



Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I Funding Opportunity Frequent Asked Questions

Program Objectives

Q. What are the objectives for the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I funding opportunity?

The objective of this funding opportunity is to invite states, Indian Tribes, irrigation districts, water districts, local governmental entities, non-profit organizations, Existing Watershed Groups, and local and special districts (e.g., irrigation and water districts, conservation districts, natural resource districts) to submit proposals to establish or develop a watershed group, complete watershed restoration planning activities, and design watershed management projects. See *Section C.4. Eligible Projects* of the funding opportunity for a more comprehensive description of eligible activities.

Q. What is a watershed group?

A "watershed group," as defined in Section 6001(6) of the Cooperative Watershed Management Act, is a grassroots, non-regulatory entity that addresses water availability and quality issues within the relevant watershed, is capable of promoting the sustainable use of water resources in the watershed, makes decisions on a consensus basis, and represents a diverse group of stakeholders, including hydroelectric producers, livestock grazing, timber production, land development, recreation or tourism, irrigated agriculture, the environment, municipal water supplies, private property owners, Federal, state and local governments, Tribes, and disadvantaged communities.

Q. Can I apply for funding if my project does not focus on a watershed group?

The main purpose of the program is to provide funding for the development of grassroots, stakeholder driven groups and for the groups to complete watershed restoration planning and watershed management project design. If your project is not focused on a watershed group, it is recommended that you do not apply to this funding opportunity. If you are looking for funding for planning and design of water management improvements and restoration projects and your project does not focus on a watershed group, it is recommended that you consider Reclamation's WaterSMART Planning and Project Design Grants funding opportunity.

Applicant Eligibility

Q. Are institutes of higher education eligible under the Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I funding opportunity?

Institutes of higher education are only eligible if they are sponsoring the formation or further development of a new or existing watershed group. If institutes of higher education apply for funding, they should use the institute's indirect cost rate for other sponsored programs instead of the indirect costs rate for research.

Q. May a watershed group that previously received funding under the Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I be selected to receive funding again?

If applying for a distinct project scope, then a past recipient under the Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I funding opportunity may apply and receive funding under the fiscal year (FY) 2023/2024 funding opportunity. For example, a watershed group that previously received funding to complete a watershed-wide restoration plan may apply under the FY 2023/2024 funding opportunity for design of a specific watershed management project. Reclamation will not provide additional funding under the FY 2023/2024 funding opportunity to a project scope that was previously selected for funding.

Funding and Cost-Share Requirements

Q. How much funding can an applicant receive through the fiscal year 2023/2024 Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I funding opportunity?

A total of up to \$300,000 in Federal funds may be awarded to an applicant over the three-year period, with no more than \$100,000 to be available per year of the project.

Q. Is a non-Federal cost share required for this funding opportunity?

No, a non-Federal cost-share contribution is not required for Phase I activities funded under this funding opportunity.

Q. Can an entity receive more than \$100,000 per year if awarded a Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I grant?

No more than \$100,000 will be made available to a grant recipient each year. Applicants that request the full \$300,000 available under this funding opportunity will receive the funding over three years. As required under Section 6002 of the Cooperative Watershed Management Act (see *Section A.1. Authority* of the funding opportunity), for each year of the grant, Reclamation must determine whether a recipient has made sufficient progress on its project during the year to justify any additional funding. If the applicant is awarded an agreement under this NOFO, Reclamation will review the interim reports to determine whether the recipient has made sufficient progress each year

of the grant. If it is determined that the progress during the year justifies additional funding, grant funds will be made available for subsequent years of the grant project.

Q. Can costs incurred prior to grant award be eligible for reimbursement?

Costs incurred prior to the posting date of the funding opportunity are NOT eligible for reimbursement or for inclusion in the project budget. Eligible costs associated with the proposed project may be eligible as pre-award costs if they are incurred after the posting date of the funding opportunity. Under no circumstances are costs associated with on-the-ground work (e.g., biological surveys, water quality monitoring, installation of gauging equipment) eligible as pre-award costs.

If the proposed project is selected, the pre-award costs will be reviewed to determine if they are consistent with program objectives and are allowable in accordance with the authorizing legislation. Proposed pre-award costs must also be compliant with all applicable administrative and cost principles criteria established in 2 CFR Part 200 and all other requirements of this funding opportunity.

Note: Any incurrence of costs in the performance of the project prior to the issuance of a financial assistance award is at the applicant's own risk. No legal liability on the part of Reclamation for any payment may arise until funds are made available, in writing, by a Reclamation Grants Officer.

Eligible Activities and Costs

Q. Are salaries and wages eligible under this funding opportunity?

Generally, grant funding can be used to fund staff salaries and wages that are directly allocable to eligible activities specifically identified in the technical project description. In addition, Reclamation funding can be used to support one full-time salary for a watershed group coordinator; however, most of the watershed group coordinators time that is funded by Reclamation should be spent on eligible activities specifically identified in the technical project description. Under the Section 6002 of the Cooperative Watershed Management Act administrative costs are limited to 20% of the grant award (see Section D.6.2. Project Cost Restrictions of the funding opportunity).

Q. Are planning efforts other than collaborative watershed restoration plans developed by a watershed group eligible for funding under this funding opportunity?

No, proposals for developing planning efforts other than collaborative watershed restoration plans developed by watershed groups are not eligible for funding under the Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I funding opportunity. Entities that want to complete a district or city specific water plan should not apply under this funding opportunity.

The following types of planning efforts are also ineligible under the funding opportunity: drought plans, appraisal investigations, feasibility studies, special studies, Basin Studies, or studies authorized under the Title XVI Water Recycling and Reuse Program, through P.L.102-575, as amended (43 U.S.C. 390h et seq.), or under the Rural Water Program, pursuant to the Rural Water Supply Act of 2006, P.L.109-45.

Applicants interested in completing similar planning efforts that do not involve a grassroots, collaborative watershed group should consider the WaterSMART Planning and Project Design Grant funding opportunity.

Q. Are educational and training activities eligible under this funding opportunity?

To be considered eligible activities, all outreach activities, training, and conferences must be specifically linked to the proposed watershed group development, watershed restoration planning, or watershed management project design activities. General education activities (e.g., K-12 educational programs) or general staff training are not eligible under the Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I funding opportunity. For an example, expenses associated with conferences or trainings for staff to learn about restoration techniques and best management practices or restoration planning may be eligible if the applicant can link them to the proposed watershed group development, watershed restoration planning, or watershed management project design activities. General staff training, such as accounting or project management training, are not eligible costs.

Note: The ARC (see *Section E.2.2. Application Review Committee* of the funding opportunity) has the discretion to determine whether a specific education/outreach activity, training, or conference is eligible.

Q. Is monitoring, measurement, and fieldwork eligible under this funding opportunity?

Monitoring, measurement, and fieldwork (e.g., water quality monitoring, vegetation surveys) to collect baseline information regarding the current conditions and needs of the watershed is eligible under this funding opportunity if they will inform a broader planning or design effort being completed as part of the same grant project. In addition, costs of these activities cannot exceed 50 percent of the Reclamation funding. The intent of this funding opportunity is not to fund ongoing monitoring or data collection efforts. Applicants should also be aware that these on-the-ground activities may require more substantial (i.e., time consuming and costly) environmental and cultural resources compliance.

Q. Are implementation projects eligible under this funding opportunity?

No. Implementation of on-the-ground watershed management projects is not eligible under this funding opportunity. Implementation of on-the-ground watershed management projects that improve ecological value and watershed health are funded under the Environmental Water Resources Projects NOFO. On-the-ground watershed management projects include, but are not limited to, removing fish passage barriers, installing fish passage structures, instream and riparian restoration projects, process-based restoration, invasive species removal, vegetation restoration, installing fences, water conservation and efficiency projects (e.g., canal lining and piping), infrastructure improvements.

Q. Can funding available under this funding opportunity be used to secure a conservation easement or lease or purchase water?

No. A project that proposes using Federal funding for the purchase of water or land, or to secure a conservation easement, is not eligible under this funding opportunity.

Q. Are costs to rent office space for the watershed group eligible under this funding opportunity?

No, costs to rent office space are considered normal operating costs and are not eligible under this funding opportunity. However, costs to rent space for specific outreach events or in-person watershed group meetings are eligible under the funding opportunity.

Proposal Development and Selection Process

Q. How do I determine whether my proposed project fits under this funding opportunity?

If you are unsure if this funding opportunity is a fit for your project, it is recommended that you reach out to the Reclamation Program Coordinator identified in *Section G. Agency Contacts* of the funding opportunity.

Q. Can Reclamation staff review or comment on draft application materials?

No, under no circumstances can Reclamation staff review or comment on draft application materials.

Q. If I submitted a proposal for funding in previous years that was not selected for funding, can I re-submit that proposal under the fiscal year 2023/2024 funding opportunity?

Yes. However, it is recommended that you review the fiscal year 2023/2024 funding opportunity and related guidance to ensure that your proposal meets the mandatory requirements and program objectives, including the evaluation criteria.

Federal Environmental and Cultural Resource Compliance

Q. How should the recipient plan for Environmental and Cultural Resources compliance?Q.

All projects funded with Federal funding, including those funded under this funding opportunity, require compliance with Federal environmental and cultural resources laws (e.g., National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act). As the Federal funding agency, Reclamation is responsible for signing off on the completion of environmental and cultural resource compliance. However, depending on project specifics, a recipient may be required to complete work associated with compliance or hire a contractor to complete compliance activities.

Under this funding opportunity, compliance activities may be more costly and time consuming for projects that include an on-the-ground monitoring or data collection component (e.g., biological surveys, water quality monitoring, installation of gauging equipment). It is highly recommended that perspective applicants reach out to their local Reclamation office to discuss the possible compliance requirements for their proposed project. Selected applicants will work with Reclamation's regional and area offices to complete compliance on their project. If you are uncertain who to contact, please contact the Reclamation Program Coordinator identified in *Section G. Agency Contacts* of the funding opportunity, to be directed to the Reclamation appropriate office.

Depending on the potential impacts of the project, Reclamation may be able to complete its compliance activities without additional cost to a grant recipient. Where environmental or cultural resources compliance requires significant participation by Reclamation, Reclamation will add a line item for costs incurred by Reclamation to the budget during development of the financial assistance agreement and cost shared accordingly (i.e., withheld from the Federal award amount). Any costs to the successful applicant associated with compliance will be identified during the pre-award process for the financial assistance agreement.