

NOAA's 2023 Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Grants Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act

Grants.gov Opportunity Number: **NOAA-NMFS-HCPO-2023-2008081**

Applicant Webinar Transcript
August 2023

Slide 1: Good day, and welcome to the Applicant Webinar for NOAA's 2023 Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Grants. This funding opportunity is supported through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. This is Natalie McLenaghan with the NOAA Restoration Center, in the Office of Habitat Conservation, and I am serving as the Competition Manager and Point-of-Contact for this funding opportunity. Stephanie Smith is our Communications Specialist, and she will be helping with the Frequently Asked Questions.

The purpose of this informational webinar is to help applicants understand the basic components of the funding opportunity. Please feel free to reach out to me after listening to this recording, with any questions you might have about this announcement. My contact information is on the last slide of this presentation. Next slide.

Slide 2: For this presentation, I will be highlighting the most pertinent information from the sections included in the Notice of Funding Opportunity that can be downloaded from Grants.gov. If you haven't accessed it yet, you can download a PDF from the Grants.gov posting, under the "Related Documents" tab. These numbers listed here on the slide correspond to the actual section headers in the funding opportunity, so you can cross-reference them when reading through the document. We will not be highlighting Section 8 during the webinar, so please refer to the document itself for questions regarding Other Information. Next slide.

Slide 3: For this funding opportunity, we anticipate that a total of \$240 million will be available to support selected awards. Proposals must be received by November 17th, 11:59pm Eastern time. Next slide.

Slide 4: Before we dive into the full details for this specific funding opportunity, I want to highlight some other grants that are available from our office this year through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. The Office of Habitat Conservation announced two funding opportunities on July 31st, highlighted here in the first two bullets of this slide: Restoring Fish Passage Through Barrier Removal Grants, and Restoring Tribal Priority Fish Passage Through Barrier Removal Grants.

In addition to the Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Grants, we also anticipate announcing a funding opportunity later this year for habitat restoration focused on

tribes and underserved communities. For a full list of current funding opportunities, visit the NOAA Bipartisan Infrastructure Law website found at the address listed here at the bottom of the slide. Next slide.

Slide 5: Section One of the funding opportunity outlines the program objective and program priorities. The principal objective of this competition is to support habitat restoration projects that restore marine, estuarine, coastal, or Great Lakes ecosystems, using approaches that enhance community and ecosystem resilience to climate hazards. Next slide.

Slide 6: Within the Program Objective section, the following terms are defined that apply to this funding opportunity: Ecosystem Resilience, Community Resilience, Underserved Communities, Meaningful Engagement, Indigenous Knowledge, Habitat Restoration, Co-benefits of Restoration, Nature-based Solutions, and Coastal Areas. I will not be reciting the definitions here on the webinar, for the sake of time, but you can find the terms outlined in Section One A of the funding opportunity document. Next slide.

Slide 7: There are four Program Priorities that you can find in Section One B of the funding opportunity document. The priorities are not listed in any order of importance, but I will cover them chronologically here. The first priority that projects will be evaluated on is called “Sustaining Productive Fisheries and Strengthening Ecosystem Resilience.”

Potential benefits for fisheries habitat will be evaluated based on how the proposed restoration actions will:

- A. Contribute to the recovery of Listed Species under the Endangered Species Act;
- B. Sustain stocks of Managed Species under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, which includes benefits to Essential Fish Habitat for recreationally and commercially important species and their prey;
- C. Enhance the sustainability of saltwater recreational fisheries by the restoration of habitat that supports the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy and Implementation Plans; or
- D. Improve habitat to support native fish species of the Great Lakes.

You should describe how your proposed work aligns with relevant plans to recover and/or manage your target species or fisheries, and also how the restoration will strengthen resilience within the target habitat and the surrounding ecosystem. Next slide.

Slide 8: Proposals will also be evaluated on the potential for the restoration to enhance resilience within coastal communities. You should describe how the proposed restoration will benefit human populations within or near the project sites, and how these actions will reduce vulnerability to the climate hazards that are most threatening to your local communities. This may include how the proposed work will enhance the ability to plan and prepare for adverse effects of extreme weather events or climate hazards. In addition, please describe how the work will provide additional co-benefits to the community, such as economic vitality or increased access to natural resources. Next slide.

Slide 9: Proposals will also be evaluated on the transformative potential of the proposed work within a defined geographic region, such as a watershed, a landscape, or any other geographically defined boundary. For this priority, you should describe how your project aligns with comprehensive planning documents or other relevant resources, in order to demonstrate how and why your proposed work is important within your region. You should also outline how your work might complement any other current or proposed restoration efforts. If your proposal includes multiple site locations, you should demonstrate how the projects collectively contribute to priorities within the same geographic area or watershed. Next slide.

Slide 10: And for the fourth program priority, proposals will also be evaluated on whether a portion of the resilience benefits from the proposed work will flow to tribal, indigenous, and/or underserved communities. In addition, please note within your application if the project is geographically located within or near tribal, indigenous, and/or underserved communities. This funding opportunity is covered under the administration's Justice40 Initiative. This initiative established a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal investments in climate, clean energy, and other areas will flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized and overburdened by pollution and underinvestment. Next slide.

Slide 11: Section Two of the funding opportunity deals with funding availability. As I stated in the beginning, NOAA anticipates up to \$240 million to be available to support new awards. We will not accept proposals with a federal funding request of either less than \$1 million, or more than \$25 million, over the length of the entire award period. NOAA encourages a period of performance of up to three years, with the potential for an extension up to five years, if necessary. The earliest anticipated start date for awards will be October 1, 2024. Next slide.

Slide 12: Section Three focuses on eligibility. Eligible applicant types are listed here on the slide, and include: institutions of higher education; non-profit and for-profit organizations; U.S. territories; and state, local, and Native American tribal governments. Federal agencies and employees are not allowed to receive funds under this solicitation, but may serve as collaborative project partners.

Restoration work must be proposed in coastal, marine, or estuarine areas that benefit species or fisheries that are outlined within the program priorities. For the purposes of this funding opportunity, coastal areas are defined as those within coastal shoreline or coastal watershed counties or parishes. Coastal shoreline counties are directly adjacent to the open ocean, estuaries, or the Great Lakes. Coastal watershed counties are located along inland rivers and streams that have a significant impact on coastal and ocean resources. Eligible applicants for Great Lakes projects must propose work within one of the eight U.S. Great Lakes states. Next slide.

Slide 13: There is no non-federal matching requirement for this funding, although NOAA desires cost sharing to encourage partnerships among government, community, industry, and academia. To this end, applicants should note that cost sharing is an element considered within

the evaluation criterion entitled "Project Costs." Cost share may include formal, non-federal match funds and/or informal leverage from a broad range of sources in the public and private sectors to implement restoration. Next slide.

Slide 14: Some examples of ineligible project types and activities are outlined here on the slide, but please consult the funding opportunity for more details. Proposals that focus solely on the following activities are not eligible: marine debris prevention and removal; acquisition of real property; and beach renourishment for recreational purposes. Proposals addressing hard infrastructure only for water quality improvement are not eligible, although improvement of water quality through the creation of fisheries habitat is eligible. Activities that are required by a separate local, state, or federal consent decree, court order, statute, or regulation are not eligible. Lastly, effectiveness monitoring and research activities are not eligible for this solicitation, but please check the funding opportunity for more information. If your proposal contains these project types or activities and you would like to discuss any eligibility concerns with us, please reach out to the contact info on the last slide. Next slide.

Slide 15: Section Four of the funding opportunity includes information about application submission and the recommended content and form of your application. For application packages, federal forms, and instructions, please see the Grants.gov posting. You should be registered in SAM, the System for Award Management, and should provide a Unique Entity Identifier within your application. Please be sure to check your SAM registration status as soon as possible, as the registration process can take several weeks.

The Content and Form sub-section in Section Four is very important to pay attention to, and outlines all of the required forms that are part of the Standard Form 424, or SF-424, family of application forms. In addition, there is a lot of helpful information about how to best address the evaluation criteria that are covered in Section Five. The application should be organized into three separate PDFs before submission in Grants.gov:

- Number One: The Project Summary and Project Narrative.
- Number Two: The Budget Narrative.
- Number Three: Supplemental Materials and Project Designs.

All of the page limits and suggested components for those sections are described within the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Next slide.

Slide 16: Section Five outlines the evaluation criteria that reviewers will rely on to score applications. Since these criteria will be used directly to evaluate your score, this is the most relevant and important section to focus on while writing your proposal:

- The first category is Importance and Applicability, which is worth 35 points out of a total of 100.
- Number Two is Technical and Scientific Merit, worth 25 points.
- Number Three is Applicant Qualifications, worth 10 points.
- Number Four is Project Costs, worth 15 points.
- And Number Five is Outreach and Education, worth 15 points.

As you will see on the next few slides, each of these main categories have multiple sub-criteria. Next slide.

Slide 17: Importance and Applicability is worth the highest number of points out of all five evaluation criteria, and closely aligns with the program priorities that were described in Section One of the funding opportunity:

- Sub-criterion A is identical to Program Priority Number One: Sustaining Productive Fisheries and Strengthening Ecosystem Resilience, and is worth 11 points.
- Sub-criterion B matches Program Priority Number Two: Enhancing Community Resilience to Climate Hazards and Providing Other Co-benefits, worth 9 points.
- Sub-criterion C corresponds to Program Priority Number Three: Fostering Regionally Important Habitat Restoration, worth 10 points.
- And Sub-criterion D is Program Priority Number Four: Providing Benefit to Tribal, Indigenous, and/or Underserved Communities, Including Through Partnerships, worth 5 points. Next slide.

Slide 18: Technical and Scientific Merit is worth the second highest number of points out of all five evaluation criteria, at 25 total points:

- Sub-criterion A is Project Methodology, and is worth 7 points.
- Sub-criterion B is Project Detail, also worth 7 points.
- Sub-criterion C is Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation, worth 5 points.
- Sub-criterion D is Sustainability, also worth 5 points.
- And lastly, there is one point available for the Data Management Plan.

Again, you can find a full description in the funding opportunity, for how to best address each of these items. Next slide.

Slide 19: Applicant Qualifications is worth 10 total points, with just two sub-criteria:

- The first is Sub-criterion A at 5 points, for Restoration and Conservation Qualifications.
- Sub-criterion B is Management Capacity, also worth 5 points.

Please note that for this category, you should upload resumes or CVs into the Supplemental Materials section, as well as describe and highlight your relevant qualifications within the Project Narrative itself. Next slide.

Slide 20: The Project Costs category is worth a total of 15 total points. Reviewers will evaluate this category based on your Budget Narrative.

- Sub-criterion A is Budget Detail, worth 3 points.
- Sub-criterion B is Funding Allocation and Cost-effectiveness, worth 7 points.
- And Sub-criterion C is Cost-sharing and Leveraging Funds, for 5 points. Next slide.

Slide 21: Outreach and Education is also worth a total of 15 points, and each sub-criterion is worth 5 points.

- Sub-criterion A is Stakeholder Support,
- Sub-criterion B is Inclusive Planning and Engagement, and
- Sub-criterion C is Community Outreach and Education.

Please note that letters of support should be included in the Supplemental Materials. Next slide.

Slide 22: Eligible applications will undergo a technical review and a panel review. The technical review is based on the evaluation criteria that I just outlined, and high-scoring applications will then be sent to a panel to evaluate how well the proposals address the program objective, program priorities, and the evaluation criteria. The earliest possible start date for your performance period is October 1, 2024. Next slide.

Slide 23: And now, here are some helpful reminders and tips.

- First, determine if you meet the eligibility requirements for applicant type and proposed project locations and activities.
- If you determine that you are eligible to submit a proposal, start the application and registration processes as early as possible. If you are not yet registered or currently active with SAM, the System for Award Management, note that registration can take several weeks. For Grants.gov, register your organization and create accounts for people who are authorized to submit proposals.
- We always recommend reading the funding opportunity document in its entirety, but please do pay very close attention to the Evaluation Criteria while you are writing your proposal.
- Before you hit the submit button, please verify that you have met all requirements. Also keep in mind that Grants.gov can take up to two business days to validate or reject applications, after you submit.
- Feel free to call or email with any questions you may have. Again, the contact information will be posted on the last slide of the presentation, as well as in Section Seven of the funding opportunity. Next slide.

Slide 24: At this time, we are going to address some Frequently Asked Questions. Stephanie will assist me by reading the questions. Take it away, Stephanie.

Stephanie: Okay, Natalie, I am going to start with an easy question. Is there a limit on the number of proposals from any one applicant, geographic area, or region?

Natalie: Thanks, Stephanie. Luckily, I have an easy answer for this one. No, there is no limit on the number of proposals from any one applicant, geographic area, or region.

Slide 25:

Stephanie: Is this the only Notice of Funding Opportunity from the Office of Habitat Conservation this year, to support restoration projects under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law or Inflation Reduction Act?

Natalie: Another easy answer for this question! No. Our office released two opportunities on July 31st, to support fish passage efforts. We also anticipate that an additional opportunity focused on habitat restoration and resilience for tribes and underserved communities will be released later this year. Check our website for more information, listed here on the slide.

Slide 26:

Stephanie: Next question. How does this funding opportunity compare to others? Which funding opportunity should I apply to?

Natalie: Good question, Stephanie. I recommend that you check all the relevant funding opportunities carefully, especially the Eligibility, Program Priorities, and Evaluation Criteria sections. Your organization can decide which opportunities are the best fit for your projects. I also recommend checking the NOAA webpage for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, to see if other grants programs would be applicable. Next slide.

Slide 27:

Stephanie: Next question, Natalie. Can an applicant apply to more than one NOAA funding opportunity for the same project?

Natalie: Yes. If a project has been submitted for funding consideration elsewhere, the amount requested or secured from other funding sources, and whether the funds are federal or non-federal in origin, should be included in the Project Summary in your application. Next slide.

Slide 28:

Stephanie: Next question. Will proposals that include project sites located across multiple states be competitive?

Natalie: Potentially. All proposals should demonstrate how the projects will collectively contribute to the priorities within a given watershed or other geographically defined area. Proposals that do not show a collective contribution to a measurable outcome within a defined region might not be as competitive. Next slide.

Slide 29:

Stephanie: Next question, Natalie. I am interested in regional planning and project feasibility. Are pre-implementation project phases eligible for this funding?

Natalie: Proposals may include the following project phases: planning and assessments; feasibility studies; engineering design and permitting; on-the-ground implementation; pre- and/or post-implementation monitoring; or any combination thereof. Proposals that include on-the-ground implementation will be given priority compared to those that include only pre-implementation activities. Next slide.

Slide 30:

Stephanie: Is funding available to hire a new staff person to help manage a restoration project?

Natalie: Yes. Applicants may include capacity-building and stakeholder engagement to support the proposed restoration. The proposal should demonstrate how capacity-building will support or catalyze subsequent on-the-ground restoration. Next slide.

Slide 31:

Stephanie: What level of detail is expected for the Budget Narrative?

Natalie: The budget should be organized by the object classes listed on the SF-424A form, with all costs clearly justified. Detailed budgets are expected for any contracts and subawards included in your application. Please visit our webpage, listed here, for resources and examples. Next slide.

Slide 32:

Stephanie: Next question. I'm concerned about inflation and competition for contractors. How can I draft an accurate budget with this uncertainty?

Natalie: Timely question, Stephanie. Budgets are inherently estimates, and grants regulations allow applicants to budget for contingency costs. Provide your best budget estimations based on your project experience, and your research on expected cost increases. Next slide.

Slide 33:

Stephanie: Next question. What federal policies am I required to follow if I receive an award?

Natalie: Great question. Federal grant regulations can be found in the Code of Federal Regulations, through 2 CFR 200. These regulations cover a wide variety of topics. For certain larger projects, there may be requirements related to signage acknowledging the source of these funds. Any requirements will be contained in the terms and conditions that are included with all award offers. Next slide.

Slide 34:

Stephanie: Next question. Does the Build American, Buy American Act apply to funds provided through this opportunity?

Natalie: Another great question. Yes. When creating your proposal, please see Section Six for more information about the Build American, Buy American Act requirements and how they pertain to the funding. Any available waivers, including one for De Minimis Infrastructure Project Purchases, Small Grants, and Minor Components within Iron and Steel Products, can be found there. Individual project waivers are a possibility, albeit an unlikely one. Next slide.

Slide 35: Last slide. Here is the email address, as well as my work cell phone number, to follow up on any questions you have about the funding opportunity. For any questions about Grants.gov, please use the contact information listed here. For a full list of NOAA funding opportunities available this year, visit the NOAA Bipartisan Infrastructure Law website found at the address listed here. And don't forget to check our webpage for the Office of Habitat Conservation grants supported through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, listed on the slide. Thanks again for listening, and happy proposal-writing to you all!