Ecosystem Restoration Grants

Question & Answer Period Responses (8/27/18)

Please note: The formal question and answer period for inquiries related to the FY2019 Ecosystem Restoration Grants RFP *was active from 7/16/18 through 8/20/18.*

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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: In the past it has not been accepted; however, we are evaluating this policy and considering making a change. We are collaborating with VTrans to better understand their processes for granting these approvals, so that DEC Leadership may make a policy decision as to if this will be acceptable for DEC grants and contracts. We expect to provide this response by mid-September. (**Updated response from FY19 Ecosystem Restoration Grants Training Q&A, August 2018)

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 projects within MS4 communities. Match eligibility is addressed on pages 3, 5, 8 and 9 of the Manual.

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

    Answer: Yes, only one project per application; however, within that one project it may contain multiple phases. For example, within the same project you could apply for preliminary design through final design. The project may span multiple properties, this is allowed and is still considered one project. To be eligible, an application must justify why it needs more than one site/project (the sites must be interrelated and necessary for the *one* project) per application.

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 projects relating to hazard mitigation, it is expected that the applicant has already worked with the Department of Public Safety and HMGP Grant Program.

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).

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 3 of the Manual) may be the responsible party 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 and signed by the responsible party.

9. **Question:** *How are capitol 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 Manual for guidance for applications on private land.

11. **Question:** C*an two related stormwater design projects that are cited near each other be in one application?*
    Answer: No, one project (one location) is allowed per 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.

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 page 8 of the Ecosystem Restoration Grants Manual. State employee time for work that is already part of what they do for their job is <u>not</u> 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 they 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 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 just started work on an application for the current round. The application form now has a "feature" that does not allow one to save the completed, or partially completed, form. I presume this is intentional and there is a logical reason for it. That said, it does make completing the application a <u>lot</u> more tedious and time consuming, as it isn't possible to fill out the form over several sessions. Now to my questions: Is this how the form is intended to work? Is it possible for DEC to change it so it's possible to save, and not just print, the document?*

    Answer: This is not how the form is intended to work. The CWIP team has tested the application, both by working directly from the webpage as well as saving first and then working on the fillable .pdf. In both instances, we were about to edit and save over several sessions without loss of content. Perhaps, the issue lies in the version of Adobe that is being used by the applicant. We recommend checking to see if there are any updates that need to occur with the Adobe subscription being used. To have the form work correctly, the applicant must be using Adobe Reader. The applicant must first download the application to their desktop (or other file location) prior to making edits. The most recent version of Adobe Reader can be downloaded from: https://get.adobe.com/reader/. If an applicant is having issues submitting their application via the guidance in the ERP Manual, please reach out to Allison.Compagna@vermont.gov for assistance.

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 on 8/3 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. This funding opportunity is available for preliminary design, final design and implementation.

23. **Question:** *Would you considering awarding agreements to more than one entity for the Woody Buffer Block grant?*

    Answer: [The Policy](#) outlines the minimum and maximum size for FY19 grants (Tables 1 & 2). The Woody Buffer Block Grant has a minimum of $50,000 and a maximum of $100,000 grant size, this ensures we will have at least two entities.

24. **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: New this year, 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.

25. **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.

26. **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

27. **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.