REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Deadline: July 15, 2024, 11:59 PM EST

A. Overview

This opportunity aims to identify an evaluator to assess the process, implementation, and outcomes of a collaborative program administered by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Education. This Request for Proposals (RFP) aims to define the requirements, solicit proposals, and gain adequate information to assess services proposed in response to this RFP. The program to be evaluated, Watershed STEM, involves partnerships between community centers and environmental education organizations that devise and provide watershed education to youth over an 18-month period.

B. Time Frame

NAAEE anticipates selecting an evaluation consultant by **early July 2024**. The selected consultant will implement an evaluation of funded Watershed STEM program activities through **12/31/2025**. The final evaluation report will be due no later than **04/30/2026**.

C. About the eeBLUE Watershed STEM Education Partnership Grants Program

The U.S. Department of Education's Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program supports the creation of community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. The program helps students meet state and local academic standards in core subject areas, such as reading and math; offers students a broad array of enrichment activities that can complement their regular academic programs; and offers literacy and other educational services to the families of participating children.

The eeBLUE Watershed STEM Education Partnership Grant Program will provide access to authentic STEM experiences at 21st CCLC sites that leverage NOAA's unique watershed education materials and environmental education framework. This will be achieved through competitive grants from the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) to fund partnerships between 21st CCLC sites and environmental education organizations (EEO). These grants will provide dynamic academic enrichment experiences to 21st CCLC program participants at least 40 21st CCLC sites, primarily in the seven geographic areas served by the NOAA Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program.

Grant activities will focus on delivering Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs), in whole or in part and led by a network of high-capacity NOAA B-WET grantees and partners, to this high-need audience. MWEEs are learner-centered experiences that focus on investigating local environmental issues that lead to environmental action projects. They are composed of multi-stage activities that include learning both indoors and outdoors. MWEEs help increase students' understanding of basic watershed concepts and the interaction between natural and social systems, highlighting the connection between human activity and environmental conditions. MWEEs include four essential elements for student experiences and four supporting practices that educators engage in to support students during a MWEE. The MWEE is the core B-WET program experience and is based on education research, evaluation results, and lessons learned from over two decades of program implementation.

NAAEE is interested in leveraging NOAA and 21st CCLC resources to increase participants' understanding and stewardship of local watersheds and related ecosystems. NAAEE is also interested in fostering lasting collaborations between EEO providers and 21st CCLC sites that:

- bring environmental education programming to 21st CCLC students during non-school hours,
- build environmental education providers' capacity to offer high-quality programming in out-of-school settings, and
- help 21st CCLC sites build a culture that values investigation, exploration, and authentic place-based learning as a context for improving student learning and achievement.

Projects funded through the NOAA-21st CCLC Watershed STEM Education Partnership Program in 2024 will fall into one of two categories or pathways:

1. **Foundations.** This pathway is intended for organizations seeking to develop capacity in out-of-school time environmental education and create new partnerships with 21st CCLC sites. Applicants to this pathway must demonstrate past experience implementing MWEEs in formal K–12 education as a B-WET grantee or partner. Experience working in out-of-school time is preferred but not required.
2. **Extensions.** Open to past recipients of Watershed STEM grants, this pathway is intended for organizations that want to build on existing work and established partnerships. Applicants should describe how the proposed project will leverage prior work and lessons learned to expand or further develop activities with 21st CCLC site partners.

Please see the NAAEE program website for more background.

D. Previous Evaluation

The NOAA B-WET program has been an agency leader in evaluation and is currently analyzing data from its national evaluation system. This system helps the program monitor and adjust activities based on information about best practices and supports grantees in using those practices. More information about B-WET evaluation work is available here.

The work funded under this proposal request should build on evaluation work conducted on previous Watershed STEM projects, including a pilot of the program in 2017 and an analysis of the last round of Watershed STEM completed in 2022.

The "NOAA 21st CCLC Watershed STEM Education Partnership Grants Program Evaluation Report: Executive Summary," released in 2023, summarizes the evaluation work conducted from July 1, 2020, to May 31, 2022.

Download the final full report.

E. Work Statement

This request for proposals (RFP) is intended to identify an evaluator to assess and produce reports on the implementation and outcomes of this collaborative program. Evaluation findings will include recommendations for the field around promising strategies for inspiring and engaging K–12 youth in watershed-related activities during out-of-school and expanded learning time using the natural environment as the context for learning. The total amount available for this RFP is $85,000.

F. Scope of Services

Through this RFP, a consultant organization will be selected to work collaboratively with NAAEE to design, develop, and implement an evaluation plan for this program. Equitable and culturally responsive evaluation should be used as much as possible within the proposal and process, as outlined in the American Evaluation Association Statement on Cultural Competence in Evaluation. Program partners are interested in the following questions:

Implementation:

To what extent do the projects funded by this program adhere to the MWEE model? Which aspects of the model provide the greatest affordances for science learning in out-of-school time (OST)? How is the MWEE model adapted to the after-school setting? What is the quality of the after-school STEM experiences regarding instructional practice? To what degree and through what means have any of the implementation

challenges identified in the previous evaluations been addressed, and what implementation challenges still exist?

Impact of Previous Experience:

How does an organization's past experience with the NOAA B-WET program or Watershed STEM program influence implementation effectiveness? How does a 21st CCLC site's previous experience with outdoor learning impact partner collaboration? How does staff experience in OST influence implementation?

Student Experience:

What are participating students taking away from the experience? Can students demonstrate STEM practices? What meaning are they deriving from participating?

Capacity Building:

To what extent has participation in this program increased 21st CCLC staff and/or organizational capacity? This may include changes in individuals (e.g., increased familiarity with MWEEs, confidence, and intention to do MWEE activities) or organizations (e.g., incorporation of MWEE programming into core activities, increased leadership, and staff support for MWEE activities, securing additional resources to support MWEE activities). What strategies increase organizational capacity to incorporate nature into 21st CCLC site programming?

Synergistic Partnerships:

To what extent has this program helped establish strong relationships between 21st CCLCs and Environmental Education providers? What strategies enable effective partnerships in this sphere? How can federal partnerships foster synergistic partnerships in this arena? To what degree did the new partnership resources (such as the program infographics and partnership tool) facilitate effective working relationships for Grantees who received funding under the Foundations Pathway? In what ways did Grantees who received funding under the Extensions Pathway sustain their partnerships between the first and second round of Watershed STEM 21st CCLC funding?

Implementation of the evaluation plan will be in accordance with relevant policies, including the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of Management and Budget Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) requirements, as applicable. If any aspect of the data collection will require IRB or PRA approval, the consultant will facilitate that process and factor a realistic timeline for approval into the evaluation design and timeline for data collection. Applicants should consider approaches that will not trigger PRA clearance to the extent practicable but not at the expense of rigorous evaluation methodology nor robust findings. The evaluator will also have to be aware of and adhere to any relevant policies pertaining to data collection from program audiences. The proposed evaluation plan will need to be reviewed and approved by the program partners.

The program evaluation deliverables include:

1. Input on program logic model, evaluation questions, and outcomes;
2. Descriptive summary of program outputs and implementation;
3. Assessment of program implementation challenges and successes;
4. Analysis of program outcomes; and
5. Recommendations for future program improvements.

1. Input on program logic model, evaluation questions, and outcomes

During the evaluation plan's development, the consultant will work with NAAEE and NOAA program staff to provide input on and refine the program logic model and evaluation questions identified in this RFP. The anticipated program outcomes are in the Appendix.

2. Descriptive summary of program outputs and implementation

The consultant will receive data from program managers on outputs collected from grant reports to be included in the evaluation report. The consultant will be asked to advise on relevant outputs to collect. These metrics may include the number of students served by gender, race and ethnicity, special needs status, location type (i.e., rural, suburban, urban), and organization type (e.g., charter school, college/university, community-based organization) of sites. In addition, the evaluation should summarize the different approaches to program implementation and the types of activities done. These could be separated by Pathway type or consolidated as appropriate. In the spring of 2025, an interim

evaluation report that outlines the work completed to date and how that work informs the next steps will be required. Details of this interim report will be negotiated with NAAEE and NOAA before its inception.

3. Assessment of program implementation challenges and successes

The consultant should collect data from a sample of projects to identify potential implementation challenges and determine what models of implementation work well for the 21st CCLC audience and site staff.

The consultant is strongly encouraged to include observational data collection using appropriate observation tools. Observations provided important insights into project implementation that could not have been collected otherwise.

4. Analysis of program outcomes

NAAEE is also interested in understanding program outcomes related to the student experience, capacity building, and partnership sustainability, as described above and in Appendix 1 of this Request for Proposals. The evaluation plan should explore this to the extent possible given the program timeline and budget. The outcome(s) to be explored will be agreed on in collaboration with the program partners as part of developing the evaluation plan. In addressing these outcomes, the consultant should use existing instruments and tools to the extent possible. Applicants should review existing instruments developed for the 2023 Watershed STEM evaluation effort and consider their utility during the evaluation of this round of Watershed STEM projects.

5. Recommendations for future program improvements

The evaluation report will include recommendations for future implementation of NOAA's Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences pursued as part of STEM programming initiatives under U.S. ED's 21st CCLC program and during non-school hours programming generally. The report should include recommendations that program managers can use to address program challenges through modifications to the request for proposals, resources, and support provided by NOAA, or other aspects of program design. This deliverable also includes recommendations for best practices for MWEEs in out-of-school time as a result of this and prior evaluation.

Specific responsibilities of the evaluator include:

- Participation in a kick-off meeting with key staff to review program goals and objectives, associated activities, evaluation criteria, questions and strategy, data collection (what, who, when, where, how), timeline, etc.
- Review and provide feedback on the program's logic model and priority program outcomes.
- Develop and execute the evaluation plan.
- Review of program reporting template to ensure descriptive information requested for funded projects is useful to the evaluation plan.
- Design and/or identify data collection instruments, processes, and methodologies.
- Lead Institutional Review Board and Paperwork Reduction Act clearance of data collection, as applicable.
- Lead a webinar for grantees to review the evaluation work (i.e., share information about the goals of the evaluation, data collection process, etc.).
- Implement data collection procedures.
- Designate sufficient and proficient staff to complete data collection, as applicable.
- Advise program partners on how to incorporate any planning, coordination, follow-up activities, and additional analyses into the evaluation work scope, as applicable.
- Prepare and submit interim and final reports.
- Participate in monthly coordination calls.
- Present evaluation findings to NAAEE program team and partners (NOAA and U.S. ED).

Responsibilities of NAAEE:

- Ensure compliance across the program.
- Educate the evaluator about the program and desired outcomes.
- Provide feedback about the proposed evaluation design and approach.
- Update evaluator on program changes.
- Provide guidance around reporting.
- Collaborate with the consultant in collecting data.
- Regularly monitor contract.

Communication Expectations	Frequency
Touch base with NAAEE and NOAA staff via email	Weekly
Communicate via phone with NAAEE staff	Monthly or as needed
Travel to meet with the program team	If needed

G. Deliverables

1. Descriptive evaluation plan, approved by NAAEE
2. Feedback on the program grant reporting template to include information valuable for evaluation
3. Interim evaluation report
4. Final cumulative report and presentation—An executive summary and full summary report incorporating data collection and analysis findings, formally presenting findings to the program team and lead partners. The report should be digestible by program managers and partners.
5. Communication product to be shared with the general public, to be determined in collaboration with NAAEE and NOAA

H. Period of Performance and Milestones

Project milestones will be updated in collaboration with project partners as part of the implementation plan development. An initial set of milestones is as follows:

Milestone	Due Date
Consultant selected	August 1, 2024
Kickoff meeting	Within two weeks of consultant selection
Submission of a draft evaluation plan to program partners	August 31, 2024
Submission of a final evaluation plan to program partners	September 13, 2024
PRA clearance (if needed)	September 30, 2024
Data collection begins	October 1, 2024
Submission of draft interim evaluation report	March 31, 2025
Submission of final interim evaluation report	April 30, 2025
All project activities end	No later than December 31, 2025
Submission of draft cumulative evaluation report	March 31, 2026
Final cumulative evaluation report and summary presentation	No later than April 30, 2026

I. Information Required from All Proposal Submitters

Preferred Contractor Qualifications

The selected contractor is required to have the following qualifications:

- Minimum 5 years professional experience, specifically in evaluating education programs
- Ability to multitask and work under tight deadlines
- Knowledge of the NOAA Office of Education, NOAA B-WET program and the U.S. Department of Education, and the 21st CCLC program (mission, management, current priority issues and programs, as well as rules and regulations)
- Ability to travel to project sites or arrange for designees to do so, to conduct observations and other data collection, as appropriate; travel to work with NOAA and U.S. ED staff
- Works well with a team, contributing to common goals, and takes and gives criticism constructively, assimilating suggestions and directions into positive results
- Willing and able to make suggestions and offer solutions as appropriate and be able to maintain a high level of professionalism and integrity at all times
- Demonstrates experience and success working with a diverse audience

Proposal Content and Requirements

To be considered for selection, your proposal must be complete and include the items listed below:

- A **cover page** with the individual or firm's name, date, mailing address, telephone number, fax number, email address, and website.

- A **concise description** of the contractor's principal expertise includes education, past experience, clients, knowledge strengths, and products and services (1 page limit). The partners are particularly interested in

organizations that have a demonstrated history of evaluating out-of-school time STEM learning programs.

- A **proposal** providing the scope of services noted above in this RFP, proof of history and capacity to provide deliverables similar in size, complexity, and nature to those described in this RFP *(5 page limit with no less than 11pt font)*. The proposal should include the proposed evaluation approach including possible data collection methodologies and rationale for those methodologies, a potential timeline describing major steps in the evaluation process, and information about potential constraints and how they will be addressed.

- An approximate, high-level **budget**. Your price quote, not to exceed **$85,000**, should cover the full scope of services and define estimated expenses for project management, design, data collection and analysis, report writing, and travel. The budget should include totals for these cost categories: Personnel, Travel, Equipment, Supplies, Contracts, Other, and Indirect costs. This project may include significant travel, depending on the evaluation design. Rates quoted must be guaranteed for the duration of the contract.

- **Qualifications** related to the specialized qualifications noted above, with titles, bios, and a brief list of clients served in the capacity proposed. Include any accreditations, licenses, or special training related to the services requested. Attaching a resume or CV is acceptable *(2 page limit)*.

- **Links to and examples of other work** similar to what is requested, produced for past clients *(1 page limit)*.

- Please provide at least three **references** for similar clients or projects produced by you or your company. Please include the organization's name, contact person's name, address, telephone number, and email. Please include references who can speak to end product satisfaction and project management experience *(1 page limit)*.

J. Submission of Proposal

Please submit your proposal and necessary document links in a single PDF to T'Noya Thompson at eeBLUE@naaee.org by July 15, 2024, at 11:59 PM EST.

Any questions on this Request for Proposals should be directed to T'Noya Thompson at eeBLUE@naaee.org.

K. Selection

Proposals will be evaluated based on experience, personnel expertise, thoroughness of the proposal, and price quote.

L. Acronyms

21st CCLC – 21st Century Community Learning Centers provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, especially students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools.
B-WET – NOAA Bay Watershed Education and Training Program. The NOAA B-WET program funds locally relevant, authentic experiential STEM learning in seven regions of the United States: California, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico, Hawaii, New England, and Pacific Northwest.
MWEE – Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience. MWEEs are multi-stage activities that include learning both outdoors and in the classroom, and aim to increase the environmental literacy of all participants. The MWEE is the core B-WET program experience and is based on research literature, evaluation results, and lessons learned.
NAAEE – North American Association for Environmental Education
NOAA – The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OST – Out-of-school time
STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
U.S. ED – U.S. Department of Education

M. Resources

National Research Council. (2015). *Identifying and Supporting Productive STEM Programs in Out-of-School Settings*. Committee on Successful Out-of-School STEM Learning. Board on Science Education, Division of Behavior and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C. National Academies Press.

NOAA MWEE Guide
An Educator's Guide to the Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE), commonly referred to as the MWEE Guide, is a manual designed for users with varying levels of familiarity with the MWEE framework. MWEEs are compelling hands-on opportunities for students to explore local environmental issues through sustained, teacher-supported programming. The tools, worksheets, and information in this guide help educators ensure that MWEEs are done thoroughly and thoughtfully to increase student environmental literacy.

2017 pilot program evaluation report:
https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/document/2019/Dec/PDF-NOAA_21stCCLC_Implementation_Evaluation-122017-BWET.pdf

You for Youth partnership page (Archive): an online professional learning community supported by the U.S. Department of Education that provides resources for afterschool educators

2020–2022 Watershed STEM program home page includes grantee blogs, spotlights, evaluation results

2020–2022 program evaluation report executive summary:
https://cdn.naaee.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/NOAA-21st-CCLC-Watershed-STEM_Education-Partnership-Grants-Program__Evaluation-Report_FINAL_January-2023_references-to-appendices.pdf

Appendix: Anticipated Program Outcomes

Projects funded under this grant should align with the following anticipated program outcomes.

21st CCLC site students will:

- Improve STEM practices.
- Improve awareness of the relevance and application of STEM to their lives and communities.
- Increase personal agency to take action regarding environmental issues that affect their communities.
- Understand how individual decisions have environmental impacts within and beyond their communities.
- Meet people who share similar interests in their environment.
- Meet STEM role models.
- Cultivate interest in learning outdoors.
- Cultivate interest in engaging in future STEM learning opportunities.
- Cultivate interest in STEM or environmental education careers.
- Explore new places in their communities.

21st CCLC staff will:

- Build skills and confidence to teach outdoors.
- Increase capacity to form and maintain mutually beneficial partnerships with EE providers.
- Understand the importance of environmental education in students' lives.
- Improve knowledge of relevant NOAA assets that can enhance student experiences.
- Express interest in forming future partnerships with EE providers.

Environmental education providers will:

- Understand the goals and objectives of the 21st CCLC program.
- Understand how to design and implement MWEE projects in out-of-school time appropriate for partnerships with 21st CCLC sites.
- Increase capacity to form and maintain mutually beneficial partnerships with 21st CCLC sites.
- Express interest in forming future partnerships with 21st CCLC sites.