

FY24 Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant Briefing
Meeting Notes
January 30, 2023

Held via Zoom Meeting

DER Staff: Carrie Banks, Holden Sparacino, Krista Haas, David Gallagher

Meeting started at 1pm

Attendees: 68

Meeting Summary:

- **Welcome & Ground Rules:** Welcomed participants. Launched meeting poll to get a better understanding of the organization they represented (e.g., municipality, consultant, regional planning agency, etc.), whether they had applied to the grant program in the past, and what phase of work they were interested in applying for in the upcoming round. Introduced DER staff. Provided meeting overview and reviewed meeting ground rules.
- **FY24 CRMA Grant Briefing Presentation:** Provided overview of Division of Ecological Restoration, Stream Continuity Program and the Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant Program and upcoming FY24 grant opportunity.
- **Questions & Answers:**
 - **Question:** We received a grant for data collection last year and plan to apply for a grant for the next phase of the culvert design this year. Would it be pertinent to request a pre-RFR meeting again this year?
 - **Answer:** *Yes, we would still suggest scheduling a meeting. It should be quick. We'll do a basic review and bring up any concerns or questions that we might have. We can also go over any changes between this year and last. It is a voluntary process, but would still suggest it. Reminder we can't discuss any future funding opportunities during the RFR period, so this is the time frame to discuss FY24 funding for your project.*
 - **Question: Are state universities (UMASS-Amherst) eligible to apply for funding?**
 - **Answer:** *We've expanded the eligibility this year, however primary applicants should be a local or regional government unit, and projects must be on a public way. It would be worth setting up a pre-RFR call, and we can go over the specifics to see if it makes sense for the university to be the primary applicant.*
 - **Question: What is the definition of ecologically high value areas?**
 - **Answer:** *The review team does a desktop review of project sites and use several data layers as part of the review process. We'll be uploading a guide to using those data layers yourself to review the restoration potential as part of the pre-RFR process. Local knowledge is also helpful. This is a great question to come to us with during the pre-RFR period so we can discuss the ecological values related to your projects of interest.*

- **Question: Regarding the Stream Crossing Standards. Do all the standards need to be met?**
 - **Answer:** *The proposed crossings should be designed to meet the goals of the Stream Crossing Standards. If for some reason all the standards cannot be met, we would want to see an explanation and justification of why all the standards cannot be met and how it would not impact benefits/goals of the standards.*
- **Question: Our office sent out project for -pre-RFR review. When should we anticipate hearing back for a meeting?**
 - **Answer:** *We are responding now in the order they are received, so you should be hearing back shortly. We anticipate holding all calls over the next couple of weeks.*
- **Question: What information is required for the Pre-RFR email?**
 - **Answer:** *It starts very simple—just send us an email at DERculverts@mass.gov and we'll respond with a form to fill out with some basic project information. Reminder that those emails need to be to us by Feb 1st, this Wednesday. We're happy to chat with you whether you have lots of or little information about the projects.*
- **Question: What should we include in our email requesting a pre-RFR meeting? How formal does this need to be?**
 - **Answer:** *See answer to above.*
- **Question: Is this grant expected to be offered in FY2025?**
 - **Answer:** *Yes, we expect that. The grant program has been offered since FY18.*
- **Question: Do you take flood reduction benefits into account at all?**
 - **Answer:** *Yes, we take flood resiliency/climate resiliency into account. They are part of the review criteria.*
- **Question: How can homeowners work with DER for Culverts and Stream Crossing Standards?**
 - **Answer:** *Projects for this grant do need to be on a public way, however homeowners, nonprofits or other partners can work with municipalities to prioritize projects that may be a good fit for the CRMA grant program. In addition, local knowledge of structures, history of flooding events, wildlife use of the crossing, and other information may be useful in applications for reviewers to better understand the conditions at the crossing. Although funding through this grant program is not available to homeowners for private ways, e.g., driveways, DER does offer other technical and projects resources and can share information on other funding opportunities.*
- **Question: Do outlet control structures upstream of the crossing prohibit grants for the downstream crossing?**

- **Answer:** *Reviewers will conduct a desktop review of the surrounding river reach for applications. If there are culverts, outlet control structures, or other barriers to aquatic connectivity or stream processes nearby, applicants are encouraged to explain the status of those structures including if they currently present a barrier to aquatic connectivity, or if there are plans for those structures to improve connectivity. Applications for stream crossings where other nearby structures reduce restoration benefits (including aquatic connectivity of the stream reach) may be less competitive.*
- **Wrap-up and Reminders:** Reminded participants they can find more details at <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/culvert-replacement-municipal-assistance-grant-program>. Reminded participants to submit project-specific inquiries to DERCulverts@mass.gov by February 1st and/or submit general grant-related questions before the RFR is posted on COMMBUYS.

Meeting ended at 2:10pm