

## **Departmental Guidance: Conservation Grants Coordination**

**Subject:** Strategic coordination of conservation grant and cooperative agreement programs.

### **What is the purpose of this Guidance?**

The purpose of this Guidance is to enhance conservation outcomes by enabling more coordination among grants and cooperative agreements. The Guidance provides a flexible, systematized method for identifying synergistic opportunities among programs that will optimize the more than \$1 billion the Department allocates annually to conservation executed through grants and cooperative agreements. It is not the purpose of this Guidance to disrupt current coordination or prevent the development of other efforts to leverage funding. Nothing in the process is intended to reduce existing program flexibility, effectiveness, or timelines.

### **Given the amount of coordination taking place, why have written guidance?**

The ongoing efforts of Interior's grant administrators, program managers, and others to coordinate grants and cooperative agreements are laudable. Additional guidance helps employees identify and reduce administrative redundancies and replicate success instead. The intent is, along with other work in grants and cooperative agreement coordination, to ensure that bureaus can strive to maximize all their efforts at achieving conservation outcomes. The goal is to yield the greatest benefits in as comprehensive a manner as possible. Having written guidance in hand facilitates this endeavor.

### **Why is this Guidance important?**

This Guidance provides a common means to seek out coordination opportunities where coordination might not otherwise occur. By identifying overarching conservation priorities, this Guidance provides focal points for coordination efforts, allowing the more than \$1 billion annual allocation to be used more effectively and efficiently to maximize conservation outcomes.

### **How should this Guidance be implemented?**

Implementation of this Guidance occurs when a decision is being made on a proposal for a grant or cooperative agreement and the decision-maker takes into account whether the proposal can help achieve other, complementary conservation priorities in addition to the primary purpose of the program. Full implementation of this Guidance involves four tools: (1) current grant and cooperative agreement program policies, rules and regulations, which shall remain in full force under this Guidance; (2) a list of conservation grant programs subject to the Guidance (see Supplement); (3) a list of conservation priorities that would be the focal points for coordination under this Guidance (see Supplement); and (4) more detailed information on implementation (see Supplement).

### **To whom does this Guidance apply?**

Interior employees in a position to seek additional conservation benefits from the grant or cooperative agreement selection process. Such employees would include grant administrators, managers of relevant programs, and regional and field staff involved in grants and developing cooperative agreements.

### **Who are potential entities with whom to coordinate?**

Partners may include bureau personnel who are already involved programmatically in pursuing a conservation priority listed in the Supplement. More generally, partners may include other bureaus, agencies, State and local entities, as well as other programs within the same bureau.

### **What is the Supplement to this Guidance?**

This Guidance generally describes an approach to enable new coordination efforts. This approach is expected to evolve over time and therefore details on its implementation will be provided on a regular basis in a Supplement. The Management Excellence Council's

Management Initiatives Team will solicit views on a line authority basis from field and regional staff and assist in updating the Supplement, which at a minimum will contain:

1. Conservation grant and cooperative agreement programs subject to this Guidance; and
2. Conservation priorities established by the Department that are focal points for grants and cooperative agreement coordination.

Supplements also may describe instances of enhanced coordination that exemplify intended outcomes from implementing this Guidance.

**When should this Guidance be applied?**

This Guidance applies to decisions on funding proposals for grants or cooperative agreements. This Guidance also should be used through all other phases of grant and cooperative agreement programs, from pre-application to monitoring. For example, the conservation priorities identified in the Supplement can be included in calls for applications and communicated to State and local agencies, as well as private and nonprofit partners, at conferences, on bureau websites, etc. The absence of a grant or cooperative agreement program from the list in the Supplement should not preclude efforts to increase coordination or link those grant programs to Departmental conservation priorities.

**How will implementation of this Guidance be monitored?**

It is important to document the implementation of this Guidance and how coordination around Departmental conservation priorities influenced decisions relating to grants and cooperative agreements. At the end of each fiscal year, bureaus will be asked to submit noteworthy coordination achievements to the Assistant Secretary – Policy Management and Budget on a self-selecting basis. The Assistant Secretary – Policy Management and Budget intends to recognize superior achievements in coordinating grants to maximize outcomes.

**Does this Guidance supersede any Departmental or bureau policies and directives pertaining to the grants my office administers?**

The goal of greater coordination should be accomplished without compromising the specific requirements of any program or greatly altering existing grant processes. This Guidance makes suggestions about how to improve coordination and the efficiency of grant programs without changing any laws or regulations and without replacing current grant program policies. Those implementing this Guidance shall continue to apply all policies relevant to grants and cooperative agreements, including, for example, 505 DM 2 of the Departmental Manual, regarding Departmental policy on procurement contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements. Additionally, as noted above, nothing in the process is intended to reduce existing program flexibility, effectiveness, or timelines.