



Request for Applications 2023-A

EPA Historically Underserved Farmers Subaward Program

Supporting Farmer Changemakers in the Mississippi River Region

Expected Award Value: \$75,000 to \$250,000

Pre-application Webinar Date: Wednesday, March 22 at 12 PM Central Time, Wednesday, April 5

at 12 PM CT, and Tuesday, April 11

at 6 PM Central Time

Due Date and Time for Questions: Send questions to

wallacegrants@winrock.org.

Wallace Center will respond to questions weekly on a rolling basis. Final questions due by April 24,

2023

Concept Due Date and Time: May 1, 2023 at 11:59pm Central

Time

Estimated Notification for Late May 2023

Applications Moving to Co-

Design Phase:

Estimated Co-Designed Project Late August 2023

Plan Due Date:

Estimated Award Date: September - December 2023



SECTION 1: PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

1.1 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The Mississippi River Region's water quality challenges and habitat loss remain stubborn issues. Frustratingly, underserved farmers have often been left out of conservation programming, which contributes to ecological harm. Many underserved farmers are and have been conservation leaders despite being under-resourced. In 2017, the Census of Agriculture revealed that Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color (BIPOC) farmers in the Mississippi River Region are more likely than white farmers to use conservation practices.

Wallace Center's EPA Historically Underserved Farmers Subaward Program is a competitive subaward program for the Mississippi River Region that aims to address the diverse needs of historically underserved farming communities, center networking and co-learning among subawardees, and resource underserved farmers as conservation leaders. This program will work with an advisory group to support eight to 20 organizations collaborating with underserved farmers on water quality, habitat, or forestry improvements, thus reducing phosphorus and nitrogen loss.

This program is one of four different competitive subaward programs supported by the EPA Gulf of Mexico Division in four different regions to work with organizations supporting historically underserved farmers on water quality, habitat resilience, and information exchange. Each program is launching a request for applications with more details about program requirements. More details and a link to each are below:

- <u>Iowa Department of Natural Resources</u> (Iowa DNR) will serve the state of Iowa.
- <u>National Association of State Departments of Agriculture Foundation</u>
 (NASDA) will serve the Ohio-Tennessee Region (Kentucky, Tennessee and
 the Gulf drainage portions of Indiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio,
 Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia).
- <u>National Association of Conservation Districts</u> (NACD) will serve conservation districts in the non-Mississippi River Gulf Drainage Region (Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, and the Gulf drainage portions of New Mexico, Colorado, Georgia, and Florida)
- Wallace Center at Winrock International will serve the Upper and Lower Mississippi River Region (Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Illinois, and the Gulf drainage portions of Minnesota and Wisconsin) – THIS REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS



Eligibility map:



The goals of this program are to:

- Work directly with Native American and/or other <u>historically underserved farmers</u>¹ on novel or innovative techniques, methods, or approaches that reduce non-point source pollution and increase the sustainability and resiliency of their operations (note that Traditional Ecological Knowledge or practices are eligible if they increase sustainability or resiliency);
- Leverage partnerships to increase knowledge sharing and collaboration within and among historically underserved communities;
- Collect and analyze data to demonstrate the results of funded projects;

¹ For this RFA, "farmers" include individuals that make management decisions concerning agriculture lands, including cropland, forestland, and grazing lands.



 Disseminate results to communities to inform future conservation or management practices and expand adoption of the most cost-effective and sustainable approaches

1.2 EXPECTED ACTIVITIES

All activities must comply with the Clean Water Act, §104(b)(3), which authorizes the award of assistance agreements to conduct and promote the coordination and acceleration of research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys and studies relating to the causes, effects, extent, prevention, reduction, and elimination of pollution. Projects must include working with underserved farmers on at least one of the following types of activities:

- Water quality initiatives such as nutrient reduction with creative runoff treatment solutions; innovative year-round ground cover to limit erosion; planting field buffers; conservation tillage; managing livestock access to streams; address key manure nutrient management issues (e.g., phosphorus saturation in soil, ammonia emissions, alternative uses for manure nutrients); increase the implementation of nitrogen-use efficiency tools to better manage inorganic nitrogen inputs on cropland.
- Habitat restoration initiatives such as riparian zone improvement; observing environmental windows; restoration or protection of wildlife corridors; partner easements; landowner habitat planting/restoration; other innovative habitat ideas; conservation and restoration of perennially flooded grasslands and forests.
- Sustainable forest management initiatives such as utilizing sustainable forestry
 practices that protect and maintain water quality and habitat; improving utilization
 of sustainable forestry practices through training, education, and public outreach;
 and monitoring effectiveness of sustainable practices

To the end of the activities above, programs may include (but are not limited to):

- Outreach and technical assistance with historically underserved farmers or communities
- Financial assistance to historically underserved farmers
- Collecting and analyzing data, including modeling approaches, direct water quality or other monitoring, or citizen science. See Environmental Monitoring and Modeling section below for additional considerations
- Sharing results and lessons learned within and among historically underserved communities and beyond (i.e., through webinars, in-person trainings, etc.)
- Organizational planning to expand reach with underserved farmers

1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AND MODELING

EPA requires that environmental monitoring should be performed at a level commensurate with the goals and metrics subawardees would like to claim. In other words, environmental monitoring should demonstrate and support subawardees' project goals and impacts. Basic estimation of environmental results across all



subawardees will be provided by Wallace Center and its Ecosystem Services colleagues in Winrock International. This includes a modelled approach to estimate nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment loss reductions for practices where data is available. This approach will require subawardees to regularly submit information on farmers reached, acres with new practices or restoration activities (including location, baseline, and practice or habitat type), and expected lifespan of practice. The results will be provided back to subawardees and to EPA for use in their respective communications. This approach will be approved by EPA in a quality assurance project plan developed by Wallace Center staff.

Subawardees are not required to do additional environmental monitoring or modelling and will not be assessed on whether those activities are included. However, subawardees are encouraged to include these activities to the extent they will be helpful, e.g. if inclusion of these activities might expand the subawardee's funding sources, build relationships with new partners such as researchers, or help tell the conservation success stories of the subawardee or participating farmers. If these activities are planned, please note that subawardees may need to develop quality assurance project plans, which the Wallace Center can support.

1.4 OVERALL PROCESS AND TIMELINE

In acknowledgement that many application processes offer timelines that reinforce inequities and prevent intentional relationship-building, the Wallace Center is using a multi-phase project design process:

Initial concept phase. Applicants will submit brief concept notes—defined as a brief paper written prior to a full proposal—(requirements detailed in Section 4) by May 1, 2023, to be assessed competitively against other applications received by a review panel of project advisors and Wallace Center staff. The review panel will select applicants to move to the next phase and provide feedback to all applicants by late May 2023.

Project co-design phase. Applicants selected to move forward will receive initial awards of up to \$8,000 to complete the co-design phase through approximately late August 2023. Co-design activities are expected to include:

- Mentorship and feedback from advisors and guidance from Wallace Center
- Development of project implementation workplans, evaluation plans, and communication plans with guidance and templates provided
- Completion of pre-award reviews and documentation of policies requested for compliance with federal and EPA regulations (including administrative review of policies and practices, organizational capacity survey, and Quality Management Plans and Quality Assurance Project Plans where appropriate)
- [optional] Attendance at workshops as determined by subawardee feedback.
 Example topics: EPA water quality modelling tools, cost-effective environmental monitoring options to use with farmers, EPA compliance in organizational policies, grassroots advocacy and storytelling on conservation



success stories, etc. As applicants are willing and able to share their strengths and learning with other applicants, this may include applicant-led/supported sessions.

• [optional] Peer networking with other applicants moving forward. In other words, during the co-design phase, applicants are encouraged to work with each other to build their approach.

Award phase. Applicants will submit finalized implementation workplan, evaluation plan, and communication plan along with requested contractual information and EPA data quality assurance documentation, where required. Contracting is expected to take place between August and December 2023.

Implementation phase. From January 2024 through December 2026, subawardees will implement their project plans, receive peer and advisor support, access technical assistance on topics defined by the subawardees, and report their progress, challenges, successes, and feedback with the Wallace Center and EPA. Expect that subawardees will gather virtually twice per year for a half-day session to share learnings and problem solve common challenges. Expect also to submit brief quarterly reports (template will be provided), ongoing data collection about farmers reached, acres with new practices (including location, baseline, and practice type), and monthly invoicing of project expenses to Wallace Center for reimbursement.

Program closeout. From December 2026 to February 2027, subawardees will close out their awards, complete final financial and programmatic reporting, join an in-person project celebration, share final feedback with Wallace Center and EPA, and share project results.

1.5 ADVISORS

This program must center the needs and assets of underserved farmers and the organizations that support them. Thus, Wallace Center is working closely with a paid advisory group diverse in race/ethnicity, gender, geography, and networks served, in order to inform the subaward program from design to completion. Advisors were chosen because they are experienced and trusted in sustainable and resilient agriculture, especially in service of underserved farmers. Advisors are subject to a conflict of interest and recusal policy for the competitive concept phase.

- Felicia Bell, Farmer, RD & S Farm
- Pakou Hang, Founder and former Executive Director, Hmong American Farmers Association
- Mackenize Martinez, Technical Assistance Specialist for the Southeast, Intertribal Agriculture Council



 Brennan Washington, 1890 Land Grant Liaison and Southeastern Outreach Coordinator, Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, and Farmer, Phoenix Gardens

Tasheena Powers, Physical Scientist, Environmental Protection Agency Gulf of Mexico Division, serves this program as a Program Officer. Tasheena will join the advisors, subrecipients, and Wallace Center staff in calls to facilitate co-learning. The EPA Program Officer will not determine awards or provide one-on-one support.

SECTION 2: AWARD INFORMATION

2.1 ANTICIPATED NUMBER OF AWARDS TO BE ISSUED

The Strengthening the Support Ecosystem for Underserved Farmers program expects to award 8 to 20 grants under this RFA dependent on the quality of applications received and availability of funding.

2.2 ESTIMATED AMOUNT OF AWARDS

It is expected that an individual award amount will be between \$75,000 and \$250,000. A total of \$2,000,000 will be awarded. This amount is inclusive of the initial \$8,000 award for co-design activities. The final amount awarded will depend on award activities and final negotiations.

Additional in-kind support to subawardees will be offered through mentorship and support with project advisors, workshops and co-learning sessions with subawardees throughout the life of the project, technical support on environmental data collection and modeling/monitoring, and support on federal and EPA regulatory compliance.

2.3 ANTICIPATED START DATE AND DURATION OF AWARDS

An initial award amount may be awarded after the concept phase to selected applicants to work with project advisors and each other on project implementation, evaluation, and communication plans. The anticipated period of performance for implementation is December 2023 through February 2027, depending on the negotiated award activities.

2.4 TYPE OF AWARDS TO BE ISSUED

Wallace Center at Winrock International will determine the appropriate subaward mechanism, in consultation with the applicant during the negotiation process, based on the pre-award assessment of the applicant, nature of the award activity, and estimated total cost of the award. Awards are expected to be reimbursement based, with reimbursements remitted to subrecipients within ~30 days after submitted invoices. Subrecipients will be able to request advances as needed.



SECTION 3: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

3.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Governmental entities (including state agencies, interstate agencies, Indian tribes, local governments), institutions of higher learning (i.e., colleges and universities), and non-profit organizations (as defined at 2 CFR 200) are eligible to apply for funding under this RFA. Consistent with the definition of Nonprofit organization at 2 CFR § 200.1, the term nonprofit organization means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization that is operated mainly for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purpose in the public interest and is not organized primarily for profit; and uses net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the operation of the organization. The term includes tax-exempt nonprofit neighborhood and labor organizations.

Note that 2 CFR 200.1 specifically excludes Institutions of Higher Education from the definition of non-profit organization because they are separately defined in the regulation. While not considered to be a nonprofit organization(s) as defined by 2 CFR 200.1, public or nonprofit Institutions of Higher Education are, nevertheless, eligible to submit applications under this RFA. For-profit colleges, universities, trade schools, and hospitals are ineligible. Nonprofit organizations that are not exempt from taxation under section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code must submit other forms of documentation of nonprofit status; such as certificates of incorporation as nonprofit under state or tribal law. Nonprofit organizations exempt from taxation under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that lobby are not eligible for EPA funding as provided in the Lobbying Disclosure Act, 2 U.S.C. 1611.

Eligible entities	Not eligible
 state agencies, interstate agencies, federally recognized Indian tribes and tribal organizations, state-designated Indian Tribes local governments, institutions of higher learning (i.e., colleges and universities), Intertribal consortia and non-profit organizations as defined in 2 C.F.R. § 200 	 individuals foreign organizations and governments, nonprofit organizations exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying, and "for-profit" organizations

To be minimally eligible for funding, applicants must comply with the following conditions:



- Be legally registered or otherwise authorized to conduct business in the United States.
- Agree to be subject to a pre-award assessment to examine that the applicant has sound management in the form of financial, administrative, and technical policies and procedures.
- Be able to demonstrate successful past performance in collaborating with underserved farmers to reach conservation goals.
- Provide a Unique Entity ID (UEI) at the time of award. If the applicant already
 has a UEI number, it should be included in their application. Otherwise,
 applicants will be expected to get a UEI number before an award is issued. UEI
 numbers can be obtained online at https://sam.gov/content/duns-uei. If you do
 not already have a UEI, please begin this process by the time you submit your
 concept as it can sometimes take weeks to secure a UEI.

3.2 ELIGIBLE GEOGRAPHIES

Proposed activities for this program must fall within areas that drain to the Gulf of Mexico in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. See map below for program boundaries for this program. See Appendix B for maps and county lists of partially covered states, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Please note that if you are in Mississippi, you may be eligible for two programs: this program and the program supported by National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). We encourage conservation districts and other eligible applicants to consider applying for that program. We also encourage applicants to connect with their local conservation districts to explore partnerships under either program. Organizations may apply to both programs, but the same work cannot be funded by both programs.



Eligibility map:





SECTION 4: INSTRUCTION TO APPLICANTS AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

4.1 PRE-APPLICATION WEBINARS

Pre-application webinars will be held as detailed below and recorded. All applicants are encouraged to attend.

Date:	March 22, 2023 (overview and Q&A), April 5, 2023 (Q&A), and April 11, 2023 (Q&A)
Details:	All potential applicants are encouraged to attend one or more pre-application webinars to learn more about this RFA, how to apply, and to better understand the collective impact approach of the program. There are three pre-application webinars planned (all will be recorded):
	March 22 at 12 PM CT (Overview and Q&A): - Introduction to the program - Metrics and environmental impact goals - Subawardee support and expectations overview - Guidance on how to submit an application for this RFA - Questions and answers related to this RFA
	April 5 at 12 PM CT (Q&A): - Questions and answers related to this RFA
	April 11 at 6 PM CT (Q&A): - Questions and answers related to this RFA
Registration link:	https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0oduqrrDloE91fhed NKczB_zbR20wnEYRd
Language Webinars to be Held In:	English. Please reach out if another language is requested at WallaceGrants@winrock.org.



4.2 CONCEPT AND SIMPLE BUDGET

Applicants will develop their concept applications based on their understanding of the program's needs, their prior institutional experience and their determination of the approaches that would be feasible and successful. In all cases, applicants shall clearly explain the rationale for the proposed approaches chosen.

An Application Form template is provided as an attachment to this RFA. You may use your own format as long as the same information is shown and it meets submission guidelines in Section 4.4. The concept note should be no longer than 4 pages in length and describe:

- Project title, lead organization name, UEI if registered, entity type, and any proposed partners
- The environmental challenge and proposed solution in your community, including the specific practices you plan to work with underserved farmers to implement (see Section 1.2)
- A description of the geography and community you will serve, including estimate of number of historically underserved farmers served and acres with new practices or activities to enhance, protect, or restore under this program
- A summary of your organization's history of and approach to working with underserved farmers and communities, including organizational leadership and involvement by underserved farmers.
- A summary of your organization's capacity to meet expectations with EPA policies and federal subaward practices (see Appendix C). Please note that applicants will not be assessed on having compliant policies and practices currently, but rather on capacity to develop or maintain those policies and practices, e.g. sufficient staffing
- A simple budget with the categories (template provided):
 - Personnel
 - Fringe
 - Travel
 - Equipment
 - Supplies
 - Consultants
 - Farmer incentives/participant support costs
 - Other grants/subawards/subcontracts
 - Other
 - Overhead/indirects. If you organization has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, please use that rate. Otherwise, subawards are capped at a 10% de minimis rate
 - Total requested budget

When designing your budget, consider:

 The initial award of up to \$8,000 for the co-design phase is included in your total budget.



- On-going monitoring and reporting of the funded activities will be the responsibility of the applicant. Subawardees will need to plan for quarterly reporting, monthly invoicing, regular data collection on activities with farmers, and twice yearly calls with other subawardees and Wallace Center.
- Travel to a one-day end-of-project event should be included, in addition to any other travel (mileage, etc.) needed for proposed work.
- Budget for communications activities is encouraged.
- Examples of other eligible expenses:
 - Staff or consultant time to work with historically underserved farmers
 - Field days or farmer events
 - Supplies or equipment that are reasonable and necessary to your approach, like water quality monitoring equipment
 - Financial assistance to historically underserved farmers

4.3 COST-SHARE / MATCH

Cost-share / match is <u>not</u> required and will not benefit your application.

4.4 SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All submissions, questions, and other communications regarding this RFA should be submitted by email to WallaceGrants@winrock.org. Written responses to questions will be made available to all applicants.

Concepts must be submitted in English and may not be more than 4 pages, using Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri, font size 12, single-spaced. Concepts must be submitted no later than the time and date indicated on the cover page.

Incomplete or late applications will be marked as such and may be ineligible for review or award; however, Wallace Center reserves the right to accept and include incomplete or late applications in the review and award process when it is considered within the best interest of Wallace Center to do so. Applications that are submitted late or incomplete run the risk of **not** being considered for review.

Please note that if your application is selected to move into project co-design, further materials will be requested or developed. These materials will include an organizational capacity matrix, audit reports or financial statements, an implementation plan, an evaluation plan, and a communications plan.

Receipt time for electronic submissions is when the application is received by Winrock's Internet Server. Please do not send files in ZIP format. Wallace Center will confirm receipt of submissions within 3 business days.



SECTION 5: APPLICATION EVALUATION AND REVIEW PROCESS

5.1 MERIT REVIEW

The criteria presented below have been tailored to the requirements of this RFA. A total of 100 points are possible for all components of the concept. The relative importance of each criterion is indicated by approximate weight by points.

In evaluating the concepts, Wallace Center and project advisors will examine overall merit and feasibility, as well as specific criteria relevant to each component as elaborated below. Applicants should note that these criteria: (1) serve as the standard against which all applications will be evaluated, and (2) serve to identify the significant matters which applicants should address in their applications. In making the final funding decisions, the Wallace Center may also consider programmatic priorities, funding availability, and geographic diversity of funds.

Concept Review Criteria	Points
Technical Approach Clarity, feasibility (including budget feasibility), and appropriateness of proposed technical approach for working with underserved farmers to achieve conservation goals.	30
Past Performance Level of previous collaboration with and organizational leadership by underserved farmers and communities on environmental challenges.	30
Organizational Capacity Extent of applicant's capacity to meet expectations with EPA policies and federal subaward practices, e.g. monthly invoicing and quarterly reporting. Applicants are not assessed on having compliant policies and practices currently, but rather should focus on explaining capacity to develop and/or maintain those policies and practices, e.g. sufficient staffing.	20
Intersectionality and Potential to Support those Harmed Historically Clarity on project and organization's approach to build intersectional power among Historically Underserved farmers and communities. For the purposes of this evaluation, intersectionality means an approach that considers the simultaneous experience of social categories such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual	20



orientation. <i>Power</i> means having the resources and relationships to realize equitable, resilient, and sustainable farming systems.	
Overall Rating (out of 100 points)	100

5.2 REVIEW PROCESS

Concepts will be reviewed and evaluated by an evaluation panel using the merit review criteria indicated above. The evaluation panel will be made up of project advisors and a Wallace Center staffer. Reviewers will be subject to a conflict of interest policy and recusal process for applicants they have a relationship with.

Simple budgets will not be scored separately but will be reviewed and evaluated for reasonableness and effectiveness based on the scope of activities being proposed.

SECTION 6: OTHER TERMS AND CONDITIONS

6.1 DISCLAIMERS

The issuance of this solicitation does not commit Wallace Center to make an award to any prospective subawardee responding to this solicitation. Prospective subawardees will not be reimbursed for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of a concept. Wallace Center reserves the right to reject any and all applications, or to make an award without further discussion or negotiation.

All awards will be negotiated, denominated, and funded in US dollars. All costs funded under the award must be allowable, allocable, and reasonable.

6.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Applicants must provide disclosure of any past, present or future relationships with any parties associated with the issuance, review or management of this RFA and anticipated subaward. Failure to provide full and open disclosure may result in Wallace Center having to re-evaluate selection of a potential applicant.

6.3 OTHER CONDITIONS

- Applicants must agree and be willing to sign and submit required certifications before an award is issued.
- For those selected for a grant award, Wallace Center will conduct a pre-award risk assessment.
- Issuance of award agreements will be subject to applicable approval by EPA, as needed.
- Applicants may only submit one application per prime organization under this RFA.
 Applicants may submit applications to other subaward programs supported by lowa



- Department of Natural Resources, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, or National Association of Conservation Districts.
- Applications must remain valid for at least 360 days. In other words, Wallace Center will consider your concept and budget able to be evaluated as-is up to 360 days after you submit.

Additionally, the following items cannot be purchased under the potential resultant grants:

- Any purchases or activities deemed unnecessary to accomplish grant purposes as determined by Wallace Center or EPA, including any grantee headquarters expenses that are not directly linked to the implementation of the proposed activities
- Private ceremonies, parties, celebrations or "representation" expenses
- Previous obligations and/or bad debts
- Expenses related to overtly religious purposes
- Expenses intended to influence the outcome of elections or other political processes
- Fines and/or penalties
- Creation of endowments
- Alcoholic beverages
- Real property (land, including land improvements, and structures thereto)

The following activities are also **ineligible** under this grant per EPA terms and conditions of the award to Wallace Center:

- Projects that do not comply with Clean Water Act Section 104(b)(3), which
 authorizes the award of assistance agreements to conduct and promote the
 coordination and acceleration of research, investigations, experiments, training,
 demonstrations, surveys and studies relating to the causes, effects, extent,
 prevention, reduction, and elimination of pollution.
- Actions required to settle a formal enforcement action or included in a court order; or specified as a required mitigation measure under a state, local, or federal permit for a specific project; however, grant funding may be used to enhance or expand such projects beyond minimum requirements for compliance.
- Work involving only routine maintenance of storm water infrastructure and other facilities
- Projects which fall under the existing planning responsibilities of an individual state or local government (e.g., development of TMDLs or MS4 permits)
- Solely "gray infrastructure" projects (e.g., installation of sewer lines)
- Construction activities that are not a part of a demonstration project. This
 includes, but is not limited to, preliminary planning to determine the economic
 and engineering feasibility of a facility; engineering, architectural, legal, fiscal,
 and economic investigations and studies; surveys, designs, plans, working
 drawings, specifications, procedures, and other actions necessary to the
 construction of a facility; the erection, acquisition, alteration, remodeling,



improvement, or extension of a facility; and the inspection and supervision of the construction of a facility.

SECTION 7: APPENDICES

Appendix A - OPTIONAL Application Template

Appendix B – OPTIONAL Budget Template

Appendix C - Program Eligibility Maps

Appendix D – Shortlist of Subaward Expectations