

# **EPA's Office of Research and Development/ National Center For Environmental Research (NCER) Competition Process**

The basics on competing for NCER  
research opportunities

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# Overview

- Finding competitive opportunities
- Funding announcement highlights
- NCER process

# Finding EPA and NCER Competitive Opportunities

- Grants.gov: [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)
  - Find current competitive opportunities
    - Synopses include important info: funding amounts, eligible entities, submission deadline, and more
  - Searchable by CFDA, keyword, agency, type of entity, etc
  - Apply online
  - Register for automatic notification of agency opportunity postings  
[http://www07.grants.gov/applicants/email\\_subscription.jsp](http://www07.grants.gov/applicants/email_subscription.jsp)

# Competitive Opportunities

- EPA Program Office Websites
  - Check program websites for current funding opportunities (ex: <http://www.epa.gov/ncer/rfa/>)
  
- Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA): [www.cfda.gov](http://www.cfda.gov)
  - Read more about assistance programs
    - Typical funding amounts, types of projects funded, eligible entities, and more
  
- EPA's Competition Policy <http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/policy.htm>
  - Familiarize yourself with EPA's policy on competition

# NCER Announcements

- NCER issues a Request for Applications (RFA)
  - The application submission includes forms and certifications necessary for award
  - Other EPA offices usually issue Requests for Proposals (RFP)-less information and forms
- Each RFA has unique instructions and requirements
- Read the RFA for:
  - Eligibility information, deadlines, proposal content, review criteria, and more
- The RFA is prepared based on OMB format  
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg/062303policy\\_directive.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg/062303policy_directive.pdf)

# NCER RFA Highlights

## ■ Section I

- Describes types of research projects and areas of interest being solicited
- Provides background information on the research and science areas involved
- Basically, programmatic description of funding opportunity

# NCER RFA Highlights

- Section II
  - Expected number of awards
  - Expected funding amount (total and per award)
  - Award type (grant or cooperative agreement)

# NCER RFA Highlights

## ■ Section III

- Lists eligible entities-based on CFDA
- Cost share/matching requirements if any
- Threshold eligibility criteria:
  - may include legal, policy, relevance, programmatic, administrative, and/or financial criteria that have the effect of making an applicant or application eligible or ineligible for award

# NCER RFA Highlights

## ■ Section IV

### – Content and form of application

- Address Section I (program info), Section III (threshold criteria) and Section V (evaluation criteria)
- NCER application package normally includes SF 424 form, Key Contacts form, Abstract, Research Plan (main part of package), QA Statement, Data Plan, Budget information, Resumes, Support Form, Letters of Intent/Support
- Page limits apply to application package

# NCER RFA Highlights

- Also in Section IV
  - Submission method (electronically thru grants.gov is encouraged; alternative methods allowed if necessary)
  - Submission dates and times

# NCER RFA Highlights

- Section V
  - Evaluation criteria and process used during review of eligible applications
  - NCER's Two Step Evaluation Process

# NCER RFA Highlights

- First Step of Evaluation Process

- External peer review by external experts based on peer review criteria in Section V
- Peer review criteria generally focus on the research proposal, investigators, facilities and equipment, and proposed budget
- Applications evaluated as excellent, very good, etc.

# NCER RFA Highlights

- Second Step of Evaluation Process
  - Internal programmatic review of the excellent (and usually also the very good) applications by EPA reviewers
  - Based on factors such as past performance and relevance of the project to EPA research priorities

# NCER RFA Highlights

- Final funding decisions usually made by NCER director based on the peer and programmatic reviews and other factors such as program balance and funding availability

# NCER RFA Highlights

## ■ Section VI

- Award notice procedures
- Administrative and national policy requirements
- New OMB subaward reporting and DUNS/CCR requirements
- Reporting
- Dispute resolution process

<http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/resolution.htm>

# NCER RFA Highlights

- Section VII
  - Agency contacts for questions on the RFA
- Section VIII
  - Other information

# Modifications to RFA

- NCER occasionally modifies RFAs
  - Due dates, clarification of requirements, etc.
- Automatic Notification
  - Sign up on [grants.gov](https://grants.gov) for automatic notification of modifications to specific announcements
  - Modifications posted on [grants.gov](https://grants.gov)

# Communications with Applicants

- See Section 11 of the Competition Policy  
<http://www.epa.gov/ogd/competition/policy.htm>
- Limitations on what can be discussed and when

# Communications with Applicants

- EPA can:
  - Answer applicant eligibility questions
  - Clarify info on administrative aspects of proposal submission
  - Respond to requests for clarification of the RFA
  - NOTE: Clarifications that result in changes to the RFA must be communicated (via modification to the RFA) to all potential applicants

# Communications with Applicants

- EPA cannot:
  - Offer to write proposals for applicants
  - Review or comment on draft proposals
  - Provide information on the Agency's approach to evaluating proposals beyond what is described in Section V of the RFA
  - Provide a competitive advantage to any applicant

# Competitive Process Summary

1. NCER prepares RFA
2. NCER posts RFA on program office website and [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)
3. NCER receives applications from applicants
4. NCER evaluates applications and makes selections
5. Awards are made

**Questions?**