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Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

Department of Environmental Protection

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MassDEP's OFFICIAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Water Quality Monitoring Grant (WQMG) Program REQUEST FOR GRANT PROPOSALS State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2025

On September 9, 2024, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) posted the Water Quality Monitoring Grant (WQMG) program, Request for Grant Proposals (RFGP) for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2025. In accordance with RFGP Section 4, the Estimated Grant Calendar, MassDEP accepted questions via email pertaining to the WQMG program from September 9, 2024, through the question submission deadline of 1:00 p.m. on September 18, 2024. Below is MassDEP's Official Answer to the Questions received by the Estimated Grant Calendar deadline.

To provide Official Answers that are relevant to all potential grant applicants, interested parties should note that MassDEP revised each question submitted to present the inquiry in a more generalized format than the originally submitted question. MassDEP also provided, in Appendix A, the text of the question as originally submitted. The original question in Appendix A also lists the corresponding MassDEP Official Answer number that is responsive to the relevant original submitted question.

Please Note: MassDEP cannot provide advice on a Proposed Project's design (including where project activities occur) to potential grantees during the WQMG application process period (from the RFGP posting date of September 9, 2024, through the Grant Application deadline of 5:00 p.m., October 11, 2024). MassDEP's answers to the questions below should not be construed as an endorsement or approval of a proposed project or application. All projects and applications will be evaluated on a fair and competitive basis, utilizing the evaluation criteria publicized in the Water Quality Monitoring Grant Program – Request for Grant Proposals – State Fiscal Year 2025 document (Section 2. "INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION SUBMISSION").

Question 1. *Is benthic macroinvertebrate sampling work, specifically funding the development of the QAPP and equipment, eligible for reimbursement through the SFY 2025 WQMG program?*

This information is available in alternate format. Please contact Melixza Esenyie at 617-626-1282.

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Answer 1. Directly measuring benthic macroinvertebrate communities to characterize water quality is an eligible activity. QAPP development is also an eligible activity and equipment purchased for monitoring Massachusetts surface waters can be reimbursed through the SFY 2025 WQMG. See Section 1.D of the WQMG SFY25 RFP.

Section 1.D states that the activities proposed “can be associated with monitoring any analyte, biogeochemical parameter, hydrologic parameter, or other measure used to assess water quality, but proposals to collect data most critically needed by MassDEP for CWA [Clean Water Act] § 305(b) and § 303(d) decision-making and reporting will be given priority”. MassDEP uses benthic macroinvertebrate data to assess water quality under the CWA. As stated in Section 1.F. of the SFY 2025 RFP, “Eligible entities should consult the Massachusetts CALM [Consolidated Assessment and Listing Methodology] Guidance Manual to understand how data are used by MassDEP for water quality assessments (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/water-quality-assessments>).” Thus, MassDEP advises all Applicants to examine the CALM to determine how MassDEP uses water quality data for CWA decision making.

As stated in Section 1.D of the SFY 2025 RFP, eligible activities include:

- “Salary for staff overseeing or conducting monitoring activities specific to this project including, but not limited to field work, laboratory work, **QAPP development**, and project planning and management.” (emphasis added)
- “Salary for staff developing, or overseeing the development of, regional and long-term monitoring programs and networks specific to the Eligible Project including, but not limited to **QAPP development**, planning, preparation, and implementation of training, and project planning and management.” (emphasis added)
- “Purchase of **monitoring equipment** and supplies for field or in-house laboratory use (e.g., enzyme-substrate analytical systems, incubators, reagents, sample containers, Secchi disk, temperature, or conductivity data loggers, etc.).” (emphasis added)
- “Purchase of **monitoring equipment** specifically intended for regional and long-term monitoring.” (emphasis added)

Question 2. *Can individuals from an Environmental Justice community participate in water quality monitoring activities if they come from outside of the watershed study area, but the city or town in which they live also gets its drinking water from the watershed area of interest?*

Who can work on or participate in the project is not restricted. The staff and/or volunteers that participate in the project may reside outside the watershed study area where sampling takes place.

The SFY 2025 WQMG program will (as part of the evaluation criteria) prioritize grant proposals that include (among other components) projects with “clear and tangible benefits for Environmental Justice (EJ) populations” (see section 1.B. of the SFY 2025 RFP). Section 2.B.4.

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describes work with EJ populations that may be eligible for this project, but potential applicants are advised to examine all evaluation criteria in Section 2 of the RFGP. Additionally, the SFY 2025 RFGP states in section 2.B.4. that communities classified as EJ populations for this grant program can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/environmental-justicecommunities-in-massachusetts>, and the Environmental Justice Policy of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) (updated June 24, 2021) can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/environmental-justice-policy6242021-update/download>. As described in these two sources, EJ populations are defined by EOEEA only for Massachusetts.

Question 3. Could rental costs for a van be reimbursable under this grant, during the funding period, in order to assist interested individuals from an environmental justice community participate in monitoring activities if transportation would otherwise be a barrier?

No, van rental costs are not an Eligible Expense under this grant opportunity. The only transportation-related cost(s) eligible to be compensated are mileage reimbursements. Please see Section 1.D. of the RFGP Document for additional information regarding “Eligible Expenses.”

Appendix A

Below is the original question received by MassDEP by email during the open question period (September 9, 2024, through 1:00 p.m. on September 18, 2024). MassDEP received two emails that contained three questions. The corresponding official MassDEP Answer is identified in ***bold italics*** after the question. Text in brackets was added by MassDEP to replace text in the original question to (1) preserve the anonymity of the person or group that asked the question or (2) remove references to specific organizations that could be interpreted as (a) an endorsement or (b) specific evaluation of an organization by MassDEP through the official answer.

Question From Email 1

I was wondering if the DEP WQM grant would cover benthic macroinvertebrate sampling work specifically funding the development of the QAPP and equipment? ***See MassDEP Answer 1.***

Questions From Email 2

Can individuals from an environmental justice community participate in water quality monitoring activities if they come from outside of the watershed study area, but the city or town in which they live also gets its drinking water from the watershed area of interest? ***See MassDEP Answer 2.***

Could rental costs for a van be reimbursable under this grant, during the funding period, in order to assist interested individuals from an environmental justice community participate in monitoring activities if transportation would otherwise be a barrier? ***See MassDEP Answer 3.***