**Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation**

**Request for Proposals:**
**2018 Ecosystem Restoration Grants**
**Responses to Questions**

## Questions and Answers

1. **The excel budget sheet provided in Appendix 4 does not include a column for match. How should match be included?**

   **ANSWER:** The budget sheet has been amended to include a column for match. However, if an applicant has already completed the budget sheet, match information can be attached to the grant application as a separate pdf.

2. **If the work under the grant is to be completed by a contractor, how should the individual costs be added to the budget (e.g. do you want all materials such as stone, bedding, gravel, pavement, with quantities for each and every part of the contractor's estimate)?**

   **ANSWER:** If a contractor has already quantified the supplies and materials needed for a project, this information can be added to the grant as an attachment rather than putting each individual item into the budget sheet. The required budget sheet can list the total, if the individual items are clearly explained in a separate document that is attached. An incomplete budget will result in the proposal not being reviewed.

3. **What is an indirect rate?**

   **ANSWER:** An indirect rate is the percent of a project expenses that are indirectly related to the project. Indirect costs may include expenses such as office rent, telephone, bookkeeping, or other expenses that are not directly attributed to the project itself (such as personnel directly completing the project, or the supplies needed for the project). The indirect rate is determined by the applicant and applied to the overall project budget.

4.  **Do we have to have a 35 foot buffer on lakeshore property?**

    **ANSWER:** Any riverine or wetland buffer must meet a minimum of 35' width. Lakeshore buffers should meet a minimum of 15' width where possible, or to the extent practical to achieve maximum ecosystem benefits.

5.  **Can we request Ecosystem Grant funds to evaluate/conduct outreach to landowners about potential river corridor easements and other floodplain protection restoration projects?**

    **ANSWER:** Most of the revenues that support the state's ecosystem restoration grants are apital funds which cannot be used for outreach. The State has alternative sources of clean water funding that can support other uses including the delivery of technical assistance or assessments such as stormwater master planning or river corridor planning. Those sources include the Clean Water Fund and the Dept. of Fish and Wildlife's Watershed Grant Fund (supported by proceeds from the sale of conservation license plates). However, funding levels are limited and, as in the case for our clean water grant programs, subject to a competitive process.

6.  **If we have three projects that are identical except in different locations (e.g. working with three landowners on three potential projects), can we submit one application?**

    **ANSWER:** The standard Ecosystem Restoration Grant program requires that there is one project per application. Combining multiple projects into one application makes the project proposal evaluation and ranking process challenging.

7.  **The application indicates that the project must start within 3 months. Construction on our project will not occur this year, but we want to apply now to recruit the contractor.**

    **ANSWER:** Page 10 of the manual indicates that projects should commence within three months of the signing of the grant (not three months from notification of the grant award). We encourage you to begin some aspect of the project within three months, stage the project to complete those tasks within this timeframe, or, if necessary, apply in the next grant round.

8.  **The State has indicated a need to get projects on the ground quickly. Why do you continue to require a 50% match for MS4s? If we had less required match, we could get projects done sooner.**

    **ANSWER:** DEC provides some funding (up to 50 percent) via its ecosystem restoration grant to municipalities under an MS4 permit. This level of grant funding ensures: (a) a maximum use of available, federally funded low-cost financing;
    (b) leveraging of state funds with other funds (such as federal and local funds, subsequently increasing the number of projects state funds can support; and

(c) some ability to offer grants across the state, rather than concentrating funds in population centers within a handful of counties.  Please refer to page 6 of the manual for types of resources that can be used to meet match requirements.

9. **The ERP Design Terminology and Guidance document on the DEC website describes different levels of complexity for projects. Under "Intermediate", there are two options for funding – would DEC prefer to see Option 1 or Option 2?**
(*Note: Option 1 is funding through 100% design first, and then later funding construction. Option 2 is funding through 30% design and then funding from 30% design through construction).*

    **ANSWER:** DEC will prioritize projects that can move towards implementation quickly and pose no potential natural resource conflicts (projects that are not located in sensitive natural water resource areas, such as river corridors, floodplains, wetlands or buffers). The applicant should choose the option that best fits the project and meets these objectives.

10. **We are submitting a project at a school, but the town is the applicant. Can the town also be responsible for the operations and maintenance agreement? Both the town and the school support this, but want to be sure it is allowable.**

    **ANSWER:** The town can be responsible for the operations and maintenance agreement.

11. **The applicant is required to contact the basin planner prior to submitting a grant application. If the basin planner has received the batch import file, is this sufficient?**

    **ANSWER:** The applicant must discuss the project with the basin planner and receive a Watershed Projects Database identification number that must be included in the application. If the project is already in the database, contact your basin planner to verify this number, as recommended on page 7 of the manual. Since the planners assist in project identification and prioritization within their basins, they are an important resource for applicants. The batch import file is used to incorporate projects identified and prioritized in the tactical basin plan implementation tables.

12. **In the webinar, you emphasized the importance of addressing potential conflicts with natural resources. Is the map that is being submitted with the application enough to cover this concern?**

    **ANSWER**: Refer to Appendix 1: Project Locator Map Instructions, which states that Ecosystem Restoration Grant-funded projects are to be designed to avoid impacts to natural resources, including floodplains, river corridors, wetlands, lake shorelands, and buffer areas. DEC requires applications to include an ANR atlas map that uses the Ecosystem Restoration data layer as a screening tool to assist in identifying potential conflicts. The map is not based on a thorough evaluation of potential conflicts. DEC strongly encourages applicants to discuss their proposed project with the pertinent

DEC program staff (e.g., staff from the DEC Wetlands, Lakes, Rivers Programs) prior to submitting the application if the applicant suspects potential conflicts.

13. **Our city is interested in bidding this project for construction this season.  Can we do this?**

    **ANSWER**: DEC cannot pay for any costs incurred prior to awarding a grant. The city may choose to bid out a project without any guarantee of funds to implement the project; however, the risk of not having the funds to cover project costs rests with the grant applicant.

14. **We are submitting an application that is final design/implementation. Which project category should we choose?**

    **ANSWER**: Refer to page 9 of the application manual.   For project proposals that involve design and construction, select the project type that best represents the final outcome.

15. **The Ecosystem Restoration Application Manual states that "Applicants seeking Ecosystem Restoration Funds for stormwater mitigation projects on private land…will need to …(b) ensure that the project is not for achieving compliance with a *state permit or state order*" [emphasis added]. Are projects involving upgrades to stormwater systems, including those with expired stormwater permits, eligible for Ecosystem Restoration funding?**

    **ANSWER**: Refer to Eligibility Section in the Ecosystem Restoration Grants Application Manual (page 3). DEC does not award Ecosystem Restoration grant funds to mitigate stormwater impacts from new or expanded developments or projects under state order associated with permit compliance.

    In this case, "state order" means projects that are subject to an administrative or judicial enforcement order to comply with water quality standards, not something that is a general statutory requirement.  Projects that are meeting permit requirements are eligible for Ecosystem Restoration Grant funding.

16. **The Application Manual indicates that the budget should include separate lines for contractual and construction costs.  The budget template does not include these lines.**

    **ANSWER**: The budget template has been amended to include these lines. However, the contractual and construction costs can also be added in the lines labeled "Other."

17. **The project summary box on the application only allow for 700 words and we would like to include additional information.**

    **ANSWER**: The project summary box has been expanded to allow for 1000 words.  The review team also wants to see additional information included to better review projects.

For all future grant rounds, applications requesting funds for implementation must include a copy of the final or most current design with the application to support the evaluation process.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit additional information related to the project as attachments to the application.  The applicant should **not** assume that the reviewers are familiar with prior designs, discussions with other DEC programs or permitting decisions.

18. **My project was denied in the last ground round because it included new impervious surfaces.  Why is this?**

    **ANSWER**: Ecosystem Restoration Grant funding may not be used to mitigate stormwater impacts from new or expanded development.  The manual has been updated to indicate this clarification.  If a project requires a stormwater permit because of new or impervious surface construction, it will not be eligible for grant funding.

19. **My town is very small and not near other towns. The manual states that equipment grants for small towns must include sharing of equipment with neighboring towns. This is a challenge in my area.**

    **ANSWER**: Smaller towns (< 5,000 persons) applying for funds to purchase water quality related equipment are currently required to share the equipment with other towns. However, the applicant may request a **waiver** to this requirement if circumstances do not allow for sharing equipment in a cost-efficient manner.  The applicant is encouraged to submit a waiver prior to the application deadline, however it can be included in the application.

20. **Act 64 required the State to provide funding for stormwater utilities. Is this available?**

    **ANSWER**: Offering grant funds to support municipalities seeking to establish stormwater utility in their town or region is described in statute as an eligible use of the Clean Water Fund (10 V.S.A. § 1389(1)(H)). DEC offers funding to support municipalities interested in establishing a **stormwater utility**. A stormwater utility (SWU) is a funding mechanism that is typically instituted by a municipal or regional government entity. The SWU uses dedicated revenues to provide a stable source of revenue for stormwater management activities, such as the design, construction, maintenance and administration of stormwater systems, as well as best management practices and other strategies to control and reduce stormwater runoff pollution to surface waters. Revenues can be generated from a variety of methods including user fees, service charges, taxes, exactions, and assessments. Project proposals should include but are not limited to the following activities: completing program needs assessments, cost of service analyses, rate structure development, database and billing analyses, developing a capital improvement plan, conducting public education and outreach or developing cooperative agreements or other activities to support the formation of a multi-

municipal stormwater utility. Preference will be given to those public entities that have already completed a stormwater utility feasibility analysis.

If a municipality is interested in applying for funding to develop a stormwater utility, use the current application, choose Stormwater Utility Development as the project type in the drop down on the application form (#4), and choose the appropriate milestones and deliverables.

21. **Last year, DEC provided funds for partner grants, which included work crews. Will these funds be available?**

ANSWER: DEC will be issuing a separate RFP for partner funds in September. This will award funds for Work Crew-Supported Project Implementation and a new "Train the Trainer" funding opportunity.  The RFP will be posted on the grants webpage (http://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/cwi/grants).

22. **I want to request funding for replacing culverts in my town.  Is this likely to be funded?**

ANSWER: Culvert replacement is considered a low priority for funding.  Culverts that contribute to geomorphic instability and/or unraveling of the stream, and are identified as priorities with the Rivers Management Program would be considered a higher priority.  Applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss potential culvert projects with the local river scientist prior to application. Applicants should also consider funding from the VT Agency of Transportation or the VT Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

23. **My application is for a project that may impact a wetland.  The manual emphasizes that applicants should make every effort to avoid these conflicts. Does that mean it would be eligible?**

ANSWER: The applicant is required to submit a map of the project location using the Ecosystem Restoration Grant Screening theme layer located on the ANR Natural Resource Atlas.  This is intended to help the applicant and the review team identify any potential natural resource conflicts, such as wetlands, river corridors or shorelands.  If the map indicates the potential for any natural resource conflicts, the applicant must explain in the project summary how the applicant has or intends to address these concerns. (As an example, if a wetland permit may be required, applications that indicate the permit has been received or that the applicant has discussed the project with the wetland program will be considered a higher priority for funding.) Projects submitted for implementation grants are expected to have finalized all necessary permits or have a plan for doing so explained in the application. Implementation grant requests that do not address this will be returned for future funding.

24. **I am confused by the reporting that must be done for my project after completion. Where can I get additional information?**

    **ANSWER:** The reporting requirements are posted on the grant website (http://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/cwi/grants) under the heading "Final Reporting Resources." Upon awarding the grant, the grant agreement will include all reporting requirements.