

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

to

Host

**National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation
& Management**



Application Deadline: April 15, 2025, 11:59 pm (Pacific Time)

Attention: [National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation & Management](#) (Center) **Applicants Invited to Advance to the Request for Proposals (RFP) Stage**

INTRODUCTION

The [Instream Flow Council's](#) (IFC) and [American Fisheries Society's](#) (AFS) Instream Flow and Water Level Conservation (IFWLC) Training Center Multistate Conservation Grant [Project Steering Committee](#) (SC) want to again express our appreciation to the applicants (see Section Four) for submitting their comprehensive application materials in response to the [National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation & Management'](#) (Center) [Request for Interest and Statements of Qualifications \(RFIQ\) November 16, 2024 Notice](#), and [RFIQ Document](#).

The Host applicants demonstrated strong interest and potential capacity to serve as IFC's and AFS' Host for the Center, supported by other applicants that may partner as an Affiliate (see Section 4) to the Center Host. Affiliate applicants demonstrated their potential to serve as an Affiliate to the Center Host ultimately selected. All will be necessary to develop and sustain the Center.

As part of the Nov. 16, 2024 Stages Two and Three processes previously outlined (also posted on the [Center Project website](#)) and the February 8, 2025 SC email correspondence to applicants, the SC, on behalf of IFC and AFS, is providing applicants this formal Request for Proposals (RFP). It supersedes the preliminary "Questions and Issues" section in the November 2024 [RFIQ Document](#) and represents the next stage of the process for selecting the Center Host.

The objectives for establishing this Center are to provide interdisciplinary leadership, training, research, development, networking, and relevant support services to all interested water stakeholders (see Section 4). These services will empower stakeholders to improve their knowledge and skills required to successfully achieve ecologically sustainable water conservation and management outcomes.

This phased process is being used to select the Center Host applicant that best demonstrates the necessary combination of interdisciplinary expertise and capacity to fully integrate the 8 primary interdisciplinary science and social elements described in the [Feasibility Assessment](#) report into its curricula and services. Science elements include hydrology, geomorphology, biology, connectivity, and water quality. Social elements include legal, regulatory, and institutional frameworks, administrative policies, and public involvement, including overarching socioeconomic considerations. A thorough understanding of these elements and how to integrate them is critical for stakeholders to achieve ecologically sustainable surface and groundwater conservation and management outcomes in freshwater/estuarine lotic and lentic water bodies, including connected waters.

The SC recognizes the opportunity for strong collaborative partnerships with permanent and temporary Affiliates (see Section 4) to further enhance the capacity of the Host to achieve Center goals and objectives.

RFP SUMMARY

This formal Request for Proposals (RFP) is structured similarly to the Nov. 16, 2024 [RFIQ document](#) and related information posted on the [Center project website](#).

The RFP follows summaries of its five sections.

The RFP frames the types of information needed by the SC to assess the skills and abilities of applicants to host the Center or to participate as an Affiliate to the Host. As noted above, this RFP supersedes the preliminary November 16, 2024 [RFIQ document](#) “Questions and Issues” and related information.

Please provide sufficient details in your proposal, and, whenever applicable, include the rationale and operating assumptions used. The SC requires this detailed information to enable it to thoroughly evaluate an applicant’s goals and objectives, abilities, and needs or limitations (if any), to address each element.

Section Summaries

Section 1: Presents the same, or similar, “Questions and Issues” contained in the November 2024 RFIQ [document](#) with a few revisions. In responding to the RFP, applicants can expound on the summary Stage One information previously submitted to the SC and/or offer additional thoughts or information to more fully address this version of the “Questions and Issues”, in addition to the December 18, 2024 [Stage One Evaluation Criteria](#).

Section 2: Contains criteria that relate to the “Questions and Issues” in Section 1. Similar to Stage One Evaluation Criteria, these criteria will be used by the SC to evaluate the resulting proposals and are included to provide guidance to help applicants focus and refine their proposals.

Section 3: Provides additional areas of emphasis and other important considerations relevant to the RFP (initially sent to applicants advancing to Stage Two by email on February 8, 2025) to help applicants refine their proposals.

Section 4: Provides supplemental RFP-related reminders and important Center-specific terminology.

Section 5: Provides a summary of the March 12, 2025 RFP Q&A Webinar.

RFP

Section 1 – “Questions and Issues”: These are (based on the RFIQ November 2024 [announcement](#) and [document](#), the October 2023 Center [Feasibility Assessment](#) report, and other relevant [Center information](#) posted online, including email information circulated to the 9 applicants.

Philosophical Compatibility:

- ❖ As noted in the October 2023 Center [Feasibility Assessment](#) report, the SC will be promoting the application of comprehensive (integrated) interdisciplinary strategies for achieving ecologically sustainable water conservation and management. These strategies include integration of eight (8) interdisciplinary elements: **hydrology, geomorphology, biology, connectivity, water quality, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks, and public involvement supplemented by overarching socioeconomic considerations**. See Appendix G of the [Feasibility Assessment](#) report and the November 2024 [RFIQ document](#),

- How does this interdisciplinary approach align with the applicant's current educational philosophy and capacities?

Administration:

- ❖ Instruction at the host Center location will include a combination of on-site, virtual, and remote techniques and formats depending on the needs of stakeholders and the physical location of instructors.
 - Does the applicant have adequate (i.e., not fully committed) classroom capacity, office space, and other training-related facilities that can be used by the Center?
 - What issues does the applicant anticipate, if any, from conducting training at remote field locations or in affiliation with other institutions?
 - What issues does the applicant anticipate, if any, from instructors affiliated with other institutions/organizations providing instruction at your institution and other locations?
 - Would the applicant have the ability to administer collection of course fees, provide continuing education certification credits, and other non-salary course elements?
- ❖ Scientific and technical field training will be an important aspect of the Center.
 - What streams, lakes, and reservoirs are potential candidates for providing regular, accessible training through the applicant's institution or organization?
 - What existing training does the applicant offer related to the 8 elements, and overarching socioeconomic considerations, and how does applicant envision their integration within a training program?
- ❖ Per the [Feasibility Assessment](#) report, the SC envisions a setting where most of the major decisions associated with the Center will be handled by an Executive Governing Board (EGB) comprised of 3 Instream Flow Council (IFC) members, 2 members from the American Fisheries Society (AFS), and 1 (or 2) Host entity representatives. The EGB would be assisted by volunteer stakeholder representatives from other prominent agencies and organizations associated with

achieving ecologically sustainable water conservation and management (both ecological and anthropogenic). This format is important to ensure the Center maintains the focus identified in the [Feasibility Assessment](#) report.

- Do the Center structure and its associated expectations align with the applicant's legal and other requirements for partnering with the IFC and AFS to administer the Center? If not, please explain why.
 - Does the applicant have similar experience working directly with other boards like this? If not, how does the applicant envision associating with the EGB such that it has a meaningful role in administration of the curriculum and overall program that maintains ultimate oversight by the IFC and AFS to ensure compliance with the [Feasibility Assessment](#) report and companion [Governance](#)?
- ❖ The long-term goal envisioned by the SC is for the Center to function in an uninterrupted, long-term manner (i.e., permanently). The SC considers it to be essential that the Center be housed in a setting where the Center can function with sufficient autonomy that it is relatively insulated from external political and budgetary issues that could compromise performance of the functions, or its long-term existence, described in the [Feasibility Assessment](#) report. These arrangements will be jointly defined in IFC/AFS's agreement with the Host and may include termination if these operating conditions cannot be maintained.
- Does the applicant believe it is currently well-positioned to facilitate this goal on a long-term basis?
 - What factors does the applicant foresee that might influence its compliance with these requirements either positively or negatively?
 - More specifically, what processes, factors or other types of considerations might limit the long-term duration of the applicant serving as the Center Host such as periodic programmatic reviews or term limits?
 - If, for certain reasons jointly defined by the IFC/AFS and the Host, the original association between the Host and the EGB becomes untenable for either party, the EGB will move the Center to another host to maintain the integrity of the Center.
 - Are there other issues the applicant would like the SC to consider relevant to achieving this long-term goal?

Funding:

- ❖ Considering the SC's intent to retain relative independence and minimize the risk of political influence to sustain the Center for the long-term, the preference of the SC is to fund the Center in large part with private funds in combination with periodic, irregular funding from grants, course fees, and other sources.
 - How would this financial structure fit within the applicant's administrative structure and requirements?
 - Would the applicant want, or be able, to invest its own funds in the Center? Do these sources presently exist, or would they need to be developed in the future? More specifically, would the applicant also pursue funding from grants and other private sources in addition to those the applicant is presently associated with?
 - If so, what requirements or expectations does the applicant have, including those that are related to insulating the Center from political or budgetary issues that could negatively impact its functions and existence and the Center's relationship with your institution?
 - What are the types of Center costs or facilities the applicant would be willing to fully or partially fund (i.e., normal office support such as copiers, office equipment, lighting, heating, etc.)? Please provide examples, if appropriate, of how you will provide these services for others who are not embedded within your institution or organization. Overhead is addressed below.
- ❖ In a best-case scenario, the SC will be requesting seed funding from philanthropic, corporate, or other sources to address most major expenses to launch the Center (e.g., salaries, benefits, travel, etc.). The SC intends to establish an income-generating foundation or endowment from which the Center might function largely on income generated by those funds.
 - Would the applicant be willing to, and capable of, managing this seed funding independently of its existing resources on behalf of the Center as part of the applicant's administrative services? This would include providing legal routine financial audits of the Center funds account.

- Please provide examples or other options if appropriate.
 - Other considerations to be addressed would include the overhead charged by the Host. What are the types and amounts of overhead charged by the applicant to partner and support entities such as the Center? Is this a variable rate that is dependent on the type of entity the applicant works with?
 - What are the applicant's thoughts on possible strategies to manage staff, pay, and benefits with a focus on helping minimize expenses for the Center and maximizing benefits to staff and the applicant?
 - Are there other costs and related funding issues the applicant wants to address? If yes, please include.
- ❖ Existing Center grant funds expire December 31, 2025 and are limited to executing this RFIQ/RFP Host selection process and refining the Center Business Plan for financing and governing the Center, including development of legal instruments that will be required to establish and operate the Center.
- What elements would the applicant like included in the Center Business Plan and its [Governance document](#)?
 - Would the applicant be willing and able to help refine these documents if selected as one of the finalists for hosting the Center?

Instructors / Curriculum:

- ❖ As noted above, the Center will promote instruction based on the integration of eight (8) interdisciplinary scientific elements and socioeconomic considerations to provide stakeholders with a comprehensive set of tools for achieving ecologically sustainable water conservation and management encompassing surface and groundwater freshwater/estuarine lotic and lentic water bodies and connected waters. We anticipate the Center will provide introductory interdisciplinary instruction in each element and emphasize their integration. The Center will provide more detailed integrated instruction to advanced students. Though the SC has a well-developed sense of what instruction might look like, we realize there is much more to know and much knowledge (methods and models) to be updated and developed (existing and new).
- ❖ We expect all the Center's instructors to promote integration of all elements but do not expect all trainers to be experts in all 8 fields and overarching socioeconomic considerations. The EGB will likewise encourage and support research and

methodological development both for and by the instructors based on these concepts. It is not essential that instructors already be employed by your institution or organization as your institution may establish a network of experts nationally and have them teach virtually or travel to teach at the central location on an as-needed basis.

- ❖ Although preferred, like criteria for instructors, it is not essential that your institution be capable of offering expertise in all 8 areas and overarching socioeconomic considerations for freshwater/estuarine lotic and lentic water bodies, and connected waters. That is one of the reasons the SC clarified the definition of Affiliates (Section 4) on February 8, 2025 . Selection of administrators and instructors is an area that will be explored and addressed by an Executive Governing Board. See Appendix G in the [Feasibility Assessment](#) report for preliminary examples of the kinds of topics we expect the Center to offer.
 - Please describe how the applicant's faculty or staff might provide instruction in these 8 elements and overarching socioeconomic considerations with special emphasis on the interdisciplinary integration of all elements relative to ,/estuarine lotic and lentic water bodies and connected waters.
 - If outside scientists are hired, could they be given University or equivalent faculty status and be eligible to collaborate with other faculty in applying for grants and conducting joint projects?
- ❖ Because of the SC's focus on consistent, comprehensive instruction consistent with the [Feasibility Assessment](#) report, it is important that Center scientists be considered lead instructors. Additional instructors or affiliates would commit to training on an as-needed basis for at least 3 calendar years once the Center begins functioning. Having the same full-time instructors over a period of time is important to facilitate networking, information exchange, and program development.
 - How does this format align with the applicant's vision of the Center and the potential use of its staff as instructors? Please describe the commitments the applicant could make to accommodate this instructional format.
- ❖ We anticipate that instructors will develop specific class offerings and training manuals after they have been hired or assigned. (Note: Other advanced courses will be developed on element integration, use of emerging technologies, analytical procedures and processes for application, analyses, and forecasting outcomes for sustainable water management schemes.)

- Is this expectation compatible with the abilities and interests of the applicant and its staff?
- Please provide us examples of courses or curricula you already provide that are consistent with the 8 interdisciplinary elements and overarching socioeconomic considerations, as described above, applicable to lotic, lentic, and estuarine waters.
- ❖ The SC envisions it may begin a process to identify potentially interested instructors and staff after it has identified a short-list of the Host finalists from the present applicant pool.
- ❖ Given recent and ongoing uncertainties with a combination of federal and state funding and granting processes (including those related to private sector philanthropic priorities), the SC realizes that the process of bringing all these pieces together may extend well beyond the current multi-state conservation grant termination date of Dec. 31, 2025.
 - How does this timeline and process align with the applicant's planning or budgeting cycles and general outlook for the near and distant future?

Section 2 – Evaluation Criteria: These are drawn from the preceding “Questions and Issues” and will be used by the SC to evaluate proposals.

- ❖ Does the applicant have the capability to provide full-time (or nearly full-time) experienced staff, who might serve as the leader and assistant for the first three years?
- ❖ Does the applicant have other staff capable of training the integration of the 8 elements and overarching socioeconomic considerations on a regular basis?
- ❖ Does the applicant have the ability to help ensure governmental and institutional independence (i.e., budget and curriculum) to achieve Center goals and objectives?
- ❖ Does the applicant have the capability to integrate surface and groundwater lentic and lotic habitats conservation training, research, and support (including estuarine habitats) required for fish, wildlife, and other instream flow and water level ecological water uses and management with anthropogenic uses and management of water?

- ❖ Does the applicant have the capability to provide support to all water stakeholders? Support could take many forms including, but not limited to, offering advice on project design, data interpretation, report reviews, and research development.
- ❖ Does the applicant have the capability to offer training opportunities on-site, off-site, and virtually?
- ❖ Does the applicant have specific or creative ideas for development and research that can advance the integration of the 8 elements and overarching socioeconomic considerations?
- ❖ What vision does the applicant have for working with permanent and temporary affiliates partners and what are the processes?
- ❖ Does the applicant anticipate working with other entities (affiliates) initially or later as the Center develops?
- ❖ What are the applicant's funding (including creative) ideas for helping secure funding?
- ❖ Does the applicant demonstrate comprehension of the proposed Center [governance](#)?

Section 3 – Additional Areas of Emphasis and Points of Clarification for Consideration (individual responses for each are not required).

- ❖ A single institution or organization must serve as the “Host” and enter into a formal agreement with the Center governing board formed by IFC and AFS.
- ❖ The Host will serve as the lead Center Institution or Organization ensuring all training, research, development, and support services comply with the goals and objectives outlined in the [Feasibility Assessment](#) report, including governance of the Center as part of its agreement with the IFC and AFS.
- ❖ Based on its review of the applications, the SC has further defined Affiliates as permanent and temporary categories (See Section 4).
- ❖ The Host applicant should identify its vision for existing and potential future roles and relationships with Affiliate institutions and organizations (which will initially be limited to permanent Affiliates, if any).

- ❖ Both Host and Affiliate applicants should clarify how training, research, development, and support services will be standardized between institutions and/or organizations and provided to stakeholders.
- ❖ Per Section 3, bullets 2 and 5, the Host Institution or Organization will also develop formal agreements with and provide regular oversight of Affiliates to ensure Affiliates (See Section 4) adhere to the goals and objectives of the Center and its governance.
- ❖ Affiliate-only applicants can also explore establishing partnerships with the other Affiliate and Host applicant institutions and organizations. Please keep in mind, only one institution or organization can be the primary Host. Please note if this is an activity you have pursued or will pursue.
- ❖ Academic independence and reasonable Center autonomy must be preserved and the ability to maintain such must be demonstrated by the selected Host. Risk of unsolicited outside influence (i.e., terms and conditions of establishing the Center) and the ability to mitigate such activities must be discussed and clearly addressed as part of the final governance agreed upon by the IFC/AFS and the Institution/Organization selected as primary Host.
- ❖ Consequences, if the primary Host is unable to maintain the Center's autonomy and ability to adhere to the Center Governance, must be mutually agreed upon in advance and included in the Governance agreement between the IFC/AFS and the primary Host.

Section 4. Supplemental Reminders and Key Terminology

- ❖ Training for practitioners and stakeholders to achieve integrated instream flow and water level conservation outcomes is central to the purpose of the Center.
- ❖ Training seminars, certificate programs, and other forms of continuing education should be the primary focus as opposed to only undergraduate and graduate programs. Undergraduate and graduate academic programs may be developed and offered to augment the core services provided by the host entity to supplement the scope of the Center, but as a lower priority.
- ❖ Applicant: An institution or organization that applies to Host the Center or serve as an Affiliate.
- ❖ Stakeholder: "Stakeholders" include entities and individuals participating in or impacted by the interdisciplinary scientific, legal, institutional, and public involvement

elements and related processes that govern water allocation and use decisions and outcomes.

- ❖ “Affiliates”: “Permanent Affiliates” are long-term partner institutions or organizations intending to supplement the services provided by the Center Host for an extended continuous period (several years) as opposed to “Temporary Affiliates.” “Temporary Affiliates” are short-term partner institutions, organizations, or other entities requested by the Center Host to provide limited and intermittent supplemental support services for a limited defined time duration such as a year, semester, week, day, or vary periodically, etc. The applicant selected to Host the Center will have the option to establish partnerships with Affiliates at any time as described in this RFP and will be further clarified if needed during the March 2025 Q&A webinar. Existing Affiliate applicants were not required to enter into a formal relationship with the Center Host applicants from the start. This information represents clarifications.
- ❖ “Water Conservation”: This term has many definitions. For the purposes of the Center, **“conserve”** means to protect, restore, or enhance instream flow and water level regimes in freshwater/estuarine lotic and lentic habitats, and connected waters.
- ❖ Although the SC believes it is appropriate for the applicant chosen to Host the Center to decide how, when, and with whom to affiliate (long or short-term partners), as inferred above, we also encourage leadership of the two Affiliate applicant institutions to consider perusing the list of host applicants in the event they want to also explore options for partnership relationships.
- ❖ The SC reemphasizes the Center Host will be responsible for ensuring the Host’s Affiliates also adhere to the goals, objectives, and governance of the Center.

Section 5: RFP Q&A Webinar: March 12, 2025, 11am (PT)

The SC will host a pre-proposal Q & A webinar for Stage Two applicants on March 12, 2025, 11am (PT). Invitations to the webinar were previously circulated to lead contacts representing the 9 Stage Two applicants. Stage Two applicants (including other members representing their institution or organization) have been invited to participate. All of the SC members were invited to attend and listen. The webinar will be recorded and available to Stage Two applicants upon request to the SC <rfiq@h2o-center.org>.

Christopher Estes, Chair of the Executive Governing Board for IFC and AFS, will moderate the webinar and answer the applicants’ questions. The SC requests each of the 9 applicants to

designate one representative that will ask their respective questions verbally in addition to inputting questions in the chat box during the webinar.

Additional written responses from the full SC will be circulated to participants within three business days after the webinar (only if such responses are warranted). Additional webinar protocols and instructions will be summarized as part of the opening webinar PowerPoint introduction, similar to the December 9, 2024, webinar.

The SC currently plans to complete its thorough review and assessment of the proposals that are received by the RFP deadline [April 15, 2025, 11:59 pm (PT)] no later than June 11, 2025.

All applicants deemed qualified to Host the Center will be notified they qualified by the SC within 2-business days after. Additionally, a separate short-list of the Host applicants (the SC considers to be among those best qualified to serve as the Center Host) will be contacted to schedule on-site interviews with the EGB at the applicant's institution or organization on mutually convenient dates as part of the process to select the host. Ideally, site visits will begin within 45 to 90 days after the short-list of Host applicants have been notified of their selection.

Qualified Host applicants (not initially selected for on-site interviews) may subsequently be considered if the initial round of interviews with the short-list of Host applicants fails to identify a preferred host that is able to enter into a mutually acceptable legally binding agreement with the IFC/AFS. As such, the SC also intends to remain actively engaged with all of the qualified applicants that were not included in the June 11 short-list as potential hosts. The SC will also alert everyone if there are any schedule shifts.