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OFF-CYCLE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

PFAS Risk Communication Messaging for Water Sector Professionals (RFP 5124)

Due Date: Proposals must be received by 3:00 pm Mountain Time on Thursday, August 12, 2021. This is a fast-track RFP with modified proposal requirements outlined in the Project Duration and Proposal Preparation Instructions sections.

WRF Project Contact: Mary Messec Smith, msmith@waterrf.org

Project Sponsors

This project is co-funded by The Water Research Foundation (WRF) and the American Water Works Association (AWWA) as part of WRF's Research Priority Program.

Project Objectives

Develop informational products and tools to

- promote effective communications between water and wastewater utilities and their customers based on established risk communication practices and guidance,
- develop ready-to-use materials to support drinking water utilities with positive observations of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) from the fifth Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR5) sampling, and
- provide ready-to-use educational materials, based on known science, for the public regarding the risks of PFAS in water sources, tap water, biosolids applications, and treatment process residuals.

Budget

Applicants may request up to \$150,000 in WRF funds for this project. WRF funds requested and total project value are evaluation criteria considered in the proposal selection process.

Background and Project Rationale

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a large group of thousands of manmade chemicals that constitute public and environmental health concerns. In February 2021, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) formally announced its intent to include 29 PFAS in the fifth Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR5). Current plans are for the UCMR5 campaign to include samples from all public water systems (PWSs) serving more than 3,300 persons, as well as a group of smaller systems (n = 10,311 PWSs). Monitoring requirements are such that two to four samples will be drawn from each entry point to the distribution system for these systems. The analytical methods used will have the ability to detect 29 PFAS at 2-9 nanogram per liter (e.g., single digit part per trillion) levels. Earlier this year, EPA announced its intent to regulate two specific chemicals, perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS). This project will take place against the backdrop of an active federal data gathering and policy development environment.

In addition to drinking water regulatory activities, several states have placed moratoriums on the land application of biosolids and are considering PFAS pre-treatment activities and discharge limits for [water resource recovery facilities](#) (WRRFs). Like drinking water utilities, WRRFs are passive receivers of PFAS, yet they are ultimately tasked with ensuring PFAS removal prior to distribution of their products.

The current activity on UCMR5, as well as individual state activities on biosolids and wastewater, is occurring at a point when information on health risks is still being accrued and evaluated. These regulatory activities represent an acute communication challenge for water systems with respect to PFAS for several reasons:

1. Some states and EPA have set different health advisory levels for individual PFAS, where each agency is citing the “best available science” and appropriate levels of precaution, though all are in part a product of the moment in time when they were finalized. Individual water systems face the challenge of communicating with the public about one or more PFAS based on a limited number of observed values and limited contextual information.
2. With the capability to measure 29 different PFAS in UCMR5, and an even broader array of PFAS using [other analytical methods](#), water systems may observe PFAS for which there is no clear information establishing a level of health concern. Observers may appropriately (or inappropriately) present observed data as a health risk either based on individual PFAS or cumulative PFAS.
3. Current EPA health advisories for PFOA and PFOS (as well as state-specific risk assessments) have led some states and EPA regions to treat observed PFOA and PFOS as “semi-acute” contaminants warranting do not drink orders, remedial actions (e.g., stop use of wells, installation of treatment, change in wholesale supplier, etc.), enhanced discharge requirements, and a cessation in land application of biosolids, all of which have led to difficult conversations about the contamination of compost.

While PFAS have been a growing concern for many years, EPA’s recent activity, as well as increasing state-level regulatory actions, will bring PFAS to the attention of an even broader audience, not only for drinking water utilities but also for water resource recovery facilities. Utilities’ clear and open communications with the public on this health risk and their efforts to manage the risks are vitally important to building and maintaining trust with the communities they serve. These communications must also emphasize the role individuals play in mitigating or worsening the PFAS problem through their choices of consumer products, which ultimately end up in wastewater and landfills.

It is important for consumers to recognize that water professionals at utilities, associations, and regulatory agencies are trusted sources of information regarding PFAS in water. This task is made more difficult in a decentralized, digital media environment when news reports are often generated by advocates or influencers. Facts about PFAS may be presented or omitted in such a way as to encourage click-throughs or support certain advocacy goals. Water utilities aim to protect public health and the environment while producing and delivering reliable, high-quality water services at an affordable price. Along with professional associations and regulatory agencies, they must present a consistent, unified communications strategy to provide consumers and decision makers with reliable and trustworthy information based on the best available data and science.

Research Approach

The research approach will be left to the individual proposers. The Water Research Foundation (WRF), the American Water Works Association (AWWA), and other water sector organizations such as those listed below under Utility and Organization Participants should be included in message development.

Expected Deliverables

Researchers should consider the following deliverables in their proposals.

UCMR5-Specific Communication Materials

- A guide to facilitate timely integration of information about monitoring in UCMR5 and the possibility of PFAS observations into water system communication plans
- Resources that compile and align facts that support message maps for communicating about the risks posed by PFAS relevant to the water sector
- Example messaging around PFAS in drinking water appropriate to UCMR5 monitoring, the state of available information, and the policy environment. Testing of key messages is preferred.
 - Preparatory information about UCMR5 monitoring and PFAS
 - Communication about observed PFAS
- Example materials reflecting key messages that water systems can refine to their own situations to support implementing elements of the guide
 - Introductory brief for elected officials
 - Model Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) language
 - Model materials for outreach to customers (e.g., newsletter articles, bill inserts, flyers, etc.)
 - Model information for customers to access (e.g., website content, FAQs, presentation strategies for locally relevant information)
- A seminar or focus group with the Society of Environmental Journalism, journalism school faculties, or similar forum for purposes of sharing the information described above
- Materials on PFAS and UCMR5 aimed at assisting stakeholders to educate the media (e.g., materials that encourage a thoughtful presentation of PFAS occurrence and health risks) that could be distributed directly to the media

One Water Communication Materials

General communication materials should be developed to address PFAS concerns related to exposure via biosolids, wastewater, drinking water, and recycled water and their treatment processes and residuals:

- Consensus messaging across water utilities, water industry associations, state and federal health and regulatory agencies
- Interpretation of UCMR5 monitoring – how it relates to proposed or existing regulations, what non-detect means, why specific compounds were selected for monitoring, how UCMR5 information informs risk
- Focus group testing of terminology that is most suitable to clearly convey the issues to a non-technical audience without promoting undue alarm or sacrificing accuracy
- Scope of the PFAS contamination in the U.S. and globally
- Proposed state and federal regulatory measures and their impacts on utilities and consumers (UCMR5, PFOA/PFAS regulations in place or in process by state and federal agencies)
- Public and environmental health impacts of PFAS
- Removal techniques used by utilities, as well as effective supplemental measures available to consumers
- Contribution of water as a source of PFAS exposure to consumers in relation to other exposure pathways (e.g., cosmetics, household and personal care products, clothing and textiles)
- Risk to consumers from water sources, tap water, biosolids applications, and water and wastewater treatment process residuals

- Relative risk from other sources of PFAS exposure
- Opportunities for consumers to help protect water sources from PFAS contamination
- Community-level PFAS release reduction (e.g., pre-treatment programs)

The project should produce deliverables that can be used by utilities to provide clear and accurate information to consumers. These should be customizable to meet unique, utility-specific needs, but they may also include general informational pieces that describe various aspects of the PFAS issue. Deliverables may include multiple formats, such as story maps, apps, fact sheets, or other media, but the source documents must be editable by funding organization staff and, where applicable, by utility staff. Ideally, the deliverables will be presented in a format that summarizes the issues, then allows the reader to delve more deeply into specific aspects of the problem and the solutions. It is imperative that the work products recognize, build upon, and improve rather than repeat prior risk communication guides and PFAS-specific materials that provide sound communication practices for water systems. Available resources on effective risk communication practices are already reflected in prior work and are listed in the References and Resources section below.

Communication Plan

Please review WRF's *Project Deliverable Guidelines* for information on preparing a communication plan. The guidelines are available at <https://www.waterrf.org/project-report-guidelines>. Conference presentations, webcasts, peer review publication submissions, and other forms of project information dissemination are typically encouraged.

Project Duration

As regulatory activities like UCMR5, individual state moratoriums on biosolids, and discharge limits on wastewater are currently ongoing, the need for communication materials is eminent. Development of project deliverables early in the first quarter of 2022 is essential to ensure distribution and the opportunity for water systems to communicate with customers and incorporate guidance into customer communications like Consumer Confidence Reports. UCMR5 monitoring begins in 2023; therefore, integration of materials into water system communication plan at local level must begin in early 2022.

Dates for project activities are set below and are not subject to negotiation:

- 7/26/2021 RFP release
- 8/12/2021 RFP response due date
- 8/19/2021 Award notification date
- 8/26/2021 Additional proposal requirements due date (see items marked with * in the Proposal Preparation Instructions section below)
- 8/31/2021 Contract execution and start date
- 1/31/2022 UCMR5-specific final deliverables due date
- 2/28/2022 General communications final deliverables due date

Acceptance of each deliverable is subject to review by the funding organizations' representatives. Proposers should build review time into their schedules to meet the stated deliverable due dates above.

References and Resources

The following list includes examples of research reports, tools, and other resources that should be reviewed when developing the RFP response.

[Trending in an Instant](#), AWWA
[Contaminant Risk Management Communication Strategy and Tools](#), WRF
[Consumer Perceptions and Attitudes Toward EDCs and PPCPs in Drinking Water](#), WRF
[Communication Principles and Practices, Public Perception, and Message Effectiveness](#), WERF
[PFAS Webpage](#), EPA
[Source Water Evaluation Guide for PFAS](#), AWWA
[Summary of PFAS Toxicological Research](#), AWWA
[PFAS Resources Page](#), AWWA
[PFAS Infographic](#), AWWA
[PFAS Overview and Prevalence](#), AWWA
[PFAS Technical Resources Addressing Environmental Releases of PFAS](#), ITRC [Note in particular [Section 14 Risk Communication](#)]
[PFAS Risk Communications Hub](#), ECOS/ASTHO [Note, this material was developed under an MOU with EPA specifically on risk communication around PFAS]
[A Water Utility Manager's Guide to Community Stewardship](#), AWWA

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

The following criteria will be used to evaluate proposals:

- Understanding the problem and responsiveness to RFP
- Qualifications, capabilities, and management. Competitive candidates will demonstrate strong experience and qualifications in the following areas:
 - Excellent written communication skills within multiple forms of communications media
 - Experience communicating with multiple audiences on high-interest topics regarding consumer health impacts
 - Strong facilitation skills for achieving a consensus among stakeholders
 - Strong working knowledge of UCMR5, CCR, and EPA's regulatory determination process
- Proposed technical approach based on the tasks outlined in this RFP
- Budget and schedule

These may differ slightly from those specified in the Off-Cycle RFP Guidelines described under Proposal Preparation Instructions section below.

Proposal Preparation Instructions

Requirements for this RFP differ from WRF's standard RFP requirements. Please carefully note the packet requirements in bold below.

Qualifications submitted in response to this RFP must be prepared in accordance with the WRF document *Off-Cycle RFP Guidelines* with the modifications listed at the bottom of this section. The current version of these guidelines is available at <https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-07/OffCycle-RFP-Guidelines.pdf>, and *Instructions for Budget Preparation* are available at <https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2019-09/InstructionsforBudgetPreparation.pdf>. The guidelines contain instructions for the technical aspects, financial statements, indirect costs, and administrative requirements that the applicant must follow when preparing a proposal.

Proposals that include the production of web- or software-based tools, such as websites, Excel spreadsheets, Access databases, etc., must follow the criteria outlined for web tools presented in the Web Tool Criteria and Feasibility Study for The Water Research Foundation Project Deliverables at

<https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-07/WebToolCriteria.pdf>.

Modifications to Requirements

Items marked with an asterisk will be required by August 26, 2021, *if the proposal is selected for funding*. Items in bold font are due on Thursday, August 12, 2021.

Proposal Packet One

1. **Cover Sheet is required** and is available at https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-07/1_ProposalCoverWorksheet.dot.
2. Project Abstract is not required. Instead, the selected team will submit a Project Information Summary within one week of award announcement. It is available at <https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-04/ProjectInformationSummary.docx>.
3. **Project Description** is replaced by the following items:
 - a. Qualitative and quantitative descriptions of previous communications messaging experience, particularly with respect to the water industry, regulatory activities, the news media, advocacy groups, and risk communications pertaining to public health. (max. 4 pages)
 - b. Research approach, description of deliverables, budget narrative, communications plan, and a schedule of deliverables that meets the time expectations outlined above for the first quarter of 2022. Anticipated value with respect to proposed efforts and budget will be a selection consideration. (max. 11 pages)
4. Applications Potential is not required.
5. *Quality Assurance/Quality Control is not required *unless the proposal is selected for funding*.
6. *Management plan is not required *unless the proposal is selected for funding*.
7. **Communication Plan** is not required as a separate document but should be included in the 11-page modified **Project Description (b)**.
8. *References are optional *unless proposal is selected for funding*.
9. *Licenses and Inventions are not required *unless proposal is selected for funding*.
10. **Budget Narrative** is not required as a separate document but should be included in the 11-page modified **Project Description**.
11. ***Schedule** is not required as a separate document but should be included in the 11-page modified Project Description. A more detailed schedule will be required if the proposal is selected for funding.
12. **Current and Pending Forms** are required and is available at https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-07/12_CurrentandPendingForm.dot.
13. **Third-Party Contributions** are required.
14. **Curriculum Vitae or Resumes for Key Team Members** are required (max. two pages/person)

Proposal Packet Two

15. **Budget Form** is required and is available at https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-07/15_BudgetForm.xlsx.
16. **Financial Statements** (for the last fiscal year) are required.
17. **Indirect Cost Documentation** (for the last fiscal year) is required.
18. **Financial Grant Management Capabilities Form** is required and is available at https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-07/18_FinancialGrantMgmtCapabilities.dot.
19. Certification and Assurance Forms (3 forms) are not required *unless proposal is selected for funding*. They are available at https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-07/19_CertificationsandAssurancesForm.dot.
20. **IRS Form W-9** is required.

21. *Co-funding Support Form is not required *unless proposal is selected for funding and additional co-funding is provided*. It is available at https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-07/21_ResearchAreaCoFundingSupportForm.dot.

Eligibility to Submit Proposals

Proposals will be accepted from domestic or international entities, including educational institutions, research organizations, governmental agencies, and consultants or other for-profit entities.

WRF's Board of Directors has established a Timeliness Policy that addresses researcher adherence to the project schedule. The policy can be reviewed at <https://www.waterrf.org/policies>. Researchers who are late on any ongoing WRF-sponsored studies without approved no-cost extensions are not eligible to be named participants in any proposals. Direct any questions about eligibility to the WRF project contact listed at the top of this RFP.

Part of a successful response to this RFP will be the ability of the research team to contract quickly with WRF. In your response to this RFP, please indicate that you are able to accept the following terms:

- This project will be contract for hire.
- Contracting must be completed and executed by August 31, 2021, or two weeks after selection/award. This is non-negotiable – please confirm your acceptance and confirmation of this deadline.
- WRF will own the intellectual property of the final results.
- Liability insurance of \$1 million US dollars.
- Applicable law and venue is Colorado.
- Must comply with all US laws and regulations, including 2 CFR 200, GAAP, and guidelines found in WRF Off-Cycle Proposal Guidelines, available at <https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-07/OffCycle-RFP-Guidelines.pdf>

Administrative, Cost, and Audit Standards

WRF's research program standards for administrative, cost, and audit compliance are based upon, and comply with, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Uniform Grants Guidance (UGG), 2 CFR Part 200 Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, and 48 CFR 31.2 Contracts with Commercial Organizations. These standards are referenced in WRF's *Guidelines for Research Priority Program Proposals*, and include specific guidelines outlining the requirements for indirect cost negotiation agreements, financial statements, and the Statement of Direct Labor, Fringe Benefits, and General Overhead. Inclusion of indirect costs must be substantiated by a negotiated agreement or appropriate Statement of Direct Labor, Fringe Benefits, and General Overhead. Well in advance of preparing the proposal, your research and financial staff should review the detailed instructions included in WRF's Off-Cycle Proposal Guidelines and consult the *Instructions for Budget Preparation*, available respectively at <https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2021-07/OffCycle-RFP-Guidelines.pdf> and <https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2019-09/InstructionsforBudgetPreparation.pdf>.

Budget and Funding Information

The maximum funding available from WRF for this project is \$150,000. The applicant must contribute additional resources equivalent to at least 33 percent of the project award. For example, if an applicant requests \$100,000 from WRF, an additional \$33,000 or more must be contributed by the applicant. Acceptable forms of applicant contribution include cost-share, applicant in-kind, or third-party in-kind

that comply with 2 CFR Part 200.306 cost sharing or matching. The applicant may elect to contribute more than 33 percent to the project, but the maximum WRF funding available remains fixed at \$150,000. **Proposals that do not meet the minimum 33 percent of the project award will not be accepted.** Consult the *Instructions for Budget Preparation* available at <https://www.waterrf.org/sites/default/files/file/2019-09/InstructionsforBudgetPreparation.pdf> for more information and definitions of terms.

Period of Performance

It is WRF's policy to negotiate a reasonable schedule for each research project. Once this schedule is established, WRF and its sub-recipients have a contractual obligation to adhere to the agreed-upon schedule. Under WRF's No-Cost Extension Policy, a project schedule cannot be extended more than nine months beyond the original contracted schedule, regardless of the number of extensions granted. The policy can be reviewed at <https://www.waterrf.org/policies>. Due to time constraints related to UCMR5 activities, the deliverables related to UCMR5 must be received according to the established schedule. More flexibility may be granted for the general communications deliverables after the UCMR5 deliverables are received.

Utility and Organization Participation

WRF encourages participation from water utilities and other organizations in WRF research. Participation can occur in a variety of ways, including direct participation, in-kind contributions, or in-kind services. To facilitate their participation, WRF has provided contact information, on the last page of this RFP, of utilities and other organizations that have indicated an interest in this research. Proposers are responsible for negotiating utility and organization participation in their particular proposals. The listed utilities and organizations are under no obligation to participate, and the proposer is not obligated to include them in their particular proposal.

Application Procedure and Deadline

Proposals are accepted exclusively online in PDF format, and they must be fully submitted before 3:00 pm Mountain Time on Thursday, August 12, 2021.

The online proposal system allows submission of your documents until the date and time stated in this RFP. Link to online proposal system: <https://forms.waterrf.org/212006198984865>. To avoid the risk of the system closing before you press the submit button, do not wait until the last minute to complete your submission.

Questions to clarify the intent of this RFP and WRF's administrative, cost, and financial requirements may be addressed to the WRF project contact, Mary Messec Smith at (303) 347-6134 or msmith@waterrf.org. Questions related to proposal submittal through the online system may be addressed to Caroline Bruck at (303) 347-6118 or cbruck@waterrf.org.

Utility and Organization Participants

The following utilities have indicated an interest in possible participation in this research. This information is updated within 24 business hours after a utility or an interested organization submits a volunteer form, and this RFP will be re-posted with the new information. **(Depending upon your settings, you may need to click refresh on your browser to load the latest file.)**

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