

DER Regional Restoration Partnerships Program FAQs

What is the DER Regional Restoration Partnerships Program?

The Division of Ecological Restoration's Restoration Partnerships Program (DER Partnerships Program) was established in 2020 with the goal to increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration across Massachusetts by building the capacity of local and regional organizations to collaboratively restore aquatic habitat ecosystems within their regions. Ultimately, the DER Partnerships Program envisions a network of regional partners across the Commonwealth with the expertise and capacity to lead and support ecological restoration projects and nature-based resilience efforts throughout the Commonwealth.

The Partnerships Program launched the first pilot Partnerships in late 2021, with three non-profit watershed-based organizations which include 124 municipalities and over 100 affiliated partner organizations focused on ecological restoration and climate resilience. Together, these Stakeholders and Core Partners leveraged external funding, increased staff capacity, and coordinated and collaborated to achieve meaningful, watershed-scale restoration and resilience outcomes.

The DER Partnerships Program provides grant funding to support capacity-building efforts, including convening partners, identifying regional restoration needs, developing strategic plans, expanding restoration skills and education, and providing technical assistance to municipalities and landowners. In addition, DER provides seed and gap funding to support the implementation of restoration projects that advance Partnership priorities.

What is a Regional Restoration Partnership?

A Regional Restoration Partnership (or "Partnership") is a collaborative group of individuals and the organizations they represent that work together to define and advance a shared vision, goals, priorities and actions for ecological restoration and nature-based climate resiliency within a partnership region. Partnership members include the Lead Partnership Sponsor, Stakeholders, and DER working collectively to support coordinated, regionally-driven restoration efforts.

How does DER support selected Partnerships?

DER delivers support through three key stages: Catalyst, Capacity and Action, and Leadership. Because Partnerships may enter the program at a different point in its development, DER will designate the stage that best aligns with each applicant's readiness, organizational capacity and partnership maturity. Initial placement is determined based on application materials and is reassessed in subsequent annual evaluations.

Each stage corresponds to an appropriate level of funding and technical assistance (see [DER Partnerships Program webpage](#) for further details). This staged approach is designed to support Partnerships as they grow and become more independent over

time, with funding and support generally building in the early years and tapering as partnerships mature.

The DER Partnerships Program provides targeted technical assistance, though not at the same level as the DER Priority Projects technical assistance program. DER collaborates with its other habitat and stream restoration Programs to offer technical support where appropriate, with the goal of building Partnership capacity and expertise over time. Partnerships are also encouraged to seek technical assistance within their own network and from other DER-supported Partnerships. This collaborative approach is further strengthened through DER-facilitated peer-to-peer learning sessions.

PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURES

What is a Partnership Region?

A Partnership Region is a geographic area within Massachusetts where the Regional Restoration Partnership activities take place, as defined by the Lead Partnership Sponsor in their application. **The minimum area for a Partnership Region is 75 square miles.**

What is a Lead Partnership Sponsor?

The Lead Partnership Sponsor serves as the primary entity responsible for representing and advancing the Partnership. Lead Partnership Sponsors are designated upon acceptance of their Partnership into the Regional Restoration Partnerships Program and are eligible applicants for Partnerships Program funding.

Who are Stakeholders?

Stakeholders are the regional and local partners who participate in the Partnership; contribute guidance, funds, and/or in-kind support for the Partnership; and work collaboratively to develop and implement restoration projects and activities that advance Partnership priorities. Stakeholders may include representatives from nonprofit organizations, municipalities, regional governments, state or federal agencies, tribal governments and tribal organizations, community-based organizations and other groups.

Who are Core Partners?

Core Partners are Partnership Stakeholders who are sub-awarded Partnerships Program funding from the Lead Partnership Sponsor to help advance eligible ecological restoration-related work through the Stakeholder's organization. Eligible recipients of sub-awards include Regional

Government and Planning Agencies, 501(c)(3) organizations, tribal governments and municipalities. For-profit organizations are not eligible for sub-awards.

ELIGIBILITY

Who can apply?

Registered tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations and Massachusetts Regional Governments/Planning Agencies may apply to the Partnerships Program.

Can an application be submitted to support an existing collaborative to serve as a DER Regional Restoration Partnership?

DER encourages applications to support established collaboratives interested in expanding their capacity to lead and support ecological restoration and nature-based climate resiliency. Established collaboratives are defined as a formal partnership between organizations and/or individuals who have worked together over time to share resources, expertise and decision-making to accomplish shared objectives. Here's what defines an established collaborative:

1. **Collaborative strategy:** The Collaborative has a well-defined and documented strategy which outlines its goals and provides a clear roadmap of actions to achieve objectives.
2. **Demonstrated Strong Relationships:** The Collaborative has built and sustained strong relationships with partners and individuals in its region, ensuring effective coordination, communication and shared resources/ expertise.
3. **Clear Process for Identifying and Prioritizing Needs:** The Collaborative has a systematic approach to recognize and prioritize the needs and opportunities in the region it serves.
4. **Ability to Communicate Restoration Benefits:** The Collaborative can effectively explain how its restoration efforts positively impact the community and environment. In summary, an established Collaborative has a proven track record of effective cooperation, guided by a strategic framework, strong partnerships, clear decision-making processes, and the ability to articulate the benefits of its work.

The current partnership my organization supports focuses on a single issue. Assuming this partnership wants to remain focused on a single issue, would it be a good fit for the Partnerships Program?

The DER Partnerships Program is designed to support comprehensive, region-wide approaches to ecological restoration. DER looks for Partnerships that consider the full range of aquatic ecosystem stressors affecting their region and work collaboratively to identify multiple restoration priorities, projects, and activities.

Partnerships that focus only on a single issue or pursue projects on an opportunistic basis—without a broader regional strategy—are generally not a good fit for the program.

Can my organization be the applicant on more than one Partnerships Program application under the same RFR?

No.

Can state-wide or regional organizations participate in more than one DER-supported Partnership?

The intent of the Partnerships Program is to increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration throughout Massachusetts. Participation by regional or statewide organizations will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the role, scope, and regional benefit across Massachusetts. Lead Partnership Sponsors are not eligible to serve as applicants, grantee or Partnership Leader for other DER-supported Partnerships.

FUNDING

How much funding is available?

Annual individual grant awards to Lead Partnership Sponsors of DER Partnerships are anticipated to be between \$30,000 to \$200,000. The maximum value of funding for each awarded Applicant will vary according to the contracted scope of work, Partnership demonstrated need, Partnership stage (see [DER Partnerships Program webpage](#)) and available funding.

What types of grant activities and costs are eligible for funding?

The DER Partnerships Program funds integrated, region-wide approaches to ecological restoration. Grants support Partnerships that work collaboratively with local and regional Stakeholders to identify, prioritize and implement projects and activities that address the key ecological stressors in their region.

Examples of eligible grant activities include:

- **Watershed planning** and project identification
- **Coordination and management** of ecological restoration projects
- **Technical assistance** for ecological restoration

Additional details on eligible tasks and costs are provided in the Request for Responses (RFR).

What types of restoration projects are eligible for funding?

DER seeks to fund an integrated approach to restoration based on an understanding of the existing

and future aquatic ecosystem stressors in each Partnership Region. Examples of eligible restoration projects include but are not limited to:

- Dam removal
- River restoration and stream crossing upgrades
- Urban river revitalization
- Cranberry bog restoration
- Coastal and freshwater wetland restoration
- Floodplain restoration
- Hydrology and streamflow restoration
- Or combinations thereof

More information on these practices is available on the [DER website](#). All projects should help communities and nature become more resilient and adapt to climate change.

Are there standardized post-implementation monitoring requirements for partner projects?

DER does not impose standardized post-implementation monitoring requirements under the Partnerships Program. However, all projects must comply with any monitoring requirements associated with applicable permits or regulatory approvals.

What types of projects are ineligible for funding?

Discrete activities that do not meaningfully reduce or eliminate the primary stressors that cause impaired ecological processes are not eligible for funding (i.e., activities that address the symptoms, not the causes, of impairment).

The following are examples of ineligible discrete activities under the Partnerships Program:

- Low Impact Development (LID) and stand-alone stormwater management projects.
- Installation of new, previously non-existent tide gates; installation of new replacement tide gates to improve operations for ecological gains may be considered.
- Standalone projects for marsh platform elevation management, through the use of Thin Layer Deposition or Thin Layer Placement.
- Dam removals that do not remove the full vertical extent of the dam.
- Repair of technical fishways.
- Creation of new technical fishways.
- Standalone bank repair and stabilization, unless part of approved final restoration project design plans.
- Pond dredging.
- Removal of dams made by beaver or other natural forces.
- Stand-alone invasive species treatment projects, such as lake and pond treatment for aquatic invasives, Phragmites treatment projects, and purple loosestrife biocontrol.
- Projects or portions of projects mandated to comply with regulatory mitigation

Some of the listed Ineligible Discrete Activities may be eligible for funding if they enhance or help sustain the benefits of an eligible restoration activity or if they are necessary to mitigate impacts caused by an eligible restoration activity. For example, riverbank armoring may be an eligible activity when necessary to prevent river scour from damaging adjacent infrastructure after a dam removal.

This is not an exhaustive list, and DER reserves the right not to fund any activity or expense that the Division deems ineligible. Selected Lead Partnership Sponsors and their Stakeholders may engage in any activities they choose; however, they may not use DER Partnerships funding to support ineligible activities and costs.

Can a Lead Partnership Sponsor sub-award funding to a Core Partner?

The applicant may propose to sub-award a portion of DER funding to support the work of Core Partners; however, all proposed subawards must be fully identified at time of application. This includes specifying the Core Partner (s), the tasks or scope of work to be performed, and the associated budget for each proposed subaward. DER will negotiate the terms and conditions for any sub-award an applicant proposes once the Lead Partnership Sponsors have been awarded. Eligible grantees of sub-awarded funding may include Massachusetts Regional Government/Planning Agencies, 501(c)(3) organizations, tribal governments, and municipalities. For-profit organizations are not eligible for sub-awards.

For Partnerships that provide subawards to Core Partners, do those subawards need to stay within state boundaries?

Partnerships are not prohibited from coordinating or collaborating across state boundaries; however, all activities and tasks funded through the DER Partnerships Program must take place within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Funding may not be used to support work conducted in other states, even if it occurs within a shared watershed.

Will DER funding cover the full cost of implementing specific projects pursued by a Partnership?

DER Partnerships Program funding is not intended to cover the full cost of restoration projects. Lead Partnership Sponsors are expected to leverage additional funding sources to support their work. DER's investment is designed to complement other funding and help advance implementation activities.

Is there a match requirement?

Applicants should review RFR, once posted.

Please note, DER funding is anticipated to meet only a portion of the needs for Partnership implementation of prioritized restoration/ nature-based climate adaptation activities and projects. Partnerships will be required to track additional leveraged resources and funding (both sought and awarded) throughout the partnership term and share with the DER Partnerships Program.

GRANT ADMINISTRATION

How is the funding provided to organizations?

Funds will be paid on a reimbursement basis. Funds cannot be disbursed until there is a fully executed grant contract. After costs are incurred, Lead Partnership Sponsors may submit invoices for reimbursement using the required expense and deliverable documentation.

Are grant reports required? How often?

Selected Lead Partnership Sponsors are required to submit quarterly financial and activity reports to DER. These reports include brief project updates, metrics, leveraged funding tracking, and progress on required deliverables. In addition, Lead Partnership Sponsors must submit an annual report summarizing overall Partnership activities and outcomes.

RFR PROCESS

How can I apply?

A DER Regional Partnership Program Designation Grant RFR is anticipated to be released in early 2026. Please visit the [DER Partnerships Program RFR webpage](#) and refer to the ‘How to Apply’ section for details and instructions on the application process. Applications will be accepted on [DER Partnerships Program RFR webpage](#) through the application submission form. In addition, applicants are solely responsible to monitor the Commonwealth’s official procurement record system, [COMMBUYS](#), for amendments to the Grant RFR announcement, if any, and for the complete RFR posting. Applicants may monitor the COMMBUYS site through publicly accessible search and browse tools in addition to visiting DER’s website.

Will I need to set up an account of some kind in order to submit an application?

No. Applications will be accepted via a form on [DER’s Partnership Program website](#) and there are no account creation requirements in order to submit.

What types of engagement opportunities are available before the RFR is released?

DER will host an informational webinar about the Partnerships Program, and a recorded version is posted on the [DER Partnerships Program RFR webpage](#).

In addition, DER will offer an optional Expression of Interest (EOI) process. Submitting an EOI is not required; however, it allows potential applicants to receive early feedback on Partnership ideas. The EOI process is intended to help applicants design more competitive applications, but does not guarantee funding. Expression of Interest forms will be available on the [DER Partnerships Program RFR webpage](#).

What if I have more questions after this RFR is released?

DER will host a formal Q&A Period after the Grant RFR is released, which will require all questions to be submitted by a specific deadline. DER will release answers to all questions shortly thereafter. All questions and answers will be provided in one comprehensive document and will be a part of the public record and posted on the [DER Partnerships Program RFR webpage](#). DER cannot answer scenario-specific questions about projects or restoration circumstances. DER cannot answer any questions outside of the designated Q&A period after the RFR is released.