

**FY25 Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant and
Culvert Replacement Training Site Program Briefing
Meeting Notes
January 23, 2024**

Held via Zoom Meeting

DER Staff: Carrie Banks, Holden Sparacino, David Azinheira, Allison Perlman

Meeting started at 1pm

Attendees: 131

Meeting Summary:

- **Welcome & Ground Rules:** Welcomed participants. Introduced DER staff. Provided meeting overview and reviewed meeting ground rules.
- **FY25 Stream Continuity Grants Briefing Presentation:** Provided overview of Division of Ecological Restoration, Stream Continuity Program, Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant Program, Training Site Initiative, and upcoming FY25 grant opportunity.
- **Questions & Answers:**
 - **Question 1: What if you know your construction cost will be well over \$400,000 and we do not have any money to supplement this project, should I apply?**
 - **Answer:** *The likelihood of funding will depend on the project priority, application scoring, project benefits, total funding requested, likelihood of the success of the project (status of permits, project schedule, external funding etc.), and total funding available to DER. DER may consider construction costs over \$400,000 pending our total funding allocation and competitiveness of other applications. For instance, a project that is requesting \$450,000 and has a high score due to high ecological and community benefits may be more likely to be considered for funding versus a project requesting \$800,000 or having fewer benefits. It may be helpful to provide details on how the project could move forward if a partial award was provided (for example, explaining how a budget shortfall or a lower-than-requested amount may be handled, and if other funding sources are known/secured that could supplement project costs). Additional information will be available in the “Funding Availability” section of the FY25 RFR.*
 - **Question 2: Will these slides be available?**
 - **Answer:** *Yes, a link will be made available on the DER [website](#) over the next couple days. We’ll also send a copy of the questions received and answers to received questions (this document).*
 - **Question 3: If a Training site is not in an anticipated priority watershed, can it still be considered?**
 - **Answer:** *Yes, applications for training sites outside of the anticipated FY25 training site priority watershed will be considered. This is one of the scoring criteria but not the largest. Additional information on the Training Site scoring criteria will be available as an Appendix to the RFR.*
 - **Question 4: What is the benefit of being a training site?**
 - **Answer:** *Training sites are long term projects/relationships between DER and municipalities stretching across multiple fiscal years that don’t require applying for multiple grants. They assist in DER’s efforts to expand the pace and capacity of municipalities and other partners to implement road stream crossings that better meet the MA Stream Crossing Standards by functioning as examples of such projects and training road managers in surrounding communities on these projects.*

In addition, successful applicants in general do not need to apply in subsequent years to seek funding for future phases of work. While the Training Sites initiative is not designed to fund the entire cost of a project from start to finish, it acts as a long-term funding and training pathway for participating projects and staff. Training sites use a separate funding source than CRMA projects, so applicants that are interested in either project type will be considered for both funding sources.

○ **Question 5: How does DER define “high ecological value” and “restoration potential?”**

- **Answer:** *DER has created a summary of the data sources used to estimate the ecological value and restoration potential of projects and sites as well as how applicants can conduct these assessments here: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/tools-to-determine-environmental-benefits-of-culvert-replacements/download>*

Some of the criteria DER looks at to determine ecological value and restoration potential of projects include: whether the crossing currently acts as a barrier to fish and wildlife passage or whether other barriers exist along the river reach that would limit restoration efforts; whether the stream/river is a Coldwater Fisheries Resources (CFR), has documented migratory fish species, and/or other factors including if the river/stream is a tributary to a Wild and Scenic River or other resource water type; if the project is in an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), in/nearby natural heritage areas or estimated priority habitats of rare species, Outstanding Resources Waters (ORW) or other priority area.

In addition, applicants may include relevant and known information to establish a site as having a high ecological value (for instance, existing reports or data from other sources).

● **Question 6: Is there any benefit if the culvert you are seeking funds for has been evaluated by certified inspector?**

- **Answer:** *Applicants should include any relevant information, reports, or photographs that explain the project need, benefits, and/or existing conditions. However, a specific type of engineering or bridge/culvert inspection is not required.*

● **Question 7: Are culverts with tidal flows eligible to this program?**

- **Answer:** *No, this grant is for non-tidal crossings only. Details will be included in the “Eligible Projects” section of the RFR. DER can direct you to potential funding resources for tidal crossing upon request.*

● **Question 8: Our stream system consists of six culverts. We would be looking for field data collection / design funding. Should we somehow prioritize the culverts to keep the count to three? Maybe just start upstream and move downstream?**

- **Answer:** *DER recommends coordinating with stakeholders and reviewing potential environmental benefits to determine what culverts are the highest priority and/or what groupings make sense to request funding. Additionally, stakeholders can use and using the resources on determining the restoration potential and ecological value of sites (see Question 5) in determining which sites are a good fit for this opportunity.*

DER also recommends making it clear that the municipality is interested in additional restoration work in the future, and using the resources on determining the restoration potential and

ecological value of sites (see Question 5) in determining which sites are a good fit for this opportunity.

- **Question 9: What if the design recommends a structure that is no longer considered a culvert and will instead be replaced with a small bridge, should we apply?**
 - **Answer:** *Yes, this is a common project type that has been previously successful under this grant. Many DER-funded projects are existing culverts that are less than 10-feet wide prior to replacement, and which require a structure of greater than 10-feet wide to meet the Massachusetts Stream Crossing Standards. MassDOT considers structures greater than 10-feet to be a bridge, as described at [Determining if a structure is a BRI](#), and this type of structure is eligible under this grant. We do recommend municipalities work with consultants who have experiencing working with MassDOT and the Chapter 85 review process if the proposed structure is considered a bridge by MassDOT.*

- **Question 10: Are only municipalities considered eligible entities?**
 - **Answer:** *Additional eligible applicant types are anticipated for this grant opportunity. The finalized eligibility criteria will be posted in the “Eligible Applicants” section of the RFR. DER anticipates that local government units, including towns, cities, districts, commissions, and regional governments; as well as federally recognized and state acknowledged Tribes will be eligible to apply. Applicants are also anticipated to be able to apply jointly, with one eligible applicant serving as the lead applicant.*

- **Question 11: If grant-supported field work and initial design work determine that the 10-foot span limit for a replacement "culvert" will be exceeded, will DER support the remaining grant work (e.g. the remaining design, engineering, and permitting work)? Additionally, will DER support the additional costs associated from replacing a small culvert with a small bridge that has a greater than 10-foot span?**
 - **Answer:** *Yes, DER is seeking applications for culvert and small bridge replacement projects, and considers projects eligible if proposed replacements or existing structures exceed a 10-foot span. Many existing undersized and small culverts may need to be replaced with a structure that has a greater than 10-foot span in order to meet the goals of the MA Stream Crossing Standards and in order to integrate updated hydraulic and environmental design criteria. This is an eligible project type under this grant.*

Effort and cost associated with replacing an undersized culvert or small bridge with a structure that meets the goals of the MA Stream Crossing Standards (including if the proposed structure is greater than 10-feet and considered a BRI or NBI by MassDOT [see [Determining if a structure is a BRI](#)]), is eligible under this grant program and would continue to be eligible to apply for CRMA funding in future years.

- **Question 12: If a proposed culvert is located immediately downstream of a dam that has a fish ladder installed, will the project be considered?**
 - **Answer:** *Yes, the project will be considered. In general, barriers in the immediate area of a proposed project do not impact eligibility, but may impact scoring and project ranking. The review committee will conduct a desktop review of all sites and their surrounding areas, including looking at restoration potential and ecological value of the project (see Question 5 or [DER’s resource on assessing ecological value of sites](#)). This includes investigating if other barriers exist in the surrounding area and stream system that may limit stream processes and connectivity benefits from implementing the proposed project.*

If there are other known structures or barriers in the immediate area (including dams, other culverts, flood control structures etc.) DER recommends providing details and a description of how those structures may impact stream connectivity benefits (for instance, describing if the structure currently acts as an in-stream barrier, if devices such as a fish ladder are in place that may reduce the impacts on fish and wildlife passage, and/or any future, ongoing, or intended efforts to remove barriers). Applicants may also provide photos of other surrounding structures which will assist the review committee in understanding the surrounding area and potential benefits and outcomes of the proposed work.

- **Wrap-up and Reminders:** Reminded participants they can find more details at <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/culvert-replacement-municipal-assistance-grant-program> or on our *Frequently Asked Questions* page: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/crma-grant-program-frequently-asked-questions>
- Reminded participants to submit project-specific questions to DERCulverts@mass.gov by February 2nd and/or submit general grant-related questions before the RFR is posted on COMMBUYS.

Meeting ended at 2:00pm