

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS
(Final & Released Version; March 24, 2005)

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory (NHEERL)
Mid-Continent Ecology Division (MED)

BIOASSESSMENT RESEARCH OF GREAT RIVER ECOSYSTEMS

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 66.511
Proposal Request issued: March 24, 2005
Final date to submit technical questions: April 15, 2005
Proposals due: May 6, 2005

Point of Contact:

Mr. Craig Johnson,
Re: Bioassessment Research of Great Rivers Ecosystems Application
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Duluth, MN 55804

Overview: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Health and Effects Laboratory Mid-Continent Ecology Division (MED), as part of the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program (EMAP), is issuing instructions for the submission of proposals under the EMAP Great River Ecosystems Program (EMAP-GRE). Proposals should result in the incorporation of innovative bioassessment research into state and tribal environmental decision-making processes. Through their direct involvement in research, state and tribal agencies will be better able to benefit the public through advancing scientific knowledge by implementing needed assessment tools and increase their capacity to report and manage conditions in Great River ecosystems. An assistance agreement is planned because it will provide project support to the states to continue and expand EMAP research to associate environmental conditions and stressors, to collect and share environmental data, and to facilitate the creation of statistically-defensible and scientifically-robust “report cards” of environmental health of rivers at multiple hydrogeomorphic, political, and ecological scales. EMAP-GRE initiated a survey of ecological condition in 2004 in partnership with state, university, and federal agencies. The survey of the Upper Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri Rivers is unified by common methods for sample collection and data analysis, and a site selection process based on a probability design. Such coordination is necessary to produce consistent data that may be aggregated across scales. Objectives of the cooperative agreement, developed in collaboration with EPA scientists, will benefit the public by: (1) developing bioassessment methods (i.e. biological indicators, survey designs, estimates of reference condition) to produce unbiased estimates of the ecological condition; (2) demonstrating and transferring bioassessment tools to conduct spatially-nested assessments in support of the Clean Water Act; and

(3) determining the relative risks to Great River ecosystems from a comprehensive list of potential stressors.

Currently, EMAP-GRE research focuses water quality and biotic integrity in main-channel and main-channel border habitats. Proposed work will enhance EMAP-GRE by sampling additional sites to estimate reference conditions, evaluate indicator performance across condition gradients and/or in other Great River habitats, or lead to assessments of partner-specified spatial units. Additional field sampling will be done on the Upper Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri Rivers in 2005-2006. Sampling on the largest tributaries and reservoirs of these rivers may be proposed if the results are relevant to program objectives. Application proposals must include activities that:

- (1) refine the application of EMAP-GRE field methods, biological indicators, and probability-based sampling designs for state-based or regional Great River assessment and monitoring plans and Clean Water Act reports; and
- (2) construct and implement field sampling programs, laboratory analyses, and/or data analyses for Great River assessments; and
- (3) estimate or develop reference conditions, biological criteria, and/or water quality standards with which to assess conditions of Great Rivers.

In addition, proposals may include activities that promote intra- and inter-state cooperative assessment and monitoring, and research innovative indicators of ecological conditions in Great Rivers. Collectively, proposal elements must contribute to the improvement of Clean Water Act reports and/or informed management decision-making for Great Rivers.

In accordance with Section 305(b) of the Clean Water Act Statute's reporting requirements, recipients shall share project data with EMAP-GRE partners including, but not limited to, state agencies and EPA scientists. At the conclusion of the project, data will be transferred to STORET, the public-access database maintained by the EPA Office of Water. Recipients shall comply with all data management guidelines and provide progress reports. They will collaborate with EPA to generate assessment products, such as State-of-the-River Reports, and participate in annual, EPA-hosted, technology transfer workshops. EPA scientists from the Office of Research and Development (ORD) and regional offices will be substantially involved with recipients in program oversight and activities in developing products, implementing methods, and transferring assessment skills and knowledge to States' CWA reporting agencies.

Outputs and Outcomes: Proposals must detail products or outputs (such as reports and data) that support efforts at meeting longer term environmental outcomes. Application proposals must include the delivery timeline, format, and intended audience of each output. Successful outcomes must improve states' capabilities to conduct bioassessments and track environmental conditions of Great Rivers. Outputs must be consistent with EPA's long-term research goals for Ecosystem Protection. The statement of work goals include, but are not limited to:

1. Providing environmental managers, the public, and researchers with a better understanding of the links between human activities, natural dynamics, ecological stressors, and river ecosystem health.

2. Providing methods and analytical tools that managers can use to predict the affect of stressors on river biota.
3. Providing scientifically-defensible methods for protecting and restoring conditions of Great Rivers.

Anticipated Funding: A total of \$1,600,000 is anticipated for all awards. Cooperative agreements of up to five years duration may be proposed but annual funding will be subject to the availability of funds and the successful performance by the recipient. Annual awards may range from \$100,000 - \$150,000 per individual state and up to \$500,000 for multi-state consortia or inter-state commission.

Eligible Applicants: The selection of proposals has been exempted from competition. The major condition of that exemption is that only state, interstate, and tribal agencies that have Clean Water Act (specifically, Section 305(b)) responsibilities for the Upper Mississippi, Ohio, and/or Missouri Rivers are eligible to apply. Because ecological problems cross political boundaries, EPA encourages groups of eligible applicants to form consortia. Each consortium must identify a single eligible organization to be the recipient of the Cooperative Agreement and which eligible organization(s) will be sub-awardees of the recipient. Subawards must be consistent with the definition of that term under Title 40 CFR Part 31.3. The recipient must administer the assistance agreement and is accountable to EPA for proper expenditure of the funds. The recipient will be the point of contact for the consortium. As provided in 40 CFR 31.37, sub-awardees are accountable to the recipient for proper use of EPA funding. Consortia may not include for-profit organizations that will provide services or products to the successful applicant. All applicants must document their responsibilities under the provisions of the Clean Water Act in the proposal.

Any contracts for services or products funded with EPA financial assistance must be awarded under the competitive procurement procedures of 40 CFR Part 31. Applicants are not required to identify contractors or consultants in the proposal. Moreover, the fact a successful applicant has named a specific contractor or consultant in the proposal EPA approves does not relieve it of its obligations to comply with competitive procurement requirements or consultant compensation limitations.

Applications will be reviewed for eligibility during the Administrative Review. Proposals from ineligible applicants will be returned without further review.

Type of Award: The primary purpose of this project is to support the accomplishment of a public purpose in the subject area rather than to acquire property or services for the EPA. Specifically, projects will advance the States overall scientific knowledge in the area of the ecological assessment of Great Rivers. The primary audiences for the research results are State, Tribal, and local governments, inter-state management commissions, non-governmental organizations, community groups, and the academic community. Meeting the objectives of the solicitation depends on joint collaboration with the EPA and meets the assistance criteria for “substantial Federal involvement” in the form of programmatic oversight and activities in developing products, implementing methods, and transferring assessment skills and knowledge to State agencies’ CWA reporting unit. Therefore, a cooperative agreement is appropriate vehicle for this GRE project.

A cooperative agreement is a legal instrument for the transfer of funds to an organization for the implementation of an approved work-plan. Substantial involvement is anticipated between EPA and the recipient during the performance of the approved activities. For example, personnel from EPA ORD and Regional Offices will work closely with recipients to provide assistance in identifying appropriate environmental information for analysis, field, laboratory, and statistical methods, and assessment endpoints. It is expected that the recipient will closely work with EPA in organizing, developing, and implementing outreach activities that promote the use of program outputs for state assessment and monitoring needs and the public good.

Anticipated Federal Involvement: Upon selection of a proposal, an EPA ORD Project Officer (PO) will be assigned to the project. Project officers will work with the applicant to develop the work-plan (including Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP)). It is the responsibility of the PO that products improve the applicants' capabilities to assess and monitor Great Rivers. The PO assures proper review of the work-plan and reconciliation of reviewers' comments. The PO provides oversight, funds management, and technical guidance. The PO also promotes collaborative work between the recipient and EPA scientists as permitted under a cooperative agreement.

Cost Sharing Requirements: Institutional cost-share is not required. However, the degree of recipient cost-sharing incorporated into the proposal, such as in-kind contributions (including facilities & equipment sharing, or professional services) provided by non-Federal public agencies, organizations, or individuals, will be considered.

Environmental Results under EPA Assistance Agreements: Clean Water Act section 305(b) requires that each state report on the quality of its waters (including interstate rivers) every two years. Proposals must detail how project outputs will support state water quality and biological assessments and inform decision actions necessary for improvement. Sound science that affects change in decision actions is an intended outcome of these projects. Outputs and outcomes of the proposed work will directly benefit each state and its population. Work under the agreements also may contribute to EPA Government Performance and Result Acts outputs and outcomes. ORD has multiple outputs (Annual Performance Goals and Measures) during the period (2005-2009) that secondarily may benefit from proposed projects. State-conducted research activities contribute to EPA Strategic Goal 4 (Ecological Research) and EPA Long-Term Goal 1: "By 2010, national policy makers will have the tools and technologies to develop scientifically-defensible assessments of our nation's ecosystems". They also affect Goal 4 (Healthy Communities and Ecosystems), Objective 4.4 (Enhanced Science and Research), Subobjective 4.4.1 (Apply the Best Available Science) and Sub-objective 4.4.2 (Conduct Relevant Research) as well as Goal 2 (Water Quality), Objective 2.2 (Protect Water Quality) and Objective 2.3 (Enhance Science and Research). EPA Project Officers will be responsible for interpreting state-generated data and results for any EPA outputs or milestone documents.

Content and Form of Application Submission

Proposals may not exceed 15 pages (single-spaced with a minimum font size of 12), excluding items 6-8. Proposals must contain the following items.

1. Cover Sheet. The cover sheet must contain the following: the Proposal title and identification number (Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) 66.511); name, address, and Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number of the applicant; name, address, telephone numbers, and email address of proposal's point of contact; date of the submission.
2. Standard forms Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) and Budget Information (SF-424a). These forms may be downloaded from www.grants.gov or www.cfda.gov. Please follow instructions on these forms. Do not submit additional forms.
3. A work-plan that describes the proposed project and outputs such as reports, articles, and data that will be generated in support of the general outcome to improve water quality monitoring and bioassessment of Great River ecosystems. The work-plan must describe the rationale, specific need, and approach for the proposed activities. Breaking the activities into discrete tasks and describing the sampling design and methods for each may be useful.
4. Timeline, including an anticipate schedule for the completion of specific tasks, and the delivery of outputs.
5. Budget estimates for the proposed work that is broken down into personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual, and other direct costs and overhead (indirect costs) with summaries for each year and the total for the entire project. Indicate any proposed cost-sharing (not required). Proposed annual budgets must not exceed \$150,000 for individual states or \$500,000 for multi-state consortia or inter-state commission (exclusive of cost-sharing but inclusive of all overhead and indirect costs at approved federal government rates). Budgets must include travel to an annual, EPA-hosted, technology transfer workshop. No construction costs are allowed in this agreement. No large capital equipment items, such as vehicles and boats, will be allowed for purchase under an agreement.
6. Letter(s) of Commitment from partners that explain their roles in the proposed project (one-page maximum; explain in-kind support, if any, in budget).
7. Resumes for key personnel (six one-page resumes maximum).
8. A Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) that outlines the steps that will be taken to adequately maintain sample and data integrity during collection, processing, and analysis, and procedures for reporting and correcting QA concerns for the duration of the project. It is understood that the initial QAPP submitted with the proposal will be refined in consultation with the MED QA Manager and Project Officer before the project is fully funded or the collection of environmental data is initiated (EPA Order 5360.1A2). Instructions for preparing a QAPP can be found in *EPA QA/G-5, Guidance for Quality Assurance Project Plans*, available at <http://www.epa.gov/quality/qs-docs/g5-final.pdf>.

Submission Dates and Times: Applications must be received through regular or express mail or other deliver service at the address below by 5 p.m. (CDT) on or before May 6, 2005:

U.S. EPA Mid-Continent Ecology Division
Attn: Mr. Craig Johnson
6201 Congdon Blvd.
Duluth, MN 55804

Amendments: Amendments and clarifications of these “Instruction for Submission of Proposals” will be distributed to all potentially eligible applicants. The application deadline will be extended if deemed appropriate.

Intergovernmental Review: This assistance opportunity is subject to Executive Order 12372, “Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.” Applicants should contact their State’s Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to find out how to comply with the state’s process. The names and addresses of the SPOCs are listed by State in the Office of Management and Budget’s homepage.

Application Review Information

The criteria used to evaluate proposals include:

1. Administrative & Relevance Reviews: All proposals will be subject to an administrative review to ensure that they conform to the requirements of these instructions, particularly applicant eligibility. Proposals that are administratively acceptable will be reviewed for relevancy to the solicited objectives. Proposals may be rejected if they lack relevance even if work is successfully performed. Also, proposals may not significantly duplicate work already completed or underway. Proposals that fail to demonstrate a public purpose of support and stimulation (i.e. it implies the primary purpose is to provide direct support to the Federal government) also may be rejected.
2. Technical Peer Review: Proposals that are found administratively acceptable and relevant will be reviewed on the basis of:
 - a. The experience of the Principal Investigators with Great River assessments. This will include their demonstrated familiarity with, and access to existing data, sampling infrastructures, and analytical techniques. (30%)
 - b. Capacity of the Principal Investigators to incorporate new information into river monitoring programs. (20%)
 - c. Suitability of personnel, facilities, and methods to achieve the stated goals of the proposal. (30%)
 - d. Applicant’s plan for measuring and tracking its progress toward achieving the expected outputs and outcomes. (20%)

Willingness to work cooperatively with EPA scientists and other partners is an important, but non-scoring, criterion. Evidence of institutional cost-sharing (such as in-kind contributions

of facilities, equipment, materials, or professional services) is optional but will be considered in the evaluation of the reasonableness and realism of the overall budget.

4. Evaluation Process: The administrative and relevancy reviews will be conducted by EPA personnel who are not a part of the technical peer review panel. The technical peer review panel shall consist of at least one internal EPA reviewer and at least two non-EPA reviewers all of whom are able to demonstrate technical expertise and a lack of any conflict of interest.
5. Rejection Factors: Applications may be rejected because they fail to comply with the administrative requirements, they are found to lack relevancy, they are judged technically unacceptable, or they are not deemed suitable for award due to other factors (if identified). EPA reserves the right to reject all proposals or applications and make no awards.
6. Source Selection: EPA will conduct the evaluation of proposals and select applicants for award based upon the technical peer review and other factors discussed above. The Decision Official will be an EPA ORD manager who will determine whether an applicant should be selected for an award. The selection of a proposal does not guarantee an award. Upon selection, an ORD Project Officer will be assigned to assist applicants in refining the work-plan, especially the reconciliation of reviewers' comments. With an acceptable work-plan, the Project Officer will assemble the funding package in accordance with the guidance provided by EPA's Office of Grants and Debarment (GAD) and will then submit recommendations to this Headquarter office's GAD Award Official.
7. Disputes: Disputes will be resolved pursuant to the process described in 40 CFR 30.63 and Part 31, subpart F.
8. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates: The anticipated cooperative agreement award date is September 1, 2005.

Award Administration Information

Award Notices: Notice of award will be made in writing by an official in the EPA Grants Administration Division. Preliminary selection or recommendation by the Decision Official in ORD does not guarantee an award will be made. Applicants are cautioned that only a Grants Officer can bind the government to the expenditure of funds. No commitment on the part of EPA should be inferred from technical or budgetary discussions with an EPA Program Official. A Principal Investigator or organization that makes financial or personnel commitments in the absence of a cooperative agreement signed by the EPA Grants Award Official does so at their own risk.

EPA will promptly notify in writing (postal or email) each applicant whose proposal is rejected. An unsuccessful applicant may request a debriefing to better understand the evaluated strengths and weaknesses of its proposal and the reason for rejection if other than technical merit.

Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Regulations and OMB Coverage: Grants and agreements with institutions of higher education, hospitals, and other nonprofit organizations are subject to 40 CFR Parts 30 and 40 and OMB Circular A-122 for nonprofits and A-21 for institutions of higher learning. Grants and agreements with state, local, and tribal governments are subject to 40 CFR Parts 31 and 40 and OMB Circular A-87.

Programmatic Terms and Conditions: Terms and conditions will be negotiated covering the following requirements:

- It is required that projects be performed by qualified personnel. All proposals must identify persons who will assist in carrying out the project. The authorized representative of the recipient whose proposal is selected for an award is responsible for accepting the cooperative agreement from the EPA and ensuring that all cooperative agreement conditions are satisfied. Recipients are responsible for the successful completion of the project and for complying with all reporting requirements of the cooperative agreement.
- Award recipients may begin incurring allowable costs on the start date identified in the EPA cooperative agreement. Activities must be completed and funds spent within the time frames specified in the agreement. EPA funds may be used only for the purposes set forth in the agreement and must conform to Federal cost principles contained in OMB Circular A-87; A-122; and A-21, as appropriate. Ineligible costs will be reduced from the final award.
- Work-plans and outputs may be subject to peer review, at EPA's expense, and must comply with EPA quality assurance requirements.
- To further the objective of supporting the public good and stimulation, applicants must agree to make methods, models, and data resulting from this agreement accessible to the public.
- Collaboration between EPA and the recipient must be substantial and span the duration of the project. Involvement may include, but not limited to, providing technical input to and the oversight of the sampling design and sample/data analyses. The EPA will be substantially involved in existing EPA approved methods, including the oversight of data analysis. Collected data must be made accessible to EPA and the public through an EPA information management system, such as STORET. Recipients and EPA will participate in annual technical workshops related to program objectives.

Reporting

Progress Reports: Recipients are required to submit quarterly progress reports. The reports must summarize technical progress, difficulties encountered, and planned activities for the next quarter. Each report must include a summary of major expenditures. The format of reports must be agreed upon by the Principal Investigators and the PO.

Final Report: Recipients are required to submit a final report that includes outputs, such as databases or papers that illustrate key findings. Relationships between outputs and outcomes must be described. The report will be reviewed by EPA who may consult with outside experts. The schedule for the development of the final report should allow for a 30-day draft review period. Recipients must adequately respond to reviewers' comments before the report is accepted as final.

Questions: Questions should be submitted in writing by the Principal Investigator to the agency contact. Do not seek information regarding proposal submission from any other sources, as the information may be erroneous. Answers that may provide an advantage to an applicant are communicated equally to all applicants.

Confidential Information: In accordance with Title 40 CFR Part 2 Section 203, applicants may claim all or a portion of their application/proposal as confidential business information. EPA will evaluate confidentiality claims in accordance with 40 CFR Part 2. Applicants must clearly mark applications or portions of applications they claim as confidential. If no claim of confidentiality is made, EPA is not required to make the inquiry to the applicant otherwise required by 40 CFR 2.204(c)(2) prior to disclosure. Proposals may be provided to non-EPA personnel for review. All reviewers will sign confidentiality agreements. They will not copy any portions of any material provided by EPA and they will return all materials to EPA upon request. If you are unwilling to allow non-EPA consultants review your proposal, please advise us of your decision in a cover letter to your proposal.

DUNS Number: Applicants are required to provide a Dunn and Bradstreet (D & B) Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number when applying for Federal Cooperative Agreements. OMB has determined that there is a need for improved statistical reporting of Federal grants and cooperative agreements. Use of the DUNS number government-wide will provide a means to identify entities receiving those awards and their business relationships. The identifier will be used for tracking purposes, and to validate address and point of contact information. A DUNS number will supplement other identifiers required by statute or regulations, such as tax identification numbers. Organizations can receive a DNS number in one day, at no cost, by calling 1-866-705-5711.

Agency Contact: All contacts with EPA should be initiated through the Agency Contact who may redirect questions to appropriate technical or fiscal resources.

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