

**FY23 Pre-RFR Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant
Information Conference Call Notes
January 27, 2022
Held via Zoom**

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Attendees: 34

Welcome and Brief Overview of FY23 RFR

- Polled attendees to get a better understanding of the organization they represented (e.g. municipality, consultant, regional planning agency, etc.) and whether they had applied to the grant program in the past.
- The goal of this call today is to take general questions about the upcoming funding opportunity. Interested applicants are encouraged to send an email to DERCulverts@mass.gov by Monday, January 31st for project specific inquiries. This will allow us to set-up an independent call with you to discuss your project before the RFR is posted for this funding opportunity.
- Applicants are encouraged to review all the Pre-RFR grant resources posted on the grant website, including the Pre-RFR documents, pre-recorded Grant Briefings, and Frequently Asked Questions: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/culvert-replacement-municipal-assistance-grant-program>.
- Reviewed summary slides of What's New in FY23? and Grant Timeline Slides from Grant Briefing Presentation.
 - Revised eligible project criteria in Section 1.4 to better align with goals of Massachusetts Stream Crossing Standards.
 - The primary purpose of this program is to encourage Massachusetts Municipalities to replace undersized, perched, and/or degraded culverts with structures that meet the goals of the Massachusetts Stream Crossing Standards, particularly in areas of high ecological value.
 - The MA SCS primary goals are to restore fish and wildlife passage, reconnect stream habitat, and to maintain natural stream processes (e.g. the movement of sediment and water through the crossing) .
 - For this upcoming funding opportunity, applicants are allowed to propose up to 3 culvert or bridge replacements within the same local connected stream network per application. This is intended to increase the potential ecological benefits of the proposed projects.
 - Updated Funding Availability Section 1.6, including typical range of awards.
 - Added a Mitigation Disclaimer in Section 1.5. This is to clarify projects with a direct connection to or obligation for compensatory mitigation are ineligible to apply.
 - Revised scoring, review criteria and application instructions in Section 3.
 - In FY23, we have incorporated environmental justice criterion to align with the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Environmental Justice Policy (June 2021).
 - Updated Project Terms and provided general clarification of grant requirements.

- Revamped appendices, including adding a how-to guide for using the new Stream Crossing Explorer online mapper (See Appendix B: DER Tools to Determine Environmental Benefits), and a reference guide for typical culvert replacement tasks (See Appendix C: Proposed Work Checklist).

Questions and Answers

Q: I filed a project inquiry, do I need to request a call or do you schedule a call?

A: Should have heard back unless it was recent inquiry. DER staff will follow-up.

Q: Is the FY23 application form that is available on the DER website the correct form or do we expect changes to the form when the RFR is released on Feb 14th?

A: No major changes expected, but it might change slightly so it's important to use the updated form once the RFR is released. The current draft form can be used to start crafting answers in anticipation of the updated form.

Q: Can you use this funding in conjunction with small bridge program funding?

A: Some of our previous funded projects have used that funding for other phases or in conjunction. The small bridge program has their own requirements, so just make sure that what you're proposing meets their requirements too. Clarified, in the past, small bridge funding limited to existing structures 10-20' wide, the CRMA program does not have that limitation, but the structure does have to cross a freshwater stream and projects that remove an existing barrier and reconnect habitat will score better.

Q: Can you clarify the other known sources of funding—does in-kind services provided by the town included, is that viewed favorably/is that taken into consideration?

A: The CRMA program does not require match, we also recognize that we can't cover the full cost of replacement. The grant program is intended to provide incentive funding to assist municipalities in meeting the Massachusetts Stream Crossing Standards. We will look at what's feasible as part of our review and if there's in-kind services that the town can offer, that's great. That won't necessarily rank a project higher or lower but shows that it's a priority for the municipality, which is part of our review. Under project readiness, we will consider if the project is ready for implementation and additional funds or support will be part of that consideration.

Q: If an existing box culvert is under 10' but a new bridge will be over, do we need MassDOT review before application, or can that occur after?

A: It would depend on what phase the project is in. If it was looking for construction funds, then we'd want to see that review, but if it's in an earlier phase, we would not expect you to already have gone through the process. You should be considering that in the proposed scope of work though.

Q: Is culvert replacement considered eligible for application of ARPA or other infrastructure grants or other financing assistance through other MA agencies?

A: Cannot speak to applicability of culvert replacements for ARPA funding or other funding programs at this time. Other programs do require match (CRMA does not require match). Some Towns have used CRMA funding as non-federal match for federal grants. For the CRMA grant program, you can use other funding sources in conjunction with the proposed phases or for future phases.

Q: Can we confirm the deadline for the project inquiries?

A: Please note this is an optional submission. Interested applicants are not required to submit a project inquiry prior to the launch of the grant RFR. It's an opportunity to set up a time to engage us on your project to talk through project-specific questions. Anybody that's interested in doing so please submit project inquiry by Monday (1/31). It just needs to be a short email (even just a single sentence) and we'll reach back out and send you a form and then will set up a call. Please get the form back to us in a timely manner so we have time to set up a call before the RFR is released. These one-on-one meetings can also be helpful to decide what project is the best fit if you're considering multiple projects.

Q: How to submit a project inquiry?

A: Just send a short email to DERCulverts@mass.gov by 1/31 to let us know you're interested in talking.

Q: Is there a requirement for the crossing to be an accepted street, like the small bridge grant requires?

A: The project does not have to be located on a roadway, for example it could be an access road to municipal conservation or recreational areas, watershed and wellheads, municipal buildings, etc. The municipality should hold a municipal interest, this may include an easement or right-of-way. Additional details can be found in the Pre-RFR materials and in the Frequently Asked Questions posted on our website.

Q: Just confirming that FY23 is still for non-tidal only?

A: Correct the project should be located on non-tidal, freshwater streams.