

FY2027 RFR for DER Partnerships Designation Grant

Written Questions and Answers, March 24, 2026

Question 1:

Can a Lead Partnership Sponsor for Partnership A, be a Core Partner for Partnership B? *Can a Core Partner for Partnership A, be a Core Partner for Partnership B?*

Answer 1:

The RFR does not specifically prohibit participation in multiple regional Partnerships; however, an entity may not submit multiple applications as a Lead Partnership Sponsor. A Lead Partnership Sponsor is not prohibited to serve as a Core Partner for another Partnership outside of its own region, and a Core Partner is not prohibited to participate in multiple Partnerships. However, an entity may not submit multiple applications as a Lead Partnership Sponsor. All applications will be reviewed and scored based on the Best Value to the Commonwealth. The reasonableness for Lead Organizations and/or Core Partners to accomplish tasks will be a part of the evaluation process.

If an entity is designated as a Lead Organization Sponsor within a Partnership, it would be eligible to receive grant funding through annual funding. If an entity is designated as Core Partner within a Partnership, it would be eligible to receive a sub-award through the Lead Organization Sponsor's annual funding.

Question 2:

Is there a process to include additional partners in year 2 or later if the partnership expands (e.g. adding a neighboring watershed)?

Answer 2:

All Core Partners and Key Partners should be identified in the Designation Grant application. Any proposed changes to Partnership composition (for example, due to expansion into a neighboring sub-watershed or if the Partnership proposes adding a new Core Partner that is critical to advancing the Partnership's mission) would be considered through the annual RFR process and must remain consistent with the requirements of the Designation Grant.

Question 3:

Can a core partner be those providing match but not receiving a direct subaward? Can these core partners include those with existing or future MA Service Agreement?

Answer 3:

A Core Partner is a Sub-recipient of the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization to help advance eligible ecological restoration activities through their organization. Listing Core Partners makes them eligible to receive sub-awards within the five-year Partnership term.

Organizations that are contributing match or otherwise playing a key role in the Partnership, but will not receive sub-awarded funding, should be identified as Key Partners, or Stakeholders.

DER's current Master Agreement expires in FY2026. An entity's expired MA status would not affect FY2027 grant eligibility. The upcoming Ecological Restoration Technical Services Master Agreement RFR will define eligibility for FY27-FY30.

Question 4:

Can you provide further guidance on eligibility related to MA Services Agreement? If a 501c3 has a Master Service Agreement are they excluded from being a core partner with subaward even if Partnership and DER Priority projects do not overlap.

Answer:

Please reference FY27 Regional Restoration Partnerships Program Designation Grant RFR, Section 1.6 Eligible Applicants.

*Organizations that participate in DER Technical Services Master Service Agreement contracts as a Category 1 vendor, Category 2 vendor, primary vendor, and/or subcontractor **are not eligible** to receive funding under DER grant programs, including the Partnerships Program.*

Under this RFR, this restriction applies to organizations serving either as the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization (grant recipient) or as a Core Partner (Sub-recipient).

DER's current Master Agreement expires in FY2026. An entity's expired MA status would not affect FY2027 grant eligibility. The upcoming Ecological Restoration Technical Services Master Agreement RFR will define eligibility for FY27-FY30.

Question 5:

Can you please explain why recipients (lead or core partner) of Partnership program award are not eligible for DER Technical Services contracts which are for DER priority projects if DER priority projects are excluded from partnership program funding.

Answer:

DER continually exercises discretion to refine grant programs and procurement practices to align with our mission, state finance law, and sound fiscal management, including but not limited to eligibility criteria for grant awards and technical service vendor awards.

Question 6:

If a designated core partner leaves the partnership and/or is no longer partner receiving subaward funding would they be eligible for DER Master Service Agreement? Do any partnership agreement terms still exclude them from Technical service agreements?

Answer:

If an entity does not have an active Partnership agreement they would not be bound by Partnership terms.

Commonwealth [Terms and Conditions](#) define contract termination for the Lead Project Sponsor Organization and all sub-awards or subcontractors.

The upcoming Ecological Restoration Technical Services Master Agreement RFR will define eligibility of prequalified vendors for services in FY2027 –FY2030.

Question 7:

Could you clarify whether field-based sampling and associated lab analysis (e.g., eDNA or sediment sampling) are eligible costs if they support advancing an approved project such as informing baseline conditions, project design, or implementation planning.

Answer:

Field-based sampling and associated laboratory analysis (e.g., eDNA or sediment sampling) may be eligible costs if they directly support advancing an approved project. This may include activities that help inform baseline conditions, project design, or implementation planning. Eligibility is contingent on the sampling and analysis being clearly tied to project advancement and consistent with the scope of work described in the proposal.

Question 8:

On the SOW Budget template should the Lead Sponsor and Core Partner budgets be combined on the Budget Detail Required tab or should additional tab be added to provide budget for each the lead sponsor and any core partners receiving subaward?

Answer:

The Lead Sponsor and any Core Partner budgets should be combined on the Budget Detail Required tab of the SOW Budget template. Applicants do not need to create additional tabs to separate the Lead Sponsor and Core Partner budgets.

Question 9:

How does DER determine which stage a Partnership is at? Is the assumption or requirement that a new Partnership start at the Catalyst Stage?

Answer:

Please reference FY27 Regional Restoration Partnerships Program Designation Grant RFR, Section 3.4 Partnership Development Stages. The Partnership Development Stage is based on the Partnership's current level of organizational and collaborative development. DER will determine final stage placement based on application materials and stages will be continually evaluated by DER throughout the Partnership annually. Typically, new DER-supported Partnerships will start at the Catalyst Stage.

Question 10:

If a partnership is applying for the Catalyst stage focused on planning is this Project Form still required and is it anticipated that the proposal for FY27 would include activities in all three Tasks as detailed in section 5.5?

Answer:

For the Catalyst stage, applicants may apply for Task 1 funding only if this best aligns with the current needs and focus of the Partnership. Applicants are not required to propose activities under all three Tasks outlined in Section 3.5 for FY27.

Regarding the Project Form, it is not required for Catalyst stage proposals focused solely on planning. However, as the submission process has already been initiated, please indicate "N/A" in the form and upload it with your application materials. DER will determine final stage placement based on application materials.

Question 11:

What is the interaction between funding for the DER Partnership Program and DER Priority Project advancement grants? Are those organizations or projects that receive DER grants excluded from eligibility for the DER Partnership program?

Answer:

Please reference FY27 Regional Restoration Partnerships Program Designation Grant RFR, Section 3.6 Project Interaction with Other DER Solicitations.

Partnerships Program funding may not be used to support Priority Projects or Provisional Priority Projects that:

- *Have been competitively selected and designated through DER's Priority Projects Program, and*
- *Are active, in good standing, and eligible for funding under DER's annual Priority Projects Program Advancement Grant RFR (PPPAG RFR).*

Organizations that receive DER grants are **not excluded from eligibility** for the Partnerships Program. The restriction applies specifically to projects that have received Priority Project or Provisional Priority Project designation and are eligible for funding through the PPPAG RFR.

Priority Project Designation After Partnership Award

If a Partnership-funded project opts to receive Priority Project or Provisional Priority Project designation within the same fiscal year as a Partnership award, the project funded through the Partnerships Program must be formally rescinded from the Partnership contract via amendment prior to the award of any Priority Project funding. Partnerships may request reallocation of Partnerships Program funds to an alternative project identified in the original grant application.

Question 12:

How does the DER Partnership program interact with other DER programs?

Answer:

For Priority Project interaction, see Question 11.

Please reference FY27 Regional Restoration Partnerships Program Designation Grant RFR, Section 3.6 Project Interactions With Other DER Solicitations.

The below provisions apply to other DER competitive solicitations, excluding DER's Priority Projects Program. Projects that are currently designated Training Sites under the **DER Culvert Replacement Training Site Program** may also receive Partnership-funded support within the same fiscal year only if the Partnership-funded tasks are not eligible for funding under the DER Culvert Replacement Training Site Program. Example: In FY27, Partnership funding may be used for a project coordination task to support a project that is also supported by the FY27 DER Culvert Replacement Training Site Program since project coordination is not an eligible task under the DER Culvert Replacement Training Site Program.

Culvert Replacement sites, previously designated but no longer active under the Culvert Replacement Training Site Program, are eligible for Partnerships Program funding support.

Projects that are not currently receiving grant funding and/or technical services from other DER programs, but did receive such support in previous fiscal years, may receive Partnership-funded support for all activities allowed under the Partnerships Program. Example: A project in FY26 received a DER Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance one-year award to complete 90% design on a culvert replacement; in FY27 Partnership funding may be used to finalize permitting and support advancing the project to construction-ready status.

Projects that are currently receiving grant funding and/or technical services from other DER programs, excluding Priority Projects, may also receive Partnership-funded support within the same fiscal year only if the tasks are not funded under the other DER programs. Example: In FY27, Partnership funding may be used for a community engagement task to support a project that is also supported by a FY27 DER Dam Removal Preliminary Design award, because community engagement is a task that is not funded under the DER Dam Removal Preliminary Design program.

All projects and associated task work that interact with other DER Solicitations within the Partnerships workplan are approved at DER's discretion; for FY27, funding for these types of activities will be capped at \$10,000 total per Partnership.

Question 13:

The RFR notes restrictions on Partnership funds being used on Priority Projects. Is this limited to funds advancing restoration activities or does it include Partnership funded staff time? Can staff time be spent on priority projects?

Answer:

Partnerships Program funding may not be used to support DER Priority Projects or Provisional Priority Projects. This restriction applies to all uses of Partnership funding, including staff time to support advancing Priority Projects.

In Addition to the Q&A Answers, DER has posted an updated RFR, Version 2, to provide additional clarity to the above questions. Please refer to Version 2 to submit an application for this RFR.