

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, TRANSPARENCY AND POSITIVE CHOICES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Q: What, in your view, is Information Technology (IT)?

In the context of this RfP, IT is the use of computers, software, and communication technologies in the service of improving the health of the Great Lakes. Experts we have contacted suggest that web-based applications, internet tools, datamining, the use of mobile devices, and data visualization technologies are under-deployed in this area. The Fund wants to advance the state-of-practice in the Great Lakes and the state-of-the-art globally. Much of the technology may not be novel, but the application of this technology to the issues affecting ecosystem health will be.

Q: Will you support the update and/or creation and maintenance of existing/new database systems?

It depends. The purpose of this set of projects is to build pervasive, interactive systems for people to receive information about the choices they are making, allow them to make healthier choices for the Great Lakes ecosystem, and validate the environmental impact of those choices. The goal of this work is not to maintain or add information to existing data repositories. However, this work may result in new information repositories or data that is added to existing databases as the prototypes are built and tested.

Q: There are a number of data resources pertaining to the Great Lakes currently available. It seems that an evaluation of existing resources must be done before any go-forward action can be taken in this area. Will you support such an evaluation?

It is unlikely that we will support descriptive, evaluation-based projects that will solely result in a set of go-forward recommendations for others to implement. The Fund is interested in projects that acknowledge the existence of current resources and build tools that harness information technology to use and/or move beyond the current data sets to inform individuals and institutions of healthier, ecosystem positive choices for the Great Lakes. We hope to see teams propose efforts that apply existing data to lead to action.

Q: How many proposals will you support?

We do not have a specific target number of projects in mind. Past RfPs have typically resulted in six to ten projects. The Fund does hope to support a portfolio of complimentary projects.

Q: Will the Great Lakes Protection Fund support projects other than those submitted in response to this RfP?

Yes. This RfP is developed to supplement our general funding guidelines. Other project ideas that are consistent with those guidelines are welcomed at any time.

Q: How much money should I ask for?

Budget requests should reflect the full amount of funds necessary to complete the work. The average level of support has been \$150,000-\$250,000, but budgets in the past have ranged from \$15,000 to \$1.5M. Matching funds are not necessary. If the team has acquired matching funds, please indicate that in the preproposal budget.

Q: What is a reasonable timeline for a project?

The project should last as long as necessary to complete the work. Projects that last for multiple years are typical.

Q: Does my organization need to be located in the basin or a Great Lakes state to qualify for funding?

No. Activities affecting the basin's ecosystem are becoming increasingly distant in space and time from the shores of the lakes. The solutions will be as well.

Q: I have a project idea related to the RfP that was not included in the project descriptions; can I still submit a preproposal?

Yes. Teams are encouraged to submit ideas that meet the intent of the RfP whether they appear as an illustrated idea or not. We expect that many teams will propose different, and better ideas than those presented as illustrations. The list of projects is meant to be illustrative of ideas of the types of projects that teams could consider and improve upon. It should not be considered an exhaustive or exclusive list.

Q: I have a project idea, but I have not secured a commitment from many of the team members; can I still submit a preproposal?

Yes. The Fund recognizes that it may be difficult to secure a commitment from all of the necessary team members prior to the preproposal submission deadline. However, if a full proposal is invited, the project manager must have a complete team assembled prior to the full proposal submission.

Q: I have a project idea, but I am having difficulty securing a partner to test the prototype. Will you provide support for my current team to work on the early stages of prototype development and to secure a final pilot group for testing?

The Fund has provided small planning grants for projects that require additional groundwork and team-building before a full project can be undertaken. If the project idea is particularly innovative, the Fund may consider such an option.

Q: What factors will you consider in the preproposal evaluation process?

The most successful preproposals will identify novel strategies to build and deploy information technology to improve ecosystem health. We will evaluate proposals on their potential to create positive ecological change in the basin; the amount of innovation in the proposed strategy; the level of collaboration from the full range of stakeholders; and how well the proposed effort fits in a portfolio of supported projects. Each individual project should create a prototype system that can be tested during the project, be a collaborative effort that includes users of the tools developed, and include sufficient evaluation to verify and quantify the project results. Teams should consider the particulars of information to be delivered including its format, timing, and granularity (level of detail). Successful preproposals will likely include innovative incentives for behavior change.

Q: How is the work supported in this RfP different from current and future work of programs like the Great Lakes Observing System (GLOS) and the Great Lakes Information Network (GLIN)?

Projects will complement these activities, especially the data gathering and clearinghouse applications of GLOS and GLIN respectively. The Fund does not wish to replicate efforts currently underway in the basin, and does not envision providing support to efforts that compete with those initiatives. In particular, teams should seek to enhance these resources with new, advanced, and practical analytic, mobile, interactive, and datamining capabilities.

Q: What do you mean by “the particulars of information delivery – time, granularity and format”?

In order to influence and change behaviors that lead to a healthier ecosystem, projects should consider the set of details that make the information and/or incentive delivery the most valuable. Based upon our discussions with information technology experts these details include: the time and frequency at which that information is delivered, the granularity or level of detail of the information provided (i.e. ballast tank v. individual vessel information v. annual ship traffic; gallons of water discharged each minute v. gallons used per month; or, emissions released at this moment v. emissions released last year), and the form in which the information is conveyed (i.e. rss feed, custom dashboard, mobile alert, etc.).