

## Responses to Applicant Questions

### Asked during Webinars for NOAA's Restoring Fish Passage through Barrier Removal Grants and NOAA's Restoring Tribal Priority Fish Passage through Barrier Removal Notices of Funding Opportunities

Webinar dates: August 10, 16, 22, and 24, 2023

Acronyms/Short-hand used:

- *NOFO: Notice of Funding Opportunity*
- *National Fish Passage: NOAA's Restoring Fish Passage through Barrier Removal Grants*
- *Tribal Fish Passage: NOAA's Restoring Tribal Priority Fish Passage through Barrier Removal*

Project Type/Eligibility Activities

#### Questions:

- 1) You mention 'on-the-ground restoration' as an eligible activity; is that intended to include all aspects of construction related to the fish passage project? **Short answer:** Yes.
- 2) Are either grant opportunities strictly for implementation projects or can the funding be used for planning, design and permitting as well? **Short answer:** *Funding can be used for planning, design and permitting as well as implementation.*
- 3) What if the project's target species do not fall under the species emphasis presented in this webinar? **Short answer:** *Section III, Eligibility Information, for both competitions states that 'applicants must propose work in areas that benefit United States migratory fish as defined in Section I.A., Program Objectives'. The species emphasized in the webinar are important to fully address evaluation criterion V.A.1)(a)-- Priority for Migratory Fish.*
- 4) Would studies of fish passage barriers and planning to prioritize removal be right for this grant? **Short answer:** *Yes, planning efforts to prioritize removal are eligible.*
- 5) In the Tribal Fish Passage competition, will setting up programs to address not yet identified fish barriers, when they become known, be supported under this funding? **Short answer:** *Yes, if they are planning efforts to prioritize removal. Also tribal capacity building to plan for barrier removals is an eligible activity for these funds.*

- 6) Can NOAA fish passage funds be spent on projects occurring on either private, state, or federal lands provided that the applicant is an eligible entity? For example, is a nonprofit working on US Forest Service lands, eligible to apply for funds for this project? **Short answer:** *Yes, funds in either competition can be used for projects that are on private, state, or Federal lands, including US Forest Service lands. Funds can not typically be transferred to a federal agency. Some exceptions apply and can be discussed with the competition manager.*
- 7) Are physical barriers that are natural (e.g. boulder debris field) qualified under "fish passage"? **Short answer:** *Yes, the funding opportunity is not limited to those examples given in the funding opportunity.*
- 8) Are projects that greatly improve fish passage but may not be able to provide 100% passage, eligible? For example, projects that include self regulating tide gate/floodgates? **Short answer:** *Yes.*
- 9) Does removal of a bridge with a large center pier that reduces fish passage in a creek qualify as an eligible project? **Short answer:** *Yes.*
- 10) We have a culvert impounded by an old concrete fire-water supply cistern. Could funding be used to help create a new emergency fire-water supply so the barrier removal won't leave our municipality without an emergency water supply? Or is funding only available for the barrier removal? **Short answer:** *If replacing the water supply is necessary to remove the barrier, it may be included in your proposal.*
- 11) Can money from the grant be used for mitigation of nearby infrastructure for issues (such as needing to fortify underwater support beams) that may need to be addressed post-dam removal? **Short answer:** *If fortifying the underwater support beams is necessary to remove the barrier, it may be included in your proposal.*
- 12) My tribe is interested in some habitat restoration work. A creek that supports a large subsistence salmon fishery experiences high sedimentation due to a physical barrier toward the headwaters (no fish go up that high, so it isn't really blocking fish passage). But it does create high sediment load by rerouting that portion of the creek. That sediment has been negatively impacting return numbers and fish health for some time. Would this sort of 'barrier' removal be eligible for the proposal? **Short answer:** *Yes, environmental barriers, like sediment, considered in concert with a physical barrier, meet the 'in-stream' barrier definition in the NOFOs.*
- 13) We have old dams with suboptimal fishways. Both dams impound water for a total of 500 abutting property owners. We would like to redesign and rebuild the fishways, and the dams will need to be reconstructed in order to function for fish

migration as well as to maintain water levels. Is this project compatible with this funding opportunity? **Short Answer:** *Yes, this project is eligible.*

14) Are projects above a dam that are part of a trap and haul program eligible?

**Short answer:** *Yes, these projects are eligible.*

15) Would dams under a FERC license that requires fish passage be created if target and species numbers are met be eligible? **Short answer:** *Please review the legal requirements in Section III.*

16) For an existing hydro facility, would the implementation of a new turbine, such as an Alden fish friendly turbine, be considered? This appears outside of the notice requirements. These turbines allow for fish passage through a dam or facility.

**Short answer:** *Yes, downstream fish passage projects are eligible for funding.*

17) Does a project need to meet all objectives listed to be eligible? **Short Answer:** *No, at least one objective should be met.*

#### **Detailed Answer:**

We recommend that anyone with project specific questions reach out to the Competition Manager for either competition and we can set up a conversation with regional colleagues to talk through your project idea. Most of the answers above address eligible activities, but not whether a proposal with those components will score strongly on the evaluation criteria.

All aspects of barrier removal and fish passage implementation are eligible activities in these funding opportunities, including planning, design, permitting and implementation, unless specifically described as ineligible in Section III. Tribal organizational capacity building is also a program priority for the Tribal Fish Passage competition. More weight is given to implementation in the National Fish Passage competition, but not in the Tribal Fish Passage competition. See Section I.B, Program Priorities, and Section V.A., Evaluation Criteria, in the Tribal Fish Passage funding opportunity for more information about how capacity building projects will be evaluated.

For all project proposals, applicants should describe the barrier, and also how removal of the barrier will improve target fish populations. Please ensure your location supports passage of migratory and sea-run fish, as defined in Section I.A. See Section III.A., Eligibility, and Section V.A., Evaluation Criteria for more details. We suggest you read the definitions carefully including “in-stream barrier” for a stronger understanding of which types of barriers are targeted by the competition.

## Program Objectives and Priorities

**Q:** We have a project where the US Army Corps of Engineers Feasibility Study has deemed bypass channels at 2 dam sites to be the preferred alternative. Will a full removal project out rank that, even if the ecological impact is huge with the bypass channels?

**A:** Proposals are rated based on how well they address the evaluation criteria. We funded a range of projects in the first round, including some that did not fully remove barriers. Please reach out to the competition manager to talk about a specific project.

**Q:** Are proposals providing benefits to more than one eligible species prioritized?

**A:** The evaluation criteria in Section V.A.1)(a)-- Priority for Migratory Fish-- does not weigh multiple species more than a single species.

## Application Process

### Questions:

- 1) Can two or more entities submit a joint application? **Short answer:** *Only one entity can submit the application, and that lead entity can partner with others as sub awardees or contractors.*
- 2) How do you define state government? Are both state agencies and state authorities eligible? **Short answer:** *Both types of recipient are eligible for the National Fish Passage program.*
- 3) Does a Tribal Conservation District have to have formed a 501(c)3 to apply for the Tribal Fish Passage funding? Are 501(c)4's eligible? **Short answer:** *All applicants need to be legal organizations registered with the IRS.*
- 4) Will applications to both tribal and non-tribal opportunities affect the chances of getting projects funded? **Short Answer:** *You can propose the same project to both opportunities-- we can not fund the project twice but we can consider the project in both competitions.*
- 5) Is there a way to relate two applications together in the two different programs? In tribal and non-tribal opportunities? **Short Answer:** *You can tell us you are applying to both competitions.*
- 6) Since a one million floor is high will NOAA work to help smaller projects come together as a bundle? **Short Answer:** *You can contact the competition manager and we can put you in touch with a regional technical staff member to talk through your projects with you*
- 7) Would a tribal letter of support for a National fish passage applicant help in any way? If so, how? **Short Answer:** *A tribal letter of support would show stakeholder support and community engagement which is evaluated in the*

*Outreach and Education criteria of the National Fish Passage funding opportunity.*

- 8) Are applications going to be accepted through eRA commons after October 1st? **Short answer:** *We are accepting applications for these two competitions through Grants.gov.*

**Detailed Answer:**

For either competition, you need to be a legal organization registered with the IRS and registered in SAM (the System for Award Management). For the National Fish Passage Competition, all organization types are eligible, except federal agencies. There are eligibility limitations for the Tribal Fish Passage Competition though, where only tribes and organizations that represent tribes are eligible to apply. These organizations need to be a legal organization registered with the IRS and registered in SAM by the time of a federal award, if they are recommended for funding.

NOAA can not split an award between two entities. Partnerships are encouraged, however there does have to be a primary applicant. The primary applicant can subaward funds to their partner. Please look at the Project Summary Section (Pg 14 in both funding opportunities) which outlines information to include in your proposal, such as if you are submitting more than one application. Applicants combining project sites together in a single proposal must balance the increase in outcomes with their ability to fully meet the evaluation criteria within the page limits. We recommend reaching out to speak with the competition managers who may be aware of other organizations doing similar work in your area if you're looking to combine projects into one proposal. Also, you can consider funding opportunities with lower minimum requests, like our [Coastal Habitat Restoration and Resilience Grants for Tribes and Underserved Communities opportunity](#).

eRA Commons will be the new grants management platform for recipients to manage projects selected for funding (and for current projects funded by NOAA), and is replacing NOAA's Grants Online platform. Successful applicants will need an eRA Commons registration, however the application process for this NOFOs is completely through Grants.gov.

## Project Costs and Budget

**Questions:**

- 1) Are activities completed prior to the award of the grant eligible to be considered as match? For example, can design, environmental compliance, and permitting completed prior to the award for construction be applied as cost share to the

overall project cost? **Short answer:** Match typically must be generated during the award period, but there are exceptions.

- 2) Do match and leveraged funds carry equal weight as non-fed contributions? Or will one or the other strengthen a proposal more? **Short answer:** They carry equal weight.
- 3) Does pending match rank the same as secured match in the evaluation process? **Short answer:** Secured contributions are emphasized over pending contributions.
- 4) What percentage of non-federal match is desired? **Short answer:** A 1:1 ratio receives maximum points, in the Fish Passage competition only. There is no scoring of match and leverage in the Tribal Fish Passage competition.

#### **Detailed Answer:**

Neither competition has a match requirement. NOAA encourages applicants whose proposed initiatives exceed the budgetary limits for these competitions to apply to this competition and also for other, complementary federal funding for separate components of their larger initiatives. The National Fish Passage competition has an evaluation criterion that weighs *all forms* of non-federal match and federal or non-federal leverage *equally*, but does emphasize secured contributions. Demonstrate a 1:1 ratio of NOAA request to other contributions to receive full points on this criterion, as stated on page 29-30. Match or other contributions are not evaluated under the Tribal Fish Passage competition, but can be shown as justification for applicant experience, project importance, partnerships, etc. In either competition, there is no benefit to indicating match on federal forms related to the evaluation criteria, and you may be required to manage those funds with the same restrictions as your federal grant funds.

#### Project Timing/ Award Length

**Q:** Since awards will not begin until July 2024, it is possible little work will get done in 2024. What if a proposal begins work in earnest in summer 2025? Will that still be competitive?

**A:** Yes it will still be competitive. We'll look for you to be realistic about your start date, per evaluation criterion V.A.2)(b). There are no evaluation criteria that focus on the specific project implementation date. We suggest looking at the Technical and Scientific Merit evaluation criteria specifically focused on project methods, description and milestones to see where you will be evaluated on realistic timelines.

**Q:** For applicants who are selected, what is the time frame for project completion? Are there any requirements around timing for spending the funds?

**A:** The earliest start date expected for either competition is July 2024. We expect most projects to be proposed for a 3 year time frame, provide a strong timeline, and be no greater than 5 years. Please see Section II.B-- Project/Award Period.

## Review and Selection Process

**Q:** Will reviewers have more than general knowledge of habitat or species?

**A:** Proposals will be reviewed by staff with both specific and general knowledge of fish passage issues, restoration, and migratory or sea-run fish species. See Section V.B, Review and Selection Process, in the NOFOs for more detailed information. Reviewers for all NOAA competitions are free of conflicts of interest, and are professionally and technically qualified, based on the competition.

**Q:** Where will the upcoming projects be noted once they are awarded, for contractors to consider solicitations?

**A:** After we provide funding recommendations, our website will be updated here: [fisheries.noaa.gov/habitat-BIL-IRA](https://fisheries.noaa.gov/habitat-BIL-IRA). Information about all funding opportunities and funded projects from NOAA can be found at this site: [noaa.gov/infrastructure-law](https://noaa.gov/infrastructure-law).

**Q:** Can we access a list of last year's funded projects? Also, how long is this funding program anticipated to last?

**A:** Previously funded fish passage projects can be found at: [www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/habitat-restoration-under-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-and-inflation-reduction-act](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/habitat-restoration-under-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-and-inflation-reduction-act). The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law allocates funds to NOAA's Restoration Center through fiscal year 2026.

## Other Funding Opportunities

We received several questions about the Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Grants and Coastal Habitat Restoration and Resilience Grants for Tribes and Underserved Communities funding opportunities.

Please see [www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/transformational-habitat-restoration-and-coastal-resilience-grants](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/transformational-habitat-restoration-and-coastal-resilience-grants) and [www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/coastal-habitat-restoration-and-resilience-grants-tribes-and-underserved-communities](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/coastal-habitat-restoration-and-resilience-grants-tribes-and-underserved-communities), respectively, for information about these opportunities and how to apply.