

**2026 Ocean Biodiversity Program Regional Engagement Grants
– Chesapeake Bay, Mobile Bay, and Puget Sound
Request for Proposals**



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RFP Title: 2026 Ocean Biodiversity Program Regional Engagement Grants – Chesapeake Bay, Mobile Bay, and Puget Sound

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RFP Website: <https://blueconvergence.org/2026-ocean-biodiversity-engagement-RFP/>

Proposal Submission Form: <https://wkf.ms/4d7plSQ>

Important dates:

Issuance of RFP	March 2, 2026
Informational Webinar	March 4, 2026
Deadline for submission of proposals	April 15, 2026
Proposal teams notified of final funding decisions	July 1, 2026
Anticipated start date of awarded agreement(s)	August 1, 2026

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About Blue Convergence Fund (BCF)

Blue Convergence Fund¹ (BCF) is a grantmaking non-profit dedicated to advancing ocean and coastal sustainability by turning knowledge into action through funding initiatives grounded in community needs. BCF's work is rooted in over 20 years of experiential learning about how to more tightly connect science and policy.

BCF Approach

BCF strives to develop innovative, equitable, and durable solutions to complex challenges facing the global oceans by connecting knowledge, communities and governance. Our work is predicated on the belief that the most actionable ideas emerge when diverse minds come together.

Blue Convergence Fund believes that strong projects:

- Foster an open, welcoming, and accessible environment that integrates dialogue among people with unique backgrounds, circumstances, needs, perspectives, and ways of thinking and/or knowing.
- Seek and embrace ideas and individuals across multi-dimensional attributes, including age, race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, culture, religion, education level, income, and socioeconomic status.
- Expand and strengthen relationships between communities, especially those with perspectives, knowledge, and wisdom that have been overlooked, underrepresented, and/or undervalued.
- Distribute and communicate project goals, methods, results, and materials to broad audiences in an open and accessible manner.
- More about our approach to grantmaking and community engagement can be found on the “Resources” page of our website.²

Scope of Work

Background – BCF's Ocean Biodiversity Program

Ocean biodiversity is a living foundation for the United States' natural heritage, well-being, and resilience. Communities depend on diverse ocean life for cultural identity, food security, livelihoods, and safety—from working waterfronts and subsistence practices to recreation and coastal protection. Yet many coastal and marine ecosystems are experiencing rapid change and loss driven by climate impacts, pollution, development pressures, and competing uses. There is an urgent need to make ocean biodiversity knowledge more actionable, trusted, and used—so communities and decision-makers can navigate real trade-offs and steward ocean life as a national asset. BCF's Ocean Biodiversity program is designed to meet this need by funding community-led, place-based

¹ For more information about BCF visit <https://blueconvergence.org/>.

² <https://blueconvergence.org/resources/>

“knowledge use” case study projects that connect real decision contexts to the best available knowledge, partnerships, and tools—and then translating what is learned into evidence that can be used in decision-making.

RFP Intent, Focus, and Scope

This RFP seeks engagement projects that unlock and mobilize existing knowledge for action and decision-making associated with ocean, coastal, and/or estuarine biodiversity. Projects should prioritize relationship-building, knowledge exchange, synthesis/translation, and the development of products or processes that help communities and decision-makers use what is already known to inform policies, plans, permits, restoration actions, or management decisions. New research should *not* be the primary focus of proposed work. If a limited research component is necessary, proposals must explain what is needed, why it is needed, how that need was identified, and how the research will be integrated with engagement and uptake activities to produce decision-ready outputs.

Proposed projects should be **up to 18 months in duration** with a **maximum total budget of \$50,000 USD**. Projects should **plan to start between August 1, 2026 and September 1, 2026**.

Geographies

This RFP is limited to three focus geographies in the United States:

- Chesapeake Bay,
- Mobile Bay, and
- Puget Sound.

Eligible projects must center on ocean, coastal, and/or estuarine biodiversity within the Bay/Sound/coastal systems and their connected nearshore waters. This includes estuaries, brackish waters, tidal wetlands, and tidal river reaches where freshwater–saltwater interactions shape biodiversity outcomes. Projects may also include work in associated coastal watersheds, but only when upstream actions or decisions clearly affect downstream ocean, coastal, and/or estuarine biodiversity and the proposed engagement is tied to a defined decision pathway in the Bay/Sound/coastal system. BCF strongly prefers project teams that are based in, or have sustained presence in, the focus region. If a lead organization is not based in the region, the proposal must demonstrate credible, pre-existing relationships and local partnership capacity to carry out the work.

Projects focused primarily on inland freshwater biodiversity with no clear downstream ocean, coastal, and/or estuarine biodiversity link are out of scope and will not be considered for funding.

Key definitions – Ocean biodiversity, knowledge, and engagement

“Ocean Biodiversity”

Rather than prescribing a single definition, applicants should define what ocean, coastal, and/or estuarine biodiversity means in their decision context. Definitions can be broad, but

proposals must keep biodiversity as the primary organizing objective—explicitly linking the work to biodiversity outcomes and decision needs—rather than positioning biodiversity as a secondary co-benefit of other priorities.

“Knowledge”

We consider “knowledge” in a broad sense, encompassing both Western and non-Western traditions of knowledge and including but not limited to: Indigenous and/or Traditional Ecological Knowledge (IK/TEK), Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK), natural science, social science, environmental monitoring, community lived experience, as well as social, economic, legal, and/or policy analysis. For proposals that engage IK/TEK/LEK, see the Data Source section below.

“Engagement”

For this RFP, “engagement” means a purposeful, structured process that brings together the people, including under-represented groups, who hold relevant knowledge and the people who make, inform, or are affected by management, stewardship, permitting, restoration, or planning decisions/actions relevant to ocean biodiversity.

Proposals can include any type or number of engagement activities. Some illustrative engagement activities are listed below, but proposals may include other approaches. For all approaches applicants should clearly demonstrate how the specific engagement approaches proposed will unlock and mobilize existing knowledge toward evidence-based decisions in the specified region:

- **Targeted, time-bounded working sessions** tied to a specific decision, policy, or process (e.g., plan update, permitting pathway, restoration prioritization).
- **Co-design / co-production workshops** that align questions, roles, and outputs with decision-maker and community needs.
- **Facilitated cross-agency or cross-sector coordination** to reduce silos and clarify knowledge onramps for decision pathways and timing.
- **On-the-water site visits** to ground discussions in place-based conditions and lived experience.
- **Joint interpretation of monitoring results and observations**, including TEK/IK/LEK where appropriate, to define implications and actions.
- **Synthesis and translation of existing information** into decision-ready formats (e.g., briefs, decision memos, dashboards, “what’s changing and why” summaries).
- **Interoperability workflows** (e.g., data dictionaries, shared repositories, translation layers) that enable comparability across programs.
- **Peer exchanges and practitioner learning loops** that accelerate implementation of existing plans and spread what works across partners.

Regional priority themes

Input from BCF’s regional virtual listening sessions, the Request for Information (RFI), and other scoping conversations revealed a common theme: many people are working on ocean biodiversity, but they aren’t always connected in ways that make existing knowledge

easy to use for on-the-water decisions. Information is often scattered, hard to compare, or not translated into practical products, and decision timelines can move faster than coordination. So, what's already known doesn't reliably shape policies, plans, permits, or actions. Distinct regional priorities also emerged, and those themes are listed below.

Proposals must focus on a single geographic region and address one of the priority themes for that region to be considered for funding.

Chesapeake Bay

Priority Theme CB-1: Making existing biodiversity information usable across Chesapeake Bay programs and jurisdictions

Support engagement that helps use existing biodiversity information to inform Bay-wide management, stewardship, and restoration decisions. Proposals should include the decision-makers and knowledge holders connected to the chosen decision pathway to align on practical metrics/indicators, improve how existing information can be connected across organizations, and deliver syntheses or crosswalks that clarify what the information means for the upcoming decision window.

Priority Theme CB-2: Assessing system-scale biodiversity outcomes from habitat restoration for Bay-wide fisheries and community decisions

Support engagement that helps assess how habitat restoration (e.g., oyster reefs, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), marshes) is affecting biodiversity and ecosystem function—and how those outcomes relate to fisheries, livelihoods, and community well-being. Proposals should draw on information that already exists from previous restoration efforts and look beyond single-project reporting to compare outcomes across multiple sites, identify Bay-wide patterns, and inform decisions about where to restore next, what to maintain or adjust, and how to target future restoration efforts.

Priority Theme CB-3: Managing and responding to change—cumulative impacts, shifting species, and invasive species

Support engagement that helps make sense of rapid ecological change and use what is already known to respond in practical ways. Proposals should strengthen shared interpretation of existing monitoring, observations, and other available knowledge about cumulative impacts, shifting species distributions, and invasive species, and translate that understanding into clear options that inform management, stewardship, and restoration choices across the Bay's interconnected waters and jurisdictions.

Mobile Bay

Priority Theme MB-1: Making existing biodiversity information usable for fisheries management and working waterfront decisions

Support engagement that helps commercial and recreational fishing communities, resource managers, and decision-makers use existing monitoring, models, and local observations in fishery management and working waterfront decisions. Proposals should focus on improving how available information is interpreted, shared, and applied,

especially where data are hard to access or compare, baseline coverage is uneven, or model outputs are not clearly applicable to, or aligned with, on-the-water decisions.

Priority Theme MB-2: Developing shared pathways for habitat restoration in Mobile Bay

Support engagement that helps align restoration decisions for critical habitats that underpin fisheries, water quality, and coastal resilience. Proposals should draw on existing monitoring, studies, and local observations to build shared agreement on goals, tradeoffs, and priorities for restoring habitats and the biodiversity outcomes those habitats support (e.g., species diversity and abundance, nursery function, food-web support). Projects should produce clear, usable outputs that help decision-makers and practitioners determine where to restore, what to restore, and how to adjust actions over time.

Priority Theme MB-3: Linking watershed-to-bay pathways for biodiversity outcomes and community resilience

Support engagement that helps connect upstream drivers and coastal development choices (i.e., Delta salinity intrusion & habitat shifts, working waterfront transitions, development) to biodiversity outcomes and to the community priorities that depend on those outcomes (e.g., seafood and working waterfront livelihoods, clean water, flooding risk, sense of place). Proposals should focus on turning what is already known (e.g., monitoring, models, local observations, lived experience) into shared understanding and practical next steps for decisions that shape watershed-to-bay conditions, including where and how habitat shifts (such as salinity intrusion and wetland transitions) affect biodiversity and resilience.

Puget Sound

Priority Theme PS-1: Making existing biodiversity information usable and interoperable to accelerate action in Puget Sound

Support engagement that helps turn existing biodiversity information—often collected by many agencies, Tribes, local governments, researchers, and community programs—into shared products that can be used in decisions. Proposals should strengthen the ability to combine information across programs and jurisdictions (without reinventing systems), improve clarity on what information exists and where, and ensure resulting syntheses are accessible and timed to planning, permitting, restoration, and management decision windows.

Priority Theme PS-2: Advancing habitat recovery through coordinated implementation and shared learning

Support engagement that helps translate existing strategies and recovery plans into on-the-ground implementation for habitats (e.g., kelp forests, eelgrass/seagrass meadows, estuaries, beaches/shorelines). Proposals should clarify who does what by when, reduce duplication across efforts, and align monitoring and management so actions are feasible, timely, and connected to on-the-water decisions.

Priority Theme PS-3: Connecting land–sea pressures to ocean and coastal biodiversity outcomes

Support engagement that connects land-based (e.g., stormwater, toxics, shoreline development) and marine pressures (e.g., vessel traffic, underwater noise) to ocean and coastal biodiversity outcomes—and helps decision-makers and practitioners take practical steps through specific decision pathways. Proposals should strengthen shared understanding of how upland and marine pressures affect ocean and coastal habitats and species, improve coordination across the agencies and sectors that control key levers, and translate existing knowledge into products and actions that can be used in permitting, infrastructure programs, pollution reduction efforts, shoreline decisions, and recovery planning.

Eligibility and Award Requirements

Proposals submitted to this RFP must align with the Scope of Work above and adhere to the budget limitations and other criteria set forth in this RFP.

Organizations selected for funding must provide documentation required for RPA’s due diligence review. These materials should not be submitted at the proposal submission stage. Documentation requirements will vary depending on the type of grant host institution.

Eligibility and Due Diligence Requirements by Organization Type:

- **U.S.-Based Non-Profit Organizations – 501(c)(3):** Must provide an Employer Identification Number (EIN).
- **U.S. Government Entities:** Must provide an EIN and a completed Form-W-9.
- **U.S.-Based For-Profit Organizations:** Must provide documentations demonstrating legal status, organizational leadership, and financial capacity. A detailed list of required materials will be shared with applicants if they are selected to move forward as grantees.

BCF cannot support the following:

- Activities involving lobbying or advocating to establish, change, or remove government regulations or policies.
- Projects led solely by graduate students; however, graduate students are welcome to participate and receive support in a project.
- Projects led by an individual with no institutional affiliation. Applicants must identify a grant host institution.

BCF does not restrict the types of organizations that may apply (e.g., federally- or non-federally-recognized Tribal Nations and governments, academic and research institutions, non-profit organizations, local/state/federal government entities, private organizations, etc.), provided that they meet the above criteria.

If you have questions about your eligibility to apply to this RFP, please email grants@blueconvergence.org.

Process and Timeline

Proposal Submission

All proposals must be submitted online through the form at: <https://wkf.ms/4d7plSQ>. Proposals submitted via email or other forms will not be accepted. Proposals must be received by **Wednesday, April 15th at 12:00 ET / 11:00 CT / 09:00 PT**.

The submission form includes fields for applicants to upload their project narrative and budget documents, and optional letters of support. To be considered complete, the proposal must submit the online form with all required materials, as specified in section 6 “Proposal Content.”

Blue Convergence Fund does not require proposals to have gone through university/institutional budget approval or to submit supporting financial documents at this stage; however, applicants should follow the requirements of their grant host institutions.

By submitting a proposal, each applicant grants Blue Convergence Fund and its designees the right to duplicate, use, disclose, and distribute all submitted materials (and information contained therein) for the purposes of evaluation and review. In addition, each applicant guarantees that (1) it has full and complete rights to all information and materials included in the proposal, and (2) all such materials are not defamatory and do not infringe upon or violate the privacy rights, copyrights, or other proprietary rights of any third party.

Opportunities for more information:

1. Informational Webinar – Blue Convergence Fund will host a webinar on **Wednesday, March 4th, 2026 at 14:00 ET / 13:00 CT / 11:00 PT** to share information about the RFP. To register:
https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_b_FeL7siSsaZtRwaWWSBTQ
 - The webinar **will be recorded**, and the recording will be posted online at <https://www.youtube.com/@BlueConvergence>.
 - Note: Please register if you cannot attend but wish to be emailed the recording after the webinar.
2. Applicants may also email grants@blueconvergence.org with specific questions; however, we request that applicants review all RFP materials carefully prior to submitting questions.

Proposal Content

The proposal must include the project narrative (PDF or Microsoft Word format) and budget spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel format) that should be developed using the templates

provided on our website: <https://blueconvergence.org/2026-ocean-biodiversity-engagement-RFP/>. In addition, letters of support are optional letters.

Project Narrative

The project narrative is a short, written statement explaining the project and how it will help to inform decision-making. This narrative should be concise, not to exceed **6 pages** (single-spaced, 12 pt font). This page limit includes all sections listed here under **Project Description, Outcomes, and Expertise**. The inclusion of figures or diagrams, while not required, will count toward the page limit. **Length and font-size requirements will be enforced and submissions that do not meet these requirements will not be considered.**

Please use the [MS Word template provided here](#).

Keep the narrative focused on the decision context, the barriers to using existing knowledge, and how your engagement will unlock and mobilize ocean biodiversity-relevant knowledge for action. To the extent possible, the narrative should be free of technical jargon.

Project Description

Title. Provide a brief title for the project (note: the online form limits this to 255 characters).

Purpose (1 sentence). Summarize the purpose and relevance of the project.

Background (~1/2 page). Briefly set the scene. Keep this high-level; details belong in Context and Project Activities. In this section:

- **Geography, scale, and priority theme:** Name the focus geography (Chesapeake Bay, Mobile Bay, or Puget Sound), relevant scale (e.g., discrete site, whole-of-Bay/Sound, cross-jurisdiction) and regional priority theme you are addressing,
- **Challenge and/or opportunity:** Describe the significance of the challenge or opportunity the work seeks to address,
- **Defining “ocean biodiversity”:** Define what ocean biodiversity means in this context and how it links to the decision(s) and intended outcomes, and
- **Situational context:** Summarize the socio-economic and environmental context in which you are working.

Context (~1 page). Use this section to describe the decision landscape, knowledge barriers, and why engagement is the right lever to make existing ocean/coastal/estuarine biodiversity knowledge usable in the decision context and pathway you’ve identified. In a clear narrative, please describe:

- **Decision context:** What specific decision(s), policy instrument(s), or process(es) this project will inform, what “use” looks like (e.g., adoption into a plan, permit condition, restoration criteria), and how the project’s outputs will reach and influence that decision (by whom, when, and in what form).

- **Knowledge mobilization barriers:** What is preventing existing biodiversity-relevant knowledge from informing decisions (e.g., siloed or inaccessible information, timing mismatches, lack of shared indicators/standards).
- **Why engagement is the primary lever:** Explain why the core constraint is engagement and how your approach will reduce the barriers identified.
- **What’s already underway and what this project adds:** Describe past or ongoing engagement and coordination relevant to the work you are proposing and clarify how your project will add value without duplicating existing efforts.

Project Activities (~2 pages).

Use this section as the core of your proposal. Describe the engagement activities you will undertake, how they will run, and how they connect back to the decision context and barriers described in the Background and Context sections. In clear terms, please cover:

- **Engagement activity plan:** The sequence of engagement activities you will deliver and what each activity is designed to accomplish (i.e., how it helps move existing biodiversity-relevant knowledge into the decision pathway).
- **Participants and roles:** Who will be involved in each activity (e.g., decision-makers, communities/rights holders, practitioners, experts) and what roles they will play.
- **How you will run the engagement:** The format(s) and approaches you will use (e.g., working sessions, co-design workshops, site visits).
- **If applicable—limited research:** If you include any research, keep it limited and explain how it directly supports the engagement and uptake pathway (not as the primary activity).

Data Sources (~1/2-1 page). For proposals that include aspects of research/knowledge identification, collation, and/or analysis, please list and describe any potential sources of data that will be needed to complete the proposed work. Include whether these data sources are publicly available, already in-hand, or would require additional action to purchase and/or acquire. If any of the data sources are considered sensitive data (e.g., culturally sensitive information that must be kept confidential) indicate how you will protect such data in accordance with applicable legal and regulatory requirements and other standards of practice, as applicable. More guidance is provided below in cases where this is applicable.

Equitable Knowledge Governance (If Applicable). If your project will engage Indigenous Knowledge, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, or Local Ecological Knowledge, describe how knowledge contributions will be requested, shared, protected, and used in ways that respect rights, consent, and sovereignty. Proposals should outline governance consistent with the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics) and, where data are being shared or managed, explain how FAIR practices (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) will be applied only as appropriate and in a manner that does not conflict with CARE, confidentiality needs, or community protocols. Please include: who provides consent and how;

agreed limits on use and re-use; attribution; data stewardship and access controls; and any confidentiality or non-disclosure boundaries.

Data Privacy Requirement (If Applicable). Please indicate whether your proposed activities will involve the collection, processing, or storage of Personally Identifiable Information (PII). PII refers to any data that could be used to clearly identify an individual. If your project will collect or handle PII, you will be required to process such information only in accordance with the grant agreement and implement appropriate operational, technical, and organizational safeguards to protect it from unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration, or destruction. These measures must be actively maintained and monitored throughout the duration of the project.

Human Subject Research (If Applicable): Please indicate whether your proposed activities involve research with human subjects. Human subjects research refers to studies that require evidence that a Federally assured Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) has reviewed and approved the protocol(s) for research on human subjects, thus assuring compliance with US Federal regulations. You do not have to have gone through IRB approval to apply to this RFP.

Challenges (~1/4 page). A. Describe any potential limitations to the proposed project and how the project design takes them into account. B. Describe any potential barriers that may limit the project’s usefulness or applicability in the context in which the work will take place.

References (~1/4 page). Please list any references included in the project description. Please note: *the inclusion of references will count toward the 5-pg limit.* Therefore, BCF encourages the use of references that are only most critical to substantiate key statements and arguments within the project narrative.

Outcomes

Measurable Deliverables & Timeline (~1/2 page). Provide a bulleted list of measurable deliverables you expect to accomplish within the grant period, including any specific products or events that will result from this grant. These deliverables will be used in internal decision-making and grant management processes, so they need to be able to stand alone and should be phrased in plain language. The final deliverable listed below is standard across our grants and reflects activities that would be led by BCF staff but that would require the participation and input of the project team. Below are specific types of deliverables that should be included in proposals:

- All grants should have deliverables that describe the engagement activities to be conducted and include the individuals and/or groups required to execute those activities.
- Some grants may have concrete outputs you will produce (e.g., brief synthesis, agreed indicators, decision brief, draft guidance/workplan, data-sharing or governance agreement).

- Some grants may have deliverables that describe research activities to be conducted and associated outputs.
- All grants should include the following deliverable: In addition to the project deliverables above, participate in communications, outreach, and engagement activities led by BCF staff and partners throughout the supported project.

For each deliverable, please include estimated dates (i.e. month, year) for achieving them.

Expertise

Personnel (~1/2 page). In lieu of submitting CVs, identify and summarize the qualifications of the project team needed to carry out the work, including the lead principal investigator, other principal staff, and outside collaborators or consultants.

Organization Information (~1/4 page). Provide a short paragraph on your organization's history, scope, and mission. If multiple institutions are involved in the project you may include only the grant host institution here.

Letters of Support (optional)

You may provide up to two 1-page letters of support. These should come from project partners and stakeholders and describe in their own words their involvement in the development of the proposal and/or related concepts, their commitment to being part of the project if funded, and how the work would help advance their goals or interests. Letters of support should be uploaded in the application form (please do not send them directly via email).

Project Budget

The proposed project budget should include project expenses and a descriptive budget narrative. The budget should be itemized for each year in which support is requested. Use the budget template that can be downloaded at: <https://blueconvergence.org/2026-ocean-biodiversity-engagement-RFP/>. Note: please do not modify the template format. For this RFP, BCF expects proposals for **up to 18 months** of work **not to exceed \$50,000 USD** total award amount. We expect to award 6-8 projects from this RFP.

Project Expenses

- Blue Convergence Fund limits the amount of indirect costs it will support to no more than 20% of total direct costs (see Appendix A for more information).
- BCF limits employee benefits to no more than 32% of employee salaries.
- BCF encourages applicants to include compensation in their budgets for individuals outside of the project team that play a significant role as advisors and/or contributors.
- Note that BCF cannot pay for costs incurred prior to the date that a project is approved by BCF/RPA.
- The final proposal budget must use only the categories included in Appendix A.

- Please round all expenses, including line items, and annual and project totals, to the nearest dollar amount. All budget items should be in USD.

Budget Narrative Spreadsheet Template

- The detailed budget narrative of project expenses should include both dollar amounts and a description of how those amounts were determined. Describe in detail who, what, where, when, and why.
- Please use [budget narrative spreadsheet template here](#). Please do not modify the format of the spreadsheet when preparing your submission.

Evaluation of Proposals

Proposals will be reviewed by a selection panel made up of BCF staff and external reviewers with expertise related to the priority topics in this RFP.

All proposals will be assessed for Relevance:

This criterion assesses alignment with the Scope of Work for this RFP, outlined in Section 3. Proposals that fail to meet this criterion will not be considered for funding.

Proposals that meet the Relevance criterion will be evaluated on the following criteria, weighted by the percent in parentheses:

- **Usable Science (20%):** This criterion assesses whether the proposals have articulated an approach that fits the project context, addresses the needs of identified audiences and decision-makers, and whether project outputs are likely to be usable by key project audiences. Proposed activities will be assessed based on whether the methods, approaches, and/or planned activities are technically sound, feasible, and have clear goals that can be realized by the work proposed. Likelihood of near-term traction: credible pathway to action within the grant period, even if broader outcomes accrue later.
- **Collaboration and Engagement (50%):** This criterion will be assessed based on whether engagement activities described in the proposal are appropriate and well-suited to the project goals and have a sound, feasible approach. Additionally, this criterion will assess whether individuals or entities that would use the information resulting from the project, or those that could meaningfully contribute to project design and/or outcomes, are involved in the project and/or there is a plan to include them. This includes whether the proposal describes how partners will share ownership in shaping and carrying out the work, including leadership roles where appropriate for community partners and Tribes/rights holders. This criterion will also assess whether the work leverages and strengthens existing venues, workgroups, or initiatives, with a clear plan to complement—not compete with—ongoing efforts. Finally, it will assess whether the proposal clearly explains what the project uniquely contributes to the identified decision context and uptake pathway (e.g., the missing connection, synthesis, coordination function, or decision-ready product), and how the engagement will reduce

the key barriers to knowledge use (e.g., silos, trust, timing, access, shared indicators, governance/consent) so existing biodiversity knowledge is translated into usable inputs for decisions.

- **Project Team/Qualifications (20%):** This criterion evaluates whether the project team has demonstrated the appropriate skill set(s) to achieve project deliverables. This also includes expertise and experience with the engagement approaches they are proposing, as well as demonstrated experience working in the systems and maintaining strong relationships with the communities in which they propose to work.
- **Budget (10%):** The budget criterion assesses whether the budget is realistic and commensurate with the project needs, including whether it adequately budgets for the proposed engagement activities.

Additional considerations:

In addition to the five criteria above, BCF will consider the following when making final award decisions:

- Portfolio balance across regions (Chesapeake Bay, Puget Sound, Mobile Bay) and across decision contexts (e.g., restoration prioritization, permitting/siting, fisheries interactions, habitat protection, water quality drivers).

Appendix A. Direct and Indirect Costs Definitions and Guidelines

- **Direct Costs:** Expenses that can be specifically and exclusively attributed to the BCF-funded project.
- **Indirect Costs:** Shared organizational expenses that support the BCF-funded project but cannot be attributed solely to it. BCF limits the allowable indirect cost rate applied to budget proposals to 20 percent of the total direct costs.

The table below provides general guidance on common direct and indirect cost categories and their definitions. It is not exhaustive, and your budget may include additional cost categories not listed here.

Direct Costs	
Cost Category	Definition
Employee Salaries	Wage compensation for employees whose time and effort are specifically dedicated to carrying out project activities.
Employee Benefits	Non-salary forms of compensation that an organization provides to its employees, in addition to their regular wages, whose time and effort are specifically dedicated to carrying out project activities. Benefits vary by country but commonly include health insurance, paid time off, retirement contributions, parental leave, transportation support, and other resources that help employees succeed at work and in their personal lives.
Other Labor Costs	Non-salaried labor such as internships and stipends. If graduate student tuition is requested, reach out to grants@blueconvergence.org to confirm eligibility.
Consultants	Fees paid to external experts or service providers engaged specifically to support project deliverables.
Evaluation and Learning	Costs for evaluation and learning activities that measure or inform the project's outcomes. If requested, reach out to grants@blueconvergence.org to confirm eligibility.
Sub-Grants	Funds passed through to partner organizations or community groups to carry out approved project activities

Equipment, Supplies, and Materials	Items essential to implementing the project, such as technology, program materials, or other tangible goods used exclusively for the BCF-funded project.
Travel	Costs associated with project-related travel, including air and rail fares, local transportation or, lodging, and other necessary travel expenses incurred by project staff, consultants, or participants to support approved project activities.
Conferences and Events	Costs associated with hosting or attending project-related conferences or events, including registration fees, travel expenses, venue rentals, event materials, catering, facilitation services, and other logistical expenses.
Indirect Costs	
Cost Category	Definition
Employee Salary	Wage compensation for administrative, finance, leadership, or support staff whose work benefits the project but is not tied to specific project activities.
Employee Benefits	Non-salary forms of compensation that an organization provides to its employees who carry out administrative, finance, leadership, or support tasks that benefit the project but is not tied to specific project activities.
Fiscal Sponsor Fees	Administrative fees charged by a fiscal sponsor for oversight, compliance, and financial management services.
Insurance, Bank Fees, Interest	Organizational costs necessary for operations, such as liability insurance, banking services, or interest, related to managing project funds but not directly tied to project activities.
Shared Facilities and Utilities	Shared facility and operational costs (e.g. rent, utilities, phone, and internet) that support both project and organizational functions but cannot be assigned exclusively to the project.
Professional Development	Organization-wide training or skill development opportunities that support staff broadly, rather than being specific to the project.