



Proposal guidelines

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Proposal guidelines

The following information provides applicants with an overview of the Aquatic Ecosystems Restoration Fund (AERF), and guidance on developing a proposal. Proponents are **required** to submit the proposal as part of the AERF application process if they want to be considered for funding. Should your project meet with the program's requirements and is chosen as a project, you will be contacted by your DFO regional office to provide further details about your project as part of the development of the contribution agreement. All sections of the proposal must be fully completed to be considered for funding under the AERF.

Information provided to Fisheries and Oceans Canada will be treated in accordance with the *Access to Information Act* and the *Privacy Act*. These laws govern, protect and limit the collection, use and disclosure of personal, financial and technical information by federal government departments and agencies.

A. Aquatic Ecosystems Restoration Fund context

The Government has established in 2017 the Coastal Restoration Fund (CRF), a five year initiative under the Ocean Protection Plan (OPP) that allowed to facilitate collaborations that contribute to developing and implementing coastal restoration plans, identifying restoration priorities, implementing habitat restoration projects, and addressing threats to marine species (e.g., whales) located on Canada's coasts.

In 2021, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has been mandated to renew and expand the Coastal Restoration Fund (CRF). As part of the OPP renewal in 2022, the department launched the new Aquatic Ecosystems Restoration Fund (AERF), a five year program that will provide \$75M in funding sources for aquatic restoration initiatives in Canadian waters.

AERF program objectives

The program will build upon, as well as expand the CRF to address human impacts on Canadian coastal aquatic environments (e.g., climate change, sedimentation issues, fish passage, erosion, algae bloom, agricultural runoff ...etc.). The renewed program with its expanded scope and mandate will support non-profit organizations, community based organizations; Indigenous organizations, and academic researchers or institutions to achieve restoration activities that help address the root cause of impacts along the coast and further in-land.

The Aquatic Ecosystems Restoration Fund will supports efforts that:

- contribute to strategic planning as well as identifying and responding to restoration priorities
- develop and maintain multi-disciplinary approaches to the restoration and rehabilitation of aquatic habitats

- support co-benefits of any activities (e.g., nature based solutions to climate change, social license to operate)
- recognizes the importance of outreach and education in support of changing of behaviors that impact habitat
- contribute to long-term sustainability
- encourage and build local community capacity and
- involve local communities but all levels of government (e.g., Indigenous Peoples, provinces and territories) in order to support a more coordinated approach

The AERF will prioritize Indigenous led projects as well as projects that clearly demonstrate the inclusion of Indigenous partners (i.e., as part of the development, design, and implementation). This will be defined as follows:

- **Indigenous led project** - An Indigenous-led project is one in which an indigenous organization government, individual, board, commission, community, association or authority, etc. is responsible/liable for the project – i.e., the Indigenous entity is the signatory to the contribution agreement.

Note: in some specific circumstances, it will be possible to have a non-Indigenous co-signatory on the agreement (i.e., the Indigenous organization must use a third party to flow funds to the projects) – though the agreement will need to clearly articulate that the Indigenous organization is the project lead.

- **Indigenous partner** - An Indigenous partner is a collaborating Indigenous organization government, individual, board, commission, community, association or authority, etc. that plays an integral role in the planning, development, implementation, monitoring and/or reporting on a project for which another entity is the signatory to the contribution agreement with the agreement signatory being responsible/liable for the project.

Preference will also be given to those projects that:

- address at least one of the program priority (see next section below)
- are medium to large projects (e.g., \$200,000 to \$1,000,000 per fiscal year), though projects as low as \$50,000 (minimum request allowed per fiscal year) will be considered if they are of strategic value
- engage a broad number of partners
- provide opportunities for skills development and capacity building initiatives;
- contribute to climate change mitigation and
- demonstrate outreach and education efforts aligned with minimizing human impact on aquatic environments

AERF Priorities

The following represents the general areas and activities for the program:

Priority areas	Priority activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- areas with important habitats for regional priority species- areas of historic development- areas impacted due to climate change or naturally degraded- spawning, overwintering and thermal refuge habitats- estuaries and coastal areas that support key ecosystems components	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- projects that contribute to the conservation and protection of valued species and habitats- support or develop watershed or regionally-specific restoration plans- address or mitigate the impact of climate change on aquatic habitat- skills development as well as education and outreach- establish sustainable partnerships- removal/mitigation of barriers to restore aquatic connectivity

Government support – stacking limit

The stacking limit is the total financial support for an AERF project coming from all levels of government (i.e., federal, provincial, territorial and municipal); it cannot exceed 100% of the eligible expenditures of the activity, and of the total project value. The cost of activities or governmental in-kind support funded by other governmental contribution programs, as directly related to implementing an AERF project, will count towards the stacking limit.

B. General program information

Eligible groups

Eligible groups under the AERF include:

- Indigenous organizations (e.g., Indigenous communities, Tribal Councils, Governments of self-governing First Nations, Indigenous conservation groups)
- community based organizations (i.e., Non-profit organizations situated in municipalities or regions, including stewardship bodies)
- non-profit organizations including environmental non-governmental organizations and stewardship bodies and
- academic researchers/institutions across the country

Eligible activities

The program supports projects that focus on priority areas that have the greatest strategic value (e.g., with the greatest benefit to specific coastal ecosystems threats) and on activities that address the root causes of impacts on coastal areas.

The AERF will support a broad range of activities, including:

- **pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, diagnostic studies, environmental evaluations, information gathering, proposal development, studies, planning, mapping and reporting**

This applies to preparation or planning work that is directly linked to physical restoration work and/or contributes to the program objectives. Any studies or planning activities must be associated with a specific restoration project or with the program (e.g., contributing to the program's priorities). Standalone studies or planning projects would not be eligible under this program.

- **rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating aquatic habitat**

This includes activities that rebuild, restore and rehabilitate aquatic habitats. It could include, but is not limited to, activities that contribute to the return of degraded or altered marine, estuarine, coastal, freshwater environments as well as habitats of diadromous, amphidromous, potamodromous, and oceanodromous fish to functioning habitats or techniques that provide species access to their historic habitats (e.g. removal of old dams that impede fish passage, removal of small dams or culverts and replacing them with bridges, removal of creosote-treated wood, etc.).

The program will also support restoration projects that contribute to the conservation and protection of commercially, recreationally and traditionally valued species (e.g., Wild Atlantic / Pacific salmon, American eel) and habitats (e.g., riverine fish habitat, estuaries, wetlands, salt marshes, eelgrass beds, riparian zones, spawning habitats); and address multiple threats/stressors and rehabilitate areas affected by cumulative impacts of various anthropogenic activities (e.g., the negative impacts of climate change). This is usually done through physical work such as construction, architectural, engineering, maintenance and project design activities that are related to aquatic restoration (e.g., bank stabilization, shore line protection, barrier island/headland restoration, phytoremediation, removal of debris and aquatic invasive species directly related to an in-water restoration initiative etc.).

All projects must have an evidence-base that demonstrates the project's feasibility (i.e., the program will not fund experimental or fundamental research or activities).

- **activities that align and/or support watershed or regionally-specific restoration plans**

This applies to restoration plans that contribute to the rehabilitation of important aquatic habitats with high ecological value and, that address and mitigate the impacts of climate change on regional fisheries resources and aquatic habitats (e.g., living shorelines, carbon sequestration, mitigation of sea-level rise, etc.).

- **skills development including management and technical training, the establishment of partnerships, as well as education and outreach**

This includes activities that contribute to the long-term sustainability of the project, for example, management and technical training or partnerships that support long-term maintenance and monitoring of restoration projects and aquatic habitat (e.g., workshops, consultation). It also includes education and outreach efforts aligned with minimizing human impact on aquatic environments.

Eligible expenses

Under the AERF eligible expenses are limited to:

- salaries and wages and employer mandatory benefits of non-core personnel
- professional and technical services (including construction and related costs)
- purchase or rental of machinery and equipment
- materials and supplies
- rental of facilities
- training fees and material
- travel, including accommodation, meals, and allowances, based on National Joint Council Directives on travel guidelines
- hosting of conferences, workshops and meetings
- maintenance and repair
- hospitality and related expenses in compliance with the Directive on Travel, Hospitality, Conference and Event Expenditures
- further distribution of funding to an agency or a third party
- ceremonial costs, including any ceremonial offerings, where the funding recipient is an Indigenous group that possesses Indigenous knowledge relevant to the initiative
- honoraria for:
 - elders and/or
 - Indigenous knowledge holders in recognition of providing Indigenous knowledge or community knowledge relevant to the initiative
- administrative overhead up to 10% of eligible costs of the program and
- any GST/HST that is not reimbursable by Canada Revenue Agency and any PST not reimbursable by the provinces

Ineligible activities and costs

The program cannot support activities that do not support the objectives or that are outside the scope of the program. For example:

- activities that solely support anthropogenic impacts on non-aquatic environments (e.g., project with a focus on migratory birds)
- activities that lend themselves to the development of new commercial and recreational fisheries' habitats
- stocking, unless directly associated with aquatic restoration (e.g., seeding for artificial reefs, or shoreline stabilization)

- regulatory requirements (e.g., offsetting projects)
- decontamination of sites as the principle focus of a project (e.g., capping)
- training unrelated to the aquatic restoration project
- removal/recovery of host ghost debris or ghost netting (or other detritus cleaning) or aquatic invasive species, as the principle focus of a project. However, if it is a small component of a larger project it may be permissible
- construction of a replacement boat launch, pier, fishing platform, etc. and
- shoreline restoration, not associated to fish habitat restoration

C. Evaluation of proposals

Each proposal will be initially screened to determine if it meets the minimum requirements to be considered an eligible AERF project. The initial review will assess:

1. Is the applicant eligible under the program?
2. Does the project proposal address the objectives of the program (e.g., are the activities and expenses within the scope of the program)?
3. Does the amount request fit within the program’s funding profile?

If a project is deemed eligible, it is then assessed to determine whether or not it is to be considered a potential AERF project. The evaluation will assess each project based on the information provided in the proposal. It will be based on:

- **strategic value:** does it address program priorities;
- **ecosystem value:** as defined by the benefits of a project to the ecological, biological, and ecological services (i.e., the benefits people obtain from ecosystems, such as clean water); and
- **technical/program specifics:** does the project have potential success as presented (i.e., is the projects technically sound).

D. Instructions to complete the proposal

Please follow the step-by-step instructions below to ensure your proposal is complete. For any inquiries related to the application process, please contact your regional DFO office at the corresponding email address listed on the [AERF website](#).

The project title will be used in all communications related to the project (suggested format: water body name followed by a brief description of the project, such as “Eastville Coastal Bank Restoration”).

1. Project title

The project title will be used in all communications related to the project (suggested format: water body name followed by a brief description of the project, such as “Eastville Coastal Bank Restoration”).

2. AERF funding request

This table will be automatically completed from the amounts identified in Table(s) 16 (i.e., AERF Expenditures/Budget). Please note that the maximum annual funding amount is \$1,000,000 per year, for a maximum of \$4,000,000 for the whole duration of the project.

3. Application information

Enter the full legal name of your group/institution/body/organization. If the project is selected for funding, you will enter into an agreement with Fisheries and Oceans Canada and payments will be made to this group/institution/body/organization name.

4. Organization description

Please provide a general description of your group/institution/body/organization (or on the group implementing the project), including your organization's mandate and objectives.

5. Project team experience

Please provide the details on the qualification and experience of your team relevant to the project proposal. This will be used to demonstrate your group's experience and capacity to deliver on your initiative.

6. Project location

Additional sets of rows should be added for projects with more than one work site. The preferred format for identifying a project location(s) is in latitude and longitude decimal coordinates in degrees, minutes and seconds.

7. Project overview

Provide an overview of the project including the ecological need for the project and issues you intend to address. The overview need to include the objective(s), goal(s), expected outcome(s) and, has to demonstrate what need(s) your project will answer.

8. Project description

Identify how the project will help to address direct and indirect impacts to fish and fish habitat on Canadian coastal aquatic environments within the timeframe of the project, and what methods will be used to do so. Also provide a clear explanation on how your project meet AERF objectives and priority activities based on your project goals and objectives, and identify the expected results and how they will be measured.

9. Broader initiatives or plan

Is your project linked to a broader initiative or plan, such as a restoration plan, a regional watershed initiative, an aquatic species recovery, or a climate change adaptation initiative? (Yes/No)

If yes, please indicate the initiative or plan and how your project supports the plan.

10. Priority areas

Does your proposed project address issues in any of the AERF priority areas? (Yes/No)

If so, please list which project activities will address what program priority area, and what is the expected outcome. You can find the AERF priority areas in Section A of this document.

11. Target and benefiting species

Please list any targeted aquatic species of the project. Further, please clarify the anticipated benefits from the project for these species (e.g., how the project will contribute to the conservation and protection of commercially, recreationally and traditionally valued species).

12. Skills development, education and outreach

Does your project include a skills development, education and/or outreach component? (Yes/No)

If so, please list the different initiatives that will be part of your activities, and provide clarifications on how they will contribute to the long term benefits of the project.

13. Ongoing sustainability of the project

Describe the measures that will be carried out to ensure on-going sustainable results of the project and its activities beyond the life of this project. For projects that involve construction, please indicate measures and/or approaches to reduce the need for ongoing maintenance.

14. Work plan and activities

Please identify key activities within your project and provide a description (including the techniques and/or methods that will be used) as well as the associated estimated budget for each of them. Activities should be organized in fiscal years and there may be several activities (**maximum of 5**) for each fiscal year. The overall AERF amounts for each fiscal year should coincide with the total fiscal year amounts in Section 16.

For example – a \$450,000 project over 3 years

Fiscal year	Activity title	General description of the activities/ key stages to be undertaken – 2-3 sentences max	Estimated cost
2023-24	Project planning – site selection	Site selection for eelgrass restoration, deployment of artificial reefs, and watershed survey	\$17,000
	Eelgrass site preparation	Characterization and preparation of sites	\$100,000
2024-25	Eelgrass restoration	Restoration of eelgrass beds through seedling and transplants	\$247,500
2025-26	Eelgrass monitoring	Monitoring of eelgrass beds development and species colonization of restored beds	\$85,500

15. Performance measures

For every fiscal year, please identify planned project performance for the items listed below.

Example table:

Planned performance measure	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Areas of freshwater environment restored (sq metres/km)	310 sq. metres	100 sq. metres	100 sq. meters	0
Areas of marine or estuarine environment restored (sq metres/km)	0	0	400 sq. meters	0

# of activities (as part of this contribution agreement) directly contributing to carbon storage (carbon sequestration)	2	1	3	0
# of activities (as part of this contribution agreement) directly and indirectly contributing to climate change impact mitigation	2	0	0	1
# of Indigenous groups engaged and/or involved in the project	1	0	0	1
# of non-Indigenous partners engaged and/or involved in the project (the Recipient and DFO must not be counted as partners):	2	2	2	2
# of jobs created	6	8	5	2
# of people trained as part of capacity building initiatives	22	10	5	0
# of Indigenous individuals trained as part of capacity building initiatives	6	6	6	6
# of outreach events conducted (presentations, workshops etc.)	2	0	0	2

16. AERF expenditures/budget

Please select the corresponding fiscal years and fill the budget tables for AERF funded expenditures. Do not include support from other sources, outside of AERF.

The expense categories use the program’s activity eligibility as headings and the level of detail required for each category will depend on the value of a specific expense. The table below provides an example of the amount of detail required for each budget line item. **Please note that for the proposal, the expense description requires only a certain degree of detail, understanding at this juncture this information is only preliminary. As you develop the required expense descriptions for this table, please think about the activities listed in Table 14 and reflect the associated expenditures in the table below.** Should your project be selected, further detail under the expense description may be required to develop the contribution agreement following discussions with the AERF regional officers.

Example table:

Expense category	Expense description	\$ Requested to AERF
Salaries and wages and employer mandatory benefits	Project Lead 1 person @ 40 weeks x 40 h/week @ \$35/h = \$56,000 Environmental Officer 1 person @ 40 weeks x 35 h/week @ \$19.48/h = \$27,272	\$83,272
Professional and technical services	Environmental Consultant (bilingual) 1 person @ 500 h x \$24/h = \$12,000 Webmaster 1 person @ 25h x \$50/h = \$1,250	\$13,250

Materials and supplies	5000 Trees @ \$5 each = \$25,000 Shrubs: \$3,105 + delivery charges \$250 = \$3,355 Planting equipment (Gas and oil for trimmer, shovels, gloves, tape, etc) = \$1,250 Geomatic tools (ArcGIS), cadastral and wildlife data) = \$15,000	\$44,605
Purchase or rental of machinery or equipment	Water pump: \$25,000 Purchase of a truck = \$45,000 (versus rental for 48 months at \$1,250 per month: \$60,000)	\$70,000
Travel, including accommodation, meals and allowances based on the NJC Directive on Travel	Meeting with landowners and primary stakeholders : 4 584 km x 0,50\$/km = \$2,292	\$2,292
Honoraria for Elders and Indigenous knowledge holders	Discussion sessions between the Indigenous Elder and the project consultant: 2 days x \$250/day	\$500
Administrative overhead up to 10% of eligible costs of the program	Rent, office supplies, phone line, internet, electricity, etc.	\$20,000
Total		\$233,919

17. Collaboration among multiple stakeholders and partners (confirmed/anticipated)

Does the project involve or engage Indigenous organizations and other stakeholders (e.g., academia, communities, conservation groups, other levels of government) in the planning, implementation and management of the initiative? If so, please indicate whether they are confirmed or anticipated partners, and provide a short description of the support offered. Add rows as required.

In specific cases where DFO or another Federal Department or Agency contribute to the project, please explain how your project will build on the activities or measures that have received full or partial funding from DFO or other federal funding programs.

18. Permits

Are permits required to complete this project? If so, please list the necessary permits associated

with the project. Note that should your proposal is successful, the required permits will need to be in place on time before the work starts.

19. Additional information

Please provide any additional information that may be relevant to the project and that has not been provided previously.

20. Signature

By selecting the checkbox, you confirm that all information contained in the proposal form is accurate.

The proposal must be e-mailed to the appropriate regional Fisheries and Oceans Canada e-mail address listed on the AERF website. Confirmation of receipt of each application will be sent within 5 business days; a file number will be assigned for use in future correspondence.