A Request for Applications for a Cooperative Agreement

to Provide Assistance for

Conducting Research to Develop Improved Methods and Approaches to Empower Communities to Participate More Effectively in Environmental Cleanups

National Center for Environmental Assessment (NCEA)
Office of Research and Development (ORD)
United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Washington, DC 20460

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EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE MORE EFFECTIVELY IN ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANUPS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The National Center for Environmental Assessment (NCEA), which is part of the Office of Research and Development (ORD) within the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), is issuing this "Request for Applications" (RFA) for one or more cooperative agreements to provide assistance to conduct research to develop improved methods and approaches to empower communities to participate more effectively in environmental cleanups of Superfund waste sites.

The value of these cooperative agreement awards is estimated to range from $100,000 to $500,000 total over a period of one to three years. Applications must be postmarked by the U.S. Postal Service, dated by a delivery service or marked received by NCEA personnel by **September 19, 2002**. Applications will be reviewed and evaluated by guidelines as set forth in this document. Interested parties are invited to submit a competitive Cooperative Agreement Application, including a full and detailed project application for funding consideration. The availability of this solicitation document is being announced via the Federal Register, the NCEA web site: http://www.epa.gov/ncea/, and email to potentially interested parties.

The EPA reserves the right not to make any awards from this solicitation. Interagency agreements with other federal agencies related to this activity are not solicited. The catalogue of federal domestic assistance number is 66.500.

This document provides information about: NCEA; the research topic for which applications are being solicited; the competitive process for awarding cooperative agreements; and the preparation of applications (see the Table of Contents on the page preceding this section). We urge each applicant to read and consider carefully the information presented in these sections before preparing an application.

2.0 MISSION OF THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EPA's National Center for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) serves as the national resource center for: the overall process of ecological and human health risk assessments; the integration of hazard, dose-response, and exposure data; and models to produce risk characterizations. NCEA occupies a critical position in the science and public policy arena of research and risk management by (1) integrating worldwide research findings and data, and (2) providing regulators with assessments and methodologies that transfer research data into characterizations that address risk management needs. NCEA's activities include:

- development of methodologies that reduce uncertainties in current risk assessment practices;

- conducting assessments of contaminants of national significance;
- providing guidance and support to risk assessors;
- acting as a catalyst for advances in the science of risk assessment brought about, for example, by cooperative endeavors;
- facilitating an exchange of ideas among environmental professionals in the federal, state, industrial, academic, environmental, public interest, and international communities; and,
- characterizing the impacts of environmental receptors whether they result from exposure(s) to single, complex, or multiple physical, chemical, biological, or radiological stressors.

3.0 RESEARCH FOR WHICH APPLICATIONS ARE BEING SOLICITED

3.1 Background/Project Description

The *primary purpose* of the research solicited by this document is to stimulate scientific research on the general topic of environmental risk communication and community involvement. The *secondary purpose* of the solicitation is to generate insights, methods, tools, and models that might be used to empower communities to participate more effectively in environmental cleanups, especially the cleanup of contaminated sediment sites.

The National Research Council's report on dredging PCB-contaminated sediments (NRC, 2000) strongly declared that all risk management decisions on cleaning up contaminated sediments should be made with early, active, and continuing community involvement. At the communities visited by members of the NRC committee, they found an active, involved, and educated public that was eager to participate in the clean-up process. However, despite having highly interested community members, the committee found that community involvement was too limited and the process to involve affected parties was too dominated by potentially responsible parties (PRPs) and the government agencies. The committee also found very high levels of distrust among communities, government agencies, and PRPs. This distrust, they believed, often resulted in extensive delays and gridlock at many sites.

The NRC report emphasizes the many benefits of community involvement. *"Participation makes the process more democratic, lends legitimacy to the process, educates and empowers the affected communities, and generally leads to decisions that are more accepted by the community. The affected community members can contribute essential community-based knowledge, information, and insight that is often lacking in expert-driven risk processes. Community involvement can also assist in dealing with perceptions of risk and helping community members to understand the differences between types and degrees of risk."* (p. 75)

Risk communication provides the methods, models, and tools for EPA to more effectively reach out to communities, earn their trust, and build an effective partnership. This partnership between EPA and affected communities will allow them to become more fully engaged in the contaminated sediments clean-up process.

Applicants are encouraged to cooperate with other organizations, educational institutions, citizens groups, and/or other non-federal governmental entities to achieve these purposes. Any transactions with such groups involving transfer of EPA funds must comply with applicable regulations. Applicants may cooperate with federal agencies, provided such an effort is consistent with that agency's authority. (See Section 4.1 for information about eligibility.)

Funds shall be used to conduct research to stimulate advances in the science of risk communication so that more effective methods, tools, and models can be used to empower communities to participate more effectively in environmental cleanups, especially the cleanup of contaminated sediment sites. Possible research projects under this solicitation might include one or more of the following:

1) **Tools to measure community preferences.** Better methods and tools need to be developed to measure the preferences of individuals, sub-populations, and communities throughout the entire sediment clean-up process. Measurement methods might include public opinion survey instruments, randomly selected focus groups, and computer-based methods such as "virtual" town meetings.

2) **Tools to summarize complex data.** More effective methods and tools are needed to describe, summarize, and present complex technical data to communities. Too often communities are either inundated with too much extraneous information that cannot be understood, or they are presented with summaries that contain too little data. Research is needed on both how to effectively extract the appropriate amount of information and how to determine what are the best vehicles (e.g., formal presentations, newsletters, informal meetings, videos, infomercials, web sites, etc.) for presenting the data to communities.

3) **Methods to extract and utilize community-based knowledge.** Communities have first-hand knowledge of contaminated sites and their own activities (such as catching and consuming fish) that may help EPA to better evaluate the site's possible impact on the community's health. Better methods are needed to develop site-specific exposure factors based on the habits of local communities which could reduce reliance on the use of national default assumptions that might not reflect local customs or conditions.

4) **Methods to assess impacts on societal/cultural practices.** Methods are needed on developing ways to determine how various societal/cultural values and practices are impacted by contaminated sediments or clean-up activities. For example, the inability of native tribes to harvest fish and then barter them for other valuables is a cultural impact that is not often considered.

5) **Outreach tools for large geographic sites.** Because some contaminated sediment sites, especially river sites, can span tens or even hundreds of miles, they present an unusually large challenge to community involvement staff. Better community outreach tools can be applied to large geographic sites with multiple diverse communities each with its own interests and concerns.

6) **Methods to evaluate the effectiveness of community involvement programs.** There is often considerable disagreement about the effectiveness of current public participation efforts. Oftentimes, conclusions are being made based upon uncertain, conflicting anecdotal observations. More objective, systematic, and reliable methods and tools need to be developed, tested, and evaluated to ensure the effectiveness of community involvement activities.

Applicants are advised that if any of the activities that they propose to be conducted under this agreement meets the definition of an information collection request by EPA as defined by 5 CFR Part 1320, then EPA must first obtain an information collection request authorization from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). [Information collection requests include, but are not limited to, any request to collect information (e.g., surveys or questionnaires, etc.) from ten or more non-Federal respondents within a 12-month period, even if the information collected is voluntary.] If, alternately, the applicant uses its own funds to design and administer the survey, then the requirement for OMB authorization is not applicable. Under this alternate funding scenario, EPA cannot (and has no desire to) be substantially involved in the design or administration of the surveys. However, EPA funds can be used to analyze data from the survey and publish the results as long as the recipient makes it clear that EPA did not fund the information collection and was not involved in the design or administration of the survey.

3.2 The EPA Collaborative Role

The fundamental role of collaboration with EPA scientists in the research activity contemplated by the agreement makes the cooperative research mechanism a distinctly different one from a grant mechanism, in which no collaboration is permitted. EPA intends to be substantially involved in this project. Applicants should state the extent and nature of collaboration with EPA that they desire in the proposal. The specifics of who will be involved and in what way they will collaborate will be subject to later negotiations between EPA and the applicant once the award is made and will become part of the official work plan in the cooperative agreement. EPA involvement with the research team could take the form of one or more of the following: (1) collaboration in the design, measurement, analysis, and interpretation of the research activity; (2) collaboration in publishing articles or reports about the research; or (3) technical assistance in carrying out the work under the agreement.

The Review Panel will evaluate the appropriateness of the applicant's proposal for collaborating with EPA. Please note that the criterion for evaluation is appropriateness, not extent of involvement. To meet the criteria for cooperative agreements, a substantive role for EPA must be proposed, but the collaboration proposed can be either extensive or limited.

However, please note that federal assistance funds cannot be used to fund the travel and expenses of any federal participants or collaborators.

4.0 FUNDING

4.1 Eligibility

Applicants must be eligible to receive federal assistance under Section 31(b) and (c) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA or Superfund). EPA will consider applications from universities and non-profit organizations. The funds available for this project will be awarded using a cooperative agreement funding instrument. EPA will not consider applications for collaborative research from other federal agencies. However, academic or Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) applicants may partner with federal agencies provided that such partnership is consistent with that agency's authority. Organizations that engage in lobbying are ineligible for funding under this solicitation[1]. Please indicate your eligibility in your application.

4.2 Award Value

The awards are estimated to range from $100,000 to $500,000 total over a one- to three-year period. Depending on the availability of funds, it is anticipated that funding will consist of approximately $100,000 to $200,000 each year.

4.3 Period of Performance

The period of performance could be one to three years, depending upon the applicant's project. Funding to begin work under the cooperative agreement will not be available until after the award is made. Any costs incurred before the award is issued are at the applicant's risk. EPA anticipates making awards in the period between November 2002 and March 30, 2003.

5.0 INFORMATION FOR INVESTIGATORS PREPARING APPLICATIONS

This section contains information of importance to research investigators preparing cooperative agreement full applications. Information about the full application process and application forms are found in the "Application Kit for Assistance." Information about eligibility can be found in Section 4.1 of this solicitation. Information can be found about legislation and regulations for assistance programs at the following internet web sites: http://www.epa.gov/ogd/AppKit/, and http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/index.html.

[1] In accordance with Section 18 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995, PL. No. 105-65, 109 Stat. 691, a recipient must affirm that: (1) it is not a nonprofit organization described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986; or (2) it is a nonprofit organization described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 but does not and will not engage in lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

5.1 General Application Description

Applicants are strongly encouraged to prepare the application in such a way as to ensure that reviewers will be able to address the Review Criteria (described below in Section 5.2).

The project narrative section of the application **may not exceed 15 pages** (on 8 ½ x 11-inch paper, consecutively numbered pages, and of standard type [10-12] characters per inch), including tables, graphs, and figures. For purposes of this solicitation, the "project narrative section" of the application must include all of the following items:

(1) Executive Summary of Project
(2) Relevance to this Solicitation's Objectives
(3) Results or Benefits Expected
(*Please note that cooperative agreements are not for the direct use or benefit of EPA.)*
(4) Detailed Project Description
(5) Collaboration with EPA/NCEA Staff

Attachments, appendices, and reference lists for the narrative section may be attached, but are included in the 15-page limitation.

Additional items **not included in the 15-page limitation** are the SF-424 and other forms; resumés; the abstract; and the cover sheet. Itemized budgets, including justifications, are not included in the 15-page limitation, but must not exceed five consecutively numbered pages (excluding budget information on SF-424.) The cover sheet must contain the following information:

1) Title of the application
2) Name of the institution or individual
3) Mailing address for disposition of the application
4) Name, phone, fax, and e-mail information for the principal investigator

All applications received by the due date will be date-stamped and reviewed to ensure that all forms and documents have been appropriately prepared. Incorrectly prepared forms and inadequate documentation can be grounds for rejection of the application.

5.2 Review Criteria

5.2.1 Screening Questions

The following screening questions will be used by the Review Panel (RP). If the answer to any of these questions is no, the proposal will be rejected.

1) Is the primary purpose of the proposed cooperative agreement to stimulate scientific research on the general topic of environmental risk communication and community involvement?
2) Does the project principally benefit a non-federal institution with authority to implement, or responsibilities for compliance with, CERCLA or SARA?
3) Is the applicant eligible to receive assistance under this solicitation?

4) Has the applicant agreed that EPA will be substantially involved in the project? (See Section 3.2 for guidance about EPA's collaborative role and what constitutes substantial involvement.)

5.2.2 Weighted Criteria

The following criteria (with the quantitative weight for each criterion given in parentheses) will be used in the review of the applications:

A. **Responsiveness to RFA (20 points total)** Reviewers will evaluate how closely the Applicant addressed the needs, topics, and other requirements outlined in the RFA.

1. **Relevancy of Proposed Research Topics (10 points)** Reviewers will consider the significance of how the proposed research meets the overall objective of stimulating scientific research on the general topic of environmental risk communication and community involvement. Specifically, the reviewers will consider the following:

a) Does the proposal address the specific needs outlined in Section 3.1 of the RFA?

b) Does the proposal clearly identify products that relate the needs of the RFA?

c) Does the proposal clearly address other requirements identified in the RFA?

2. **Relevancy of Proposed Products (10 points)** Reviewers will consider the extent to which the proposed work will assist communities in becoming more fully involved in environmental clean-up projects. Reviewers will consider the extent to which the proposed work is likely to generate insights, methods, and approaches that would lead to this objective. Applicants should clearly demonstrate how the expected results and/or products would be of value in promoting more effective involvement of communities in the decision-making process.

B. **Scientific Merit / Proposal Quality (40 points total)** Reviewers will consider the scientific merit of the proposed approach to addressing the topic, including the soundness of fundamental scientific and technical approaches, and unique or innovative approaches evident in the application. Applicants should demonstrate an understanding of the state of the science on the proposed topic, and the contribution of the applicant's proposed approach to advancing the state of the science. In addition, applicants should demonstrate that proposed products will be scientifically sound.

1. **Study Design (20 points)** Reviewers will evaluate the extent to which the proposed work is likely to yield results that would be relevant and useful to the principal purpose of the RFA, which is to stimulate scientific research on the general topic of environmental risk communication and community involvement. Specifically, reviewers will consider the following:

a) Are the objectives of the project well defined, clearly articulated and scientifically sound?

b) Is the research/application and proposed technical approach scientifically sound and defensible? Will the approach achieve the research objectives?

c) Is there a good probability that the objectives can be accomplished?

d) What are the strengths and weakness of the project as related to its scientific merit and ability to accomplish its stated objectives?

2. **Creativity and Originality (10 points)** Reviewers will evaluate the extent to which the proposed work develops innovative approaches. Specifically, the reviewers will consider the following:

a) Does the research/application reflect the state of the art/science, and/or development/application of new techniques, methods or risk communication tools?

b) Does the proposal display innovative approaches?

c) Are there other special qualities or unique characteristics of the proposed research/application that enhance its scientific quality or advance the science?

3. **Clarity (10 points)** Reviewers will consider the overall conciseness, readability, and understandability of the application regarding its objectives, proposed methods, proposed budget, and schedule.

C. **Applicant Capabilities (20 points total)** Reviewers will evaluate the experience, qualifications, and capabilities of the persons and organizations proposed to conduct the work. Specifically, the reviewers will consider the following:

1. Do the applicants have the necessary experience and qualifications to perform the work?
2. Have the key personnel made the necessary time commitment to support the proposed work?
3. Will the investigators be able to provide technical support, facilities, equipment, data and other tools and information relevant to the successful completion of the work?
4. Do the researchers have an organizational structure that will facilitate the work?
5. Do the researchers have experience in managing federal funds (including any adverse audit findings)?
6. Has the applicant fully described the experience and qualifications of the staff who will be engaged in the work?
7. Has the applicant adequately documented planning for quality assurance/quality control management of research activities and progress, data generation, data security and accuracy (if applicable), and staff supervision and integrity?

D. **Collaborative Role for EPA/NCEA (10 points total)** Reviewers will evaluate the appropriateness of the applicant's proposal for collaborating with EPA (e.g., in the design, analysis, interpretation, and publication phases of the proposed work). Applicants should demonstrate how the technical assistance that the applicant proposes to receive from EPA/NCEA is appropriate to NCEA's mission, its technical capabilities, and the expertise of its staff. (Note: The proposal should identify collaboration with NCEA by stated area of expertise, not by naming a specific researcher.)

E. **Cost Effectiveness (10 points total)** Reviewers will evaluate each proposal's merit as an investment for EPA funds. Reviewers will consider how to achieve the greatest public benefit

(relative to the objectives of this solicitation[2]) given limited EPA resources. Reviewers will consider the extent to which each application will result in direct expenditures for activities that benefit a non-federal institution with authority to implement, or responsibilities for compliance with, CERCLA or SARA.

5.3 Review of Applications

The Screening Questions and the Review Criteria (see Section 5.2) will be used to evaluate applications. A Review Panel (RP) will be convened to evaluate the submitted applications. The RP will include at least two EPA and two non-EPA panelists. The panelists will be required to certify that no conflict of interest is created through the individuals' participation in the panel or review process, and that the individual will not benefit, personally or financially, either directly or indirectly, from any aspect of participation in the review process. Panel members will not be permitted to discuss or retain applications after the completion of the review process. The RP will make final recommendations for funding to the Acting Associate Director for Health, National Center for Environmental Assessment (NCEA). The Acting Director will consider the RP's recommendations in light of the factors set forth in 40 CFR 40.140-1 and make final selection decisions. A letter will be sent to each applicant that submitted an application that indicates whether the application has been selected for funding.

5.4 Other Information for Applicants

5.4.1 Negotiating a Final Cooperative Agreement

Following selection of applications for funding, NCEA will negotiate scopes of work with the successful applicant. Care will be taken to avoid making changes to the cooperative agreement that might have significantly affected the outcome of the formal review process or the evaluation of the application by the RP.

5.4.2 Quality Assurance Requirements

Successful applicants must develop and implement a Quality Assurance Program that is acceptable to the award official to receive an EPA Assistance Award. The Quality Assurance Narrative Statement must be approved by EPA prior to award as being adequate to ensure that the organization is capable of preparing an acceptable Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP). While QAPP is not required as part of the application to be submitted for this competition, a QAPP must be prepared by those research organizations with applications selected for awards and submitted to the EPA project officer for approval within 30 days after award, and before initiating data collection activities.

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[2]Recall that the *primary purpose* of the research solicited by this document is to stimulate scientific research on the general topic of environmental risk communication and community involvement.

5.4.3 Award Process

An EPA Award Official in the Grants Operations Branch is responsible for issuing the final award for the cooperative agreement.

5.4.4 Peer Review of Publications

EPA encourages publication of the results of cooperative research agreements. As part of EPA's substantial involvement, reports and informational material prepared under the cooperative agreement must be submitted to NCEA for peer review prior to publication. Cooperating authors must give consideration to any peer review comments from this review. The cooperating party may publish the work, providing the publication includes the appropriate disclaimer statement. This requirement for peer review extends to publications based on research conducted during the period of performance, even if the publication is prepared after the completion of the performance period.

5.5 Communication with EPA Employees During Competition

During the period of competition for cooperative agreements, EPA will not provide information that would confer an unfair competitive advantage to the recipient of such information. To reduce both the potential for inadvertent communication of such information, and the appearance of conferring unfair advantage, it is ORD policy to restrict any communication about cooperative agreements undergoing competition to systematic communication that insures that all competitors have equal access to information. In furtherance of this policy, NCEA will only accept written questions for clarification of this solicitation. Questions may be e-mailed to: kelley.dave@epa.gov. Mr. Kelley's full contact information (including mailing and delivery addresses are given below. Questions and responses will be posted on the NCEA's Internet website: http://www.epa.gov/ord/ncea..

5.6 Instructions for Submitting Applications

One original and one copy of each full application must be submitted. Completed applications that respond to this solicitation must be mailed by regular, priority, or express U.S. mail or delivered by other delivery service, and received at the address indicated above on or before the deadline indicated in the assistance package (**September 19, 2002**). Applications that are postmarked, dated, or marked received after this deadline will not be considered. To request applications or solicitations, email Dave Kelley or contact him by phone: 202-564-3263, or by fax: 202-564-2268.

Applications must be marked received by EPA personnel no later than **September 19, 2002**. Please note: Due to concerns over anthrax contamination, the U.S. Postal Service has been unable to establish a time frame for regular mail delivery to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20460. To ensure that applications reach EPA by the due date, please: (1) use a private delivery service, (2) use electronic means such as fax or email, or (3) use a courier service. The cost of a delivery service is the responsibility of the applicant. Applicants may submit applications through the U.S. Postal

Service, however, any application sent through the Postal Service must be marked received by EPA personnel **no later than the deadline of September 19, 2002.** Applicants are advised to follow up their application with an email to the EPA Contact below to verify receipt of the application.

<u>via regular mail service</u>

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5.7 Dispute Resolution

Any disputes will be resolved under 40 CFR 30.63 and 40 CFR Part 31, Subpart F as applicable.