

2018 Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program

Accelerating protection of America's healthy freshwater ecosystems and their watersheds

The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (Endowment) seeks applications for the 2018 Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program. This opportunity closes Thursday, February 1, 2018, at 8:00 p.m. Eastern. Proposals received after this time may not be considered. The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program is a partnership that includes the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Water's Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Endowment.

Applicants are strongly urged to contact Peter Stangel (peter@usendowment.org; 404-915-2763) or Jeff Lerner (jalanlerner@gmail.com; 202-236-1883) to discuss project ideas before submitting an application.

Funding

Up to \$3 million is available for the 2018 grant round. Funding is provided by the EPA, NRCS, and the Endowment. Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program awards may be federal or non-federal funds, or a combination of both. Funding at about this level is anticipated on an annual basis around this time through 2020. A review committee makes final project recommendations. Projects funded in this cycle must conclude no later than December 31, 2020.

Competition for funds is stiff. In 2016, 169 proposals were received and nine funded. In 2017, 74 proposals were received and 16 funded. In 2018 priority will be given to proposals that maximize measureable outcomes for watershed protection (e.g. acres protected, progress toward protection goals, degree of watershed function protected, etc.).

2016 and 2017 Funded Projects

2018 Process Schedule

RFP Issued:	September 2018
Informational Webinar:	Wednesday, October 11, 2:00 p.m. Eastern
Proposal Deadline:	February 1, 2018 (8 p.m. Eastern)
Proposal Review Completed:	Week of March 26, 2018
Applicants notified:	Week of April 2, 2018

Contractual agreements between the Endowment and successful applicants should be completed within four to eight weeks after notification unless complications arise.

Program Goal

The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program goal is to accelerate strategic protection of healthy, freshwater ecosystems and their watersheds. The primary focus for applicants should be protection and stewardship of land in the watershed, rather than restoration of degraded habitats or projects with a strictly water quality improvement outcome. This goal will be achieved by:

- Developing funding mechanisms, plans, or strategies to implement large-scale watershed or source water protection, green infrastructure, or landscape conservation objectives;
- Building the sustainable organizational infrastructure, social support, and long-term funding commitments necessary to implement large-scale protection of healthy watersheds; and

- Supporting innovative or catalytic projects that may accelerate funding for or implementation of watershed protection efforts, or broadly advance this field of practice.

Awards will be considered in the following three categories. These categories are not rigid; they simply reflect our approach to watershed protection.

- 1) *Watershed Action Projects* are specific projects that fulfill components of an established plan or guiding document. These projects will typically leverage a Healthy Watersheds Consortium award many times for maximum results and should be part of a broader watershed strategy developed at the HUC 8 scale or larger. Applicants may seek additional funding for new projects in the same watershed in future award cycles (\$50,000 - \$250,000 award size).
- 2) *Building Watershed Protection Capacity* awards grow the organizational capacity needed for large-scale, long-term healthy watershed protection. Applicants should identify existing or proposed funding or strategies to be tapped with increased capacity for project implementation. How will increased capacity allow your organization to secure the funding or implement a strategy needed to accelerate long-term watershed protection? Award duration of up to two years with funding renewed annually, based on performance (maximum \$150,000/year)
- 3) *Advancing the State of Practice* —Awards for new or experimental technologies, methods, financing strategies, or approaches to incentivize watershed protection that can be scaled to a broader level. Training projects that relate to gathering or exchanging information to advance the state of practice are eligible. Proposals must include a plan for scaling projects and disseminating information to relevant users and must include a demonstrated need from end users, via letters of support (\$50,000 - \$200,000 award size).

Eligible Projects

The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program was conceived by EPA to protect healthy, aquatic ecosystems and their watersheds. Funding will be considered for projects that:

- Achieve large-scale, measureable outcomes (acres protected, etc.);
- Mobilize, expand, and strengthen collaborations to achieve watershed protection;;
- Tap into new or existing funding sources for highly leveraged outcomes;
- Develop mechanisms for securing financing necessary to implement protection projects;
- Involve multiple watersheds that are adjacent or clustered in a single geography;
- Implement protection-related activities in existing watershed, source water, or similar plans or programs, such as: National Wild and Scenic Rivers; Sentinel Landscapes; USDA Forest Service Community Forests, and others.
- Develop and/or implement large-scale green infrastructure projects;
- Protect drinking water sources and watersheds;
- Create/expand organizational/social infrastructure to accelerate healthy watershed protection;
- Create sustainable landowner incentives for watershed protection;
- Develop sustainable land-use planning that protects healthy watersheds;
- Demonstrate or quantify the economic benefits of healthy watersheds;
- Demonstrate the human health (drinking water, fishable/swimmable water), recreation, and other benefits of healthy watersheds;
- Communicate the value of healthy watersheds to key constituencies to enhance protection;
- Develop watershed protection plans and the funding needed to implement those plans; and
- Develop a community of learning for watershed protection groups to share information.

Ineligible Projects

Awards *may not* be directly used for land acquisition, conservation easements, or habitat restoration, unless as smaller components of Advancing the State of Practice projects with clear, scalable applications. Awards *may* be used to secure other sources of funding for direct land acquisition or to develop programs that lead to land protection.

The following types of projects are not likely to be competitive for funding:

- Dam removal to facilitate fish passage;
- Restoration of highly degraded lands;
- Land stewardship projects that are short-term or unsustainable;
- Invasive, exotic species removal/control projects that are unsustainable;
- Amelioration of point source pollution sources;
- Water quality improvement projects that do not include a land conservation component;
- Urban activities that don't accelerate watershed protection;
- Plans or capacity building without a clear link to potential funding for implementation;
- Research without a clear link to measurable protection;
- Education or communication programs without a clear link to measurable protection;

Geographic Eligibility

Work must be in the 50 United States, Tribal Lands, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories.

Eligible Applicants

Not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organizations, for-profit companies, tribes, intertribal consortia, interstates, state, and local government agencies including water utilities and wastewater facilities, and colleges and universities are eligible for funding. Unincorporated individuals and federal agencies are not eligible. Public/private partnerships are particularly desirable. The Endowment does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in any of its programs or activities.

Nondiscrimination Policy

The Endowment does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in any of its programs or activities.

Funding Restrictions

Awards may not be used for lobbying, fundraising, political advocacy, or litigation.

Indirect Rates

Please consult the Endowment's policy on [Indirect Cost Recovery](#) and direct any questions about this policy to [Cameron Tommey](#), Director, Legal and Program Compliance.

Matching Fund Requirements

Applicants should provide at least 25% of the total project cost. This may include cash donations or in-kind contributions from third-parties and allowable costs incurred by the applicant in the course of the project. The Endowment may decrease the matching requirement to as low as 10% if the applicant can demonstrate in writing that fiscal circumstances are constrained to such an extent that fulfilling the matching funds requirement would impose undue hardship. Matching funds should meet these criteria: verifiable from applicant records; not already considered as match to another Federal award; necessary

to complete project objectives; committed directly to the project and used within the project period (begins date your application was submitted); and Allowable under OMB 2 CFR 200 Cost Principles.

Federal to federal funding matches are not allowed. Because Healthy Watershed Consortium awards may include non-federal (Endowment) and/or federal funds (EPA/NRCS), it is important to clearly state the origin of proposed match in the application.

NOTE: Applicants are strongly urged to request decreased match requirements in writing prior to submitting a full proposal. Submit your request to peter@usendowment.org.

Metrics and Evaluation

It is essential that applicants provide a practical, cost-effective approach for measuring the success of their efforts. This includes describing clear, specific objectives and the strategies, activities and outcomes necessary for project success. The application will guide you through a process for developing these parameters. Assistance is available to applicants to help develop these important tools for their projects. Click here for additional information on [Goals, Hurdles, and Outcomes](#).

Watershed Scale

The Healthy Watershed Consortium Grant Program seeks protection at larger scales. The minimum scale considered for funding are projects designed to apply within a HUC 8 subwatershed planning unit. Activities that are tied to implementation of a larger-scale plan are most desirable.

Multiple Values and Partners

Watershed protection is a holistic endeavor. Healthy Watershed Consortium grants should benefit a wide range of values, including but not limited to water quality and quantity, source water and drinking water, wildlife, local economies, and recreation. Diverse partnerships will strengthen proposals.

Post-Grant Support

As part of our overarching goal to accelerate protection, this Program seeks to help communities protect their healthy watersheds. Staff at the Endowment, EPA, and NRCS is committed to our awardee's success. We and our consultants are available to support awardees in all aspects of their work. We seek to be active partners in problem-solving and information dissemination. These services may include, but are not limited to, communications, technical review, monitoring, group facilitation, and project design.

Grantee Annual Meetings

To maximize effective project implementation and to enhance information-sharing, awardees are invited to participate in one or more Healthy Watershed Consortium meetings. Awardees will be engaged in setting the agenda. Travel funding is into grant awards.

What is a Healthy Watershed?

For this program, a healthy watershed is one in which the hydrological, biological, and land-based functions of the ecosystem are largely intact. The EPA defines a healthy watershed as one in which natural land cover supports dynamic hydrologic and geomorphic processes within their natural range of variation (i.e., sediment storage and deposition), where there is habitat of sufficient size and connectivity to support native aquatic and riparian species, and where water quality is adequate to support healthy biological communities. For more information about EPA's literature on what constitutes a healthy watershed, visit the [Healthy Watershed Consortium's webpage](#).

A healthy watershed may include natural, semi-natural, and well-managed lands and may contain a variety of human land uses. Healthy watersheds don't have to be pristine, but should be in good condition. *Applicants must make the case to the review committee that their watershed is healthy.*

What does “Protection” Mean?

The goal is to conserve healthy aquatic ecosystems and the supporting natural and managed landscape and watershed processes, such as hydrology, that support them. The principle is to protect and sustain healthy watersheds so that they will continue to provide ecological services such as clean water, drinking water, habitat for fish and wildlife, recreation, and protection from natural hazards.

The Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program encourages creative, cost-effective, locally-developed approaches to watershed protection. The review committee challenges applicants to propose protection strategies that best fit their watershed.

Achieving large-scale protection of healthy watersheds may take decades. The Healthy Watershed Consortium Grant Program seeks to create and build the sustainable organizational infrastructure and financing needed to help communities protect their healthy watersheds over the long-term.

Two types of protection activities will be considered:

- 1) *Land acquisition and conservation easements*: The primary focus is to prevent conversion of a healthy watershed to uses that would diminish its function. This is traditionally accomplished through land acquisition or use of conservation easements from willing landowners. Although awards may not be directly used for acquisition or easements, applications are encouraged for developing or supporting efforts that enable acquisitions or easements on a larger or sustainable scale. Easements should be long-term or preferably in perpetuity.
- 2) *Land stewardship*: A secondary focus is for lands that are already protected (public ownership or secured with easements), in good condition, and that have appropriate land cover, but that require stewardship to maintain or enhance watershed function. Applications will be considered that provide measurable benefits to watershed function (e.g. reduced wildfire hazard). For example, projects that:
 - Incentivize private landowners to enhance stewardship;
 - Certify forests and appropriate agricultural systems to improve landscape condition;
 - Deliver cost-share or education programs to landowners for best stewardship practices; and
 - Improve watershed management on public lands.

As with the acquisition approach described in the previous paragraph, awards *may not* be directly used for stewardship activities (e.g. funding to treat 100 acres). Applications will be considered for developing or implementing financing or other mechanisms that will result in stewardship on a larger, sustainable scale (e.g. to secure financing from other entities or to develop mechanisms to treat large acreages). Applicants must demonstrate proposed stewardship projects will take place on land that is already protected or provide assurance that stewardship activities are sustainable.

Proposal Submission

Application Assistance

Applicants are strongly urged to contact Peter Stangel (peter@usendowment.org; 404-915-2763) or Jeff Lerner (jalanlerner@gmail.com; 202-236-1883) to discuss project ideas before submitting an application. A Sample Application is also posted on the [webpage](#).

Informational Webinar

A webinar will be held on [October 11, 2017](#) to provide additional information and to answer questions—check the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program [webpage for updates](#) and other information. Answers to common application questions and a Sample Application are posted on the webpage.

Letters of Support

Applicants should provide at least three, but no more than five, letters from partners demonstrating their awareness of and support for your project. Project partners should be explicit in describing how your proposed project integrates with and leverages ongoing work in the watershed. Partners might include State Departments of Natural Resources, Forestry, and Water Quality and Drinking Water Programs; land owners; financial institutions; tribal entities; state or regional offices of federal natural resource agencies; source water collaboratives; and non-governmental conservation groups. A [sample letter of support](#) is available. Please do not send hard copies of letters. Letters of support should be addressed to Peter Stangel and attached to your application and sent as one file to peter@usendowment.org.

Electronic Proposal Submission

Only proposals submitted on the [application form](#) will be considered. The application form, letters of support, and up to two maps (optional) should be combined into one document and submitted via email to peter@usendowment.org. Receipt of your application will be acknowledged within two business days. If that doesn't happen, send an email to peter@usendowment.org.

Criteria for Evaluating Proposals

There are seven primary criteria for evaluating proposals. Total points available = 100 + 5 bonus pts.

- 1) To what extent has the applicant shown theirs is a healthy watershed? (Yes or No).
- 2) What is the impact of projected measurable outcomes for short- and long-term landscape conservation or stewardship (acres protected, acres with improved stewardship, etc.)? 30 points.
- 3) Is the Project Plan logical and compelling? 20 points.
- 4) Does the applicant's treatment of the Success Factors demonstrate that the proposed project has the ingredients to be successful, or could have them in the near future? 10 points.
- 5) Degree to which the applicant has the experience, personnel and partnerships to accomplish the proposed work. 15 points
- 6) Do the goals, hurdles, strategies and activities present a logical approach to achieving stated outcomes? Are the proposed metrics appropriate for measuring project success? 15 points.
- 7) Is the budget sufficient to accomplish the proposed project? 10 points. Is there strong potential for leveraging funds to improve the project's cost-effectiveness? (5 point bonus.)

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Sign-up for the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program Newsletter [\(link\)](#)