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MassDEP's Official Answers to Questions Regarding the October 3, 2023 Sewage Notification Assistance 2023-2024 Grant Program Posted on October 24, 2023

On October 3, 2023, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) announced the 2023-2024 Opportunity for the Sewage Notification Assistance Grant Program (Grant Program). On October 11, 2023, at 1 p.m., MassDEP held a virtual Bidders' Conference and accepted both verbal and written questions from potential applicants through the 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 October 12, 2023, deadline. All questions are formatted in **bold font** and answers are posted below questions in *italicized font*.

Eligible Entities

Question 1 (Q1): Are recipients of funding from the previous round eligible to apply again? If so, can they expand the previous project or would it have to be a different project?

Answer 1 (A1): Yes. Applicants who were awarded funds during the 2022-2023 grant program may apply again. Applicants may expand on a previous project, so long as the project meets the other eligibility criteria.

Q2: If a community received a grant under the first round, are they still eligible under this round?

A2: Any applicant meeting the definition of an "Eligible Entity" may apply for funding. Please see Section 1.D. of the Grant Opportunity document. Receipt, or non-receipt, of an award during the 2022-2023 iteration of this grant program is not a factor in determining eligibility.

Q3: Also, how much money is available this round and is there a max grant amount?

A3: A total of \$563,289 is available for this grant program. Grant Awards may range from \$10,000 to \$563,289 per applicant, although the MassDEP review committee reserves the right, in its discretion, to grant smaller awards to proposals of exceptional merit. See Section 1.H of Grant Opportunity.

Q4: Do we qualify for the program since we don't have a Wastewater Treatment Facility?

A4: Any entity that meets the regulatory definition of "permittee" and who is required to notify the public of any event listed in Section 1.B of the Grant Program and under MassDEP's 314 CMR 16.00 regulations is eligible for this grant. Eligible Entities can include communities that do not have CSO events. See also A2 above.

Eligible Projects

Q5: Is new signage only eligible at CSO outfalls, or at any public access to a waterway potentially affected by an SSO?

A5: Eligible projects are not limited to new signage at CSO outfalls, but may include new signage at any public access to a waterway potentially affected by an SSO, CSO, or Partially Treated discharge. Note that the grant application must also justify why the proposed new signage will be beneficial.

Q6: I know you listed software, but would equipment purchases (sensors, etc.) be excluded as well?

A6: Equipment purchases are an eligible expense. See Section 1.E of the Grant Opportunity. Eligible Projects must result in non-operational expenditures, capital investments, planning projects, or installation of equipment that will help Sewage Notification permittees meet one or more requirement(s) of 314 CMR 16.00. For example, the purchase/installation of sensors or meters, used to detect/determine discharges, measure volume, and/or for similar activities related to the Permittee's compliance with the requirements of 314 CMR 16.00, are eligible for reimbursement under this grant funding opportunity.

Q7: Would solar-enabled, remote-activation flashing lights be a fundable enhancement to our existing CSO signage at public access points? In the first year, could we use the grant to pay for all related license and service fees?

A7: Fees associated with the installation and initial setup of the signs are eligible for funding under this grant. Recurring subscription fees are not eligible. Applications should explain how each fee constitutes an eligible cost under Section 1.E of the Grant Opportunity. See also A4 and A5 above.

Q8: We would like to install hardware and software as a package. Is this eligible?

A8: Yes. The purchase and/or installation of equipment including a one-time software purchase, sensor purchase, or installation/setup fees are Eligible Projects. See Section 1.E of the Grant Opportunity document.

Q9: What are innovative projects?

A9: Eligible Projects will result in non-operational expenditures, capital investments, planning projects, or installation of equipment that will help Sewage Notification permittees meet one or more requirement(s) of 314 CMR 16.00. Eligible projects will also improve the timeliness, accuracy, and reliability of public notification; and/or improve the clarity and accessibility of this information to the public. For a list of example eligible projects, refer to Section I.E. of the Grant Program.

Q10: If a project was started in FY23 and continued in FY24, can we include the entire project in the application?

A10: Both existing and proposed projects are eligible for this grant program, and funding will support work activities for any phase(s) of a project, from initial project planning through project implementation, so long as the work funded by this program is conducted during the contract period (i.e., started on or after July 1, 2023, and completed on or before June 30, 2024). Thus, you may apply for funding for the portion of the project conducted in SFY24, even if the project was begun in SFY23. See Section 1.E of Grant Opportunity and A2 above.

Funding

Q11: Is there a minimum amount for the Grant?

A11: The minimum grant amount is \$10,000. The MassDEP grant review committee reserves the right, in its discretion, to grant smaller awards to proposals of exceptional merit. See Section 1.H of the Grant Opportunity.

Q12: If we are receiving funds through another grant, are we still eligible? We have funding through another grant for a portion of the project, but it won't cover everything.

A12: If receiving other grant funds for a portion of the proposed project, the budget should clearly identify the funding source of each part of the project. Duplicate grant funding for the same portion of a project is not eligible.

Grant Awards

Q13: Is a list of all successful past-year grant awards available for review? I'd like to see what other[s] have done.

A13: A press release issued April 19, 2023, on the MASS.gov website displays the projects and funding amounts of each permittee that was awarded grant funding during FY2023: <https://www.mass.gov/news/healey-driscoll-administration-awards-600000-in-grants-to-assist-local-communities-in-meeting-sewage-notification-requirements>.

Q14: Can a list of all permittees be provided?

A14: Eligible entities are permittees as defined in the regulation: A person granted a permit under M.G.L. c. 21, § 43, and 314 CMR 3.00: Surface Water Discharge Permit Program, or the NPDES permit program, to operate and maintain a particular outlet for the discharge to pollutants into surface waters of the Commonwealth; a person operating a sewer system; or a person discharging pollutants from an outlet without a required permit or in violation of the conditions of a valid permit. If you are unsure of whether 314 CMR 16.00 applies to your community please reach out to samuel.ashbrook@mass.gov or the Sewage Notification email at MassDEP.Sewagenotification@mass.gov.

Application

Q15: How many applications were received for consideration last year?

A15: In total, 22 applications were received for consideration during FY23.

Q16: We applied for this grant last year but did not receive funding. Can we get feedback? Do you have any general advice?

A16: You can reach out to MassDEP for feedback about a past grant application after grant awards are announced. In general, MassDEP advises all applicants to closely read the Grant Opportunity document, application, and any attachments, when putting together an application. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to closely review the evaluation criteria and to draft their applications in a manner that addresses the sample questions listed for each scoring category.

Other requirements

Q17: If we have further questions about the DEP Sewage Notification website, who should be contacted?

A17: For further questions regarding the DEP Sewage Notification website, please contact Samuel Ashbrook via email at samuel.ashbrook@mass.gov or the Sewage Notification email at MassDEP.Sewagenotification@mass.gov. Please note that MassDEP cannot provide advice about applications or the grant process during the grant application period.

Q18: 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.

A18: The notification of grant awards is estimated to be posted on Friday, December 22, 2023. 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.