**Partnerships Program Virtual Grant Information Session:**

**Questions & Answers from Webinar**

Pre-REQUEST FOR RESPONSE (Pre-RFR)

Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration

Regional Restoration Partnerships Program

Department of Fish and Game

RFR ID: DER 2021-03

*The following questions and answers were generated during the Partnerships Program Virtual Grant Information Session that took place on June 15, 2021.*

*If interested applicants are looking for more information, please refer to the following resources:*

* [*Regional Restoration Partnerships Program RFR ID: DER 2021-03*](https://www.mass.gov/doc/partnerships-program-pre-rfr/download)
* [*Recording of the webinar on YouTube*](https://youtu.be/jGgJVtR0DYY)
* [*Division of Ecological Restoration Partnerships Program website*](https://www.mass.gov/how-to/ders-partnerships-program)

**What role do you see the Restoration Coordinator playing compared to the role that DER Restoration Specialists play?**

Restoration Coordinators will be employed by a Lead Organization and are not DER employees. Restoration Coordinators are regionally connected with Stakeholders in the Partnership Region. They work within their Partnership Region and develop enduring relationships with the Partnership Stakeholders. DER Restoration Specialists also frequently work with community-based partners, but they work in a variety of locations state-wide. The Restoration Coordinator and DER’s Restoration Specialists are similar in that they have/will develop skills for ecological restoration project management and expertise in natural resources and aquatic ecosystems. Restoration Coordinators will also lead, facilitate, and coordinate the Partnership’s planning work and support and track the projects and activities that advance Partnership priorities.

**Please define indirect expenses and fringe benefits.**

Fringe benefit costs are costs associated with employing a staff person, in this case, the Restoration Coordinator. Fringe benefit costs may include, for example: FICA (typically 7.65%), worker’s compensation expenses, employee health insurance, and other employer-sponsored benefits.

Indirect costs are costs not directly attributable to a specific restoration project/activity or to the Restoration Coordinator, but rather are costs associated with day-to-day operation of the Lead Organization. Indirect costs may include, for example: electricity, office rent, phone, and other overhead expenses.

**Explain what DER covers for indirect and fringe expenses.**

Employer-sponsored benefits vary between organizations, so fringe rates vary between organizations. The maximum fringe rate that can be requested is 30% of the portion of the Restoration Coordinator’s base salary that is funded by DER. The Partnerships Program application will ask applicants to provide a summary of how the requested fringe rate was calculated and what benefits are included in the calculation.

Indirect costs are limited to a maximum of 15% of the total amount requested for the Restoration Coordinator position, including fringe. Refer to Attachment 2, the Application Budget worksheet for more details.

**Can a lead partner count additional indirect as match?**

DER will allow the difference between the Lead Organization’s actual indirect cost rate and the indirect amount awarded under this RFR to count toward the required match. For example, if the Lead Organization’s actual indirect cost rate is 25%, and the Lead Organization requests the maximum 15% indirect amount for DER funding, then the Lead Organization may apply the value of the remaining 10% indirect costs as match. Lead Organizations that do not request any DER funding for indirect costs may apply their full indirect rate toward the required match.

**How much are you interested in incorporating climate resilience into restoration projects?**

Very interested. Process-based restoration ultimately helps communities and nature become more resilient and adapt to climate change. Under the Partnerships Program, DER will support ecological restoration projects and activities that generate climate resilience co-benefits.

**What is the salary range for the Restoration Coordinator?**

Funding will be provided for a maximum of 75% of the base salary for a 1.0 FTE Restoration Coordinator position with an annual base salary range of $55,000 - $75,000. Applicants that propose less than a 1.0 FTE may request a maximum of 75% of the annual base salary that is prorated to reflect the reduced FTE level.

**Many non-profits have the skills and expertise that you are stating the Restoration Coordinator should have. Can the skills and expertise of existing Lead Organization staff support the Restoration Coordinator (who may be strong in one area but not have all the described skills) and can the Lead Organization receive funding for this?**

This RFR is open to Massachusetts-registered tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations and Massachusetts Regional Planning Agencies as applicants. Applicants may propose to transition an existing qualified staff person to serve in the Restoration Coordinator role. Lead Organizations cannot assign Restoration Coordinator duties to multiple staff. However, work conducted by other Lead Organization staff that directly supports the Restoration Coordinator in carrying out their duties can be proposed as in-kind match.

**What educational/training background should the Restoration Coordinator have?**

The Restoration Coordinator is an employee of the Lead Organization, and therefore should meet the needs of the Lead Organization to successfully support its Partnership. Depending on the needs of the Lead Organization, a Restoration Coordinator might possess a background and experience in natural resource management and/or aquatic ecosystem restoration. A Restoration Coordinator should also have group facilitation skills, strong interpersonal skills, project management and administration skills, fundraising skills, time management skills, and the ability to communicate and coordinate outreach activities effectively. For more details about what functions a Restoration Coordinator should be able to support, see Attachment 1 in the RFR document.

**Are there opportunities to split Restoration Coordinator roles and funding? For example, if there are two organizations that may be able to cover a region best by splitting the Restoration Coordinator funding and responsibilities, is this acceptable?**

There can only be one applicant/Lead Organization per Partnership. The Lead Organization hires and manages the Restoration Coordinator, and the Restoration Coordinator position cannot be split between two staff or split between two organizations. However, the applicant has flexibility to propose a Partnership model that works best for the proposed Partnership Region. See Attachment 1 in the RFR document for more information on Partnership models.

**You mentioned DER will help build skills for the Restoration Coordinators - what would that include? Would professional development/trainings be included in that, or could those be included in direct or indirect expenses in the budget?**

Materials and training for the Restoration Coordinator and the Lead Organization will be provided by the DER Partnerships Specialist and may include: DER-grantee expectations, reporting requirements and template use, Partnership basics and support for Partnership functions, Partnership planning, foundational literature on restoration ecology such as peer-reviewed journal articles, and other content relevant to ecological restoration and project management skills. Example project management training topics include: how to identify, assess, and prioritize restoration opportunities; how to oversee a feasibility analysis; how to oversee engineering and design contracts; the restoration project permitting process; and information about relevant funding sources for restoration projects. DER will work towards building these training capacities as the Partnerships Program evolves; they will not all be available at the outset.

Outside professional training and development for the Restoration Coordinator are eligible costs that an applicant may propose under direct expenses in the budget.

**Is there a minimum number of hours the Restoration Coordinator has to work in order to be eligible for 0.50 FTE status? Please explain the flexibility between 0.50 FTE and 1.0 FTE Restoration Coordinator options.**

A 1.0 FTE typically works 40 hours per week. A 0.5 FTE typically works 20 hours per week, or half of the employer’s weekly full-time scheduled hours. The FTE is based on the employer’s full-time scheduled workweek.

The Restoration Coordinator position may be staffed anywhere between 0.5 to 1.0 FTE, and the FTE level may change during the Partnership term. For example, an applicant may propose to transition an existing employee into the Restoration Coordinator role starting at 0.5 FTE and then increase hours to a higher FTE level at a specified point in the future. The flexibility between 0.5 FTE and 1.0 FTE also allows for circumstances that might be unique to individual applicants, for example if an applicant has secured funding for a 0.5 FTE to support climate resiliency-related work and wants to use DER funding to make the position a 1.0 FTE.

**Could a Restoration Coordinator be a volunteer instead of a paid employee?**

No.

**Can we make subawards to stakeholder partners and if so, how do you see that working?**

Yes, subawards of DER Implementation Funding may be made to registered 501(c)(3) Stakeholders within a Partnership Region to advance restoration priorities and support Partnership activities. To issue a subaward, the Lead Organization would enter into a subaward contract with the Stakeholder. The Lead Organization would be required to track, document, and report all subaward expenditures to DER. An example Partnership model is provided in Attachment 1 of the RFR and describes a subaward scenario. Applicants may propose another arrangement if a different Partnership model and subaward arrangement works better for their proposed Partnership Region.

**Would existing restoration projects in a region be taken over by the Restoration Coordinator position?**

If you and your Stakeholders collaboratively decide to include existing projects in your Partnership Plan and they are prioritized by the group for the Restoration Coordinator to advance, then yes, the Coordinator could take on those projects. The projects must meet the Program guidelines as outlined in the RFR.

**You are encouraging organizations to apply together under one application if they are within the same geographic region within the state. Is there a way to find out what other partnerships might be forming to avoid overlap?**

To clarify, DER is not encouraging or discouraging organizations to apply together under one application. DER encourages organizations to coordinate with each other prior to submitting applications if they may be interested in collaborating under one Partnership and/or may be proposing distinct Partnerships that have the potential to overlap. Two potential outcomes of this pre-application coordination are 1) organizations decide to collaborate and submit one application with one Lead Organization that covers a Partnership Region within which multiple organizations collaborate to advance restoration work, and 2) organizations decide to submit separate applications with two or more Lead Organizations and delineate common boundaries between adjacent Partnership Regions, thereby avoiding overlap. Please see the RFR Section III(a) for details about the minimum requirements for Partnership Regions.

**Are “Stakeholders” the same as “partners” in the proposed partnerships?**

Stakeholders are the regional and local partners who participate in the Partnership and work collaboratively to develop and implement restoration projects and activities that advance Partnership priorities. Stakeholders often contribute time, technical expertise, and in some cases funding to help advance the Partnership’s restoration priorities. Stakeholders may include representatives from nonprofit organizations, municipalities, state or federal agencies, and other groups.

**What kinds of restoration projects would DER expect the Partnerships Program to achieve (i.e. dams, freshwater wetlands, salt marshes, daylighting, culverts, stream de-armoring, stormwater retrofitting, contaminated sediments, etc.)?**

Selected Lead Organizations will work collaboratively with Stakeholders to identify restoration projects and other activities that effectively address the aquatic ecological stressors identified within the Partnership Region. DER expects that all implementation activities will meet the definition of process-based ecological restoration provided in the RFR. Examples of eligible restoration activities are provided in the RFR.

**Could Natural Resource Damages Trust funds be used as match?**

Yes.

**Can the match for the salary be in-kind or does it need to be cash contribution toward the Coordinator's salary/benefits?**

Match may be met with state or federal funding, cash, and/or in-kind contributions that directly support the Restoration Coordinator position. Examples of eligible match contributions are provided in the RFR.

**If there are existing stakeholder networks already established in a region, could the Restoration Coordinator utilize those established networks for their coordination meetings in lieu of creating a separate network?**

Yes, provided that the established network(s) can effectively advance the Partnership goals and Stakeholder functions identified in the RFR and the application.

**When in the process is the Restoration Coordinator hired?**

If the Lead Organization is transitioning an existing employee to fill the Restoration Coordinator role, the position would be filled immediately after the Lead Organization signs a Cooperative Agreement and FY22 grant contract with DER. If a new hire is needed to fill the position, the hiring process should commence after the Cooperative Agreement and FY22 grant contract are signed.

**Since the Restoration Coordinator funding cannot be split between organizations and we cannot overlap regions, what do you anticipate the agency coordination/cooperation to look like?**

DER staff do not understand the intent or meaning of this question. Therefore, we cannot provide an answer.

**After 3-5 years, what is DER’s vision for the next steps for the Restoration Coordinator and Regional Partnership?**

DER recognizes that building capacity takes time. The Partnerships Program will support the efforts of Lead Organizations and their Partnerships to build self-sustaining restoration capacity during the Partnership term. As the Program evolves, it will evaluate future needs and opportunities to provide support for both existing and new restoration Partnerships. This may include issuing future RFRs to continue DER support for Partnerships that have reached the end of their initial Partnership term.

**Will the awarded grants be spread out regionally?**

DER cannot predict what the regional distribution of RFR applications will be. However, depending on the quality of applications from various regions, we anticipate selecting Lead Organizations that represent a diversity of geographic regions across Massachusetts.