

U.S. EPA GREAT LAKES NATIONAL PROGRAM OFFICE
Great Lakes Long-Term Biology Monitoring Program: Phytoplankton Component
2016 Request for Applications

Federal Agency Name: Environmental Protection Agency
Funding Opportunity Title: Great Lakes Long-Term Biology Monitoring Program:
Phytoplankton Component
Announcement Type: Request for Applications
Funding Opportunity Number: EPA-R5-GL2016-1
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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This Request for Applications (RFA) solicits applications from eligible entities for a cooperative agreement to be awarded pursuant to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan II (<http://glri.us/actionplan/pdfs/glri-action-plan-2.pdf>). Applications are requested for a project to continue the long-term monitoring of phytoplankton in the open waters of the Great Lakes. This RFA is the first of several funding opportunities available through federal agencies under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (“GLRI” or “Initiative”) for FY2016.

Funding/Awards: Up to \$2.5 million may be awarded for one cooperative agreement to be incrementally funded at approximately \$500,000 annually over a five-year period. The awarding of this cooperative agreement is contingent upon funding availability, the quality of applications received and other applicable considerations. However, EPA expressly reserves the right to make no awards under this RFA. Proposed projects **must** be limited to the specified project duration. All incrementally funded awards will be subject to the availability of funding, future appropriations, satisfactory performance of work, and other applicable considerations.

Authorization for GLRI funding is contained in applicable appropriations acts, including the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Public Law No: 114-113. EPA has authority to award grants and cooperative agreements for planning, research, monitoring, outreach and implementation projects in furtherance of the GLRI and the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Nonfederal governmental entities, including state agencies, interstate agencies, federally-recognized Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and local governments as defined in 2 C.F.R. 200 and or 2 C.F.R. 1500; institutions of higher learning (*i.e.*, colleges and universities); and non-profit organizations are eligible to apply for funding under this RFA. Individuals, foreign organizations and governments, nonprofit organizations exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying, and “for-profit” organizations are not eligible.

Important Dates:

- February 22, 2016 - Applications **must** be submitted via Grants.gov by 5:00 p.m. Central Daylight Time / 6:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time. See Section IV for further submission information.
- March 2016 – EPA expects to notify finalist.
- April 2016 – EPA expects to make award.

Other Application Information: For your convenience, an RFA web page has been created at <http://www2.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/great-lakes-long-term-monitoring-program-phytoplankton-rfa> where you will find information relating to the RFA process as well as a link to frequently asked questions (FAQs). We encourage all applicants to sign up for our mailing list and register with us at <http://www.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/great-lakes-news-email-list>. Further submittal information is described in Section IV.

**U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
Request for Applications: EPA-R5-GL2016-1**

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**U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
Request for Applications: EPA-R5-GL2016-1**

I. APPLICATION INFORMATION

Background, Authority, and Funded Activities:

The President, Congress, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in conjunction with other federal departments and agencies, have made restoring the Great Lakes a national priority. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (“GLRI” or “Initiative”) builds on the prior efforts of federal, state, and local agencies; Indian tribes; businesses; public interest groups; interested citizens; and others to develop a collaborative and comprehensive approach to restoring the Great Lakes. Information about the Initiative can be found at <http://greatlakesrestoration.us/>.

This RFA is expected to result in the award of a cooperative agreement to help implement the GLRI. Cooperative agreements are assistance agreements in which EPA expects to have substantial involvement in completing the project. Authorization for GLRI funding is contained in applicable appropriations acts, including the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Public Law No: 114-113. EPA has authority to award grants and cooperative agreements for planning, research, monitoring, outreach and implementation projects in furtherance of the GLRI and the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA). The statutory authority to take action to implement the U.S. responsibilities under GLWQA is contained in Section 118(c) of the Clean Water Act. The principal goal of GLWQA is the restoration and maintenance of the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Great Lakes ecosystem.) Funded activities **must** advance protection and restoration of the Great Lakes ecosystem in support of: (i) the GLRI Action Plan II (see <http://glri.us/actionplan/pdfs/glri-action-plan-2.pdf>) and (ii) EPA’s Strategic Plan.¹ For projects with international aspects, the above statutes are supplemented, as appropriate, by the National Environmental Policy Act, Section 102(2)(F).

This RFA solicits applications from eligible entities for a cooperative agreement to be awarded pursuant to the statutory authorities referenced above and the GLRI Action Plan II. Up to \$2.5 million may be awarded incrementally over a five-year period (approximately \$500,000 per year) under this RFA for one project contingent on the quality of applications received, funding availability and other applicable considerations.

All eligible projects will be evaluated as described in Section V.

¹ See EPA’s Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2014-2018; Goal 2: *Protecting Americas Waters*; Objective 2: *Protect and Restore Watersheds and Aquatic Ecosystems (Protect, restore, and sustain the quality of rivers, lakes, streams, streams, and wetlands on a watershed basis, and sustainably manage and protect coastal and ocean resources and ecosystems)*. The Plan is available at: <http://www2.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan>.

Minority Academic Institutions:

All eligible applicants, as defined in Section III, including Minority Academic Institutions (MAIs) as described below, are encouraged to apply for funding under this competition. For purposes of this solicitation, the following are considered MAIs:

1. Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1061). A list of these schools can be found at: <http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/whhbcu/one-hundred-and-five-historically-black-colleges-and-universities/>;
2. Tribal Colleges and Universities, as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1059(c)). A list of these schools can be found at: <http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/whiaiane/tribes-tcus/tribal-colleges-and-universities/>;
3. Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), as defined by the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec.1101a(a)(5)). There is no list of HSIs. HSIs are institutions of higher education that, at the time of application submittal, have an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25% Hispanic students at the end of the award year immediately preceding the date of application for this grant; and
4. Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), as defined by the Higher Education Act [20 U.S.C. Sec. 1059g(a)(2)]. There is no list of AANAPISIs. AANAPISIs are institutions of higher education that, at the time of application submittal, have an enrollment of undergraduate students that is not less than 10 % students who are Asian American or Native American Pacific Islander.

Subawardees and/or Contractors:

If you name subawardees/subgrantees and/or contractor(s), including individual consultants, in your application as partners to assist you with the proposed project, pay careful attention to the information in Section III regarding "Coalitions" and to the "Contracts and Subawards" provisions at: <http://www2.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses> (incorporated by reference in Section IV.J).

RFA Terms:

For purposes of this RFA:

1. The term "**output**" means an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product related to an environmental goal and objective that will be produced or provided over a period of time or by a specified date. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative, but **must** be measurable over the term of the cooperative agreement funding period. An output for the long-term phytoplankton monitoring program could be, e.g., the annual collection and taxonomic analysis of phytoplankton samples and analysis and interpretation of phytoplankton communities.

2. The term “**outcome**” means the result, effect or consequence that will be achieved by carrying out an environmental activity, effort, and/or associated work product that is related to an environmental or programmatic goal or objective. Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic in nature, **must** be quantitative, and may not necessarily be achievable within a cooperative agreement funding period. As an example, an outcome for the long-term phytoplankton monitoring program could be the incorporation of phytoplankton data into the development of Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, Annex 4 nutrient reduction plans, the incorporation of data into annual fisheries management decisions by the GLFC Lake Committees, or the inclusion of interpreted phytoplankton data in Lakewide Action and Management Plan decision-making. All these activities would benefit the larger Great Lakes community.

Funding Opportunity for the Great Lakes Long-Term Biology Monitoring Program: Phytoplankton Component

General Background: The Great Lakes Biological Monitoring program was established in 1983 in order to assess and investigate the ecological health of the Great Lakes. The program benefits federal, state and tribal fisheries and water quality managers by focusing on whole lake responses to changes in loads of anthropogenic substances, and more recently, aquatic invasive species. Sampling is typically focused on the relatively homogeneous offshore waters of each lake. Phytoplankton has been an integral part of the program since its inception. The community structure of the biota has been rapidly changing in many areas of the Great Lakes in recent years. More information on the Great Lakes biological monitoring program can be found at http://www3.epa.gov/greatlakes/monitoring/sop/appendix_b.pdf.

Planktonic algae or phytoplankton identification and enumeration have historically provided the information which identified nutrient enrichment problems (eutrophication) in surface waters. In the Great Lakes, eutrophication is a problem which has existed at varying levels of severity since the 1960's. Since that time, there have been efforts to control nutrient input to the lakes through improvements in sewage treatment plants, bans on phosphorus in laundry detergents and improved land management practices to reduce nutrients in runoff. These efforts led to better ecosystem conditions in the lakes. Tracking these conditions and documenting the changes to the environmental condition of the Great Lakes is of great importance to a broad Great Lakes community that includes fisheries managers and water quality managers. Successful and informed participation of state and tribes under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement relies on monitoring of conditions to track the success of environmental management actions, and to provide the scientific underpinnings for changes to these actions. Ecological indicators based on phytoplankton identification have been a critical part of the information used to assess the results of management actions and to guide state and local fisheries and water quality managers.

Goals and Objectives: EPA expects to provide up to \$2.5 million for one cooperative agreement over a 5-year period, consisting of incremental funding of about \$500,000 per year, to support: 1) the continued documentation of the status and trends of the ecological health of the open waters of the Great Lakes based on phytoplankton community analysis, and 2) the impacts of changing phytoplankton communities on fisheries.

Applicants are expected to conduct activities in support of these goals through the five main objectives of the Great Lakes Biology Monitoring Program – Phytoplankton Component (Sample Collection; Taxonomic Analysis ; Data Management; Data Interpretation, Statistical Analysis, and Report Writing; and Applied Research), as detailed in Section IV.D.2.

Outputs of the award should include the first five items in the following list and one or more of the remaining items (and any additional ones identified by the applicant) and must link to the GLRI Action Plan’s II Measures of Progress or goals and objectives:

- sample collection, taxonomic analysis, data management, data interpretation, statistical analysis, and report writing;
- a quantification of Great Lakes ecosystem health based on phytoplankton taxonomic analysis consistent with past floral identifications
- an evaluation of the temporal trends of ecosystem health based on phytoplankton communities in the Great Lakes
- development of Great Lakes scientists through the education of graduate and undergraduate students in taxonomy and Great Lakes ecosystem science;
- a monitoring design that contributes to the Coordinated Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI)²;
- dissemination of results via peer-reviewed journal articles and other media
- development of phytoplankton indicator reports consistent with previous State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference formats
- refinement of phytoplankton indicators sensitive to anthropogenic stressors and recovery from stress.
- investigation of the response of Great Lakes phytoplankton communities to anthropogenic stressors

Applicants must also demonstrate how their proposed project will achieve one or more of the following outcomes (and any additional ones identified by the applicant):

- increased understanding of biological health of the Great Lakes and the relationship to fisheries management
- enhancement of indicators, based on phytoplankton communities, of the health of the Great Lakes; or
- increased understanding of the impacts of *dreissenid* mussel feeding and nutrient load changes on the phytoplankton community

² The Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI) is a joint United States and Canadian effort to provide environmental managers with needed information on each Great Lake. The lakes are visited one per year in a five-year rotation. In 2015, CSMI will be focused on Lake Michigan. In subsequent years (2016-2020), CSMI will focus on Lake Superior, Lake Huron, Lake Ontario, and Lake Erie.

II. AWARD INFORMATION

Amounts and Number of Projects: Up to \$2.5 million in EPA funding is expected to be awarded under this RFA for one project over five years, consisting of incremental funding of about \$500,000 per year. Project funding under this RFA will be based on the quality of applications received, the availability of funding, and other applicable considerations. **Please note that applications seeking more than \$2.5 million will be rejected. In addition, an application for a multi-phase project will be treated as a request for the full amount for all phases. If that combined amount exceeds \$2.5 million, the application will be rejected.**

EPA reserves the right to reject all applications and make no awards pursuant to this RFA.

Anticipated Project Start and End Dates: Applications should specify a start date on or around April 15, 2016 and **must** specify an end date no later than March 14, 2021.

Award Funding: The award will be funded incrementally and is based on funding availability, future appropriations, satisfactory performance of work, program priorities, and other applicable considerations.

EPA reserves the right to make additional awards under this announcement, consistent with Agency policy and guidance, if additional funding becomes available after the original selections are made. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than 6 months after the original selection decisions.

Funding Type: A successful applicant will be awarded a cooperative agreement³. A cooperative agreement is an assistance agreement that is used when there is substantial federal involvement with the recipient during the performance of an activity or project. EPA awards cooperative agreements for those projects in which it expects to have substantial interaction with the recipient throughout the performance of the project. EPA will negotiate the precise terms and conditions of “substantial involvement” as part of the award process. Federal involvement may include close monitoring of the recipient’s performance; collaboration during the performance of the scope of work; review of proposed procurements in accordance with; C.F.R. 200.317 and 2 C.F.R. 200.318 and 2 C.F.R. 1500.9 reviewing qualifications of key personnel; and/or review and comment on the content of printed or electronic publications prepared. EPA does not have the authority to select employees or contractors employed by the recipient. The final decision on the content of reports rests with the recipient.

Future Funding: Selection or award of funding under this RFA is not a guarantee of future funding.

Partial Funding: In appropriate circumstances, EPA reserves the right to partially fund an application by funding discrete portions or phases of the proposed project. If EPA decides to partially fund an application, it will do so in a manner that does not prejudice the applicant or

³ While the award being offered pursuant to this RFA will be a cooperative agreement, throughout the remainder of the RFA the terms “grant” and “cooperative agreement” are synonymous.

affect the basis upon which the application, or portion thereof, was evaluated and selected for award, and, therefore, maintains the integrity of the competition and selection process.

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

Applicant Eligibility (CFDA 66.469): Non-federal governmental entities, including state agencies, interstate agencies, federally-recognized Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and local governments as defined in 2 C.F.R. Section 200.64; institutions of higher learning; and nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply for funding under this RFA. Individuals, foreign organizations and governments, nonprofit organizations exempt from taxation under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying, and “for-profit” organizations are not eligible. A “nonprofit organization,” as defined at 2 C.F.R. Section 200.70, is any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization that: (1) is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest; (2) is not organized primarily for profit; and (3) uses its net proceeds to maintain, improve, and/or expand its operations.

Coalitions: Groups of two or more eligible applicants may choose to form a coalition and submit a single application under this RFA; however, one entity **must** be responsible for the grant. Coalitions **must** identify which eligible organization will be the recipient of the grant and which eligible organization(s) will be subawardees of the recipient. Subawards and subgrants **must** be consistent with the definitions of those terms in 2 C.F.R. 200 and/or 2 C.F.R. 1500. The recipient that administers the grant will be accountable to EPA for proper expenditure of the funds and reporting, and will be the point of contact for the coalition. As provided in 2 C.F.R. 200 and/or 2 C.F.R. 1500, subrecipients or subgrantees are accountable to the recipient or grantee for proper use of EPA funding.

Coalitions may not include for-profit organizations that will provide services or products to the successful applicant. For-profit organizations are not eligible for subawards. For-profit organizations are eligible to receive contracts. Any contracts for services or products funded with EPA financial assistance **must** be awarded under the competitive procurement procedures of 2 C.F.R. 200 and/or 2 C.F.R. 1500, as applicable. The regulations also contain limitations on consultant compensation. (Please see 2 C.F.R. 200 and 2 C.F.R. 1500, as applicable.)

Eligible Activities: Unless specifically excluded under this RFA, assistance is available to eligible applicants for planning, research, monitoring, outreach, and implementation of the GLRI and GLWQA. In order to be eligible under this solicitation, proposed projects **must** also: (i) protect, enhance, and/or restore the Great Lakes, including projects impacting connecting waterways such as Lake St. Clair and the St. Lawrence River (at or upstream from the point at which the St. Lawrence River becomes the international boundary between Canada and the United States); or (ii) protect Great Lakes ecosystem health, including human health. Information about the GLRI can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/great-lakes-restoration-initiative-glri>. Applications for other activities will be rejected.

Ineligible Activities: Sampling and analysis of coastal wetland habitats for the purpose of listing/delisting criteria and generation of Area of Concern (AOC) Beneficial Use Impairment data.

If an application is submitted that includes any ineligible activities, including, but not limited to, those listed above, that portion of the application will be ineligible for funding and may, depending on the extent to which it affects the application, render the entire application ineligible.

Match or Cost-Share: There is no cost-sharing or matching requirement as a condition of eligibility under this RFA. However, see Section IV.C.2.b.iii and Section V for additional information regarding applicants who propose voluntary matches and additional funds/resources to support the project.

Although cost-sharing/matching is not required as a condition of eligibility under this competition, pursuant to Section V of this RFA, EPA will consider voluntary cost-sharing/matching and other leveraging as a part of the criterion for collaboration and plans.

Leveraging generally refers to situations where an applicant proposes to provide its own additional funds/ resources or those from third party sources to support or complement the project they are awarded under the competition which are above and beyond the EPA grant funds awarded. Any leveraged funds/resources, and their source, **must** be identified in the proposal (See Section IV of the RFA). A letter of support should also be included in the application package to document any proposed leveraging. Leveraged funds and resources may take various forms as noted below.

Voluntary cost share is a form of leveraging. Voluntary cost sharing refers to situations where an applicant voluntarily proposes to legally commit to provide costs or contributions to support the project when a cost share is not required. Applicants who propose to use a voluntary cost share **must** include the costs or contributions for the voluntary cost share in the project budget on the SF-424. If an applicant proposes a voluntary cost share, the following apply:

- A voluntary cost share is subject to the match provisions in the grant regulations (2 C.F.R. Section 200.306);
- A voluntary cost share **must** be eligible and allowable;
- The recipient may not use other sources of federal funds to meet a voluntary cost share unless the statute authorizing the other federal funding provides that the federal funds may be used to meet a cost share requirement on a federal grant; and
- The recipient is legally obligated to meet any proposed voluntary cost share that is included in the approved project budget. If the proposed voluntary cost share does not materialize during grant performance, then EPA may reconsider the legitimacy of the award and/or take other appropriate action as authorized by 2 C.F.R. 200 and/or 1500.

Other leveraged funding/resources that are not identified as a voluntary cost share should not be included in the budget and the costs need not be eligible and allowable project costs under the

EPA assistance agreement. While this form of leveraging should not be included in the budget, the grant workplan should include a statement indicating that the applicant expects to produce the proposed leveraging consistent with the terms of the announcement and the applicant's proposal. This form of leveraging may be met by funding from another federal grant, from an applicant's own resources, or resources from other third party sources. If applicants propose to provide this form of leveraging, EPA expects them to make the effort to secure the leveraged resources described in their proposals. If the proposed leveraging does not materialize during grant performance, then EPA may reconsider the legitimacy of the award and/or take other appropriate action as authorized by 2 C.F.R. Parts 200 or 1500.

Threshold Eligibility Criteria: These are requirements that if not met by the applicant by the time of application submission will result in elimination of the application from consideration for funding. Only applications for eligible activities from eligible entities (see above definitions of **applicant eligibility**, **eligible activities**, and **ineligible activities**) that meet these criteria by the time of application submission will be evaluated against the ranking factors in Section V of this RFA. Applicants deemed ineligible for funding consideration as a result of the threshold eligibility review will be notified by e-mail within 15 calendar days of the ineligibility determination.

1. Applications that do not demonstrate how they will ensure continuity of taxonomic analysis with historic phytoplankton data will be rejected
2.
 - a. Applications seeking EPA funding in excess of \$2.5 million will be rejected. In addition, an application for a multi-phased project will be viewed as a request for the full amount of all phases. If that combined amount exceeds \$2.5 million, the application will be rejected.
 - b. Applications **must** substantially comply with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in Section IV of this RFA or else they will be rejected. Where a page limit is stated for the Narrative Proposal in Section IV, pages in excess of the limitation will not be reviewed.
 - c. In addition, applications must be submitted through www.grants.gov as stated in Section IV of this announcement (except in the limited circumstances where another mode of submission is specifically allowed for as explained in Section IV) on or before the application submission deadline published in Section IV of this announcement. Applicants are responsible for following the submission instructions in Section IV of this announcement to ensure that their application is timely submitted.
 - d. Applications submitted after the submission deadline will be considered late and deemed ineligible without further consideration unless the applicant can clearly demonstrate that it was late due to EPA mishandling or because of technical problems associated with Grants.gov or relevant SAM.gov system issues. An applicant's failure to timely submit their application through Grants.gov because they did not timely or properly register in SAM.gov or Grants.gov will not be considered an acceptable reason to consider a late submission. Applicants should confirm receipt of their application with Glenn Warren (warren.glenn@epa.gov) as soon as possible after the submission deadline—failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

3. Applicants may submit more than one application under this RFA so long as each application is for a different project and is separately submitted.
4. Applications for projects exceeding the maximum end date of April 14, 2021 will be rejected.
5. Ineligible activities: If a proposal is submitted that includes any ineligible tasks or activities, that portion of the proposal will be ineligible for funding and may, depending on the extent to which it affects the proposal, render the entire proposal ineligible for funding.

Applicants should contact the applicable individual listed in Section VII with any questions about the threshold eligibility requirements.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

a. Requirement to Submit Through Grants.gov and Limited Exception Procedures

Applicants, except as noted below, must apply electronically through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) under this funding opportunity based on the grants.gov instructions in this announcement. If an applicant does not have the technical capability to apply electronically through grants.gov because of limited or no internet access which prevents them from being able to upload the required application materials to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), the applicant must contact OGDWaivers@epa.gov or the address listed below in writing (e.g., by hard copy, email) *at least 15 calendar days prior to the submission deadline under this announcement* to request approval to submit their application materials through an alternate method.

Mailing Address:

OGD Waivers
c/o Barbara Perkins
USEPA Headquarters
William Jefferson Clinton Building
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N. W.
Mail Code: 3903R
Washington, DC 20460

Courier Address:

OGD Waivers
c/o Barbara Perkins
Ronald Reagan Building
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Rm # 51267
Washington, DC 20004

In the request, the applicant must include the following information:

Funding Opportunity Number (FON)

Organization Name and DUNS

Organization's Contact Information (email address and phone number)

Explanation of how they lack the technical capability to apply electronically through

Grants.gov because of 1) limited internet access or 2) no internet access which prevents them from being able to upload the required application materials through Grants.gov.

EPA will only consider alternate submission exception requests based on the two reasons stated above and will timely respond to the request -- all other requests will be denied. If an alternate submission method is approved, the applicant will receive documentation of this approval and further instructions on how to apply under this announcement. Applicants will be required to submit the documentation of approval with any initial application submitted under the alternative method. In addition, any submittal through an alternative method must comply with all applicable requirements and deadlines in the announcement including the submission deadline and requirements regarding proposal content and page limits (although the documentation of approval of an alternate submission method will not count against any page limits).

If an exception is granted, it is valid for submissions to EPA for the remainder of the entire calendar year in which the exception was approved and can be used to justify alternative submission methods for application submissions made through December 31 of the calendar year in which the exception was approved (e.g., if the exception was approved on March 1, 2015, it is valid for any competitive or non-competitive application submission to EPA through December 31, 2015). Applicants need only request an exception once in a calendar year and all exceptions will expire on December 31 of that calendar year. Applicants must request a new exception from required electronic submission through Grants.gov for submissions for any succeeding calendar year. For example, if there is a competitive opportunity issued on December 1, 2015 with a submission deadline of January 15, 2016, the applicant would need a new exception to submit through alternative methods beginning January 1, 2016.

Please note that the process described in this section is only for requesting alternate submission methods. All other inquiries about this announcement must be directed to the Agency Contact listed in Section VII of the announcement. Queries or requests submitted to the email address identified above for any reason other than to request an alternate submission method will not be acknowledged or answered.

b. Submission Instructions

The electronic submission of your application must be made by an official representative of your institution who is registered with Grants.gov and is authorized to sign applications for Federal assistance. For more information on the registration requirements that must be completed in order to submit an application through grants.gov, go to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and click on "Applicants" on the top of the page and then go to the "Get Registered" link on the page. If your organization is not currently registered with Grants.gov, please encourage your office to designate an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) and ask that individual to begin the registration process as soon as possible. Please note that the registration process also requires that your organization have a DUNS number and a current registration with the System for Award Management (SAM) and the process of obtaining both could take a month or more. Applicants must ensure that all registration requirements are met in order to apply

for this opportunity through grants.gov and should ensure that all such requirements have been met well in advance of the submission deadline. Registration on grants.gov, SAM.gov, and DUNS number assignment is FREE.

Applicants need to ensure that the AOR who submits the application through Grants.gov and whose DUNS number is listed on the application is an AOR for the applicant listed on the application. Additionally, the DUNS number listed on the application must be registered to the applicant organization's SAM account. If not, the application may be deemed ineligible.

To begin the application process under this grant announcement, go to Grants.gov and click on "Applicants" on the top of the page and then "Apply for Grants" from the dropdown menu and then follow the instructions accordingly. Please note: To apply through grants.gov, you must use Adobe Reader software and download the compatible Adobe Reader version. For more information about Adobe Reader, to verify compatibility, or to download the free software, please visit Adobe Reader Compatibility Information on Grants.gov

You may also be able to access the application package for this announcement by searching for the opportunity on Grants.gov. Go to Grants.gov and then click on "Search Grants" at the top of the page and enter the Funding Opportunity Number, EPA-R5-GL2016-1, in the appropriate field and click the Search button. Alternatively, you may be able to access the application package by clicking on the Package button at the top right of the synopsis page for the announcement on Grants.gov. To find the synopsis page, go to Grants.gov and click "Browse Agencies" in the middle of the page and then go to "Environmental Protection Agency" to find the EPA funding opportunities.

Application Submission Deadline: Your organization's AOR must submit your complete application package electronically to EPA through Grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, on February 22, 2016. Please allow for enough time to successfully submit your application process and allow for unexpected errors that may require you to resubmit.

Please submit *all* of the application materials described below using the grants.gov application package that you downloaded using the instructions above. For additional instructions on completing and submitting the electronic application package, click on the "Show Instructions" tab that is accessible within the application package itself.

Application Materials

The following forms and documents are required under this announcement:

Mandatory Documents:

1. Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
2. Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)
3. Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)

4. Grants.gov Lobbying Form
5. EPA Key Contacts Form 5700-54
6. EPA Form 4700-4 – Preaward Compliance Review Report
7. Narrative Proposal (Project Narrative Attachment Form)-prepared as described in Section IV.D. of the announcement
8. Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL), if applicable

Applications submitted through grants.gov will be time and date stamped electronically. If you have not received a confirmation of receipt from EPA (not from grants.gov) within 30 days of the application deadline, please contact Glenn Warren at (312) 886-2405. Failure to do so may result in your application not being reviewed.

c. Technical Issues With Submission

1. Once the application package has been completed, the “Submit” button should be enabled. If the “Submit” button is not active, please call Grants.gov for assistance at 1-800-518-4726. Applicants who are outside the U.S. at the time of submittal and are not able to access the toll-free number may reach a Grants.gov representative by calling 606-545-5035. Applicants should save the completed application package with two different file names before providing it to the AOR to avoid having to re-create the package should submission problems be experienced or a revised application needs to be submitted.
2. Submitting the application. The application package must be transferred to Grants.gov by an AOR. The AOR should close all other software before attempting to submit the application package. Click the “submit” button of the application package. Your Internet browser will launch and a sign-in page will appear. **Note: Minor problems are not uncommon with transfers to Grants.gov. It is essential to allow sufficient time to ensure that your application is submitted to Grants.gov BEFORE the due date identified in Section IV of the solicitation.** The Grants.gov support desk operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, except Federal Holidays.

A successful transfer will end with an on-screen acknowledgement. For documentation purposes, print or screen capture this acknowledgement. If a submission problem occurs, reboot the computer – turning the power off may be necessary – and re-attempt the submission.

Note: Grants.gov issues a “case number” upon a request for assistance.

3. Transmission Difficulties. If transmission difficulties that result in a late transmission, no transmission, or rejection of the transmitted application are experienced, and following the above instructions do not resolve the problem so that the application is submitted to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) by the deadline date and time, follow the guidance below. The Agency will make a decision concerning acceptance of each late submission on a case-by-case basis. All emails, as described below, are to be sent to warren.glenn@epa.gov with the FON in the subject line. If you are unable to email, contact Glenn Warren at (312) 886-2405. Be aware that EPA will

only consider accepting applications that were unable to transmit due to [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) or relevant www.Sam.gov system issues or for unforeseen exigent circumstances, such as extreme weather interfering with internet access. Failure of an applicant to submit timely because they did not properly or timely register in [SAM.gov](https://www.SAM.gov) or [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) is not an acceptable reason to justify acceptance of a late submittal.

a. If you are experiencing problems resulting in an inability to upload the application to [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov), it is essential to call [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) for assistance at 1-800-518-4726 before the application deadline. Applicants who are outside the U.S. at the time of submittal and are not able to access the toll-free number may reach a [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) representative by calling 606-545-5035. Be *sure* to obtain a case number from [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov). If the problems stem from unforeseen exigent circumstances unrelated to [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov), such as extreme weather interfering with internet access, contact Glenn Warren at (312) 886-2405.

b. Unsuccessful transfer of the application package: If a successful transfer of the application cannot be accomplished even with assistance from [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) due to electronic submission system issues or unforeseen exigent circumstances, send an email message to warren.glenn@epa.gov prior to the application deadline. The email message must document the problem and include the [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) case number as well as the entire application in PDF format as an attachment.

c. [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) rejection of the application package: If a notification is received from [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) stating that the application has been rejected for reasons other than late submittal promptly send an email to warren.glenn@epa.gov with the FON in the subject line within one business day of the closing date of this solicitation. The email should include any materials provided by [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) and attach the entire application in PDF format.

D. Narrative Proposal:

Narrative Proposals (including the **Summary Information Page and Workplan**) must be no more than **twenty** single-spaced pages in length and include the items below in the requested order. **Excess pages will not be reviewed.** Each Narrative Proposal must be formatted for 8½” x 11” paper and should use no smaller than an 11-point Times New Roman font with 1” margins. Do not use a “double column” (aka newspaper) format. Readability is of paramount importance. Do not include more than one application in any file. Please do not zip the file or use a zip extension for your file because it will not be accepted.

Summary Information Page (should not exceed one page):

- i. Project Title.** Please limit to 60 characters. EPA reserves the right to change the project title for its administrative convenience.
- ii. Applicant Information.** Include applicant (organization) name, address, contact person, phone number, and e-mail address. *Do not include private information.*
- iii. Proposed Funding Request.** The total dollar amount requested from EPA- make sure it is within the limits specified or your application will be rejected.

- iv. **Project Duration.** Provide beginning and ending dates. See “Anticipated Start and End Dates” in Section II.
- v. **Brief Project Description.** Summarize the proposed project in 100 words or less in a clear and succinct manner in PLAIN LANGUAGE, including expected outputs, outcomes and environmental benefits resulting from implementation of the project. Include environmental KEY TERMS that could be used as search terms (*e.g.*, phytoplankton, algae, ecosystem, water quality, *etc.*). Do not use acronyms. Should the proposal be selected and a grant awarded, this description may be posted to the EPA Web. EPA reserves the right to make unilateral changes to conform to posting requirements. See <http://greatlakesrestoration.us/projects/index.html> for examples.

Work Plan:

The Work Plan for the proposed project **must** explicitly describe how the proposed project meets the guidelines established in Sections I-III of this RFA (including the threshold eligibility criteria in Section III) and **must** address each of the evaluation criteria set forth in Section V. Each Work Plan should be organized in the order and with the headings and information requested below. Details and associated point values for each section of the workplan are described in RFA Section V.A (Application Review) below.

1) Project Summary and Approach

Applicants should describe with specificity the nature of the proposed project including what will be done, by whom, how, and when it will be accomplished. Outline the steps to be taken and the significant milestones to be achieved to complete the proposed project as well as the estimated dates of these achievements, including the submittal of the final report.

Include a statement of the project’s relevance to the Great Lakes, particularly (1) the needs and priorities of the GLRI Action Plan II (<http://glri.us/actionplan/pdfs/glri-action-plan-2.pdf>), or (2) Great Lakes protection and restoration pursuant to Objective 2.2 (Protect and Restore Watersheds and Aquatic Ecosystems) of the Fiscal Year 2014-2018 EPA Strategic Plan (<http://www2.epa.gov/planandbudget/strategicplan>). It is sufficient for the purpose of clause (ii) to include a general statement of how the project will protect and restore the Great Lakes ecosystem without specifying a connection to the strategic measures for the Great Lakes that are included in the EPA Strategic Plan.

2) Technical Process and Study Design

Applicants should describe the process by which the applicant will implement a monitoring and assessment approach consistent with the five major objectives of the project.

- a) **Sample collection** – Applicants should describe their plans to collect phytoplankton samples on all five Great Lakes in spring and summer. Applicants may use the USEPA Research Vessel Lake Guardian for sample collection. Historic sampling procedures can be found at http://www3.epa.gov/greatlakes/monitoring/sop/chapter_4/LG400.pdf. Applicants should describe how they intend to maintain comparability and continuity with historic sampling procedures. Applicants may suggest modifications to historic sampling procedures with supporting rationale. The supporting rationale should demonstrate how the different sampling procedures will still maintain continuity between historical data and the data collected under this project.
- b) **Taxonomic Analysis** – Applicants should describe their plans to identify, enumerate and determine biovolume for phytoplankton. Applicants should document their taxonomic expertise. Applicants should demonstrate how they intend to maintain comparability and continuity of taxonomic analysis with historic identifications. Historic taxonomic species lists for phytoplankton can be found at: <https://wcms.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/2016-rfa-great-lakes-long-term-biology-monitoring-program-phytoplankton>, and historic analytical techniques at: http://www3.epa.gov/greatlakes/monitoring/sop/chapter_4/lg401.pdf. Applicants may suggest modifications to historic taxonomic procedures with supporting rationale. The supporting rationale should demonstrate how the different taxonomic procedures will still maintain continuity between historical data and the data collected under this project.
- c) **Data Management** – Applicants should describe their plans (and capability) to develop and manage a comprehensive and efficient data management system for phytoplankton data. The data management system should be able to incorporate historic data sets from 1983 to 2014 as well as data collected under this project. Historic data currently resides in the “Great Lakes Environmental Database” (GLENDa), and incorporates much of the station, location, physical and limnological data. More information on GLENDa can be found at: http://www3.epa.gov/greatlakes/monitoring/data_proj/glenda/index.html. GLNPO will provide existing database structures as well as data from 1983 to 2014 for most biological taxonomic lists. Applicants may suggest modifications to the existing database structures with supporting rationale. The supporting rationale should demonstrate how different databases will maintain continuity between historical data and the data collected under this project and improve the applicant’s ability to assess long-term trends in phytoplankton communities.

An electronic copy of all final verified data shall be transferred to GLNPO in a format that is consistent with data submissions from prior laboratories. Applicants should demonstrate how they will submit final verified data within 18 months of receipt of samples in their laboratory (e.g., submit data on all samples collected in 2016 by March, 2018). Applicants should also discuss project elements and processes that allow field and lab data to be efficiently managed and interpreted year-to-year.

- d) **Data Interpretation, Statistical Analysis, and Report Writing** – Applicants should describe their plans to ensure the monitoring and assessment information generated is made available to the Great Lakes community in a wide variety of formats, including journals and internet products. Applicants are expected to discuss how this dissemination will occur using data collected year-to-year, with a focus on fisheries and water quality managers. Additionally, it is important that any new information generated be placed in a historical perspective so that determinations may be made of how the plankton and benthic communities are changing over time. The successful applicant is expected to integrate recent and historical data in order to provide interpretation of changes to the biological communities.

Applicants should demonstrate how they will work with the EPA Project Officer to report on the status and trends of the phytoplankton community in the Great Lakes in a timely fashion and provide indicator reports.

Applicants should also discuss how their work will increase understanding of the biological health of the Great Lakes and the implications for fisheries management. The advancement of scientific knowledge may include the development of phytoplankton community-based indicators, application of ecosystem models, identification of stressor-state relationships, and the further education of graduate students in taxonomy and Great Lakes ecosystem research.

- e) **Applied Research and Special Studies** – Applicants should discuss how monitoring will be flexible enough to adequately track, monitor, and investigate: (1) large scale changes of significant components of the Great Lakes lower food web that are affected by new species invading the Great Lakes regularly; (2) fluctuations of the state of the biological community; and (3) phytoplankton responses to oligotrophication (decrease in offshore nutrient levels), global climate change and the rates and mechanisms of herbivory. Applicants should also discuss how additional special studies and/or enhancements to the long-term monitoring program will be implemented. As an example, applicants should discuss how the monitoring design will contribute to the Coordinated Science and Monitoring Initiative (CSMI).

3) Results

Applicants should describe with specificity your plan for achieving high quality and timely results for the project.

a) Outputs

Applicants should specify the estimated quantitative outputs of the proposed project including but not limited to those specifically identified in Section I, any other applicable objectives or measures from the GLRI Action Plan II, and the approach and measurements that will be used to track and measure your progress towards

achieving the applicable outputs. Demonstrate how the project will achieve the desired results.

b) Outcomes

Applicants should specify the estimated qualitative outcomes of the proposed project (see Section 1) and how the outcomes factor into the goals of the GLRI Action Plan II, the 2012 GLWQA, and EPA's goal of protecting human health and the environment. Please identify how progress towards achieving the project outcomes can be measured, assessed and tracked. Demonstrate how the project will achieve the desired results.

4) Collaboration and Plans

Applicants should demonstrate that the project will effectively disseminate data and reports for use by local, state and tribal environmental managers, academia and/or other interested stakeholders. The applicant must also specify plans for timely information transfer, including annual interpretive reports, presentations at meetings and conferences, journal articles, textbooks, Internet postings, and peer-reviewed publications.

Applicants should also discuss how they intend to collaborate with the principal investigators of zooplankton and benthos components of the long-term biological monitoring program to provide a complete assessment of lower food web health and changes.

Applicants proposing to provide a voluntary cost-match or other form of leveraging to demonstrate collaboration and support for the project should describe that in this section in accordance with the voluntary cost share requirements in Section III of this announcement.

5) Programmatic Capability and Past Performance

Submit a list of federally funded assistance agreements (assistance agreements include Federal grants and cooperative agreements but not Federal contracts) similar in size, scope and relevance to the proposed project that your organization performed within the last three years (no more than 5 agreements, and preferably EPA agreements) and describe (i) whether, and how, you were able to successfully complete and manage those agreements and (ii) your history of meeting the reporting requirements under those agreements including whether you adequately and timely reported on your progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes of those agreements (and if not, explain why not) and whether you submitted acceptable final technical reports under the agreements. In evaluating applicants under these factors in Section V, EPA will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources, including information from EPA files and from current/prior grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information provided by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please

indicate this in the proposal and you will receive a neutral score for these factors (a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). If you do not provide any response for these items, you may receive a score of 0 for these factors.

Please Note:

If you have previously received a GLRI award or awards, you should list the award(s) and provide the information described above. In addition, for EPA GLRI awards issued in 2010 to 2014 please provide an explanation of and documentation supporting your quarterly rate of expenditure on those prior GLRI projects up through the date of the applicant's submission under this solicitation.

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.

Applicants should demonstrate expertise in Great Lakes phytoplankton taxonomy through publications in the literature relevant to the Great Lakes, limnology, and aquatic biology.

6) Education/Outreach

In its review of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the Science Advisory Board (Science Advisory Board Review of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan (EPA-SAB-12-002)) noted "that there is currently a scarcity of taxonomic expertise and an aging taxonomic workforce that will be available for species identification, especially considering surveillance of such diverse ecosystems requires expertise in many different types of organisms." Applicants should describe how they intend to educate and train undergraduate and graduate students in Great Lakes taxonomy and ecological issues as part of the project.

Applicants should describe how project results will be disseminated to interested stakeholders; your demonstrated track record of outreach to citizens on environmental issues; and the potential of the project for transferability and applicability to other places in accordance with the application review criteria in Section V.A.7.

7) Detailed Budget Narrative

Applicants should clearly explain how EPA funds will be used. For guidance see: <http://www2.epa.gov/grants/office-grants-and-debarment-budget-detail-guidance> Use this section to provide a narrative description of the budget found in the SF-424A. Applicants must itemize costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, contractual costs, travel, equipment, supplies, other direct costs, indirect costs, and total costs. Applicants should use whole dollar amounts. Applicants should include costs for quality system documentation (*i.e.*, quality assurance project plans or quality management plans) and environmental and regulatory compliance (*e.g.*, costs for assisting EPA with compliance

by conducting surveys and analysis to identify whether protected resources are in the project location and, if so, whether there will be any effects; costs associated with potential mitigation measures; *etc.*). Applicants that do not include such costs may have to fund these and other overlooked costs out of their own funds.

As part of the detailed budget narrative, applicants should explain their approach, procedures, and controls for ensuring that awarded grant funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner. Please include an explanation of expenditure projections, with quarterly fiscal projections and milestones, for the life of the grant.

E. Other Attachments

Additional attachments not part of the Narrative Proposal may be submitted (*e.g.*, resumes, letters of support, maps, charts) and are not included in the 20 page limit.

F. Notification

Within two weeks after the application due date, EPA intends to post a link to project information (including title and identification number) to: <https://wcms.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/2016-rfa-great-lakes-long-term-biology-monitoring-program-phytoplankton>. ALL APPLICANTS SHOULD CHECK THIS POSTING TO VERIFY THAT THEIR SUBMISSIONS HAVE BEEN INCLUDED IN EPA'S DATABASE. See Section VII for contact information if you do not receive a confirmation or if your project is not posted. All applicants will be contacted following selections to tell them whether or not they have been selected. Selection information will also be posted to a page linked to: <https://wcms.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/2016-rfa-great-lakes-long-term-biology-monitoring-program-phytoplankton>.

G. Information provided to EPA

Before applying for an award, applicants should be aware that under Public Law No. 105-277, data produced under an award, and any information provided to EPA, is subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

H. Communications

See: <http://www2.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses> for general provisions regarding communications with applicants. Submit questions using the form available from <https://wcms.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/2016-rfa-great-lakes-long-term-biology-monitoring-program-phytoplankton>. EPA will respond to questions received through [Wednesday, February 17, but cannot guarantee that it will respond to questions received thereafter.

I. Intergovernmental Review

Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs, may be applicable to awards resulting from this announcement. Applicants selected for funding may be required to

provide a copy of their application to their State Point of Contact (SPOC) for review, pursuant to Executive Order 12372. This review is not required before submitting an application and not all states require such a review. A listing of State Point of Contacts (SPOC) may be viewed at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc.

J. Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into RFA.

Additional provisions that apply to this RFA and/or awards made under this RFA, including but not limited to those related to confidential business information, application assistance and communications, management fees, contracts and subawards under grants, and duplicate funding can be found at: <http://www2.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>.

These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants **must** review them when preparing proposals for this RFA. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with the EPA contact listed in Section VII of this RFA to obtain the provisions.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

A. Application Review:

Applications meeting the threshold eligibility criteria in Section III will be evaluated based on the criteria set forth below. Applicants should directly and explicitly address these criteria as part of their Narrative Proposal and application submission. Each submittal will be rated under a point system, with a total of 120 points possible. Applicants will be evaluated based on the quality and extent to which the work proposed will address the criteria; the failure to provide applicable information in the application may affect the score assigned for a criterion.

1) Project Summary and Approach (6 points)

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on the extent to which a proposed monitoring plan provides an overview of applicants framework for merging preceding monitoring efforts with future monitoring and research .

2) Technical Process and Study Design (56 points)

a) Sample Collection (11 points)

Applicants will be evaluated based on how well they demonstrate a study design and monitoring protocols that continue to determine status and trends of Great Lakes phytoplankton communities.

b) Taxonomic Analysis (25 points)

Applicants will be evaluated on their demonstrated ability to identify Great Lakes phytoplankton, as well as their plan to maintain comparability and continuity with

historical identifications, and biomass calculations. Applicants must provide documentation of taxonomic expertise for diatoms and soft-bodied algae through publication.

c) Data Management (6points)

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated on the extent to which a detailed and proactive plan is proposed to manage and disseminate large data sets, reports, presentations, and other media on an annual frequency to multiple stakeholder groups seeking to manage the Great Lakes ecosystem. Applicants will also be evaluated on their plan to report data to GLNPO in a timely manner.

d) Data Interpretation, Statistical Analysis and Reporting (8 points)

Applicants will be evaluated on the extent to which a detailed plan addresses how they will make the monitoring and assessment information available to the Great Lakes community in a wide variety of formats, including journals and internet products, and how they will integrate recent and historical data in order to provide interpretation of changes to the biological communities.

e) Applied Research and Special Studies (6 points)

Applicants will be evaluated on the quality of proposed studies that address, for example: monitoring activities that support the Coordinated Science and Monitoring Initiative, develop new plankton-based indicators, or contribute to fisheries management practices.

3) Results (12 points)

a) Outputs (6 points)

Applicants will be evaluated based on how well their project will achieve the expected outputs listed in Section I and demonstrates how it will achieve relevant objectives and measures of the GLRI Action Plan II. In addition, the applicants approach for tracking and measuring its progress towards achieving the outputs will be evaluated.

b) Outcomes (6 points)

Applicants will be evaluated based on the how well they demonstrate a proposed monitoring plan will achieve relevant long-term goals of GLRI Action Plan II, the 2012 GLWQA, and EPA's goal of protecting human health and the environment. Applicants will also be evaluated on the extent to which they demonstrate how the project outcomes including those identified in Section I will be achieved and how progress towards achieving the project outcomes can be measured, assessed and tracked in detail over the project period.

4) Collaboration (10 points)

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on how well they demonstrate that their project will involve a diverse collaboration of academic, monitoring institutions and/or other interested stakeholders as described in Section IV.D.5. The diverse collaboration may contribute to all aspects of the project including study design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of results to a broad Great Lakes audience. If the applicant's project will not involve collaboration with others then it will be evaluated based on the quality and extent to which it demonstrates how well the applicant can effectively complete and perform the project without such collaboration.

5) Programmatic Capability and Past Performance (12 points - 3 points each item below)

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on their ability to successfully complete and manage the proposed project taking into account the applicant's: (i) past performance in successfully completing and managing the assistance agreements identified in response to Section IV.D of the announcement (**3 points**), (ii) history of meeting the reporting requirements under the assistance agreements identified in response to Section IV.D of the announcement including whether the applicant submitted acceptable final technical reports under those agreements and the extent to which the applicant adequately and timely reported on their progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes under those agreements and if such progress was not being made whether the applicant adequately reported why not (**3 points**), (iii) organizational experience and plan for timely and successfully achieving the objectives of the proposed project (**3 points**), and (iv) staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them, to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project (**3 points**). Note: In evaluating applicants under items i and ii of this criterion, the Agency will consider the information provided by the applicant and may also consider relevant information from other sources including agency files and prior/current grantors (e.g., to verify and/or supplement the information supplied by the applicant). If you do not have any relevant or available past performance or past reporting information, please indicate this in the proposal and you will receive a neutral score for these subfactors (items i and ii above-a neutral score is half of the total points available in a subset of possible points). If you do not provide any response for these items, you may receive a score of 0 for these factors.

NOTE:

Points may be reduced from an applicant's score under item a, above, if it has previously been awarded GLRI funds and such funds, or a significant portion of them, have not been expended expeditiously as of the date of the applicant's submission without adequate explanation. Applicants must provide an explanation if they have failed to expeditiously expend previously awarded GLRI funds or a significant portion thereof.

6) Education/Outreach (6 points)

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on the quality and diversity of project dissemination methods proposed including the range of audiences targeted for dissemination, plans and flexibility to summarize various data in formats appropriate for intended use by audiences, and the immediacy of information dissemination. Applicants will also be evaluated on the extent to which undergraduate and graduate students will benefit from training and activities associated with the agreement.

7) Budget (18 points)

a) Detailed Budget Narrative (6 points): (Also see Appendix I, Budget Sample).

Under this criterion, proposals will be evaluated based on the extent and quality to which they demonstrate the adequacy of the information provided in the detailed budget and whether the proposed costs are reasonable and allowable.

b) Expeditious Spending and Sufficient Progress in the use of GLRI Funds (12 points)

Under this criterion, applicants will be evaluated based on how well they demonstrate a plan to expend project funds in a timely and efficient manner.

B. Selection Process:

1. Evaluation:

Applications will first be evaluated against the threshold factors listed in Section III. Only those applications which meet all of the threshold factors will be evaluated using the evaluation criteria listed above. There will be a review panel, composed of federal agency staff, established to assess an applicant's ability to perform the proposed project successfully based on the criteria above. Eligible applications will be evaluated by the review panel members independently based on the criteria above. Following independent assessment by review panel members, the panel will be convened to discuss the merits of each proposal and develop rankings and a preliminary funding recommendation for the selection official.

Final funding decisions will be made by the selection official. In making the final funding decision, the selection official will consider the review panel rankings and recommendations and may also consider program priorities.

VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. Award Notices and Status: Following evaluation of applications, all applicants will be notified regarding their status, as follows:

EPA anticipates that notification to *finalists* will be made via email to the original signer of the application or the project contact listed in the application. The notification will advise them that their proposed project has been evaluated and forwarded to the EPA approving official for further consideration and possible award. This notification, which advises finalists that their

proposed project has been forwarded to the approving official, **is not and should not be considered as** an authorization to begin performance. Applicants are cautioned that only the EPA award official is authorized to bind the Government to the expenditure of funds; selection does not guarantee an award will be made. For example, statutory authorization, funding, or other issues discovered during the award process may affect the ability of EPA to make an award to an applicant. The award notice signed by the EPA award official is the authorizing document and will be provided through electronic or postal mail. The applicant may need to prepare and submit additional documents and forms, which **must** be approved by EPA, before the grant can officially be awarded. The time between notification of selection and award of grant can take up to 90 days or longer.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirement: The successful applicants will be required to adhere to federal grants requirements, particularly those found in 2 C.F.R. 200 ([Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards](#)); and EPA-specific regulations that are located in [2 C.F.R. 1500](#). This includes government-wide requirements pertaining to accounting standards, lobbying, minority or woman business enterprise, publication, meetings, construction, and disposition of property. EPA regulations governing assistance programs and recipients are codified in Title 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations. A listing and description of general EPA regulations applicable to the award of assistance agreements may be viewed at: <http://www2.epa.gov/grants>

C. Quality System Documentation: Quality system documentation (*i.e.*, quality assurance project plans or quality management plans) is required for grants involving the use or collection of environmental data. EPA **must** have this documentation within 90 days of award and it **must** be approved **before grantees commence activities associated with the use or collection of environmental data**. Applicants should budget time and resources for developing quality system documentation. **Applicants that do not do so may have to fund the quality system documentation and any necessary project changes out of their own funds.** For specific guidance on GLNPO's quality requirements please see <http://www3.epa.gov/greatlakes/quality/>.

E. Reporting Requirements: Applicants selected for funding shall provide narrative technical progress reports addressing financial and work progress. Special conditions requiring financial and progress reporting and a detailed final technical report, will be added to awards. Applicants should budget time and resources for these activities.

PLEASE NOTE: If selected, applicants may be asked to revise their anticipated fiscal expenditure projections on a quarterly basis in order to monitor the progress of the awarded project. These projections should be submitted as a part of the fiscal and technical reporting.

F. Other Programmatic Requirements: Additional applicable programmatic terms and conditions will be included in grant agreements, including provisions for: signage for on-the-ground projects, and EPA pre-approval of subcontracting and of conference participation. Applicants should budget time and resources for these activities.

J. Issuance of Awards: EPA reserves the right to negotiate appropriate changes in project terms and amounts (*i.e.*, changes that do not affect the integrity of the competition or materially change the application) consistent with EPA Order 5700.5A1 and other applicable policies, before making final decisions and awards. EPA reserves the right to reject all applications and make no awards. Applicants may be asked to include greater detail and specificity for their work plans before final awards are issued. Applicants may also be requested to satisfy data quality or peer review requirements before or shortly after the awarding of grants.

K. Additional Provisions For Applicants Incorporated Into RFA. Additional provisions that apply to this RFA and/or awards made under this RFA, including but not limited to those related to data access and information release, nonprofit administrative capability, subaward and executive compensation reporting, SAM and DUNS requirements, unliquidated obligations, website references, tax liabilities and felony convictions, unfair competitive advantage, exchange network, disputes, copyrights, restrictions on use of federal funds, and competency of organizations generating environmental measurement data, can be found at:

<http://www2.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses>.

These, and the other provisions that can be found at the website link, are important, and applicants **must** review them when preparing proposals for this RFA. If you are unable to access these provisions electronically at the website above, please communicate with Glenn Warren (312-886-2405) to obtain the provisions.

VII. AGENCY CONTACTS

RFA Contact: (For administrative, eligibility, technical, and other general RFA questions):

- Glenn Warren, 312-886-2405 / warren.glenn@epa.gov

VIII. OTHER INFORMATION

GLNPO will send an e-mail announcement of these and any of its funding opportunities to all who register at <http://www.epa.gov/great-lakes-funding/great-lakes-news-email-list>.

Appendix I Budget Sample

Budget Narrative

This section of the work plan is a detailed description of the budget found in the SF-424A, and **must** include a detailed discussion of how EPA funds will be used. Applicants **must itemize** costs related to personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual costs, other direct costs, indirect costs, and total costs.

If the project budget includes any voluntary cost share, the Budget Detail portion of the narrative proposal **must** include a detailed description of how the applicant will obtain the cost-share and how the cost-share funding will be used. If EPA accepts an offer for a voluntary cost-share, applicants **must** meet their sharing commitment as a legal condition of receiving EPA funding. If the proposed cost-share is to be provided by a third-party, a letter of commitment is required. Any form of cost-share included in the Budget Detail **must** also be included on the SF 424 and SF 424A. Please see Sections III and Section IV.C.2.B.iii of this RFA for more detailed information on cost-share.

Applicants should use the following instructions, budget object class descriptions, and example table to complete the Budget Detail section of the work plan. Use only whole dollar amounts.

- 1. Personnel - List all staff positions by title. Give annual salary, percentage of time assigned to the project, and total cost for the budget period.** This category includes only direct costs for the salaries of those individuals who will perform work directly for the project (generally, paid employees of the applicant organization). If the applicant organization is including staff time (in-kind services) as a cost share, this should be included as Personnel costs. Personnel costs do not include: (1) costs for services of consultants, contractors, consortia members, or other partner organizations, which are included in the “Contractual” category; (2) costs for employees of subrecipients under subawards, which are included in the “Other” category; or (3) effort that is not directly in support of the proposed project, which may be covered by the organization’s negotiated indirect cost rate. The budget detail **must** identify the personnel category type by Full Time Equivalent (FTE), including percentage of FTE for part-time employees, number of personnel proposed for each category, and the estimated funding amounts.
- 2. Fringe Benefits - Identify the percentage used, the basis for its computation, and the types of benefits included.** Fringe benefits are allowances and services provided by employers to their employees as compensation in addition to regular salaries and wages. Fringe benefits include, but are not limited to the cost of leave, employee insurance, pensions and unemployment benefit plans.
- 3. Travel - Specify the mileage, per diem, estimated number of trips in-State and out-of-State and international (include specific international locations), number of travelers, and other costs for each type of travel.** Travel may be integral to the purpose of the proposed project (*e.g.*, inspections) or related to proposed project activities

(e.g., attendance at meetings). Travel costs do not include: (1) costs for travel of consultants, contractors, consortia members, or other partner organizations, which are included in the “Contractual” category; (2) travel costs for employees of subrecipients under subawards, which are included in the “Other” category.

- 4. Equipment - Identify each item to be purchased which has an estimated acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit and a useful life of more than one year.** Equipment also includes accessories necessary to make the equipment operational. Equipment does not include: (1) equipment planned to be leased/rented, including lease/purchase agreement; or (2) equipment service or maintenance contracts. These types of proposed costs should be included in the “Other” category. Items with a unit cost of less than \$5,000 should be categorized as supplies, pursuant to 2 C.F.R. 200 and or 2 C.F.R. 1500. The budget detail **must** include an itemized listing of all equipment proposed under the project.
- 5. Supplies - “Supplies” means all tangible personal property other than “equipment”.** The budget detail should identify categories of supplies to be procured (e.g., laboratory supplies or office supplies). Non-tangible goods and services associated with supplies, such as printing service, photocopy services, and rental costs should be included in the “Other” category.
- 6. Contractual - Identify each proposed contract and specify its purpose and estimated cost.** Contractual/consultant services are those services to be carried out by an individual or organization, other than the applicant, in the form of a procurement relationship. Leased or rented goods (equipment or supplies) should be included in the “Other” category. The applicant should list the proposed contract activities along with a brief description of the scope of work or services to be provided, proposed duration, and proposed procurement method (competitive or noncompetitive), if known.
- 7. Other - List each item in sufficient detail for EPA to determine the reasonableness and allowability of its cost.** This category should include only those types of direct costs that do not fit in any of the other budget categories. Examples of costs that may be in this category are: insurance, rental/lease of equipment or supplies, equipment service or maintenance contracts, printing or photocopying, rebates, and subaward costs. Subawards (e.g., subgrants) are a distinct type of cost in this category. The term “subaward” means an award of financial assistance (money or property) by any legal agreement made by the recipient to an eligible subrecipient. This term does not include procurement purchases, technical assistance in the form of services instead of money, or other assistance in the form of revenue sharing, loans, loan guarantees, interest subsidies, insurance, or direct appropriations. Subcontracts are not subawards and belong in the contractual category. Applicants **must** provide the aggregate amount they propose to issue as subaward work and a description of the types of activities to be supported.
- 8. Indirect Charges - If indirect charges are budgeted, indicate the approved rate and base.**
Indirect costs are those incurred by the grantee for a common or joint purpose that benefit more than one cost objective or project, and are not readily assignable to specific cost

objectives or projects as a direct cost. In order for indirect costs to be allowable, the applicant **must** have a federal or state negotiated indirect cost rate (e.g., fixed, predetermined, final or provisional), or **must** have submitted a proposal to the cognizant federal or state agency. Examples of Indirect Cost Rate calculations are shown below:

- Personnel (Indirect Rate x Personnel = Indirect Costs)
- Personnel and Fringe (Indirect Rate x Personnel & Fringe = Indirect Costs)
- Total Direct Costs (Indirect Rate x Total direct costs = Indirect Costs)
- Direct Costs minus distorting or other factors such as contracts and equipment
- (Indirect Rate x (total direct cost – distorting factors) = Indirect Costs)

Example Budget Table

	EPA Funding	Cost-Share
Personnel		
(1) Project Manager @ \$40/hr x 10 hrs/week x 52 wks		\$20,800
(5) Project Staff @ \$30/hr x 40 hrs/week x 40 wks	\$244,000	
TOTAL PERSONNEL	\$244,000	\$20,800
Fringe Benefits		
20% of Salary and Wages	20%(\$244,000)	20%(20,800)
- Retirement, Health Benefits, FICA, SUI	\$48,800	\$4,160
TOTAL FRINGE BENEFITS	\$48,800	\$4,160
Travel		
In State travel for Project Manager and staff: 500 mi/mo @ \$0.55/mi x 12 mos.	\$3,300	
Out of State (IL, WI, IA) Travel for Project Staff: 20 trips per month x \$2,500 per trip	\$600,000	
SOLEC Meeting (Toronto, Canada) Travel for Project Manager: 2 trips/year x \$3,500 each	\$7,000	
TOTAL TRAVEL	\$610,300	
Equipment		
Sample Bottles (8600 x \$2.98 each)	\$25,700	
Fish Sampling Nets (300 x \$50each)	\$15,000	
1 Project Vehicle	\$25,000	
1 Project Boat	\$15,000	
TOTAL EQUIPMENT	81,100	
Supplies		
Office and related supplies to support training	\$400	
Office computer and printer	\$2,500	
TOTAL SUPPLIES	\$2,900	
Contractual		
ABC Support Services Contract	\$100,000	
XYZ Land & Water Conservation	\$66,400	
TOTAL CONTRACTUAL	\$166,400	
Other		

Travel for 3 representatives to attend workshop training – 100 trips x \$1,000 each	\$100,000	
Travel for 4 representatives to attend workshop training – 200 trips x \$2,000 each	\$500,000	
TOTAL OTHER	\$500,000	
Indirect Charges		
Federal Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate = 10% (Indirect Rate x Personnel = Indirect Costs; as negotiated)	\$26,480	
TOTAL INDIRECT	\$26,480	
TOTAL FUNDING	\$1,679,580	\$24,960
TOTAL PROJECT COST	\$1, 704,540	

** Any voluntary cost-share funds, while not required under this RFA, **must** also be included on the SF-424A as detailed in Section IV.C.2.B.iii of this RFA. Federal funds are not allowed to be used for cost share; please identify the source of the cost share in your budget narrative.

Expeditious Spending and Sufficient Progress in the use of GLRI Funds: Include an explanation of how, if the applicant is awarded a grant, they will ensure that the funding will be used expeditiously.