

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What projects are eligible for Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) funding?**

ERP grants are supported by State of Vermont capital construction funds. Therefore, eligible construction projects target nonpoint sources of pollution that cause or contribute to the degradation of the State's surface waters (rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands). Capital-eligible projects can have only a minor, if any, emphasis on education and outreach, monitoring, and long-term maintenance.

### **What types of equipment are eligible for ERP funds?**

Equipment that enhances local Best Management Practices (BMP) implementation and maintenance, such as hydroseeders or high efficiency vacuum street sweepers and vacuum (vactor) trucks or trailers are eligible for grant funds. Larger municipalities (>6,000 persons) will be considered for individual ownership. Smaller municipalities will be considered provided that the applicant involves a cooperative of at least four municipalities and equipment-sharing arrangements to improve utilization rates. All proposals for equipment will need to have in place acceptable: (1) a long term equipment maintenance plan, and (2) a solid waste (sediment) disposal plan.

### **Who can apply for an ERP grant?**

Vermont municipalities, regional organizations, non-profit associations, citizen groups, and state agencies are eligible to receive Ecosystem Restoration Program grants. Individuals, for-profit entities, and federal agencies are not eligible to receive funds directly, but may be a specified partner to collaborate in a proposed project.

### **Is there a limit in the size of a grant request?**

The project budget cap has been increased for this round to \$400,000.

### **What are some examples the funding categories?**

*Project Scoping* would include river corridor planning, storm water master planning, storm water mapping, and Agency of Agriculture or Natural Resource Conservation Service-sanctioned agricultural land critical source area mapping. *Project Planning, Feasibility or Design* may involve any preliminary tasks such as design work or feasibility analysis that is necessary prior to implementation.

*Implementation* involves construction, installation, application, or implementation of a project.

*Easements* include easement scoping or implementation that accomplishes permanent protection where no existing protection or regulations exist.

### **Can an organization or municipality submit more than one grant applications?**

A single organization or municipality may submit up to three proposals (each containing one project). An organization or municipality may be a sub-applicant in other proposals. This three-application limit does not apply to easement proposals because of the small number of organizations statewide involved in the development of easements.

### **Can an organization combine two or more projects under one grant application?**

A single organization or municipality may combine multiple, similar projects within one application where appropriate. However we do discourage applicants from combining dissimilar projects together in a single proposal. Our goal is to allow us to effectively compare proposals based on the type of projects, when they are combined, it makes a fair evaluation of the proposal difficult.

**How do I find a copy of the Tactical Basin Plan for my area?**

Visit the Tactical Basin Planning website and select your basin from the list (<http://www.watershedmanagement.vt.gov/planning.htm>).

**What if my project is not mentioned specifically in a Tactical Basin Plan? Is it still eligible for funding?**

Projects that are not specifically referenced in a Tactical Basin Plan are still eligible for an ERP grant. We encourage applicants to also look to other State-sanctioned plans for additional projects including River Corridor Plans or Stormwater Master Plans. Certain types of projects including improvements to stream crossings, hard stabilization of streambanks and shorelands, land protection, and projects with alternative funding sources are still eligible but are considered a low priority for ERP funding. Be sure to consult with your Watershed Coordinator to help in the assessment of your project's eligibility and document the water quality problem and pollution source in your proposal.

**How do I find out who the Watershed Coordinator is for my area?**

Watershed Coordinators for each basin can be found on the Basin Planning website ([http://www.vtwaterquality.org/planning/htm/pl\\_basins.htm](http://www.vtwaterquality.org/planning/htm/pl_basins.htm)).

**Can you apply for an ERP grant if you are in an MS4 community?**

Yes, all municipalities in the state, including Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) municipalities, are now eligible to apply for ERP funds for nonpoint source pollution abatement projects. MS4s applying for stormwater management projects will be required to provide match.

**Can you apply for an ERP grant if the project is within a Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) district?**

Yes. A proposed stormwater management project within a CSO district is eligible for ERP funding, if the following conditions are met:

- (1) the project uses the principles of low impact development (LID), and its primary focus is to implement green stormwater infrastructure practices; and,
- (2) the budget for the project includes a minimum of 25 percent local match (in-kind contributions, donations, or other resources.)

**Can my project include monitoring, education and outreach, and long-term maintenance?**

Yes. However, these elements must be a minor budget component of the overall project.

**One of the eligibility requirements is to provide a Stewardship Commitment to assure that the project will meet its functional life. Why does the proposal need to include a Stewardship Commitment?**

An ERP-funded project should be planned, constructed, and maintained based on its expected design life. A stewardship commitment is intended to provide assurances that the project will continue to function over its design life.

**Can the cost associated with implementing the Stewardship Commitment be included in the project's budget?**

Yes, as long as the costs associated with the stewardship commitment represent a minor amount of the project's overall cost.

**What would be a Stewardship Commitment look like for a buffer planting project?**

The Commitment should include a landowner’s agreement not to cut down the newly planted vegetation, and a removal of plant protection devices, if installed at the time of planting, when they are no longer necessary.

**What would be a Stewardship Commitment look like for an assessment or design project?**

The Commitment should include how the project will be integrated into Tactical Basin Plans, and how it will lead to targeted implementation of priority projects.

**The RFP indicates that bridge and culvert assessments are not a high priority in this grant round. What if they are included in a Phase 2 river corridor assessment that is supported by the Watershed Coordinators?**

The implementation of stream crossing replacement projects are considered lower priority. River Geomorphic Assessments and corridor planning projects that include bridge and culvert assessment are considered priority projects.

**Do I need to have landowner permission in order to submit a proposal?**

We need some demonstration that there is local support for the project, such as a letter to show a support from the municipality, landowner(s), and/or other relevant partner.

**What additional information will we need to submit prior to entering into a grant agreement with the Ecosystem Restoration Program?**

Prior to executing a grant agreement, grant recipients will be required to provide the following documents:

1. A copy of its procurement procedures (a model document is available on the ERP website); and,
2. A certificate of insurance to show that the minimum coverage is in effect. Grant recipients shall name the State of Vermont and its officers and employees as an additional insured:
  - a. Workers Compensation (In accordance with the laws of the State of Vermont);
  - b. General Liability and Property Damage (\$1,000,000 per occurrence);
  - c. Automotive Liability (\$1,000,000 combined single limit).
3. Comply with the Conflict of Interest policy (Section 22 of Attachment C – attached)

**How do I calculate project match?**

Project match is calculated by dividing the total matching funds by the total project costs (requested ERP funds plus the matching funds). For example: If you have a project that costs \$15,000 and are requesting \$10,000 of ERP grant funds while providing \$5,000 in matching funds, your match is 33%.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Total match/total project costs} &= \text{percent match} \\ \$5,000/\$15,000 &= 0.33 = 33\% \end{aligned}$$

**Are funds available for a road-related project?**

Yes, but we encourage applicants to look for alternative funding sources for road-related erosion or sediment control projects. Vermont Agency of Transportation’s [Better Back Roads program](#) is an option for road-related water quality improvement funding in Vermont.

**What if I don't know the cost of my project until I put it out for bid? How do I account for those costs in the RFP? What happens if the costs are greater than what we estimated?**

We strongly encourage project proponents to make every effort to secure best estimates for the proposal's budget. The State will require accurate budgets, based on costs obtained via the organization's procurement procedure before execution of the final grant agreement.

**Are there any guidelines for costing out a project?**

We encourage project proponents to work with contractors in securing quotes or bids during the project proposal development process. Below is an evaluation of budgets associated with projects that were funded in prior years. This information may help you gauge expected costs associated with your project idea:

- Riparian buffers: \$2,500 - \$3,500 per acre.
- Stormwater designs: \$10,000 - \$12,000 per design.
- River Corridor Planning/Phase II Stream Geomorphic Assessment: approximately \$2,400 per river mile.

**What performance measures should I use from the ERP Performance Standards in my proposal?**

The ERP Performance Standards are to be used as a guide for applicants in drafting performance measures. Please use those standards that are most relevant to your project, not all the measures listed will be applicable to every project.

**What does High/Medium/Low priority in the ERP Performance Standards mean?**

The priority levels in the ERP Performance Standards are a guide for the type of projects that are capital eligible (as ERP funds are capital funds) and are a priority for ERP.

**What is a single audit? Is this the same as an independent audit?**

A single audit, also known as an OMB A-133 audit, is the required examination of an organization's financial records if they receive more than \$750,000 in Federal funds (grants or contracts) annually. This is not the same as an independent audit.

**What if my organization doesn't have an accounting system? Can I still apply for a grant?**

Organizations that don't have an accounting system that can track receipt and disbursement of funds for a single agreement or account for 100% of each employee's time, are still eligible to apply for a grant. However, an organization that doesn't have an accounting system or whose accounting system doesn't meet these requirements will be considered high risk. In order to receive a grant through the State, an organization will be subject to close monitoring and additional requirements at the time of the grant award. We recommend that such organizations work to upgrade their accounting systems and processes to meet these requirements, or partner with an organization that does meet these standards.

**Does the State require funds to be withheld until the final deliverable is completed?**

The final deliverable must be at least 5% of the total award amount. Please develop your Table of Performance Measures accordingly.

**When will grantees hear if their proposals will be funded?**

We anticipate announcing the first round of FY2016 grant awards by late November, however this is subject to change. Please note that some proposals may be partially funded, waitlisted, or could be funded at a later date, depending on the availability of funds.

## **Application Review Process and Scoring Criteria**

The evaluation and ranking of the ERP grant applications are based on the seven criteria listed in Section C of the application. The ERP Grant Review Committee will evaluate the applications using the scoring criteria outlined below.

Each ERP Grant Review Committee member will evaluate and score each ERP grant application. . The proposal’s final evaluation is an averaging of those scores. A standard deviation of the will also becalculated for each application. The ERP Grant Review Committee will meet to discuss the scoring, project proposals with significant standard deviation, and make final award determinations. The Grant Review Committee’s goal is to fund those capital-eligible project proposal that score a minimum of 60 points, subject to the availability of funds.

The scoring criteria for each of the seven questions are listed below. The points show a minimum amount of points associated with the corresponding category:

### **1. PROJECT CONSISTENT WITH TACTICAL BASIN PLAN (15 points) (RFP section E.1)**

<b>Points</b>	<b>Category</b>
15 [High]	<u>Specified in Tactical Plan</u> : An activity or action considered as a top priority in a Tactical Basin Plan or other State-sanctioned plan. Applicant provides detail on where within tactical plan and how project aligns. Basin Planner and Technical Staff agree that the project is high priority.
10 [Medium-High]	An activity or action considered as a high priority in a TBP or other State-sanctioned plan.
5 [Medium]	An activity or action considered as a medium priority.
0	An activity or action considered as a low priority.

Any projects that fall under the following categories should receive no points for this section, they are still eligible for funding, but should not be scored above zero.

<b>Points</b>	<b>Category</b>
0	<u>Improvements to Stream Crossings</u> : The Vermont stream alteration permit now requires the sizing of structures based on river equilibrium (or natural stability) conditions.
0	<u>Hard Stabilization of Streambanks and Shorelands</u> : An action that seeks to stabilize an eroding streambed or bank using standard structural channelization practices (rather than the non-structural approaches that use native vegetation).
0	<u>Land Protection</u> : A project that principally involves land conservation that does not involve a river corridor or stormwater easement.
0	<u>Alternative Funding Available</u> : A project that has current access to other State or Federal sources of primary funding.

### **2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION (10 points) (Section E.2)**

Applicant must provide a description of project including; (1) water quality issues/threat being addressed, (2) how the project addresses those issues, and (3) why the work is necessary.

**Points Category**

- 10 Includes all three elements specified in adequate detail to determine goals of the project.
- 5 Includes the three elements specified, but does not provide enough specificity.
- 0 Does not provide the elements specified.

**3. TARGETING TO ACHIEVE ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS (10 points) (Section E.3)**

Applicant is asked to describe the (a) current conditions and (b) how the project addresses the current conditions and critical pollution sources that are causing impacts to a specific water body

**Points Category**

- 10 Includes details on current conditions and specific detail on improving water quality by targeting critical pollution sources; describes the necessity of the project, and how it aligns with ERP's goals.
- 5 Includes basic information on current conditions and some information on water quality, necessity, and ERP's goals, but does not provide enough specificity; or neglects to address one of the three questions.
- 0 Does not provide the elements specified.

**4. STEWARDSHIP COMMITMENT (5 points) (Section E.4)**

Applicant asked to describe the project's stewardship commitment and the entity that will be responsible for carrying out the agreement.

**Points Category**

- 5 Includes a detailed description of a stewardship agreement or maintenance contract for the design life of the project and includes reference to the entity that will be carrying out the agreement or contract.
- 2 Describes a stewardship agreement, but without sufficient detail and/or neglects in include the entity responsible for the stewardship agreement.
- 0 Does not provide a stewardship commitment or an adequate commitment.

**5. COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT (10 points) (Section E.5)**

Applicant Explain the extent to which you have identified and secured local support for the project including commitments from municipalities and landowner(s).

**Points Category**

- 10 Proposal clearly identifies local support from municipalities and landowners and includes documentation to demonstrate local support.
- 5 Proposal describes and demonstrates some preliminary support for the project.
- 0 Proposal offers no demonstration of local support.

**6. MEASURABLE OUTCOMES, PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND MILESTONES (20 points) (Section E.6)**

Applicant must identify performance measures and complete table of milestones, anticipated task-based performance measures, associated project deliverables, and payment per deliverable. They must include as deliverables: a press release, a short blog article for the State blog, and stewardship commitment. Applicant must input budget into table provided and provide a narrative explaining the costs listed in the budget. This must include hourly rates and number of hours anticipated for Personnel category.

**Points Category**

- 20 Performance measures are clear and task-based, include the required deliverables, and reasonable payments. Budget is complete, inclusive of all costs and reasonable given the nature of the project. And Budget Narrative includes sufficient details, describe entire project’s costs, and costs are competitive.
- 13 One of the sections (performance measures, budget, or budget narrative) and their components are incomplete or lack sufficient detail for a proper review. However, the other components still allow for a complete understanding and analysis of the costs associated with the project.
- 10 Two of the sections (performance measures, budget, or budget narrative) and their components are incomplete or lack sufficient detail for a proper review. Project costs do not appear to be in line with project scope as detailed in the proposal.
- 0 Performance measures are not tied to clear tasks or tasks are undefined, required deliverables are missing, and/or partial payments are included. Budget and narrative are incomplete, do not encompass the scope of the project, and/or are not in line with expected costs.

**7. PROJECT READINESS (5 points) (Section E.7)**

Grant recipients not implementing the project promptly or fall behind schedule and cannot complete the project within the specified one or two year timeframe may be at risk of having the grant award reduced or rescinded. Thus, the proposal must specify that the project will be: (a) implemented soon after the grant is awarded and contract signed, and (b) completed within a one or two year time frame.

**Points Category**

- 5 Yes; to both
- 0 No to one or both questions about readiness.

**8. ITEMIZED BUDGET AND NARRATIVE (10 points) (Section E.8)**

Applicant must input budget into table provided and provide a narrative explaining the costs listed in the budget. This must include hourly rates and number of hours anticipated for Personnel category.

**Points Category**

- 10 Budget is complete, inclusive of all costs and reasonable given the nature of the project. And Budget Narrative includes sufficient details, describe entire project’s costs, and costs are competitive.

- 5 budget or budget narrative is incomplete or lack sufficient detail for a proper review. However, the other components still allow for a complete understanding and analysis of the costs associated with the project.
- 2 Budget, or budget narrative is incomplete or lack sufficient detail for a proper review. Project costs do not appear to be in line with project scope as detailed in the proposal.
- 0 Budget and narrative are incomplete, do not encompass the scope of the project, and/or are not in line with expected costs.

**9. PROJECT MATCH (10 points) (Section E.9)**

Match is the incorporation of additional funding sources, cash donations, in-kind contributions, or other resources that substantially expand the project’s scope and environmental benefits. Applicants Match should also be documented in the previous section (Itemized Budget and Narrative), please compare these sections.

<b>Points</b>	<b>Category</b>
10	≥ 50% Match
7	25% – 49% Match
4	10% – 24% Match
2	< 0% - 9% Match
0	0% Match

**10. PAST PERFORMANCE (5 points) (section E.10)**

Past performance on similar projects, if applicable, is a predictor of the likelihood for successful outcomes. We ask that applicants describe performance on similar projects within the last five years. Describe whether the project was successful, your history meeting reporting requirements, and how you documented success. If applicants have no prior experience with grant programs, they need to provide relevant examples of successful project completed on time and within the budget provided. If applicants have received but have not yet completed the terms of a grant or contract, they need to provide assurances that they are compliant with the terms of the grant or contract.

<b>Points</b>	<b>Category</b>
5	Applicant submitted description of past performance that demonstrated completion of a grant or contract within the time allotted and within budget.
0	Applicant’s failed to submit description of past performance or description failed to provide assurances that the project will be completed within the fixed timeframe and budget.