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MASSDEP'S OFFICIAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Water Quality Monitoring Grant (WQMG) Program REQUEST FOR GRANT PROPOSALS State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024

On October 18, 2023, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) posted the Water Quality Monitoring Grant (WQMG) Program, Request for Grant Proposals (RFGP) for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024. In accordance with RFGP Section 4, the Estimated Grant Calendar, MassDEP accepted questions via email pertaining to the WQMG Program from October 18, 2023, through the question submission deadline of 12:00 p.m. on October 25, 2023. Below is MassDEP's Official Answer to the Question received by the Estimated Grant Calendar deadline.

To provide Official Answers that are relevant to all potential grant applicants, interested parties should note that MassDEP revised the question submitted to present the inquiry in a more generalized format than the originally submitted question. MassDEP also provided, in Appendix A, the text of the question as originally submitted. The original question in Appendix A also lists the corresponding MassDEP Official Answer number that is responsive to the relevant original submitted question.

Question 1. *Would field monitoring of ponds targeting the (1) timing and (2) water quality related to spring turn-over and early cyanobacteria blooms experience on Cape Cod be (1) eligible for the WQMG and (2) considered a priority for the SFY 2024 WQMG program?*

Answer 1. Direct measures of cyanobacteria concentrations and direct measures of other parameters that address "water quality" in ponds are eligible activities. As stated in Section 1.D. of the SFY 2024 RFGP, activities proposed "can be associated with monitoring any analyte, biogeochemical parameter, hydrologic parameter, or other measure used to assess water quality, but proposals to collect data most critically needed by MassDEP for CWA § 305(b) and § 303(d) decision-making and reporting will be given priority." Direct measures of cyanobacteria and direct measures of nutrient concentrations (which are a common potential cause of cyanobacteria blooms) may be used by MassDEP for CWA decision-making.

As stated in Section 1.F. of the SFY 2024 RFGP, “Eligible entities can consult the Massachusetts CALM to understand how data are used by MassDEP for water quality assessments (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/water-quality-assessments>).” Thus, MassDEP advises all Applicants to examine the CALM to determine what measures of “water quality” are used by MassDEP for CWA decision making.

Measures of cyanobacteria are not specifically a data priority for the SFY 2024 WQMG program (see Section 1.F. of the SFY 2024 RFGP). However, basic limnological parameters related to trophic status of lake and pond ecosystems are a data priority (Section 1.F.3), which can incorporate measures of “water quality”. Thus, direct measures of parameters examining “water quality” may be evaluated as priority data if the work is to determine lake or pond trophic status.

No geographic priorities are evaluated for the SFY 2024 WQMG program, and any work performed in Massachusetts is eligible. The project period is defined in Section 3. of the SFY 2024 RFGP, which can include the “spring”, and “actions to develop regional and long-term monitoring programs or networks” are eligible projects as described in Section 1.D.3. of the SFY 2024 RFGP. However, only Eligible Expenses (a) incurred during the grant contract period and (b) completed by June 30, 2024, are eligible for reimbursement. MassDEP advises all applicants to review Sections 1.D. to determine what expenses are eligible for reimbursement.

Please Note: MassDEP cannot provide advice on a Proposed Project’s design (including what analytes to sample) to potential grantees during the WQMG application process period (from the RFGP posting date of October 18, 2023, through the Grant Application deadline of 5:00 p.m., November 15, 2023). The question, and corresponding answer outlined above, should not be construed as an endorsement or approval of a proposed project or application. All projects and applications will be evaluated on a fair and competitive basis, utilizing the evaluation criteria publicized in the WQMG Program Request for Grant Proposals – State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024 document (see Section 2.0, “INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION SUBMISSION”).

Appendix A

Below is the original question received by MassDEP by email during the open question period (October 18, 2023, through 12:00 p.m. on October 25, 2023). MassDEP received one email that contained one question. The corresponding official MassDEP Answer is identified in ***bold italics*** after the question. Text in brackets was added by MassDEP to replace text in the original question to (1) preserve the anonymity of the person or group that asked the question or (2) remove references to specific organizations that could be interpreted as (a) an endorsement or (b) specific evaluation of an organization by MassDEP through the official answer.

Question From Email 1

Would field monitoring of ponds targeting the timing and water quality related to spring turn-over and the early cyanobacteria blooms we experience on Cape Cod be of value?

See MassDEP Answer 1.