

Ecosystem Restoration Grants

Question & Answer Period Responses (3/6/19)

Please note: The formal question and answer period for inquiries related to the [FY2019 Round 3 & FY2020 Ecosystem Restoration Grants RFP](#).

1. **Question:** *RPC's use an indirect rate that is above 10%, it has been approved by VTrans for work with their grants but is not an official NICRA. Is this sufficient for grant eligibility?*

Answer: Yes. In the past it has not been accepted; however, we now accept indirect rates that have been approved by another State entity such as VTrans, if a federal NICRA is not available.

2. **Question:** *If a stormwater project is located in an area that is being proposed by an MS4 community, but is on a private site and will support nutrient and/or sediment reduction from the public lands of the MS4 community, is it eligible?*

Answer:

Page 5, Table 4 of the Manual states,

"Projects identified in a MS4 plan (e.g. FPR, PCP) on private land but [the] project is sponsored by the MS4 [are eligible]. Sponsored means the Municipality assumes full responsibility for the operation and maintenance, or they are a co-permittee and agreement identifies O&M responsibility."

Page 8 of the Manual states,

"Applications [from an eligible applicant] to construct clean water improvement projects on private land are eligible for Ecosystem Restoration grants. Some project types are typically sited on private land, such as floodplain restoration, woody buffer restoration, and agricultural controls on farmland. However, with respect to stormwater and road-related mitigation projects, DEC places municipal project proposals at a higher priority for funding than similar projects on private property."

3. **Question:** *If a stormwater project is located on private land but is proposed by an MS4 community, does it require 50% match?*

Answer: Yes, 50% match required for stormwater projects within MS4 communities. Match eligibility is addressed on pages 10-11 of the [ERP Application Manual](#).

4. **Question:** *Is there only one project allowed per application?*

Answer: Yes, only one project per application. Assessment projects may include the development of several preliminary designs that are identified in the assessment as high priority. An application may include both preliminary and final design for a single project. Applications for implementation may not include preliminary and/or final design.

5. **Question:** *For projects such as developing a stormwater master plan or LakeWise assessment, does that mean the grantee who developed the plan is responsible to securing funding for, and implementing, all the projects outlined in the plan?*

Answer: No, the grantee would only be responsible for the scope of the project that was awarded. For example, responsible only for the development of the assessment and not responsible for implementing the projects outlined in the assessment.

6. **Question:** *Is this an appropriate funding source when other funding sources are not the right fit, or they have used all the funding available from other sources? For example, if a farmer has reached their Farm Bill Cap with USDA-NRCS and have an easement but want to plant buffers, could they apply to ERP for funding?*

Answer: Ecosystem Restoration grants are a great opportunity for niche funding when other funding sources are unavailable or only partially fund a project. In this agriculture example, this project would be directed to the CWI Woody Buffer Block Grant or potentially the River Corridor Easement Block Grant (if a conservation partner wanted to add a river corridor easement with planting onto the existing ALE easement). Additionally, for any road projects where there is potential funding, such as through Grants-in-Aid, but the Town or recipient of those funds plans to utilize them for other projects, an applicant could propose the road project to Ecosystem Restoration Grants. It is imperative that the executive summary portion of the application detail the how these other funding sources are not accessible for the project and emphasize the importance of the project for nutrient and sediment reductions.

7. **Question:** *If there is a property where multiple stormwater practices will be installed, should one application be completed for each practice?*

Answer: Applications may contain one project with multiple practices. One location, one application (excluding assessments which often cover multiple locations). It is important to note that the location may not be restricted to one land parcel. For example, if a project is utilizing multiple stormwater practices to treat runoff from an impervious surface complex and the most appropriate siting of a stormwater treatment practice is next to the impervious surface but on an adjacent landowner's parcel, the application is still eligible.

8. **Question:** *For a project on private land that is sponsored by an eligible applicant, does the eligible applicant have to take responsibility for the Operations & Maintenance Agreement (O&M)?*

Answer: No, any partner considered “eligible” (Table 2 of the Manual) may be the responsible party for the O&M. If the project is on private land, the landowner may be responsible for the O&M. For example, the applicant may be a Regional Planning Commission but the responsible party for the O&M is the Town. Attached to the application, please include a letter of support from the responsible party indicating they will be responsible for the O&M (for the life of the project, 10 years). Upon project award and grant agreement execution, the O&M will be developed utilizing the ERP O&M Template and signed by the responsible party.

9. **Question:** *How are capital funds used?*

Answer: Capital funds are used for construction projects.

10. **Question:** *If a grantee receives clean water funding through Ecosystem Restoration Grants to fund preliminary designs for a project on private land, could the partner apply again for capital funding to implement the project?*

Answer: Yes, see answer to question 2 above and the [ERP Application Manual](#) for guidance for applications on private land.

11. **Question:** *Can two related stormwater design projects that are cited near each other be in one application?*

Answer: If the stormwater design projects are to treat the same nutrient and sediment source for the same project, yes. For example, a project may contain multiple stormwater treatment practices and thus would require designs for each. If the projects are separate and not at the same site, they cannot be combined in one application.

12. **Question:** *Can an invoice be submitted without a deliverable?*

Answer: Yes, that is the benefit of cost-based invoicing, rather than deliverables-based. The grantee may submit an invoice at any time, as many times as needed. With that invoice, they should include back up information documenting the expense requested in the invoice and provide narrative information as to the status of achieving the deliverables outlined in the grant agreement. 10% of the project cost will be reserved for final payment upon completion of the milestones and deliverables included in the grant agreement.

13. **Question:** *Can I send a link with instructions on how to access large data, rather than sending a large file as the deliverable?*

Answer: Yes, that is an acceptable form of submitting deliverables. The grantee would coordinate with the Technical Project Manager (TPM) throughout this process.

14. **Question:** *If we have a project that we need to reapply for, do we use the same Watershed Projects Database ID number?*

Answer: Yes, the number associated with a project always remains the same.

15. **Question:** *Grant File Checklist- is this new?*

Answer: This is a new addition as of FY18 Q3. It is provided with the agreement finalization documentation during grant agreement execution. This resource is provided to assist grantees in appropriately filing documentation related to their grant agreement. Ecosystem Restoration Grants are supported with state funds and are subject to auditing. Grantees are encouraged to utilize the [Grant File Checklist for Grantees](#), as it is a helpful resource should an audit come up.

16. **Question:** *What constitutes match?*

Answer: Eligible and ineligible match is outlined on pages 10-11 of the [ERP Application Manual](#). State employee time for work that is already part of what they do for their job is not eligible as match.

17. **Question:** *For match documentation, what needs to be saved?*

Answer: Any documentation related to invoicing or match for Clean Water Initiative Grants should be filed (in a way that they are readily accessible), should it be requested during an audit. For example, match provided may include volunteer hours and the corresponding log of volunteer time should be saved specific to the grant agreement and match documentation. See question 15 above.

18. **Question:** *For the block grants, will providing a certificate of insurance be required by the partner facilitating the block grant?*

Answer: Within the block grant format, the partner who is the recipient of the block grant is responsible for overseeing the prioritization, implementation, disbursement and documentation of funds. To receive State funds, the partner(s) selected will need to provide the State with an up-to-date Certificate of Insurance. In addition, the selected partner(s) will have developed their own procedures in accordance with our guidelines, to disperse funds to others. The Design & Implementation Block Grant RFP will be released Fall 2018.

Example: [Municipal Certificate of Insurance](#)

Example: [Organization/Business Certificate of Insurance](#)

19. **Question:** *For stormwater master planning projects, can the town or a subcontractor assist in the project?*

Answer: Yes, the grantee may utilize a subcontractor. A [subcontractor approval form](#) is required if you wish to use any award dollars to pay said contractor. Please send it to Shalini Suryanarayana (Shalini.Suryanarayana@vermont.gov) before committing funds to the subcontractor and expect 1-5 days for request processing. It is imperative that the development of stormwater master planning projects adhere to DEC guidance. Please see below.

Municipal Stormwater Management:

<http://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/cwi/solutions/municipal-stormwater>

Vermont Stormwater Master Planning Guidelines:

<http://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/erp/docs/SWMP%20Final%20Guidelinesrev1-18.pdf>

20. **Question:** *I'm having issues saving the grant application. Who should I work with?*

Answer: For any issues relating to the grant application please contact Allison Lewis, Allison.Lewis@vermont.gov, 802-490-6124.

21. **Question:** *We are supporting an MS4 developing an application for engineering final design of a stormwater retrofit practice. The likely total value of the design is over \$20,000. Since the applicant is an MS4 and the project is within the regulated MS4 area, a 50% match is required. Is it correct that the total value of the design would need to be \$40,000 to be eligible for ERP funding (\$20,000 "funding need" and a \$20,000 match)? If this application now falls in that gap and is not eligible for ERP funding, would it instead be forced to advance through the Design & Implementation Block Grant – Year 2 Pilot?*

Answer: Yes, you are correct. Although, partners from the Year 1 Block Grant Pilot may still have funds available. If this project is for final design and implementation you could reach out to them first- that may be a faster route for getting this project funded. Of importance- the Year 1 block grant was for *final design and implementation* projects only; the Year 2 block grant will also include *preliminary design*.

22. **Question:** *We had previously been informed that one entity would be allowed to bundle several small projects into one proposal for \$20,000 or more. However, the ERP Grants Application Manual and Q&A from the presentation suggest that you will consider only one project/location per proposal. Would you please advise how entities with smaller (<\$20,000) natural resource projects should proceed with proposals?*

Answer: Eligible applications may contain only one project for Ecosystem Restoration Grants. Single projects whose requested funding (excluding match) is at least \$20,000 may apply through Ecosystem Restoration Grants. Projects less than \$20,000 may apply through the FY19 Design & Implementation Block Grant – Year 2 Pilot or other applicable block grants (Woody Buffer Block Grants, River Corridor Easement Block Grants, etc.). This funding opportunity is available for preliminary design, final design and implementation.

23. **Question:** *If our application is for a project that will require an individual permit, do we need to have the permit or is it okay if we just say we know we will need one?*

Answer: Starting in FY2019, projects that require individual permits are now eligible for Ecosystem Restoration Grants. To be eligible, the application must specify which permits are required and document that they have begun the process of receiving said permit(s). As with any other competitive application, it is imperative that the DEC technical staff (wetlands, rivers, lakes, stormwater) and basin planners be aware of the project. If an application is awarded funding, the grant agreement will not be finalized until the permit(s) are issued. Ecosystem Restoration Grant recipients may request permission to begin work 90 days prior to the finalization of the grant agreement. For projects requiring an individual permit(s), permission to begin work prior to the grant agreement execution will not be granted until all necessary permit(s) are obtained.

24. **Question:** *In the application, the question that asks if we agree with the milestones, will we lose points if we say “no”?*

Answer: There are no points associated with this question and answering “no” will not impact the application review. We ask this question because we understand that some projects do not fit perfectly into our milestones and it will save time during grant agreement development if we know ahead of time. Answering “no” should be reserved for projects where the milestones do not make sense for the type of project, this is not an opportunity to wordsmith or get creative with milestones. Answering “no” does not guarantee that DEC will approve the request for project-specific milestones.

25. **Question:** *What is the Stormwater Treatment Practice (STP) Calculator and when should it be used?*

Answer: The STP Calculator is a tool developed by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to estimate total phosphorus load reductions achieved by stormwater treatment practices (STPs). The user enters STP data into the tool and the tool calculates the estimated annual average total phosphorus (P) load reduction. Calculations are based on the same methods DEC will use to track progress reducing phosphorus pollution loading into Lake Champlain and Lake Memphremagog.

The STP calculator may not be suited for complex STP systems or projects where an existing STP is being retrofitted. See the **Other Applications** section at the end of the [instructions document](#) to how the tool can be applied when an existing STP is being modified. The calculator should not be used for practices outside of Lake Champlain or Lake Memphremagog basins or practices draining agricultural or forested landscapes.

If submitting a grant application for a stormwater treatment practice in the Lake Champlain or Memphremagog basin, the calculator should be used to estimate potential phosphorus reductions. Once a value has been computed in the calculator, the user can choose the “To Report” button to save a copy of the values entered and computed. A copy of this report should be attached to the grant application when it is appropriate.

The STP calculator along with more detailed instructions can be found here: <https://anrweb.vt.gov/DEC/CleanWaterDashboard/STPCalculator.aspx>

26. **Question:** *What is the best way for me to stay tuned in to information about Clean Water Initiative Grants?*

Answer: Visit our [Grants](#) webpage, this is our home base for all information pertaining to funding opportunities. At the top of the page, there is a link to [subscribe](#) to the Clean Water Initiative Program's Grants Notification List- this is our main resource for sharing information. It is important to have read the materials on the grants webpage, especially our [Policy](#) document. We recommend visiting our grants webpage regularly, as well as thoroughly reviewing all materials available for the grant you are applying for, prior to submitting the application.

27. **Question:** *If the scope of my project, such as the budget or design, has changed- do I have to notify DEC?*

Answer: Yes! If the budget/design/scope changes more than 50%, you must get approval from the TPM and the DEC business office before moving forward. We encourage grant recipients to keep their TPM looped into the progress of the project and always reach out if there are any changes or you need support. We will do our best, but we cannot guarantee that changes to the budget (such as an increase in funds) can be accommodated. These types of changes require formal amendments to the grant agreement and it is best for the grantee not to assume a change is okay without first receiving written approval from their TPM & DEC business office.

28. **Question:** *Can you apply for an Ecosystem Restoration Grant if the project is within a Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) district?*

Answer: A proposed stormwater management project within a CSO district is eligible for Ecosystem Restoration Grant funding, if the following conditions are met:

- I. The municipality is compliant with the State 2016 CSO Rule; the project is not required to meet an existing state 1272 order issued outside of the State 2016 CSO Rule; and
- II. The project uses the principles of low impact development (LID), and its primary focus is to implement green stormwater infrastructure practices.

29. **Question:** *Can I use awarded ERP funds as match to other funds my organization is pursuing?*

Answer: Possibly. If an organization would like to use their ERP award for their own match, they must first receive permission from the DEC business office. The request to use the funds as match should be submitted prior to the grant agreement being finalized. DEC cannot guarantee accommodation of these requests, but we will try. If a grantee has not received formal permission to use their ERP funds as match, the State of Vermont is using it as match and for the grantee to use it as well would be considered double counting and is not permissible.

30. **Question:** *Can I use federal funds I have received from another source as match to ERP?*

Answer: Possibly. Match eligibility criteria are outlined on pages 10-11 of the [ERP Application Manual](#). Like with ERP, it is important that the grantee first receive permission from the source of those funds prior to using them as match.

31. **Question:** *The application asks how many months for project completion. What is the scope of project completion?*

Answer: This timeline includes from when the grant agreement is signed through final reporting and project closeout. Applicants should provide their best estimate. These estimates will be used in the development of the grant agreement timeline. If a certain aspect of the project may be a range of months, we recommend estimating a longer timeline to ensure plenty of time to complete the project while avoiding the potential for a grant agreement amendment for a time extension.

32. **Question:** *Where do we get the clean water project signs and when do they need to be posted?*

Answer: Clean water project signs are to be posted during construction for implementation projects and are available via the Regional Planning Commissions. Please read the [Clean Water Project Sign Guidance](#) for more information.

33. **Question:** *How do I know my responsibilities as a grantee and applicable business office procedures such as invoicing, reporting, etc.?*

Answer: The [ERP Training Presentation](#) contains important information about roles, responsibilities and procedures for ERP grant agreements, and we encourage applicants and grant recipients to review this information thoroughly. After each grant round, applicants who have received an ecosystem grant award will be required to attend a mandatory grant recipient training that will review policies and procedures in detail. Additionally, questions may be directed to Shalini.Suryanarayana@vermont.gov.

34. **Question:** *How do I complete the Certificate of Good Standing?*

Answer: The [Certificate of Good Standing](#) is a self-certification form that is a required document for the ecosystem restoration grant applications. Populate the cells in the form, sign it, save as a .pdf and include in the attachments document submitted along with the application. It is considered up-to-date if it has been signed within one year of the grant application submission.

35. **Question:** *What is the average to maximum a grant can be applied for?*

Answer: There is no maximum amount that a grant application can ask for. Applications must include a minimum of \$20,000 requested Ecosystem Restoration Funds.

36. **Question:** *If a university is involved, what is the overhead fee?*

Answer: Funding opportunities through the Clean Water Initiative Program do not have set administrative fees. Overall program delivery costs (total administrative costs) cannot exceed 15% of the total award amount. If the indirect rate is 10% or greater, a federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA) or other approved documentation, must be provided. Further information can be found in the [ERP Application Manual](#) on page 20.

37. **Question:** *Are grant agreements for one- or two-year periods?*

Answer: The grant agreement timeline is something that the grantee will work with the Technical Project Manager (TPM) to finalize during the grant agreement signing process. As a standard, grant agreements are usually set at two years in length. It is important that the grantee and the TPM develop a realistic timeline for project completion, to avoid the need for a formal grant agreement amendment.

38. **Question:** *Are there any tools available for natural resources screening besides the ANR Atlas?*

Answer: Yes, the new [Project Screening Tool](#) is available! The tool was created by DEC staff to screen natural resource conflicts for water quality projects in the [Watershed Projects Database](#). After a project screen is complete, the tool provides you with the contact information of your Basin Planner, River Scientist, and natural resource regulatory staff including your Stormwater Analyst and Act 250 coordinator in your area. You can find this tool in the [ANR Clean Water Portal](#), which also houses the [Interagency Clean Water Projects Dashboard](#), [Watershed Project Database Search](#), and the [Stormwater Treatment Practice \(STP\) Calculator](#). You can also access the project screening tool directly from a project selected in the Watershed Project Database. DEC is requesting feedback on the tool to make it as user friendly as possible. Before you try it out, make sure your browser allows cookies from the site. If you have any comments or questions, please [contact your local basin planner](#).

39. **Question:** *I have questions about ERP project eligibility, specifically for projects aimed at assessing and designing for increased sewer line integrity to prevent wastewater overflows resulting from infiltration and inflow issues (groundwater or stormwater entering a sewer line network due to broken pipes or other problems). Vergennes has had issues with overflows for years. They technically don't have a combined system, but the sewer line infrastructure underground has deteriorated to the point that it acts like a combined system – stormwater/groundwater enters the sewer system and overwhelms the pumping station. Vergennes is eager to identify (one or more) projects to reduce overflow occurrences. Although preliminary work for mapping the sewer system and identifying high priority pipelines to be replaced was completed in the recent Stormwater Master Plan (funded by a LCBP grant), further planning, feasibility, and design work is needed to address the I&I sewer issues. What is the eligibility of a planning endeavor meant to prioritize and narrow cost range for pipe replacement across the City and perform preliminary design of replacement work? What is the eligibility of funding final design or implementation of pipe replacement, meant to fix these I&I issues and reduce overflow occurrence?*

Answer: The most applicable source of funding for this work is through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF). This program offers up to 50% off any planning (preliminary and final design) and depending on the project, may also be eligible for a state pollution control grant. For questions, please contact Terisa Thomas: Terisa.Thomas@vermont.gov, 802-249-2413.