

# National Rural Water Association

*Proposal for*

## Apprenticeship Building America, Round 2 (ABA2) Grant Program Application

*Formal Response to Funding Opportunity No. FOA-ETA-24-04*

*Due Date: April 15, 2024*

### Category 3: Abstract

Prepared for:



U.S. Department of Labor  
Employment and Training Administration

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Prepared by:



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NATIONAL  
RURAL WATER  
ASSOCIATION

*America's Largest Utility Membership*



**Abstract [4.a.1]**

<p><b>Lead Applicant/Organization Name:</b> National Rural Water Association</p>
<p><b>Lead Applicant entity type:</b> 501(c)6</p>
<p><b>Lead Applicant City and State:</b> Duncan, Oklahoma</p>
<p><b>Select Grant Category:</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> Ensuring Equitable Apprenticeship Pathways and Partnerships Trough Pre-Apprenticeship Leading to RAP Enrollment: up to \$4 million  <input type="checkbox"/> Creation of Education System-aligned Pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship Programs: up to \$4 million  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Registered Apprenticeship Hubs up to Registered Apprenticeship Hubs: up to \$6 million for projects with a local/regional or statewide geographic scope; and up to \$8 million for projects with a national geographic scope</p>
<p><b>Project Title:</b> NRWA Diversifying and Expanding the Water Workforce</p>
<p><b>Funding Amount Requested:</b> \$8 million</p>
<p><b>Applicant Geographic Scope of Proposed Project:</b> National Geographic Scope to be Targeted</p>
<p><b>Populations to be Served:</b> All, with an emphasis on underrepresented populations, underserved communities, unemployed workers, underemployed workers, incumbent worker, veterans, and spouses of veterans, youth (in and out of high school), employed and unemployed youth, justice-involved youth, youth from underrepresented populations, foster youth, parenting youth, housing insecure youth</p>
<p><b>Required Partners:</b> (Organization Name and Entity Type) Vermont Works for Women, Community-Based Organization  <b>Other Required Category 3 Partners:</b> Kentucky State Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Commerce – Office of Skills Development, Bluegrass Workforce Innovation Board, Cumberlands Workforce Development Board, Building Bridges, Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program, Green River Area Development District, Indiana Department of Environmental Management, InVets, River Valley Resources, West Kentucky Workforce</p>
<p><b>Optional Partners:</b> (Organization names and entity type) All the following partners are State Affiliate nonprofit organizations: Alabama Rural Water Association, Arkansas Rural Water Association, California Rural Water Association, Colorado Rural Water Association, Delaware Rural Water Association, Florida Rural Water Association, Hawaii Rural Water Association, Idaho Rural Water Association, Illinois Rural Water Association, Alliance of Indiana Rural Water, Kansas Rural Water Association, Kentucky Rural Water Association, Louisiana Rural Water Association, Main Rural Water Association, Maryland Rural Water Association, Minnesota Rural Water Association, Mississippi Rural Water Association, Missouri Rural</p>



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Water Association, Montana Rural Water Systems, New Jersey Rural Water Association, New Mexico Rural Water Association, New York Rural Water Association, North Carolina Rural Water Association, North Dakota Rural Water Association, Ohio Rural Water Association, Oklahoma Rural Water Association, Oregon Association of Water Utilities, Pennsylvania Rural Water Association, Rhode Island Rural Water Association, Rural Water Association of Utah, South Carolina Rural Water Association, South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems, Tennessee Association of Utility Districts, Texas Rural Water Association, Vermont Rural Water Association, Virginia Rural Water Association, Evergreen Rural Water of Washington, West Virginia Rural Water Association, and Wyoming Association of Rural Water Systems

**Project Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to develop a more robust NRWA Registered Apprenticeship Hub (HUB) by increasing the number of underserved communities and underrepresented populations entering a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) in the water industry, giving them the opportunity to become **Safe Water Professionals** (Water Systems Operation Specialist) or **Clean Water Professional** (Wastewater Systems Operation Specialist). Through incentivization, NRWA will leverage the participation of 200 new employers (utilities) to mentor the Apprentices, ultimately, providing them with sustainable living wage jobs. This program will also help to fill the growing decline in Apprentices in the water industry, as the current generation retires at a high rate; thus, securing the future of the water industry by ensuring there is a licensed operator at each utility.

**Subrecipient Activities:** The subrecipients will be Vermont Works for Women and the 39 NRWA State Affiliates, with the Apprenticeship Coordinators being the primary oversight for the program in each state. In collaboration with NRWA, the State Affiliates will implement this program by identifying new employers interested in participating in the program and placing Apprentices based on underserved communities and underrepresented populations. NRWA will work with Vermont Works for Women to develop the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) training and develop additional resources and materials to ensure this concept is a primary focus of the program. Furthermore, Vermont Works for Women will help develop the Good Jobs workshop in a box, which the State Affiliates will provide to each participating employer, ensuring they complete the training and understand the intent of the program. The Apprenticeship Coordinators will be responsible for overseeing the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, which will be reported quarterly to the DOL.

**List of Credentials(s) to be awarded:** NRWA HUB Apprentices have the opportunity to become either a Safe Water Professional (Water Systems Operation Specialist) or Clean Water Professional (Wastewater Systems Operation Specialist), both of which are based on the National Guideline Standards of Apprenticeship for Water and Wastewater System Operation Specialists with the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, which were approved by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship. The Standards are registered as part of the National Apprenticeship System in accordance with the



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standards established by the Secretary of Labor. NRWA designed the National Guideline Standards with substantial input from small and rural water system managers and board members. These same systems are eligible borrowers and fulfill the U.S. Department of Labor’s requirement of an employer driven model of workforce development.

Given that the NRWA National Guideline Standards offer flexibility to the NRWA State Affiliate program sponsors, certifications vary from state to state. In most State Affiliate RAPs, during the course of the apprenticeship, Apprentices will also obtain one or multiple classifications of a State Water/Wastewater Operator License(s). In many cases, multiple safety related certifications such as OSHA 10, Trenching and Shoring, Competent Person, Confined Spaces are also attained. NRWA is also developing industry recognized credentials such as Code of Conduct, Emergency Response Certification, and Cybersecurity Awareness.

**SUMMARY OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:** NRWA will build upon the foundation of its Registered Apprenticeship Hub to work collaboratively with the 39 participating State Affiliates with established RAPs to broaden the reach of the program and target apprentices in underserved communities and underrepresented populations. In partnership with two Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance organizations, NRWA will create a diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) training program for all Apprenticeship Coordinators, who are responsible for overseeing the RAPs implementation within each participating state. Additionally, NRWA will work with a contractor for the implementation of a Good Jobs workshop in a box for all participating State Affiliates (SAs) to educate them on the most imperative elements of this proposal – (1) expanding the accessibility of DEIA; (2) job quality (adhering to *The Good Jobs Principles*); (3) support for high-quality, scalable and sustainable programs, integrating the pre-determined evidence-based approaches; and (4) identifying new opportunities for innovation, engagement, and ease of access. NRWA will provide \$20,000 stipends over the four-year program period to employers (utilities) willing to accept apprentices and with available mentors as incentives to increase the number of Apprentices being placed with utilities. These \$20,000 stipends will generate interest among 50 new utilities per year, or 200 total. Ultimately, yielding approximately 200 new Apprentices projected to graduate by the close of the award period and filling a growing gap in the number of **Safe Water Professionals** (Water Systems Operation Specialist) and **Clean Water Professionals** (Wastewater Systems Operation Specialist) in each state.

**Public Contact Information:**

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