

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

NFWF - America's Ecosystem Restoration Initiative

This FAQ is intended for organizations with active AERI grants administered by NFWF. If you have questions not addressed here, contact your ECT Field Liaison or NFWF Grants Administrator directly.

Contact information is also made available at:

<https://www.ectinc.com/americas-ecosystem-restoration-initiative-aeri/>

What is AERI?

The America's Ecosystem Restoration Initiative (AERI) is a competitive grant program administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). The program supports ecosystem restoration projects across the United States. The AERI Program was formally known as 'America the Beautiful Challenge' until January, 2025.

What is the difference between NFWF, SWCA, and the ECT Liaison Team?

- **NFWF** administers the grant program and funding and offers grant support.
- **SWCA Environmental Consultants** supports required federal environmental compliance processes (i.e., NHPA, ESA, and NEPA).
- **The ECT Field Liaison Team** provides technical assistance, virtual and on-site grant support, and coordination assistance between grantees and NFWF.

Who should we contact with questions?

For grant administration or contractual questions, contact your NFWF Grants Administrator. For general project support, coordination, or technical assistance, the ECT Liaison Team is available to assist. ECT Liaisons can be emailed at NationalProgramLiaisons@ectinc.com.

Grantees can also book virtual meetings with ECT Liaison Team members at:

<https://outlook.office.com/book/NFWFAERILiaisonBookingsPage>

Reporting

What reporting is required?

Most grantees complete: Annual Interim Progress Reports, A Final Financial Report, and A Final Programmatic Report. Reporting requirements and timelines are outlined in your award agreement and may vary depending on the funding source.

When are final reports due?

Final reports are generally due within 90 days of the project end date. Reporting requirements are further outlined in your award agreement.

What mapping information is required?

Final reports require an accurate project map through NFWF's online mapping tool. Spatial data should depict the exact (within a 15% margin of error) location and boundaries of each on-the-ground conservation practice implemented during the grant. Exact locations may not be required

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where privacy, cultural, or resource sensitivity concerns exist. If you have any of those concerns, reach out to ECT or NFWF.

Is there a final payment holdback?

Yes. NFWF typically holds the final 10% of grant funds until final reports are submitted, reviewed, and approved.

Budgeting & Invoicing

Can grant funds be used for project management and administration?

Yes. Grant funds may be used for reasonable project management, administration, and reporting activities directly related to the project.

Can we request advance payments?

Advance payments may be available with prior approval and must meet federal funding requirements. To initiate a request, contact your NFWF Grants Administrator, who will open the appropriate task in EasyGrants. More information on advance payments can be found at <https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Advance-Payment-Guide.pdf>

Can we purchase equipment with grant funds?

Usually, yes. If equipment was not included in your approved budget, contact your NFWF Grants Administrator before making any purchases to confirm eligibility and determine if a budget amendment is needed. Note that equipment purchases using federal funding may require depreciation reporting that extends beyond the life of the grant. Contact your ECT Field Liaison or NFWF Grants Administrator with questions.

What if we need to change our budget?

Budget amendments are required if funds need to be moved between categories by more than 10% of the total award amount, or for certain new expenses such as a change in your indirect rate. For smaller reallocations within those thresholds, an amendment may not be needed. Always include a budget narrative to explain any deviation from the original budget. If your project is at risk of going over budget, contact your ECT Field Liaison or NFWF Grants Administrator to discuss whether a scope adjustment or budget amendment is needed.

What if our NICRA or indirect rate changes?

Changes to your negotiated indirect rate (NICRA) or de minimis rate may require a budget amendment. Please contact your ECT Liaison or your NFWF Grants Administrator to determine the appropriate next steps.

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Match

Does AERI require matching funds?

Yes. Most AERI grants require non-federal matching funds. Requirements are specified in your award agreement and must be documented.

Can we use federal funds from another source as match?

In most cases, federal funds cannot be counted toward match unless specifically authorized. Contact your ECT Liaison or NFWF Grants Administrator before assuming eligibility.

What if we are concerned about meeting match or metrics?

Grantees are encouraged to contact their ECT Field Liaison or NFWF Grants Administrator early to identify concerns so options can be evaluated, including amending metrics or requesting a project extension if needed.

Amendments & Project Changes

What types of amendments are available?

Several types of amendments are available depending on your situation. A no-cost time extension may be requested if your project needs more time without changes to the budget. A budget amendment may be required if funds need to move between categories beyond allowable thresholds or if your indirect rate changes. A scope amendment may be required if project activities, locations, or outcomes change, and in some cases may trigger additional federal compliance review. Contact your ECT Field Liaison or NFWF Grants Administrator to determine which type of amendment applies to your situation.

What if our project is behind schedule?

Grantees may request a no-cost time extension prior to the project end date. A brief justification and proposed new end date will be required. Contact your ECT Liaison or NFWF Grants Administrator to begin the process.

What if our project scope changes?

If project activities, locations, or outcomes change, a scope amendment may be required, and some changes may trigger additional federal compliance review. Grantees are encouraged to contact their ECT Field Liaison or NFWF Grants Administrator before implementing significant changes.

Compliance

What is a single audit, and is it required?

A single audit may be required under federal Uniform Guidance depending on the total amount of federal funding your organization receives in a fiscal year. Requirements vary by organization and funding source. Contact NFWF if you have questions about your specific situation.

What compliance requirements apply to AERI projects?

Because AERI is supported by federal funding, projects require environmental compliance review under federal laws such as NEPA, ESA, and NHPA. SWCA assists grantees with federal compliance.

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Does SWCA handle all permits?

SWCA supports required federal environmental compliance processes. However, grantees remain responsible for securing any additional federal, state, or local permits required for their project.

Will additional monitoring or site visits be required?

Some projects may be subject to additional monitoring, reporting, or auditing requirements, including site visits and expense verification. Any enhanced compliance requirements will be communicated directly by NFWF or your ECT Field Liaison.

Communication and Media

Will our project be featured publicly?

NFWF and the ECT Liaison Team may highlight project accomplishments through websites, social media, or other communications.

What materials may be requested?

Grantees may be asked to provide photos, maps, outcome metrics, or brief project updates to support communications efforts.

Do we need approval before publishing or sharing information about our project?

Grantees may discuss their awarded projects publicly, provided that NFWF AERI funding is appropriately acknowledged and copies of any published materials are shared with NFWF as part of final reporting. Prior approval from NFWF is required if the NFWF logo or other funding source logos are used in any materials. Contact your ECT Field Liaison or NFWF Grants Administrator with questions about specific publication or media inquiries.