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Lake Champlain Basin Program Announcement

Request for Proposals for Native Tree Nursery Projects

The Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP), in coordination with NEIWPC, is pleased to announce a Request for Proposals (RFP) for projects that support organizations situated in the Lake Champlain basin that sell or grow native trees and shrubs for habitat conservation projects. The intent of this funding is to measurably enhance the native plant supply available to local organizations for habitat conservation projects that benefit Lake Champlain. Funding may be used for infrastructure investments and to support workforce development initiatives needed to build or grow tree nursery capacity and reduce the cost of stems for conservation planting projects located in the Lake Champlain basin. Applicants must demonstrate or provide a viable business plan and describe how costs to local non-profits purchasing the native plants will remain stable or be reduced or eliminated through use of this funding.

Eligible organizations include colleges, universities, nonprofit organizations, for-profit companies, and non-federal/non-state government agencies, including municipalities, that are situated and involved in the support or production of trees and shrubs native to the Lake Champlain basin.

Up to approximately \$1,000,000 is available to support awarded projects. Proposals for the full funding amount should offer a scope that supports the U.S. portion of the Lake Champlain basin. This work will support the Clean Water and Healthy Ecosystem goals of LCBP's management plan, [*Opportunities for Action: An Evolving Plan for the Future of the Lake Champlain Basin*](#). This grant opportunity is supported by funds awarded to Lake Champlain by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#).

Applicants must submit proposals via [the online form at this link](#) no later than 12pm (noon) on Wednesday May 10, 2023.

Please see below for complete details and proposal format requirements. LCBP anticipates granting multiple awards from this RFP. All awards are subject to funding availability. This Request for Proposals is available on the LCBP website at lcbp.org/grants.

I. Overview of the Lake Champlain Basin Program

Congress designated Lake Champlain as a resource of national significance with the Lake Champlain Special Designation Act of 1990. The Special Designation Act also established the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP) and authorized it to receive direct support from EPA under the Clean Water Act. LCBP works in partnership with government agencies from New York, Vermont, and Québec, private organizations, local communities, and individuals to coordinate and fund efforts that benefit the Lake Champlain Basin's water quality, fisheries, wetlands, wildlife, recreation, and cultural resources. These efforts are guided by the comprehensive management plan, [*Opportunities for Action: An Evolving Plan for the Future of the Lake Champlain Basin*](#).

Since 1992, NEIWPC has served as the primary program administrator of LCBP at the request of the [*Lake Champlain Steering Committee*](#) and administers the program's personnel and finances. NEIWPC is a regional commission that helps the states of the Northeast preserve and advance water quality. NEIWPC engages and convenes water quality professionals and other interested parties from New England and New York to collaborate on water, wastewater, and environmental science challenges across shared regions, ecosystems, and areas of expertise.

II. RFP details and requested project tasks

LCBP-NEIWPC received FY22 funding through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, a once-in-a-generation investment in our nation's infrastructure and competitiveness. The Lake Champlain Steering Committee has allocated a total of \$1,000,000 to this Tree Nursery Support Program effort as the recent increase in federal and state resources for habitat conservation projects has led to a shortage of product for habitat conservation projects in the Lake Champlain basin. Consequently, some tree planting projects in recent years have been delayed by a season or more. Grants will be available to organizations situated in the Lake Champlain basin that sell or grow trees and shrubs native to the Basin. The intent of this funding is to measurably enhance the native plant supply available to local organizations for habitat conservation projects and reduce the cost of stems for conservation planting projects that benefit water quality or riparian habitat in the Lake Champlain basin. While infrastructure investments are a priority for this funding, a percentage of the requested funding may be used to support workforce development initiatives needed to build or grow tree nursery capacity. Applicants must demonstrate a viable business plan and describe how costs to organizations purchasing the native plants for projects in the Lake Champlain Basin will remain stable or be reduced through this funding. The funding must support the Clean Water and Healthy Ecosystems goals of [*Opportunities for Action: An evolving plan for the future of the Lake Champlain Basin*](#).

Infrastructure Investments may be defined as building and equipment costs, funding to lease or rent land, or project-specific planning, permitting, engineering or architectural plans.

Workforce development investments may be defined as technical skill training for staff, business management training, and/or business succession planning, including hiring a consultant to support any of these processes.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Lake Champlain Basin Program is committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion across our work. Proposals that demonstrate benefits to disadvantaged communities will be given additional weight during the proposal evaluation process. Please review LCBP’s [disadvantaged community definition and guidance](#) for more information. Questions relating to LCBP’s definition or this portion of the proposal evaluation process can be directed to Mae Kate Campbell, Associate Scientist (mkcampbell@lcbp.org).

III. Summary of other requirements for selected applicants

The selected applicants will be required to complete the following additional tasks:

1. Within thirty days of LCBP grant award notification, applicants must submit a detailed project workplan that will be subject to the LCBP approval process before a contract will be issued. The workplan describes the project methods, tasks, timeline, outputs, and task-based budget. Selected contractors will be responsible for the completion of all project tasks. **Payments will only be made for fully completed tasks; please keep this in mind when developing your task-based budget.** If a project is selected for funding, LCBP staff will provide the grant recipient with workplan guidance. We strongly encourage all applicants to use the LCBP grant application and reporting templates and to visit the LCBP website for more information on the LCBP grant process and reporting templates [at this link](#).
2. Successful applicants will prepare and submit brief quarterly reports documenting progress on each objective and task in the project (see below Proposal Format Requirements). A final report fully documenting the project outputs/results will be required at project completion.
3. When approved, the final report will be edited for content and style in consultation with the successful applicant. Some content of this report may also be used for future LCBP and/or NEIWPC public outreach materials.
4. Successful applicants will complete projects according to the following schedule (subject to change):

Proposals due to LCBP	May 10, 2023, at 12pm (noon) EST
Applicants notified of funding decisions	July 2023
Detailed project workplan due	September 2023
Project start	November 2023
Project deliverables and final report due on or before	December 2025

5. All materials and work products, regardless of physical form or characteristics, produced as a result of this project shall be made available to LCBP, NEIWPC, and EPA in a suitable file format. LCBP, NEIWPC, and EPA shall have an unrestricted right to use any materials, software, maps, studies, reports, and other products or data generated using assistance funds or specified to be delivered. The contractor shall not obtain, attempt to obtain, or file for a patent, copyright, trademark or any other interest in any such materials, or work products without the expressed, written consent of LCBP and NEIWPC, and subject to any other approvals required by state or federal law. Reports and other deliverables will credit LCBP, NEIWPC, and EPA as funding partners for any work completed under the project contract.
6. GIS data produced under this project must adhere to the requirements of EPA's National Geospatial Data Policy (see <https://www.epa.gov/geospatial/epa-national-geospatial-data-policy>). Specifically, the selected contractor must provide documentation for all produced data, including source information for each digital data layer (i.e., scale and accuracy, map projection, coordinate system, etc.), and specific information about the data layer itself (i.e., method used, geographic extent of data layer, file format, date of creation, staff contact, description and definition of data fields and their contents, related files, if any, and description of data quality and quality assurance methods used). The EPA Metadata Editor (EME) was developed to simplify and standardize metadata development and is a recommended tool for streamlining production of required metadata. The EME and related training materials can be downloaded from <https://edg.epa.gov/EME/>. Specific technical guidance on geospatial deliverables and acceptable formats can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/geospatial/epa-region-2-gis-deliverables-guidance>. GIS data produced under this project will be submitted to LCBP as a deliverable.
7. NEIWPC requires its contractors to maintain workers compensation and liability insurance. Contractors must submit proof of adequate insurance coverage on an annual basis for the duration of the project. The Contractor shall, at its sole expense, obtain and maintain in force, and shall require any subcontractor or assignee to obtain and maintain in force, both for the benefit of NEIWPC, the following kinds and amounts of insurance:
 - Workers' Compensation Insurance. The policy shall cover the obligations of the Contractor in accordance with the Workers' Compensations Law and Disability Benefits Law covering all operations under the Contract, whether performed by it, or by its subcontractor.
 - Liability and Property Damage Insurance. Unless otherwise specified, each policy shall have limits not less than: \$2,000,000 combined (Bodily Injury & Property Damage); \$3,000,000 aggregate, single limit per occurrence.
8. Subawardees must comply with all requirements and responsibilities of this subaward and with all U.S. EPA General Terms and Conditions under the prime agreement as outlined [at this website](#). Subawardees are required to submit a [Subrecipient Risk Assessment Form](#) with their proposal, which includes a requirement to attach an audit

in some cases. If a Sub awardee fails to submit or complete this form their proposal may be eliminated from consideration.

9. NEIWPCC COVID-19 Vaccination Policy

NEIWPCC is committed to providing a working environment that keeps all staff as safe as possible and promotes the well-being of our community. All RFP applicants who may come into close contact with NEIWPCC staff are required to be [fully vaccinated](#). Close contact may occur during a project with a Quality Assurance Project Plan (via a QAPP audit), during project planning meetings, during project implementation, or other occasions. While some of these may occur virtually, please note that NEIWPCC reserves the right to audit a project at any time. Applicants must be prepared to show proof of vaccination prior to any close contact with NEIWPCC staff. Accepted proof of vaccination includes the original vaccination card, a printed copy of the vaccination card, or a digital photograph of the vaccination card. To protect confidential information, NEIWPCC will not maintain copies of these documents, and any records provided will be discarded.

In addition, NEIWPCC is committed to providing events that keep all participants as safe as possible and promote the well-being of our community. NEIWPCC requires all individuals who participate in NEIWPCC-funded events to be fully vaccinated in order to attend. Any events hosted with funding from NEIWPCC must follow this pandemic policy.

This policy also applies to the contractor's subcontractors. All contractors applying for new work (or amending existing agreements) must be vaccinated. Go to <https://neiwpc.org/about-us/working-with-neiwpc/contractor-guidance/> for more information.

10. **UEI Number:** The official entity identifier for doing business with the U.S. Government and NEIWPCC has changed from a DUNS number to a SAM.gov created Unique Entity Identifier ("UEI") number. The DUNS number is no longer acceptable. Instead, Contractors must register for a UEI through the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://www.sam.gov/portal/SAM>. This SAM-generated number is required for all NEIWPCC Contractors as part of the agreement process. Existing NEIWPCC Contractors that have already registered in Sam.gov will be automatically assigned a UEI which will be displayed in Sam.gov. No further action is required.

IV. Eligibility

Eligible organizations include colleges, universities, nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, and non-federal/non-state government agencies, including municipalities, that are situated and involved in the support or production of trees and shrubs native to the Lake Champlain basin.

Individuals and representatives from organizations that participated in the development or review of this RFP and its contents are ineligible to apply.

An organization may submit one proposal as the primary applicant to this opportunity.

V. Proposal evaluation and selection criteria

Proposals received in response to this RFP will undergo a confidential external peer review, and will be judged according to the following criteria:

1. **Impact (40 points).** Extent to which project outputs will benefit:
 - a. (a) Ecological Communities (20 points): measurably enhance the native plant supply available to local non-profit organizations for habitat conservation projects in the Lake Champlain basin without increasing costs to the local non-profits;
 - b. (b) Disadvantaged Communities (20 points): per [LCBP's definition](#). Projects that benefit a disadvantaged community that meets **multiple** criteria included in LCBP's definition **AND** demonstrate meaningful involvement from the selected community will receive 20 points for this criterion. Projects that benefit a community meeting only one criterion or do not demonstrate meaningful involvement with disadvantaged communities will receive between 5-15 points proportional to the degree of benefit or engagement with disadvantaged communities.
2. **Likelihood of success (20 points).** The extent to which the project team demonstrates that project outputs can and will be accomplished with high quality, on time with the proposed schedule, and within the proposed budget.
3. **Long-term plan (20 points).** Strength of a long-term plan for project success beyond the life of the grant – proposal describes how grant funds will be used to support a long-term effort to increase the native plant supply available for habitat conservation projects completed by organizations in the Lake Champlain basin. The applicant demonstrates a viable business plan.
4. **Budget (10 points).** Appropriateness and efficiency of proposed funding request, project budget, and non-federal match for the scope and outputs of the project.
5. **Outreach (5 points).** Extent to which the need for and benefits of the project will be communicated with local communities and stakeholders.
6. **Prior performance of project team (5 points).** Extent to which the project team has successfully completed LCBP projects in the past with high quality outputs delivered on time with planned schedules and within planned budgets. New applicants and those with a record of success with delivering high quality outputs on time and within budgets for LCBP projects will receive a full score (5 points) in this category.

VI. Available funds and match requirements

LCBP anticipates a total of approximately \$1,000,000 will be available to be awarded to projects. The Lake Champlain Steering Committee will ultimately decide the final distribution of available funds. Partial funding of total application requests may be awarded.

Applicants may budget costs that are associated with the project as direct expenses, including equipment and infrastructure purchases, personnel costs, travel, project supplies, meeting expenses, and subcontracts. Some allocation of project funds for indirect costs also is acceptable

(see below). No in-kind or cash match is required, though match will be considered favorably during budget review and may make proposals more competitive.

VII. Appropriate use of funds

- LCBP grant funds **cannot be used** to produce for-profit products or to cover costs associated with regulatory compliance or direct fundraising efforts. LCBP grant funds also cannot be used for endowment funds or legislative advocacy of any kind.
- Grant award funding may not be used for the purchase of food or beverage.
- Grant applicants are required to follow the small purchase method which is a relatively simple and informal method (procurement procedure) for purchasing supplies, equipment, and services that cost more than \$10,000 and less than \$250,000. This procurement procedure is applicable to proposals submitted in response to this RFP if the primary applicant is not a for-profit organization. The purpose is to ensure fair and open competition for purchases supported by LCBP/federal funding. If the applicant plans to use LCBP funding to obtain supplies, equipment, or contractual services to complete its proposed workplan, then it must follow federal procurement regulations:
 - Procurement of supplies and services that do not exceed \$10,000 may be made without soliciting competitive quotes if the price is considered reasonable.
 - Procurement of supplies, equipment and services that are greater than \$10,000 and do not cost more than \$250,000 require that the recipient obtain multiple price quotes through a documented competitive process. Good faith efforts to obtain services from disadvantaged business enterprises should also be made, including contacting the small business administration and minority business development agency to inform them about the opportunity for businesses to submit price quotes as part of the competitive process. At least three price quotes for professional services or subcontracted work must be secured. The selected item or service does not need to be the lowest cost if it does not meet your requirements or you can otherwise demonstrate that the higher price offers the “best value.” Justification must be provided for the outcome of the bid process. This process may take place prior to the submission of a proposal for LCBP funds.
 - “Equipment” is defined as tangible, non-expendable, personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit. Equipment purchases may require additional information at the time of purchase, an LCBP staff person taking inventory on an annual basis, and disposition instructions from funding source following the completion of the project.

[Build America, Buy America requirements](#)

When applicable, projects will be required to comply with EPA's implementation guidance on Build America, Buy America (BABA). This guidance is not yet available; however, LCBP anticipates these requirements will cover projects related to the construction, alteration,

maintenance, or repair of infrastructure in the U.S. LCBP will provide additional information as it becomes available.

Direct and Indirect Costs:

Applicants should budget costs that are associated with the project as direct expenses, including infrastructure and equipment purchases, personnel costs, travel, project supplies (mailings, phone costs, office supplies) etc. Necessary indirect costs that are not directly attributable to funded activities are subject to the following policy:

- Applicants that do not have a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) may charge a maximum indirect rate of 10 percent of direct costs (de minimis rate)
- Applicants (including academic institutions) with a valid NICRA with their cognizant federal agency can charge indirect costs to projects based on their negotiated indirect cost rate and must enclose a current copy with their proposed work plan.
 - A valid NICRA is one in which the effective period has not expired. Applicants must provide a copy of their valid NICRA with their application in order for indirect cost reimbursement to be considered. If the effective period of the NICRA has expired but the grantee has documented evidence (via an indirect cost rate proposal) that they have reapplied for a new rate, the expired rate may be accepted.

VIII. Schedule and requirements for proposal submission

Proposals must follow the format requirements below.

Only Microsoft Word-compatible submissions using the below proposal form will be accepted and must be submitted no later than 12pm (noon) on May 10, 2023 via the [online form at this link](#) You should receive a confirmation email once your proposal is successfully submitted (please check your spam folder). Once you submit the online form you will have the option to edit the proposal up until the due date.

IX. Proposal format and content requirements

Proposals should utilize the proposal form below and not exceed the maximum 8- page length, NOT including disadvantaged community information, budget information, bibliography of references cited, letters of support, or project team resumes. Proposals that include benefits to or engagement with disadvantaged communities may use up to one additional page to describe that information.

Please use 12-point Times New Roman (or equivalent) font or larger, minimum 1-inch margin on all sides. Single-spaced text is acceptable.

A description of the required proposal format begins on the next page.

Proposal format requirements

Proposals should adhere to the following format and should not exceed a 8-page maximum length (font size 12), NOT including disadvantaged community information, budget information, references cited, and investigator resumes, and letters of participation or support. Proposals that include benefits to or engagement with disadvantaged communities may use up to one additional page to describe that information.

TITLE: Concise and descriptive.

POINT OF CONTACT: Name, position, organization, address, county where the organization/business is located, telephone, fax, and email of the person who will be the point of contact.

AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE: Name, position, organization address, telephone, fax and email of the person who is authorized to sign the contract.

TRACKING INFORMATION: Federal Tax Identification Number (EIN), UEI (SAM.gov) Number, and Certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE): (Yes or No)

TOTAL REQUEST AMOUNT: Total proposal request amount in US dollars.

NON-FEDERAL MATCH AMOUNT: Total proposed non-federal match amount. While matching funds are not required, they make projects more competitive.

ABSTRACT: Brief description of proposed work.

INTRODUCTION: Overview of the project and what it will accomplish in relation to the RFP.

DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITITES: Describe, if applicable, any benefits for or engagement with disadvantaged communities that your project will include, drawing on LCBP's [definition](#) and accompanying [mapping tool](#) as needed.

TASKS: Describe in detail the tasks that will be performed, including methods and approaches.

DELIVERABLES AND OUTPUTS: Detailed description of the items that will be sent to LCBP as documentation of work completed through the award, and the elements of the projects that are not delivered to LCBP, such as outreach efforts. Quarterly progress reports and a final report (including GIS data) are required deliverables.

OUTCOMES: Provide a description of the anticipated impact or change in condition (i.e. behavior or environment) that you are trying to achieve through this award. Outcomes may be short-term or long-term.

SCHEDULE: Timeline showing anticipated dates for completion of the major tasks and deliverables and outputs. Quarterly progress reports are due on the last day of December, March, June, and September. Work is to be completed within the specified performance period in the RFP.

DETAILED BUDGET JUSTIFICATION: Cost breakdown by major tasks and budget categories (e.g., personnel, equipment), linking costs to specific tasks/deliverables wherever possible. Breakdown should show costs to be covered by the LCBP award and other sources (if applicable), as well as any match amounts and totals.

Required budget table format:

Task number	Task title	Personnel	Fringe	Travel	Supplies	Prof. services	Indirect costs	Total budget
1		\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
2		\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
3		\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
4		\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
5		\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
All tasks		\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$

Non-federal match table format:

Personnel	\$
Fringe	\$
Volunteer time	\$
Travel	\$
Supplies	\$
Professional services	\$
Indirect	\$ -
Total match	\$

*See budget table template and calculator at the [Grantee Toolkit](#) website to estimate the value of volunteer time. While matching funds are not required, they make projects more competitive.

TECHNICAL REFERENCES CITED: List bibliography details for references used in the proposal. This section is not included in the page maximum total for the proposal.

CURRICULUM VITAE/RESUME OF PROJECT TEAM: You may include up to 3-5 references for prior work pertinent to the proposed project. Please limit to one page per team member. This section is not included in the page maximum total for the proposal.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT: You may attach partner and stakeholder letters of support to your proposal, which do not count toward the maximum page limit.