

# Responses to Applicant Questions

## Asked during Webinars for NOAA's Restoring Fish Passage through Barrier Removal Grants and NOAA's Restoring Tribal Priority Fish Passage through Barrier Removal Notices of Funding Opportunities

Webinar dates: Nov 20, Dec 3, and Dec 12, 2024

### Acronyms/Short-hand Used:

- *NOFO: Notice of Funding Opportunity*
- *National Fish Passage: NOAA's Restoring Fish Passage through Barrier Removal Grants*
- *Tribal Fish Passage: NOAA's Restoring Tribal Priority Fish Passage through Barrier Removal*

### Project Type/Eligibility Activities

**Overview:** We recommend that anyone with project specific eligibility questions reach out to the Competition Manager for either competition to talk through your project idea. Most of the questions and answers here address eligible activities, but not whether a proposal with those components will score strongly on the evaluation criteria.

All aspects of barrier removal and fish passage implementation are eligible activities in these funding opportunities, including planning, design, permitting and implementation, unless specifically described as ineligible in Section III. Tribal organizational capacity building is also a program priority for the Tribal Fish Passage competition.

For all project proposals, applicants should describe the barrier, and also how removal of the barrier will improve target fish populations. Please ensure your location supports passage of sea-run migratory fish, as defined in Section I.A. See Section III.A., Eligibility, and Section V.A., Evaluation Criteria, for more details. We suggest you read the definitions carefully including "in-stream barrier" for a stronger understanding of which types of barriers are targeted by the competitions.

- 1) If the project creates floodplain habitat for juvenile salmon, is that considered fish passage improvement? **Answer:** *An in-stream barrier is defined as any blockage that prevents or reduces the ability of migratory fish to move where needed to complete their life cycle. The evaluation criteria were designed with traditional upstream/downstream passage in mind, but projects that provide passage into floodplain habitat may be able to meet all the evaluation criteria, and will be reviewed.*

- 2) I don't see tide gates listed in the PPT. Are tide gate removals or fish passage upgrades to tide gates eligible? **Answer:** *Yes. Projects that remove a barrier will be more competitive than projects that install structures that require operations and maintenance. An operations and maintenance plan should be considered when applicants are proposing to install structures that require ongoing operation and maintenance to be effective, such as fish passage devices, fishways, or tide gates. (See page 14 of the National Fish Passage NOFO for more details about these plans.)*
- 3) Our dam is subject to a Settlement Agreement with obligations that have been adopted as requirements of the FERC license. Is the project ineligible because the hydropower company's license requires the construction of a fishway? Does this change if my dam is subject to a FERC exemption? **Answer:** *Section III.C of the NOFO states that activities required by a separate consent decree, court order, statute, regulation or FERC license are not eligible. An "exemption" is still a form of license or approval that comes with legally required terms and conditions for operation. Applicants should refer to those terms and conditions in their application to show why the proposed work is not required for legal operation.*
- 4) Would ESA listed migratory (adfluvial) bull trout be eligible for the tribal fish passage funding? **Answer:** *Possibly. Proposed work must meet the migratory fish definition, as described in I.A.: "Target fish species under this funding opportunity are those native species that spend a portion of their lives in rivers, floodplains and/or ponds and a portion in the ocean, estuaries or Great Lakes." Bull Trout do not migrate from the ocean to freshwater, and are not Great Lakes native species. When bull trout habitat overlaps with other eligible species that may also benefit from the project, the proposal should focus on the benefits to a sea-run migratory species.*
- 5) Please confirm that these grants are for passage of fish that move between freshwater and marine habitat, or between freshwater and the Great Lakes. Are American eel a target species, if we have no other anadromous or catadromous species? **Answer:** *Yes. American eel are catadromous fish, spending a portion of their lives in the ocean, and are an eligible species. Applicants are asked to review Section III, Eligibility Information, for both competitions, which states that 'applicants must propose work in areas that benefit United States migratory fish as defined in Section I.A., Program Objectives'. NOAA Restoration Center staff are available to discuss the specific location and species benefits for all projects.*
- 6) To clarify one of the presentation's FAQ's, if a project has already been awarded other BIL funding (via a separate federal agency grant program), does that trigger a conflict with the National Fish Passage opportunity? **Answer:** *No, prior*

*funding does not prevent receiving funds under this competition. We request that you show information about your full project budget, including consideration of categorizing the other BIL funds as cost share (not required, but encouraged).*

- 7) Do barrier projects and/or feasibility studies need to be the most downstream barrier on a tributary to the Great Lakes, or just in a Great Lakes watershed? **Answer:** *Regardless of the watershed, the subject barrier is not required to be the most downstream barrier. However, discussing the project with a NOAA Restoration Center technical contact will be helpful in addressing the Priority for Migratory Fish evaluation criterion, which may be more difficult to address at upstream barriers.*
- 8) Would projects that propose removing or modifying natural barriers to fish passage (e.g., modifying natural waterfalls that would allow emphasized fish species to access new habitat) be competitive in this competition? **Answer:** *We suggest you look at the evaluation criteria related to Scientific and Technological methods. A project like this may encounter more engineering or permitting hurdles.*
- 9) Are projects that are solely focused on dam inventorying and prioritization of dam removal, across a Great Lakes watershed and not only for most downstream barriers, eligible for this award? **Answer:** *Proposals focused solely on inventory and prioritization may delay the benefits to the target fish species, and consequently may not score as well in the Priority for migratory Fish evaluation criterion.*
- 10) There are state regulations that require fish barrier removals on state and private land, or require a fish ladder to receive a license for the dam. Would these fish barriers be ineligible for this grant? **Answer:** *In section 1.A we state that fish passage that requires a structure that needs long term maintenance or management will not score as well as one that fully removes a barrier. In section 3.C we state that legally required fish passage is not an eligible project type.*
- 11) If a project is proposed independent of but affecting the same fish run as another project, will the cumulative improvement be taken into consideration? Barrier removal is already underway downstream; the new project is closer to the headwaters. **Answer:** *It is important to evaluate the criteria related to watershed context and include details about the watershed, discussing any other barriers or improvements within that system.*
- 12) If you have two dams in sequence is it better to propose them together or as individual projects? **Answer:** *Consider the timeline and cost. Weigh overall benefits to fish against the criteria that focus on certain timelines and cost*

*estimates. There is not a better answer, this is about what the timeline looks like and what could be realistically and feasibly completed.*

- 13)** If a project has essentially no equity-related benefit because of where it's located, is it unlikely to succeed? **Answer:** *Our definitions of underserved communities are not solely related to geography. Please review the underserved communities definition as well as the evaluation criteria in the Outreach and Education section for each competition to see how work with underserved communities is described in the funding opportunity.*
- 14)** Where might projects fall out (eligible vs. ineligible) that develop monitoring infrastructure that would be used to manage passage? (e.g., fish detection stations that could be used to guide flow management to help migratory fish pass a dam). **Answer:** *Eligibility information is listed in Section III, where you can see information on eligible applicants and other criteria that affect eligibility, such as funding minimums and caps, and excluded activities. Monitoring infrastructure to guide flows is not an ineligible cost. To better understand how the project and any infrastructure for monitoring might be scored, review the Evaluation Criteria which describes the scoring that will be used to evaluate a proposal. Take a look at all categories, especially the Technical and Scientific Merit section and sustainability sub section.*
- 15)** Are there any restrictions on the types of projects that can be considered (i.e. are bridges allowed if they replaced a culvert damaged from a fire)? How about installation of a better type of culvert (i.e. box culvert)? **Answer:** *These examples, a bridge to replace a culvert, and installation of an improved culvert design are eligible projects for this funding opportunity. See the Eligibility section III.C (other factors affecting eligibility) to see what is not eligible.*
- 16)** Would removal of fish passage barriers above a dam be considered? **Answer:** *Yes. We do recommend you reach out to talk about your specific project and pay close attention to the fish passage definitions, program priorities and evaluation criteria to understand how your proposal will be evaluated. There is consideration in the competitions for watershed context and priority for migratory fish for example.*
- 17)** Do we need to show that a stream is fish-bearing through local data in order for a project to be considered? **Answer:** *Not necessarily. We want to understand watershed context, historic content, and other factors that influence a project and how it relates to our fish passage definitions and the evaluation in this competition.*

- 18) The funding is proposed for "coastal" watersheds. All rivers lead to the sea, so can you define a "non-coastal" watershed? **Answer:** *I recommend you review the definition of fish passage which describes sea-run fish (section I.A: Definitions).*
- 19) Does the definition of "migration barrier" include unscreened irrigation diversions that entrain emigrating juvenile salmonids? In other words, are projects that screen these diversions eligible? **Answer:** *Yes, the funding opportunity is not limited to those examples given in the funding opportunity.*
- 20) Does an organization on a densely populated lake (where some residents use the lake water) with two dams in need of upgrades, be supported by funding so that a nature-like fishway (to be installed by a different NGO) The fishway can't be installed without the dams upgrades and vice versa. **Answer:** *These activities sound like they are striving for fish passage improvements. Yes, the funding opportunity is not limited to those examples given in the funding opportunity.*
- 21) Would the removal of non-native species that impede native migration at a dam be eligible for funding under this program? **Answer:** *Yes, the project would be eligible. Please review the portions of the funding opportunity (Evaluation Criteria 1(a) and 2.(d) that address low maintenance, sustainable solutions to fish passage. Efforts that do not permanently remove a barrier to passage or require long-term maintenance may not score as highly as projects that do completely remove a barrier.*

## Program Objectives and Priorities

- 1) What is included in the priority for enhancing community resilience? Does this include mitigating flooding, or resilience to hazards that are not weather-related such as earthquakes, oil spills, and aging infrastructure? **Answer:** *Yes, the Priorities described in Section I.B, and the Evaluation Criterion in V.1.b reference both weather and climate hazards, and other co-benefits. Co-benefits are defined in Section I.A as "benefits of restoration that extend beyond biologically-relevant benefits to target species. This includes... reduced safety hazards, or reduced maintenance costs." Our website includes a [resource on demonstrating community resilience](#).*
- 2) Does removal of dams rank higher than removal and replacement of perched, plugged, or crushed culverts? **Answer:** *We cannot make a comparison as it is highly dependent. This would be where the removal of the structure would score higher than something that would need maintenance. Look at evaluation criteria and see what we are scoring on for the technical evaluation section and how it would meet the goals of your project. Proposals are rated based on how well*

*they address the evaluation criteria. We funded a range of projects in the first round, including some that did not fully remove barriers. Please reach out to the competition manager to talk about a specific project.*

- 3) Will projects doing construction be prioritized over projects doing studies and pre-construction work? **Answer:** *No.*
- 4) Are projects for migratory fish that move from oceans to freshwater given more priority than Great Lakes projects? **Answer:** *No.*

## Application Process

**Overview:** For either competition, to receive an award the applicant needs to be a legal organization registered with the IRS. There are eligibility limitations for the Tribal Fish Passage Competition, where only Indian tribes and organizations that represent Indian tribes are eligible to apply.

eRA Commons is the new grants management platform for recipients to manage NOAA awards. Successful applicants will need an eRA Commons registration as part of the application process, along with SAM.gov and Grants.gov registrations.

- 1) Please summarize/highlight what (if anything) has changed since Round 1 & 2 funding? **Answer:** *There were two primary changes. 1) Reduced amount of funding overall, and associated reduction in the minimum and maximum allowable proposals and 2) changes in the evaluation criteria to emphasize certainty in project timelines and costs.*
- 2) We applied for (and received) a similar NOAA grant 2 years ago. Is it safe to assume the budget and budget narrative reqs are the same? i.e. maintain the same format and level of detail? **Answer:** *Yes, there is no change to the budget requirements compared to earlier rounds. However, more emphasis has been placed on scoring related to cost certainty.*
- 3) Does NOAA require a letter of contribution for cost share contributions or is it sufficient to just include this in the Budget Narrative (PDF 2)? **Answer:** *Yes, it is sufficient to include that information in a budget narrative, but you may also choose to include this in your supplemental materials. We wish to remind applicants that cost share or match, or leverage are not required. However, in the National Fish Passage competition, up to 4 points are available for projects that show partnerships and momentum through non-federal contributions.*
- 4) Can I apply on behalf of another organization? For instance, if I'm a regional agency that supports a locality, or if another organization has already received partial funding for the project? **Answer:** *We encourage partnerships, but there*

*needs to be a primary applicant for each proposal. You can be the primary applicant and subaward funds to a partner organization for all or some of the work on a project. Subawards can be leveraged with other funds that the Partner already has to complete a project component. The Project Summary Section outlines where you can note if you are submitting more than one application for the same project.*

- 5) Can unfunded federal partners provide letters of support or be included as providing non-monetary support of the project? **Answer:** *Yes, Federal partners can provide letters of support for an application.*
- 6) Can you provide any contacts in NOAA or at outside partners that can help with initial, informal evaluation of merit, feasibility, design and costs of proposed projects? **Answer:** *We want to support all of our applicants and do our best to provide a local contact to those who reach out to us.*
- 7) Are there restrictions against using these funds to supplement another project receiving State or any other type of funds for a project? **Answer:** *These funds can not be used to supplement mitigation projects, unless the NOAA-funded portion will be separate from the mitigation. See Section III.C for 'Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility'.*

## Project Costs and Budget

**Overview:** Neither competition has a match requirement. NOAA encourages applicants whose proposed initiatives exceed the budgetary limits for these competitions to apply to this competition and also for other, complementary federal funding for separate components of their larger initiatives. The National Fish Passage competition has an evaluation criterion that weighs *all forms* of non-federal match and federal or non-federal leverage *equally*, but does emphasize secured contributions. Match or other contributions are not evaluated under the Tribal Fish Passage competition, but can be shown as justification for applicant experience, project importance, partnerships, etc. In either competition, there is no benefit to indicating match on federal forms and you may be required to manage those funds with the same restrictions as your federal grant funds.

- 1) Are funds used prior to the start date eligible to be considered as a match in the review process? Do prior studies or plans that support the development of a proposed project count as non-federal contributions? **Answer:** *These costs will be considered as part of the non-federal share in the review process Non-federal match has a strict definition that includes the requirement to be incurred during the award period. However, leveraged costs, including those prior to the award*

*period, are counted towards the evaluation criteria for cost-sharing and leveraged funds equally with formal non-federal match.*

- 2) Can funds used for capacity building include hiring for a temporary position? **Answer:** *Yes, positions funded by the grant for capacity building can be temporary.*
- 3) Can this funding cover acquisition of a property relating to a barrier to be removed? **Answer:** *Yes, it can be part of the project but not the entirety of the project. We have funded some property acquisitions but these projects generally have high scores in the Importance and Applicability section of the NOFO, to counter their typically high costs.*
- 4) How secure is the funding? Will you fund awards fully at the time of the award or can the funding be revoked either before or after the projects are awarded? **Answer:** *We cannot speculate about any changes that might occur related to upcoming changes in administration and funding. However, we will not sign an award with an applicant unless we have funds in place to allocate to that award. We do not expect to use our multi-year award option (where funds are released over time). Instead, we expect to release the awarded funds fully at the time of the award. Note that the anticipated earliest start date is January 2026.*
- 5) Can effectiveness monitoring costs be used as evidence of match/cost-sharing from non-federal partners? **Answer:** *Yes, effectiveness monitoring costs can be used to complement NOAA's investment with other funding sources, either during or before the award period.*
- 6) Does NOAA prefer the budget submitted in a PCSRF (Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund) format? **Answer:** *Our detailed budget format in the [Supplemental Guidance](#) for NOAA Restoration Center Applicants is based on NOAA's Grants Management Division's guidance for budgets. The same guidance underlies guidance provided by NOAA's PCSRF program. It is most important that our reviewers can understand your budget request and address the Evaluation Criteria for Project Costs in Section V.4. We can always work together to improve the budget format for an award, if the proposal is ranked highly in our review.*
- 7) If a project has a fish passage barrier as a smaller part of a larger project, should I include the full cost estimate and make note of what funds I am requesting through this grant, or should I only include items in the cost estimate directly related to fish passage barrier removal? **Answer:** *Your budget narrative should focus only on the costs you are requesting from this NOAA application. However,*



*you should also give us details about the full project and what other sources of funding you have, so we can evaluate your budget details and cost certainty.*

- 8) Can the fish passage funding be used to match other federal funds? **Answer:** *Potentially. It is up to the other federal program if they accept Federal funds as a match.*
- 9) What is the minimum request for the national award? **Answer:** *The minimum request for the National Fish Passage award is \$750,000 and the minimum for the Tribal Fish Passage Award is \$300,000.*

## Review and Selection Process

- 1) What is the expected time between award announcement and grant money dispersal? **Short Answer:** *The earliest anticipated start date for awards will be January 1, 2026. Often, we provide an announcement slightly earlier than that. But cannot anticipate exactly when that announcement will be.*
- 2) How many awards do you anticipate making (for National Fish Passage)? **Answer:** *The first Round of BIL Fish Passage funding opportunities provided a similar level of funding availability. 23 awards were made in our Round 1 National Fish Passage competition and 13 awards were made in Round 1 Tribal Fish Passage competition.*
- 3) Would bundling projects (e.g. dam removal construction for an already permitted project, in combination with design work for another dam removal in the same watershed) negatively or positively affect competitiveness? **Answer:** *Projects and sites can be combined as long as they do not exceed the maximum amount for the funding opportunity. We want to ensure these projects can be completed in that 2-3 year timeframe.*
- 4) Should we submit multiple individual projects, or bundle them up to the maximum request? **Answer:** *You have the option to do either. NOAA staff can discuss the projects in question, and offer suggestions to balance the increase in outcomes with your ability to fully meet the evaluation criteria within the page limits. We recommend reaching out to speak with the competition managers who may be aware of other organizations doing similar work in your area if you're looking to combine projects into one proposal. If an individual project's budget doesn't meet the minimum request you can consider funding opportunities with lower minimum requests, like our Coastal Habitat Restoration and Resilience Grants for Tribes and Underserved Communities funding opportunity.*

- 5) Are there regional requirements, i.e. only 3 awards per state? **Answer:** *No there are no requirements, however there are some selection factors (Section V of the NOFO) that you can see under the review and selection process that allow for us to consider projects out of rank order. These factors do include geographic area.*
- 6) My team is already registered with Grants.gov and anticipates using that. However, if snailmail becomes necessary, then is the deadline for it to be postmarked or delivered to NOAA by the due date? **Answer:** *The deadline for postmark is 11:59 EST on the funding opportunity due date. Please remember to review our instructions for registering with eRA Commons, a new system for many NOAA applicants.*

## Other Funding Opportunities

**Overview:** All four of the third round of BIL funding opportunities can be found under the 'Open Habitat Restoration Funding Opportunities' section at:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/habitat-restoration-under-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-and-inflation-reduction-act>.

- 1) Can one submit the same project to both the Tribal and National competitions? In our case, the Tribe would apply to the Tribal competition and the municipality would apply to the National competition. Is there any benefit in doing this? **Answer:** *Yes, a tribe can submit the proposal to both competitions, or you can have a non-tribal applicant submit the same proposal to the National competition. You can propose the same project to both opportunities, and if the proposals both rank highly, and justify the funding need for both proposals, we can consider funding both.*
- 2) When will the Office of Habitat Conservation release their other BIL funding opportunities? **Answer:** *Our office has now published Notices of Funding Opportunity for all of 4 of our 'Round 3' Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding. These opportunities close in February, April, and May, 2025. All Inflation Reduction Act resources have been allocated through Round 1 & 2.*
- 3) How many applications were there for the tribal priority in the last round? trying to get a sense of competition and how large of a proposal I should submit. **Answer:** *We received 21 applications in Round 2 for the Tribal Fish Passage competition. We were able to fund about 90% of the funding requested in Round 2. Your proposal should be tailored to meet the evaluation criteria, including those related to certainty of budgets and timeline within a 2-3 year award period.*