



Canada
Water Agency

Agence de l'eau
du Canada



Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative

Applicant Guide 2027/2028

NOTE TO APPLICANTS

This Call for Applications reflects changes to program priorities and requirements. Please read this guide carefully, with particular attention to Section 1: Eligible Projects and Section 9: Evaluation Criteria.

About the Applicant Guide

The Applicant Guide is designed to assist eligible applicants in applying to the Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative. You are welcome to contact the Canada Water Agency (CWA) office if you require clarification on the information contained in this guide. If you require assistance with the Grants and Contributions Enterprise Management System (GCEMS), please contact GCEMS directly.

Contact Information	
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The Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative

As part of the Federal Freshwater Action Plan, the Government of Canada is taking action to restore and protect freshwater ecosystems of national significance through Freshwater Ecosystem Initiatives (FEIs). FEI investments support actions that address regional freshwater challenges and priorities. The Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative will provide financial support for eligible projects that will improve freshwater quality and aquatic ecosystem health of the Mackenzie River.

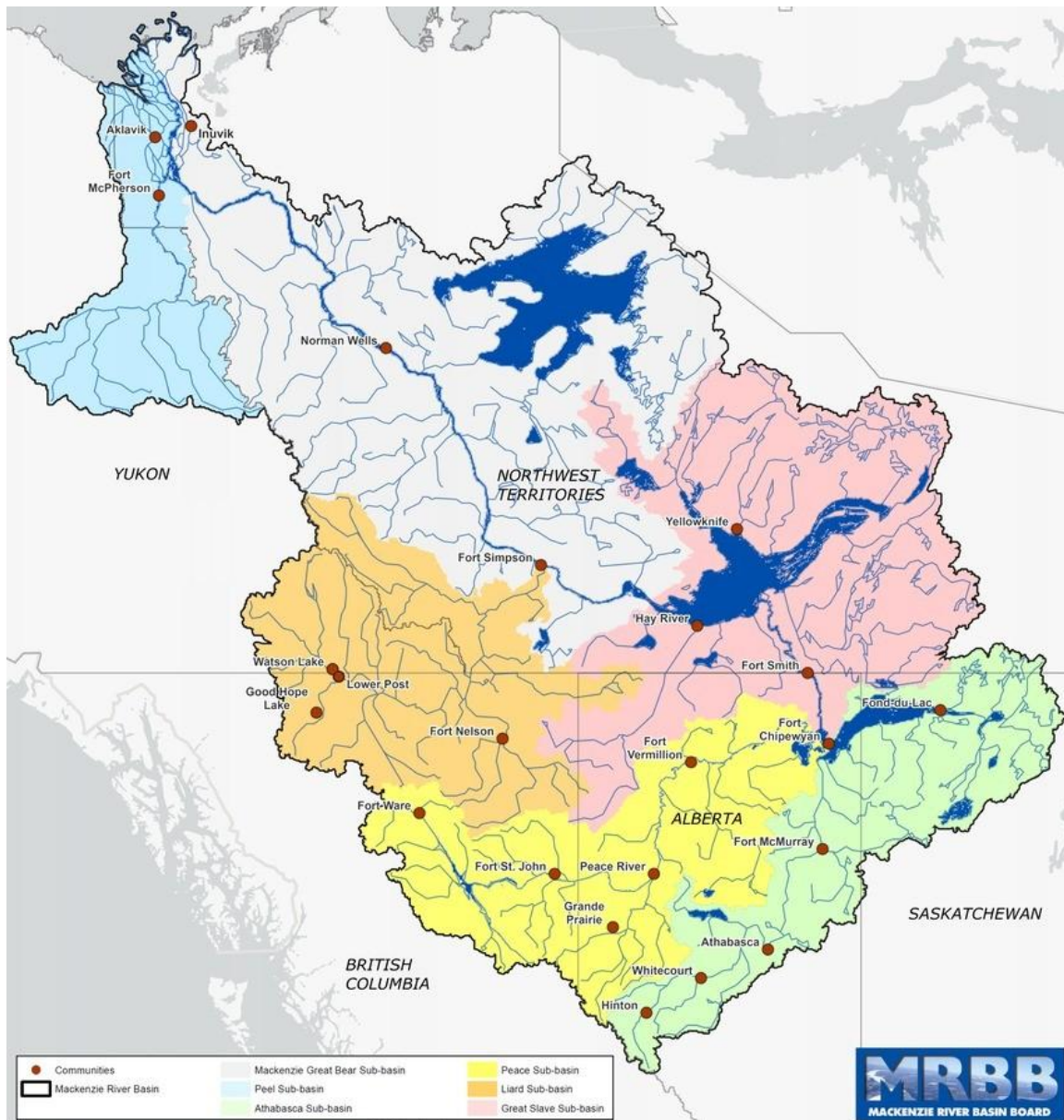


Figure 1: Mackenzie River Basin

1. Eligible Projects

In the Mackenzie River Basin, whole basin scale concerns include downstream impacts to ecosystem health from development such as resource extraction, hydroelectric development and other activities; changing climate impacts such as melting permafrost impacting flow regimes and sediment loads; threats to food security; changes to biota and invasive species that may impact aquatic life; and other emerging issues.

Priority may be given to projects being implemented along or near the mainstem of the Mackenzie River, contributing waters and/or watersheds that directly discharge into it.

In this context, the Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative will fund projects, implemented by domestic partners within the Mackenzie River Basin (see reference map Figure 1 above), that address at least one of the following three program priorities:

- Advancing Science and Knowledge
- Indigenous Knowledge, Capacity Building and Engagement
- Enabling Resiliency and Adaptation

1. Advancing Science and Knowledge: Projects that address knowledge gaps by collecting, analyzing, sharing and/or using information to increase knowledge and/or understanding of stressors threatening freshwater quality **and** aquatic ecosystem health. Science-based projects are encouraged to bridge Indigenous Knowledge (also referred to as Traditional Knowledge) and science to address gaps and employ respectful knowledge co-development.

Types of projects that may be funded include:

- Advancing the understanding of the impacts on freshwater quality and aquatic ecosystem health from:
 - changes in climate,
 - sediment loading and other harmful pollutants,
 - other emerging issues.
- Advancing the understanding of aquatic ecosystem changes or health to better understand trends over time and/or identification of priorities, including:
 - the impacts on freshwater ecosystem health;
 - freshwater ecosystem changes or trends;

- multiple stressors and related cumulative effects on freshwater ecosystems;
 - development of place-based indicators of freshwater ecosystem health.
- Identification of freshwater priorities, data and research gaps, and/or sharing of knowledge and information;
- Use of tools and approaches to share knowledge and information (e.g., audio or visual means, graphic demonstrations, etc.) to inform decision-making and actions to restore and protect freshwater ecosystems.

2. Indigenous Knowledge, Capacity Building and Engagement: Projects will support Indigenous-led efforts to advance knowledge of freshwater quality issues, and/or build capacity of Indigenous governments, communities and organizations and to address freshwater quality issues and concerns. This includes projects that enable participation of Indigenous youth and build a future knowledge bank to support intergenerational transfer of knowledge.

Types of projects that may be funded include:

- Gathering of Indigenous Knowledge and applying Indigenous Knowledge systems to inform decision making and actions related to freshwater quality;
- Youth engagement and opportunities for intergenerational transfer of knowledge;
- Building capacity, outreach, training, and engagement for Indigenous governments, communities and organizations to research and implement actions on the ground to address freshwater quality issues;
- Culturally responsive knowledge gathering, transfer and dissemination, including returning knowledge to communities;
- Projects that bring together diverse knowledge systems and perspectives to support actions and decision making related to freshwater quality.

3. Enabling Resiliency and Adaptation: Projects that encourage and strengthen collaborative efforts to improve freshwater quality and/or enable increased resiliency and adaptation through freshwater stewardship.

Types of projects that may be funded include:

- Development, testing and/or implementation of innovative tools, technologies and techniques to improve freshwater quality;
- Implementing on-the-ground actions to improve freshwater quality and/or aquatic ecosystem health
- Enabling processes that support knowledge-based decision making to protect and/or restore freshwater in the basin;

- Training, outreach, and/or education to support the implementation of actions that improve freshwater quality and/or freshwater ecosystem health;
- Facilitate knowledge sharing and collaborative efforts among partners to mobilize knowledge and engage effectively on freshwater quality-focused activities and/or to support the development and implementation of strategies and activities that improve freshwater ecosystem health;
- Citizen science initiatives to build public awareness and/or collaboration to increase water literacy related to water quality and/or aquatic ecosystem health and/or to foster freshwater stewardship.

2. Projects Not Eligible for Funding

The following types of projects are not eligible for funding under the Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative (not exhaustive):

- Monitoring and data collection as stand-alone projects. These projects must be part of an overall trend analysis, or integrated planning process as further described in Section 1: Eligible Projects;
- Projects that have a single issue 'action' focus such as stream clean-ups, attending conferences, training, workshops and meetings;
- Projects that are focused solely on:
 - water quantity, drinking water, groundwater, or marine environments;
 - water temperature;
 - fish and/or fish habitat, including sediment transport;
 - barriers to navigation
- Projects designed only to beautify an area;
- The purchase of land;
- Projects required by law and/or mandated by a level of government;
- Capital or operating costs of infrastructure projects (e.g. dikes, sewers, sewage treatment plants, storm water ponds).

3. Eligible Applicants

Canadian-based organizations are eligible to apply and include:

- Indigenous governments, communities, organizations, boards, and associations.
- Not-for-profit organizations such as charitable and volunteer organizations, professional associations, and non-governmental organizations.
- Research, academic and educational institutions.
- Regional, municipal and local governments
- Local organizations such as community associations and groups, seniors' and youth groups, and service clubs.

- For-profit organizations such as small businesses with fewer than 100 employees

Federal, provincial and territorial governments are not eligible funding recipients; they are encouraged to partner with applicants on projects.

Applicants from outside the Mackenzie River Basin are eligible to apply; however, priority will be given to those applicants who are geographically located within the Mackenzie River Basin.

4. Eligible Project Costs

The following project costs are eligible:

- Human resource costs including salaries and benefits
- Management and professional service costs such as accounting, monitoring, communications, official language translation, audits, and legal fees
- Hospitality, travel and venues/conference expenses that are attributed directly to carrying out the project in accordance with the [Treasury Board Secretariat's Directives on Travel, Hospitality, Conference and Event Expenditures](#).
 - Hospitality expenditures can include costs related to Indigenous ceremonial offerings to be utilized or consumed during meetings or ceremonies such as traditional medicines, cultural foods, tea, and sacred plants
- Costs associated with an Indigenous participation or ceremony
- Honoraria offered to Indigenous Elders and/or Knowledge Keepers related to specific participation activities which may include but are not limited to translation and interpretative costs, leading a traditional opening/closing ceremony and/or prayer, the sharing of Traditional Knowledge and protocols, (including spiritual advice to individuals), and demonstrating traditional art and other practices
- Materials and supplies costs
- Printing, production, and distribution costs
- Equipment and Capital Assets purchases or rental
- Vehicle rental and operation costs
- Contractors required to perform activities related to the project
- A reasonable share (20% or less) of overhead and/or administrative costs directly attributed to project delivery
- Any GST/HST that is not reimbursable by the Canada Revenue Agency and any PST not reimbursable by the provinces

The following project costs are ineligible:

- Expenditures related to lobbyist fees;
- For for-profit recipients: Equipment and Capital Assets purchase or rental; and
- Costs associated with land securement.

In alignment with the Government of Canada's [Buy Canadian Policy](#), funding recipients are encouraged to prioritize Canadian suppliers, materials, or content and to provide a simple report on how they have done so in their project. Priority may be given to projects that prioritize Canadian suppliers, materials, or content. Applicants who do not prioritize Canadian suppliers, materials, or content are encouraged to include a justification in their application.

5. Funding Details

Projects are eligible for funding up to **a maximum of \$200,000** per project. The current call for applications is for projects that will begin during the 2027/28 fiscal year. Projects can be single or multi-year in nature but must begin on or after April 1, 2027, and be completed by March 31, 2030. Eligible projects that are not funded may be re-submitted in a future call for applications.

Please note that unsuccessful applications will not be retained.

6. Matching Requirements

For non-Indigenous led projects, at least **35% of the total support for the project** must come from sources other than the Canada Water Agency.

For **Indigenous-led projects**, at least **10% of the total support for the project** must come from sources other than the Canada Water Agency.

Other sources of support may be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions, or a combination of both as defined in Section 4: Eligible Project Costs.

Applicants should declare all prospective sources of support (cash and in-kind) for the project including federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and other sources of funding in their application.

Example for non-Indigenous led projects

Contributor Name	Contributor Type	Cash	In-kind	Total
Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative	Canada Water Agency	\$65,000	\$0	\$65,000
Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)	Federal Government	\$5,000	\$0	\$5,000
Water Project Foundation	Other	\$0	\$10,000	\$10,000
Clean Water Society	Other	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$20,000
Total Contributions		\$80,000	\$20,000	\$100,000
\$80,000 Cash + \$20,000 In-kind = \$100,000 total project support \$65,000 is requested from CWA. \$35,000 is from other sources. \$65,000 request from CWA is 65% of \$100,000 (total project support). \$35,000 from other sources is 35% of \$100,000 (total project support). The funding request from CWA is eligible as at least 35% of total project support is from sources other than CWA.				

Example for Indigenous-led projects

Contributor Name	Contributor Type	Cash	In-kind	Total
Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative	Canada Water Agency	\$90,000	\$0	\$90,000
Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)	Federal Government	\$5,000	\$0	\$5,000
First Nations Band	Indigenous Organization	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$3,000
Clean Water Society	Other	\$0	\$2,000	\$2,000
Total Contributions		\$97,000	\$3,000	\$100,000
\$97,000 Cash + \$3,000 In-kind = \$100,000 total project support				

Contributor Name	Contributor Type	Cash	In-kind	Total
\$90,000 is requested from CWA. \$10,000 is from other sources. \$90,000 request from CWA is 90% of \$100,000 (total project support). \$10,000 from other sources is 10% of \$100,000 (total project support). The funding request from CWA is eligible as at least 10% of total project support is from sources other than CWA.				

7. Performance Indicators

Project applicants are required to report on at least one key performance indicator from the list below. Applicants should identify all indicators that apply to the project in their application and explain how the target numbers were calculated.

- Number of activities supporting collaborative priority-setting and decision-making (# of activities)
- Number of events supporting knowledge transfer and sharing (# of events)
- Number of partner organizations engaged in project activities (# of organizations)
- Number of youths engaged in project activities (# of youths)
- Number of sites with enhanced monitoring (# of sites)
- Area of land restored or conserved (# of hectares)
- Number of activities reducing nutrients or contaminants in water (# of activities)
- Number of activities reducing sediment in water (# of activities)
- Number of Indigenous-led activities that enable freshwater stewardship and/or the intergenerational transfer of knowledge (# of activities)
- Number of mitigation measures and/or management practices implemented (# of mitigation measures and/or management practices)
- Number of partner organizations contributing financial and/or in-kind resources (# of partners/organizations)
- Number of decision-support tools developed and/or implemented (# of tools)
- Number of reports/papers compiled and published (# of reports/papers)
- Number of jobs created (# of jobs)

8. Permits and Federal Lands

Applicants are responsible for conducting the necessary research to determine if laws or mandates apply to any of the activities listed in the application. It is recommended that applicants verify relevant federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal legislation and regulations relating to the project's activities and/or location(s).

Permits

If permits or authorizations are required for the project, these must be identified in the application. If not yet obtained, ensure the timeline for obtaining these approvals is included in the project's work plan.

Federal lands

Applicants must review their project locations and activities and determine if any activities will occur on federal lands. Projects occurring on federal lands may be required to complete an Impact Assessment.

According to the [Impact Assessment Act](#), **federal lands** are defined as:

- a) lands that belong to His Majesty in right of Canada, or that His Majesty in right of Canada has the power to dispose of, and all waters on and airspace above those lands, other than lands under the administration and control of the Commissioner of Yukon, the Northwest Territories or Nunavut;
- b) the following lands and areas:
 - i. the internal waters of Canada, in any area of the sea not within a province;
 - ii. the territorial sea of Canada, in any area of the sea not within a province;
 - iii. the exclusive economic zone of Canada;
 - iv. the continental shelf of Canada; and,
- c) reserves, surrendered lands and any other lands that are set apart for the use and benefit of a band and that are subject to the [Indian Act](#), and all waters on and airspace above those reserves or lands.

9. Evaluation Criteria

Eligible applications will be evaluated on their strength of support of program priorities including through the key criteria outlined below.

- **Demonstrates strong linkages to the Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative program priorities.**

The application must clearly demonstrate how the project will improve water quality and aquatic ecosystem health through at least one of the three program priorities described in Section 1: Eligible Projects.

- **Builds partnerships through collaboration with other organizations.**

Contributions of the various partners and project collaborators need to be clearly described in the application including the benefits derived from these collaborations such as increased capacity, expertise and/or resources that are leveraged through these partnerships. Preference will be given to projects that build partnerships and/or collaboration across diverse groups, including projects that enable participation of Indigenous youth and/or intergenerational transfer of knowledge, as well as projects that collaborate across sectors, disciplines, communities, etc.

- **Is scientifically and/or technically sound.**

(For projects that include scientific or research components.) The application must provide detailed information on methodology and techniques used in order to evaluate the merit of the project. It must demonstrate the project will be based on knowledge including sound scientific principles and techniques and/or the use of diverse knowledge systems that inform the techniques and approaches being applied.

- **Project management capacity and financial management capacity**

The application should demonstrate that the project team has the expertise and capacity to manage project and financial resources to ensure the successful completion of the project on-scope, on-budget and on-time. The application should demonstrate that risks to successful completion of the project have been considered and describe how those risks will be mitigated. This should include how progress towards results is monitored during project implementation and how the approach to the project can adapt to changing circumstances. A competitive application will demonstrate strong value for money.

- **Indigenous-led efforts and/or Indigenous Knowledge.**

Projects including these elements should describe how Indigenous organizations or communities are actively engaged and/or leading in the design and delivery of the project. Where applicable, details related to how the project enables capacity, knowledge sharing and the desired outcomes resulting from the project should be included.

- **Builds on/integrates existing research and scientific knowledge/Indigenous Knowledge.**

Project activities are expected to build on existing research and knowledge wherever possible. The Canada Water Agency recognizes the value of both Traditional and western knowledge and encourages the use of both in any project. A strong application should build on a vast knowledge base from public and private sources in order to undertake activities that achieve greater environmental results.

- **Communication of results and knowledge.**

Applicants are encouraged to seek opportunities for knowledge transfer to partners, external stakeholders and/or user groups in order to extend the reach of project outcomes. A competitive application will demonstrate a commitment to sharing any monitoring or data analysis results and findings to enable benefits to be shared with a wide array of partners and stakeholders, to enable future work and achieve broad impacts throughout the watershed.

10. Application Process

Applicants must submit their project application using the [Grants and Contributions Enterprise Management System](#) (GCEMS), Environment and Climate Change Canada's (ECCC) online application system.

Note: The online application system (GCEMS) is shared between CWA and ECCC. References to ECCC in the system apply to both organizations.

It is strongly recommended that applicants complete the budget in GCEMS at least 24 hours prior to the deadline to allow sufficient time to resolve any errors. If an application is not submitted by the deadline, it will not be considered.

GCEMS Applicant User Guide: The [GCEMS Applicant User Guide](#) contains step-by-step instructions on how to apply for funding, including information on how to create, edit and submit project applications.

For technical assistance when using GCEMS, please contact the GCEMS team directly at: sgesc-gcems@ec.gc.ca.

11. Selection Process

The Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative project funding decisions will be determined through a competitive merit-based review process. Eligible projects will be evaluated on the quality and completeness of the application and

contributions to the Mackenzie River Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative program priorities

Eligibility decisions of the Evaluation Committee pursuant to this process are final. Applications will not be retained for further consideration during this call for applications.

The CWA may share applications with other funding programs for which applications may be eligible; applicants who do not wish for their applications to be shared may choose to opt out during the submission process.

12. Notification and Reporting Requirements

All applicants (both successful and unsuccessful) will be notified in writing via e-mail. If your application is approved, you will be contacted to negotiate a Contribution Agreement, which outlines the terms and conditions of funding. Federal Members of Parliament and/or their team may be advised about the approval of a project and may be provided with information in the project application including applicant's name, project title, project description, project location, funding amounts and contact information.

Funding is conditional on the successful negotiation of a Contribution Agreement between the applicants and the CWA. Each Contribution Agreement must include written confirmation of all funding sources, a summary of project design, delivery, progress evaluations and anticipated results, as well as a budget forecast. All components must be accurately completed before the agreement can be signed.

All approved recipients are required to submit reports to the CWA throughout the duration of the project as outlined in the Contribution Agreement. Payments are based on reporting and cannot be made until a report has been submitted, reviewed, and approved by a CWA program officer.

Once a project has finished, a final report is required. The final payment will not be provided (minimum 10% holdback) until a final report has been submitted and approved by the CWA.