

Fiscal Year 2021 NOAA Gulf of Mexico Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET)
 Program

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NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce (DOC)

Funding Opportunity Title: Fiscal Year 2021 NOAA Gulf of Mexico Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) Program

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-SE-2021-2006733

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.008, NOAA Mission-Related Education Awards

Dates: Applications must be received by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on February 26, 2021 to be considered for funding. Applicants should apply online through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).

Funding Opportunity Description: The National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office (Southeast Regional Office) is seeking proposals under the Gulf of Mexico Bay Watershed Education and Training (Gulf of Mexico B-WET) Program: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/noaa-gulf-mexico-bay-watershed-education-and-training-gulf-b-wet-program>.

The goal of Gulf of Mexico B-WET is to increase understanding and stewardship of the Gulf of Mexico watershed and its local population, geography, culture, and natural, financial, and human resources. To accomplish this, Gulf of Mexico B-WET funds locally relevant, authentic experiential learning for K-12 audiences through Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs) in Gulf of Mexico coastal communities.

MWEEs are learner-centered experiences that focus on investigations into local environmental issues that lead to informed stewardship actions. They are composed of multiple elements that include learning both outdoors and in the classroom, and are designed to increase the environmental literacy of all student participants. All students, regardless of where they live or their social or economic status, should have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from MWEEs.

This year, the Gulf of Mexico B-WET Notice of Funding Opportunity is modified to reflect the significant impact COVID-19 has had on the ability of environmental education providers to engage with schools and therefore meaningfully reach students and teachers. The resulting loss

of programs will have lasting repercussions on the targeted audiences of these programs and to the institutions who provide these services. The NOAA B-WET Program recognizes that support is needed to bridge this gap that has been created by the loss of revenue, the cancellation of programs, and the inequities that are being exacerbated by the pandemic.

As a major contributor to environmental education programs, the NOAA B-WET Program is committed to responding to the immediate needs of this pandemic and supporting these critical institutions that provide meaningful experiences for youth at all levels.

Given this, the FY21 Gulf of Mexico B-WET funding announcement focuses on the following priority areas: 1) Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences, 2) Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development with Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their students, and 3) Systemic Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience Implementation, and 4) Meaningful Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

For Gulf of Mexico B-WET, Applicants may be physically located in any U.S. state; however, education projects must target teachers and/or students in Gulf of Mexico coastal counties. For the purposes of this solicitation, the coastal counties of Gulf of Mexico states (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas) are defined and listed on page 48-49 of the following document: National Ocean Service, NOAA. 2011. The Gulf of Mexico at a Glance: A Second Glance. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, ftp://ftp.library.noaa.gov/noaa_documents.lib/NOS/state_of_coast/Gulf_of_Mexico_2011.pdf.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

a. OVERVIEW

Every year, the NOAA B-WET Program supports environmental education programs for thousands of students and teachers. These programs engage youth in meaningful watershed educational experiences that provide memorable hands-on, experiential learning that are not typically available within traditional classrooms. It also plays a significant role in providing professional development to classroom teachers nationwide that increases their content knowledge, skills, and pedagogical expertise.

However, this year, COVID-19 has significantly impacted the ability of environmental education providers to engage with schools and therefore meaningfully reach students and teachers. The loss of programs will have lasting repercussions on the targeted audiences of these programs and to the institutions who provide these services. The NOAA B-WET Program recognizes that support is needed to bridge this gap that has been created by the loss of revenue, the cancellation of programs, and the inequities that are being exacerbated by the pandemic.

With challenges though, come opportunities. School districts and their partners have a unique moment to reflect on and reevaluate environmental literacy programs and to move forward with increased direction, alignment, and commitment. For example, new learning and practices from recent shifts from in-person to virtual can be applied to enhance programs' sustainability and applicability. There is also a renewed recognition of the value of outdoor spaces to the health of students and communities.

As a major contributor to environmental education programs, the NOAA B-WET Program is committed to responding to the immediate needs of this pandemic and supporting these critical institutions that provide meaningful experiences for youth at all levels.

b. DEFINING THE BAY WATERSHED EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM

The NOAA Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program is an environmental education program that promotes locally-relevant, authentic experiential learning focused on K-12 audiences. B-WET was established in 2002 in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and currently exists in seven regions: Chesapeake Bay, Gulf of Mexico, New England,

California, Pacific Northwest, Hawaii, and Great Lakes. The primary delivery of B-WET is through competitive funding that promotes Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs).

Gulf of Mexico B-WET advances the goals of NOAA's Education Strategic Plan (<https://www.noaa.gov/education/explainers/noaa-education-strategic-plan>). It also addresses NOAA's Long Term Goal of Healthy Oceans: Marine fisheries, habitats, and biodiversity are sustained within healthy and productive ecosystems and NOAA's Engagement Enterprise Objective for An engaged and educated public with an improved capacity to make scientifically informed environmental decisions.

More information about the national B-WET program can be found at <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet>. Information on the Gulf of Mexico B-WET program, including examples of currently supported projects, can be found on NOAA's website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/noaa-gulf-mexico-bay-watershed-education-and-training-gulf-b-wet-program>.

c. DEFINING THE MEANINGFUL WATERSHED EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

MWEEs are learner-centered experiences that focus on investigations into local environmental issues that lead to informed stewardship actions. They are composed of multiple elements that include learning both outdoors and in the classroom, and are designed to increase the environmental literacy of all student participants. All students, regardless of where they live or their social or economic status, should have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from MWEEs.

The MWEE model applies multidisciplinary practices in order for students to understand how the environmental systems they are investigating relate to their community's social or cultural systems. MWEEs help connect students with their local environment and enable them to take actions and make decisions that contribute to stronger, sustainable, and equitable communities. These experiences, grounded in best practices for learning, academic standards, and the context of the local watershed and community, help increase student interest and engagement for learning, support student achievement, promote 21st Century skills, and achieve environmental stewardship.

The MWEE consists of four essential elements and four supporting practices that build upon each other to create this comprehensive learning experience for students. This process should be tailored to each audience and be age appropriate with practices growing in complexity and sophistication across the grades, starting with teacher-guided investigations and

progressing to student-led inquiry. Teachers should support and assist students in their inquiry and investigations of local environmental issues that are of interest to them throughout the MWEE. To support teacher implementation of MWEEs, B-WET has also included five practices that are recommended to be in place for teacher professional development activities.

NOAA adopted this definition of the MWEE to assist with the development of effective projects founded in best practices determined through environmental education evaluation and research. This definition builds on the work of the Chesapeake Bay Program Education Workgroup and is further informed by over a decade of B-WET project implementation and evaluation work across the country. While these criteria represent standard national guidelines, each B-WET regional program will continue to craft and refine its own priorities that build on this MWEE definition and are tailored to the local population, geography, culture, and natural, financial, and human resources.

More information about the MWEE can be found at the following link:

<https://www.noaa.gov/education/explainers/noaa-meaningful-watershed-educational-experience>

1. MWEE Essential Elements

The MWEE consists of four essential elements that describe what students do. These elements promote a learner-centered approach that emphasizes the role of the student in actively constructing meaning from the learning experiences. The order of the elements depends on project design and is not always linear. For example, some elements, such as Synthesis and conclusions, should occur repeatedly throughout the MWEE.

1.1. Issue Definition

Teachers and students work together to define a locally relevant environmental issue or phenomenon affecting watershed, coastal, or ocean ecosystems. Throughout the MWEE, students focus on a driving question that guides their inquiry and investigations of the defined issue and leads to stewardship actions. During Issue Definition, students learn about the issue through classroom instruction and are actively involved in planning and conducting background research and investigations focused on understanding the driving question (e.g., making observations and/or measurements; carrying out investigations; talking to experts or relevant stakeholders; reviewing credible resources; reviewing current environmental policies or community practices; exploring models; using tools). Students also reflect on personal and public values and perspectives related to the driving question. Teachers should ensure that the driving question is open-ended, relevant to the students' lives, and meets their learning objectives.

1.2. Outdoor Field Experiences

Students participate in multiple outdoor field experiences sufficient to investigate the driving question. Within appropriate safety guidelines, students are actively involved in planning and conducting the field investigations, including developing supporting questions to explore the driving question in the field. During field experiences, students use their senses to make first-hand observations, gain experience using equipment or technology to collect data or measurements, and conduct experiments necessary to answer their supporting questions and inform student stewardship actions.

Outdoor field experiences can take place on school grounds or at locations in close proximity to schools, such as streams or city parks. They can also take place at offsite locations such as state parks, wildlife refuges, or education centers that are staffed by experts and have access to field education materials and facilities. A range of individuals, including teachers, environmental educators, natural resource professionals, or trained volunteers, can help facilitate field experiences and ensure a safe outdoor learning environment. However, facilitators should co-develop and co-teach instruction with teachers so that field experiences are supportive of their learning objectives and/or academic standards.

Outdoor field experiences allow students to interact with their local environment and contribute to learning in ways that traditional classroom or laboratory settings may not. Projects should employ methodologies used in fieldwork so students learn how to work in a natural uncontrolled environment. Students who have opportunities to learn in, thrive in, and appreciate the outdoors can become informed and engaged champions for our natural resources.

1.3. Synthesis and Conclusions

Students identify, synthesize, and apply evidence from their investigations to draw conclusions about the defined issue or phenomenon. They demonstrate understanding of their investigations and conclusions through communication to a variety of audiences such as other classrooms, schools, parents, or the community.

Synthesis and conclusions is an iterative process and should happen regularly throughout the MWEE. Throughout the process, teachers dedicate time for students to reflect on their experiences and investigations in relation to the defined issue or phenomenon. Teachers should facilitate students sharing their conclusions with each other. Students' conclusions should be used to help develop stewardship actions.

1.4. Stewardship Actions

Students identify and implement a stewardship action as a solution that directly addresses the defined issue or phenomenon within their school, town, neighborhood, or community. Students are actively engaged and, to the extent possible, drive the decision-making, planning, and implementation of the stewardship action while teachers play a facilitation role by forming groups, moderating, and answering questions. Students reflect on the action and determine the extent to which the action successfully addressed the issue or phenomenon.

This element allows students to understand that they personally have the power to bring about change to environmental issues, take action to address these issues at the personal or societal level, and understand the value of that action. This can instill confidence in students and can contribute to students becoming environmental stewards in their communities.

Stewardship actions can take many forms and may fall into the following categories:

> Watershed Restoration or Protection: actions that assist in the recovery or preservation of a watershed or related ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed (e.g., plant or restore protective vegetation/trees; restore a local habitat; remove invasive plants; clean up litter at local beaches, parks, or school grounds; develop a school garden, natural history area, community garden, or other sustainable green space; install rain gardens to help manage stormwater).

> Everyday Choices: actions that reduce human impacts on watersheds and related ecosystems and offer ways to live more sustainably (e.g., reduce/reuse/recycle/upcycle; monitor and save water in the face of potential drought or reduction in water availability; compost food or yard waste; research and implement energy efficient strategies or energy alternatives at school and/or at home).

> Community Engagement: actions that inform others about how to address community-level environmental issues (e.g., give presentation to local organizations; organize community events; record or broadcast public service announcements; share information on social media; post flyers in community; share posters at community events/fairs/festivals; mentoring).

> Civic Action: actions that identify and address issues of public concern. Students acting alone or together to protect public values or make a change or difference in a student's school, town, neighborhood, or community (e.g., present to school board or school principal; attend, speak, or present at town meetings; write or meet with decision makers/elected officials of a students' school, town, neighborhood, or community).

2. MWEE Supporting Practices

The MWEE also includes four supporting practices that describe what teachers do. B-WET recommends that these supporting practices be in place to ensure successful MWEE implementation with students.

2.1. Active Teacher Support

MWEEs depend on teachers facilitating and supporting student learning for the duration of the MWEE. Teachers help students make connections and draw on past lessons, serve as environmental role models, and ensure that the essential elements of the MWEE come together to support goals for learning. Even when environmental educators or other professionals are leading elements of the MWEE, the teacher should be actively engaged in answering questions and relating the experience back to the full arc of the MWEE.

To support this level of engagement, teachers should have access to professional development opportunities that support their content knowledge, understanding of the MWEE framework, and confidence and intention to implement MWEEs independently (see Teacher Professional Development for MWEEs for specifics).

2.2. Classroom Integration

To be effective, MWEEs need to be embedded into what is already occurring in the classroom. MWEEs should be anchored to state and national academic standards and support goals for learning and/or student achievement. They are not meant to be something extra, but rather an educational approach that helps teachers meet their learning objectives. They can provide authentic, engaging interdisciplinary learning that crosses traditional boundaries between disciplines. Out-of-school activities (e.g., after-school clubs; summer camps) may provide MWEEs, or complement and enrich traditional classroom-based MWEEs.

2.3. Local Context

MWEEs use the local environment and community as a context for learning. Situating the MWEE within local contexts promotes learning that is rooted in the unique culture, history, environment, economy, literature, and art of a students' school, neighborhood, town, or community. To enrich MWEEs, local resources (e.g., partners; expertise; field sites) should be incorporated. Partnerships, such as those with local community-based organizations, allow students to engage with members of their community of diverse cultures, values, and expertise for a more equitable and inclusive experience.

Emphasizing local contexts enables students and teachers to develop stronger connections and appreciation for their local environments and communities. This also enables students and teachers to explore how their individual and collective decisions affect their immediate surroundings and how their immediate surroundings affect larger ecosystems and

watersheds.

2.4. Sustained Learning Experience

MWEEs have multiple experiences that engage students from beginning to end. While a lesson may focus more heavily on one essential element, it does not stand in isolation from the others. Each essential element builds upon and reinforces the others to provide rich learning opportunities spread over the course of a unit or multiple units. All students should have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from each essential element.

3. Teachers MWEE Professional Development Practices

Professional development should empower teachers to confidently and competently use the MWEE approach to support standards-based learning that aligns with local education agency initiatives. In order to gain and maintain environmental education competencies, teachers benefit from sustained, high quality professional development that includes ongoing support and feedback. Teachers should gain confidence in the value of MWEEs and strategies for conducting them so that they will be able to implement MWEEs after the professional development has ended. Specifically, the following practices are recommended for professional development to support teachers implementing MWEEs.

3.1. Increases teachers' knowledge and awareness of environmental issues

Teachers must have an adequate level of content knowledge for their MWEE topic area specific to their grade level and discipline, including an understanding of their local watersheds, interactions between natural systems and social systems, and human impacts on local watersheds and larger Earth systems. Recognizing that environmental issues often include different perspectives and opinions, teachers must also have a deep understanding of the facts related to environmental issues, along with an understanding of the various stakeholder values. In addition, teachers who demonstrate environmentally responsible attitudes and behaviors may be role models for their students and increase their ability to guide students in stewardship actions to address complex environmental issues.

3.2. Models MWEE framework

Facilitators should utilize the same techniques and experiences in professional development that teachers are expected to use with their students, such as hands-on outdoor field experiences, critical thinking about environmental issues, and stewardship actions. Professional development should also provide opportunities for teachers to understand the goals and rationale behind the MWEE as an approach to learning and stewardship. Professional development should deliver workshops on both MWEE content and instruction, include ongoing support for teachers, and include time for teachers to plan for how the student MWEEs will be implemented.

3.3. Allows for adequate instructional time

Professional development should be multi-day, occurring consecutively or over the course of several weeks or months. Professional development should include ample opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices and plan for how to use knowledge and skills gained from professional development in the classroom. Opportunities to share ideas and challenges with colleagues in a cohort creates space for dialogue that can provide teachers with additional support and inspiration.

3.4 Provides ongoing teacher support and appropriate incentives

Even in cases where teachers participate in robust multi-day workshops, such as summer or weekend courses, it is still essential that professional development providers have a structure in place for on-going teacher support and enrichment. This can take the form of follow up meetings, creating web-based forums for communication and feedback, establishing mentor teachers who can serve as points of contact, or including teams of teachers from one particular school. Continuing education credits and stipends can be used to encourage participation in on-going professional development opportunities. Outreach and training opportunities for school administrators may help increase high level support for both environmental education and continuing teacher professional development for teachers.

3.5. Meets jurisdictional guidelines for effective teacher professional development

Each jurisdiction has established guidance and recommendations relevant to all forms of teacher professional development. When possible, professional development opportunities for MWEEs should adhere to these general guidelines set forth by local education agencies.

d. RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE MEANINGFUL WATERSHED EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The following resources explain the Meaningful Watershed Education Experience (MWEE) and provide guidance on implementing a MWEE. Though some of the following resources are Chesapeake Bay-focused, the information provided is highly applicable to MWEEs implemented in the Gulf of Mexico.

> MWEE descriptive webpages: <https://www.noaa.gov/education/explainers/noaa-meaningful-watershed-educational-experience>. The full definition of the MWEE is provided online in an easy to use online format.

> Bay Backpack MWEE webpages: <http://baybackpack.com/mwee/what-is-a-mwee>. Bay Backpack is an online resource that supports hands-on environmental learning. By providing

educators with information about field studies, and curriculum guides and lesson plans, Bay Backpack helps educators find the tools they need to give their students MWEEs.

> An Educator's Guide to the MWEE:

http://baybackpack.com/assets/documents/Educators_Guide_to_MWEE_Download.pdf.

This guide provides basic tools to help think, plan, and evaluate a MWEE. It has been designed for users with varying levels of familiarity with the MWEE. It defines and explains the MWEE, guides you through creating a solid plan that connects a MWEE to the curriculum, helps you identify opportunities to build on existing MWEEs and assess success, and provides guidance on communicating MWEE successes and securing funding.

> MWEE 101 training: <https://cbexapp.noaa.gov/course/view.php?id=5555>. This is an online course for the MWEE and is made up of three lessons: Why MWEEs, What Makes a MWEE, and Planning and Evaluating MWEEs. These lessons will introduce you to the MWEE, explore what MWEEs can look like, highlight the MWEE's components, and introduce the tools that support the development and implementation of MWEEs.

> School Grounds for Learning: http://baybackpack.com/schoolyard_projects/about. This resource supports the development and continued use of integrated, sustainable indoor and outdoor environmental learning projects on school grounds.

B. Program Priorities

a. GULF OF MEXICO ALLIANCE PRIORITIES

The NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program responds to regional education and environmental priorities through local implementation. Therefore, applications are asked to employ MWEEs that address the priorities outlined by the major regional policy workgroup, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. The Gulf of Mexico Alliance is a partnership of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, with the goal of significantly increasing regional collaboration to enhance the ecological and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. The five U.S. Gulf States have identified six priorities that are regionally significant and can be effectively addressed through increased collaboration at local, state, and federal levels.

Gulf of Mexico Alliance Priorities:

- > Water quality for healthy beaches and shellfish beds
- > Wetland and coastal conservation and restoration
- > Environmental education
- > Identification and characterization of Gulf habitats

- > Reducing nutrient inputs to coastal ecosystems
- > Coastal community resiliency

For more information about these priorities please visit the Gulf of Mexico Alliance website at: <http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org/>.

b. GULF OF MEXICO B-WET PRIORITY AREAS

Proposals MUST address one of the following B-WET priority areas: (1) Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences; (2) Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development with long-term classroom- integrated Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their students; (3) Systemic Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences Implementation, or (4) Meaningful Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Each of these four B-WET priority areas is described below.

Please note, unlike previous years' opportunities, the Gulf of Mexico FY21 Notice of Funding Opportunity does not include a priority for Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for Students only.

This year applicants may be struggling to deal with uncertainty related to COVID-19 on programming. Applicants should describe how their methods and programming will be adapted to address all MWEE elements, to the degree possible, while being responsive to guidelines and restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic. Proposals may detail a range of approaches to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions and uncertainty impacting schools throughout the watershed. It is understood that adjustments and alternate approaches will likely be different from the traditional MWEE approach of past projects.

Specifically, applicants should:

- > Know audience limitations: Because pandemic restrictions and limitations vary by jurisdiction, school, and household, applicants should demonstrate awareness of their target audiences' capabilities (such as access to the technology needed to participate in virtual programming). Applicants should describe planned communication with school partner administrative staff about how best to engage their audiences.

- > Describe alternate methods: Applicants should provide options and examples of how the MWEE framework can be addressed through alternative approaches and methods, such as virtual, blended, or at-home, or in-person learning, and remote stewardship activities.

> Describe project flexibilities: Because pandemic responses are fluid over time, applicants should describe what flexibilities their project plan possesses and their ability to adjust methods mid-stream, if needed, and still carry on their project plan. Applicants may describe more than one scenario in their proposal, however the objectives of the scenarios should aim for a common outcome.

1. Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences

The NOAA B-WET Program seeks proposals for projects that provide teachers opportunities for professional development in the area of environmental education. Professional development should empower teachers to confidently and competently use the MWEE approach to support standards-based learning that aligns with local education agency initiatives. Long-term professional development opportunities will reinforce a teacher's ability to teach, inspire, and lead young people in exploring current critical issues that impact the watershed resulting in thoughtful stewardship of our natural resources. In order to gain and maintain environmental education competencies, teachers benefit from sustained, high quality professional development that includes ongoing support and feedback. Projects should be designed so that teachers are capable of conducting a MWEE and provide the resources and technical support needed to implement an experience in their classroom. Proposals submitted under this area should be designed so that teachers not only understand what a MWEE is, but why this type of pedagogy is important. The goal is to ensure that professional development experiences for the teacher ultimately benefit the student.

Proposals submitted under this area should address the specific elements and types of activities that define Professional Development for Teachers related MWEEs (see section I.A.c.).

2. Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development and Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their Students

The NOAA B-WET program seeks proposals for exemplary projects that combine Teacher Professional Development with long-term classroom-integrated MWEEs for their Students. Long-term professional development for teachers coupled with multiple MWEEs for students that are fully supported in the classroom by their teachers will ensure that the concepts of watershed education are fully reinforced throughout the school year. Exemplary projects should have a 24-month project period. Projects should focus on teacher professional development in year one, and implementation of student MWEEs in year two. This recommendation is made due to the fact that teacher audiences may be easier to reach

than students during the pandemic and in the initial recovery. Teachers also have a high need for resources that they can apply immediately to their modified school programming.

Proposals submitted under this area should address the specific elements and types of activities that define both Teacher Professional Development and MWEEs for their Students (see section I.A.c.).

3. Systemic Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience Implementation

The NOAA B-WET program seeks proposals that develop and implement systemic MWEEs in school districts throughout the Gulf of Mexico coastal counties. Systemic MWEE projects reach the entire student population in one or more grades within a school district, with teacher-supported MWEEs and ensure that the teachers of these students receive high quality professional development to give them the content knowledge and pedagogical skills for outdoor learning to support all aspects of the MWEE as defined in section I.A.c.

Exemplary projects should have a 24-month project period. Projects should focus on teacher professional development in year one, and implementation of student MWEEs in year two. This recommendation is made due to the fact that teacher audiences may be easier to reach than students during the pandemic and in the initial recovery. Teachers also have a high need for resources that they can apply immediately to their modified school programming.

Projects that are systemic encourage ownership from a broad range of constituents and promote long-term sustainability of the MWEE project in a school district. These programs require leadership and support from the school district, however, because of the broad reach of systemic projects, partnerships with multiple partners are often required to ensure all students receive all components of a MWEE and meaningful professional development for teachers is provided.

For systemic projects, students should participate in all MWEE elements as defined in section I.A.c (issue definition, outdoor field experiences, synthesis and conclusions, and stewardship actions). Student MWEEs should be organized around a driving question that has students focus on a locally relevant environmental issue, problem, or phenomenon.

For systemic projects, teacher professional development should be offered for all teachers whose students will be engaged in MWEEs so they can support classroom integration. Projects should deliver training on both content and instruction in the outdoors, include year-long support for teachers, and include a plan for how teachers will be involved in implementing watershed education with their students. This kind of in-depth professional

development reinforces a teacher's ability to teach, inspire, and lead young people toward thoughtful stewardship of our natural resources. Where appropriate, teacher professional development should include tools for teachers to implement MWEEs on their school grounds. Teacher professional development under this priority area should address all aspects of the MWEE as defined in section I.A.c.

For systemic projects, proposals should include details about where the project fits in the scope and sequence of school district curriculum, and applicants should clearly understand and convey the primary learning objectives. Multi-disciplinary objectives are encouraged. Letters of support from curriculum supervisors and science, social studies, and other relevant subject coordinators at the district level can be effective in communicating such details.

Whenever possible, MWEEs should be embedded across an entire grade level or levels in a district, or be part of a broader systemic program in a school district to reach every student.

For example, projects may reach only half of a grade level's teachers and students if the application includes documentation from the school district and other partners that the proposed project is a component of a larger systemic effort that reaches the entire grade level. If this is not feasible, applicants should explain why it is not feasible and how they will build toward systemic implementation over the course of the grant and into the future.

Applications for projects can come from any eligible applicant, however, substantial coordination and support from the school district is required. To document the appropriate level of support and engagement from school districts, official letters from superintendents, school boards, and/or school district curriculum supervisors are requested with proposals.

Per the eligibility information in section III.A. projects must target teachers and/or students in Gulf of Mexico coastal counties. An applicant who elects to implement a systemic project will reach the entire student population in one or more grades within a district. Rarely do school districts and counties also share the same physical territory. Therefore, the district targeted with a systemic MWEE must overlap territory with a coastal county as defined in section III.A.

4. Meaningful Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The NOAA B-WET Program recognizes that the environmental education field faces multiple threats due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent survey of impacts on the field found that thirty percent of environmental education providers report they will be definitely unable or very unlikely to reopen. Organizations will need funding to support creative and

alternative approaches so they can provide online or physically distant meaningful opportunities, especially in marginalized groups, particularly students of color and students from low-income families, that are more likely to lose environmental education within their local school districts. In addition, the financial challenges many organizations are facing through the pandemic raises the risk that in the recovery they will prioritize majority audiences and paying participants, with the potential to set back years of efforts to engage more historically underfunded communities in these programs. In response to these impacts, the NOAA B-WET Program will focus on capacity building to ensure providers can adjust and adapt to this changing environment. Capacity building can be defined as building capacity within the school system to implement meaningful watershed educational experiences, or building capacity within the organization that is providing the meaningful watershed educational experience. Our intent through this priority is to allow the community to respond with their needs.

Some examples of capacity building could include:

- > Innovative approaches to meaningful watershed educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- > Support for environmental educators to be redeployed into schools and school systems to provide assistance to instruction in an outdoor setting;
- > Support to promote the value of environmental education as engaging, effective, and essential during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- > Support for an Outdoor Access Coordinator who assists schools and school systems to navigate the pathway towards outdoor learning and field trips during the COVID-19 pandemic, under existing, or new, restrictions that apply to these opportunities;
- > Development of schoolyard habitats, gardens, restoration areas, outdoor labs, weather stations, and other outdoor settings that are functional for teachers and engaging for students;

- > Training for environmental education staff to engage with marginalized communities;
- > Support to acquire technology and professional training that will enable environmental education organizations to reimagine their programming so they can provide both high-quality and meaningful online and/ or physically distant learning opportunities, especially in marginalized communities;
- > Development of partnerships that are a significant driver in ensuring equity and inclusion in environmental literacy planning activities or may bridge pathways between in-school MWEE implementation and complementary out-of-school activities.

We strongly encourage applicants to partner with community-based organizations that will lead with equity during recovery. Community-based partnerships are clearly defined in section I.B.c.2.

As noted, our intent through this priority is to allow the community to respond with their needs. Therefore, applicants should include a clear description of need within their target audience, and a justification for adjustments that will lead to successful meaningful experiences during COVID-19. Applicants are encouraged to describe the demographics and needs of their target audience(s) and use data to support these assertions. The target audience should be included in the planning process for implementing adjustments. The targeted community's need and participation should be verified with letters of support from both the applicant's community-based partner organizations, and the targeted schools, school district, or school systems.

Resources for applicants:

- > eeGuidance for Reopening Schools (<https://naaee.org/eeopro/resources/eeguidance-reopening-schools>) has been developed by NAAEE and members of its Affiliate Network. The guide includes information and strategies for how community-based environmental and outdoor education programs can help schools to equitably reopen during and after the pandemic.
- > The National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative (<https://www.greenschoolyards.org/covid-learn-outside>) broadly addresses the use of outdoor spaces to support their work.
- > Bay Backpack offers a resource for developing outdoor classrooms, labs & habitats (http://baybackpack.com/schoolyard_projects/project/outdoor_classrooms_labs_habitats).
- > Nature Based Education Consortium has published Outdoor Learning in Response to COVID-19 (<https://www.nbeconsortium.com/outdoor-learning-schools>).

c. SPECIAL INTEREST AREAS

Any proposal to this announcement must meet Priority Areas as described in the previous section. NOAA also has two additional Special Interest Areas that applicants may wish to address if they choose, which are: Gulf of Mexico Fisheries and Community Partnerships. More information on these special interest areas is provided below. While applicants are not required to address a NOAA Special Interest Area, projects that do so are encouraged because they capitalize on a specific NOAA resource or issue area that is a priority to the NOAA Southeast Regional Office.

1. Gulf of Mexico Fisheries: The Southeast Regional Office is an office under the National Marine Fisheries Service. We work with partners to ensure sustainable fishing opportunities, protection for endangered species and marine mammals and the conservation of the habitat needed to support marine life. Given these commitments, NOAA is interested in B-WET

projects that develop student understanding around the ecological, economic, or cultural importance of Gulf of Mexico fisheries and protected resources including but not limited to shrimp, snapper, grouper, sturgeon, sawfish, sea turtles, coral, or marine mammals; and the habitats that support them. Projects addressing this special interest area have fisheries or protected resources as the main issue student's investigate, and include student action to protect or restore the species and/or its habitat.

2. Partnerships: Partnerships are essential to implementing the Gulf of Mexico B-WET program. In most cases, partnerships with school divisions and/or the state department of education (if the applicant is not one of these entities) are highly encouraged and necessary.

Projects are also encouraged to collaborate with NOAA entities as partners. Projects should use NOAA assets, including personnel, data, curriculum, or other resources. More information about NOAA assets and educational resources can be found at: <http://www.education.noaa.gov/>.

Importantly, applicants are encouraged to work with community-organizations that lead with equity (if the applicant is not one of these entities). In order to be effective, sustainable, and equitable, environmental education must be integrated within organizations that understand and support the needs of their community. In addition, this current crisis will be felt disproportionately by historically marginalized groups, particularly students of color and students from low-income families, that are more likely to lose environmental education within their local school districts. Therefore, the NOAA B-WET Program is interested in projects that partner specifically with organizations and institutions that are run by and/or serve marginalized groups, particularly minority communities. Projects are strongly encouraged to develop meaningful and mutually-beneficial partnerships that honor the strengths of community organizations. In successful partnerships, organizations have shared goals and work together to share resources, communicate effectively, collaborate on decision-making, and competently engage members of diverse cultures and expertise. Adequate compensation should be provided for community-based organization partners and community members for the effort they are contributing to the project. Applicants are encouraged to apply NAAEE's Community Engagement Guidelines for Excellence in developing their project plans for engagement of target audiences.

Community partnerships may look different across proposals but may include:

- > Historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and institutions that work in underserved areas;
- > Organizations and institutions that are run by and/or serve marginalized communities, particularly minority communities;

- > Partnerships that help to address a watershed challenge, problem, or phenomenon by bringing in local expertise on existing environmental issues and creating innovative solutions;
- > Partnerships that enhance the local context, cultural relevance, and cultural competence in professional development for all teachers.

C. Program Authority

Under 33 U.S.C. § 893a(a), the America COMPETES Act, the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is authorized to conduct, develop, support, promote, and coordinate formal and informal educational activities at all levels to enhance public awareness and understanding of ocean, coastal, Great Lakes, and atmospheric science and stewardship by the general public and other coastal stakeholders, including underrepresented groups in ocean and atmospheric science and policy careers. In conducting those activities, the Administrator shall build upon the educational programs and activities of the agency.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

It is anticipated that approximately \$600,000 will be available in FY 2021 to fund eligible applications. NOAA anticipates making approximately three to seven new awards, subject to the availability of appropriations. For applications to B-WET priority areas 1, 2, and 4 the total Federal amount that may be requested from NOAA should not exceed \$100,000 per award. For applications to B-WET priority area 3, the total Federal amount that may be requested from NOAA should not exceed \$150,000 per award. In all cases, the minimum Federal amount to request from NOAA is \$25,000. It is recommended that the period of award performance be 24 months. The distribution of funding will depend on the Selection Factors in section V.C. of this announcement.

If there are no funds available or if funding for new projects is very limited in FY 2021, Gulf of Mexico B-WET may carry proposals recommended for funding forward until funding does become available. In that case, the results of this competition, including the results of the application review and rankings, will be carried over for FY 2022. So while we anticipate funding three to seven proposals in FY 2021, additional proposals from this competition may be selected for funding in the next fiscal year should funds be available.

The possibility of carrying the results of this competition over to FY 2022 depends on determining that the project applications received under this funding opportunity for FY

2021 funds remain relevant to NOAA priorities in the Gulf of Mexico in FY 2022.

This alternative to developing another, new funding opportunity for FY 2022 acknowledges the great effort required by applicants to develop a strong proposal as well as the work required by the B-WET Program Office and reviewers to conduct panel reviews. If we select proposals from this FY 2021 competition for possible funding in FY 2022, the standard practice of considering the remaining projects from this FY 2021 solicitation in rank order will be followed.

Future opportunities for submitting proposals to the B-WET competitive process are anticipated, but will depend on funding levels and resources available to support new projects.

B. Project/Award Period

The project start date should not begin before August 1, 2021. It is recommended that the period of award performance be 24 months. Applications must include a project description and a budget for the entire award period. Applicants selected to receive funding may be asked to modify the project start date. It is recommended to include the flexibility of the requested start date in your project description.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a grant or cooperative agreement depending upon the amount of collaboration, participation, or involvement of NOAA in the management of the project. A cooperative agreement will be used if the NOAA B-WET program shares responsibility for management, control, direction, or performance of the project with the recipient. Specific terms regarding substantial involvement will be contained in special award conditions.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are K-12 public and independent schools and school systems, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, state or local government agencies, interstate agencies, and Indian tribal governments. For profit organizations, foreign organizations, and foreign public entities are not eligible to apply; however, for-profit and foreign organizations and foreign public entities may participate with an eligible applicant as a project partner. Likewise, Federal agencies are not allowed to receive funds under this announcement but may serve as collaborative project partners and may contribute services in

kind.

Applicants may be physically located in any U.S. state; however, education projects must target teachers and/or students in Gulf of Mexico coastal counties. For the purposes of this solicitation, the coastal counties of Gulf of Mexico states (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas) are defined and listed on page 48-49 of the following document: National Ocean Service, NOAA. 2011. The Gulf of Mexico at a Glance: A Second Glance. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, ftp://ftp.library.noaa.gov/noaa_documents.lib/NOS/state_of_coast/Gulf_of_Mexico_2011.pdf.

Per the system priority information in section I.B.b.3., an applicant that chooses to implement a systemic project will reach the entire student population in one or more grades within a school district. Rarely do school districts and counties also share the same physical territory. Therefore, if an applicant chooses the systemic priority, the district targeted must have overlapping territory with a coastal county as defined in this eligibility section III.A.

Consideration will be given to applicants who show prior experience in working in the Gulf of Mexico region or who show prior experience with Gulf of Mexico regional issues.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

No cost sharing is required under this program. Cost sharing is not considered in the evaluation criteria or selection factors.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

The applicant acknowledges and understands that information and data contained in applications for financial assistance, as well as information and data contained in financial, performance and other reports submitted by applicants, may be used by the Department of Commerce in conducting reviews and evaluations of its financial assistance programs. For this purpose, applicant information and data may be accessed, reviewed and evaluated by Department of Commerce employees, other Federal employees, and also by Federal agents and contractors, and/or by non-Federal personnel, all of whom enter into appropriate conflict of interest and confidentiality agreements covering the use of such information. As may be provided in the terms and conditions of a specific financial assistance award, applicants are expected to support program reviews and evaluations by submitting required financial and performance information and data in an accurate and timely manner, and by cooperating with Department of Commerce and external program evaluators. In accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.303(e), applicants are reminded that they must take reasonable measures to safeguard protected personally identifiable information and other confidential or sensitive

personal or business information created or obtained in connection with a Department of Commerce financial assistance award.

In addition, Department of Commerce regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. Sec. 552, are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the Department regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA. Applications submitted in response to this Notice of Funding Opportunity may be subject to requests for release under the Act. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information that should be exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information. In accordance with 15 CFR § 4.9, the Department of Commerce will protect from disclosure confidential business information contained in financial assistance applications and other documentation provided by applicants to the extent permitted by law.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

If it is not feasible to apply online through Grants.gov, application packages may be requested from: Amy Clark, Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program Manager, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, (727) 466-8586, amy.clark@noaa.gov.

Potential applicants may contact the Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program Manager before submitting an application to discuss B-WET goals and objectives as well as the elements of the Meaningful Watershed Education Experience (MWEE).

B. Content and Form of Application

Proposals should follow the content and format described below. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of the Southeast Regional Office or the reviewers as to the relative merits of the project described in the application.

a. FORMAT REQUIREMENTS

All pages should be single-spaced and should be composed in at least 11 point font with one-inch margins on 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper. The project description should not exceed 15 pages, exclusive of project summary, literature cited, budget information, resumes of investigators, letters of support, data sharing plan, National Environmental Policy Act questionnaire, and federal forms. Any attachment included in an electronic application should meet the above

format requirement when printed out. All documents submitted as electronic application elements should be PDF (rather than MS Word, Excel, MOV, or other files types).

b. CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

1. Federal Forms: The following Federal Forms are required and must be submitted with applications with signatures of the authorized representative of the submitting institution. (Note: submission through Grants.gov results in automatic electronic signatures on these forms.)

1.1. Application for Federal Assistance: SF-424

1.2. Budget Information, Non-construction Programs: SF-424A

1.3. Assurances, Non-Construction Programs: SF-424B

1.4. Certifications Regarding Lobbying: CD-511

Additionally, the following Department of Commerce forms may be required:

1.5. Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: SF-LLL (if applicable, see instructions on form)

2. Narrative Body: The following should be included in the body of the application.

2.1. Project Summary (1-page limit): It is critical that the project summary accurately describes the project being proposed and conveys all essential elements and objectives of the activities. A person unfamiliar with your project should be able to read the summary and grasp your plan. The project summary should include: organization title; principal investigator(s); address, telephone number, and email address of principal investigator(s); the Gulf of Mexico Alliance issue to be addressed in section I.B.a.; B-WET priority area to be addressed as described in section I.B.b. (Professional Development for Teachers related to MWEEs, Exemplary MWEE Programs, Systemic MWEE Implementation, or Meaningful Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic); special interest area addressed if any in section I.B.c.; project title; project duration; project objectives; total federal funding requested; cost-sharing to be provided from non-federal sources if any; succinct description of work to be performed during the project period including audience description information (i.e. schools/school districts, grade levels, number of teachers/students to be reached), delivery method to be used (e.g. workshops, field experiences, interactive programs, summer institutes, classroom outreach, etc.), and contact time with project participants with indication of how much of this time will be spent outdoors.

2.2. Project Description (15-page limit): The project description should describe and justify the project being proposed and address the elements of the evaluation criteria as described in section V.A.

Project descriptions should include the goals and objectives for your project. Include specific approaches to achieving those objectives, including methods, timelines, and expected outcomes. Include information about how the project contributes to greater understanding and stewardship of the Gulf of Mexico watershed and human elements or how the project responds meaningfully to the COVID-19 pandemic. Describe the need for your project and cite timely studies or sources, where appropriate, that verify the need for your project.

Project descriptions should provide a discussion of the target audience(s) that will be served. Specifically, project descriptions should include a precise location of the project and area(s) to be served and the number of teachers and/or students to be reached each year of the proposed project. Demonstrate an understanding of the needs of that audience, including anything that makes your target audience unique. Applicants should clearly state total anticipated contact time with target audience, and indicate how much of this time will be spent outdoors. Applicants should indicate whether the project will reach marginalized communities, particularly minority communities, or their students; describe the demographics and vulnerabilities of their target audience(s), and use data to support these assertions.

Project descriptions should include significant external sharing, communication, and stewardship. Projects should include a mechanism that encourages target audiences to share their experiences with peers and with the environmental education community.

For priorities 1-3, project descriptions should outline the methods and approaches to be used to ensure the project implements each component of a MWEE (defined in section I.A.c.). In addition, project descriptions should detail how the project will address the factors described in the selected B-WET priority area (section I.B.b.1-3.).

For Priority 4, project descriptions should describe the capacity building needed to assist education providers in adjusting and adapting to COVID-19. Project descriptions should detail how the project will address the factors described in B-WET priority area 4 (section I.B.b.4.).

For all priorities, project descriptions should also identify and document the results or benefits to be derived from the proposed activities. For Priorities 1-3, project descriptions should include a two-part evaluation description as explained below. Up to 10% of the budget can be spent on the evaluation component of your proposal.

(1) Project-level Evaluation: For this funding opportunity, project-level evaluation is defined

as the systematic collection and documentation of information about your project's short-term outcomes in order to improve the project's effectiveness, document successes towards meeting project objectives, and inform decisions about future programming. It informs those who design, manage, and implement the project to make refinements and introduce improvements into future efforts.

Project-level evaluations should be rigorous and well planned, with a clear articulation of how the evaluation results will be used (e.g. what questions will they answer). They should be appropriate for the kind of project proposed, the capacity of the applicant, and the size of project (e.g. new start up project vs. long standing program, new applicant vs. repeat applicant). They may be quantitative and/or qualitative and may include, for example, evaluation tools and surveys, observation, or outside consultation. They should result in not only data, but interpretations of the data.

Proposals should provide a project-level evaluation plan for short-term outcomes. If your medium- and long-term outcomes can also be measured within the project period, explain your plans for that evaluation as well. The evaluation plan should include:

- > How will the evaluation be used and what do you hope to gain (e.g. information to determine the success of the project; information on how to improve the project's effectiveness.)
- > What will be evaluated (e.g. changes in participants' knowledge or attitudes related to watersheds)
- > The type(s) of evaluation that is planned (e.g. needs assessment, formative evaluation, process evaluation, outcome evaluation, etc.)
- > The methods for implementing the evaluation (e.g. what will be measured, how it will be measured, when will evaluation data be gathered, and how will results be analyzed and delivered?)

Resources for Project evaluation:

- > The MWEE Audit Tool in the Chesapeake Bay MWEE Planning Toolbox:
<http://baybackpack.com/assets/img/mwee/planning-toolbox.pdf>. Use the Audit Tool to determine if your project meets the full definition of the MWEE and to identify areas that could be strengthened.
- > B-WET Student Item Bank and Guidance:
<https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/PDF%20-%20Guidance4MeasuringStudentMWEE-Outcomes%20-%202008-2014%20-%20NOAA.pdf>. Use this guidance and item bank to assess students' science learning, watershed literacy, and environmental stewardship outcomes.
- > California B-WET Project Evaluation Guidance:

<http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/education/evaluation/welcome.html>. Use this guide for tools and techniques helpful in making informed decisions about B-WET programming.

and

(2) National Evaluation: In addition to project evaluation, grantees will be asked to participate in data collection for the national B-WET evaluation. The B-WET national evaluation consists of two parts; part 1 is for all recipients of B-WET grants while part 2 is only for programs that work with teachers. The B-WET national evaluation is intended to monitor program implementation and outcomes on an ongoing basis. Results of this evaluation will be used to improve the B-WET program, document its value, and better tailor it to program audiences. Grantees with teacher participants will be able to view a summary of responses from their participating teachers. Success of this effort depends on grantee participation, so applicants are strongly encouraged to review the information about the national evaluation system (available here: <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/grantee-resources/national-evaluation>) and consider how they can support it as part of their projects.

National Evaluation Part 1 (for all B-WET grantees): As part of this evaluation system, one individual from each recipient organization will be asked to voluntarily complete an online questionnaire once per year of the award. The questionnaire should be able to be completed within 30-60 minutes (depending on the nature of the program) and may require some internal data compilation.

National Evaluation Part 2 (for programs with teacher professional development): For projects that work extensively with teachers, the teacher-participants will be asked to complete one questionnaire at the close of their professional development and one after implementing MWEs with their students (at the end of the following school year). Each teacher questionnaire should be able to be completed within 30 minutes. Along with completing the recipient questionnaire, grantees will be asked to provide the email addresses of participating teachers (after notifying teachers that their email will be shared) and to encourage teachers to participate in the national evaluation.

B-WET grantees and teachers who respond to the questionnaires will remain anonymous to B-WET and NOAA. NOAA will only view the resulting data in aggregate at the national or regional level; however, grantees will receive a password-protected report link to allow them to view data from teacher participants of their project in aggregate.

All applicants should provide information about how they plan to support this national

evaluation system, incorporate it into the project timeline, and ensure responses from participating teachers as part of their application. Applicants may incorporate staff time required to complete the B-WET national evaluation in their budget proposal. More information, including all of the survey instruments, is available on the NOAA B-WET National Evaluation website here: <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/grantee-resources/national-evaluation>. Grantees should review the information available and take this into consideration in the planning for their project evaluations. For example, grantees may not need to include questions that will be answered through the teacher instrument in their own evaluations.

Wherever possible grantees should try to incorporate participation in the evaluation system into existing requirements for professional development program completion. For example, on completion of the teacher professional development survey, teachers will receive some program incentive.

Note that this evaluation system is not intended to replace project level evaluation. While grantees will have access to their teacher's results from the evaluation system, the national evaluation may not provide the level of detail needed to fully understand, describe, and improve specific grant projects. Grantees are therefore encouraged to balance these needs within their planning and budgeting process. Additional information about this project, including background, FAQs, survey instruments, and suggested text for communicating with your teacher participants about this project, is available here: <https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/grantee-resources/national-evaluation>.

This data collection will be conducted in a manner consistent with OMB guidelines (OMB Control No 0648-0658).

2.3. Literature Cited: If references are cited, proposals should include a literature cited list. Literature Cited does not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

3. Letters of Support and Partnership descriptions: Letters of support from each partner that is making a significant contribution to the project should be included with the application. Letters of support do not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

Wherever reasonable, proposals should include partnerships with school divisions and/or the state department of education (if the applicant is not one of these entities).

Applicants should describe the nature and makeup of the proposed community-based

partners (if the applicant is not one themselves), including the partners' expertise in competently engaging members of diverse cultures, providing expertise on existing environmental issues, creating innovative solutions to the challenges, and/or enhancing the local context/cultural relevance throughout the proposed programming. See definition of community-based partnerships in Section section I.B.c.2.

Projects are also encouraged to collaborate with NOAA entities as partners, or use NOAA products, assets, or services. More information about NOAA assets and educational resources can be found at: <http://www.education.noaa.gov/>.

4. Budget and Budget Justification: In addition to the SF-424A Budget Information form, applicants should include a detailed budget justification, or budget narrative. Also, a budget template found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/webdam/download/80873093> is offered as guidance. All budget information submitted with the application should mirror the dollar amounts on required SF-424 and SF-424A forms. The budget documentation does not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

The budget justification should explain the need for all budget items in sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested in relation to the project description. To ensure equitable participation by community members, applicants are encouraged to include participant support costs (e.g., direct financial compensation, covering travel expenses and meals, providing lodging).

Grant recipients may be asked to attend a two to three-day B-WET conference during the award period. The conference will be an opportunity for current B-WET grant recipients to learn from each other and from NOAA experts. Your budget should include, in the travel category, estimated funds for these trips (such as meals, lodging, airfare and/or other transportation including rental car, shuttle, or taxi). Although this is considered an outreach and education opportunity, it should not be the sole justification to meet the outreach and education criteria; local, regional or national communication is required as well.

The budget may include an amount for indirect costs, which are essentially overhead costs for basic operational functions (e.g., lights, rent, water, insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified specifically within a particular project. See 2 C.F.R. 200.56-.57 and 200.412-.415 at <http://go.usa.gov/SBYh> and <http://go.usa.gov/SBg4>. An applicant may also propose all allowable project charges as direct costs. An applicant requesting indirect costs should provide a current approved Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement established with its cognizant Federal agency or an acknowledgement letter from the cognizant agency to which the applicant has submitted a

proposed rate. In addition, if an award recipient has never established an indirect cost rate with any Federal agency, the recipient may request to use the de minimus rate described at 2 C.F.R. 200.414 or it may negotiate a new rate with the Department of Commerce. The negotiation and approval of a new rate is subject to the procedures required by the NOAA and the Department of Commerce. The U.S. Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions,

<https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/oam/Department%20of%20Commerce%20Standard%20Terms%20Conditions%2030%20April%202019.pdf>, require that within 90 days of the award start date, recipients submit documentation (indirect cost proposal, cost allocation, plan, etc.) necessary to perform the review to establish a new rate to the address listed below.

Lamar Revis, Grants Officer

NOAA Grants Management Division 1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor Silver Spring, MD 20910

5. Resumes (2 pages maximum for each major participant) and description of programmatic capabilities: In addition to resumes, provide a description of the applicant's ability to successfully implement and manage the proposed project including staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources or the ability to obtain them to successfully achieve the goals of the project, and your organizational experience and past history in performing tasks similar to the proposed project. Resumes do not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

6. Data Sharing: Please see section VI.B.h. for information on the data sharing section of the application. The data sharing plan does not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit. The data shared plan do not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

7. NEPA: NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Consequently, if your project may trigger consideration under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), identify any impact the proposed work will have on the quality of the environment by completing the NOAA NEPA Questionnaire at the following link (<https://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>) and include it as an appendix to your application. This NEPA responses do not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

C. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

As required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C.6101 note, to the extent applicable, any applicant awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the System for Award Management (SAM), which may be accessed online at <https://www.sam.gov/SAM/>.

Applicants are also required to use the Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System (www.dnb.com) and will be subject to reporting requirements, as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 CFR Part 25 (<https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?node=pt2.1.25&rgn=div5>), and 2 CFR Part 170 (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr170_main_02.tpl). A recipient's DUNS number must correspond with the recipient's information in Sam.gov.

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or Federal awarding agency that is excepted from those requirements under 2 CFR §25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the federal awarding agency under 2 CFR §25.110(d)) is required to: (i) Be registered in SAM before submitting its application; (ii) provide a valid unique entity identifier in its application; and (iii) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a federal awarding agency. A federal awarding agency may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the federal awarding agency is ready to make a federal award, the federal awarding agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant.

Applicants should allow a minimum of thirty days to receive a DUNS number and to be registered in SAM. Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through www.grants.gov.

D. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on February 26, 2021 to be considered for funding. Applications should be submitted through Grants.gov. For applications submitted through Grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication is included and will be the basis of determining timeliness.

When developing your submission timeline, keep in mind that it may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject the application and that an advance registration process is required that may take a few days or several weeks.

If Grants.gov has technical issues that prohibit submission or use of Grants.gov is otherwise not feasible, hard copy applications will be accepted. Hard copies may be submitted by postal mail, commercial delivery service, or hand-delivery. Mail hard copy applications to Amy Clark, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 1021 Balch Blvd, Suite 1003, Stennis Space Center, MS 39529. Hard copy applications must be received (not postmarked) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on February 26, 2021. Hard copy applications arriving after the deadline given above will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that the application was provided to a delivery service that guaranteed delivery prior to the specified closing date and time. Hard copy applications received by Southeast Regional Office later than two business days following the closing date will not be accepted.

E. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program are not subject to Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.

F. Funding Restrictions

a. **INDIRECT COSTS:** The budget may include an amount for indirect costs if your organization has an established indirect cost rate with the Federal government. If indirect costs are requested, indirect-cost-rate agreements must be included for the applicant organization and the negotiated rate must be requested. If an applicant does not have an indirect cost rate and wants to include indirect costs, the applicant has up to 90 days after the award start date to submit an indirect cost proposal or cost allocation plan. Indirect-cost-rate agreement documentation is not required for sub-awardees, however indirect cost rates at the negotiated levels should be paid by the primary awardee.

Under 2 C.F.R. § 200.414 Indirect (F&A) Costs, any applicant that has never received a negotiated indirect cost rate may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs which may be used indefinitely. Costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs, but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 200.403 Factors affecting allowability of costs. If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a cooperator chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the non-Federal entity may apply to do at any time. The negotiation and approval of a rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the Department of Commerce Standard Terms and Conditions Section B.06. The NOAA contact for indirect or facilities and administrative costs is: Lamar Revis, Grants Officer; NOAA Grants Management Division; 1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor; Silver Spring, Maryland 20910; lamar.revis@noaa.gov.

b. **CONSTRUCTION:** B-WET cannot fund projects with the primary purpose of construction. This includes the construction of new buildings, completion of shell space in existing buildings, renovation or rehabilitation of existing buildings, and construction or development of real property infrastructure improvements (e.g., site preparation, utilities, streets, curbs, sidewalks, parking lots, other streetscaping improvements, etc.). Alteration activities in support of an education project, such as the renovation of an educational exhibit or installation of a schoolyard garden space, would likely not be considered construction.

c. **ALLOWABLE COSTS:** All costs must be reasonable, allowable and allocable. Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out the project. Allowable costs are determined by reference to the OMB Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (OMB Uniform Requirements), found at 2 C.F.R. Part 200 and adopted by the Department of Commerce through 2 C.F.R. 1327.101. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/SBYh> and <http://go.usa.gov/SBg4>. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, equipment, supplies, and training, as long as these are necessary and reasonable.

G. Other Submission Requirements

Applications should be submitted through Grants.gov. For applications submitted through Grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication is included and will be the basis of determining timeliness.

When developing your submission timeline, keep in mind that it may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject the application and that an advance registration process is required that may take a few days or several weeks.

If Grants.gov has technical issues that prohibit submission or use of Grants.gov is otherwise not feasible, hard copy applications will be accepted. Hard copies may be submitted by postal mail, commercial delivery service, or hand-delivery. Mail hard copy applications to Amy Clark, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 1021 Balch Blvd, Suite 1003, Stennis Space Center, MS 39529. Hard copy applications must be received (not postmarked) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on February 26, 2021. Hard copy applications arriving after the deadline given above will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that the application was provided to a delivery service that guaranteed delivery prior to the specified closing date and time. Hard copy applications received by Southeast Regional Office later than two business days following the closing date will not be accepted.

Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through Grants.gov. Validation or rejection of your application by

Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission. Because first-time registration with Grants.gov can take up to three weeks or more, it is strongly recommended that this registration process be completed as soon as possible. Also, even if an applicant has registered with Grants.gov previously, the applicant's password may have expired or their registration may need to be renewed prior to submitting to Grants.gov. Grants.gov will not accept submissions if the applicant has not been authorized or if credentials are incorrect. Authorizations and credential corrections can take several days to establish. Please consider these notes in developing your submission timeline.

If you experience Grants.gov technical problems or glitches with the Grants.gov website that you believe threatens your ability to complete a submission before an applicable funding cycle deadline, please print any error message received; and call the Grants.gov Contact Center at 800-518-4726 for immediate assistance. Ensure that you obtain a case number regarding your communications with Grants.gov. Please note: problems with an applicant organization's computer system or equipment are not considered Grants.gov technical problems. Similarly, an applicant's failure to: complete the required registration, ensure that a registered Authorized Organization Representative submits the application, or receive an email message from Grants.gov are not considered Grants.gov technical problems. A Grants.gov technical problem occurs in connection with the operations of Grants.gov system, such as the temporary loss of service by Grants.gov due to unexpected volume of traffic or failure of information technology systems, both of which are highly unlikely. In the event of a confirmed technical problem, NOAA may allow more time for applicant submission due to system problems at Grants.gov at the time of application submission that are beyond the control of the applicant.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

a. EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR PRIORITIES 1, 2, AND 3: (1) Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences, (2) Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development with Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their students, and (3) Systemic Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience Implementation

1. IMPORTANCE, RELEVANCE, AND APPLICABILITY OF PROPOSAL TO THE PROGRAM GOALS (20 points)

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. For the NOAA Gulf of

Mexico B-WET program Priorities 1 - 3, this may include the following questions:

Connection to watershed (5 points): Does the project make a direct connection to the greater marine or estuarine environment and watershed system; and does it address how actions within that system can affect the environment? Does the applicant address the Fisheries Special Interest Area defined in section I.B.c.1.?

Project need (5 points): Does the applicant demonstrate a need for the project?

Likelihood to succeed (5 points): What is the likelihood of the proposed educational and environmental activities to improve the general understanding and stewardship of the environment?

Local contact (5 points); Does the experience use the local context for learning and focus around questions, problems, or issues pertaining to the Gulf of Mexico region including its local population, geography, culture, and natural, financial, and human resources?

2. TECHNICAL MERIT (45 points)

This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program Priorities 1 - 3, this may include the following questions.

Objectives (3 points): Are the objectives and outcomes defined in the proposal focused on the stated outcome(s)? Does the applicant demonstrate that the objectives can be reached within the proposed project period?

Target audience (6 points): Does the applicant define the audience(s) that will be reached? Are the targeted communities historically marginalized groups, students of color, students from low-income families, or those that are more likely to lose environmental education within their local school districts? Does the applicant include data to justify and support their description of the targeted communities? Does the applicant define the targeted community's needs and limitations?

COVID-19 Challenges (6 points): In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, does the applicant clearly define pandemic-induced challenges that may be faced and do they describe reasonable approaches to working around, or overcoming, the challenge?

Best practices per the elements of the MWEE and Gulf B-WET Priorities (15 points):

> Teacher Professional Development for MWEE best practices: Consistent with the definition of the MWEE as defined in section I.A.c. and the Gulf of Mexico Priority defined in section I.B.b.1, if the project focuses on teacher training, will such teacher professional development increase teachers' knowledge and awareness of environmental issues, model the MWEE framework, allow for adequate instructional time, provide ongoing teacher support and appropriate incentives, and meet jurisdictional guidelines for effective teacher professional development? Does the project include more than 30 hours of professional development time? Is more than 10 hours of professional development time spent outdoors?

OR

> Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development and Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their Students: Consistent with the definition of the MWEE define in section I.A.c. and the Gulf of Mexico Priority defined in section I.B.b.2, if the project is exemplary in nature, does it implement the best practices of BOTH the Teacher Professional Development for MWEEs and MWEEs for their Students? Does the project demonstrate at least 30 hours of long-term professional development for teachers that increases teachers' knowledge and awareness of environmental issues, models the MWEE framework, allows for adequate instructional time, provides ongoing teacher support and appropriate incentives, and meets jurisdictional guidelines? Is the teacher professional development coupled with MWEEs for students that includes a defined local issue, at least 5 hours of student activity time spent outdoors, analyzed and evaluated results of investigations, adequate teacher participation in the student MWEE, a description of how the project is an integral part of the classroom or instructional program, connections to the local community and environment, and experiences that are a set of activities over time?

OR

> Systemic MWEE Implementation best practices: Consistent with the definition of the MWEE defined in section I.A.c. and the Gulf of Mexico Priority defined in section I.B.b.3, if the project is systemic in nature, does it develop and implement projects that reach the entire student population in one or more grades within a district? Is there demonstrated support from the school district leadership via official letters from superintendents, school boards, and/or school district curriculum supervisors? Does the applicant clearly document that the proposed project is part of building or supporting a broader systemic program in a school district? Are there demonstrated partnerships with multiple partners to ensure all students receive all components of a MWEE and meaningful professional development for teachers is provided? Does the application implement the best practices of BOTH the Teacher

Professional Development for MWEEs and MWEEs for their Students? Does the project demonstrate at least 30 hours of long-term professional development for teachers that increases teachers' knowledge and awareness of environmental issues, models the MWEE framework, allows for adequate instructional time, provides ongoing teacher support and appropriate incentives, and meets jurisdictional guidelines? Is the teacher professional development coupled with MWEEs for students that includes a defined local issue, at least 5 hours of student activity time spent outdoors, analyzed and evaluated results of investigations, adequate teacher participation in the student MWEE, a description of how the project is an integral part of the classroom or instructional program, connections to the local community and environment, and experiences that are a set of activities over time?

Stewardship (6 points): Does the project guide students in identifying and implementing a stewardship action as a solution that directly addresses the defined issue or phenomenon they are investigating? Or, does the project provide guidance for teachers to prepare them to offer their students stewardship activities?

Alignment with National and State Educational Guidelines (2 points): Does the applicant demonstrate how their project is aligned and supports the goals and strategies of the NOAA Education Strategic Plan (<https://www.noaa.gov/education/explainers/noaa-education-strategic-plan>)? Is the project aligned with environmental literacy principles (e.g. Ocean Literacy, <http://www.coexploration.org/oceanliteracy/documents/OceanLitChart.pdf> or Climate Literacy, http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/education/literacy/climate_literacy.pdf) where appropriate? Does the applicant demonstrate how their project is aligned to state learning standards?

NOAA Assets and Data Management (2 points): Does the project use NOAA assets including products, data, services, or scientific/professional experts? Did the applicant discuss the relevance of data sharing to their project?

Evaluation (5 points): Does the applicant provide an effective project-level evaluation plan, appropriate to the maturity and scale of the project, to determine the project's effectiveness, document successes towards meeting the objectives, and inform decisions about future programming? Does the plan describe how the evaluation will be used? Does the plan define what will be evaluated and the types of evaluation planned? Are the methods for implementing the evaluation appropriate? Does the applicant discuss how the B-WET National Evaluation system will be incorporated into their plans for project evaluation?

3. OVERALL QUALIFICATION OF APPLICANT (10 points)

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program Priorities 1 - 3, this may include the following questions:

Knowledge of K-12 landscape (3 points): Does the applicant show the capability and experience in successfully completing similar K-12 projects? Does the applicant demonstrate knowledge of the Content Standards for their state? Does the applicant document collaborations with schools or school systems (if they are not one such organization)?

Knowledge of local watershed (3 points): Does the applicant show prior experience in working in the Gulf of Mexico region, show prior experience with Gulf of Mexico regional issues, or demonstrate partnerships with local organizations in the Gulf of Mexico region on proposed projects? Does the applicant demonstrate knowledge of watershed issues? Does the applicant partner with content experts, if needed, for program implementation? Does the applicant demonstrate use of NOAA assets or other NOAA partnership?

Partners (4 points): Does the applicant describe the nature and makeup of the proposed partners? Are they community-based partners as described in section I.B.c.2.? Do they describe how the partners' expertise and membership position them to ensure equity and inclusion in environmental literacy planning activities? Does the applicant describe their partners' qualifications and experience related to competently engaging members of diverse cultures, providing expertise on existing environmental issues, creating innovative solutions to the challenges, and/or enhancing the local context/cultural relevance throughout the proposed programming?

4. PROJECT COSTS (20 points)

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program Priorities 1 - 3, this may include the following questions:

Reasonable (10 points): Does the applicant adequately justify the proposed budget request and is the budget request reasonable for the number of students, teachers, and/or participants being reached and represent a good return on investment? Is the proposed budget suitable to the geographic area?

Direct programming (10 points): Is a significant percentage of the budget directly related to bringing students and teachers in contact with the environment? Are requested funds for

salaries and fringe benefits only for those personnel who are directly involved in implementing the project?

5. OUTREACH AND EDUCATION (5 points)

This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program Priorities 1 - 3, this may include the following questions:

Outreach (3 points): Does the proposal describe opportunities for outreach and education around the value of MWEEs and environmental education at events that engage school boards, public officials, parents, community organizations, other schools, or the media?

Peer-to-peer sharing (2 points): Does the proposal describe opportunities for peer-to-peer sharing for teachers, educators, and school administrators?

b. EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR PRIORITY 4: (4) Meaningful Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

1. IMPORTANCE, RELEVANCE, AND APPLICABILITY OF PROPOSAL TO THE PROGRAM GOALS (20 points)

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program Priority 4, this may include the following questions:

Does the project use local issues to increase student's environmental stewardship of the Gulf of Mexico and its watershed? (5 points)

Does the applicant include the appropriate partners to ensure that the deliverables of the grant can be executed? Does this list of partners represent the full set of voices for this work to be successful and sustainable? (5 points)

Does the applicant clearly demonstrate a gap or need for addressing the target audience and the watershed issue? (5 points)

Does the applicant provide data that demonstrates that the school(s) to be served have a high percentage of minorities, low-income individuals, or other indicators of inequities? (5 points)

2. TECHNICAL MERIT (45 points)

This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program Priority 4, this may include the following questions.

Objectives (3 points): Are the objectives and outcomes defined in the proposal focused on the stated outcome(s)? Does the applicant demonstrate that the objectives can be reached within the proposed project period? Does the applicant address the Fisheries Special Interest Area defined in section I.B.c.1.?

Target audience (6 point): Does the applicant define the audience(s) that will be reached? Are the targeted communities historically marginalized groups, particularly students of color and students from low-income families, that are more likely to lose environmental education within their local school districts? Does the applicant include data to justify and support their description of the targeted communities? Does the applicant define the targeted community's needs and limitations? Does the applicant include members of the targeted audience in the planning and implementation processes proposed?

Defining challenges (14 points): In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, does the applicant clearly define pandemic-induced challenges that may be faced and do they describe reasonable approaches to working around, or overcoming, the challenge? Does the project address the needs, challenges, and inequities that are being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic? Does the project address the challenges environmental education providers face in engaging with schools and meaningfully reaching students and teachers?

Methods (15 points): Does the applicant describe the proposed creative or alternative approach (capacity building) to address the challenge (e.g. capacity building within the school system or within an EE provider organization)? Does the applicant articulate their specific methods for capacity building and do they define how these will ensure EE providers and/or teachers can implement successful meaningful watershed educational experiences while adapting to the changing and challenging environment under COVID-19? Does the applicant incorporate best practices from existing publications into their approach to engaging with schools during the pandemic, equitably reopening schools during and after the pandemic, and/or addressing the use of outdoor spaces for education?

NOAA Assets and Data Management (2 points): Does the project use NOAA assets including products, data, services, or scientific/professional experts? Did the applicant

discuss the relevance of data sharing to their project?

Evaluation (5 points): Does the applicant provide an effective project-level evaluation plan, appropriate to the maturity and scale of the project, to determine the project's effectiveness, document successes towards meeting the objectives, and inform decisions about future programming? Does the plan describe how the evaluation will be used? Does the plan define what will be evaluated and the types of evaluation planned? Are the methods for implementing the evaluation appropriate?

3. OVERALL QUALIFICATION OF APPLICANT (10 points)

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program Priority 4, this may include the following questions:

Qualifications (5 points): Does the applicant show the capability and experience in successfully completing similar projects? Does the applicant document collaborations with schools or school systems? Does the applicant use NOAA assets? Does the applicant demonstrate an understanding of the target audience?

Community-based Partners (5 points): Is the applicant a community-based organization as described in section I.B.c.2., or does the applicant address the Community-Based Partner Special Interest Area defined in section I.B.c.2.? Does the applicant describe the nature and makeup of the proposed community-based partners? Do they describe how the partners' expertise and membership position them to ensure equity and inclusion in environmental literacy planning activities or bridge pathways between in-school MWEE implementation and complementary out-of-school activities? Does the applicant describe their community-based partners' qualifications and experience related to competently engaging members of diverse cultures, providing expertise on existing environmental issues, creating innovative solutions to the challenges, and/or enhancing the local context/cultural relevance throughout the proposed programming? Does the applicant describe a mutually-beneficial partnership that uses the strengths of the community-based organizations, includes shared goals and resources, communicates effectively, and collaborates on decision-making? Is adequate compensation provided to the applicant's community-based partners and community members for the effort they are contributing to the project?

4. PROJECT COSTS (20 points)

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program Priority 4, this may include the following questions:

Reasonable (10 points): Does the applicant adequately justify the proposed budget request and is the budget request reasonable for the number of students, teachers, and/or participants being reached and represent a good return on investment? Is the proposed budget suitable to the geographic area?

Direct programming (10 points): Is a significant percentage of the budget directly related to bringing students and teachers in contact with the environment? Are requested funds for salaries and fringe benefits only for those personnel who are directly involved in implementing the project?

5. OUTREACH AND EDUCATION (5 points)

This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET program Priority 4, this may include the following questions:

Does the applicant include plans for sharing best practices and lessons learned from this project? (3 points)

Does the target audience share their findings, experiences, or results to their peers or their community? (2 points)

B. Review and Selection Process

After the application period has closed, we will screen received applications to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see IV.D. Submission Dates and Times); include SF 424 authenticated by an authorized representative; were submitted by an eligible applicant (see III.A. Eligibility Information); address one of the B-WET priority areas (see I.B.b.); and include required content (see IV.B.). If your application does not conform to the requirements and the deadline for submission has passed, the application will be rejected without further consideration. NOAA, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues that may be easily rectified or cured.

Applications responsive to this solicitation will be evaluated by a two-part review process; a technical review and a panel review. Both phases are conducted by the same set of private

and/or public sector expert reviewers. Each review phase is described in detail below.

a. TECHNICAL REVIEW:

The purpose of the technical review is to evaluate each proposal's technical merit via individual evaluations of the proposals. Each application will be reviewed by a minimum of 3 reviewers. Reviewers provide comments (which are shared with applicants after the competition has concluded) and assign scores to the applications based on the evaluation criteria in section V.A. of this federal funding opportunity. If one or more non-Federal reviewer is used, no consensus advice will be given.

The Program Officer will use these scores to create a preliminary ranked list of proposals. This preliminary rank order will be used in the subsequent panel meeting where final funding recommendations are made.

b. PANEL REVIEW:

A virtual panel review will be held following the technical review process. The purpose of the panel meeting is to discuss in-depth the proposals that ranked highly in the technical review process and to get final funding recommendations from reviewers. This in-depth discussion may raise issues, answer questions, or clarify an issue. Panel members individually consider the significance of the problem addressed in the project proposal, along with technical evaluation scores, and the need for funding.

Both the ranking, and the scores from individual reviewers, inform which proposals are discussed at the review panel meeting. If a proposal ranks in the bottom half of all proposals, and it did not rank in the top three for any individual reviewers, it is not considered for discussion or funding.

After discussing a particular proposal, the individuals on the panel will provide comments and rate each proposal as either Recommended for Funding or Not Recommended for Funding. If one or more non-Federal reviewer is used, the Panel will give no consensus advice. Using the recommendation on each discussed proposal, the Program Manager will calculate a percent recommended for each discussed proposal. This establishes a final rank order for funding that is provided to the Selecting Official.

In the event that there are two or more projects tied in the final rank order that are competing for the final available funds, the technical review scores will determine the rank order. If a tie persists beyond this, all tied projects will be given equal consideration by the Selecting

Official. The Selecting Official will resolve any ties by selecting projects based on the selection factors listed in section V.C. of this federal funding opportunity.

NOAA may select all, some, or none of the applications, or part of any application, ask applicants to work together or combine projects, defer applications to the future, or reallocate funds to different funding categories, to the extent authorized. Applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans or budgets, and provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and NOAA program staff.

The NOAA Grants Officer will review financial and grants administration aspects of a proposed award, including conducting an assessment of the risk posed by the applicant in accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.205. In addition to reviewing repositories of government-wide eligibility, qualifications or financial integrity information, the risk assessment conducted by NOAA may consider items such as the financial stability of an applicant, quality of the applicant's management systems, an applicant's history of performance, previous audit reports and audit findings concerning the applicant and the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-federal entities.

Applicants may submit comments to the Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS) about any information included in the system about their organization for consideration by the awarding agency. Upon review of these factors, if appropriate, specific award conditions that respond to the degree of risk may be applied by the NOAA Grants Officer pursuant to 2 C.F.R. 200.207. In addition, NOAA reserves the right to reject an application in its entirety where information is uncovered that raises a significant risk with respect to the responsibility or suitability of an applicant. The final approval of selected applications and issuance of awards will be by the NOAA Grants Officer. The award decision of the Grants Officer is final.

C. Selection Factors

The Gulf B-WET panel ratings will be provided in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official shall recommend awarding in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based on the following factors:

1. Availability of funding;
2. Balance/distribution of funds:

- a. geographically
 - b. by type of institutions
 - c. by type of partners
 - d. by research areas
 - e. by project types
3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA/federal agencies;
 4. Program priorities and policy factors as set out in section I.A. and I.B.;
 5. Applicant's prior award performance;
 6. Partnerships with/Participation of targeted groups;
 7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

The Selecting Official may negotiate the funding level of the proposal. The Selecting Official makes final recommendations for awards to NOAA's Grants Management Division who is authorized to obligate funds.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, successful applications are usually recommended within 240 days from the date of publication of this notice. The project start date should not begin before August 1, 2021.

The exact amount of funds awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project are determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and the NOAA Program Office. Recipients must not initiate projects until an approved award is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been approved for funding by the NOAA Grants Management Division with the issuance of an award signed by a NOAA Grants Officer. This is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. The official notice of award is the Standard Form CD-450, Financial Assistance Award, which the NOAA Grants Officer will typically issue electronically through NOAA's Grants Online system. The authorizing document, the CD-450 award cover page, is provided to the

authorized representative identified by the applicant on the SF-424, typically via an email from Grants Online, and the principal investigator may receive a copy. Unsuccessful applicants will receive notification from the Program Office indicating that their proposals were not recommended for funding and including technical reviewers' comments.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

a. Pre-Award Notification - The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390) are applicable to this solicitation. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/cXC7A>.

b. Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements at 2 C.F.R. 200 (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr200_main_02.tpl), implemented by the Department of Commerce at 2 C.F.R. 1327.101, apply to awards in this program.

c. The Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions will apply to awards in this program. See <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/oam/Department%20of%20Commerce%20Standard%20Terms%20Conditions%2030%20April%202019.pdf>. In addition, award documents provided by NOAA may contain special award conditions, including those limiting the use of funds for compliance activities such as outstanding environmental compliance requirements, which will be applied on a case-by-case basis.

d. Limitation of Liability - Funding for potential projects in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. NOAA and the Department of Commerce are not responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

e. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA Web site at www.nepa.noaa.gov, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA at http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6.pdf and the Council on Environmental website at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq>.

Consequently, applicants may be asked to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, number and species expected to be caught, species and habitat to

be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required.

Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by the grants officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment of any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

If your project may trigger consideration under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), identify any impact the proposed work will have on the quality of the environment by completing the NOAA NEPA Questionnaire at the following link <https://www.nepa.noaa.gov/> and include it as an appendix to your application. This NEPA appendix does not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit.

f. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. 552. Department of Commerce regulations implementing FOIA are found at 15 C.F.R. part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the Department regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA. Applications submitted in response to this FFO may be subject to requests for release under FOIA. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information which is exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information. Based on these markings, the confidentiality of the contents of those pages will be protected to the extent permitted by law.

g. Certifications Regarding Tax Liability and Felony Criminal Convictions - When applicable under appropriations law, NOAA will provide certain applicants a form to be completed by the applicant's authorized representative making a certification regarding federally-assessed unpaid or delinquent tax liability or recent felony criminal convictions under any federal law.

h. Data Management –

(1) **Data Management Plan:** Proposals submitted in response to this announcement must include a Data Management Plan of up to two pages. This Data Management Plan does not count against the 15-page Project Description page limit. The Data Management Plan should be aligned with the NOAA B-WET Data Management Guidance provided below and will be considered as part of proposal review. NOAA may, at its own discretion, make publicly visible the Data Management Plan from funded proposals, or use information from the Data Management Plan to produce a formal metadata record and include that metadata in a Catalog to indicate the pending availability of new data. Proposal submitters are hereby advised that the final pre-publication manuscripts of scholarly articles produced entirely or primarily with NOAA funding will be required to be submitted to NOAA Institutional Repository after acceptance, and no later than upon publication. Such manuscripts shall be made publicly available by NOAA one year after publication by the journal.

(2) **Data Management Guidance to Applicants:** The NOAA B-WET program has developed this guidance to help grant applicants plan to share quality environmental data collected as part of their B-WET funded projects, where applicable. Environmental Data are defined by NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 212-15: Management of Environmental Data and Information as recorded and derived observations and measurements of the physical, chemical, biological, geological, and geophysical properties and conditions of the oceans, atmosphere, space environment, sun, and solid earth, as well as correlative data such as socio-economic data, related documentation, and metadata. Digital audio or video recordings of environmental phenomena (such as animal sounds or undersea video) are included in this definition. Numerical model outputs are included in this definition, particularly if they are used to support the conclusion of a peer-reviewed publication. Data collected in a laboratory or other controlled environment, such as measurements of animals and chemical processes, are included in this definition.

Environmental data and information collected or created under NOAA grants or cooperative agreements must be made discoverable by and accessible to the general public, in a timely fashion (typically within two years), free of charge or at no more than the cost of reproduction, unless an exemption is granted by the NOAA Program. Data should be available in at least one machine-readable format, preferably a widely-used or open-standard format, and should also be accompanied by machine-readable documentation (metadata), preferably based on widely-used or international standards.

Proposals submitted in response to this announcement must include a Data Management Plan of up to two pages describing how these requirements apply to the proposed project and will be satisfied. The Data Management Plan will be considered as part of the proposal review. Note that the Federal Program Officer may require revisions to the applicant's Data

Management Plan prior to recommending the application for funding.

Applicant Data Management Plans should be aligned with the following Data Management Guidance.

If environmental data collected/generated as part of the project are primarily for education and/or the practice of making observations using scientific techniques/methods (e.g. measuring pH of water with a refractometer, measuring atmospheric humidity with a sling psychrometer, measuring percent vegetative cover using a transect, etc.) and are not intended to be shared with scientists outside of the educational program, applicants may request permission not to make data publicly accessible and obtain approval from the Federal Program Officer, if funded. In this case, this element of the application should consist of a paragraph (under the heading Data Management Plan) describing the intended use of the data and that an exemption from data sharing is requested.

If environmental data collected/generated as part of the project are for purposes beyond education and/or the practice of making observations using scientific techniques/methods, applicants should describe (up to 2 pages, under the heading Data Management Plan) how data will be shared, based on the following guidance:

Contents: A typical Data Management Plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information expected to be created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; methods for providing data access; approximate total volume of data to be collected; and prior experience in making such data accessible. The plan should describe or reference the data quality control techniques that will be used or note that the data will not be quality controlled. Data that is not quality controlled should include a description on the limitations of the data or an indication of degree of uncertainty.

Technical recommendations: The NOAA B-WET program does not offer specific technical guidance. Applicants should describe their proposed approach. Use of open-standard formats and methods is encouraged.

Data Accessibility: The NOAA B-WET program recommends that public access to grant-produced data be enabled via an existing publicly accessible online data server at the funded institution is to be used to host these data (describe in application); or a public data repository appropriate to this scientific domain (describe in application). (e.g. The GLOBE Program - <http://www.globe.gov/>, CoCoRaHS Community - <http://www.cocorahs.org/>); or recipient-established data hosting capability (please describe in application's Data

Management Plan).

Resources: Proposals are permitted to include the costs of data preparation, accessibility, or archiving in their budgets.

(3) Questions Regarding This Guidance: Responsible NOAA Official for questions regarding this guidance and for verifying accessibility of data produced by funding recipients: Amy Clark, Gulf of Mexico B-WET Coordinator, NOAA Fisheries, amy.clark@noaa.gov; or Bronwen Rice, B-WET National Coordinator, NOAA Office of Education, bronwen.rice@noaa.gov.

C. Reporting

Unless otherwise specified by terms of the award, performance and financial reports are to be submitted semi-annually in accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.327-.329 and the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, and must be submitted no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period. Reports shall be submitted electronically via the NOAA Grants Online system (<https://grantsonline.rdc.noaa.gov>).

Reports include:

- a. Financial Reports - Information about federal financial reports is available at: http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/grantsonline/Documents/Grantees/Manuals/FFR_PP_R4.13.06.pdf
- b. Performance/Progress Reports - Suggested content and guidance related to B-WET performance/progress reports can be found here: https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/DOC-progress_report_guidance-COVID-04072020-BWET.docx
- c. The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C. 6101 Note, includes a requirement for awardees of applicable federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under federal assistance awards. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all subawards of \$25,000 and over.

VII. Agency Contacts

For questions regarding Gulf of Mexico B-WET program or the application process, you

may contact: Amy Clark, Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program Manager, Amy.Clark@noaa.gov, (727) 466-8586, or view <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/noaa-gulf-mexico-bay-watershed-education-and-training-gulf-b-wet-program>.

VIII. Other Information

None.