
  
- *What is the difference between critically eroded beach vs. being 'recreational' beach as a disqualifier?*
  - **Answer:** Beaches that are restored for their habitat, and will also provide recreational benefits, are eligible to apply. Renourishing a beach for the SOLE purpose of recreation is not eligible.
    - The primary difference is whether or not recreation is the sole purpose of the project, or if habitat and/or conservation of a species is the primary purpose of a project.
    - The nuance is the focus on renourishment of the beach, e.g. bringing sand in to replenish the beach that might have eroded away. This is different from planting dune grass to stabilize and preserve existing beaches.
  
- *If the focus of the project is restoring degraded water quality from non-tribal, nonpoint agricultural impacts, can the proposal fund infrastructure to combat these effects on water quality?*
  - **Answer:** Projects that improve water quality through the creation or enhancement of fisheries habitat are eligible, as are projects that increase the amount of streamflow (e.g. storage and forbearance).
    - Funding for hard infrastructure ONLY for water quality improvement is not eligible. See page 15 of the funding opportunity for more details.
  
- *Is sampling and testing for water/soil contaminants an eligible use?*
  - **Answer:** Sampling or testing for contaminants would be an eligible cost, as long as the sampling/testing is not required by a separate local, state, or federal consent decree, court order, statute, or regulation. If it is required, it is not eligible.
  
- *Is basic research eligible under this funding opportunity?*
  - **Answer:** Research is not eligible under this funding opportunity.
    - Actionable science support activities, including monitoring, that build capacity within the tribe, tribal entity, or underserved community, and/or address needs of tribes and underserved communities to make decisions for current or future restoration actions are eligible.
    - Actionable science support, includes, but is not limited to the collection and/or analysis of climate, habitat or other community – or conservation-related data to inform planning and decision making or decision making tools related to restoration actions.

- *Can funding be used for writing a proposal to a different competition in collaboration and/or partnership with an underserved community, tribe, or tribal entity?*
  - **Answer:** Funding can be used to build organizational and technical capacity, which may include proposal development for future funding.
- *Will there be any provision made to help community-based organizations compete?*
  - **Answer:** There are no specific provisions related to the type of organization that will receive funding, or how they will compete.
    - The evaluation criteria, and program priorities focus on the connection of a project to a tribe or underserved community. The applicant must be able to demonstrate a strong connection to these communities in order to be successful for this opportunity.
    - The competition is driven by the number of proposals that are submitted, and their ability to clearly connect with the evaluation criteria.

## Funding Availability

- *Can you please clarify how the \$20M allocated to Indian tribes (as defined in 25 U.S.C. Section 5304(e)) and Native American organizations that represent Indian tribes through formal legal agreements (e.g. tribal commissions, tribal consortia, tribal conservation districts, and tribal cooperatives) via subawards is distinct from the \$25M for all other applicants?*
  - **Answer:** The only distinction between the \$20M and the \$25M is that for proposals to compete for the \$20M set-aside, the **tribe or tribes** as defined in the funding opportunity (*federally recognized tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and organizations that represent tribes through formal legal agreements*) must be the primary applicant or receiving a subaward from the primary applicant to implement the proposed activities.
    - Tribes that are the primary applicant or identified as a subrecipient in the application will be considered for all of the available funding.
      - The primary applicant would receive a direct award from NOAA, and administer the award.
      - A subaward to a tribe is an award where a non-tribal applicant receives a direct award from NOAA, but provides a specific amount of funding to a tribe to carry out a portion of the award. \*The subaward does not have to be for 100% of the requested funding, however the subaward must allocate a portion of the overall budget directly to a tribe. There is not a designated amount or percentage that needs to go to the tribe, however the percentage is part of the overall benefit that will flow to the tribe from the implementation of the proposed activities, and is considered in the Evaluation Criteria, Section V.A.

- Applicants that are not tribes (*as defined in the funding opportunity*) are only eligible for \$25M of the available funds in this competition. Non-federally recognized tribes will compete only for this portion of the available funding.
- When eligible proposals are reviewed, they will be screened for tribal primary recipients or subrecipients. Proposals submitted by tribes (*as defined in this funding opportunity*) will automatically be considered for all funding available in the competition.
- When the selecting official is ready to select the projects recommended for funding under this competition, they will ensure top-ranked proposals selected for funding meet the allocation requirement of this funding opportunity. This means that of the top-ranked proposals, \$20M will support the top-ranked proposals with tribal primary recipients or subrecipients, and the remaining \$25M will support top-ranked proposals by any eligible applicant, including tribes.

## Program Priorities

- *Does my project need to do habitat restoration to “directly improve the quality and function of habitats, for the purpose of recovery or sustainability of the target species or fisheries,” and/or build ecosystem and/or community resilience to reduce the impact of disturbances to “extreme weather and climate risks,” or both?*
  - **Answer:** The project could do either one, or both.
    - Look at the Evaluation Criteria, Importance and Applicability information in Section V.A. on page 28. Points are distributed among a project’s ability to: 1) Strengthen Ecosystem Resilience, 2) Enhance Community Resilience, and 3) Meaningful Engagement and Capacity Building. \*All of these terms are defined in the Program Objective Section I.A. of the funding opportunity, term definitions on page 8-9.
    - Reaching out to the Competition Manager is a great way to get more feedback about your project idea or ideas.
- *Do proposals have to address one of the two program priorities, or both of the program priorities?*
  - **Answer:** Successful proposals will be those that meet the evaluation criteria (Section V.A.) most closely, including those criteria related to the program priorities.
    - Applicants may apply for funding to support one or more of these priorities for a range of activities connected to each priority.
    - The program priorities for this competition are: 1) Enhancing habitat in support of ecosystem and community resilience and/or 2) Increasing organizational and technical capacity of tribes, tribal entities, and/or underserved communities to lead and/or participate in habitat restoration activities, including actionable science support.

- *Is there more information about how “underserved” communities are identified and how we would prove our “underserved” status?*
  - **Answer:** NOAA does not have one tool, or a preferred method for you to use to identify and/or prove your underserved status. There are a variety of resources available to identify underserved communities, such as:
    - Interviews, surveys, or other direct engagement with community members or groups
    - Studies or plans developed by local governments, academic researchers, or community groups
    - U.S. Census Bureau Information
    - State or national environmental justice mapping tools, such as the Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) or the Environmental Protection Agency's EJScreen.
      - CEJST is a tool provided by the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) that aims to help federal agencies identify disadvantaged communities as part of the Justice40 initiative to accomplish the goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits from certain federal investments reach disadvantaged communities.
    - Other federal agencies or state governments maintain publicly available datasets relevant to identifying underserved communities and/or communities with likely environmental justice concerns.
  - The applicant's responsibility is to describe how the community has been underserved. It is important to include a brief description of the community, and its relationship to the project or project site, and the nature of expected project benefits.
    - For the proposed project, you will also want to think about why the benefits of the project are important to the underserved community, and make the connection clearly. You will also want to be as specific as possible about how the project has in the past, or plans in the future, to engage the underserved community in visioning, decision-making, and execution of restoration activities.
  
- *Other NoFOs out right now for habitat restoration place a strong emphasis on increasing acreage through restoration actions, do you see a similar increased acreage focus in this NoFO?*
  - **Answer:** This funding opportunity is focused on building organizational and technical capacity, enhancing community and ecosystem resilience for tribes, tribal entities, and/or underserved communities, and promoting meaningful engagement to community members ensuring they are integral to the visioning, decision-making, and leadership for coastal habitat restoration projects that may affect their environment, and/or health and well-being. Acreage is not emphasized in the funding opportunity.

## Content and Form of Application

- *Are there any restrictions against submitting the same general project for multiple Habitat Restoration NoFOs (i.e., this one and the Transformational Habitat funding opportunity)?*
  - **Answer:** There are no restrictions to how many funding opportunities you can submit the same general project.
    - If you submit the same general project to multiple opportunities, we suggest reviewing the priorities and evaluation criteria for each funding opportunity to ensure that you are connecting the general project to the funding opportunity.
    - Using the same proposal for all opportunities is not a good strategy, and will not compete well in any opportunity.
  
- *The recommended project period is three years. Is there flexibility in the length of the project?*
  - **Answer:** Yes. The project period should be as short or as long as you think you need to successfully complete the project.
    - NOAA encourages a three year performance period.
    - A shorter project period is acceptable, and there is potential for up to five years, if necessary and approved by NOAA.
  
- *Are we able to apply for a two part plan? For example, phase one is developing a tribal watershed plan utilizing an existing study, and phase two is implementing immediate strategies? OR is it better to just apply for developing a Watershed protection plan this year, and submit a separate application for the second phase at a later time?*
  - **Answer:** You can apply for both in one proposal. Your primary driver should be thinking about what you can realistically complete in three years and with a budget of \$3M or less.
  
- *Where do I find more information about Implementation Monitoring?*
  - **Answer:** Implementation monitoring is monitoring that allows you to clearly demonstrate that the proposed project was implemented as designed and/or intended.
    - The exact metrics would depend on the specific project type. The RC Implementation Monitoring Guide is a great place to start, however it does not cover all habitat or project types.  
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/monitoring-and-evaluation-restoration-projects>
    - Reach out to the Competition Manager to discuss metrics, especially those not covered in the RC guide.
  
- *What does a letter of support from a non-tribal underserved community look like?*
  - **Answer:** The goal of a letter of support is for the community or communities that will benefit from the proposed work to demonstrate their support for the project.



- *Will proposals that provide cost share be given higher priority, or additional points in the review?*
  - **Answer:** Non-federal match is not included in the Evaluation Criteria, and therefore not included in scores during the technical review process.
    - Non-federal match and/or leverage funds may be optionally included within the application to demonstrate stakeholder support for the proposed work.
    - Stakeholder support, such as documentation demonstrating contributions of time, meeting space, funding, etc. that demonstrate the community's commitment to the project and/or its chances of success is part of the evaluation criteria.
  
- *How should we highlight that a project, or part of a project has been proposed for multiple sources of funding in the proposal?*
  - **Answer:** In your Budget Narrative, include a summary of the competitions to which you have submitted proposals for all or a subset of the activities in the proposal you are submitting to this competition.
    - The summary should include the funding source (or agency), the title of the competition, the amount of the requested or secured funding, approximate decision date for anticipated award selection, and if the funds would be federal or non-federal in origin.
    - The Restoration Center will reach out to other competitions to confirm your status in other competitions, if you were to be recommended for funding from the Restoration Center.