



# Department of Environmental Protection

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## SFY 2021 Water Quality Monitoring Grant MassDEP's Official Answers to Questions

MassDEP accepted questions pertaining to the Water Quality Monitoring Grant Program ("WQMG"), Request for Grant Proposals ("RGP") for State Fiscal Year 2021 from January 6, 2021 through the January 12, 2021 RGP Question Deadline (the "Q&A Period"). Below is a list of the questions received during the Q&A Period and MassDEP's official answers. Where appropriate, MassDEP generalized Questions that were received in order to provide answers to a larger audience. In addition, MassDEP combined multiple versions of the same question into a single official Answer. Please see Appendix A for all original question contents and the corresponding MassDEP official answer number.

### **Q1. Is our organization in "good standing" with MassDEP, based on performance on previous WQMGs? How is our "standing" going to be applied to our SFY 2021 WQMG proposal?**

**A1.** MassDEP will consider "good standing" as part of the proposal review and does not have a formal notification process prior to proposal submittal. The question of "good standing" is incorporated into the score of evaluating the organization's capacity to carry out the proposed scope. Please refer to RGP Section 2.A.2.

### **Q2. Can MassDEP provide guidance on the locations of sampling sites or other design aspects of the monitoring project that will be supported by the purchase of equipment under this WQMG, if awarded?**

**A2.** During the WQMG application process period up through the announcement of the grant awards, MassDEP cannot provide sampling design and monitoring guidance to potential grantees. Following the award of the grants, however, MassDEP can work with grantees and provide technical support as part of the agency's quality assurance and outreach program. This coordination with grantees typically occurs during the review and approval of Quality Assurance Project Plans (QAPP) submitted by groups for monitoring surface waters. MassDEP currently anticipates that these QAPPs would specifically reference the equipment purchased using the grant funds and how the equipment would be used to generate data for assessing surface waters of the Commonwealth.

**Q3. The focus of the SFY 2021 WQMG is on the purchase of equipment and supplies to support monitoring by coalitions of non-profit entities. This differs considerably in focus from the WQMGs offered in SFY 2019 and SFY 2020, which focused on supporting bacteria monitoring by external groups to provide DEP with high quality bacteria data. In light of the difference in foci, is the SFY 2021 WQMG the "same" as those offered in 2019 and 2020, or will DEP be offering an additional WQMG,**

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**with the “traditional” focus on bacteria monitoring? If not, is DEP still interested in receiving high quality bacteria data from external groups?**

**A3.** The SFY 2021 WQMG reflects a different focus from the previous (2) grant offerings as described in the RGP. The current SFY 2021 WQMG is the only water quality monitoring grant being offered by MassDEP in SFY 2021. However, MassDEP will continue to seek out and accept high quality external data, including bacteria data, from external groups to support the agency’s Clean Water Act programs.

**Q4. What is the eligibility status of a coalition formed of non-profit entities of which at least one member organization has current 501(c)(3) status, but one or more other members does not?**

**A4.** Provided that a minimum of one of the coalition member organizations includes documentation of current 501(c)(3) status in the grant proposal, then coalitions that include one or more organizations that are not currently 501(c)(3)-certified are considered to be eligible entities under this grant opportunity; see Sections 1.D and 1.E of the SFY 2021 WQMG RGP.

**Q5. If a lake/pond association is part of the coalition applying for the SFY 2021 WQMG, must the lake/pond that is the focus of the association have public access, or be considered a “public” lake?**

**A5.** No. The lake/pond does not need to have public access or be a “public” lake. Waterbodies included in proposals will be considered in the evaluation of the project’s ability to meet the MassDEP Priority Data Needs and other Evaluation Criteria, as stated in Section 1.F of the RGP.

**Q6. Are proposals for equipment/supplies to support monitoring projects focused on screening level assessments e.g., for Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) screening, eligible for the SFY 2021 WQMG?**

**A6.** Yes. If awarded, the grant funds could be used to support monitoring projects such as screening level projects for HABs. Waters not meeting the identified Priority Data Needs (RGP Section 1.F) may be considered to be less competitive during the evaluation process.

**Q7. Can the SFY2021 WQMG funds be used to pay for analytical laboratory costs, salaries (e.g., for the monitoring program coordinator, training new volunteers), et cetera?**

**A7.** No. Analytical laboratory costs, salaries, and/or any other non-equipment or supplies costs are not eligible purchases under this WQMG, as stated in the RGP. The SFY 2021 WQMG can only be used to purchase monitoring and analytical equipment and supplies (Please see RGP Section 1.C.f). Refer to Section 1.C, subsections a. and b. for examples of eligible equipment and supplies.

**Q8. Can MassDEP confirm that the equipment and supplies included in our proposal are aligned with the priorities and eligibility criteria of this grant opportunity?**

**A8.** As noted in Answer 2, MassDEP cannot provide guidance on specific aspects of proposal design during the open period following the release of the RGP and the awarding of the grants. Refer to Section 1.C, subsections a. and b. for examples of eligible equipment and supplies.

**Q9. Can funds from this grant be used to purchase equipment/supplies that will support monitoring in waters not described as Priority Data Needs in the RGP? Examples of such waters may include those not identified as impaired (Category 5) in the Final 2016 Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters, unassessed or unimpaired streams that flow into impaired waters, and waters without an Assessment Unit (segment number).**

**A9.** Yes. if awarded, grant funds can be used to support monitoring projects in waters not identified as sources of Priority Data as described in Section 1.F of the RGP. However, proposals that seek equipment or supplies for waters not meeting the identified Priority Data Needs (RGP Section 1.F) may be considered to be less competitive during the evaluation process.

**Q10. Does the target environmental justice community need to be located in the watershed(s) where monitoring is to take place?**

**A10.** Yes. If a proposal specifies that equipment/supplies purchased with these grant funds will be used to meet one of the Priority Data Needs by conducting monitoring in an environmental justice community, then at least some of the monitoring project must identify sampling sites within that environmental justice community. Please refer to the RGP Sections 1.C.a. and 1.C.e., and Section 2.A.7. (Environmental Justice).

The following questions were received shortly after the noon deadline on 1/12/2021. In the interest of providing as much information as possible to potential applicants, below are MassDEP's Official Answers to these Questions.

**Q11. How does MassDEP determine if a water body is impaired?**

**A11.** Please refer to the *Massachusetts Consolidated Assessment and Listing Methodology (CALM) Guidance Manual for the 2018 Reporting Cycle*, available online at <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/05/07/2018calm.pdf>. The CALM document provides decision criteria for assessing a water body as supporting or not supporting (i.e., impaired) specific surface water uses (Aquatic Life, Primary Contact Recreation, Secondary Contact Recreation, Aesthetics, Fish Consumption and Shellfishing).

**Q12. Will it be acceptable to provide two options at two different costs, one including more lakes than the other?**

**A12:** Please refer to the RGP Section 1.I. While MassDEP may at its discretion partially fund a proposal, concise clear proposals that fully meet the eligibility requirements may be considered to be more competitive during the evaluation process.

## Appendix A

Below are the original questions received by MassDEP during the Q&A Period (January 6, 2021 through 12:00 p.m., January 12, 2021). After each question, the corresponding official MassDEP Answer is identified.

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Are you able to let me know if we're in good standing with DEP with respect to the work we did last summer? See Answer 1 (A1).

However, assuming we are [in good standing], should we apply to expand our work or focus on the same priority areas? Is this along the lines of what DEP is looking to fund? See Answer 2 (A2).

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Is this opportunity in addition to or the same as any bacteria monitoring grants in 2021? See Answer 3 (A3).

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1a) Are lakes/ ponds associations that are not 501(C)3 nonprofits eligible to partner with a 501c3 watershed association and be considered part of the "coalition of three"? See Answer 4 (A4).

1b) If three 501c3 nonprofits have formed a coalition, can a lakes/ponds association that is not a 501c3 join that coalition as an additional partner? See Answer 4 (A4).

1c) Does there have to be a public access component to the lake/pond? See Answer 5 (A5).

1d) can a lakes/ponds association that is caring for a private lake be part of the coalition? See Answer 5 (A5).

2a) Are screening level assessments eligible? See Answer 6 (A6).

2b) specifically, are screening level assessments for HABs eligible? See Answer 6 (A6).

3) Are state labs available for doing followup analyses? We are thinking about screening for HABs, with follow up by a lab. See Answer 7 (A7).

4) Will the grant pay for private lab costs (if an agreement can be worked out with a lab in advance wherein they get paid by June 30, 2021, prior to receiving the samples). See Answer 7 (A7).

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We are looking at a few options for our proposal (such as a fixed in situ bacteria monitoring device) and just want to confirm we are aligned with the priorities and intention of the program. See Answers 2, 8 (A2, A8).

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I have a quick question about this year's Water Quality Monitoring Grant Program. The RFP recently posted to your site has several changes when compared to the grant in 2019 and 2020. Will there be a second RFP/grant opportunity released for 2021 that will be more similar to the program in 2019/2020? Or is the RFP currently on the website the only grant opportunity for the 2021 Water Quality Monitoring Grant Program? See Answer 3 (A3).

Questions: 1. One of the priority data needs listed in the RFP includes "Any waters assessed as impaired i.e., in Category 5 of the Final 2016 Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters". Is MassDEP interested in data for water bodies that have not been assigned an Integrated List of Waters Assessment Unit ID (AU\_ID)? In particular, smaller streams which have no official DEP Assessment Unit ID but feed into impaired waters. Is monitoring in these water bodies with no AU\_ID helpful to MassDEP's goals? Are water bodies that have not been assigned an AU\_ID but feed into an impaired water body considered priority data needs? See Answer 9 (A9).

## Appendix A

2. Mass DEP has made public the locations of historical water quality monitoring stations. In designing our sampling plans should we prioritize areas where DEP has or has not sampled historically? Sampling at new locations offers information in locations with no data, but sampling at old locations offers opportunities to observe trends and changes. What would be more helpful to DEP in achieving their goals in alignment with the watershed planning program? See Answer 2 (A2).

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1. Does the target environmental justice community need to be located in the watershed(s) where monitoring is to take place? See Answer 10 (A10).

2. How specific must the benefit of monitoring be to an environmental justice community? If the watershed being monitored is a water supply source and recreation destination for the broader region, could long-term monitoring activities be seen as benefiting protection of the resource for multiple uses and the region as a whole? See Answer 10 (A10).

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1. Can staff time be funded in addition to purchase of supplies – both for amending a QAPP and for coordinating sampling. It appears that this grant is really to fund the purchase of supplies only. (If this is the case, this makes it impossible for smaller organizations to provide additional data for Mass DEP). See Answer 7 (A7).

2. Would this fund temperature sensors, shuttles and software to monitor the coldwater streams in Berkshire County. HooRWA has begun this work last year and HVA and BEAT have been looking to fund a program to determine the climate resilience of our cold water streams. See Answers 8, 9 (A8, A9).

3. Is Mass DEPs intent to continue to gather bacteria monitoring data from their partners as in years past – not just on impaired segments, but also unassessed streams? See Answer 3 (A3).

4. One focus for Berkshire County is to assess streams that may be impacted by Ag NPS pollution – especially bacteria – as they flow through farmland. These are not necessarily listed as impaired, but we have discovered a few that are impaired for bacteria. See Answers 3, 9 (A3, A9).

5. Another focus is potential bacteria impairment due stormwater in urban areas. These are probably more likely on already impaired segments, but could be on non-impaired segments. It appears that impaired segments are a greater priority this year – is that correct – or can we include sampling on tributaries that we may not know if they are impacted and they aren't listed as impaired. See Answer 9 (A9).

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**These questions were received shortly after the noon deadline on January 12, 2021 (at 12:07 pm and 4:16 PM, 1/12/2021).**

1. What criteria does DEP use to list a water body as impaired on the 303d list? See Answer 11 (A11).

2. Will priority only go to monitoring water bodies that are listed as impaired for HABs on the 2016 303d list, or will water bodies that are known to have HABs be prioritized as well? See Answer 9 (A9).

## Appendix A

3. Will it be acceptable to provide two options at two different costs, one including more lakes than the other? See Answer 12 (A12).

4. Will it be acceptable to include as an option some personnel costs for training new volunteers in the use of the equipment? See Answer 7 (A7).