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Department of Environmental Protection

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MassDEP accepted questions pertaining to the Water Quality Monitoring Grant Program ("WQMG"), Request for Grant Proposals ("RGP") for State Fiscal Year 2020 from November 19, 2019 through the December 4, 2019 WQMG RGP Question Deadline (the "Q&A Period"). Below is a list of all the questions received during the Q&A Period and MassDEP's official answers. Questions were generalized in order to provide answers to a larger audience. Please see Appendix A for original questions and their corresponding answer number.

Q1. Is there a resource, shapefile, table, or otherwise that'll tell us which "small and/or unnamed streams and ponds have never been monitored or assessed" or "waters that have been assessed for pathogens historically, but which there are no recent bacteria data"?
A1. A list of segments that have not been assessed for primary or secondary contact use derived from the draft 2016 Integrated List of Waters has been posted to our website at: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/grants-financial-assistance-watersheds-water-quality#water-quality-monitoring-grant-program-

Q2. Is there a resource, example, or template of a sampling and analysis plan ("SAP") applicants can draw upon?
A2. MassDEP is in the process of developing a SAP template, specific to bacteria sampling that will be provided to grantees at the time of project awards. Example SAPs are available for review on our website at: https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/02/05/qapp-sap.zip.

Q3. Is there a list of contractors/non-profits that would provide training on data formatting and data management?
A3. MassDEP does not have a list of contractors/non-profits who provide training on data formatting or management at this time. MassDEP will continue to evaluate opportunities to provide training on these topics in the future as resources allow.

Q4. Will MassDEP staff provide training on data formatting and data management?
A4. No training is planned at this time. However, MassDEP will continue to evaluate opportunities to provide training on these topics in the future as resources allow.

Q5. Is there a minimum funding level for project proposals this year?
A5. There is no minimum funding level for proposals. The review committee will focus on the description of how the funding will be used, which is discussed in Section 2.0. Instructions for Application Submission, subsection A., item 3 ("Item 3") of the Evaluation Criteria Components in the Request for Grant Proposals (RGP). Item 3 is worth up to 15 points (out of a total of 100) and includes the following considerations:

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- How well does the applicant describe the proposed project and the work to be covered by this funding?
- If applicable, are sampling locations, frequency of sampling, and number of samples per site described?
- If applicable, is a locus map of the project area and a detailed map of the project site provided?

Q6. If sampling has been conducted in the past, should the application reference field experiences in which sampling was found to be problematic (i.e. access)? Particularly if field reconnaissance will be proposed in order to find more suitable sites for sampling?
A6. See A5 response above. A description of how time will be spent under the current project should be described as required under Item 3 – Description of How Funding will be Used, of the Evaluation Criteria Components. A description of where samples will be taken must also be described in the SAP.

Q7. If past sampling locations did not exceed bacteria criteria standards should new locations be proposed?
A7. The primary focus of the WQMG program is to increase the amount of bacteria data available for MassDEP's use in the assessment of primary and secondary contact recreation activities in surface waters of the Commonwealth. MassDEP anticipates a balance between the number of sites that are sampled over multiple years and segments that have never been assessed for pathogens.

Q8. How much data history should be referenced in the application?
A8. Examples of historic data should be briefly described, if available, as noted under Section 2.0. Instructions for Application Submission, subsection A., item 2 – Organizational Capacity of the Evaluation Criteria Components.

Q9. Can the budget be front-loaded so that expenses planned to be incurred after June 30, 2020 are invoiced prior to the June 30, 2020 deadline?
A9. The funding provided under the WQMG program is available only for expenses incurred for project-related activities that have occurred between the project start date and June 30, 2020. **Expenses incurred after June 30, 2020 will not be eligible for reimbursement through the grant program.** Eligible Entities are encouraged, but not required, to plan and complete as many activities (i.e., monitoring project design and planning, purchase of monitoring equipment and supplies, training in monitoring support areas, and/or field time associated with surface water bacteria monitoring activities) by the June 30, 2020 deadline in order to maximize the use of grant funding to support the total cost of the project. Costs incurred after June 30, 2020 will not be eligible for reimbursement under this grant.

Q10. How much priority will be given to applications that propose to continue sampling from July 1st through September 30th, by utilizing non-grant funding (i.e. in-kind services, monetary match), as expenses incurred after June 30, 2020 are not eligible for reimbursement through the grant program?
A10. As noted in the Evaluation Criteria Components in Section 2.0. Instructions for Application Submission, subsection A., a total of up to 45 points (out of 100 point total) may be awarded for proposals that seek to continue sampling by utilizing non-grant funding. Both item 5 – Project Budget and Cash Flow Schedule (15 points) and item 7 – Project Benefits (30 Points) of the Evaluation Criteria Components consider whether the proposed project will continue to collect bacteria data after the June 30, 2020 grant funding end date.

Q11. Does the WQMG program provide funding to support cyanobacteria data collection?
A11. This WQMG program does not provide funding for cyanobacteria data collection.

Q12. The Request for Grant Proposals says that grantees must complete their own Sampling and Analysis Plan to supplement MassDEP's generic QAPP. If we already have our own QAPP from the 2019 grant, which was approved for 2019-2021, will we need to create a separate SAP?
A12. Data must be collected under both an approved QAPP and an approved SAP. If an awardee has a pre-existing approved QAPP, only a SAP for this year is required.

Q13. This year's grant guidance recommends a bi-weekly sampling frequency, while last year's guidance recommended weekly. Since we are continuing the same sampling program, should we switch to bi-weekly sampling this year?
A13. Bi-weekly sampling is recommended as the minimum frequency to ensure adequate data are available to determine criteria evaluations within the 90-day averaging period. A more frequent sampling frequency, i.e. weekly, is welcomed but not required for this year's grant program.

Q14. Does the WQMG program provide funding to cover the purchase of new capital equipment such as an incubator, or YSI hand-held monitoring probe for WQ data (DO, temp, salinity, pH)?
A14. The WQMG program provides funding for the purchase of monitoring equipment and supplies that are specifically required to collect bacteria data. An incubator would be an eligible piece of equipment. However, a YSI hand-held monitoring probe for water quality data would not be eligible under the WQMG program as it is not specific to bacteria data collection.

Q15. Will MassDEP provide training in the use of enzyme-substrate analytical systems?
A15. MassDEP does not anticipate offering training in the use of enzyme-substrate analytical systems at this time.

Q16. Can grant funds be used for obtaining training in the use of enzyme-substrate analytical systems?
A16. Training in monitoring support areas (e.g., use of enzyme-substrate analytical systems) is an eligible cost under the WQMG program.

Q17. What are the recommendations for sampling under wet vs. dry weather conditions as part of this program?
A17. MassDEP does not support one sampling condition over the other. Ideally samples would be collected under a range of flow and precipitation conditions.

Q18. The RFP had a hidden character under the Project Benefits Section where it describes the sampling frequency. For some reason the 7 was not visible until I copied and pasted the passage. I believe the complete text is as follows:
"Does the project provide a sampling frequency and duration that is aligned with proposed surface water quality standard revisions and MassDEP assessment requirements (at a minimum 7 sampling conducted every other week consistently between April 1st and October 15th, with higher preference to projects that include sampling through September)?"
Could you confirm that the minimum number of samples between April1 and October 15 is in fact, 7?
A18. The text that was copied from of the PDF version of the RFP is located on pages 6 and 7. When you select and copy text from both pages the page number from page 7 also ends up highlighted, even though it is not close to the selected text. When the selection is then pasted, the page number ("7")

ends up between the text that ends on page 6 ("at a minimum…") and the text that starts on page 7 ("…sampling conducted).

Bi-weekly sampling is recommended as the minimum frequency to ensure adequate data are available to determine criteria evaluations within the 90-day averaging period. A more frequent sampling frequency, i.e. weekly, is welcomed but not required. See also A13 above.

Q19. In Appendix B – General Guidance the lab QC is described as: "Lab QC sampling? YES. Minimum of one lab duplicate and one lab blank per batch of samples." Is the lab blank supposed to be a lab fortified blank (i.e., positive and negative controls with a known fluorescent or non-fluorescent bacteria strains in sterile distilled water) or sterile distilled water only?
A19. The lab blank should consist of sterile distilled water only.

Q20. Should applicants that conducted sampling last year continue to sample the same locations or shift their sampling focus on alternative sites that have not been assessed yet?
A20. The primary focus of the WQMG program is to increase the amount of bacteria data available for MassDEP's use in the assessment of primary and secondary contact recreation activities in surface waters of the Commonwealth. MassDEP anticipates a balance between the number of sites that are sampled over multiple years and segments that have never been assessed for pathogens. See also A7 above.

Q21. Does the WQMG program support bacteria source tracking?
A21. No, the WQMG program does not support bacteria source tracking. The focus of the WQMG program is to increase the amount of bacteria data available for MassDEP's use in the assessment of primary and secondary contact recreation activities in surface waters of the Commonwealth.

Q22. Does the WQMG program support the development or management of a bacteria database?
A22. The focus of the WQMG program is to increase the amount of bacteria data available for MassDEP's use in the assessment of primary and secondary contact recreation activities in surface waters of the Commonwealth. If the development or management of a bacteria database directly aids the applicant's ability to provide quality assured bacteria data to MassDEP, collected under an approved QAPP, it would be eligible for funding. The applicant is required to describe in its proposal how the bacteria database would assist the applicant's ability to provide quality assured bacteria data to MassDEP.

Q23. Can MassDEP provide a word version of the RGP so applicants can customize the templates found in Appendix A?
A23. A word version of the RGP has been posted to our website at: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/grants-financial-assistance-watersheds-water-quality#water-quality-monitoring-grant-program

Below are the original questions received by MassDEP during the Q&A Period. After each question the corresponding official MassDEP Answer is identified.

- Is there a resource, shapefile, table, or otherwise that'll tell us which "small and/or unnamed streams and ponds have never been monitored or assessed" or "waters that have been assessed for pathogens historically, but which there are no recent bacteria data"? I've been using the 2012 Integrated List of Waters from MassGIS. Is that appropriate? **See Answer 1.**
- Is there a resource, example, or template of a "sampling and analysis plan" we can draw upon? **See Answer 2.**
- Is there a list of contractors/non-profits that would provide training on data formatting and data management? Or would this allow DEP staff to help us out? **See Answers 3 and 4.**
- Is there a minimum funding level for project proposals this year? **See Answer 5.**
- In the new app, should we reference experiences in the field in which we found sampling to be problematic (access) if we're suggesting in the new app that some new field reconnaissance needs to be conducted to find more suitable sites? Should we also suggest in the new app that if we consistently found that a particular site had little to no enterococcus signal that (Weymouth Back River Yacht Club) a new site on the river (further upstream, away from tidal influence) is warranted? How much data history should be referenced in the new app? **See Answers 6, 7, and 8.**
- Can applicants front-load the personnel budget (site leaders) before the June 30, 2020 deadline, yet state that some of the work (or a lot of the work) is to be performed in July and August? In my understanding of reimbursement grants, the answer to my question is no. I'm asking, however, because my interactions over the past few years with grant writers more "savvy" than I have budgeted personnel expenses in this way. Last year I spread out personnel costs into the next FY, and was holding my breath while the legislature took its time with the budget. My reading of the grant this year is that all funds must be expended before June 30, 2020. Is that correct, and can you comment if the grant can cover personnel expenses into the next FY? **See Answer 9.**
- Finally, I read that applicants who can continue work into September will be given priority. How much of a priority is that to the grant reviewers? I ask because if it's a high priority, I will endeavor now to secure Sept commitments from students and teachers. **See Answer 10.**
- Would this grant program provide funding to support our work in monitoring for cyanobacteria and associated harmful cyanobacteria blooms in freshwater ponds of Cape Cod? **See Answer 11.**
- The Request for Grant Proposals says that grantees must complete their own Sampling and Analysis Plan to supplement MassDEP's QAPP. If we already have our own QAPP from the 2019 grant, which was approved for 2019-2021, do we really need to create a separate SAP? **See Answer 12.**
- This year's grant guidance recommends a bi-weekly sampling frequency, while last year's guidance recommended weekly. Since we are continuing the same sampling program, should we switch to bi-weekly sampling this year? **See Answer 13.**
- If it has not already been asked, that is, does the funding cover the purchase of new capital equipment such as an incubator, or YSI hand-held monitoring probe for WQ data (DO, temp, salinity, pH)? **See Answer 14.**
- We are interested in applying for funding towards training in the use of enzyme-substrate analytical systems. Will MassDEP offer this training or will we have to procure this from another source such as the equipment vendor? If MassDEP can offer this training, at which regional office might it take place? **See Answers 15 and 16.**

- What are the recommendations for sampling under wet vs. dry weather conditions as part of this program? **See Answer 17.**
- The RFP had a hidden character under the Project Benefits Section where it describes the sampling frequency. For some reason the 7 was not visible until I copied and pasted the passage. I believe the complete text is as follows: "Does the project provide a sampling frequency and duration that is aligned with proposed surface water quality standard revisions and MassDEP assessment requirements (at a minimum 7 sampling conducted every other week consistently between April 1st and October 15th, with higher preference to projects that include sampling through September)?" Could you confirm that the minimum number of samples between April1 and October 15 is in fact, 7? **See Answer 18.**
- In the recommendations where lab QC is described: "Lab QC sampling? YES. Minimum of one lab duplicate and one lab blank per batch of samples." Is the lab blank supposed to be a lab fortified blank, i.e., a positive and negative controls with a known fluorescent or non-fluorescent bacteria strains in sterile distilled water or sterile distilled water only? **See Answer 19.**
- The Blackstone River Coalition is wrapping up our work on the grant we received last year. We will be submitting our season of bacteria data and reporting on the new database we've developed and tested and are populating with this season of wqm data. Our plan for the current grant proposal will be to continue and expand both the bacteria sampling and database development. Regarding the bacteria portion, the subset of our regular wqm sites we sampled for ecoli this year were selected based on DEP priority needs. Some sites tested high for bacteria. I'm wondering if DEP would like another year of data on those? I'm thinking BRC itself is interested certainly in continuing to monitor for ecoli there if funding were available. Other sites did not test high even though those waterways are listed by DEP as impaired for bacteria. Would DEP be interested in another season of data on these sites or should we select a new subset of sites? **See Answer 20.**
- For sites that were high, we are thinking about focusing on testing closer to outfalls for those waterways to get some sourcing info as it ties into land use and stormwater runoff. Do you have guidance on this? **See Answer 21.**
- Regarding the database portion, our current work has focused on developing, testing, and piloting the new software application and relational database along with inputting this year's wqm data. Since 2019 was our 16th year of wqm, we have a large amount of historic data that we want to input into the new system. There are additional elements to the database management development that would allow the BRC to (1) better analyze and report status and trends to local and state planners and (2) support our ongoing education and outreach initiates. That would require considerable staff time which we need funding for. Since the effective use of our wqm data is dependent on a fully developed database, I wanted to run by you our intent to request DEP's grant support for this effort. **See Answer 22.**