

2026 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

New York's Great Lakes Basin Small Grants Program

New York Sea Grant (NYSG) in partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) is requesting proposals for projects that serve to benefit the environment and economy of New York's Great Lakes basin by demonstrating the application of ecosystem-based management (EBM) to local watershed challenges. The small grants program is made possible by the New York State Environmental Protection Fund and Article 14 of Environmental Conservation Law.

Proposals due on March 27, 2026, by 4:30 PM EST

TIMELINE

- **RFP Announced:** January 12, 2026
- **Webinar:** January 27, 2026, at 12:00 PM
- **Office Hours:** Thursdays at 12:00 PM throughout February
- **Proposal Submission Deadline:** March 27, 2026, at 4:30 PM
- **Award Notification:** May 29, 2026
- **Project Term Dates:** July 1, 2026 – December 31, 2027 (18 months)

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

With guidance from planning initiatives by New York State agencies and NYSG, New York's Great Lakes Basin (NYGLB) Small Grants Program is intended to support stakeholder-driven efforts to restore and revitalize the state's Great Lakes region and demonstrate the successful application of EBM.

New York State published the 2023 revision of the **Great Lakes Action Agenda (GLAA)**, a strategic blueprint for applying EBM principles in New York's Great Lakes basin. Developed by the NYSDEC in collaboration with partners and stakeholders, the GLAA outlines six priority goals that address critical issues such as water quality, healthy ecosystems, community resilience, and sustainability. This updated document reflects emerging challenges and revised priorities to enhance and preserve the ecological integrity, socio-economic vitality, and resilience of the region. The [Great Lakes Action Agenda](#) is available on the NYSDEC website.

PROJECT PRIORITIES

NYSG is soliciting proposals up to **\$40,000** in total costs for projects that advance the goals of the GLAA and implement actions identified in locally supported community plans. Approved, locally supported community plans are strategic or planning documents that have been formally adopted or endorsed by a local government, public

agency, or multi-stakeholder planning body. These plans must reflect local priorities and include actionable items developed through community engagement or public input. These plans may focus on water quality, natural resources, or sustainable land use and include, but are not limited to, Coastal Lakeshore Economy and Resiliency Regional (CLEAR) Plans, Comprehensive Plans, Harbor Management Plans, Hazard Mitigation Plans, Local Waterfront Revitalization Plans (LWRPs), Natural Resource Management Plans, Resilient NY flood mitigation studies, and Watershed Management Plans.

Proposed projects must directly originate from an approved community plan, clearly identifying the name of the plan and the specific location within the document (i.e., page and section number) where the activity is described. Additionally, eligible proposals must identify at least one GLAA goal that the project addresses, along with the specific strategy and/or action under that goal, and the associated GLAA evaluation metric(s) that the proposed activity will contribute to. As applicable, projects should prioritize the implementation of natural and nature-based approaches to maximize ecosystem and public benefits, consistent with the NYS Community Risk and Resiliency Act's [Using Natural Measures to Reduce the Risk of Flooding and Erosion](#) guidance document.

Proposals should also demonstrate how an EBM approach will be applied to achieve ecological, social/community, and economic benefits.

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- A floodplain restoration project to benefit aquatic habitat, water quality, and reduce flood risk.
- An ecosystem-based management shoreline study that recommends nature-based approaches for shoreline management and coastal process restoration.
- Implementation of activities identified in a climate-smart comprehensive plan that support community revitalization goals, open space preservation, and/or water-dependent recreational assets.
- Reviews and/or updates to municipal codes or policies that integrate resilience measures into local law.

Civil works, property acquisition, infrastructure projects, and research will not be considered for this funding. Proposals requesting additional funding for previously funded projects may be submitted if the proposed activities are distinct from the previous proposal and significantly enhance and build upon the previous project. Applicants seeking support solely for the continued operation or maintenance of an existing project or program will not be prioritized. Special consideration may be given to projects for which other readily available funding sources do not exist.

It is anticipated that a total of \$200,000 will be awarded to approximately 5 proposal requests.

For additional information about projects previously funded through this program, please visit the [New York's Great Lakes Basin Small Grants Program webpage](#).

WHO CAN APPLY

Proposals will be accepted from the following entities located in New York's Great Lakes basin:

- Not-for-profit organizations,
- County and local government (e.g., County Departments, cities, towns, villages, etc.),
- Indian nations recognized by the state or the United States with a reservation wholly or partly within the boundaries of New York State,
- Public agencies, such as regional planning entities, environmental commissions and soil and water conservation districts; and,
- Educational institutions, including, but not limited to, public and private K-12 schools, Colleges, and Universities.

DURATION OF PROJECTS

Projects must be completed by December 31, 2027, though requests for no-cost extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis.

BUDGET SIZE

Budget requests cannot exceed **\$40,000.00**.

COST-SHARE REQUIREMENTS

Match is not required.

HOW AND WHEN TO SUBMIT

Full proposals must be submitted by **4:30 PM EST on March 27, 2026**. They must be submitted electronically through New York Sea Grant's electronic submission website which can be accessed by visiting the [New York Great Lakes Basin Small Grants webpage](#). The website will **not** accept proposals submitted after 4:30 PM EST.

PROPOSAL FORMAT

A standardized application cover sheet, 90-4 Budget Form, and Subcontractor Commitment Form are available through the website link above and **must** be submitted with each proposal. All proposal components must be combined into a **single PDF file** and submitted using the following file naming convention:

ProjectLeadLastName_AbbreviatedOrganization_2026Proposal.pdf

- **ProjectLeadLastName:** Use the last name of the primary project lead.
- **AbbreviatedOrganization:** Provide an abbreviation for your organization (e.g., NYSG for New York Sea Grant).
- **2026Proposal:** Include this text exactly as written to identify the proposal year.

For example, if the project lead is Jane Smith from My Organization, the file should be named: **Smith_MyOrg_2026Proposal.pdf**

Proposal Components:

1. Cover Sheet (Template provided on submission portal)

The cover sheet must include:

- **Project Title (100-character max.):** Write for a non-technical audience.
- **Project Lead and Team Contact Information:** Include names, addresses, phone numbers, and emails.
- **Amount Requested:** Cannot exceed \$40,000.
- **Executive Summary (200-word max.):** Provide a concise public-friendly summary of your project.

2. Project Description *5-page max., single-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-point font*

The main body of the proposal should include:

- **GLAA Goal(s):** Identify the GLAA goal(s) your project addresses, the corresponding strategy and/or action under that goal, and the associated GLAA evaluation metric(s) your project will contribute to. Refer to the [2023 Great Lakes Action Agenda](#).
- **Annual Project Focus:** Identify the locally supported plan and specific action(s) within the plan your proposal addresses.
- **Project Summary:** Provide a clear overview of your project, including its purpose and key objectives.
- **Project Location:** Specify the location of your project. All projects must be within or directly related to NY's Great Lakes basin. Refer to the NYSDEC's [Great Lakes basin map](#).
- **Goals and Methods:** Outline the overarching goals of your project and methods for achieving them.
- **Outcomes and Deliverables:** Describe the anticipated outcomes of the project, including the benefits or changes expected. Specify the deliverables that will be produced, such as reports, tools, or other tangible products.
- **EBM Principles:** Briefly explain how the project integrates or applies ecosystem-based management principles. Refer to page 6 "Evaluation of Proposals" for EBM criteria.
- **Personnel and Collaboration:** List key personnel and identify the project lead. If collaborating with partner organizations, include the organization's name and describe the partnership's role.

3. Personnel and Partners *2-page max. per biographical sketch*

Include a biographical sketch for the top three personnel, including the project lead. Include name, address, phone, and email for each.

4. Letters of Support *(Required if activities occur on public or private lands)*

Provide a letter of support from the relevant municipal government and/or private

landowner. Projects that take place on private lands must demonstrate broad public value. General support letters are not required and will not be considered.

5. Timeline 1-page max.

The timeline should include:

- Tasks, project measures, and deliverables
- Project start and end dates

6. Budget Justification:

Explain how funds will support key project milestones, deliverables, and schedules. Provide details for each category:

- Labor Costs:** List each person separately and provide the basis for labor costs.
- Fringe Benefits:** Provide explanation of how fringe benefits are applied and provide documentation for the rate or dollar amounts assessed.
- Permanent Equipment:** Provide make, model and dollar amount. Explain whether price was determined from vendor quote, catalogue price, or past experience. Permanent equipment includes items like fish tanks, graduated cylinders, monitoring equipment, textbooks, etc.
- Expendable Supplies/Equipment:** Provide a list of expendable supplies and equipment needed for the project.
- Travel/Transportation:** Describe nature and purpose.
- Other Costs:** Provide a breakdown for items needed and include a justification.
- Indirect Costs:**
 - Use 18% of Total Direct Costs (TDC) if a federally negotiated rate exists. Attach federally negotiated rate agreements if applicable.
 - Use the 15% De Minimus rate if no federally negotiated rate exists.

7. Cost Reasonableness Statement:

Cost reasonableness statements should identify how costs were determined and how they are appropriate and competitive (i.e., used market rates, competitive salaries, etc.). Budget justifications and cost reasonableness statements are not the same.

8. 90-4 Budget Form: (Form provided on submission portal)

Use the provided form to detail the project's budget.

9. Subcontractor Commitment Form: (Form provided on submission portal)

All applicants must complete and submit the provided Subcontractor Commitment Form with their proposal. If awarded, your organization will be considered a subcontractor under Cornell University.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

- **Certificate of Liability Insurance:** Applicants will need insurance coverage. At this time, do not include proof of insurance. However, should funding be awarded you will be required to provide proof of insurance, Workman's Compensation and Disability benefits.
- **Audited Statements:** Please be aware that if you are successful, in order to process the award, we will require a recent Single Audit or recent audited financial statements.
- **Permits/Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP):** For all projects requiring permits or a QAPP, all necessary permits must be obtained prior to receiving the award. For specific QAPP requirements see the QAPP section at the end of the RFP.
- **Documentation of Ownership and Public Interest in Property:** Prior to receiving the award, successful applicants must be able to document adequate ownership rights in and to the subject property, and that the ownership or use of the subject property is of a public nature.
- **Municipal Endorsement:** Prior to receiving the award, successful applicants must provide a municipal endorsement and authorization to conduct the proposed project on municipal property.

EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

The applicant and proposal must meet the following criteria to be eligible for review:

- ✓ The applicant is considered eligible to apply. (See *Who Can Apply* on page 3.)
- ✓ The proposed project is located within and/or directly related to New York's Great Lakes Basin.
- ✓ The proposed project aligns with an approved locally supported community plan.
- ✓ The proposed project aligns with one or more GLAA goals, identifies corresponding strategies and/or actions under that goal, and identifies the associated GLAA evaluation metric(s) that their project will contribute to.
- ✓ The proposed project is not a research, infrastructure, or land acquisition project.
- ✓ The proposed project is not solely for ongoing operations/maintenance.
- ✓ The proposal is complete and has all 9 required components. (See *Proposal Components* on page 4.)

All eligible proposals that meet the minimum requirements outlined above will be evaluated by a technical review team consisting of, at a minimum, members of NYSG, NYSDEC, and other State agencies. Proposals will be scored by reviewers using the following criteria and grading rubric:

Score:	Low (1-2 points)	Medium (3-4 points)	High (5 points)
Great Lakes Action Agenda (GLAA) Linkage <i>Score weight = x3</i> <i>15 points maximum</i>	<p>The proposal demonstrates minimal or unclear alignment with GLAA goals. Specific actions and/or metrics are either not identified or lack relevance to the stated goal(s).</p>	<p>The proposal identifies one or more GLAA goals and associated metrics but provides only a partial or general connection. Specific steps for implementation may be mentioned but lack sufficient detail or clarity.</p>	<p>The proposal provides a strong and well-defined link to one or more GLAA goals and metrics. Specific actions and metrics are clearly outlined, demonstrating intentional and actionable steps toward achieving the stated goal(s).</p>
Appropriateness of Measurable Outcomes or Deliverables <i>Score weight = x3</i> <i>15 points maximum</i>	<p>The proposal provides vague or poorly defined outcomes and deliverables. They lack clear connections to the project's stated goals and appear unrealistic or unattainable within the 18-month term.</p>	<p>The proposal outlines outcomes or deliverables that are generally well-defined and relevant to the project goals. However, they may lack sufficient detail, clarity, or feasibility, raising concerns about whether they can be fully achieved within the project term.</p>	<p>The proposal outlines specific, realistic, and measurable outcomes that are directly aligned with the project goals. The deliverables are well-defined and clearly achievable within the 18-month timeframe, demonstrating a strong likelihood of success.</p>
Integration of Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) Principles <i>Score weight = x2</i> <i>10 points maximum</i>	<p>The proposal demonstrates minimal integration of EBM principles. Key concepts, such as balancing ecological, economic, and community values, are vaguely addressed.</p>	<p>The proposal addresses some EBM principles but lacks depth or a comprehensive approach. While one or more of the 9 principles may be present, they are not fully developed or integrated into the project's overall framework.</p>	<p>The proposal thoroughly integrates EBM principles, demonstrating a clear and balanced approach to ecological, economic, and community values. Multiple EBM principles are intentionally and explicitly addressed, including stakeholder participation, collaboration, scientific rigor, and adaptive management.</p>

Score:	<i>Low (1-2 points)</i>	<i>Medium (3-4 points)</i>	<i>High (5 points)</i>
Local Plan Integration (Topical Focus) <i>Score weight = x2</i> <i>10 points maximum</i>	<p>The proposal provides little alignment with an approved, local, community-based plan. Connections are vague, incomplete, or lack documentation to support the claim.</p>	<p>The proposal indicates a general connection to one or more approved, local, community-based plans, but the alignment is not well-defined. Specific actions or priorities are mentioned but lack clarity on how they are integrated into the project's goals.</p>	<p>The proposal clearly and convincingly demonstrates alignment with one or more approved, local, community-based plan. Specific actions are directly tied to local priorities, and there is evidence of intentional integration that reflects a thorough understanding of local goals.</p>
Outreach Component <i>Score weight = x2</i> <i>10 points maximum</i>	<p>The proposal demonstrates little to no evidence of incorporating outreach into the project. There are minimal or no strategies presented for communicating results or engaging the broader community.</p>	<p>The proposal includes an outreach component with basic strategies for communication and engagement, but these are underdeveloped or lack sufficient detail to ensure broad reach or effective application of results.</p>	<p>The proposal clearly integrates a robust outreach component, with well-defined and thoughtful strategies to communicate results widely and engage a diverse range of community stakeholders.</p>
Creativity, Innovation, & Strategic Approach <i>Score weight = x2</i> <i>10 points maximum</i>	<p>The proposal lacks originality or strategic depth. It primarily reflects the continuation of past activities with limited innovation or adaptation. The proposed approach may be conventional, with unclear added value or long-term potential.</p>	<p>The proposal includes some creative or strategic elements. It may improve upon past work or show consideration of context and potential for local relevance.</p>	<p>The proposal presents a compelling, innovative approach that is well-aligned with program goals and community needs. It introduces new tools, partnerships, outreach approaches, or ecological strategies. It demonstrates strong potential to inform future efforts or deliver meaningful, replicable impact.</p>
Qualifications of the Project Team <i>Score weight = x1</i>	<p>The proposal provides limited evidence of relevant experience or qualifications. Team members lack</p>	<p>The team members possess relevant experience and qualifications, though some gaps in expertise</p>	<p>The project team demonstrates strong qualifications and extensive experience directly aligned with all</p>

Score:	<i>Low (1-2 points)</i>	<i>Medium (3-4 points)</i>	<i>High (5 points)</i>
<i>5 points maximum</i>	demonstrated expertise in key areas essential to project success.	may exist in critical areas. While generally capable, the team's collective skills may not fully align with all project needs.	aspects of the project. Each member brings relevant skills and expertise that will support the project's success.
Coordination with Appropriate Partners <i>Score weight = x1</i> <i>5 points maximum</i>	The proposal provides little to no evidence of coordination with partners. Collaboration efforts are unclear or minimal, and the project risks duplicating existing initiatives without adding value.	The proposal demonstrates some level of coordination with partners, with moderate collaboration to support project outcomes. However, the extent of collaboration may lack depth, and there may be some overlap with existing efforts.	The proposal exhibits strong coordination with appropriate partners, clearly avoiding duplication of existing efforts. Collaboration is well-documented and actively enhances the project's goals, demonstrating a unified and strategic approach.
Appropriateness of Budget <i>Score weight = x1</i> <i>5 points maximum</i>	The budget lacks sufficient detail, is poorly documented, or appears unrealistic for the project's scope. Costs may seem inflated, misaligned, or unjustified.	The budget is generally reasonable and aligned with the project's scope and needs, though minor gaps, inconsistencies, or areas requiring clarification are present. Some costs may lack full justification or transparency.	The budget is thoroughly documented, transparent, and reasonable. Costs are clearly justified and closely aligned with the project's scope, goals, and deliverables, demonstrating efficient use of funds.
Building Capacity for Future Projects <i>Score weight = x1</i> <i>5 points maximum</i>	The proposal provides little to no evidence of opportunities for future capacity-building or follow-up projects. There is minimal or no mention of sustainability or plans for expanding the project's impacts after completion.	The proposal suggests some potential for future capacity-building, but the plans lack sufficient detail or clear strategies for ensuring long-term sustainability or follow-up actions.	The proposal strongly supports capacity-building for future efforts. It includes a clear, well-developed plan for sustaining and expanding the project's impacts, with detailed strategies for follow-up actions and long-term growth.

Score:	Low (1-2 points)	Medium (3-4 points)	High (5 points)
Benefits to Environmental Justice Communities <i>Score weight = x1</i> <i>5 points maximum</i>	<p>The proposal demonstrates limited or unclear benefits to Environmental Justice or disadvantaged communities. There is little or no indication that these communities are prioritized or explicitly considered in the project's design.</p> <p>For more information related to environmental justice or disadvantaged communities, applicants may reference the resources listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYSG's Environmental Justice Mapping Tools Guide • NYS Energy Research and Development Authority's Disadvantaged Communities Map 	<p>The proposal identifies some benefits to Environmental Justice or disadvantaged communities but does not fully emphasize or clearly articulate these impacts.</p>	<p>The proposal explicitly targets Environmental Justice or disadvantaged communities and is designed to deliver clear, measurable benefits to these areas. The project demonstrates a strong commitment to addressing the needs and priorities of these communities.</p>

**A proposal can receive a total maximum score of 95 points.*

FUNDING GUIDELINES

Applicants selected for an award will receive a subaward from Cornell University under Prime Award #CM04068 Project MOU OSP 170672. The subaward must be fully executed before invoicing can commence. Funds are available for specific costs associated with project implementation and for general overhead expenses as outlined in section 6 Budget Justification. The selected projects will require invoicing for reimbursement, including a copy of all receipts. If you are selected for funding, in addition to electronic copies of any products produced, you will be required to send progress status reports and invoices at the end of each calendar quarter, and a final report along with an evaluation of your project, electronically, to the New York Sea Grant office.

WEBINAR

An informational webinar will be held during the open application period on **Tuesday, January 27, 2026, at 12:00 PM**. This webinar will provide guidance on the application process and include presentations from project leaders about previously funded projects. Please register on the [New York Great Lakes Basin Small Grants webpage](#).

CONTACT INFORMATION

For any questions regarding this RFP, registering for the webinar, or general questions about the small grants program, please contact:

Megan Cochran (*she/her*)
Great Lakes Outreach Coordinator
New York Sea Grant
Email: mk2236@cornell.edu
Phone: (716) 270-2490

QUALITY ASSURANCE REQUIREMENTS:

Quality assurance applies to all programs/projects that involve the collection, generation, or use of environmental data associated with the mapping, modeling, monitoring, and assessment of water quality data intended for use by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) for its regulatory purposes. This includes the design or use of water quality-focused environmental technology. Guidance and resources for NYSDEC's quality assurance can be found on [NYSDEC's quality assurance webpage](#). For programs/projects that involve the assessment or monitoring of water quality, all monitoring and measurement activities conducted in the field or laboratory shall be:

- Performed in accordance with an effective quality system for planning and assessing environmental measurements and tests, and for conducting required quality assurance and quality control procedures to promote and maintain the accuracy and reliability of environmental measurements and test results. An effective Quality System includes a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) based on guidance provided by the USEPA Guidance for Quality Assurance Project Plans (QA/G-5 May 2006) or a similarly structured and purposed protocol.
- Performed by a laboratory certified by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) under the Environmental Laboratory Approval Program (ELAP) pursuant to Section 502 of the Public Health Law. This requirement shall not apply to specific parameters when NYSDOH ELAP has not issued a certificate for the specific parameter.
- Performed in a manner that ensures all requisite quality control and calibration requirements are met including field testing, sample collection, preservation, and record keeping. Basic quality assurance and quality control requirements defined in 40 CFR Part 136.7 shall be followed as well as any specific method requirements.

- Required to submit environmental monitoring data electronically to US EPA Water Quality Exchange (WQX) following the guidance as set by US EPA's WQX Submission Instructions.

The small grantee/subawardee agrees that any work products including but not limited to water quality data or environmental information; measured, generated, or developed under this small grant/subaward cannot be released, published, cited, or shared in draft or final form without the prior written authorization of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Division of Water.