

assistance agreements to the EPA Regional Administrators. Thus, OEI anticipates that the selection of pre-proposals for funding will be made by the OEI Assistant Administrator, as in previous years, and that the processing, awarding, and management of assistance agreements may be handled by the appropriate EPA Regional Offices.

It is EPA's policy to promote competition in the award of assistance agreements. EPA will strive to ensure that the competitive process is fair and open and that no applicant receives an unfair competitive advantage. Only those eligible applicants whose pre-proposals are selected for funding will need to proceed with developing and submitting the formal assistance agreement application package.

After EPA notifies the applicants whose pre-proposals have been selected for funding, those applicants will have 45 days to complete and submit the formal assistance agreement application package to the appropriate Network Regional Coordinator.

The duration of each project and the final scope of activities to be completed will be determined in pre-award discussions between the applicant and the appropriate EPA Network Regional Coordinator. In anticipation of this process, all applicants should refer to the Web site <http://www.epa.gov/ogd/AppKit> and review the forms and documentation required for submitting final applications.

Applicants whose pre-proposals are selected for funding may request that assistance be provided in the form of a grant or cooperative agreement. Such a request should be based on the desired level of EPA involvement in the project and must be made in writing prior to the award of the assistance agreement.

A *grant* may be the most appropriate legal instrument if the proposed activities are not principally for the direct benefit or use of the Federal Government and no substantial involvement is anticipated between EPA and the recipient during the program period. A *cooperative agreement* may be more appropriate if the proposed activities are not principally for the direct benefit or use of the Federal Government and substantial involvement is anticipated between EPA and the recipient during the program period.

All or part of a grant or cooperative agreement may be provided in the form of *in-kind assistance* (in lieu of funding) if it would be more efficient in terms of cost or time for EPA to purchase services or equipment on a recipient's behalf (e.g., through an EPA-approved

contractor). (Policy for Distinguishing between Assistance and Acquisition, EPA Order 5700.1, March 22, 1994.)

A recipient may also choose to receive an Exchange Network assistance agreement as part of a *Performance Partnership Grant (PPG)*. PPGs can provide States with greater flexibility during the work plan negotiation process and allow them to organize their work plan components in ways that best suit their specific needs. Where appropriate, the assistance agreement work plan will reflect both EPA and State roles and responsibilities, and a joint performance evaluation process will be negotiated.

For additional information on assistance agreements or for guidance in preparing pre-proposals or final applications, please contact the appropriate Exchange Network Regional Coordinator or Rebecca Moser in EPA's Office of Information Collection (see Section IX).

Section IV. Application and Submission Information

Based on an evaluation of pre-proposals, EPA expects to make funding decisions in the Spring of 2004. EPA may ask applicants whose pre-proposals have been selected for funding to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to giving final approval of the award.

Pre-proposals must be submitted electronically in either WordPerfect or Microsoft Word by February 3, 2004, to neengprg@epa.gov with an electronic copy to the appropriate Exchange Network Regional Coordinator (see Section IX). Each pre-proposal should not exceed 10 single-spaced pages (12 point font).

Pre-proposals should follow the following format:

I. Project Information

State/Tribe/Territory Agency or

Department:

Title of Project:

Focus Area (i.e., Readiness,

Implementation, or Challenge):

Total Funds Requested from EPA:

Total Project Cost (including State/Tribal cash contributions, if applicable):

Contact Person (name, title, address, phone, fax, and e-mail):

II. Overview

Provide an overview of the project that explains the purpose, goals, and objectives. This section should give reviewers an understanding of the nature and expected outcomes of the project. If applicable, explain how the project will build on previous work

supported by the Exchange Network Grant Program.

III. Summary Work Plan

Describe what the project will achieve and who will benefit from the project. Explain each aspect of the project in enough detail to allow reviewers to understand and evaluate it. No specific format is required for this section, but pre-proposals should address the following:

- *Proposed Activities:* List and describe the activities and how they relate to the evaluation criteria described in Section VI of this guidance.

- *Project Milestones:* List the key project milestones, with estimated dates for completion.

- *Performance Measures:* Describe how the success of the project will be measured.

- *Sharing Results:* Indicate a commitment to share results with other Exchange Network partners by working with the NSB to post those results at <http://www.exchangenetwork.net>.

Applicants should be aware that pre-proposals and applications submitted under this or any other EPA assistance agreement program are subject to potential public release under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). If an applicant considers any of the information submitted in the pre-proposal or application to be Confidential Business Information (CBI), the applicant must claim that information as CBI when the pre-proposal or application is submitted to EPA [40 CFR 2.203(a)].

Section V. Application Review Information

Pre-proposals will be evaluated separately for each assistance agreement category: Readiness, Implementation, or Challenge. The criteria and scoring system outlined in Section VI will be used to guide the evaluation of each pre-proposal. The scoring system allows each pre-proposal to be given a numeric value based on the criteria. A value of one to a maximum of 90 will be assigned for one or more of the activities listed in the criteria. A value of one to 10 will be assigned for describing the benefits of the project being proposed. The maximum score for any pre-proposal submitted would be 100. Pre-proposals will be initially screened based on this criteria and scoring system.

After the pre-proposals have been initially scored, EPA will form a review panel composed of representatives from EPA Headquarters and Regional Offices. This panel will consider not only the initial scoring, but also the basic