

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

DIVISION OF ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

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Request for Response (RFR)

FY2027 Regional Restoration Partnerships Program Designation Grant

1 COMMBUYS Bid#: BD-26-1046-DER-FWE01-124722

Agency Document Number: RFR DER 2027-RRPAG

February 27, 2026

Summary of Changes

This RFR is being reissued with the following changes:

Section

1.6 Eligible Applicants	Revised the definition of eligible applicants in paragraphs 3 and 4.
1.10 Definitions	Updated definitions of <i>Core Partner</i> , <i>Direct Costs</i> , <i>Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization</i> . Added definitions for <i>Grantee</i> , <i>Key Partner</i> , <i>Sub-award</i> , <i>Subcontractor</i> , <i>Sub-recipient</i> , <i>Vendor</i> .
3.2 Regional Restoration Partnerships Program Designation Terms	Revised language in paragraph 3 under <i>Lead Partnership Organization</i> Paragraph 3 to align with updated definitions in Section 1.10.
3.5 Annual Grant Funding Activities	Updated language under Task 2 to align with revised definitions in Section 1.10.
4.6 Compliance	Revised first sentence to replace “Sub-awards” with “Sub-awards or subcontracts”.
6 Instruction for application submission	Updated bullet 3 with additional instruction detail.

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2 Opportunity Summary

2.1 Applications Sought

The Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration (DER), within the Department of Fish and Game, invites grant proposals from eligible applicants to strengthen regional ecological restoration efforts through the designation as a DER-supported Regional Restoration Partnership.

An award will result in a five-year designation to established collaboratives and associated FY2027 funding to support established collaboratives¹ seeking to expand their capacity to lead and implement aquatic ecosystem restoration and nature-based climate resiliency projects across the Commonwealth.

The purpose of the [Regional Restoration Partnerships Program](#) is to provide support to regional collaboratives such as watershed groups and regional governments and planning agencies who work with municipalities and other local partners to implement river and wetland restoration projects in Massachusetts.

2.2 Overview and Goals

DER's mission is to restore and protect the Commonwealth's rivers, wetlands, and watersheds for the benefit of people and the environment. Through the Regional Restoration Partnerships Program, DER selects Partnerships that help advance this work.

For this opportunity, DER's Partnership Program seeks to identify and fund established Collaboratives which are currently advancing dam removals, stream crossing upgrades, urban river revitalization, river and floodplain restoration, cranberry bog restoration, and coastal and freshwater wetland restoration, or combinations thereof to restore aquatic ecosystems and increase climate resiliency for our communities.

Applications should align with [DER's mission](#). Partnerships Designation and FY2027 grant funding

¹ An **established** collaborative is 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.

awards will be based upon consideration of the collaborative's:

- Demonstrated regional need for support to advance restoration efforts
- Likelihood of partnership success based on clear partnership structure, strategic planning and strength of collaboration
- Demonstrated ability to provide regional coordination, build restoration knowledge and advance restoration work
- Commitment to environmental justice and community benefits
- Proposed Restoration Projects/ Activities align with DER Partnerships Program and DER goals
- Reasonableness of proposed timelines and budget

2.3 Applicable Procurement Law

This RFR is issued under the following law(s):

- 815 CMR 2.00

2.4 Number of Awards

Multiple grant awards may result from this Request for Response (RFR).

2.5 Voluntary Restoration Support Disclaimer

Funds awarded under this RFR may not be used to meet an Applicant and/or owner's compensatory mitigation requirements or to support projects that have an independent obligation to execute wetland or stream restoration / mitigation pursuant to statute, regulation, ordinance, consent decree, judgement, court order, permit condition, or other requirement of law. This does not preclude projects from receiving funding from the Department of Fish and Game's In-Lieu Fee Program (ILFP). Applicants who have received an order from the MA Office of Dam Safety to address deficiencies or remove the dam are eligible only if they commit to moving forward with a dam removal.

2.6 Eligible Applicants

Only organizations registered as tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations, and Massachusetts Regional Governments and Planning Agencies may apply as a Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization. Only one Applicant may serve as the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization.

A single Applicant can apply individually as Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization, and/or a Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization may opt to collaborate with additional Core Partners in their application, see Section 3.3. Information pertaining to both the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization and Core Partners (if proposed) will be required and evaluated as outlined in Section 5.2.

Eligible Core Partner or Sub-recipients include Regional Governments and Planning Agencies, 501(c)(3) organizations, tribal governments, and municipalities.

Recipients of a grant award (Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization) or Sub-award (Core Partner) shall not be eligible to apply for DER Technical Services Master Service Agreement contracts as a Category 1 vendor, Category 2 vendor, and/or Subcontractor. Please see Section 3.6 for Partnership interactions with other DER solicitations.

2.7 Eligible Restoration Projects

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

See **Section 7, Appendix A** for a list of ineligible restoration activities.

2.8 Funding Availability

Total available funding is estimated to be **up to \$1,050,000** subject to legislative appropriation and/or bond authorization.

This grant may be supported by multiple funding sources, which include, but are not limited to state capital and operating funds.

DER Partnerships Program grant funding is provided annually on a reimbursement basis, and awards are based on available funds.

The maximum value of funding for each awarded Applicant will vary according to the contracted scope of work, Partnership demonstrated need, Partnership stage (See Section 3.4 for more details on Partnership stages) and available funding. Designated Partnerships are required to apply each year for annual funding.

Catalyst Partnerships

DER anticipates Catalyst Partnership funding range is between \$30,000 - \$150,000 per award for eligible grant activities for a one-year contract period.

Capacity + Action Partnerships

DER anticipates Capacity and Action Partnership funding range is between \$100,000 - \$250,000 per award for eligible grant activities for a one-year contract period.

Leadership Partnerships

DER anticipates Leadership Partnership funding range is between \$30,000 - \$60,000 per award for eligible grant activities for a one-year contract period.

Contract execution anticipated for July 1, 2026. Annual grant funding contracts will terminate on or before June 30, 2027.

2.9 Match Requirement

Applicants are not required to provide match to be awarded a DER Partnerships Grant. However in-kind and cash matches will be awarded extra points in the scoring criteria.

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 funding (both sought and awarded) throughout the partnership term and share with the DER Partnerships Program.

2.10 Definitions

Applicant is an entity that submits the Regional Restoration Partnerships Program Designation Grant application materials to DER. Refer to Section 1.6 Eligible Applicants for more details.

Climate Resiliency is the ability of a community to address the needs of its built, social, and natural environment to anticipate, cope with, and rebound stronger from events and trends related to climate change hazards, including temperature changes, extreme weather, sea level rise, coastal and inland flooding, changes in precipitation, and other impacts.

Core Partner is a Partnership Stakeholder who is a Sub-recipient of the Grantee or Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization to help advance eligible ecological restoration-related work through the Stakeholder's organization. Eligible recipients of Sub-awards include Regional Governments/Planning Agencies, 501(c)(3) organizations, tribal governments, and municipalities. For-profit organizations are not eligible to be Sub-recipients under this RFR. All Core Partners, if identified in the application, must be awarded by DER in the Partnership designation.

Direct Costs are costs necessary to support the implementation of Partnership work. Examples of direct costs may include but are not limited to: contracted services, subcontracts to vendors, or other fees relating to Partnership work such as meeting space to host Stakeholder meetings, training costs, and the purchase of supplies and travel expenses. For mileage costs, estimate at the current IRS

rate. Actual miles driven will be reimbursed at the amount stated in the annual grant contract. All Direct Costs need DER pre-approval.

Ecological Restoration is “the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed” ([SER Primer, 2004](#)). To assist the recovery of a natural system, activities should seek to identify and remove, or meaningfully reduce, anthropogenic stressors using a scientifically-sound, process-based approach. By repairing natural processes, activities increase ecological function and allow natural systems to adjust over time, thus enhancing ecosystem resilience.

Environmental Justice (EJ), codified in Massachusetts General Laws², is based on the principle that all people have a right to be protected from environmental hazards and to live in and enjoy a clean and healthful environment regardless of race, color, national origin, income, or English language proficiency. Environmental justice is the equal protection and meaningful involvement of all people and communities with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of energy, climate change, and environmental laws, regulations, and policies and the equitable distribution of energy and environmental benefits and burdens. More information can be found on the [Department of Fish and Game’s Environmental Justice](#) and [Office of Environmental Justice and Equity’s](#) websites.

Established Collaborative is 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.

Grantee A public or non-public entity selected as a recipient of a grant.

Key Partner is a stakeholder that contributes match funding and/ or other resources (e.g. staff time, expertise, coordination, or in-kind support) and plays a significant or strategic role in the Partnership’s activities and success. Key Partners do not receive Sub-awarded grant funding and are therefore distinct from Core Partners, who serve as sub-recipients of the Grantee or Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization.

Labor Rates must be inclusive of all costs and overhead. Project management and other administrative costs must be built into the task budgets toward specific project deliverables. As a

deliverable-based grant program, all project costs must be directly tied to project deliverables to be eligible for reimbursement. General project management costs and other charges to administer the grant (e.g., overhead fees) should not be separate budget line items.

Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization, a Partnership’s Grantee, serves as the primary entity responsible for representing and advancing the Partnership. Lead Partnership Sponsor Organizations are designated upon acceptance of their Partnership into the Regional Restoration Partnerships Program and are eligible applicants for Partnerships Program funding under this RFR.

Nature-based Climate Resiliency Projects are projects which improve our resiliency to current and future climate impacts and help our communities adapt to climate change through projects that protect, restore, and/or manage an existing ecological system, and/or mimic natural processes, to safeguard public health and clean water, increase natural hazard resilience, and sequester carbon.

Partnership Region is the geographic area within Massachusetts where the Partnership activities take place.

Stakeholders within the Partnership Program 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.

Sub-award Funding award from a Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization to a Core Partner as designated in a Partnership agreement

Subcontractor A vendor contracted as a result of a procurement by the Grantee or Sub-recipient to perform specific tasks or provide goods and services within the grant contract.

Sub-recipient An entity that receives designated grant funding, or Sub-award, from a Grantee to assist in achieving the defined public purpose within a grant. Funding sub-awarded by the Lead Organization to a Core Partner to advance eligible ecological restoration-related work in alignment with the Partnership priorities would be a sub-recipient.

Vendor A vendor is an individual or organization that offers goods or services for purchase.

3 ESTIMATED PROCUREMENT CALENDAR

EVENT	DATE
Optional Expression of Interest Period	January 26– February 24, 2026
Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)	January 23, 2026
Bid Release Date	February 27, 2026

Deadline for Submission of Questions through “Q&A” Period	March 16, 2026 at 5:00PM EST
Official Answers for Bid Q&A published (Estimated)	Estimated March 20, 2026 at 5:00PM EST
Deadline for Quotes/Bid Responses (“Bid Opening Date/Time” in COMMBUYS)	April 3, 2026 at 5:00PM EST

3.1 “Q&A” Question and Answer Period

The “Q&A” provides the opportunity for Applicants to ask written questions and receive written answers from DER regarding this RFR. Applicant questions must be submitted through the **Q&A Form** on DER’s website, prior to the Deadline for Submission of Questions stated in the Procurement Calendar. See Section 2 above. DER will not respond to questions submitted after this date. A link to the **Q&A Form** will be posted to [DER’s dedicated webpage](#) for this opportunity. Please note that questions submitted to DER using any other medium (including those that are sent by mail, fax, email, or call/voicemail, etc.) will not be answered.

Applicants are responsible for submitting written questions that are suitable for public viewing, since all Question and Answer responses provided by DER are accessible to the public. Applicants must not include information that could be considered personal, security sensitive, inflammatory, incorrect, collusory, or otherwise objectionable, including information about the Applicant’s organization. DER reserves the right to edit or omit submitted questions that raise any of these issues.

DER responses to questions in writing will be provided in COMMBUYS and on [DER’s website](#) on the date stated in the Procurement Calendar, see Section 2.

4 Program structure, Terms, and Performance

4.1 Partnership Program Structure

Restoring a degraded ecosystem is inherently a long-term effort. DER Partnerships Program seeks to provide longer-term support, to give partners the stability to plan strategically, adapt over time, and deliver lasting ecological and community benefits. This Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization award establishes a partnership designation resulting in an initial 5-year term with an option to renew an additional 5-year period.

Each Partnership will be designated a stage, outlined in Section 5.4, in FY2027. Partnerships will be evaluated annually which will determine stage designation in each year.

Designated Partnerships will be required to apply each year for annual funding. Year one funding, or FY2027 will be included in this funding opportunity. Designated Partnerships will need to apply for annual funding in years 2-5, (FY2028-FY2031).

4.2 Regional Restoration Partnerships Program Designation Terms

If awarded, all Applicants must execute and abide by the Standard Contract form for a five-year term as a designated Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization, including the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Terms and Conditions. Based on evaluation, DER may opt to renew this designation for an additional five-year period.

Terms of DER's Regional Restoration Partnerships Program Designation apply to this designation which include, but are not limited to, those set forth below:

- Partnerships designation results in an initial 5-year term with an option to renew an additional 5-years, see Section 3.1; DER staff will initiate the renewal process starting in the fifth year of designation with a review of existing Partnership's goals, successes and outcomes. Partnerships will be redesignated for an additional 5 years if Partnerships are deemed in good standing at the end of the internal evaluation process.

The Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization will:

- Commit to collaboratively support and advance the Partnership goals
- Advance the Partnership by progressing from the Catalyst Stage through Leadership Stage of the Partnership Program
- Work collaboratively with local and regional Stakeholders and DER to develop Partnership plans and implement restoration projects and activities
- Support and coordinate the Partnership activities
- Provide administrative and supervisory support within the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization for the Partnership and Partnership activities
- Designate a staff person or officer within the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization with signatory authority for the duration of the contract term.
- Assign a primary point of contact(s) responsible for maintaining regular communications with DER Restoration Partnership Program staff.

- Contract directly with DER
- Submit all Sub-awards and subcontracts to DER for review and approval
- Manage all Core Partners
- Submit reports, invoices, and other agreed-upon grant tasks and deliverables by the deadlines outlined in the grant contract scope of work.
- Document requested and leveraged grant funds from other sources that support Partnership projects and activities.
- Include DER Partnerships staff on Stakeholder communications and meetings.
- Provide feedback to DER on the Partnership Program through Partnership Assessments, Feedback Surveys and check-in meetings.
- Credit DER as a partner and funder whenever funded work is mentioned in formal written communications, meetings, and presentations.
- Ensure final terms, budgets, and scopes of work approved in grant and Sub-awards contracts and Partnership planning documents meet Partnership Program funding eligibility requirements.
- Manage Sub-recipient and subcontractor agreements
- Review and verify all invoices as accurate prior to submission to DER for reimbursement.
- Submit invoices within 30 days of incurred expenses.

DER will:

- Support the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization and the Partnership with ongoing advisory, financial, and technical assistance for the duration of the Partnership term. The types of assistance are subject to available DER capacity.
- Designate a DER Partnerships staff as the primary point of contact at DER for the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization and its staff for the duration of the Partnership term.
- Assess Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization needs and DER capacity to provide mentorship, Partnership development support, Partnerships Program planning guidance, grant management training and support, and project management technical support to the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization staff through DER's Partnerships program staff for the duration of the Partnership term. The types and amount of DER assistance available at any given time will depend on DER capacity.
- Facilitate structured feedback from the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization on Program elements, templates, processes, and workflows through DER's Partnerships program staff for the duration of the Partnership term.
- Facilitate and support learning and sharing opportunities (i.e. a community of practice) among Restoration Coordinators for the duration of the Partnership term.
- Work collaboratively with the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization and its staff to coordinate events and press releases for the Partnership and related restoration activities funded by DER (pending appropriate prior notice and DER capacity).

4.3 Partnership Models

The Partnership is a cooperative endeavor between the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization, regional stakeholders, and DER to work collaboratively in identifying, prioritizing, and advancing ecological restoration priorities. Applicants may propose a simplified partnership model which

engages regional stakeholders, often through a regional steering committee that may include municipalities, regional or local organizations, tribal governments and Regional Governments or Planning Agencies to help define the Partnership’s vision, goals, and priorities. Alternatively, Applicants may propose a more complex partnership model, in which the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization works with additional local and regional organizations (such as 501(c)(3) organizations, Regional Governments and Planning Agencies, tribal governments) and may Sub-award a portion of funding to eligible stakeholders, or “Core Partners”, to compensate them for providing services and technical expertise to support the Partnership’s restoration goals. The partnership model should be determined by the collaborative and aligned with the Partnership’s goals, planned actions, and regional context.

4.4 Partnership Development Stages

DER delivers support through three key stages: Catalyst, Capacity and Action, and Leadership. Because each Partnership enters the program at a different point in its development, DER will designate which stage—Catalyst, Capacity and Action, or Leadership—best aligns with the applicant’s current readiness and organizational capacity through initial designation and in subsequent annual evaluations. This approach ensures consistency, fairness, and alignment with program goals. It allows DER to “meet partners where they are” and provide the right level of support to help them advance to the next stage. The stage determines the appropriate level of funding and technical assistance needed for a Partnership as defined in the RFR, supporting growth and independence over time as funding builds in the early years and tapers as partnerships mature.

Applicants are only eligible for one Partnership Development Stage based on their 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.

Catalyst Stage: Planning and Partnership Building

An early stage focused on building an enduring Partnership foundation. A collaborative which has been previously funded through DER’s Partnerships Program does not qualify for this development stage.

Partnership in the Catalyst Stage must:

1. Demonstrate commitment and coordination from two or more partners/ stakeholders representing relevant restoration interests (e.g., municipalities, watershed associations, conservation organizations, tribal governments, or regional government/ planning agencies).
2. Demonstrate a functioning Collaborative with defined governance, partner roles, and regular coordination and communication mechanisms.
3. Have documented shared restoration goals and regional priorities but may need to further develop a more refined Strategic Plan to align with DER’s and the Regional Restoration Partnerships Program goals.

4. Be able to articulate the ecological and community benefits of their work.
5. Have not previously received funding through DER's Partnerships Program.

Activities in this stage may include:

- Engaging Core Partners and stakeholders and establishing decision-making processes
- Establishing roles, responsibilities, and areas of expertise
- Developing Partnership regional priorities, vision, and goals
- Developing meeting needs and methods of information sharing
- Developing/updating a Strategic Plan which aligns with DER Partnerships Program requirements and identifying staffing needs
- Identifying and prioritizing regional projects
- Building networks to advance high-value regional projects
- Early development of projects: building project support, identifying funding pathways, and early site information gathering

Capacity + Action Stage: Restoration Implementation

A mid-development stage, harnessing the momentum from the previous stage's Partnership foundation into action. This stage positions the Partnership as a regional hub for collaboration, innovation, and delivery of on the ground restoration outcomes.

Partnerships in Capacity + Action Stage must:

1. Have a Strategic Plan or documented restoration strategy that outlines goals, priorities, and an implementation framework.
2. Demonstrate a functioning Collaborative with defined governance, partner roles, and regular coordination and communication mechanisms.
3. Demonstrate strong relationships with partners/stakeholders, including effective cooperation in advancing projects and Partnership objectives.
4. Have an active project pipeline, including projects in or approaching implementation.
5. Be able to articulate the ecological and community benefits of their work.
6. Demonstrate the ability to coordinate multiple stakeholders and leverage external funding to support restoration efforts.
7. Be actively updating and refining the Partnership Strategic Plan to reflect evolving regional needs and priorities.
8. Commit to developing and implementing a diversified funding strategy to support ongoing Partnership coordination and project delivery.

Activities in this stage include:

- Initiating and advancing restoration projects to implementation

- Continuing to build the project pipeline and regional coordination
- Updating the Partnership Strategic Plan
- Developing a diversified funding strategy for Partnership and project implementation
- Supporting capacity building of external stakeholders to scale restoration work
- Sharing lessons learned and best practices across regions to inform broader restoration strategies
- Convening or facilitating multi-partner collaborations at the regional scale

Leadership Stage

An advanced Partnership development stage. Previous foundation building and project implementation set forth a Partnership leadership role in advancing regional-scale restoration work. As leaders, Partnerships are well established, have demonstrated project successes and ongoing initiatives, and have tapped various funding sources to support their work, with the need for DER investment reduced accordingly.

Partnerships in the Leadership Stage must:

1. Have a DER-approved Partnership Strategic Plan, formal governance, and decision-making structure.
2. Demonstrate a track record of successful project implementation resulting in measurable ecological and community benefits.
3. Demonstrate strong relationships with partners/stakeholders, including effective cooperation and coordination at the regional scale.
4. Be able to articulate the ecological and community benefits of their work.
5. Have a diversified funding base that supports ongoing Partnership operations and restoration activities.
6. Demonstrate capacity to mentor and support emerging Partnerships and share best practices regionally and statewide.
7. Have established mechanisms for sharing lessons learned, tools, and innovations with other Partnerships.
8. Demonstrate readiness to sustain Partnership operations with reduced reliance on DER funding over time.

Activities in this stage include:

- Supporting capacity building of external stakeholders to scale restoration work
- Providing mentorship to Catalyst stage Partnerships
- Sharing lessons learned and best practices across regions to inform broader restoration strategies
- Convening or facilitating multi-partner collaborations at the regional scale

- Leveraging diverse and innovative funding mechanisms to sustain watershed-scale restoration work

4.5 Annual Grant Funding Activities

DER supports Partnership restoration activities across all phases of project development and implementation, including technical assistance and training. All proposed activities—deliverables and services—must be clearly tied to one or more of the tasks outlined below and must align with the intent of the strategic actions identified in Partnership planning documents.

This program provides capacity-building support for eligible Partnerships to complete the tasks described. Funds may be used by the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization (LPSO) and Core Partners solely for costs necessary to fulfill the public purpose of advancing statewide ecological restoration and shall not provide a direct benefit or be used for the maintenance of the entity not associated with the fulfillment of the grant.

Each year, Lead Partnership Sponsor Organizations must develop a Scope of Work based on the eligible activities associated with the task categories below and submit it as part of their annual grant application. Applications and budgets must identify proposed tasks and include relevant staff, labor rates, and estimated hours needed by the LPSO or Core Partners to complete each task.

See Scope of Work/ Budget template and submittal instructions in Section 6 for additional detail.

Task 1 Watershed planning and project identification

This task will build the Restoration Partnership, develop and update a Watershed Restoration Plan (Strategic Plan), identify restoration projects, and build stakeholder relationships necessary for river and wetland restoration within the region.

Examples of activities under this task include but are not limited to:

- Lead or update the development and launch of a Watershed Restoration Action Strategy that defines how the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization, municipalities, NGOs, and other stakeholders will coordinate to implement restoration activities in alignment with DER and Program goals. The Strategy will assess challenges to river and wetland health, identify and prioritize potential restoration projects, and be regularly updated to reflect progress and emerging needs.
- Build and maintain stakeholder engagement in the watershed restoration plan and project prioritization. Stakeholder engagement will include engagement with government entities, environmental justice focused non-profits, business organizations, academia, restoration specialists, and other stakeholders in the region to expand regional coordination, restoration efficiency and effectiveness and community benefits
- Contract reporting and associated contract check-in meetings

Task	Deliverables (including but not limited to)
Task 1 Watershed Planning and Project Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watershed Restoration/ Strategic Plan and annual updates • Prioritized list of restoration projects

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership and stakeholder engagement products (website, outreach materials, brochures, surveys, etc.) and quarterly reports and meeting documentation • Planning documents (maps, priority lists, action strategy, etc.) • Quarterly reports and meeting documentation
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Task 2 Restoration Project Coordination and Project Management

This task will result in vetted river and wetland restoration projects that have been researched, have landowner support, have been assessed for feasibility, and project advancement through engineering and design and construction.

- Project development and research: preliminary desktop review of available data, review existing related planning efforts, project scope development and early cost estimates, pre-project monitoring and data collection
- Develop scopes of work and budgets for restoration project feasibility studies, design, permitting, construction, and monitoring
- Manage subcontracts/ Sub-recipients
- Provide permitting support
- Review of project deliverables
- Support project owner through all stages of restoration project including feasibility studies, design and engineering, permitting, construction bidding, contractor selection, and construction
- Manage public engagement and stakeholder engagement
- Coordinate post-project monitoring and maintenance
- Contract reporting and associated contract check-in meetings

Task	Deliverables (including but not limited to)
Task 2 Restoration Project Coordination and Project Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Plans: including early site assessment information, proposed timelines, work to date and next steps. • Project budgets, consultant scopes of work • Feasibility studies and other project background and assessment reports • Engineering plans, technical memos, permit applications, and other technical documents for each restoration project • Project outreach materials to support public engagement • Sub-award/ subcontract contracts Public/ landowner meeting presentations/ documents • Quarterly reports including project tracking, metrics and leveraged funding updates

Task 3 Restoration Technical Assistance (Maximum of 25% of total budget request or up to \$25,000 whichever is greater)

This task will provide restoration technical assistance and support to municipalities, NGOs, and others who are carrying out restoration work within the Restoration Partnership region. Examples may include but are not limited to:

- Assess the level of river and wetland restoration knowledge among municipalities, NGOs, and others who are involved in restoration work.
- Continue to build restoration knowledge and skills of the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization and Core Partners by attending trainings, webinar/ conferences, short courses, certificate programs ³
- Develop tools, trainings, guidance documents, checklists, technical guides, templates and other river and wetland restoration resources for use by municipalities, NGOs, and others
- Coordinate and lead restoration field tours and trainings; participate in restoration field tours and trainings led by others
- Provide assistance and trouble-shooting for river and wetland restoration projects led by municipalities, NGOs, and others within the region
- Share restoration resources, challenges, and lessons learned with other Restoration Partnerships
- Evaluate effectiveness of trainings, tools, and other technical assistance products
- Contract reporting, invoicing and associated contract check-in meetings

Task	Deliverables (including but not limited to)
<p>Task 3 Restoration Technical Assistance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools, technical guidance documents, templates, checklists, trainings, webinars, workshops, and other restoration technical assistance products • List of restoration projects and proponents supported by technical assistance • Direct 1:1 technical assistance tracking • List of and related documentation of trainings, workshops and other resource-sharing opportunities organized or co-sponsored by the Partnership

³ All Partnerships are required to submit a request for approval to utilize grant funding for each training, webinar/ conference, short course, and certificate program. Requests must be in the form of a written memo and include name, date, cost and a justification for the training and outline the Partnership Program nexus as well as how the public benefit of the proposed activity outweighs the private benefit to the non-profit. DER will review all requests and issue approval if the request is deemed appropriate.

4.6 Project Interaction With Other DER Solicitations

Allowable and unallowable Partnership tasks for projects funded through other competitive DER solicitations and procurements:

DER Priority Projects Program

Partnerships funding may not be used to support Priority Projects or Provisional Priority Projects⁴ that 1) have been competitively selected and designated through DER's Priority Projects Program and 2) that are active, in good standing, and eligible for funding under DER's annual [Priority Projects Program Advancement Grant RFR](#) (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 award of any Priority Project funding. Partnerships may request reallocation of Partnerships funds to an alternative project identified in the original grant application.

Other DER Competitive 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.*

⁴ "Provisional status" for DER priority projects indicates that a project has been accepted into the program but has not yet met all the requirements for full "Priority Project" 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.

Scopes of work and tasks will be reviewed through DER's annual Partnerships Program competitive process to ensure funding leverages existing investments and enhances restoration outcomes across DER programs.

The applicant must certify compliance with the above provisions in the application and contract.

Please reference **Section 8, Appendix B** for a list of ineligible grant activities/ costs.

4.7 FY2027, Year One Grant Funding

In this funding opportunity grant funding for FY2027, Year 1 will be awarded to selected Lead Partnership Sponsor Organizations in conjunction with designation award to support Partnership development and advancement of restoration projects. Year one grant funding expires on June 30, 2027. In years 2-5 of the Partnership, Lead Partnership Sponsor Organizations will apply annually to receive grant funding.

4.8 Budget Guidelines

Proposals must include an adequate budget for the proposed Partnership services for FY2027 ending 6/30/2027. The budget should list position/ title and related Labor Rates along with justification and description of personnel duties. Estimated Direct Costs, including materials, meeting expenses, travel and training, must be broken down by type.

If Applicant is proposing Core Partners, Applicant is required to include budget details similar to above for each Core Partner.

A budget template is provided in Attachment B and is required to be used.

The budget must be itemized into the following activities, see above Section 3.5:

- Task 1: Watershed Planning and Project Identification
- Task 2: Restoration Project Coordination and Project Management
- Task 3: Restoration Technical Assistance

5 MISCELLANEOUS

5.1 Deliverables, Ownership, and Due Credit

DER requires that all technical deliverables produced under the contract resulting from this award be delivered to DER in native format, either electronic or hardcopy, as decided under scope and contract. Deliverables may include software, maps, reports, contracts with engineering and/or construction firms, design plans, etc. to execute restoration work.

5.2 Invoicing

The payment procedure for grants resulting from this RFR is by reimbursement for costs incurred during the contract period.

Only tasks and deliverables identified in the grant Scope of Work are eligible for reimbursement. No reimbursement shall be made for Massachusetts sales tax. Reimbursement is made after acceptance by DER of a correctly executed invoice with appropriate documentation and deliverables. Proof of payment must be provided with reimbursement request.

Payments are processed within a 45-day payment cycle through EFT, in accordance with the Commonwealth Bill Paying Policy. Grant reimbursement will be made using Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). Final fiscal year invoices are due July 31 each year.

5.3 Final Payment and Reporting Requirements

A minimum of ten percent (10%) of the total contract award will be retained pending receipt and approval of all required final reports, deliverables, and documentation. Release of the final payment is contingent upon successful completion of all approved project activities and programmatic requirements, and confirmation that all work performed complies with the terms and conditions of the grant.

5.4 Contract Revision and Expansion

DER reserves the right to fund a portion, modify or amend the scope, and/or add or delete tasks of any project proposal in coordination with the grant recipient, to more closely meet the purposes of the program.

If additional funds become available during the grant contract duration period, DER reserves the right to increase the maximum obligation, expand the scope of work, and/or modify the grant contracting terms to some or all grant contracts executed as a result of this RFR or to execute contracts with Applicants not funded in the initial selection process. This is subject to available funding, satisfactory contract performance, project need, and based on successful negotiation with the Applicant.

5.5 Condition of an Award

Within a reasonable timeframe from the public announcement of the award, the awardee will execute a contract with DER. If other related factors (for example other anticipated financial sources, required approvals, etc.) are not resolved by the awardee thereby preventing the awardee from

signing a contract, DER reserves the right to withdraw financial support of the Partnership or reduce financial support and will provide the awardee with 30 days written notice.

5.6 Compliance

The sub-recipient's signature on the Contract indicates compliance with the following as well as provides assurance that these compliance provisions will be included with any associated contracts or Sub-awards or subcontracts which may be entered into with this funding. Grant recipients and all project activities must comply with all applicable State and, regulations, and policies see Section 1.3.

5.7 Applicant Communication with DER and the Commonwealth

Applicants are prohibited from communicating directly with any employee of DER regarding this grant opportunity during the RFR period except as specified during the Q&A period in Section 2.1. No other individual Commonwealth employee or representative is authorized to provide any information or respond to any question or inquiry concerning this grant opportunity. Applicants may email the contact person for this Grant Announcement in the event this grant opportunity is incomplete, or the Applicant is having trouble obtaining or submitting any required attachments. Please see Section 6.

5.8 Public Records

All responses and information submitted in response to this RFR are subject to the Massachusetts Public Records Law, M.G.L., c. 66, s. 10, and to c. 4, s. 7, ss. 26. Any statements in submitted responses that are inconsistent with these statutes shall be disregarded.

5.9 List of Attachments

- A: Application Form
- B: Scope of Work/ Budget Template
- C: Project Form Template
- D: Commonwealth W-9 form
- E: Electronic Fund Transfer Authorization Form
- F: Commonwealth Standard Terms and Conditions
- G: Standard Contract Form
- H: Contractor Authorized Signatory Listing Form

See Section 6 for application requirement details.

5.10 List of Appendices

- Ineligible Restoration Activities (see Section 7)
- Ineligible Grant Activities (see Section 8)

6 Evaluation

Applicants must submit a completed application that includes all of the required supporting materials, agree to the program conditions, and meet the eligibility requirements in order to be considered for a reimbursable grant award. Applicant scores will be used to rank Applications and will determine which Applicants will proceed to subsequent stages of the evaluation and/or enter negotiations with the Commonwealth to receive a Contract award.

As part of the review of proposals, DER may contact applicants for (a) response/application clarifications, (b) to request additional information and documentation, (c) to conduct field inspection and/or consider statewide geographic distribution in its final recommendations for funding. DER reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and to only accept projects that are in keeping with DER's mission. The funds awarded under this RFR will be based on the availability of DER resources to support Partnerships and the evaluation criteria set forth below.

6.1 Application Eligibility Requirements

For an application to be eligible for evaluation, the following **Application Requirements** must be satisfied:

All Applicants:

- Applicants are Massachusetts-registered tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations or Massachusetts Regional Governments or Regional Planning Agencies.
- The applicant is the Lead Partnership Sponsor Organization (Section 1.10).
- The applicant proposes eligible Partnerships activities (Section 3.5).
- The proposed work aligns with an existing Strategic Plan or documented partnership restoration strategy and DER and Partnerships Program Goals or work aligns with proposed changes to the Strategic/ Restoration Plan.

6.2 Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on criteria and associated point values described below, using information and materials supplied by the applicant.

Critical Need for Support (20 points)

- Does the applicant clearly define the Partnership Region with clear boundaries within Massachusetts, including the estimated square mileage and the watersheds/municipalities encompassed within the region?
- Does the applicant describe the region's key ecological restoration and climate adaptation needs, including the key stressors or challenges driving those needs?
- Does the applicant convey the urgency and significance of these needs, and demonstrate alignment with DER's mission and the Partnerships Program goals?

- Is the proposed scope of work feasible, well-structured, and appropriate to address the identified critical need(s)?
- Does the applicant clearly articulate how grant funding will be used to advance restoration outcomes and strengthen the Collaborative's capacity to coordinate regional restoration and climate adaptation efforts?
- Does the application demonstrate how support will produce lasting benefits—ecological, community, or climate resiliency—that would not be achievable otherwise?

Likelihood of Partnership Success (20 points)

- Does the Collaborative have a clear and compelling vision supported by a Strategic Plan or documented restoration strategy?
- Does the Collaborative's Strategic Plan or documented restoration strategy demonstrate a strong understanding of the region's ecological and climate adaptation needs, including how prior investments and planning efforts inform project priorities?
- If changes to an existing Collaborative model or Strategic Plan are proposed, are they clearly described and likely to strengthen alignment with DER/ Partnerships Program goals?
- Are the goals and outcomes of the proposed scope of work aligned with the Collaborative's plans and support a shared vision amongst the Core Partners/ Stakeholders?
- Are the partner/ stakeholder roles and responsibilities clearly defined, and does the partnership model and organizational structure support effective participation, communication and learning across Collaborative's members?
- Are decision-making processes clear and transparent?
- Does the applicant demonstrate effective communication of the ecological and community benefits of their work?

Ability to advance regional coordination and restoration/ resiliency work (20 Points)

- Applicant clearly demonstrates its ability to lead and coordinate regional restoration and nature-based climate resiliency work.
- Applicant demonstrates ability to leverage external funding or other resources to advance regional goals.
- Applicant shows evidence of strong collaboration with regional stakeholders and municipalities.
- Has the Collaborative demonstrated measurable progress in expanding restoration and resiliency capacity within their region?
- Applicant describes how the proposed scope of work continues to support the advancement of restoration outcomes.

Community Characteristics and Benefits (15 points)

- Is the Collaborative structure representative of the communities within its region?

- Does the proposed restoration work equitably distribute benefits and meaningfully advance restoration and resilience?
- Has the applicant demonstrated or proposed meaningful engagement strategies that build public understanding and involvement in restoration planning and work and/ or improve community access to nature? For additional information on meaningful engagement strategies, see [Community Engagement Levels](#), a resource for thinking about the spectrum of community engagement, and how to move towards greater collaboration and community leadership. Examples of meaningful engagement from past Partnerships include:
 - Hosting interactive activities at community events where residents map their experiences, priorities, and concerns related to their local river.
 - Engaging Core Partners in strategic planning processes to ensure decision-making reflects the perspectives of communities across the region.
 - Facilitating hands-on educational opportunities, such as stream table demonstrations and youth workshops, that build awareness of watershed and restoration practices.

Proposed Restoration Project/ Activities Information (15 points)

- Does the proposed scope of work align with DER and Partnerships Program goals and advance restoration priorities?
- Does the proposed work contribute to a geographically balanced distribution of DER Partnerships Program support?
- Does the applicant provide a clear description for each scope of work item **and** include complete scope of work Task 2 detail in the Project Form (using template) including including project name, location (longitude/ latitude if applicable), municipality (ies), stream/ waterbody name, ownership type, phase (if applicable), site description, work to be advanced and anticipated ecological/ community benefit?
 - If more general tasks are proposed in scope of work task 2 (e.g., advancing 2-3 dam removal preliminary designs), the applicant must identify potential project sites in the Project Form. **Note:** Projects not included in the grant application may not be added after contract execution.
- DER will use information from MassWildlife’s [“Biomap”](#) and resources noted under Commitment to Environmental Justice and Community Benefits above to inform assessment.

Reasonableness of proposed timelines and budget (10 points)

- Is the proposed scope of work cost effective, with reasonable labor rates consistent with competitive wages paid for similar work in MA?
- Is the budget realistic and appropriate for the proposed scope of work?
- Is the timeline reasonable for the proposed scope of work?

7 Instructions for application submission

Applications must be submitted through [DER's Website](#). No paper applications will be accepted. **Applications received after the deadline will not be accepted.** Applicants must complete and submit as instructed all required documents.

Application Submissions should include the following:

- Completed **Application Form** (*Required*) The Application Form template can be found on [DER's Website](#) and COMMBUYS.
- Completed **Scope of Work/ Budget Form** (*Required*) The Budget Form template including instructions can be found on [DER's Website](#) and COMMBUYS. **Please submit in original format (excel document).**
 - If Budget form includes request (s) for training, webinars/ conferences, short courses or certificate programs funding, please include justification for each request stating the nexus with the Partnership Program and how the public benefit of the proposed activity outweighs the private benefit to the non-profit. DER will review all requests and issue approval if the request is deemed appropriate.
- Completed **Project Form** (*Required*) The Project Form template can be found on [DER's Website](#) and COMMBUYS. **Please submit in original format (excel document).** The Project Form is required for project-specific activities. For Catalyst stage applications focused on planning/ restoration technical assistance only, enter "N/A" in all fields and upload the form to indicate it is not applicable.
- Partnership Region Map (*Required- pdf*)
- Letters of Commitment from all Core Partners (if applicable) or from at least two stakeholders demonstrating collaborative support (*Required- pdf*)
- Staff qualifications/ resumes for individuals identified in Scope of Work/ Budget form (*Required- pdf*)
- Partnership Strategic Plan / documented restoration strategy: Applicants must submit either a strategic plan or a documented restoration strategy that outlines the vision, priorities, and approach for the proposed Partnership. Applicants may also provide an existing strategic plan for a smaller area within the proposed Partnership region, if the applicant demonstrates how it will be updated or built upon to incorporate the entirety of the proposed Partnership. Alternatively, applicants may submit a draft strategic plan if the intent is to finalize the plan in FY27.- (*Required- pdf or word document with hyperlinks to website*)

If you have trouble with your online submission, please contact Anthony Lucivero, prior to the RFR opening date:

Anthony Lucivero, anthony.lucivero@mass.gov

7.1 RFR Opening Date/Time

All Applications must be submitted before the specified date, month, year, and time displayed in the Procurement Calendar, Section 2, of this RFR through [DER's Website](#). Times are Eastern Time. All Applicants are advised to allow adequate time for Application submission by considering potential online submission impediments such as Internet traffic, Internet connection speed, file size, and file volume. DER is not responsible for delays encountered by Applicants, or for an Applicant's local hardware failures, such as computers or related networks, associated with application compilation or submission. Applications submitted are time stamped and is considered the official time of record. Applications will not be accepted if submitted after the RFR Opening Date/Time deadline.

7.2 Additional Contractual Documentation

If an application is awarded funding, the grant recipient will be required to submit the following forms to complete a contract. Applicants are encouraged to review these forms prior to submission of a Response.

- Commonwealth Standard Contract Form
- Completed Contractor Authorized Signature Listing Form
- Commonwealth W-9 form
- Electronic Fund Transfer Authorization Form

Forms can also be downloaded from: <https://www.macomptroller.org/forms/#Section-5>:

8 Appendix A

8.1 Ineligible Restoration Activities

Ineligible Regional Restoration Partnerships Program Grant Activities include, but are not limited to:

- 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 (**See Section 1.5**).

9 Appendix B

9.1 Ineligible Grant Activities/Costs

DER will only reimburse for Partnership activities and associated costs that are incurred during the grant contract term and that directly support DER and Partnerships Program goals, priorities, and activities as outlined in grant contracts and approved Partnership planning documents. Examples of ineligible activities and costs include but are not limited to:

- Political activities or lobbying
- Participation in administrative appeals or other legal actions, any costs associated with legal services
- Providing or communicating support for, or opposition to, an existing or proposed project, program, petition, initiative, law, regulation, or permit application
- Costs or activities that do not directly support a Partnership
- Costs associated with ineligible restoration activities
- Work that occurs outside of a grant contract term (scope and time period)
- Costs for activities already undertaken, completed, or that are in process or completed prior to the contract date
- Work that occurs outside Massachusetts
- Travel and training costs for activities outside of Massachusetts
- Certain costs associated with projects that have a current DER grant award and/or active Priority Project or Culvert Replacement Training Site designation, see Section 3.5.
- Massachusetts Sales tax
- Itemized indirect costs
- Staff salary: DER will only fund labor rates as defined in Section 1.10 for staff time spent directly implementing tasks within the approved Scope of Work.
- Organization-based technology: Costs for software, hardware or digital tools which can be used by the organization as a whole.
- Long-term equipment: Costs for equipment with a useful life of more than 3 years.

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 Sponsor Organizations and their Stakeholders may engage in any activities they choose; however, they may not use Partnership funding to support ineligible activities and costs.