SCIENCE EVALUATION

Bucket 2 – Council Selected Restoration Component

PROPOSAL TITLE

Gulf of Mexico Estuary Program

LOCATION

TX, LA, MS, AL, FL

SPONSOR(S)

US EPA

TYPE OF FUNDING REQUESTED (Planning, Technical Assistance, Implementation)

Planning, Technical Assistance, Implementation, and Program

REVIEWED BY:

DATE:

1/02/2015

Best Available Science:

These 6 factors/elements help frame the reviewers answers to A, B and C found in next section:

1. Have the proposal objectives, including methods used, been justified using peer reviewed and/or publicly available information?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

The EPA has been very successful at starting NEP programs in the past and have an established process for doing so. The broad process of setting up NEP offices was well explained in the proposal; however, I would have preferred to see more details about certain aspects of this process. For instance, the formation of a Technical Support Team is briefly explained as including representatives of the EPA Regions, EPA Gulf Program Office, State Programs, the Gulf NEPs and LPBRP. While I am certain that qualified representatives could be found within these subgroups, it would been nice to present a brief list of required qualifications for individuals to serve on this team. Additionally, the selection of a host for each proposed NEP program is vaguely described as an RFP process. A brief list of required qualifications of a potential "host" agency or a table of host agencies for established NEPs would have been beneficial.

2. If information supporting the proposal does not directly pertain to the Gulf Coast region, are applicant's methods reasonably supported and adaptable to that geographic area?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

This project directly pertains to the entire span of the Gulf Coast region.

3. Are the literature sources used to support the proposal accurately and completely cited?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

4. Are the literature sources represented in a fair and unbiased manner?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

5. Does the proposal evaluate uncertainties and risks in the scientific basis for the proposal, including any identified by the public and Council members?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

This proposal does provide some justification that this proposed project is low risk due to the success and strong partnerships of the existing NEPs. These NEPs have withstood many events that could have compromised their integrity from hurricanes, oil spills, government changes, and fluctuating funding sources. This program should be considered to have a very low risk of failure.

6. Does the proposal evaluate uncertainties and risks in achieving its objectives over time? (e.g., is there an uncertainty or risk that in 5-10 years the project/program will be obsolete or not function as planned given projections of sea level rise?)

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Comments

This proposal does mention that there are uncertainties in funding that could compromise the success of the proposed NEPs. Given the success of the existing NEPs at forming partnerships with established organizations, the risk of failure is very small.

Based on the answers to the previous 6 questions, and giving deference to the sponsor to provide within reason the use of best available science the following three questions can be answered:

A. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that uses peer-reviewed and publicly available data?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

B. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that maximizes the quality, objectivity, and integrity of information (including, as applicable, statistical information)?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

C. Has the applicant made a reasonable determination that the proposal is based on science that clearly documents and communicates risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects?

- (●) YES
- ( ) NO
- ( ) NEED MORE INFORMATION

Information Needed:

Science Context Evaluation

A. Have other methods been discussed and reasons provided to why the method is being selected (e.g., scientifically sound; cost-effectiveness)?

The EPA has been successful at establishing the existing NEPs and the proposed methodology for setting up these programs is already established. Because of the established methodology, this proposal did not present any alternate methodologies for setting up NEPs. It would have been beneficial for the author to list some potential qualifications required to be the host institution for an individual NEP or serve on the Technical Support Team. All NEPs are scientifically sound and are integral to

B. Has your agency/vendor/project manager conducted a project/program like the one proposed?

Yes. There are 7 NEPs already established in the Gulf region.

C. Is there a risk mitigation plan in place for project objectives? (captures risk measures as defined under best available science by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

There are not risk mitigation plans mentioned in the proposal; however, the establishment of NEP programs has been very successful in the past and has a very low risk of failure. Existing NEPs have been able to form strong partnerships with other agencies, thereby reducing the risk of failure even more.

D. Does the project/program consider consequences with implementation? (captures risk measures as defined under best available science by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

For the establishment of NEPs, there are no potential negative consequences that I can think of. Establishing more NEPs along the Gulf coast should only have positive consequences such as: improvement of water quality, facilitation of research, increased public awareness of environmental issues, and increased capacity for conservation and restoration efforts for each respective coverage area.

E. Does the project/program have clearly defined goals?

Yes, the overarching goal of this entire proposal is to establish 5-12 NEPs along the Gulf coast.

F. Does the project/program have clearly defined objectives?

Yes, the author has proposed several objectives that will contribute to fulfilling the goal of establishing 5-12 NEPs along the Gulf coast. Some of the goals for each proposed NEP is to establish at Technical/Science Advisory Committee, Management Conference/NEP Management Committee, identify a host institution, and hire a Program Director (who will hire remaining staff). All of these objectives will be obtainable within the funding timeline of 5 years.

G. Does the project/program have measures of success? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

The author does give many examples of past success of existing NEPs and states that the proposed NEP offices should provide similar functions and successes as the existing NEPs.

H. Is a monitoring program in place to determine project goals, success and help adaptive management (if applicable)? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes, the author states that annual work plans will be developed for each proposed NEP and that their performance will be compared to the goals set in the work plans.

I. Does the project/program consider recent and/or relevant information? (captures statistical information requirement as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes, the author references many different recent and relevant projects that have been completed by existing NEPs. The goals of the proposed NEPs are to perform the same functions as the existing NEPs in each respective area.

J. Has the project/program evaluated past successes and failures of similar efforts? (captures the communication of risks and uncertainties in the scientific basis for such projects as defined by the Comprehensive Plan and Act)

Yes, this proposal thoroughly explains the past successes of existing NEPs. However, they do not mention any lessons learned from the establishment of previous NEPs that could serve as beneficial information for the establishment of the proposed NEPs. A brief summary of what worked and what didn't (unless there were no failures) would have been beneficial to validate a well-established method for establishing NEPs.

Please summarize any additional information needed below:

In summary, I highly recommend this proposal get funded to the full amount possible since the establishment of more NEPs would be a tremendous benefit to the Gulf region through improving water quality and restoring/conserving habitat. I do have some alternate suggestions as to how this funding should be distributed. As mentioned in section A of the Science Context Evaluation Section, the cost required to establish an individual NEP ($400k/yr) seems low since that money encompasses staff, facilities, travel, equipment, meeting expenses, conference support, and technical assistance for a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan. The EPA obviously has had great success at establishing NEPs in the past, but I would