

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

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BIOASSESSMENT RESEARCH OF GREAT RIVER ECOSYSTEMS

General Information

Announcement Type: Initial Announcement, Guidance and Instructions for Completing Non-Competitive Application

Funding Instrument Type: CA

Funding Opportunity Number: EPA/ORD/NHEERL/MED-FY2006-06-0416

Posted Date: April 15, 2006

Original Due Date for Applications: To be considered timely, printed applications must be received by 3:00 p.m. local time in Duluth, MN on August 4, 2006 from the U.S. Postal Service, or other commercial delivery service. Applications submitted electronically through <http://www.grants.gov> must be received by 6:00 p.m. EST on 04 August 4, 2006.

Current Due Date for Applications: To be considered timely, printed applications must be received by 3:00 p.m. local time in Duluth, MN on August 4, 2006 from the U.S. Postal Service, or other commercial delivery service. Applications submitted electronically through <http://www.grants.gov> must be received by 6:00 p.m. EST on August 4, 2006.

Archive Date: (To be completed by Grants.gov)

Category of Funding Activity: Environment

Anticipated Number of Awards: Up to 8

Anticipated Total Program Funding: \$ 6,000,000.00

Award Ceiling: \$ 500,000.00 (Year One); with up to \$500,000.00 per year)

Award Floor: \$ 150,000.00 (Year One)

CFDA Number: 66.511

Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement: None

Eligible Applicants

The selection of proposals has been exempted from competition (<http://epawww.epa.gov/ogd/compet/piexemptions/greatrivers.htm>). A condition of that exemption is that only state and tribal agencies, or interstate commissions that have Clean Water Act (specifically, Section 305(b)) responsibilities for the Mississippi, Ohio, and/or Missouri Rivers are eligible to apply. This announcement contains guidance and instructions for completing non-competitive application.

Federal Agency Name

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Research and Development
National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory
Mid-Continent Ecology Division
6201 Congdon Boulevard
Duluth, MN 55804
Attn: Mr. Craig Johnson,

Description

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 applications under the EMAP Great River Ecosystems Program (EMAP-GRE). The goal is to provide opportunities for states and tribes to participate in the development and demonstration of bioassessment methods that will increase states' capacity to report and manage ecological conditions in the Mississippi River and its major tributaries. Priority will be given to work proposed on the Lower Mississippi River (downstream of its confluence with the Ohio River). Results will benefit the public because implementing innovative assessment methods promotes the integration of needed environmental data into state and tribal decision-making processes. Objectives of the proposed Cooperative Agreements, to be developed in collaboration with EPA, will be (1) to develop bioassessment methods (i.e. ecological indicators, survey designs, analytical techniques) yielding statistically-sound estimates of the ecological condition; (2) use these methods to conduct spatially-nested assessments of the river in support of the Clean Water Act; and (3) transfer the methods to appropriate agencies for incorporation into future assessment programs. Cooperative Agreements between EPA and state & tribal water quality management agencies will support continued and expanded research to collect and share environmental data, and to facilitate the creation of statistically-sound and scientifically-defensible "report cards" of environmental health of the river at multiple spatial scales.

Application Materials

You may submit either a printed application or an electronic application for this announcement. The printed application must be submitted to Mr. Craig Johnson, U.S. EPA MED, 6201 Congdon Blvd, Duluth, MN 55804, by the closing date and time. To apply electronically, the electronic application package available through the <http://www.grants.gov/> web site must be used. If your organization is not currently registered with Grants.gov, you will need to allow approximately one week for completing the registration process. This registration, and electronic submission of your application, must be performed by an appropriate representative of your organization.

Agency Contact Person for Electronic Access Problem

Mr. Craig Johnson, phone: (218) 529-5016 email: johnson.craig@epa.gov

Link to Full Announcement

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FULL TEXT OF ANNOUNCEMENT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

Title of Assistance Opportunity: BIOASSESSMENT RESEARCH OF GREAT RIVER ECOSYSTEMS

Background: 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 guidance and instructions for the submission of a non-competitive application under the EMAP Great River Ecosystems Program (EMAP-GRE). The goal is to provide opportunities for states and tribes to participate in the development and demonstration of bioassessment methods that will increase states' capacity to report and manage ecological conditions in the Mississippi River and its major tributaries. Priority will be given to work proposed on the Lower Mississippi River (downstream of its confluence with the Ohio River). Results will benefit the public because implementing innovative assessment methods promotes the integration of needed environmental data into state and tribal decision-making processes. Objectives of the proposed Cooperative Agreements, to be developed in collaboration with EPA, will be (1) to develop bioassessment methods (i.e. ecological indicators, survey designs, analytical techniques) yielding statistically-sound estimates of the ecological condition; (2) use these methods to conduct spatially-nested assessments of the river in support of the Clean Water Act; and (3) transfer the methods to appropriate agencies for incorporation into future assessment programs. Cooperative Agreements between EPA and state & tribal water quality management agencies will support continued and expanded research to collect and share environmental data, and to facilitate the creation of statistically-sound and scientifically-defensible "report cards" of environmental health of the river at multiple spatial scales.

EMAP-GRE initiated a survey of ecological conditions of the Upper Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri Rivers in 2004. The work continues in partnership with state, university, and federal agencies. The survey is unified by a common probabilistic sample design, sample collection methods, and data analysis. This standardized approach is necessary to produce consistent data that may be aggregated across scales. Currently, EMAP-GRE research focuses on water quality and biotic integrity in main-channel and littoral habitats. By engaging additional state and tribal partners it may be possible to link ecological conditions in the Mississippi River to conditions in the Gulf of Mexico. The new agreements also will enhance the EMAP-GRE assessment; in particular with the characterization of reference conditions and the evaluation of indicator performance across condition gradients. Main-channel habitats remain the priority of EMAP-GRE but sampling on the larger tributaries and reservoirs of the Mississippi River system may be proposed if the results are directly relevant to EMAP-GRE program objectives.

Funding Priorities/Focus: The primary objectives of the solicited research are to provide States and Tribes with methods and approaches for incorporating statistically-valid ecological monitoring data into their environmental decision-making process. Project goals are to be consistent with EMAP's probabilistic approach (www.epa.gov/emap) to answer questions about ecological conditions in the Mississippi River basin. Project outputs and outcomes should be

consistent with the U.S. EPA's strategic plan (www.epa.gov/ocfopage/plan/plan.htm) and research priorities. In general, the expected outcomes supported by this Assistance Agreement will be the strengthened ability to assess and compare risks to ecosystems, to protect or restore them, and to track progress in terms of ecological outcomes. Expected outputs delivered by this assistance agreement are to be consistent with EPA's long term research goals for Ecosystem Protection. In general, these include, but are not limited to:

- Products that provide environmental managers and researchers with a better understanding of the links between human activities, natural dynamics, ecological stressors and ecosystem condition.
- Tools that managers and researchers can use to predict stressors on ecological resources.
- Scientifically defensible methods for protecting and restoring ecosystem condition.

More specific outputs depend on the research project proposed. Information produced from projects is to be transferable to Regional, State, and Tribal water quality monitoring programs and regulatory agencies. Research proposals must consider one or more of the following:

- State and Tribal monitoring needs for water quality reporting (CWA Section 0305b).
- Information needed for identifying impaired waters (CWA Section 303d).
- Using probability information to identify the effectiveness of restoration/remediation efforts.
- Advancing the science of biological reference condition for establishing biocriteria.
- Improved tools and approaches for the assessment of aquatic ecosystems.

We will consider any and all proposals that meet state and tribal aquatic monitoring needs related to the Lower Mississippi River.

Environmental Results: This RFA seeks applications that will advance the following goals/objectives as identified in EPA's Strategic Plan (<http://www.epa.gov/ocfo/plan/2003sp.pdf>):

The specific Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) Goals, Objectives and Sub-objectives that relate to this RFA are:

Goal 4: Healthy Communities and Ecosystems

Objective 4.4: Enhance Science and Research—provide a sound scientific foundation for EPA's goal of protecting, sustaining, and restoring the health of people, communities, and ecosystems by conducting leading-edge research and developing a better understanding and characterization of environmental outcomes under Goal 4.

Sub-objective 4.4.1 Apply the Best Available Science—identify and synthesize the best available scientific information, models, methods and analyses to support Agency guidance and policy decisions related to the health of people, communities, and ecosystems.

Sub-objective 4.4.2 Conduct Relevant Research—conduct research that contributes to the overall health of people, communities, and ecosystems.

Proposals must describe project outputs (such as reports and data) that support desired longer-term outcomes (such as implementing cost-effective river monitoring programs, improved Clean Water Act reports, and better informed decision-making). Proposals must include the delivery timeline, format, and intended audience of each output. 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:

- Providing environmental managers, the public, and scientists with a better understanding of the links between human activities, natural processes, ecological stressors, and river ecosystem health.
- Providing methods and analytical tools that managers can use to predict and track the affect of stressors on river biota.
- Providing scientifically-defensible methods for evaluating progress in adaptive management and restoration of the Mississippi River.

Statutory Authority for Award of Assistance: Statutory Authority for Award of Assistance: Research will be funded under the statutory authority of the Clean Water Act (P.L.92-500, as amended) Section 104(b3).

II. Award Information

Anticipated Amount of Individual Awards: \$150,000.00 to \$2,500,000.00 (may be incrementally funded)

Anticipated Number of Awards: Up to 8

Anticipated Funding: A total of up to \$6,000,000.00 is anticipated for all awards. Cooperative agreements of up to five years duration may be proposed. Funding will be incremental with annual funding subject to the availability of funds and the successful performance by the recipient. Awards may be made to individual states but proposals from multi-state consortia or inter-state commissions are particularly encouraged .

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

Anticipated Project Period: It is anticipated that project periods will vary between projects (see previous section). The start of individual projects will vary depending upon completion of funding packages (see section V) and date of award by the Grants Administration Division. The earliest start date is anticipated to be on or about March 1, 2007.

Type of Award: The Agency anticipates the award of cooperative agreements.

Anticipated Federal Involvement: EPA anticipates substantial involvement in the implementation of the research. This involvement includes, but is not limited to:

- Contributing to development of the probabilistic sampling design of projects.
- Technical assistance and training in the application of EMAP-GRE approach for assessing large rivers of the Mississippi River basin.
- Logistical support as requested by applicants.
- Provide other In-kind assistance such as equipment and analytical services if it is more efficient in terms of cost or time.
- Provide assistance on application of information management approaches and analysis and interpretation of data.
- Participate in the development and preparation of reports and journal articles on these activities.

III. Eligibility Information

Eligible Applicants: The selection of proposals has been exempted from competition (<http://epawww.epa.gov/ogd/compet/piexemptions/greatrivers.htm>). A condition of that exemption is that only state and tribal agencies, or interstate commissions that have Clean Water Act (specifically, Section 305(b)) responsibilities for the 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 must stipulate which eligible organizations(s) will be sub-awardees of the recipient.

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

Sub-agreement Eligibility Criteria: Groups of two or more eligible applicants may choose to form a consortium and submit a single application for this assistance agreement. Consortia must identify which eligible organization will be the recipient of the assistance agreement, and which eligible organizations(s) will be sub-awardees of the recipient. Sub-awards must be consistent with the definition of that term in 40 CFR 30.2(ff). The recipient must administer the assistance agreement, is accountable to EPA for proper expenditure of the funds, and will be the point of contact for the coalition. As provided in 40 CFR 30.2(gg), sub-recipients 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. For-profit organizations are not eligible for sub-awards. Any contracts for services or products funded with EPA financial assistance must be awarded under the competitive procurement procedures of 40 CFR Part 30 and 31. Applicants are not required to

identify contractors or consultants in the proposal. Moreover, the fact that 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.

Cost Sharing Requirements: Institutional cost-sharing is not required. However, if the applicant intends to cost-share, a brief statement concerning cost-sharing should be added to the budget justification, and estimated dollar amounts must be included in the appropriate categories in the budget table.

Environmental Results under EPA Assistance Agreements: Clean Water Act section 305(b) requires that each state report 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. Improving environmental decision-making at the state and tribal level is an intended outcome of these projects. Outputs and outcomes of the proposed work must 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.

Threshold Criteria: Applications will be rejected which do not include the following:

- Use, to the extent possible, existing EMAP-GRE field methods, biological indicators, and probability-based sampling designs for state or regional river assessment (<http://www.epa.gov/emap/greatriver/fom.html>). Proposed projects must include field sampling and data analysis. It may include ancillary laboratory analyses.
- Promote the incorporation of probability-based sampling designs and bioassessment methods into monitoring plans and Clean Water Act reports.
- Characterize and develop reference conditions, biological criteria, and/or water quality standards with which to assess conditions of the rivers.
- Collaboration with EPA staff to collect, analyze and promote the use of the environmental data for Clean Water Act reporting. It is strongly suggested that all activities include intra- and inter-state collaborations.

IV. Application and Submission Information

Applicants must submit a full, detailed application to include all of the documents described in Section A below. Applicants should submit adequate information addressing each of the ranking criteria in Section V. Additional guidance on completing the documents is available at EPA's Office of Grants and Debarment (<http://www.epa.gov/ogd/>) Applicants may submit either a printed application or an electronic application through <http://www.grants.gov> this announcement. Applications may not be submitted via email or by fax. Applications submitted by email or fax will not be considered for selection. Instructions for both forms of submission follow.

A) Application Materials

The application is made through submission of the materials described below for both electronic and printed applications. *It is essential that the application contain all information requested and be submitted in the formats described.* The application must contain the following items:

1. **Application For Federal Assistance (SF-424)** (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/sf424.pdf>). This form will be the *first page* of the application. Instructions for completion of the SF-424 are included with the form. The form must contain the original signature of an authorized representative of the applying institution. Please note that both the Principal Investigator and an administrative contact are to be identified in Section 5 of the SF424. The applicant's DUNS number must be included.
2. **Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)**. Budget information must be broken down by each year of the project.
3. **Project Narrative and Supporting Documentation**—The Project Narrative is the technical proposal that discusses the technical approach and organizational capabilities for accomplishing the goals stated under the Funding Priorities/Focus in Section I. It will become the technical work plan for selected proposals. It describes the objective of the proposed project and its link to EPA's strategic plan. Pages should be consecutively numbered (bottom center) on 8.5X11-inch pages of single-spaced, standard 12-point type with 1-inch margins. Narratives shall include all supportive text, tables, figures, and references. Proposals may not exceed 15 pages (single-spaced with a minimum font size of 12), excluding items G-K. Proposals must contain the following sections and information:
 - A. *Title Page*. Include the title of the proposed project, the organization submitting the proposal, the principal investigator(s) with address, phone number and email address and other contact information if different than the PI. Also include the EPA Region for which the proposal is intended.
 - B. Table of Contents.
 - C. *Project Description*. Brief discussion (1-2 paragraphs) of the purpose, rationale, and importance of the research to be conducted. Identify region and resource population being sampled or targeted and discussion about how the outputs (products) of this project

will be linked to real environmental outcomes.

D. Background. State the problem. Incorporate existing literature.

E. Project Objectives. Specify questions/hypotheses that the research will address. Describe how this research is consistent with EPA's strategic plan.

F. Technical Approach.

- i. Overview of approach. Include activities and measurements that will be needed to address the objectives of the proposed research.
- ii. Statistical design. Identify target population, site selection criteria and sample size required to meet research objectives.
- iii. Existing data. Identify sources and information about existing data, including land cover data, and how it will be used in the research.
- iv. Sampling and analytical procedures and protocols. Identify criteria used to select field and laboratory methods, description of the logistics for the field work, including choosing, training and deployment of field crews, and the approach for evaluating the efficacy of the methods. Include, in the Appendices, copies of proposed analytical and field methods. If methods are established EPA EMAP methods or standard analytical methods, cite in references only.
- v. Data qualifications. Specify precision, accuracy, completeness, representativeness, and comparability of data required to meet objectives.
- vi. Data reduction, validation, management and reporting procedures. Include discussion on how data are to be managed, validated, and analyzed. It will also describe how the data and metadata files will be made available to EPA and State and Tribal stakeholders.

G. Schedule, Milestones, Products and Final Reports. Include sampling schedules, schedules for data analysis, reports, workshops, etc. Break down project activities and deliverables for each year of anticipated funding. Identify specific anticipated environmental outputs and associated outcomes, and include a plan for tracking and measuring the success in achieving the same.

H. Personnel Qualifications, Project Management Structure, Personnel Time Commitments, and Personnel Responsibilities. Identify roles and responsibilities of personnel and expertise for the research to be undertaken. Include, in appendices, letter(s) of commitment from partners and consortium members, if any, that explain their roles in the proposed project.

I. Include citations of relevant manuscripts, reports, etc. produced by the proposed key personnel under other similar projects that would demonstrate their expertise, experience and knowledge of the proposed research. Include partners and collaborators.

J. References

K. Appendices

4. **Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP).** If a QAPP is not submitted with the application package, it must be identified as a deliverable in the Project Narrative (under Schedule, Milestones, Products, and Final Reports) and it will be listed in the Terms and Conditions of the Assistance Agreement. The QAPP documents the procedures necessary to assure that the project will result in high quality data. It includes, but is not limited to, sample tracking/custody procedures, Internal quality control checks and frequency, performance and systems audit procedures and frequency, preventative maintenance schedules and procedures, procedures for corrective actions, and specific procedures for assessing precision, accuracy, and completeness of data. A QAPP is required for all monitoring projects and must be approved prior to the collection or use of environmental data (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>). An acceptable QAPP shall be due within 45 days following acceptance of the award and prior to any data collection.
5. **Plan for tracking and measuring progress** toward achieving the expected outputs and outcomes identified in Section I of the announcement. See EPA order 5700.7 (<http://www.epa.gov/ogd/grants/award/5700.7.pdf>).
6. **List documenting Environmental Results Past Performance.** Submit a list of all EPA and other Federal agency assistance agreements that your organization performed in the last three years, and describe how you documented and/or reported progress towards achieving the expected results (e.g., outputs and outcomes) under those agreements. Explain any circumstances resulting in not achieving the expected results.
7. **List documenting Programmatic Capability** Submit a list of all federally funded agreements similar in size, scope and relevance to the proposed project that your organization performed within the last three years and describe how you were (1) technically able to successfully carry out and manage those agreements and (2) your history of meeting the reporting requirements under those agreements including submitting acceptable final technical reports. In evaluating applicants, under this factor in Section V, EPA will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources, including information from EPA files and from current and prior Federal agency grantors. In addition, provide information on your organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project and your staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project.
8. **A Budget Narrative** which includes detailed, itemized budget estimates for the project and is broken down into direct labor, fringe benefits, contractual and sub-agreement costs,

equipment, travel, other direct costs and overhead with summaries for each year and the total for the entire project. If a sub-agreement is included in the application, provide a separate budget for the sub-agreement in the same format if the sub-agreement is greater than \$25k.

If amounts are budgeted for subcontracts, provide a description of the work that will be subcontracted and an explanation of why it must be subcontracted. Indicate whether the subcontracts will be awarded competitively or if not, what justification exists to make a non-competitive award. Any budget that includes amounts for subcontracts of 40% or more of the total direct costs will be subject to special review. Refer to Section III, Sub-agreement Eligibility Criteria, for a further discussion of proposed subcontracts.

Please note that institutional cost-sharing (In-Kind) is not required. However, if you intend to cost-share, a brief statement concerning cost-sharing should be added to the budget justification, and estimated dollar amounts must be included in the appropriate categories in the budget table.

Describe the basis for calculating the personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual support, and other costs identified in the itemized budget and explain the basis for their calculation. (Special attention should be given to explaining the “travel,” “equipment,” and “other” categories.). For any proposed equipment, identify any tangible non-expendable personal property to be purchased which has an estimated cost of \$5,000 or more per unit and a useful life of more than one year. (Personal property items with a unit cost of less than \$5,000 are considered supplies.)

9. Copy of the Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement.

10. **EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54**—should include the Principal, Co-Investigators, and administrative contacts. A copy of this form should also be completed for major sub-agreements (contacts at the institutions of primary co-investigators).

11. **Biographical Sketches**—one-page curriculum vitae should be included for the Principal Investigator(s) and any other key personnel identified in the proposal. If more than six PI and key personal are involved, the additional personnel may be listed on a single, separate page.

B) Submission Instructions for Electronic Applications—The electronic application package available through the <http://www.grants.gov/> web site must be used for electronic submissions. In order to view the application package, download the PureEdge viewer (hyperlink available under "Apply for Grants" then "Apply Step 1"). The application package may be quickly accessed from https://apply.grants.gov/forms_apps_idx.html using either the CFDA number of 66.511 or Funding Opportunity Number **EPA-ORD-06-0416**. It is recommended that you “Register to Receive Notification” of announcement updates.

The actual submission of an electronic application must be made by an authorized organizational representative (AOR) of the submitting institution who is registered with Grants.gov. Most individual investigators will not be eligible to submit the application). Please see <http://www.grants.gov/>, “Get Started” for further information. *The registration process may*

take a week or longer. Please check with your Sponsored Programs or equivalent office to locate your AOR and see if your institution is registered. If your institution is not currently registered, encourage your AOR to begin the process immediately.

The complete application ***must be transferred to EPA through Grants.gov by your organization's AOR no later than 6:00 pm Eastern Time on 04 August 2006.*** An e-mail will be sent by NHEERL to the Principal Investigator and the Administrative Contact to acknowledge receipt of the application and to transmit other important information. If an email acknowledgment from NHEERL (*not* support@grants.gov) has not been received within 30 days of the submission closing date, immediately contact the technical contact listed under "Agency Contacts" in this solicitation. Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

Documents I through III listed under Application Materials in Section IV.A of this announcement should appear in the "mandatory Documents" box on the <http://www.grants.gov> Grant Application Package page.

For documents I and II, click on the appropriate form and then click "Open Form" below the box. The fields that must be completed will be highlighted in yellow. Optional fields and completed fields will be displayed in white. If you enter an invalid response or incomplete information in a field, you will receive an error message. When you have finished filling out each form, click "Save". When you return to the electronic Grant Application Package page, click on the form you just completed, and then click on the box that says, "Move Form to Submission List". This action will move the document over to the box that says, "Mandatory Completed Documents for Submission."

For document III, you will need to attach electronic files. Prepare each of the documents as described in items III.1 through III.7 of Section IV.A and save the documents to your computer as an MS Word, PDF or WordPerfect file. When you are ready to attach your proposal to the application package, click on "Project Narrative Attachment Form", and open the form. Click "Add Mandatory Project Narrative File", and then attach your proposal (previously saved to your computer) using the browse window that appears. You may then click "View Mandatory Project Narrative File" to view it. Enter a brief descriptive title of your project in the space beside "Mandatory Project Narrative File Filename". The filename should be no more than 40 characters long. If there are other attachments that you would like to submit to accompany your proposal, you may click "Add Optional Project Narrative File" and proceed as before. When you have finished attaching the necessary documents, click "Close Form". When you return to the "Grant Application Package" page, select "Project Narrative Attachment Form" and click "Move Form to Submission List". The form should now appear in the box that says, "Mandatory Completed Documents for Submission".

Once you have finished filling out all of the forms/attachments and they appear in one of the "Completed Documents for Submission" boxes, click the "Save" button that appears at the top of the Web page. It is suggested that you save the document a second time, using a different name, since this will make it easier to submit an amended package later if necessary. Please use the following format when saving your file: "Applicant Name – FY 06 (grant category; e.g., Assoc Prog Supp) – 1st Submission" or "Applicant Name – FY 06 (grant category) – Back-up

Submission.” If it becomes necessary to submit an amended package at a later date, then the name of the 2nd submission should be changed to “Applicant Name – FY 06 (grant category) – 2nd Submission.”

Once your application package has been completed and saved, send it to your AOR for submission to the U.S. EPA through Grants.gov. Please advise your AOR to close all other software programs before attempting to submit the application package through Grants.gov.

In the “Application Filing Name” box, your AOR should enter your organization’s name (abbreviate where possible), the fiscal year (e.g., FY06), and the grant category (e.g., Assoc Prog Supp). The filing name should not exceed 40 characters. From the “Grant Application Package” page, your AOR may submit the application package by clicking the “Submit” button that appears at the top of the page. The AOR will then be asked to verify the agency and funding opportunity number for which the application package is being submitted. If problems are encountered during the submission process, the AOR should reboot his/her computer before trying to submit the application package again. [It may be necessary to turn of the computer (not just restart it) before attempting to submit the package again.] If the AOR continues to experience submission problems, he/she should contact <http://www.grants.gov> for assistance (Phone: 1-800-518-4726, Email: support@grants.gov). If submission problems are not quickly resolved, contact the NHEERL electronic submission support person, Craig Johnson (218) 529-5016, johnson.craig@epa.gov.

Application packages submitted through <http://www.grants.gov> will be time/date stamped electronically.

C) Submission Instructions for Printed Applications

Submit a complete application including all of the documents identified in Section IV.A. of this announcement. If the application is not submitted electronically through <http://www.grants.gov/>, it *must be* sent through regular mail, express mail, or a major courier to: **Mr. Craig Johnson, U.S. EPA, MED, 6201 Congdon Blvd. Duluth, MN 55804. Do not email or Fax the application. Electronic copies must be made available upon request.**

Because of security concerns, applications cannot be personally delivered. To be considered timely, printed applications must be received by 3:00 p.m. local time in Duluth, MN, on 08/04/2006 from the U.S. Postal Service or a major courier. Applications received after the deadline will not be considered and will be returned to the submitter. Printed applications, including all documents stated in Section IV.A., must be submitted in the original with 3 copies and should be double-sided. Grant application forms can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/ogd/AppKit/application.htm>

D) 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 SPOC's are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's home page at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

E) Funding Restrictions—annual increments of awards will be made by request to EPA. Funding will be contingent upon availability of funds and satisfactory performance during the first year.

F) Amendments—Amendments will be posted on the NCER website (<http://es.epa.gov/ncer/rfa/#2005epa>.), and the due date for applications extended if deemed appropriate.

V. Application Review Information

A) Administrative & Relevance Reviews—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.

B) Technical Peer Review and Ranking Criteria—Proposals that are found administratively acceptable and relevant will be reviewed on the basis of (ranking criteria are in parentheses):

- The experience of the Principal Investigators with great river assessments. This will include their demonstrated familiarity with sampling infrastructures and analytical techniques. (20%)
- Potential for project results to be incorporated into states' river monitoring programs and Clean Water Act reports. (30%)
- Suitability of personnel, facilities, and methods to achieve the stated goals of the proposal. (30%)
- 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.

C) Evaluation Process—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.

D) 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.

- E) Selection**— EPA will conduct the evaluation of proposals and select applicants for award based upon the technical peer review (one internal and two external reviewers) 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.
- F) 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: <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20051800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2005/05-1371.htm> . Copies of these procedures may also be requested through the contacts listed in Section VII. Disputes relating to matters other than competitive selection of recipients will be resolved under 40 CFR 30.63 or 40 CFR 31.70, as applicable.
- G) Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates**—The anticipated cooperative agreement award date is 01 March 2007.

VI. Award Administration Information

- A) Award Notices**—Notice of award will be made in writing by an official in the EPA Grants Administration Division. Preliminary recommendation by the Decision Official in the Office of Research and Development 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 grant or cooperative agreement signed by the EPA Grants Award Official does so at their own risk.

EPA will promptly notify in writing (postal or email) those applicants whose application 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.

B) Administrative and National Policy Requirements

- 1) Regulations and OMB Coverage**—Grants and agreements with institutions of higher education, hospitals, and other non-profit organizations are subject to 40 CFR Parts 30 and 40 and OMB Circular A-122 for non-profits 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.

- 2) Programmatic Terms and Conditions**—Terms and conditions will be negotiated with the selected recipient covering the following requirements:
- a) All tasks must be performed by qualified personnel. Proposals must identify persons who

will assist in carrying out the project.

- b) 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.
- c) 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.
- d) The work-plan, QAPP, and outputs may be subject to peer review, at EPA's expense, and must comply with EPA quality assurance requirements.
- e) 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.
- f) 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.
- g) Collected data must be made accessible to EPA and the public through an EPA information management system, such as STORET.
- h) Recipients and EPA will participate in annual technical and training workshops related to the program objectives.

C) Reporting

- 1) Progress Reports—Recipients are required to submit quarterly progress reports. The report must summarize progress, difficulties, products, 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.
- 2) Performance Reports—In accordance with 40 CFR 30.51 and 31.40, recipients agree to submit performance reports with brief information on:
 - comparisons of actual accomplishments with the anticipated outputs/outcomes specified in the assistance agreement work plan;
 - reasons why anticipated outputs/outcomes were not met;
 - other pertinent information, including, when appropriate, analysis and explanation of cost overruns or high unit costs.

The recipient also agrees that it will notify EPA of problems, delays, or adverse conditions which materially impair the ability to meet the outputs/outcomes specified in the assistance agreement work plan.

- 3) Final Report—Recipients are required to submit a final report that includes outputs, such as databases or papers. 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 a 30-day draft review period. Recipients must adequately respond to reviewers' comments before the report is accepted as final.

VII. Agency Contact

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

Mr. Craig Johnson
USEPA ORD NHEERL MED
6201 Condon Blvd
Duluth, MN 55804

218-529-5016 (voice)
218-529-5015 (fax),
johnson.craig@epa.gov

VIII. Other Information

- A) Pre-proposal/Application Assistance and Communications:** EPA will respond to questions from individual applicants regarding threshold eligibility criteria, administrative issues related to the submission of the proposal, and requests for clarification about the announcement. Because this program is exempt from competition, EPA may contact applicants and discuss proposal information prior to the submission of a full application as long as no ethical conflict or conflict of interest exists. Any response or information that could provide an advantage to an applicant will be communicated equally to all applicants.
- B) 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.
- C) 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.
- D) Data Access and Information Release:** The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-110 has been revised to provide public access to research data through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) under some circumstances. Data that are (1) first produced in a project that is supported in whole or in part with Federal funds and (2) cited publicly and officially by a Federal agency in support of an action that has the force and effect of law (i.e., a regulation) may be accessed through FOIA. If such data are requested by the public, the EPA must ask for it, and the grantee must submit it, in accordance with A-110 and EPA regulations at 40 C.F.R. 30.36.

- E) Geospatial Information:** It is anticipated that the agreement that is awarded will involve or relate to geospatial information. In compliance with Executive Order 12906, EMAP data is made available for use throughout all levels of government, the private and non-profit sectors, and the academic community. The goal of this infrastructure is to reduce duplication of effort among agencies, improve quality and reduce costs related to geographic information, to make geographic data more accessible to the public, to increase the benefits of using available data, and to establish key partnerships with states, counties, cities, tribal nations, academia and the private sector to increase data availability. Further information regarding geospatial information may be obtained by viewing the following website: <http://www.fgdc.gov/nsdi/nsdi.html>.
- F) Animal and Human Subject Research:** Research projects that involve animals will be subject to the Animal Welfare Act of 1966 (P.L. 89-544), as amended, 7 U.S.C. 2131-2156. Recipients agree to abide by the “U.S. Government Principles for the Utilization and Care of Vertebrate Animals used in Testing, Research, and Training”. (Federal Register 50(97): 20864-20865. May 20, 1985). The nine principles can be viewed at: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/awic/pubs/IACUC/vert.htm>. For additional information about the principles, the recipient should consult the *Guide for Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, prepared by the Institute of Laboratory Animal Resources, National Research Council and can be accessed at: <http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/labrats/>. Vertebrate animals include cold-blood organisms such as fish and amphibians. Recipients who propose to conduct research on human subjects must agree to meet all of the EPA requirements under 40 CFR 26, referred to as the “Common Rule”. If the proposed project involves human or animal testing studies, including field collections, please indicate it on a separate sheet of paper.
- G) DUNS Number:** Grant applicants are required to provide a Dun and Bradstreet (D&B), Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number when applying for Federal grants or 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 be required whether an applicant is submitting a printed application or using the government-wide electronic portal (<http://www.grants.gov>).

The DUNS number will supplement other identifiers required by statute or regulation, such as tax identification numbers. Organizations can receive a DUNS number in one day, at no cost, by calling the dedicated toll-free DUNS Number request line at 1-866-705-5711. Individuals who would personally receive a grant or cooperative agreement award from the Federal government apart from any business or non-profit organization they may operate are exempt from this requirement. The website where an organization can obtain a DUNS number is: <http://www.dnb.com>. This takes 30 business days and there is no cost unless the organization requests expedited (1-day) processing, which includes a fee of \$40.