

Bureau of Reclamation

**Notice of Funding Opportunity**

WaterSMART Drought Response Program

Funding Opportunity Number

R26AS00016

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## BASIC INFORMATION

**Announcement Type:** Initial

**Funding Opportunity Number:** R26AS00016

**Assistance Listing Number(s):** 15.514

**Estimated Total Program Funding:** \$13,500,000

**Expected Number of Awards:** 20

**Award Ceiling:** \$1,500,000

**Award Floor:** \$25,000

Approximately 8-20 awards will be awarded under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), depending on the amount requested by each applicant and available Federal appropriations.

Applicants are invited to submit proposals under the following funding groups:

**Funding Group I:** Up to \$500,000 in Federal funds, not to exceed 50% of project costs.

***Drought Contingency Planning applications are limited to applying under Funding Group***

**Funding Group II:** Up to \$1,500,000 in Federal funds, not to exceed 50% of project costs.

***Construction Start Date Limitation - Proposed projects must not start construction until at least 12 months after the submission deadline. The estimated start date is dependent upon the complexity of the project and degree and significance of environmental impacts associated with the project. Some projects may require more than 12 months to start construction.***

**Cost Sharing Required?**

Yes

**Closing Date Explanation**

**July 28, 2026, 4:00 p.m. Mountain Daylight Time (MDT)**

U.S. states and local governments may be required under [Executive Order 12372](#), [Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs](#) to submit their application to their State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for review. For more information, see the [Intergovernmental Review SPOC List](#).

**Have Questions?**

For questions regarding application and submission, contact the NOFO team at [bor-sha-fafoa@usbr.gov](mailto:bor-sha-fafoa@usbr.gov).

For questions regarding applicant and project eligibility or application content, contact the Program Coordinator, Sheri Looper, [slooper@usbr.gov](mailto:slooper@usbr.gov), 916-612-7816.

Please include the NOFO number R26AS00016 in the subject line of any email correspondence.

### **Executive Summary**

Through WaterSMART, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) leverages Federal and non-Federal funding to work cooperatively with States, Tribes, and other entities as they plan for and implement actions to increase water supply and hydropower reliability. The WaterSMART Drought Response Program NOFO invites eligible applicants to submit proposals for projects designed to improve drought resilience by developing effective water management strategies and drought contingency plans. Funding under the Drought Response Program supports a range of initiatives including infrastructure improvements for increased water storage and distribution capabilities, water source diversification, decision-making tools for water management, and comprehensive planning to prepare for and respond to drought conditions.

WaterSMART Drought Response Program demonstrably advances Trump administration priorities, such as those identified in Presidential Executive Order 14154 (January 20, 2025): Unleashing American Energy (E.O. 14154) and Secretarial Order 3418, and aligns with other priorities and requirements, such as those identified in Presidential Executive Order 14332 (August 7, 2025): Improving Oversight in Federal Grantmaking (E.O. 14332).

## **ELIGIBILITY**

### **Eligible Applicants**

Others (see text field entitled "Additional Information on Eligibility" for clarification)

### **Additional Information on Eligibility**

Applicants eligible to receive an award under this funding opportunity are described below.

#### **Category A Applicants**

- States, Tribes, irrigation districts, and water districts;
- State, regional, or local authorities, the members of which include one or more organizations with water or power delivery authority; and
- Other organizations with water or power delivery authority.

Category A applicants must be located in the Western United States or Territories; specifically: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

#### **Category B Applicants:**

Nonprofit conservation organizations that are acting in partnership with, and with the agreement of an entity described in Category A.

Category B applicants should include with their application a letter from the Category A partner stating that the Category A partner:

- Is acting in partnership with the applicant;
- Agrees to the submittal and content of the application; and
- Intends to participate in the project in some way, for example, by providing input, feedback, or other support for the project.

Partners do not necessarily need to contribute cost share funding. All Category B applicants must be located in the United States or the specific Territories identified above.

**Ineligible Applicants** - Those not eligible include, but are not limited to, the following entities:

- Federal Governmental entities
- Individuals
- Institutes of higher education

**PLEASE NOTE:** Applicants in Puerto Rico and Alaska and Category B applicants are not eligible to apply for Drought Contingency Plans as applicant eligibility is defined in the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1999, as amended.

## Cost Sharing Requirement

### Cost Sharing Required?

Yes

50% of total project costs.

All cost-share contributions must be non-Federal in original source and meet the requirements of 2 CFR 200.306. Total project cost is the sum of all allowable costs, including cost share and third-party contributions. For example, if the total project cost is \$1.5 million, the minimum amount of non-Federal cost share would be \$750,000.

|                                  |              |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Total Project Costs -            | \$1,500,000  |
| <u>Cost Share-</u>               | <u>x 50%</u> |
| Applicant share of project costs | \$750,000    |
| Federal share                    | \$750,000    |

Note: This cost-sharing requirement is not applicable to American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, or the Virgin Islands<sup>1</sup>. Cost-share waivers may be considered for Drought Contingency Plans (see Attachment C for more details).

<sup>1</sup>See Public Law 95-134, Title V, § 501 (1977) (codified at 48 U.S.C. 1469a), as amended by Public Law 96-205, Title V, § 601

## GET READY TO APPLY

## Required System Registrations

### Unique Entity Identifier and SAM.gov Registration

Before applying, all **applicants** except individuals applying as a natural person **must be registered in SAM.gov**. During the SAM.gov registration the entity will obtain their Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

**The SAM.gov registration process can take several months. If your organization is not already registered in SAM.gov, begin the registration process as soon as possible.**

**To register in SAM.gov**, go to the [SAM.gov website](#) and use the available resources to complete registration.

- **Financial assistance registrants** must review and certify compliance with the SAM.gov “Financial Assistance General Representations and Certifications”.
- **Already registered?** You already have a Unique Entity ID. Before applying, check that your “Financial Assistance General Representations and Certifications” on SAM.gov is complete. Remember to renew your registration every year to keep it active while you have an award or application in progress. You can update your registration whenever you need, including during renewal.
- **Need help?** For additional information and contact information on the [SAM.gov Help page](#).

### GRANTS.GOV

This program accepts applications through [Grants.gov](#) so once you receive your UEI return to Grants.gov to [register](#) with Grants.gov. Please allow 30 days to register and set up a Workspace in Grants.gov. See [Submission Instructions](#) section below for additional details.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

### Program Goals

- Through WaterSMART, Reclamation leverages Federal and non-Federal funding to work cooperatively with States, Tribes, and local entities as they plan for and implement actions to increase water supply reliability through investments in infrastructure and attention to local water needs.

The objective of the WaterSMART Drought Response Program NOFO is to invite eligible applicants to leverage their money and resources by cost sharing with Reclamation on drought resiliency and planning projects designed to increase water management flexibility and reliability, helping entities prepare for and address impacts of drought and water supply shortages. Projects funded under this NOFO are proactive measures to build long-term drought resiliency.

### Program Description

In general, projects under this NOFO will increase water supply reliability and build long-term resilience to drought. Proposed projects should aim to reduce the need for emergency drought response actions, such as water hauling programs and temporary infrastructure, while providing sustained benefits that build long-term resilience. This NOFO provides funding under two task

areas: Task A: Infrastructure Projects and Task B: Water Management and Planning Projects. [Eligible projects](#) under each task area are described below.

Phases of a larger project may be eligible for funding under this program, so long as the phase proposed for funding will generate benefits to address drought resiliency or water supply reliability, independent of completing additional phases.

Certain restrictions apply to water reclamation, reuse, desalination, and water storage projects, including phases of these types of projects. Please see [Water Reclamation, Reuse, and Desalination](#) and [Small Surface and Ground Water Projects](#) below for more information.

Proposed projects will be reviewed by the Program Office to determine eligibility for merit evaluation. Additionally, projects may be prioritized based on project type and task area (Tasks A and B), ensuring a balanced distribution across both task areas and a diverse range of projects within each task area.

Certified Local Governments are encouraged to prioritize projects in support of the celebration of America's 250th birthday (American250). This may include, but is not limited to, preservation planning, interpretation, public engagement, and rehabilitation projects that recognize and honor the nation's founding, history, and cultural heritage.

### **Task A: Infrastructure Projects**

Investments in infrastructure improve drought resiliency by increasing water management flexibility and providing alternative sources of water supply. Infrastructure projects include, but are not limited to the following:

- **System modifications or improvements.** Projects that will increase flexibility of water conveyance and deliveries, facilitating access to water supplies in times of drought. Projects include, but are not limited to:
  - Constructing or modifying surface water intakes to access supplies when water levels are low (e.g., at dead pool), or to allow access at different locations.
  - Constructing new conveyance system components (pipelines, canals, pumping plants, etc.) to increase delivery flexibilities, facilitate voluntary water marketing, or to deliver water from alternative sources.
  - Constructing connections between water delivery systems to provide more options for water conveyance.
  - Installing barriers or other facilities to prevent saltwater intrusion into surface supplies.
- **Storing water and/or recharging groundwater supplies.** Projects that enable the capture or storage of additional water supplies that can be made available during drought. Projects include, but are not limited to:
  - Developing or expanding surface water storage facilities such as off-stream storage ponds.
  - Installing water towers and storage tanks to store water for municipal and domestic use.

- Installing recharge ponds or injection wells to increase recharge and storage of surplus, inactive, or reclaimed water for later beneficial use.

**Note: Multiple recharge basins or injection wells in one application will be considered as one project (or a phase of a larger project, if applicable). Storage projects have cost limitations for eligibility under this NOFO. See Small Surface Water and Groundwater Storage Projects below for more details.**

- **Developing Alternative Water Supply Sources Through the Treatment and Reuse of Surface Water and Reclaimed Water.** Projects that develop alternative water supplies to build drought resiliency. Projects include, but are not limited to:
  - Constructing or expanding water treatment facilities to treat impaired surface water, municipal wastewater or stormwater runoff for later beneficial use.
  - Constructing stormwater capture and reuse systems, including stormwater infrastructure solutions such as rain gardens, cisterns, and bioswales.
  - Installing residential grey water and rain catchment systems.

**Note: Water reclamation, reuse, and desalination projects have eligibility limitations under this NOFO. See Water Reclamation, Reuse, and Desalination information below for more details.**

- **Groundwater Recovery and Treatment Projects.** Projects that implement the sustainable use of groundwater or the recovery of recharged water to build drought resiliency. Projects include, but are not limited to:
  - Constructing or rehabilitating a well to provide back-up water supplies during times of drought.
  - Constructing an extraction well at groundwater banks or other recharge areas to improve extraction and return capabilities during dry years.
  - Constructing an aquifer storage and recovery well
  - Treating impaired groundwater for beneficial use.

**Note for applicants applying for groundwater projects:** Applications for groundwater projects (including rehabilitation and the treatment of well water) will be **limited to two wells** per applicant. If two wells are included in the same application the wells must be located within the applicant's service area. This limitation does not apply to monitoring or injection wells.

## **Task B: Water Management and Planning Projects**

Task B projects are intended to help entities better manage water supplies through decision support tools, modeling, the identification of potential strategies to address drought, and comprehensive drought planning. Projects include but are not limited to the following:

- **Developing water management, water marketing, and modeling tools to help communities evaluate options and implement strategies to address drought.**
  - Developing online decision support tools to help communities identify alternative water supplies or water management options in times of drought.
    - For example, in 2019, Reclamation awarded the Texas Water Development Board with a Drought Resiliency Grant to modify their

existing drought prediction tool to provide more accurate forecasting of average May through July rainfall, reservoir levels, and reservoir storage across the state by county. The project was completed in 2022, and the forecasts are updated bi-weekly and made accessible for water managers through the Water Data for Texas website:

[www.waterdatafortexas.org/reservoirs/statewide](http://www.waterdatafortexas.org/reservoirs/statewide).

- Installation of monitoring equipment to accurately track water supply conditions (e.g., stream flow measurement structures, groundwater monitors, reservoir level monitors) to improve water management practices, optimizing water resources and supporting informed decision-making.
  - Developing new models or improving existing models for analyzing and predicting drought conditions. Such models should be based on proven methods to analyze drought frequency, duration, and intensity, as opposed to research type efforts.
  - Developing water budgets and tiered pricing programs that incentivize decreased consumptive use.
  - Real-time operational modeling to track supply conditions and demands. Modeling can be used to analyze different operational scenarios to optimize pumping capacities, evaluate user restrictions, water delivery needs, etc., and determine how to best meet compliance requirements such as temperature control points, water quality, or other environmental compliance (e.g., Endangered Species Act), and Clean Water Act.
  - Assessing water quality with respect to the level of drought to determine appropriate measures to protect water quality for fish and wildlife, agriculture, and human consumption (e.g., water quality testing or constructing groundwater monitoring wells).
  - Developing tools to facilitate water marketing, connecting willing sellers and willing buyers that want to participate in the buying, selling, leasing, or exchanging of water.
- **Developing or updating Drought Contingency Plans (comprehensive drought plans) that, when implemented, will increase water reliability and improve water management through the use of expanded technologies for drought forecasting, planning mitigation actions, and identifying drought response actions.**
    - Drought contingency planning efforts are to develop and update comprehensive drought plans designed to build resilience to drought in advance of a crisis. Applicants under this NOFO may request funding to develop a new drought plan or to update an existing drought plan (collectively, Drought Contingency Plans). **Drought Contingency Plans funded under this NOFO must include six required project elements:** 1) Drought Monitoring, 2) Vulnerability Assessment, 3) Mitigation Actions, 4) Response Actions, 5) Operational and administrative Framework, and 6) Plan Development and Update Process.

Proposed Drought Contingency Plans should be divided into two phases (Phase I and Phase II):

- **Phase I** includes the establishment of a drought planning task force, development of a detailed work plan, and development of a communication and outreach plan.
- **Phase II begins after the detailed work plan is accepted by Reclamation. In Phase II, the planning lead develops the plan or plan update including the required Drought Contingency Plan elements.**

See Attachment C for detailed information regarding the Drought Contingency Plan's six required elements, Phase 1, and Phase 2.

### **Ineligible Projects**

Projects that are not eligible for funding under this NOFO include, but are not limited to:

- ***Operations, Maintenance, and Replacement:*** In accordance with Section 9504 of Secure Water Act, projects that are considered normal operations, maintenance, and replacement (OM&R) are not eligible for funding under this NOFO. OM&R is described as system improvements that replace or repair existing infrastructure or function without providing increased efficiency or effectiveness of water distribution over the expected life of the improvement. Examples of ineligible OM&R projects include:
  - Replacing malfunctioning components of an existing facility with the same components
  - Improving an existing facility to operate as originally designed
  - Performing an activity on a recurring basis, even if that period is extended (e.g., a 10-year interval)
  - Sealing expansion joints of concrete lining because the original sealer or the water stops have failed
  - Sealing cracks in canals and/or pipes, including those sealant projects intended to improve facilities with inherent design and construction flaws
  - Replacing broken meters with new meters of the same type
  - Replacing leaky pipes with new pipes of the same type
  - Completion of one-time leak detection surveys
- ***Water Conservation Projects:*** Projects primarily focused on water conservation are not eligible under this NOFO, including:
  - Lining or piping canals to conserve water.
  - Installing landscape irrigation measures.
  - Turf replacement.
  - Water metering and measurement projects are ineligible as a standalone project but may be included if it is a necessary subcomponent of an eligible project type.
- ***Water Reclamation, Reuse, and Desalination:*** Projects or project components that are required to comply with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act or the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act are not eligible for funding under this program.

Any projects or project elements that are part of a congressionally authorized Title XVI Water Reclamation or Reuse Project are not eligible for funding under this NOFO.

Any projects or project elements that are part of a water desalination or recycling project eligible for funding under Section 4009(a) or 4009(c) of the WIIN Act, P.L. 114-322 are not eligible for funding under this NOFO.

In addition, if a water desalination, reclamation, or recycling project has a total estimated project cost of more than \$20 million, that project is not eligible under this NOFO and should be pursued under the Title XVI Water Reclamation and Reuse Program or the WaterSMART Desalination Planning and Construction Program. Note, this applies to phases or project elements of a desalination, reclamation, or recycling project that are part of a larger project with a total estimated project cost of more than \$20 million.

See the Title XVI-Water Reclamation and Reuse webpage, <https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/title/titlexvi.html>, for more information.

- ***Small Surface Water and Groundwater Storage Projects:*** An application for funding of a small surface or groundwater storage project (including groundwater recharge, injection wells, and aquifer storage and recovery wells) with a total estimated project cost of more than \$10 million, or that is a phase of a larger project that exceeds \$10 million, is not eligible under this NOFO. Applicants proposing such projects may wish to consider Reclamation's Small Storage Program. See the Small Storage Program webpage, <https://www.usbr.gov/smallstorage/>, for more information.
- ***Water, Land Purchases, and Easements:*** The purchase of water, land, or land with the primary purpose to secure a permanent easement, are not eligible under this NOFO and cannot be included as part of the non-federal cost-share.
- ***Emergency Drought Response Projects:*** Emergency drought response projects that provide temporary benefits, including projects involving temporary facilities (e.g., temporary pipes and pumps), water hauling services, and water purchases. Applicants seeking funding drought emergency relief should request emergency drought assistance under Reclamation's Drought Response Program. See the WaterSMART Drought Response Program webpage, [www.usbr.gov/drought/](http://www.usbr.gov/drought/), for more information.
- ***Building Construction:*** Proposals to construct a building are not eligible for Federal funding under this NOFO (e.g., a building to house administrative staff or a building to house promotion of public awareness for water conservation).
- ***Pilot Projects:*** Proposals to conduct a pilot study to evaluate technical capability, economic feasibility, or viability for full-scale implementation or to test an unproven material or technology are not eligible for Federal funding under this NOFO.

- **On-Farm Improvements:** Projects to conduct on-farm improvements are not eligible under this NOFO. Applicants interested in on-farm improvements should contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to investigate opportunities for Federal assistance. For more information on NRCS programs, including application deadlines and a description of available funding, please contact your local NRCS office or see [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov) for further contact information in your area.

Applicants interested in projects for water delivery systems improvements that will enable farmers to make additions on-farm improvements in the future should consider Reclamation's Water and Energy Efficiency Grants. See the WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency Grants webpage, <https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/weeg/index.html>, for more information.

- **Projects Receiving Other Federal Financial Assistance:** Proposals for projects or activities that are funded under another Federal Financial Assistance agreement are not eligible for funding under this NOFO.

**Multiple Applications** - Multiple applications for funding may be submitted for consideration under this funding opportunity, provided that the project scopes are not duplicative. No more than \$1,500,000 will be awarded to a Category A applicant under this NOFO. Category B applicants may be awarded up to a total of \$3,000,000 given that the Category A partners are not duplicative on projects selected for award.

In general, if you are seeking funding for multiple project components, and the components are interrelated or closely related (e.g., a project to construct a new storage and conveyance system coupled with a decision support tool for operation of the system), you should combine these in one application. However, if the projects are only loosely related or are independently operated, you should submit them as separate applications.

**Technical Assistance** - Technical assistance should be discussed with Reclamation staff prior to applying. By request, Reclamation can provide technical assistance after award of the project. If you plan to receive Reclamation's assistance, you must account for these costs in your budget. To discuss available assistance and associated costs, contact the Program Coordinator identified in the [Have Questions](#) section above.

For more information regarding WaterSMART Drought Response Program, including previously funded projects and applications, visit <https://www.usbr.gov/drought/>.

### **Buy America Preferences for Infrastructure Projects**

This program has Federal funding for infrastructure projects. Buy America preferences apply to Federal awards for infrastructure projects in the United States. Reference [2 CFR Part 184 - Buy America Preferences for Infrastructure Project](#) for further guidance.

Projects funded under this NOFO are subject to the following Buy America preferences:

- All iron and steel products used in the project must be produced in the U.S., including beams, bars, rods, and tubing.
- All manufactured products must be made in the U.S., requiring substantial transformation and final assembly in the country.
- All construction materials, such as cement and concrete, must be sourced domestically.

Buy America preferences need to be taken into consideration when developing the project budget.

### **Legislative Authority**

Section 9504(a) of the Secure Water Act, Subtitle F of Title IX of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, Public Law (P.L.) 111-11 (42 United States Code [U.S.C.] 10364), as amended.

Title I of the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1999, P.L. 102-250, (43 U.S.C. Section 2201, et seq.), as amended.

### **Type of Award**

Projects will be funded through CA (Cooperative Agreement), G (Grant).

Recipient should expect the Federal agency to have substantial involvement in the project.

Awards will be made through a grant or cooperative agreement, depending on the project. If a cooperative agreement is awarded, the recipient should expect Reclamation to have substantial involvement in the project. This may include collaboration or participation in the management of the project and/or review, input, and approval during implementation of the project.

## **PREPARE YOUR APPLICATION**

### **Application Content and Format**

#### **Pre-Application Requirements**

Prior to applying, applicants should review presidential actions found at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/> and DOI Secretary's Orders found at: <https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order>. By applying in response to this Notice of Funding Opportunity, the applicant certifies awareness and compliance with all currently effective and applicable executive orders and secretary's orders, including, but not limited to the Executive Order titled *Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing* as well as the Executive Order and Secretary's order titled *Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History*. Applicants are responsible for ensuring their proposed activities are consistent with the intent and requirements of these directives.

To be eligible under this NOFO for a Drought Contingency Plan, applicants must participate in a technical consultation with the Reclamation Drought Coordinator before submitting an application. During this technical consultation, the Reclamation Drought Coordinator will discuss the six required elements of a drought plan or plan update (as outlined in Attachment C), planning steps, and eligible tasks. Reclamation reserves the right to remove an application from consideration if a technical consultation was not completed. To schedule a technical consultation, contact the program coordinator identified in [Have Questions](#).

## Application Documents

Applicants must submit the following forms with their application as specified below. Instructions for accessing and submitting application forms are provided in the [Submission Instructions](#) section of this document below. For instructions on completing form fields, see the form instructions on the [Grants.gov Forms Repository](#).

| Forms/Assurances/Certifications                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Submission Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance<br><br>Note: For applicants requesting more than \$100,000 in Federal funds, the Authorized Representative's signature (or electronic equivalent) on the Application for Federal Assistance form also represents their certification of the statements in <a href="#">Appendix A to 43 CFR 18-Certification Regarding Lobbying</a> | Required from all applicants                                                                                                                                                                            |
| SF-424A, Budget Information – Construction and Non-Construction Programs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Required for construction and non-construction projects                                                                                                                                                 |
| SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Required if requesting more than \$100,000 in Federal funds <u>and</u> the applicant has used or plans to use funds other than Federal appropriated funds for lobbying related to the proposed project. |
| Project Abstract Summary (OMB 4040-0019). Must include, in plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Award purpose,</li><li>• Activities to be performed,</li><li>• Expected deliverables or outcomes,</li><li>• Intended beneficiaries,</li><li>• Subrecipient activities (if known or specified at time of award)</li></ul>                                   | Required from all applicants                                                                                                                                                                            |

### SF-424A Budget Information

Reclamation uses the SF-424A for both construction and non-construction programs. The SF-424A should be fully filled out, including both the costs that will be paid with Federal funds and those that will be paid with the non-Federal funds. In Section D of the SF-424A – Forecasted Cash Needs, applicants do not have to project cash needs by quarter. Instead, include all costs in the first quarter of the first year and enter “0” in all other fields of Section E – Budget Estimates of Federal Funds Needed for Balance of the Project.

### Project Abstract Summary

Failure to include a Project Abstract Summary will not result in removal of the proposal from consideration by Reclamation.

## **Project Narrative**

The Project Narrative, including responses to the [Merit Review Criteria](#) shall be limited to a maximum of **35** consecutively numbered pages. If this section exceeds **35** pages, only the first **35** pages will be evaluated. **The full application, including all attachments, should not exceed 100 pages. If the application exceeds 100 pages, only the first 100 pages will be considered in the merit review.**

The font should be at least 12 points in size and easily readable. Page size shall be 8½ by 11 inches, including charts, maps, and drawings. Margins should be standard 1-inch margins. Oversize pages will not be accepted.

The Project Narrative should include the components described below. Applicants should only describe the work that is reflected in the budget - do not include activities that are already complete or will be completed in a future phase.

## **Title Page**

Provide a brief, informative, and descriptive title for the proposed work that indicates the nature of the project. Include the name and address of the applicant, and the name and address, e-mail address, and telephone of the Project Manager.

## **Table of Contents**

List all major sections of the proposal in the table of contents.

## **Executive Summary**

The executive summary should include:

- The date, applicant name, city, county, and state.
- The Task Area (Task A or B) under which you are applying.
- Applicant Category: Indicate whether you are a Category A applicant or Category B applicant. If you are a Category B applicant, please briefly explain how you are acting in partnership with a Category A partner. Note: If you are a Category B applicant, you must include a letter from the Category A partner confirming that they are partnering with you and agree to the submittal and content of the application (see the [Eligible Applicants](#) section). See the [Letter of Partnership \(Category B Applicants\)](#) section for additional information.
- Length of time and estimated completion date for the proposed project (month/year).
- Whether or not the proposed project is located on a Federal facility.
- Relevant background information about the applicant and service area such as services provided, population served, irrigated acres served, crops grown in the project area, etc.
- **For Task A projects**, include details regarding the applicant's or applicant's Category A partner's water supplies. This should include water delivered or diverted from all water sources including water supply contracts, water rights, applicant or partner owned wells,

and any other long-term water supplies that are part of the water use portfolio (e.g., drainage from upstream users, reclaimed/recycled water, water transfer agreements). Include the 10-year average annual water supply from 2016 to 2025 (in acre-feet). Utilizing the following chart in your proposal is highly recommended:

| Year                                                                                         | Surface Water<br>Total<br>(acre-feet)* | Agency Groundwater (acre-<br>feet) | Recycled M&I<br>Water<br>(acre-feet) | Other<br>(acre-<br>feet) | Total<br>(acre-<br>feet) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2016                                                                                         |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| 2017                                                                                         |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| 2018                                                                                         |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| 2019                                                                                         |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| 2020                                                                                         |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| 2021                                                                                         |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| 2022                                                                                         |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| 2023                                                                                         |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| 2024                                                                                         |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| 2025                                                                                         |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| Total Annual Water Supply for 2016-2025 =                                                    |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |
| Average Annual Water Supply = _____ acre-feet<br>(Divide Total Supplies for 2016-2025 by 10) |                                        |                                    |                                      |                          |                          |

\*Include water transfers and exchanges that occur on a long-term basis. Exclude single year transfers.

- A short paragraph project summary that provides the location of the project, a brief description of the work that will be carried out, any partners involved, expected benefits, how those benefits relate to the water management issues you plan to address, and what planning document and objective the project supports. Include a description of drought conditions in the project area and how this project is expected to help alleviate impacts of those conditions or other concerns in the area. This information will be used to create a summary of your project for Reclamation's website if the project is selected for funding.
  - *Example:* The Southern San Joaquin Municipal Utility District, located in Delano, California, will convert 160 acres into spreading ponds for groundwater recharge. This will provide additional recharge capacity of approximately 5,560 acre-feet per year of water that can be recovered for later beneficial use. The San Joaquin Valley experiences severe drought conditions and reduced water deliveries. Increased recharge capacity can play a crucial role in alleviating impacts drought conditions, helping to ensure a more resilient water supply for the region. The

project is supported by the Poso Creek Integrated Regional Water Management Plan and the regional Drought Contingency Plan.

### **Project Location**

Provide detailed information on the proposed project location or project area including a map showing the geographic location. For example, [project name] is located in [state and county] approximately [distance] miles [direction, e.g., northeast] of [nearest town]. The project latitude is [##°##'N] and longitude is [###°##'W].

### **Technical Project Description**

Provide a comprehensive description of the technical aspects of your project, including the goals and objectives of the project and the approach for the on-the-ground project. This description should provide detailed information about the project materials and equipment including what is currently installed and a description of the upgrade being made. Include in your description the necessary site preparation, removal of materials, motorized and rotating equipment required for installation, site laydown and mobilization areas, and areas impacted by construction. This section provides an opportunity for the applicant to provide a clear description of the technical nature and installation process of the project and to address any aspect of the project that reviewers may need additional information to understand.

*Please do not include your project schedule and milestones here; that information is requested in response to the Merit Review Criterion D—Implementation and Results. In addition, please avoid discussion of the benefits of the project, which are also requested in response to Merit Review Criterion B-Project Benefits. This section is solely intended to provide an understanding of the technical aspects of the project.*

*If the work for which you are requesting funding is a phase of a larger project, please only describe the work that is reflected in the budget and exclude description of other activities or components of the overall project.*

### **Merit Review Criteria**

“[The Merit Review Criteria](#)” section provides a detailed description of each criterion and sub-criterion and points associated with each. The merit review criteria portion of the application should thoroughly address each criterion and sub-criterion in the order presented to assist in the complete and accurate merit review of the proposal.

***Copying and pasting the merit review criteria and sub-criteria in Project Narrative’s [Merit Review Criteria](#) into your applications is suggested to ensure that all necessary information is adequately addressed.***

### **Letters of Support:**

Attach all support letters from stakeholders at the end of your application (see Merit Review Criterion C). Letters of support will not be counted towards page limits.

## **Letter of Partnership (Category B Applicants)**

Category B applicants need to submit a Letter of Partnership from their eligible Category A partner, confirming their collaboration and agreement with the application. Ideally, this letter should be included with the application; however, if selected for an award, it must be received before the financial assistance agreement is finalized.

## **Budget Narrative**

Applicants must describe and justify items and costs listed in their budget. The budget narrative must identify the following cost items: total estimated costs, non-Federal cost share, third-party contributions, and any pre-award costs. Total project cost is the sum of all allowable costs, including required and voluntary cost share and third-party contributions.

Budget items must be:

- Reasonable, allowable, allocable, and necessary
- Compliant with [2 CFR §200 Subpart E](#) cost principles

Indirect Costs: Applicants must indicate in their budget narrative how they will charge indirect costs, including the rate to be applied:

- De Minimis Rate: If eligible, state if your organization is opting to use the de minimis rate of up to 15% of total modified direct costs. Entities that do not have a current Federal negotiated indirect cost rate (including provisional rate) may propose to use the de minimis rate. For more information, refer to [2 CFR 200.414\(f\)](#).
- Negotiated Rate: State if you will negotiate with your cognizant agency. If your organization has previously negotiated a rate, attach a copy of the most recently negotiated rate agreement (active or expired).

The budget narrative provides a written description of the costs included in each budget category on the SF-424A and how they were estimated. While the SF-424A gives the total cost for each category of the budget, the budget narrative gives the item by item breakdown for each category and shows the calculations used to derive the costs. The budget description serves two purposes: 1) it explains how the costs were estimated, and 2) it justifies the need for the cost. See Attachment B for Budget Narrative Guidance. Attachment A is a suggested format for capturing budget details to support the Narrative.

Pre-award costs (defined at [2 CFR 200.458](#)) are allowed, subject to Grant Officer approval. To be eligible, pre-award costs must be incurred after the posting date of this NOFO. Pre-award costs are at the applicant's risk. Successful applicants may submit requests for approval of pre-award costs to the awarding Grant Officer.

## **Program Cost Restrictions**

Proposal costs: The costs for preparing and submitting an application in response to this funding opportunity, including developing data necessary to support the proposal, are not eligible project costs and must not be included in the project budget.

Other project costs: The costs for the purchase of water or land, or to secure an easement other than a construction easement are not eligible project costs under this funding opportunity.

### **Environmental and Regulatory Compliance Costs**

Include costs in the budget for completing compliance activities for Federal environmental and cultural resources laws and regulations. Applicants should contact their [local Reclamation office](#) to discuss the compliance requirements and potential costs. If the project is selected for award, these costs will be reviewed for accuracy and adjusted as needed. See Administration and National Policy Requirements for additional detail.

Some of the projects funded under this NOFO typically incur high compliance costs (e.g., between \$30,000 and \$200,000 per project). In some cases, Reclamation may be able to complete a portion of its compliance activities without additional cost to the recipient. The actual amount of costs to the recipient associated with compliance will be identified while developing a final project budget for inclusion in the financial assistance agreement. If it is determined that the recipient will need to contribute funds for compliance costs, funds will be withheld from the grant agreement to cover such costs or will be incorporated into the budget as a cost-shared line item. If the recipient is responsible for covering a portion of the compliance costs, under no circumstance will the funds awarded exceed the amount allowable under this NOFO and cannot exceed what was requested in the application. If a portion of the amount budgeted in your application for compliance is not needed for compliance activities, that amount may be reallocated to other project costs during the process of developing a financial assistance agreement, so long as the non-Federal cost share contribution is maintained.

### **Conflict of Interest and Unresolved Matters Disclosures:**

If any actual or potential conflict of interest exists related to this project at the time of application, the applicant must provide sufficient information to support a program determination of significance per [2 CFR 1402.112](#). Refer to [2 CFR 200.112](#) Conflict of Interest and [2 CFR 200.113](#).

### **Overlap or Duplication of Effort Statement:**

Applicants must state in their application if the activities, costs, or time commitment of key personnel proposed in this application overlap with those in any other Federal proposal or award or not. If no overlap exists, include a statement to that effect. If any overlap exists, provide:

- Activities: Description any overlapping activities.
- Costs: Description of any overlapping costs.
- Time: Description of any overlapping key personnel time.
- A copy of any overlapping or duplicative proposal submitted to any other potential funding entity.
- Details on when any overlapping proposal was submitted, to whom, and the expected date of the funding decision.

### **Other Required Information**

### Letters of Commitment

Applicants should include letters of commitment from third-party cost share sources. Letters of commitment should identify the amount of funding committed, the date the funds are available, time constraints on the availability of funds, and any other funding contingencies.

## SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES

### Address to Request Application Package

Grants.gov contains a complete application kit to submit a full application in response to this NOFO. Instructions for the Grants.gov application process are [available here](#). Contact Alisha James at [bor-sha-fafoa@usbr.gov](mailto:bor-sha-fafoa@usbr.gov) if you are unable to access the application materials electronically.

Proposals received after the application deadline will not be considered unless it can be determined that the delay was caused by Reclamation or there were technical issues with [Grants.gov](#). To document a delay due to a technical issue in Grants.gov, you must furnish a Grants.gov helpdesk ticket number to the NOFO team that validates the delay. Difficulties related to an applicant's Grants.gov profile (e.g., incorrect organizational representative), uploading documents to Grants.gov, or an applicant's SAM.gov registration are not considered technical issues with the Grants.gov system.

### Submission Dates and Times

**Closing Date for Applications:** 07/28/2026

#### Closing Date Explanation

**July 28, 2026, 4:00 p.m. Mountain Daylight Time (MDT)**

### Submission Instructions

#### Apply Through Grants.gov

To apply through [Grants.gov](#), please follow the instructions in the [Quick Start Guide for Applicants](#). Before applying, ensure that at least one person at your organization is registered and has the Authorized Organization Representative (AOR). Only the AOR can submit the application. If you need more users, they must create their own Grants.gov account. Follow these steps below to apply:

- *Create a Workspace:* Creating a workspace allows you to complete it online and route it through your organization for review before submitting.
- *Complete a Workspace:* Invite participants to the workspace so you can collaborate on the application. Required applications forms are included in the Grants.gov Funding Opportunity Package and can be completed in the Workspace, unless noted otherwise in the Required Forms table above. Check for errors before submission.
- *Submit a Workspace:* An application may be submitted through workspace by clicking the Sign and Submit button on the Manage Workspace page, under the Forms tab
- *Track a Workspace Submission:* After successfully submitting a workspace application, a Grants.gov Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) is automatically assigned to the application.

The system generates a date and time stamp and sends it to the applicant's AOR via email as proof of submission. Make sure your application passes the Grants.gov validation checks. Do not encrypt, zip, or password-protect any files. Only registered individuals in SAM as both a user and an AOR can submit applications. Please allow 30 days to register in Grants.gov.

**Application System Technical Support:** For Grants.gov technical registration and submission, downloading forms, and application packages, contact Grants.gov Customer Support at 1-800-518-4726 or by email at [Support@grants.gov](mailto:Support@grants.gov).

Applicants can submit a hard copy application by U.S. Mail or express delivery to the addresses below.

By mail or United States Postal Service overnight services:

Bureau of Reclamation  
Financial Assistance Operations Section  
Attn: NOFO Team  
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27133  
Denver, CO 80225

By all other express delivery and courier services:

Bureau of Reclamation mail services  
Attn: NOFO Team  
Denver Federal Center  
Bldg. 67, Rm. 152  
6th Avenue and Kipling Street  
Denver, CO 80225

Please notify the Reclamation Financial Assistance Contact listed in the "Basic Information" section by 2:00 PM MT on the submission date to confirm the hard copy submission.

## APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

### Eligibility Review

During the eligibility review, the application is checked for timely submission, completed packages (see [Application Documents](#) above) and alignment with the requirements of this announcement. The Federal agency may remove an application if it does not pass the eligibility review.

Applications will be removed if they do not include:

- Completed SF-424 and SF-424A forms

- SAM registration, with a valid UEI (unless an exemption at 2 CFR 25.110 applies, see below)
- A project narrative
- A budget narrative

If an applicant selected for funding hasn't finished their SAM.gov registration (see [2 CFR 25.200](#) and [2 CFR 25.110](#)) when the federal agency is ready to make an award, we may decide that the applicant is ineligible for the award and choose to grant it to someone else. Please refer [2 CFR 25.205](#) for more information.

Prior to making an award, the DOI checks the anticipated recipient and their key project personnel against the current list of prohibited or restricted persons or entities in the System for Award Management (SAM.gov) Exclusions database. We are prohibited from making an award if a recipient or any key personnel are found ineligible, prohibited, restricted, or otherwise excluded from receiving or participating in an award, as their ineligibility condition applies to this program.

If removed from consideration for ineligibility, the Federal agency will notify the applicant in writing.

## Merit Review

The merit review criteria should be addressed in the Project Narrative. Applications should thoroughly address each criterion and any sub-criterion in the order presented below. Applications will be evaluated against the merit review criteria listed below. It is recommended that applicants directly copy and paste the criteria in their application, answering applicable questions to their project and removing any irrelevant merit review questions.

| <b>Merit Review Criteria Scoring Summary</b>          | <b>Points:</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| A. Severity of Drought Conditions and Impacts         | <b>15</b>      |
| B. Project Benefits                                   | <b>20</b>      |
| C. Planning and Support                               | <b>10</b>      |
| D. Readiness to Proceed and Project Implementation    | <b>15</b>      |
| E. Nexus to Reclamation                               | <b>5</b>       |
| F. Presidential and Department of Interior Priorities | <b>20</b>      |
| G. Construction Priority                              | <b>10</b>      |
| H. Cost Share Priority                                | <b>5</b>       |
| <b>Total</b>                                          | <b>100</b>     |

*Note: Projects may be prioritized to ensure balance among the program task areas and to ensure that the projects address this NOFO's goals and objectives.*

### Merit Review Criterion A: Severity of Drought and Impacts (15 points)

Up to **15 points** may be awarded based upon the severity of actual or potential drought impacts **to be addressed by the project**. Proposals should focus on local drought impacts to water supplies, industries, and users which the project will directly address. Proposals that focus on local conditions versus statewide conditions will be given higher consideration on this criterion. In addition, proposals that address more urgent needs will receive higher priority consideration on this criterion than proposals that address less significant needs and impacts.

- **Describe recent, existing, or potential drought conditions in the project area.**
  - Is the project in an area that is currently suffering from drought or water scarcity, or which has recently suffered from drought or water scarcity? Describe existing conditions, including when and the period of time that the area has experienced drought or water scarcity conditions. Include information to describe the frequency, duration, and severity of current or recent conditions. You may provide information relating to historical conditions. Please provide supporting documentation (e.g., Drought Monitor, [droughtmonitor.unl.edu](http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu)).
  - Describe any projected increases to the severity or duration of drought in the project area. Provide supporting documentation for your response.
- **Describe the local impacts of drought.**
  - What are the ongoing or potential drought impacts to specific sectors in the **project area** (e.g., impacts to agriculture, environment, hydropower, recreation, tourism, forestry), and how severe are those impacts? **Impacts should be quantified and documented to the extent possible.** For example, impacts could include, but are not limited to:
  - Whether there are social concerns (e.g., public health, food security, loss of livelihoods and incomes) associated with current or potential conditions (e.g., water quality concerns, potential shortages of drinking water supplies).
  - Whether there are ongoing or potential environmental impacts affecting vegetation, water quality, wildlife, and ecosystems.
  - Whether there are local or economic losses associated with current water conditions that are ongoing, occurred in the past, or could occur in the future (e.g., business, agriculture, reduced real estate values).
  - Whether there are other water-related impacts not identified above (e.g., tensions over water that could result in a water-related crisis or conflict).

### Merit Review Criterion B: Project Benefits (20 points)

Up to **20 points** may be awarded based on the expected drought resiliency and other benefits of the proposed project. The following criteria will be used to prioritize proposals that demonstrate that project benefits and increased water yield will address the identified impacts in Criterion A. Proposals containing a well-supported and detailed description of both quantifiable and qualitative benefits will receive the most points under this criterion.

**Task A projects will be evaluated under sub-criterion B.1. Task B projects will be evaluated under sub-criterion B.2. Only respond to sub-criterion relevant to the project task area.**

**Task A: Sub-criterion B.1. - Project Benefits**

This section of the criterion is to assess the significance of the project in advancing drought through augmenting and diversifying water supplies, thus improving water supply reliability.

- What is the estimated quantity of additional supply the project will provide, and how was this estimate calculated? Clearly state this quantity in acre-feet per year (AFY) as the average annual benefit over ten years (e.g., if the project captures flood flows in wet years, state this and provide the average benefit over ten years or longer including dry years).
- What percentage of the total water supply does the project's water yield represent? How was this estimate calculated? Use the 10-year average that was presented in the Executive Summary to calculate this percentage. It is recommended to use the following chart:

|                                                                                              |  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Total Project Water Yield in AFY</b>                                                      |  |
| <b>Average Annual Water Supply in AFY</b><br>(From Table in Executive Summary)               |  |
| <b>Percentage Yield</b><br>(Divide Total Project Water Yield by Average Annual Water Supply) |  |

*Example: The project water yield is 10,000 AFY. The average annual supply is 200,000 AFY. The percentage of the total water supply is  $10,000/200,000 = 5\%$*

- How will the project build long-term resilience to drought? Include factors such as the predictability of supply, variability in availability, and the likelihood of interruptions or failures.
- Describe the water users and/or sectors who will benefit from the project.
  - Are there intentional, direct environmental benefits that are expected to result from project implementation (e.g. fish screens, dedicated instream flows during dry periods, habitat improvements?) If so, quantify the direct benefits and provide reasonable support.
- How many years will the project continue to provide benefits?
  - Provide a qualitative description of the degree/significance of the benefits associated with the additional water supplies as it relates to the impacts discussed in Criterion A.
- How will the project supply help buffer against water shortages, reduce the need for emergency responses, and enhance the resilience of water systems?

**Groundwater recovery projects only:** Failure to address the following bullet points may result in the removal of your application from funding consideration:

- In AFY, what is the estimated capacity of the new well(s)? How was the estimate calculated?
- How much water do you plan to extract through the well(s), and how does this fit within and comply state or local laws, ordinances, or other groundwater governance structures applicable to the area?
- Will the well be used as a primary supply or supplemental supply when there is a lack of surface supplies?
- Does the applicant participate in an active recharge program contributing to groundwater sustainability?
- Provide information documenting that proposed well(s) will not adversely impact the associated aquifer (overdraft or land subsidence). This should include aquifer description, information on existing or planned aquifer recharge facilities, a map of the well location and other nearby surface water supplies, and physical descriptions of the proposed well(s) (depth, diameter, casing description, etc.). If available, information should be provided on nearby wells (sizes, capacities, yields, etc.), aquifer test results, and if the area is currently experiencing aquifer overdraft or land subsidence.
- Describe the groundwater monitoring plan that will be undertaken and the associated monitoring triggers for mitigation actions. Describe how the mitigation actions will respond to or help avoid any significant adverse impacts to third parties that occur due to groundwater pumping.

#### **Task B: Sub-Criterion B.2.-Project Benefits**

This section of the criterion is to assess the extent of the benefits expected to occur upon implementation of the project or Drought Contingency Plan (collectively referred to as project) and how effective the project will be in building drought resilience, avoiding crises, or the need for emergency response during drought. Applications that include strong supporting information for the estimated project benefits will score higher.

- Describe the impacted water users and/or sectors who will benefit from the project.
- How will the project improve the management of water supplies? For example, will the project increase efficiency, increase operational flexibility, or facilitate water marketing (e.g., improve the ability to deliver water during drought or access other sources of supply?) If so, how will the project increase efficiency or operational flexibility for drought resiliency?
- How will the project or resulting information be applied, and who will use the project or data developed?
- Will the project make new information available to water managers? If so, what is that information and how will it improve water management? Provide a qualitative description of the degree/significance of the associated benefits.
- How soon following completion of the project will the project or information be able to be used?
- Describe how widespread and significant the project benefits are expected to be.

- Will the project help meet the water supply needs of a large geographic area, region, or watershed? If the project will not address the water supply needs of a large geographic area, why is the area significant and appropriate for the project?
- Are there intentional, direct environmental benefits that are expected to result from project implementation? If so, quantify the direct benefits and provide reasonable support.

### **Merit Review Criterion C: Planning and Support (10 points)**

Up to **10 points** may be awarded based on the extent to which the proposed project is supported by an existing collaborative effort or builds upon prior planning efforts and the extent to which the proposal demonstrates diverse stakeholder support for and/or involvement in the project.

**Task A projects will be evaluated under sub-criterion C.1. Task B projects will be evaluated under sub-criterion C.2. Only respond to sub-criterion relevant to the project task area.**

**Task A: Sub-Criterion C.1- Planning and Support -** Task A projects that are clearly supported by a previous drought planning effort that was inclusive of diverse stakeholder input will be awarded the most points under this criterion. *Note: Diverse stakeholders input includes a mix of entities internal and external to the applicant's organization (e.g., municipal, agricultural, recreational, environmental non-profits, landowners, Tribes, and state and local water management entities, among others.)*

While the proposed project may be supported by multiple planning efforts, please provide specific details related to only **one** relevant plan. If multiple plans are cited, **the Application Review Committee will only use the information regarding the first plan cited to evaluate this criterion.** Cited plans may include but are not limited to Drought Contingency Plans, Integrated Resource Water Management Plans, Urban or Regional Water Management Plans, Watershed or Basin Management Plans, Adaptation Plans, and Sustainable Water Management Plans.

Attach the sections of the plan referenced in the application as an appendix. These pages will be included in the 100-page maximum for the application. Provide clear citations to the relevant sections when answering the criteria below. Do not include links to external documents or websites, as the Application Review Committee will not review material outside the proposal package.

**Task A Plan Description and Objective:** Is your proposed project supported by a specific planning document? If so, identify the plan by name and describe the plan, including:

- When was the plan developed? How often is it updated?
- What is the purpose and objective of the plan?
- What is the geographic scope of the plan?
- Explain how the applicable plan addresses drought (e.g. contains a system for monitoring drought, drought response actions, drought vulnerability assessments, identification of drought mitigation projects).

**Task A Plan Development Process:** Was the plan developed through a collaborative process? Describe the process including the following:

- Who was involved in developing the plan? Identify specific entities or organization and describe their involvement.
- What stakeholders were involved in preparing the plan and do they represent diverse interests (e.g., agricultural, municipal, tribal, environmental, recreational interests)? Describe the process used for interested stakeholders to provide input during the development of the plan.
- If the plan was prepared by an entity other than the applicant describe whether and how the applicant was involved in the development of the plan or why they were not part of the planning process.
- Tribal Plans: For some Tribal plans, collaboration could include working with entities representing multiple interests within the Tribe (e.g., Tribal water agencies; Tribal fish and wildlife agencies, cities, or towns on Tribal land; Tribal fisheries, industries, or agriculture; and Tribal community members). For Tribal plans that were developed collaboratively with multiple Tribal interests, but did not include collaboration with external entities, provide an explanation as to why collaboration with entities external to the Tribe were not involved in the development of the strategy or plan.

**Task A Project Identification and Prioritization in Plan:** Is the proposed project identified by name and location as a potential drought mitigation or water management action?

- Is the project prioritized within the plan and if so, is it identified as a high, mid, or low priority project? Explain the methodology used to prioritize projects within a plan. Why are you choosing to implement this project over other projects in the plan?
- If the proposed project is not specifically identified in the plan, does the project clearly support a goal or need identified in the plan?

**Task A Stakeholder Support:** Provide specific details regarding any support and/or partners involved in the project. Please attach any relevant supporting documents (e.g., letters of support or memorandum of understanding).

- Does a diverse group of stakeholders support the project? What is the extent of other stakeholder or partner involvement in the project?
- Are any stakeholders providing support for the project through cost-share contributions or through other types of contributions to the project?

### **Task B: Sub-Criterion C.2- Planning and Support**

**Task B Previous Planning Efforts:** Identify any previous or on-going planning efforts related to the proposed project.

- Explain how any prior or on-going planning efforts relate to proposed project and how the proposed project adds value and builds on any prior or on-going planning efforts.
- Is the proposed project supported by an existing water planning effort or does it build upon other planning or management tools within the project area? If yes, describe in detail.

**Task B Stakeholder Involvement and Support:** Provide specific details regarding any support and/or partners involved in the project. Please attach any relevant supporting documents (e.g., letters of support or memorandum of understanding).

- Identify stakeholders in the project area who have *committed to be involved* in the project, and describe what sector(s) the participating stakeholders represent and how they will engage in this effort (e.g., will they contribute funding or in-kind services, or otherwise engage in the project development and implementation)?
- Provide documentation of the commitment by stakeholders to participate in the project. This could include letters from stakeholders committing to be involved; such letters should explain what their specific interest is and how they plan to participate.
- Describe stakeholders in the project area who have *expressed their support* for project, whether or not they have committed to participate.
- What will the applicant do during the planning or implementation process to ensure participation by a diverse array of stakeholders?
  - If some sectors are not yet represented, explain how this will be accomplished. Support could include a description of stakeholder interests in the project area, and what you will do to engage them (e.g., workshops, public meetings, or outreach tools such as using local media, outreach to known stakeholder groups, web-based outreach, social media, or other kinds of announcements).

### **Merit Review Criterion D: Readiness to Proceed and Project Implementation (15 points)**

Up to **15 points** may be awarded based upon the extent to which the proposed project is capable of proceeding upon entering into a financial assistance agreement.

Applications that include a detailed project implementation plan (e.g., design (if applicable), estimated project schedule that shows the stages and duration of the proposed work, including major tasks, milestones, and dates), contacted their local Reclamation office, and have initiated applicable environmental and cultural compliance will receive the most points under this criterion.

- Describe the implementation plan of the proposed project. Include an estimated project schedule that shows the stages and duration of the proposed work, including major tasks, milestones, and dates for completing the project within the applicable timeframe. Milestones may include but are not limited to preliminary and/or final design, environmental and cultural resources compliance, permitting, and construction/installation. See [Construction Start Date Limitations](#) when developing the project schedule.

**Example Milestone/Schedule:**

| <b>Milestone/Task/Activity</b>              | <b>Planned Start Date</b> | <b>Planned Completion Date</b> |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Task 1: Environmental Compliance            | April 2027                | April 2028                     |
| Task 2a: 60% Final Design                   | August 2027               | October 2027                   |
| Task 2b: 100% Final Design                  | October 2027              | February 2028                  |
| Task 3: Bidding                             | March 2028                | April 2028                     |
| Task 4: Construction of Recharge Pond       | May 2028                  | September 2028                 |
| Task 5: Installation of Conveyance Pipeline | September 2028            | December 2028                  |

- Describe any permits or approvals that will be required (e.g., water rights, water quality, stormwater, State Historical Preservation Office, other regulatory clearances). Include information on permits or approvals already obtained. For those permits and approvals that need to be obtained, describe the process, including estimated timelines for obtaining such permits and approvals.
- Identify and describe any engineering or design work performed specifically in support of the proposed project. If design work has commenced, what phase of design is the project current in (e.g., preliminarily or final and percentage-30%, 60%, 90%, or complete). If additional design is required, describe the planned process and timeline for completing the design. Projects that are further in design will receive more points.
- Describe any land purchases that must occur before the project can be implemented, and the status of the purchase. (While land purchases are not allowable costs under this NOFO, this information is still important to assess the readiness to proceed.)
- If the project is completely or partially located on Federal land or at a Federal facility, explain whether the agency supports the project and has granted access to the Federal land or facility, whether the agency will contribute toward the project, and why the Federal agency is not completing the project.
- Describe your approach to ensuring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and other applicable State and Federal laws for the proposed project. You are highly encouraged to contact your local Reclamation office to discuss the potential compliance requirements for your project and the associated costs.
  - Describe any archeological or culturally significant sites, as well as buildings, structures, and objects within the project area that have historic significance or appear on state or national registers.
  - Describe any threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat in the project area. Please refer to <https://ipac.ecosphere.fws.gov/> to help you identify.

**Drought Contingency Planning Projects Only - Address the following**

- Describe how each of the six required elements of a Drought Contingency Plan (Attachment C), as applicable, will be addressed within the project timeframe. If the proposal is for a plan update, please explain whether all or only some elements of the existing plan will be updated, and why. Include a preliminary project schedule that shows the stages and duration of the proposed work including major tasks, milestones, and dates. For each task and milestone, indicate who will have the primary responsibility for completion. Proposals that provide a detailed project schedule and budget, broken down by tasks and subtasks (e.g., six required elements) and separated by the responsible parties, will be prioritized.
- Describe the availability and quality of existing data and models applicable to the proposed plan or plan update. Your response to this sub-criterion should demonstrate your understanding of the tasks required to address the required elements of a Drought Contingency Plan under this program.
- Identify staff with appropriate technical expertise and describe their qualifications. Describe any plans to request additional technical assistance from Reclamation or by contract.

### **Merit Review Evaluation Criterion E. Nexus to Reclamation (5 points)**

Up to **5 points** may be awarded if the proposed project is connected to a Reclamation project or Reclamation activity. Previously awarded grants do not constitute as a nexus under this criterion.

Please consider the following:

- Does the applicant have a water service, repayment, or OM&R contract with Reclamation? If so, please provide the contract number(s), or is the applicant a Tribe?
- If the applicant is not a Reclamation contractor, does the applicant receive Reclamation water through a Reclamation contractor or by any other contractual means?
- Will the proposed work benefit a Reclamation project area, activity, or tribal trust responsibility?

### **Merit Review Evaluation Criteria F. Presidential and Department of Interior Priorities (20 Points)**

Up to **20 points** may be awarded based on the extent that the project demonstrably:

- advances the Trump Administration's priorities, including E.O. 14154: Unleashing American Energy, justifies alignment with priorities and requirements in E.O. 14332: Improving Oversight in Federal Grantmaking;
- includes primary project elements that develop, demonstrate, and or implement artificial intelligence (AI) technologies that advance the Trump Administration and Department of Interior's priorities for AI, including OMB M-25-21 Accelerating the Use of AI through Innovation, Governance, and Public Trust; S.O. 3444: Leading Interior's Path to Artificial Intelligence Transformation;
- aligns with Secretary Burgum's strategic objectives, including those identified in S.O.s 3417: Addressing the National Energy Emergency, 3418 Unleashing American Energy,

3419 Delivering Emergency Price Relief for American Families and Defeating the Cost-of-Living Crisis;

- aligns with goals and objectives in the U.S. Department of the Interior FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan; and
- supports water management and enhanced operational flexibility in Reclamation States, with priority given to the Colorado River Basin, which is experiencing long-term drought conditions.

**Please address only those priorities that are applicable to your project. All priorities will be given equal consideration.** A project will not necessarily receive more points simply because multiple priorities are addressed. Points will be allocated based on the degree to which the project supports, advances, or otherwise demonstrates an enhancement of one or more of the priorities identified, and whether the connection to the stated priority (or priorities) is (are) well supported.

### **Merit Review Evaluation Criteria G. Construction Priority (10 Points)**

Up to **10 points** may be awarded based on the extent that the proposed project is a construction project that can be completed within the allowable project duration. Projects that focus on construction of hard infrastructure to deliver durable, long-term improvements in water reliability and resilience will be prioritized. Hard infrastructure is tangible or built infrastructure. Please identify the hard infrastructure construction components of the project, if applicable.

### **Merit Review Evaluation Criteria H. Cost Share Priority (5 Points)**

Up to **5 points** may be awarded to proposals that include non-Federal cost share contributions exceeding the minimum by at least 5 percent. Projects with a higher non-Federal cost share may be awarded more points. State the percentage of non-Federal funding provided using the following calculation:

$$\text{Non-Federal Funding} / \text{Total Project Cost} = \%$$

See Cost Sharing Requirement and Budget Narrative for more information on cost-share requirements and eligible costs.

*Note: projects selected for award will have reported cost-share amounts verified. If reported cost share is found to be ineligible, there may be impacts to award. Accordingly, please ensure reported cost share amounts are accurate and eligible.*

### **Review and Selection Process**

This program reviews proposed budgets to ensure:

- figures are correct
- estimated costs are necessary and reasonable and clearly linked to project narratives
- avoid obviously unallowable costs

- identify costs requiring prior approval
- ensure indirect cost rates are applied correctly
- confirm cost sharing requirements are reflected in the budget.

This program reviews applications for potential overlap or duplication between the proposed project and any other funded or proposed project. Depending on the circumstances, DOI may choose to not make an award.

**Initial Review:** Prior to conducting the comprehensive merit review, an initial review will be performed to determine whether: (1) the applicant is eligible for an award; (2) the information required by the NOFO has been submitted; (3) all mandatory requirements of the NOFO are satisfied; (4) the proposed project is responsive to the program objectives of the NOFO (program determination); and (5) the proposed project is in compliance with all applicable executive and secretary orders, including the President’s executive order on *Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing* as well as the executive order and Secretary order on *Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History*. If an applicant fails to meet the requirements or objectives of the NOFO, or does not provide sufficient information for review, the applicant will be considered nonresponsive and eliminated from further review.

After the merit review, Reclamation conducts a “red-flag” review of top-ranking applications. During this review, Reclamation identifies any reasons a project would not be feasible or advisable, including environmental or cultural compliance, permitting, legal, financial, performance or other concerns. After the red-flag review, Reclamation conducts a “managerial review” of top-ranking applications. The managerial review prioritizes applications for selection based on the objectives of the NOFO. The review of applications will follow the requirements of E.O. 14332, such as ensuring review by senior appointees, and that selections demonstrably advance the President’s policy priorities consistent with applicable law. Geographic dispersion, project types, applicant types, previous award history, and applicant success in implementing Gold Standard Science (E.O. 14303) may be considered during the review. Selections are finalized once all reviews are complete, and all applicants are notified.

## Risk Review

Prior to making an award, the applicant will be assessed for their level of risk per [2 CFR 200.206](#). This assessment includes the applicant's financial management capabilities, project delivery experience, staffing resources, past award performance, administration and reporting compliance records, and overall project complexity and potential for challenges. If an award will be made, special conditions may be applied to the award corresponding to the assessed risk. For awards over the simplified acquisition threshold (currently \$350,000), a review of the applicant's eligibility and financial integrity information in the applicant's SAM.gov records will also be performed per [2 CFR 200.206](#).

A Reclamation Grants Officer conducts a detailed budget analysis and a business evaluation and responsibility determination. During this evaluation, the Reclamation Grants Officer will consider several factors, such as:

- Allowability, allocability, and reasonableness of proposed costs
- Financial strength and stability of the applicant

- Past performance, including satisfactory compliance with all terms and conditions of previous awards, such as environmental compliance, reporting requirements, and audit compliance
- Adequacy of personnel practices, procurement procedures, and accounting policies and procedures.

## AWARD NOTICES

Notices of Federal Award are sent electronically via GrantSolutions or e-mail. These notices outline the terms, conditions, and payment instructions per [2 CFR 200.211](#). The Notice of Federal Award signed by an authorized Grants Officer is the legal instrument obligating financial assistance to a recipient. Any other prior notice is not an authorization to begin work. If the program allows pre-award costs per [2 CFR 200.458](#), beginning performance before receiving a Notice of Federal Award is at the applicant's own risk.

**Anticipated Project Start Date:** 07/28/2027

**Anticipated Project End Date:** 10/03/2030

Reclamation anticipates contacting potential award recipients and unsuccessful applicants in Winter 2027, subject to the timing and amount of final appropriations. Reclamation will contact award recipients individually to discuss the time frame for the completion of their agreement. A webinar will be held for successful applicants within 30 days following their notice of selection to review next steps and pre-Financial Assistance Agreement procedures.

Reclamation may post successful applications on a Reclamation website, after necessary redactions, in consultation with the successful applicant.

## POST AWARD REQUIREMENTS AND ADMINISTRATION

### Administration and National Policy Requirements

For award administration and national policy requirements, see the [DOI General Terms and Conditions](#). Infrastructure projects require the use of American iron, steel, manufacture products, and construction materials per [2 CFR 184](#).

### Automated Standard Application for Payments Registration

All recipients must be registered with and willing to process all payments through the Department of Treasury Automated Standard Application for Payments (ASAP) system. All recipients with active financial assistance agreements with Reclamation must be enrolled in ASAP under the appropriate Agency Location Code(s) and UEI Number prior to the award of funds. If a recipient has multiple UEI numbers, they must separately enroll within ASAP for each unique UEI Number and/or Agency. If your entity is currently enrolled in the ASAP system with an agency other than Reclamation, you must enroll specifically with Reclamation in order to process payments. All the information on the enrollment process for recipients, will be sent to you by ASAP staff if selected for award.

## **Approvals and Permits**

Recipients shall adhere to Federal, State, Territorial, Tribal, and local laws, regulations, and codes, as applicable, and shall obtain all required approvals and permits. Recipients shall also coordinate and obtain approvals from site owners and operators, as applicable.

## **Environmental and Cultural Resources Compliance**

The recipient must comply with all applicable Federal, State, and local environmental, cultural, and paleontological resource laws and regulations. Data collections supporting compliance efforts must follow separate compliance procedures. **All projects will require compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Historic Preservation Act before any ground-disturbing activity may begin.**

Recipients are prohibited from any ground-disturbing activities (e.g., biological or water quality surveys, grading, clearing, excavation, and other preliminary or construction activities) on a project before environmental and cultural resources compliance is complete. A recipient that proceeds before environmental and cultural resources compliance is complete risks forfeiting funding. The Grant Officer will issue a Notice to Proceed that explicitly authorizes work to proceed once environmental and cultural resource compliance is complete.

## **Official Resolution**

Prior to award, the recipient must provide an official resolution adopted by the organization's governing body, or, for state government entities, an official authorized to commit the recipient to the financial and legal obligations of the financial assistance award. The official resolution verifies:

- The identity of the official with legal authority to enter into an agreement
- The board of directors, governing body, or appropriate official who has reviewed and supports the application submitted
- That the organization will work with Reclamation to meet established deadlines

## **Intangible Property**

Title to intangible property acquired under this agreement vests upon acquisition with the Recipient, however Reclamation reserves the right to obtain, publish, reproduce, or otherwise use and authorize others to use for Federal purposes in accordance with [2 CFR Part 200.315](#).

## **Real Property**

Real property, equipment, and intangible property that is acquired or improved with a Federal award must be held in trust by the recipient as trustee for the beneficiaries of the project or program under which the property was acquired or improved, per [2 CFR §200.316](#). Title to real property acquired or improved under a Federal award will vest upon acquisition in the recipient. Except as otherwise provided by Federal statutes or by the Federal awarding agency, real property will be used for the originally authorized purpose as long as needed for that purpose, during which time the recipient must not dispose of or encumber its title or other interests. When real property is no longer needed for the originally authorized purpose, the recipient must obtain disposition instructions from the Federal awarding agency or pass-through entity.

**Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)**

Please note that any application submitted for funding under this NOFO may be subjected to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request (5 U.S.C. §552, as amended by P.L. No. 110-175), and as a result, may be made publicly available.

In response to a FOIA request for research data relating to published research findings produced under a Federal award that were used by the Federal Government in developing an agency action that has the force and effect of law, the Federal awarding agency must request, and the recipient must provide, within a reasonable time, the research data so that they can be made available to the public through the procedures established under the FOIA.

**Requirements for Agricultural Operations under P.L. 111-11, Section 9504(a)(3)(B)**

In accordance with Section 9504(a)(3)(B) of P.L.111-11, financial assistance will not be awarded for an improvement to conserve irrigation water unless the recipient agrees to both of the following conditions:

1. Not to use any associated water savings to increase the total irrigated acreage of the recipient and
2. Not to otherwise increase the consumptive use of water in the operation of the recipient, as determined pursuant to the law of the state in which the operation of the recipient is located.

If the recipient is a Tribe, a financial assistance agreement will not be awarded unless the recipient agrees to not use any associated water savings to increase the total irrigated acreage or otherwise increase the consumptive use of water more than the water right of the Tribe, as determined by a court decree, a settlement, a law, or any combination of these authorities.

**Title to Improvements P.L.111-11, Section 9504(a)(3)(D)**

If the project results in a modification to a portion of a federally owned facility that is integral to the existing operations of that facility, the Federal government shall continue to hold title to the facility and the improvements thereto. Title to improvements, P.L.111-11, Section 9504(a)(3)(D) that are not integral to existing water delivery operations shall reside with the project sponsor.

**Operation and Maintenance Costs under P.L.111-11, Section 9504(a)(3)(E)(iv)**

The non-Federal share of the costs for operation and maintenance of any infrastructure improvement funded through an agreement awarded under this NOFO shall be 100 percent.

**Improvements to Federal Facilities**

Note that improvements to Federal facilities that are implemented through any project awarded funding must comply with additional requirements. Reclamation may also require additional reviews and approvals prior to award to ensure that any necessary easements, land use authorizations, or special permits can be approved and that the development will not impact or impair project operations or efficiency, consistent with the requirements of 43 CFR Section 429.

### **Liability under P.L.111-11, Section 9504(a)(3)(F)**

Except as provided under 28 U.S.C. Chapter 171 (commonly known as the Federal Tort Claims Act), the United States shall not be liable for monetary damages of any kind for any injury arising out of an act, omission, or occurrence that arises in relation to any facility created or improved through an agreement awarded under this NOFO, the title of which is not held by the United States.

### **Geospatial Data**

If you receive financial assistance from the Department of the Interior (DOI), recipient must follow these rules for geospatial data:

**Follow Federal Standards:** All geospatial data you collect or create must meet the standards set by the Federal Geospatial Data Committee (FGDC) or the Department of the Interior. This is required by the Geospatial Data Act of 2018, which is part of Public Law 115-254, specifically in Subtitle F (Geospatial Data), sections 751-759C (codified at [43 U.S.C. §§ 2801–2811](#)).

**Include Metadata:** Your Geographic Information Systems (GIS) files must include complete metadata. Metadata is information that describes the data, such as where it came from, how accurate it is, and how it should be used. This is to ensure that anyone using the data understands its context and quality.

**Check for Existing Data:** Before you start collecting new geospatial data, you need to check GeoPlatform.gov. This is to see if there is already existing geospatial data from federal, state, local, or private sources that can meet your needs and is available for free. If such data is available, you should use it instead of gathering new data.

These rules help ensure that geospatial data is reliable, high-quality, and that resources are used efficiently.

### **Reporting**

The recipient's Notice of Award will detail all reporting requirements, including frequency, due dates, and instructions for requesting extensions. In general, but not limited to, recipients must:

- Submit Federal Financial reports and Program Performance reports.
- Use the [Federal Financial Report \(SF-425\) form](#) for financial reporting.
- Monitor award activities and report on program performance per [2 CFR 200.329](#),
- Promptly notify the awarding program in writing of any issues, delays, or conditions impairing award objectives per [2 CFR 200.329\(e\)](#),
- Disclose any conflicts of interest related to their award that arise during the award period per [2 CFR 1402.112](#),
- Report on the status of real property acquired under the award in which the Federal government retains an interest per [2 CFR 200.330](#), and
- Report all violations of Federal criminal law involving fraud, bribery, or gratuity violations potentially affecting the Federal award per [2 CFR 200.113](#).

- Report any matters related to recipient integrity and performance to SAM.gov per [Appendix XII to 2 CFR 200](#).
- If the Federal share of the award is more than \$100,000 and the recipient makes or agrees to make any payment using non-appropriated funds for lobbying in connection to the award, disclose those activities using the Disclosure of Lobbying (SF-LLL) form per [43 CFR 18.100](#).
- Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 (FFATA) and 2 CFR 170 requires certain recipients to report information on executive compensation, and information on all sub-awards, subcontracts and consortiums equal to or over \$30,000 to SAM.gov.
- Report any required mitigation to lessen environmental impacts of the project.
- Recipients of Reclamation awards must include the following information in performance reports:
  - a comparison of actual accomplishments to the milestones established by the financial assistance agreement for the period,
  - the reasons why the project did not meet established milestones, if applicable,
  - the status of milestones not met from the previous reporting period, if applicable,
  - whether the project is on schedule and within the original cost estimate,
  - any additional pertinent information or issues related to the status of the project, and
  - photographs documenting the project (appreciated, although not required). Note: Reclamation may print photos with appropriate credit to the recipient.
  - Final reports are public documents and may be made available on Reclamation's website.

### **Other Information**

Reclamation will host a webinar to provide general information regarding this NOFO and answer questions. For more information regarding this NOFO, the general information webinar, and WaterSMART Drought Response Program, including previously funded projects and applications, visit <https://www.usbr.gov/drought/>.