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GENERAL QUESTIONS

Where do I go to find information on the America the Beautiful Challenge (ATBC)?

For general information about the ATBC, we encourage you to review the Request for Proposals, tip sheets, webinar, and other materials on our website: www.nfwf.org/challenge. For specific information about the 2022 Request for Proposals visit [this webpage](#).

Please check back often for updates and new program support documents.

Will a recording of the webinar be made available?

Yes, a recording of the webinar is available via [GoToWebinar](#) or via [ShareFile](#).

Why establish the ATBC?

Congress provided hundreds of millions of dollars through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) to several federal agencies to fund conservation activities across the country. Those federal government agencies are now tasked with awarding these funds to state and local governments and other entities to achieve the expected conservation actions. The ATBC was established to create a centralized funding source for applicants and simplify the process for applying for and receiving these conservation funds.

Why is NFWF administering the ATBC?

NFWF has administered programs in partnership with federal agencies for nearly four decades, under numerous administrations, and therefore has tremendous experience and expertise in this area. NFWF's non-partisan, competitive grant programs provide an efficient, effective process for state and local government, educational institutions, NGO's, private entities, and others to apply for federal funding in a streamlined and efficient process. NFWF also establishes a mechanism by which federal agency funds can be leveraged and/or matched by private funds to deliver larger, more impactful cross-boundary conservation results. Finally, NFWF has decades of monitoring and evaluation experience and has developed a standard set of ATBC reporting metrics that will allow for easy comparisons and tracking of progress across projects, programs, agencies, and departments.

What is the ATBC, is it an annual grant program?

Through the ATBC, multiple federal agencies have come together to create an easier way for entities to apply and receive funding from the IIJA. NFWF will administer the funding opportunity that facilitates an accessible application process and supports the conservation and restoration goals of the America the Beautiful Initiative. This is expected to be a five-year program, and the first RFP was released on May 4, 2022. Future RFPs are expected to be released each spring, contingent upon the federal appropriations process.

Why are DOI funds only available for states, Tribes, and territories?

The IIJA directs that the funding provided to DOI that is available through the ATBC is only available to these entities. NGOs and other entities are encouraged to partner with states, Tribes, and territories as subrecipients as part of larger, landscape-level proposals submitted by those entities.

Is ATBC the same as the 30 by 30 Initiative?

The America the Beautiful Challenge is intended to fund a broader range of outcomes focused on conservation and restoration, whereas the 30x30 Initiative is a worldwide effort to designate 30 percent of the Earth's lands and oceans as protected areas by the year 2030. The America the Beautiful Challenge includes objectives such as conserving and restoring rivers, coasts, wetlands, and watersheds and connecting and reconnecting wildlife corridors, large landscapes, watersheds, and seascapes. In short, the ATBC is focused more broadly on restoration activities that will conserve and restore America's natural heritage for the benefit of future generations

What types of projects will be funded?

ATBC will prioritize proposals that implement voluntary, large-scale, on-the-ground conservation and restoration activities or otherwise lead to on-the-ground implementation through capacity building, community engagement, planning, and project design. The overarching goals are to advance existing landscape conservation plans and/or propose to knit together a diverse stakeholder partnership that develops and/or implements new conservation plans. As part of this, projects should address priority species and/or habitat conservation actions identified in existing plans or other species recovery or conservation plans. Projects that are informed by Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) and promote Tribal co-stewardship are encouraged. Successful projects will focus on cross-boundary and/or landscape-level conservation and restoration activities.

Will the ATBC respect private property rights?

Yes. The ATBC will focus on voluntary, locally led conservation and restoration efforts following the same conservation approach NFWF has used for nearly four decades. The ATBC will honor private property rights and the voluntary contributions of ranchers, farmers, forest owners, and private landowners.

Can projects cross U.S. borders – Canada or Mexico?

Yes, while projects should be within the U.S./territories, the ATBC can accommodate the practical reality that ecosystems can cross international borders. The project's purpose must be clear that project outcomes will primarily and directly benefit U.S. ecosystem(s) and/or U.S. ecosystem restoration management goals. Thus, though it may be possible, we would expect it to be uncommon for projects to cross borders. Additionally, given that funds are only available for provision to states, territories, and Tribes, the U.S. recipient must be able to meet the minimum match requirement, have an independent way to pass funding to the cross-border partner (if needed), and to describe the clear link to the ecosystem for which they are responsible.

Who can apply?

Based on legislative funding authorities, the DOI funding in this round can only support states, territories, Tribal governments, and Tribal-affiliated organizations.

- State government agencies, territories of the United States, and Indian Tribes¹ are eligible to apply for all four grant categories.
 - Federally recognized Tribes are eligible to apply directly; all others should partner with states, territories and federally recognized Tribes in a proposal.
- Nonprofit 501(c) organizations, local governments, municipal governments, and educational institutions are eligible to directly apply for grants in categories (3) Grants to Buffer and Benefit Public Lands, and (4) Private Forests and Farmland. These entities are also eligible to serve as subrecipients for grants awarded to state, Tribal and territorial government entities.

¹ The term "Indian Tribe" has the meaning given the term in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. § 5304). "Indian tribe" or "Indian Tribe" means any Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, including any Alaska Native village or regional or village corporation as defined in or established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (85 Stat. 688), which is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians. 25 U.S.C. § 5304(e).

- Ineligible applicants include U.S. federal government agencies, businesses, unincorporated individuals, and international organizations.

What qualifies as a Tribal-affiliated organization?

The Department of the Interior has determined that Tribal governments also include affiliated operating entities. This may include Tribal Nation government entities, such as fish and wildlife departments, historic preservation offices, corporations, etc. Generally, a nonprofit, even if Tribally-led/run, would not be such an entity and so would not qualify as a lead applicant for ATBC. However, a Tribe may apply for a grant and utilize a nonprofit to execute the grant funding. In other words, while the grantee must be a governmental entity of the Tribal Nation, it is not necessary for the Tribe to carry out the grant. If available, an applicant may include any MOU, statutory language, resolutions, or other documentation that defines the applicant as an entity of Tribal government.

What qualifies as a “state” – do state universities or natural resource / conservation districts qualify?

Any state agency can qualify as a lead applicant (i.e. department of fish and wildlife, department of transportation, department of natural resources, etc.). State universities and conservation districts (or water management districts, irrigation districts, etc.) can qualify as a state applicant if their organization is an operating entity of the state and they are acting on behalf of that entity (in other words, they qualify as a state if in fact they are part of the state government). Because not all public universities are part of the state government, and because various districts are established with the intention to operate separately from the state, applicants should be able to show how their institution qualifies (i.e. any statutory authority or language).

PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

Can multiple organizations submit a joint application for one project?

Yes, we encourage applicants to bring together broad partnerships in support of the project. However, the application can only have one primary applicant organization, and the point of contact on Easygrants (NFWF's grant-management software) must be directly affiliated with the applicant organization. If awarded, all funding will flow through the applicant organization, which will be responsible for managing subawards to any project partners.

Can an organization submit more than one application for this RFP?

Yes, more than one application may be submitted, but please note that anything beyond two or three submissions per grant category may see diminished competitiveness. We generally encourage applicants to submit the one or two of their best projects per RFP grant category. Please do not submit the same project to multiple categories — select only the most appropriate one.

What is the period of performance?

The Period of Performance is the time between the start and end date of your project for which all activities in the scope of work (and request and match budgets) must be included. Expenses incurred outside of the start and end dates cannot be reimbursed or counted as match.

What is the latest possible start date for a project funded through the 2022 ATBC?

It is up to the applicant to specify the period of performance for their project that is appropriate for the work they are proposing to complete. For the 2022 grant slate, we will consider projects with start dates from August 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023.

What is the greatest possible period of performance?

It is up to the applicant to specify the period of performance for their project that is appropriate for the work they are proposing to complete and [the grant category](#) selected. For this RFP, a project cannot have a start date prior to August 1, 2022 or an end date after June 30, 2027. Any expenses incurred prior to an official award letter and signed contract are taken solely at the risk of the applicant.

Are matching funds required for these grants?

Each agency funding source has a slightly different match requirement based on the legal authorities associated with the funding. Applicants who are unable to meet these minimum requirements are still encouraged to apply and to proactively contact NFWF staff before submission. Where possible, NFWF will work with potential applicants to help meet these minimum requirements. Match should be incurred and expended during the period of performance. The tables below outline the requirements for each type of funding.

Do Tribal Nations need to provide match for ATBC funding?

No. [Native Americans in Philanthropy](#) (NAP), as a part of their new partnership with NFWF, will be providing all match for any granted Tribally led projects. Tribally led applications can leave the matching contributions section of Easygrants blank, NFWF will be able to tag NAP funds to applicable projects on the back end. If there is match that an applicant would like to include, you are still able to do so in Easygrants, but it is not required.

DOI Conservation and Restoration Funds

Recipient Type	Federal cost share	Non-federal cost share
States	90% of costs	10% of costs, of which at least 2.5% must be cash
Indian Tribes & Territories*	97% of costs	3% of costs, of which at least .75% must be cash. (WAIVED for Indian Tribes: fully covered by partnership with Native Americans in Philanthropy; WAIVED for territories per DOI legal interpretation, see below)

DoD Conservation and Restoration Funds

Recipient Type	Federal cost share	Non-federal cost share
All entities	100% of costs	Not required

USFS Conservation and Restoration Funds

Recipient Type	Federal cost share	Non-federal cost share
All entities	80% of costs	20% of costs (WAIVED for Indian Tribes: fully covered by Native Americans in Philanthropy)

NRCS Technical Assistance Funds

Recipient Type	Federal cost share	Non-federal cost share
All entities	50% of costs	50% of costs (WAIVED for Indian Tribes: fully covered by Native Americans in Philanthropy)

*Pursuant to Section 601 of Pub. L. 96-205, as amended, the match requirement is waived for the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Please reach out to program staff with any questions.

Does 638 BIA funding count as nonfederal match?

Yes, there is broad statutory authority allowing the use of 638 funds as matching shares (25 USC 5322(c); 25 USC 5363(j)), which supports the Tribes' use of 638 funding for ATBC matching purposes. The Tribe will need to confirm that their 638 funds fall within those statutes if they intend to use them for the match.

How can I capture federal funds leveraged in support of a project, when they do not count as non-federal match?

In the match section of your application, you can indicate that funds are federal. You can also detail federal funds leveraged in support of your project in your proposal narrative. These funds will be counted as federal leverage but not match when evaluating your proposal.

Can grant funds be used for administration/project management?

Yes. Your project budget should include all costs to carry out the project including personnel costs for fiscal and programmatic management and reporting.

Are smaller proposals more competitive because they are requesting less money?

No. ATBC will fund proposals that advance conservation and restoration at a scale that is appropriate for the landscape and the applicant. Overall, this funding is intended to support large cross-boundary or landscape scale projects.

Can ATBC projects be implemented on federal land?

Yes, projects can be implemented on federal/public land. Projects requesting funds from the USFS must be implemented on or benefit USFS land or Indian forestland or rangeland. Projects requesting DoD funding may not be implemented on military lands/installations but should be located near military installations per the Sentinel Landscape project areas. A [map of these locations](#) is included on the website.

Do ceded lands count as Tribal Lands? Or must projects on “Tribal lands” be on a reservation only? What about private lands within a reservation?

Projects can take place on public or private land and are not limited to “Tribal” or “reservation” lands; the key factor in a project would be that it is within a geography for which the applicant is at least partially responsible and has approval (including direct authority over the land or the ability to enter into an agreement with one who does) to carry out the work on the lands in question.

Is land acquisition or conservation easement eligible under this program?

The focus of the 2022 ATBC is on implementing restoration priorities identified in established or new conservation plans, broader ongoing restoration efforts and/or projects that are informed by Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) and promote Tribal co-stewardship. Voluntary acquisition and easement projects are not excluded, but to be competitive the application would need to demonstrate how the acquisition or easement is critical to the overall landscape restoration and stewardship work being conducted. In short, acquisition or easement could be a means to achieving a broader conservation goal, but not the goal of the project itself. An example would be protecting land within a high priority migration corridor as part of a broader effort to improve the overall health and functionality of that corridor. Land acquisition and conservation easement proposals will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis — particularly with respect to the conservation and restoration outcomes that can be delivered, the degree to which they incorporate a public access component, and the overall cost effectiveness of the proposed approach, among the other evaluation criteria detailed in the RFP. Only grant categories 1 and 3 allow for land acquisition. This type of transaction would require an appraisal and compliance with federal acquisition rules, and the details of the particular project may affect the type of appraisal needed. Assistance will be available to work through these questions and discuss the required process for approved grants.

Can the DOI funds be used to purchase water rights (voluntarily) for the restoration of at-risk species habitat?

Yes, however this type of transaction would constitute a real property acquisition requiring an appraisal, and the details of the particular project may affect the type of appraisal needed. Assistance will be available to work through these questions and discuss the required process for approved grants.

Is environmental compliance (NEPA, ESA, historic preservation, etc.) required for these projects?

Yes. Projects selected may be subject to requirements under the Endangered Species Act (ESA; state and federal), National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other Federal regulations, as applicable. These requirements typically come into play on projects that would involve ground- or habitat-disturbing activities. Even habitat restoration projects designed to improve habitat conditions have the potential to affect listed species or disturb historic artifacts during implementation. Documentation of compliance with these regulations must be completed by the grant recipient prior to initiating activities that involve ground disturbance, or other alterations to the project site(s). Applicants should budget time and resources to provide this information early in the process.

For implementation projects, must permits be in hand?

For the implementation project category, we are looking to fund “restoration ready” projects that are ready to start in 2023. Projects that have permits in hand may be more competitive, and it is expected that most viable projects will be well into the permitting process by the proposal due date. Given the four-year timeline to spend grant funding, it is expected that projects will be able to receive all permits and start construction within six months of the start date for the project’s period of performance.

What are NFWF’s procurement guidelines and procedures?

As indicated in the ATBC RFP, this program awards federal assistance funds subject to the requirements of OMB Uniform Guidance, which can be [accessed here](#). As such, recipients must maintain and follow a documented procurement process that aligns with the Procurement Standards of the Uniform Guidance and must maintain sufficient supporting documentation. Please note, NFWF does not approve the solicitation and/or selection of contractors.

What is the difference between a subaward and a contract?

A contract provides goods or services to the grant recipient and typically must be sought through a competitive process, whereas a subaward allows the grant recipient to pass through funds to the subrecipient for project or program implementation. Subawards transfer a portion of the programmatic work (public benefit) to another organization. To qualify as a subaward, the subrecipient must have responsibility for programmatic decision making and measurable performance requirements related directly to the prime award.

Can federal agencies/entities be part of an applicants’ budget as a subaward or contract?

Yes, please note the procurement information above and the agency subrecipient needs to have the requisite authority to apply for and accept the grant.

What do you mean by the term “underserved”?

Underserved or under-resourced populations are those who receive inadequate or inequitable environmental services and protection, who experience quality-of-life disparities, and who by design

have little power or influence over outside decisions that impact their daily quality of life. These include both urban and rural populations.

When will funds be available?

This will depend on how complete your application is, the grants policies and routing at your organization and how responsive you are to modification requests. Funds are only disbursed to grantees who have a signed grant agreement with NFWF. Notifications are expected in November 2022, therefore, the soonest funds are likely to be available is January 2023. February or March of 2023 would be safer start dates, if your project is flexible.

GRANTS TO BUFFER AND BENEFIT PUBLIC LANDS (CATEGORY 3)

Can an applicant apply for both USFS and DoD funding within this category in one proposal?

In general, we advise that applicants apply to the DoD opportunity or USFS opportunity separately unless a strong nexus can be made in the connection between the two projects or the singular project that aligns well with the geographic focus and activities called out in the RFP.

Will the USFS opportunity only fund projects on Forest Service land? Will USFS only fund invasive species detection, prevention, and treatments, fish passage and water quality activities?

Projects requesting funds from the USFS must be implemented on or benefit USFS land or Native Nation forestland or rangeland (federal or public land). At this time we do not have a specific geographic distance requirement from Forest Service land, but applicants should make benefits and connections clear in the narrative and provide maps if possible. As for project content, all USFS projects should incorporate one or more of the focus activities noted above. While those activities should be the primary focus of the project, other supporting elements can be included in the metrics, narrative, and budget as applicable/needed.

For DoD funding, what is required proximity or distance from the Sentinel Landscapes or military installations?

DoD funds will be prioritized to [Sentinel Landscapes](#) or areas that advance the military mission (e.g., the Pacific region or directly supporting an installation). Projects may not be implemented on military lands/installations but should be located near military installations. At this time we do not have a specific geographic distance requirement from military installations, but applicants should make benefits and connections clear in the narrative and provide maps if possible.

PRIVATE FOREST, RANGELAND AND FARMLAND GRANTS (CATEGORY 4)

What types of projects will be funded under the “Private Forests, Rangeland and Farmland Grants” category?

Grants in this category will provide technical assistance to advance the goals of one or more of the 22 national and state NRCS [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) (WLFW) initiatives. Competitive projects will increase participation in Farm Bill programs (e.g., [EQIP](#), [CSP](#), and [easement programs](#)) and help private landowners develop and implement practices to benefit WLFW [target species and priority landscapes](#). Please also visit the WLFW webpage for links to published [species strategies](#).

How should applicants coordinate with NRCS when developing proposals under the “Private Forests, Rangeland and Farmland Grants” category?

To ensure your proposal is in alignment with NRCS WLFW goals and priorities, please confer with the [NRCS State Conservationist and their staff](#) in the state in which your project is located. Please do not include a letter of support from the NRCS State Conservationist, but please do briefly describe your coordination efforts in the proposal narrative. Applicants are also encouraged to consult with state-level NRCS WLFW coordinators for more information on planning projects that align with specific WLFW initiative goals. Contacts for other NRCS staff can be [found here](#) selecting the “Site Directory by State” option and selecting your state and “NRCS” from the drop-down menus. Working Lands for Wildlife state coordinators are often the NRCS State Biologist.

What activities are eligible for funding under the “Private Forests, Rangeland and Farmland Grants” category?

This category will provide funding for grant recipients to hire or otherwise support field conservation professionals to provide technical assistance to private landowners and operators. Technical assistance includes outreach to and engagement with farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners on developing management plans, designing and implementing best practices, participating in Farm Bill programs, and sharing their experiences and lessons learned. Eligible grant expenses are limited to personnel, travel, supplies, and indirect expenses for grantees and their subrecipients. Conservation practice implementation expenses (e.g., restoration contracts, equipment, financial incentives, cost share payments) are not eligible.

PROPOSAL UPLOADS & EASYGRANTS

Are letters of support required?

Letters of support are not required but are strongly encouraged, especially for any partnering entity that is contributing match and any communities or organizations that will directly benefit or be impacted by project implementation (particularly those the applicant cites as underserved or disadvantaged).

If we didn't have to undergo an A-133/Single Audit, do we upload a statement to that effect?

Depending on your organization type, you may not be required to provide this upload. To see which documents are required of your organization go here: <https://www.nfwf.org/apply-grant/application-information/required-financial-documents>. If an upload does not apply to your organization, you will need to upload a simple document stating it is not needed and why in 1 to 2 sentences in lieu of the financial document itself. The same applies for the Statement of Litigation requirement (state and local government applicants are not required to complete this document).

How is the project description different from the abstract?

A description is a two-sentence overview. The abstract is more detailed. Please [reference the tip sheet](#) for specific instructions on completing these sections.

Who should be the main point of contact for the proposal/project in Easygrants, particularly where a project has multiple partners?

The organization that will be managing the project should be the one submitting the application. Only one person can be on the application to submit, so you will need to work within your group to determine who is the best person to be the primary point of contact. If your organization is awarded a grant, you will be able to have multiple contacts listed for the project in Easygrants, including finance staff managing the award and grant reporting. Please note that Easygrants only allows one individual assigned per task.

If a group of organizations is submitting a proposal as part of a collaborative group, how do we complete the Applicant Demographic Form?

Demographics should be provided for the lead applicant within the Applicant Demographic Form.

How can an additional tracking metric be added to the drop-down menu?

We are not accepting additional program level metrics at this time – please add any further metrics you feel are important to the metrics section of your narrative. If you think an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact NFWF staff listed in the RFP to discuss acceptable alternatives.

What are the metrics for different project categories?

Please see the metrics section in the RFP and Appendix 1 – metrics are grouped by activity type (i.e. restoration, water quality, engagement, etc.), this same full list of metrics is available for each project category type. All metrics listed in the ATBC RFP are available in Easygrants and applicants may select any applicable metrics—but please pay special attention to those most relevant to the grant category to which you are applying.

Can funds be used to purchase drones?

Possibly. DOI has a website on drones and software that complies with all federal laws. It can be found here: <https://www.doi.gov/aviation/uas/fleet>.

How do I estimate costs in the budget with rising prices?

Given the current financial situation, we are encouraging grantees to consider and budget for any additional costs that may accrue as a result of market forces, including inflation, increasing fuel costs, supply chain disruptions, and labor shortages.

Will grant awards include funding appropriated through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act include specific terms and conditions, including Buy American provisions?

Yes. The funding from DOI will be from IIJA. Applicants should consider and budget for any additional costs necessary to comply with IIJA requirements, including Buy America Preference provisions. More information about Buy America Preference Provisions can be found in Title IX of the IIJA (Public Law 117-58, 135 Stat. 429) and in an April 18, 2022, Office of Management and Budget Memorandum, entitled "Initial Implementation Guidance on Application of Buy America Preference in Federal Financial Assistance Programs for Infrastructure."

For the budget, does NFWF ATBC allow a line item for contingency?

No, we cannot include contingency budget in ATBC awards so please prepare your budgets with the most current and comprehensive information possible. However, NFWF understands that unexpected costs can arise in large-scale projects and encourage you to work with your program team if awarded to discuss any budget amendment needs.

Is there a way to print a preview of the application questions?

Yes, there is a great deal of information on the application, indirect costs, etc. that can be found at <http://www.nfwf.org/whatwedo/grants/applicants/Pages/home.aspx>. The full proposal [narrative template](#) is available for preview on the ATBC website.

Who can help me with Easygrants issues?

For issues or assistance with our online Easygrants system, please contact:

Easygrants Helpdesk

Email: Easygrants@nfwf.org

Voicemail: 202-595-2497

Hours: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET, Monday-Friday.

Include: your name, proposal ID #, e-mail address, phone number, program you are applying to, and a description of the issue.