

APPLETREE 2023 NOFO FAQ

October 26, 2022

ATSDR published Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) TS-23-0001 ATSDR's Partnership to Promote Local Efforts to Reduce Environmental Exposure (APPLETREE) on October 6, 2022. On October 17, 2022, ATSDR held an informational call for prospective applicants. This document aggregates questions received before, during, and after the October 17th informational call. ATSDR has provided answers to each question below. Additional questions can be sent to Audra Henry at ate1@cdc.gov. **This document may be updated with new Q&As periodically, but no later than November 4, 2022.**

Q: About the Components – Do we apply for one or the other, or both? Is it looked upon negatively if we only apply for Component 1?

A: All applicants are required to propose activities under Component 1 Strategy A. It is optional to propose activities under Component 1 Strategy B and Component 2. A decision as to whether or not to apply for Component 1 Strategy B and/or Component 2 will have no impact on funding decisions for Component 1 Strategy A.

Q: For Component 1, are both Strategies required?

A: No. Component 1 Strategy A is required for all applicants. Component 1 Strategy B is optional.

Q: For Component 1, can we include strategy 1B as a subsection within the 15-page project narrative, or should strategy 1B have a separate narrative section in the application?

A: Either option is fine.

Q: If we create a separate narrative for strategy 1B, what is the page limit? Can it be covered under the additional 4 pages for subsections (page 36 of 61 in the NOFO, item 10: Project Narrative)?

A: There is no page limit for 1B, and it can be covered under the additional 4 pages for subsections.

Q: Page 25 of the NOFO contains bolded, underlined sentence: "Component 1 (Strategy A) activity description must include the hazardous waste site name and primary exposure concern(s)." Is that sentence referring to the high-level 5-year work plan or the detailed 1-year work plan?

A: The sentence refers to the 1-year work plan. The Component Strategy A 1-year work plan should include the sites where applicants propose to conduct site assessment and community engagement activities. Include the hazardous waste site name and primary exposure concern(s).

Q: Do the sites included in the 5-year work plan have to be comprehensive, only priority sites, or can they be examples of sites in which we will conduct Component 1 activities?

A: The 5-year work plan should be comprehensive (i.e., inclusive of all sites), but it does not need to have the same level of detail as the 1-year work plan.

Q: If an applicant is applying for both Component 1 (Strategy A and B) and Component 2, can we condense all of that into a single table? Or do we need to have separate tables for each Component's separate items? This is for the workplan, data management plan, and Evaluation and Performance Measurement Plan (EPMP).

A: It can be a single table. However, applicants should ensure all information is labeled clearly for objective reviewers.

Q: For Component 2, it mentions that activities proposed should address up to three Focus Areas. Should we just focus on one of the Focus Areas or multiple ones. If they overlap, is that okay?

A: Applicants decide on the number (i.e., up to three) of Focus Areas for Component 2. It is okay if proposed activities overlap.

Q: For Component 2—Is this new component something that some APPLETREE partners are already doing, or is there other work going on at ATSDR that could provide inspiration?

A: It is possible other states are already doing activities that fall under this scope. However, that's not where this idea originated. The idea was to have applicants propose ideas that are cross-cutting, forward leaning, and preventive.

Q: Are Component 2 Focus Areas a continuation for previously funded Component 2 recipients?

A: Component 2 Focus Areas are different from the previous NOFO and are not a continuation for previously funded Component 2 recipients.

Q: Could statewide exposures and fish consumption activities fit into the scope of Component 2?

A: Yes. Component 2 allows for innovation, flexibility, and broad proposals. We're open to what applicants are proposing given the focus area. All activities should align with the NOFO goals, objectives, and outcomes.

Q: The new ATSDR NOFO has two components possibly being awarded. Historically, we have been awarded \$450,000. I see for Component 1 they are potentially awarding \$420,000. When preparing the budget, may we apply for \$450,000, or should we stay with the given \$420,000?

A: The approximate \$420,000 award for Component 1 is an average amount across all recipients. Applicants can apply for an award that meets their program needs. The proposed budget can be lower, the same, or higher than the anticipated \$420,000 average award.

Q: Is the \$420,000 for Component 1 encompassing the average anticipated \$100,000 for strategy B? Or is the \$100,000 in addition to the \$420,000?

A: The \$420,000 includes Component 1 Strategies A and B.

Q: For states that have just one cycle of Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education (CSPECE) funding complete, can you explain the part in the NOFO that says "up to \$100,000" can go to CSPECE budgets? Does that mean if we estimate an award of \$420,000 per year (for example) that we can request up to \$100,000 go to CSPECE expenses and the remaining \$320,000 would therefore be left for core components like salaries? And if \$320,000 is inadequate to cover those three positions and other core components, we would presumably ask for less than \$100,000 to go to CSPECE in our core budget for component 1A-B?

A: The estimated \$420,000 for Component 1 is an average of all APPLETREE Component 1 awards (and includes Strategies A and B) across all recipients. Applicants may request less than, the same as, or more than the \$420,000 estimated average award for Component 1. We anticipate funding of up to \$100,000 for CSPECE as part of the Component 1 award. However, applicants may request a higher amount. ATSDR may award more or less than the expected average award amount for all components and strategies.

Q: May we request more than \$100,000 for CSPECE, and how does that affect the total we apply for?

A: Yes, applicants may request more than \$100,000 for CSPECE. Applicants should consider the anticipated Component 1 average award of \$420,000 annually. This amount includes Strategies A and B, and applicants should adjust their proposed budgets as needed.

Q: If we ask for funding above the available amount, do we have the ability to choose where we might make cuts for our core functions and salaries and resubmit the budget?

A: Yes, applicants can update their budget or submit a budget redirection.

Q: Is it reasonable to request less than \$100,000 for Component 1 Strategy B if our goal is to preserve core functions and salaries? What we want to make sure of is that if we apply for \$420,000 for Component 1 Strategy A and we are asked to cut back on the total request in the application, that we can preferentially cut the "optional" budgets to protect the core component salaries and benefits.

A: We cannot suggest budget amounts to applicants as expenses will vary by program. The recipient has the flexibility and discretion to adjust Strategy A or B expenses as needed. Any budget adjustments should be sufficient to accomplish the APPLETREE goals and objectives.

Q: Does funding consider past performance or prior grants?

A: Applications will be reviewed and scored based on the criteria described in the 'Review and Selection Process' section of the NOFO. Past performance or prior grants are not scoring metrics.

Q: Is there a minimum or maximum award amount?

A: No. There is no maximum or minimum award amount.

Q: Is an extension to the application deadline possible?

A: No. The application deadline for competitive applications is firm, and no extensions are available.

Q: Can applicants submit a combined budget for Components 1 and 2?

A: No. Applicants should submit a separate budget for Components 1 and 2. Applicants that wish to apply for Component 1 Strategy B should include line items for expenses in their Component 1 budget.

Q: Are universities eligible for funding under CFA-RFA-TS23-0001?

A: Eligibility for funding under this announcement is limited by statute to States or political subdivisions thereof. Public and State-controlled institutions of higher learning must provide documentation from the state verifying the institution is considered a political subdivision of the state and that it has the authority to apply for funding and perform the activities required under this announcement. See the “Additional Information on Eligibility” section of this announcement for more information.

Q: Are community health centers eligible to apply for funding under CFA-RFA-TS23-2001?

A: The CDC-RFA-TS-23-0001 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is open to States and their political subdivisions thereof. Eligible applicants include local and state governments or their bona fide agents and tribal governments. Bona fide agents must include documentation of their status in the application. Community health centers are often nonprofit organizations that would not meet the eligibility criteria. Please see the Additional Information on Eligibility section of the NOFO for more information on eligibility.

Q: There are outcomes listed on page 7 and outcomes on page 19 and 20. Are these specific outcomes for CSPECE programs that have been funded in the past versus not funded previously?

A: The outcomes shared are not specific to either those previously funded or new to the funding. The listed outcomes are optional illustrative examples that applicants can use or modify to fit program needs. Applicants can also add process and outcome performance measures that are not listed.

Q: Page 9 of the NOFO states that “Recipients are required to request and address all comments from external stakeholders (e.g., recipient’s leadership staff and other agencies) before submitting the certified document to the Technical Project Officers (TPO) for preclearance review.” Can you clarify this statement?

A: This NOFO text applies to certified documents that go through ATSDR’s clearance process. Authors should address the draft document comments from appropriate data sources, applicable external agencies, and their internal staff before sending the document to the TPO to start ATSDR’s preclearance review. Once preclearance begins, the author should only address the reviewer’s comments (not re-sharing the draft and requesting new comments from others).

Q: Page 9 of the NOFO states that “Recipients are required to send non-certified public health assessments (PHAs) and health consultations (HCs) to the Technical Project Officer (TPO) for approval before the recipients release the document to the public.” This seems new. How long is the clearance process expected to be?

A: This is not new. This is an approval (not clearance) process with the TPO. Approval time varies with every document. Approval time is optimized when recipients complete all necessary tasks before sending the document to the TPO for approval.

Q: Page 9 of the NOFO states that “Exposure Investigations (EIs) may be conducted as part of the public health assessment process to fill data gaps and better define site-specific human exposures. EIs may include the collection of environmental and biological data. EIs using APPLETREE funds require approval from ATSDR’s Technical Project Team and EI Program staff as well as written approval from the APPLETREE Program Officer.” What category of APPLETREE funds may be used for EIs? How does one budget for future/unknown EIs? And would funds be allowed to cover data collection and analysis?

A: All budget categories are possible except equipment, and the budget categories depend on the needs for the EI and the final report. Applicants do not budget for future/unknown EIs. If a recipient receives the necessary approvals to complete an EI, awarded funds (if available) or in-kind resources are used to complete an EI. With approvals, recipients can use amendments or other mechanisms (e.g., carryover request or budget redirection) to move awarded funds to the necessary budget categories.

Q: At the bottom of page 9, there is a statement about cancer incidence analyses and cancer cluster investigations not being authorized under this NOFO. CDC/ATSDR are currently in the process of updating the CDC cancer cluster guidelines (<https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/clusters/guidelines.htm>), so we find the statement in the NOFO to be confusing. Also, we have had instances where the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has requested a cancer incidence analysis in relation to a site. Could you please provide more information about this?

A: The statement on page 9 refers to allowable APPLETREE products and activities under this NOFO. CDC/ATSDR engages in a variety of activities that may be outside the allowable products or activities under the APPLETREE program. Cancer incidence analyses and cancer cluster investigations are not allowable products or activities under APPLETREE. APPLETREE recipients use ATSDR’s public health assessment (PHA) guidance to guide our products and activities. With the exception of a health advisory, an overview of health assessment products for APPLETREE recipients are listed in the [Public Health Assessment Guidance Manual \(PHAGM\)](#). Please see the “Products to Communicate PHA Process Findings” section. The PHAGM also describes how to assess cancer risks and the appropriate use of a health outcome data review. This guidance should be applied to requests for involvement.

Q: Based on information shared on page 15 for Component 2, do our activities have to be in relation to a specific site? For example, specific wildfire or can this apply broadly to statewide exposures?

A: Component 2 activities do not have to be site specific and are generally non-site specific.

Q: For the Component 2 climate change focus area, can earthquakes be considered locally driven hazards?

A: Yes. Earthquakes can be considered locally driven hazards.

Q: On page 16, under with organizations not funded by CDC, we are including letters of support. There is a third bullet that says, “include one letter of support from their program or leadership staff.” Since we are the applying organization, are you intending for us to get a letter of support from our own organization?

A: Yes, we are looking for a letter of support as described in the NOFO from your program or leadership staff.

Q: On page 21 of 61, there is a section that details the required data collection form. It includes the ATSDR Community Activity Survey (ACAS). The ACAS appears to be indicating that it is pending OMB approval. Is there an estimated time that it might be approved? Perhaps during this 5-year grant period? How should we include that?

A: The ACAS is OMB approved and will be made available to recipients during the period of performance. Therefore, the ACAS should not be included in the application. Recipients will learn more about ACAS at a later date.

Q: On Page 24 of the NOFO, it is stated that “An integrated team to achieve the cooperative agreement goals and objectives. Integrated teams consist of, at a minimum, a principal investigator, health assessor/toxicologist, and health educator/community involvement specialist. It is acceptable and encouraged for applicants to demonstrate required expertise through in-kind support, contracts, or external partnerships. Applicants should include information (organization name, scope of work, and method of accountability) about any contractual organization(s) that will have a significant role(s) in implementing program strategies and achieving project outcomes. Curriculum vitae (CV) for all staff working on the project must be provided.” Does that mean that CVs must be provided also for proposed contractual staff?

A: Yes. CVs must be provided for proposed contractual staff that will help implement program strategies and achieve project outcomes.

Q: Regarding the workplan on page 26; Component 1, Strategy A. Are the 5 or more National Priorities List (NPL) sites for one annual workplan year or does the 5 or more NPL sites include the 5-year total period?

A: The 5 or more NPL sites include the 5-year period of performance (total period).

Q: On page 35 where it discusses the project abstract summary, when we submit this as a separate document in grants.gov, will there be a character limit for this box that we need to be aware of?

A: We are not aware of a character limit.

Q: Is there a page limit for the application? On page 35 of the NOFO, it states no page limit. Is that a section? On page 36, it states that there is a maximum of 15 pages with 4 additional pages per component. Additionally, is the Evaluation and Performance Measurement Plan (EPMP) part of the page limits?

A: On page 35, the no page limit reference is under the Table of Contents section and refers to the Table of Contents. The 15-page limit in the Project Narrative section on page 36 includes all supporting documentation. That does not include EPMP or the required forms. The page limit gives applicants a range. If applicants exceed this amount by a few pages, it is not a problem.

Q: On page 37, the workplan is called out as a separate part of the application. Would you like the narrative as separate attachment or part of the project narrative in the application?

A: It is recommended that applicants include the work plan as an attachment. If applicants are applying for both components, separate pdf attachments for each workplan would also assist the objective reviewers.

Q: On Page 39 of the NOFO, it is stated that “Applicants should also include travel for two to four staff to attend a regional meeting (at or near ATSDR Regional Offices) during (any year) the period of performance.” Does “any year” mean once during the 5-year of period of performance, or once every year of the 5-year period of performance?

A: “Any year” refers to one (total) anticipated regional meeting during the 5-year period of performance.

Q: Page 56 of the NOFO provides a list of acceptable attachments. Forms SF424 and SF424A are listed under international NOFOs. Can you confirm that the above forms are also required and acceptable for this NOFO please?

A: Yes. The SF424 and SF424A are required forms for all federal grant applications (domestic and international).

Q: Can applicants propose international projects or activities that meet the goals of the cooperative agreement program?

A: ATSDR is funded through CERCLA which only has domestic authority. Therefore, proposed activities under this announcement must be within the domestic jurisdiction of the applicant.

Q: Can we offer community participation incentives in this grant cycle?

A: Gift cards and monetary incentives are not considered reasonable expenses needed to accomplish program objectives. Other community-based (non-monetary) incentives will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Q: Would it be okay to contract with a community-based organization, to incentivize partnerships through contracted and shared work?

A: Yes, applicants can use contractual support for this particular activity or focus area.

Q: Can we purchase or rent an XRF monitor for the Soil Screening, Health, Outreach, and Partnership (soilSHOP) outreach activities, what’s preferred, or do most programs rent or buy their XRF?

A: ATSDR encourages recipients to partner with agencies that already have an XRF to conduct soilSHOPS (e.g., Environmental Protection Agency, ATSDR, State Health Departments, or Food and Drug Administration). If an XRF is not available from partnering agencies, recipients may consider renting an XRF. Equipment purchases are not allowed under this NOFO. XRF availability from partnering agencies, cost, maintenance, calibration, and other related expenses must be reviewed and approved by the program before considering an XRF purchase as a supply.

Q: For the NOFO, is ATSDR looking for the narratives to have a high-level overview of the Evaluation and Performance Measurement Plan (EPMP)? Or should applicants attach something like the templates used in annual reporting for those re-applying?

A: Attaching the optional template is allowable. However, any information provided should align with the program objectives and outcomes described in the NOFO. The EPMP is also part of the Phase II review in the NOFO.

Q: Can you translate the first paragraph of the Project Narrative section (page 36) of the NOFO?

A: This paragraph can be interpreted as the following:

Multi-component NOFOs may have a maximum of 15 pages for the “base” (subsections of the Project Description that Components 1 and 2 share with each other, which may include target population, inclusion, collaboration, etc.); and up to 4 additional pages for Component 1 and 4 additional pages for Component 2 for Project Narrative subsections that are specific to each Component. However, if applicants exceed this amount by a few pages, it is not a problem.

Q: Is the Letter of Intent required?

A: The Letter of Intent is recommended but is not required. Letters of Intent are emailed to Audra Henry (ate1@cdc.gov). See the announcement for the due date and additional information about the Letter of Intent.

Q: Are we allowed to submit additional letters of support beyond the 3 that are described on page 16 or 61?

A: Yes. Make sure that they are included as attachments in your application.

Q: Should applicants use GrantSolutions at all for this round of applications? The NOFO only refers to Grants.gov.

A: Applicants submit competitive applications through the grants.gov web site. Applicants use the grants.gov web site for application submission (pre-award phase). Recipients will use GrantSolutions for post-award tasks only.

Q: Plain language is required for the application. Do you have a recommended reading level that is appropriate for us to target?

A: There is not a recommended reading level. Applicants may wish to aim between an 8th grade and 12th grade reading level. Consult plainlanguage.gov for more information about plain language.

Q: There is yellow background highlighting that is interspersed throughout the application. Do you know if that indicates anything that we need to be aware of?

A: Applicants can disregard the yellow background highlighting. It does not indicate anything that the applicants need to be aware of.

Q: Do we focus our efforts on at least 5 NPL or petition sites for the next 5 years, depending on your inventory of sites and State capacity?

A: Each recipient is expected to focus on high-priority sites on their work plan, including ATSDR-accepted petition sites and sites proposed to or listed on the NPL. Other sites of high public health impact, Congressional (State or Federal) interest, community or media interest, and sites otherwise deemed an ATSDR priority should also receive high priority on the work plan.

Q: With respect to the letter of support from program or leadership staff (Page 16/61). What exactly are you looking for? Do you really just want a simple letter confirming we will follow ATSDR's guidance, policies, and procedures, and participate in trainings, technical work groups, etc.?

A: We're looking for a letter that gives specific examples of how the applicant will follow ATSDR's guidance, policies, and procedures as described in the NOFO. Specific examples include, but are not limited to, following ATSDR's procedures for the clearance and release of HCs/PHAs and the use of comparison values.

Q: The NOFO didn't clearly require Letters of Support from other CDC-funded entities but provided directions for file naming and uploading. Does ATSDR want or require letters of support from states' respective PEHSU, childhood lead poisoning prevention program, and other CDC-funded programs for this NOFO?

A: Letters of Support from other CDC programs and CDC-funded organizations are not requested or required.