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MassDEP's Official Answers to Questions Regarding the December 13, 2023 Natural Resource Nitrogen Sensitive Area 2023-2024 Grant Program Posted on December 22, 2023

On December 13, 2023, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) announced the 2023-2024 Opportunity for the Natural Resource Nitrogen Sensitive Area (NRNSA) Grant Program (Grant Program). On December 19, 2023, at 10 a.m., MassDEP held a virtual Bidders' Conference and accepted both verbal and written questions from potential applicants through the December 20th 3 p.m. deadline for the submission of questions as posted in the Section 3 of the Grant Program's Estimated Procurement Calendar.

Below are MassDEP's official Answers to all questions received by the December 20, 2023, deadline. All questions are formatted in **bold font** and answers are posted below questions in normal *italicized font*.

Eligible Entities

Question 1 (Q1): If we have received funding from a different resource, are we eligible to apply for this grant?

Answer 1 (A1): Yes, you are still eligible so long as you meet the criteria for Eligible Entities and Eligible Projects. Applicants are not required to provide matching funds. However, applicants are encouraged to identify other known sources of funding for a proposed project on the Application Form, from both secured and anticipated sources. See Section 1.I of the NRNSA Grant Opportunity Request for Responses (RFR).

Q2: Is a county an Eligible Entity?

A2: County entities are eligible to apply for this grant opportunity because they meet the definition of Local Government Unit as defined in 314 CMR 21.00. See Section 1.D of the RFR.

Q3: Would this grant be available to a county entity to make changes to a present database to inform towns during the watershed plan development process?

A3: A County could propose database improvements to a system that produced data used as part of the planning project which contributes to the Watershed Management Plan (WMP), Watershed Permit application or De Minimis Load application. The Application should detail how the database changes contribute to the planning project for communities. See Section 2.A of the RFR.

Q4: Eastham as you know is rather unique, as we are not an NSA however, we have completed and are in the process of submitting a TWMP for Nauset Estuary may we utilize this grant?

A4: Eligible projects are limited to planning projects in the 31 NRNSA designated watersheds on Cape Cod. See Section 1.D of the RFR. MassDEP is working to make the NRNSA Grant Program an annual opportunity which may be open to other watersheds in subsequent years.

Eligible Projects

Q5: Is it my correct understanding that it can apply to retroactive planning activities as long as it's a discrete task through the FY 2023-2024?

A5: Both existing and proposed projects are eligible for this grant program, and funding will support work activities for the planning phase of Watershed Management Plans or a Watershed Permit, so long as the work funded by this program is conducted during FY2024 (i.e., July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024). See Section 1.H of the RFR.

Q6: Can the funding be used to purchase equipment for planning purposes such as YSI meters for water quality?

A6: Yes, the purchase of equipment will be considered under this grant opportunity provided that the data collected from the equipment is part of the planning project which contributes to the Watershed Management Plan (WMP), Watershed Permit application or De Minimis Load application. See Section 1.E of the RFR.

Q7: Is work related to the Pleasant Bay Watershed Permit Eligible?

A7: Yes, planning activities required by an approved watershed permit are eligible for funding. Pursuant to Section 1.E of the RFR. Eligible Projects include, but are not limited to:

- *Data analysis of ambient water quality monitoring results; or*
- *Permeable reactive barrier design.*

Q8: Are planning/design projects for stormwater management BMPs eligible?

A8: Yes, if the planning project for stormwater management contributes to, or comes from, a Watershed Management Plan (WMP), a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP), a Comprehensive Water Resource Management Plan (CWRMP), a Targeted Watershed Plan (TWMP), Watershed Permit application or De Minimis Load application. See Section 1.E of the RFR.

Q9: Are the development of Quality Assurance Project Plans (QAPPs) eligible?

A9: Yes, the development of a QAPP is an Eligible Project provided that the monitoring plan contributes to, or comes from, a Watershed Management Plan (WMP), a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP), a Comprehensive Water Resource Management Plan (CWRMP), a Targeted Watershed Plan (TWMP), Watershed Permit application or De Minimis Load application. See Section 1.E of the RFR.

Q10: Is effluent disposal planning an eligible activity?

A10: Yes, effluent disposal planning is an eligible activity provided that it contributes to, or comes from, a Watershed Management Plan (WMP), a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP), a Comprehensive Water Resource Management Plan (CWRMP), a Targeted Watershed Plan (TWMP), Watershed Permit application or De Minimis Load application. See Section 1.E of the RFR.

Q11: Is creating a modeling scenario for impaired estuaries an eligible activity?

A11: Yes, modeling scenarios are an eligible activity provided that they contribute to, or come from, a Watershed Management Plan (WMP), a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP), a Comprehensive Water Resource Management Plan (CWRMP), a Targeted Watershed Plan (TWMP), Watershed Permit application or De Minimis Load application. See Section 1.E of the RFR.

Q12: Is creating an inter-municipal planning solution an eligible activity?

A12: Yes, creating an inter-municipal planning solution is an eligible activity provided that it contributes to, or comes from, a Watershed Management Plan (WMP), a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP), a Comprehensive Water Resource Management Plan (CWRMP), a Targeted Watershed Plan (TWMP), Watershed Permit application or De Minimis Load application. See Section 1.E of the RFR.

Funding

Q13: Is there a minimum amount for the Grant?

A13: The minimum amount is \$20,000. The MassDEP review committee reserves the right, in its discretion, to grant smaller awards to proposals of exceptional merit. If there are remaining unspent capital funds available from other Department projects during

the period between the announcement of this grant opportunity and the announcement of the grant awards, the Department reserves the right to allocate supplemental funds to this grant solicitation and/or initiate additional funding rounds. See Section 1.H of the RFR.

Q14: Is the \$300,000 total funding available to all communities? Or can each community apply up to \$300,000?

A14: Funding is only available to the 31 NRNSA designated watersheds on Cape Cod. See Section 1.D of the RFR. The total amount of grant funding available and anticipated to be awarded for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) is \$300,000. Grant Awards may range from \$20,000 to \$300,000 per applicant, although MassDEP reserves the right, in its discretion, to grant smaller awards to proposals of exceptional merit. If there are remaining unspent capital funds available from other Department projects during the period between the announcement of this grant opportunity and the announcement of the grant awards, the Department reserves the right to allocate supplemental funds to this grant solicitation and/or initiate additional funding rounds. See Section 1.H of the RFR. DEP is working to make the NRNSA Grant Program an annual opportunity with additional funding in subsequent years.

Q15: If a project was started in FY23 and continued in FY24, can we include the entire project in the application?

A15: Only work done during FY24 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024) is eligible for grant funding. You may apply for funding for the portion of the project conducted in SFY24, even if the project was begun in FY23. See A5 above, as well as Section 1.H of the RFR.

Q16: Are there other upcoming grant opportunities I should be aware of?

A16: 319 and 604(b) grant opportunities will be made available in 2024. For information go to: [Grants & Financial Assistance: Watersheds & Water Quality | Mass.gov](#).

Q17: Would the 319 or 604(b) opportunities be applicable for Martha's Vineyard communities? i.e., if they have watersheds with TMDL who are currently completing a CWMP.

A17: 319 or 604(b) opportunities are not restricted to the 31 watersheds on Cape Cod with NRNSA designation. Eligibility for Martha's Vineyard communities would depend on requirements of 319 and 604B grants. For information go to: [Grants & Financial Assistance: Watersheds & Water Quality | Mass.gov](#).

Q18: If there are additional funds remaining from this current grant opportunity, would DEP consider funding CWMPs in Nitrogen Sensitive areas on Martha's Vineyard

A18: Eligible Projects are limited to planning projects in the 31 NRNSA designated watersheds on Cape Cod. See Section 1.E. of the RFR. DEP is working to make the NRNSA

Grant Program an annual opportunity which may be open to other watersheds in subsequent years.

Grant Awards

Q19: When will the awards be given?

A19: The estimated date for notification of grant awards is Friday, March 8, 2024. Please see Answer 24 below for a table of upcoming important dates and Section 3 of the RFR.

Application

Q20: How will the grant be scored?

A20: Section 2.A. of the NRNSA Grant Opportunity Request for Responses (RFR) document includes instructions for application submission. Section 2.A of the RFR includes evaluation criteria that will be used by DEP when reviewing applications. You can access the RFR here: [2023-2024 Natural Resource Nitrogen Sensitive Area Grant Program Notice of Grant Opportunity](#).

Q21: We are going to a lot of shut down periods of municipalities, is the January 5th deadline a hard deadline? Will there be an extension?

A21: DEP does not anticipate an extension of the January 5th application submission deadline.

Q22: Any preferred approach to apply where perhaps two towns in an NRNSA have a project for consideration – one town take the lead?

A22: The preferred approach for two (2) towns working on an NRNSA project is to have one (1) town to take the lead and be the entity on the contract. See section 2.C and Attachment A of the RFR.

Misc. Questions

Q23: Are there Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) / Woman Business Enterprise (WBE) requirements for project delivery teams? Are there any Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (BDE) or procurement requirements for work already underway and if so how would it affect a contract already in place?

A23: There are no requirements in the grant specific to MBE, WBE, or BDE for project delivery teams. MassDEP is committed to advancing equity, diversity, and environmental justice (EJ) through its public investments. The agency seeks to prioritize the direction of these resources to benefit EJ communities and to address environmental inequities. To that end, MassDEP grant, and funding programs include criteria and evaluation

parameters that emphasize equity, diversity, and environmental justice, consistent with each program’s statutory authority and source of funding. Preference will be given to projects that provide direct benefit to environmental justice populations. Information on which communities are classified as environmental justice populations can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/environmental-justice-populations-in-massachusetts>. See Section 1.C of the RFR.

Q24: Could you please clarify the timeline when the applicants will be notified if awarded the grant? And the timeframe in which the money needs to be spent.

A24: The notification of grant awards is estimated to be posted on March 8, 2024. See section 3 of the RFR. The notification will be posted on both COMMBUYS and MassDEP website. Projects must be conducted during the contract period (i.e., started on or after July 1, 2023, and completed on or before June 30, 2024) to be eligible for reimbursement. See section 1.H of the RFR. A table of estimated dates is included below:

Item:	Date:	Time:
<i>Question & Answers posted</i>	<i>Friday, December 22, 2023</i>	<i>5pm</i>
<i>Grant Applications Due</i>	<i>Friday, January 5, 2024</i>	<i>5pm</i>
<i>Notification of Grant Award(s)</i>	<i>Friday, March 8, 2024</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Estimated Contract Start Date</i>	<i>Friday, March 29, 2024</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Project Completion Date</i>	<i>Sunday, June 30, 2024</i>	<i>-</i>