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NOTICE OF GRANT OPPORTUNITY

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

Summary of Grant Opportunity: The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (“MassDEP”), through the Watershed Planning Program (“WPP”) in the Bureau of Water Resources, is seeking grant proposals from Eligible Entities supporting ongoing or new monitoring and data collection efforts to increase the amount of external data MassDEP uses for water quality assessments under the federal Clean Water Act (“CWA”).

Grant Program Scope: With more than 3,000 lakes and ponds, 12,000 miles of streams and rivers, and almost 3,000 square miles of coastal waters in the Commonwealth, MassDEP’s WPP can sample only a fraction of these surface waters in any given year. MassDEP supplements its own surface water quality dataset (“internal dataset”) with data collected by entities outside of the agency (“external dataset”). Internal and certain external data meeting MassDEP’s acceptance criteria for data quality are used as the basis for assessing surface water quality and integrated reporting in accordance with requirements set forth in § 305(b) and § 303(d) of the federal CWA. For more information on MassDEP’s water quality assessment process described in the Massachusetts Consolidated Assessment and Listing Methodology (“CALM”) Guidance Manual, please see: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/water-quality-assessments>.

Through the Water Quality Monitoring Grant (“WQMG”) program, MassDEP seeks to support both new and ongoing water quality monitoring initiatives conducted by federally recognized tribal nations located in the Commonwealth, community water quality monitoring groups, and other non-profit organizations (referred to collectively as “organizations”). Such initiatives, include: (1) direct monitoring of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and estuaries (surface waters) through field and laboratory work; (2) associated capacity-building actions (including, but not limited to training and outreach) that improve the organization’s ability to monitor surface waters through field and laboratory work; and (3) developing regional and long-term monitoring programs and networks.

While activities eligible for funding through this grant program are broad, MassDEP will (as part of the evaluation criteria) prioritize grant proposals that include: (1) clear plans for data submittals to MassDEP; (2) the examination of specific priority analytes or measures using approvable approaches and procedures;

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(3) clear and tangible benefits for EJ populations; (4) matching funds and/or in-kind services that directly support the project; and (5) demonstration of meaningful collaborative approaches (as described below).

MassDEP is committed to advancing equity, diversity, and environmental justice (“EJ”)¹ through its public investments. The Agency seeks to prioritize the direction of these resources to benefit EJ communities and to address environmental inequities. To that end, MassDEP grant and funding programs include criteria and evaluation parameters that emphasize equity, diversity, and EJ, consistent with each program’s statutory authority and funding source.

Eligible Entities: Eligible Entities for this Grant Opportunity are limited to: (1) federally recognized Tribal Nations within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; and (2) non-profit organizations that may include watershed groups, lake and pond associations, and other non-profit organizations with the ability to conduct monitoring activities during SFY2025 (July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025) using technically sound, approvable methodologies. While coalitions are not required for this grant application, collaborative projects that effectively leverage partnerships to create synergies (i.e., interactions among coalition partners that create combined project outcomes greater than outcomes anticipated if coalition partners worked individually) will be given priority for funding. Academic institutions and towns and municipalities are not eligible for this SFY2025 grant program.

Eligible Projects:

Eligible Entities must describe in their proposals how the grant funding will support one or more activities aligned with the scope of the grant program.

1. Direct monitoring of surface waters through field and laboratory work, including:

- a) 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.).
- b) Fees for external laboratory analysis of samples during SFY2025.
- c) Fees for services that: (a) provide direct monitoring by a consultant; (b) develop data management tools that lead to submission of data to MassDEP by a consultant; and (c) calibrate and repair instruments used during the contract period for the proposed project. Eligible Entities must demonstrate that work performed by a consultant or other vendor cannot be performed by staff and/or volunteers and that the Eligible Entity can perform effective oversight of the consultant’s work. Additionally, Eligible Entities must demonstrate that the organization or coalition is the principal contributor to the overall project being proposed when the budget includes fees for services by a consultant. Proposals where the

¹ “Environmental justice is based on the principle that all people have a right to be protected from environmental hazards and to live in and enjoy a clean and healthful environment regardless of race, color, national origin, income, or English language proficiency. Environmental justice is the equal protection and meaningful involvement of all people and communities with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of energy, climate change, and environmental laws, regulations, and policies and the equitable distribution of energy and environmental benefits and burdens.” See Environmental Justice Policy of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (updated June 24, 2021): <https://www.mass.gov/doc/environmental-justice-policy6242021-update/download>.

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- organization or coalition are not the principal contributor to the proposed work are not eligible for funding.
- d) 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.
 - e) If submitting as a coalition, salary for a coalition coordinator's organization and oversight of activities and work specific to the Eligible Project.
2. Actions that increase the organization's or coalition's capacity to perform monitoring of surface waters through field and laboratory work, including:
- a) Training of volunteers or organization personnel to conduct monitoring activities.
 - b) Training on Quality Assurance (QA) activities such as probe calibration or laboratory best practices.
 - c) Training on data management and review.
 - d) Outreach to the community to increase volunteer participation in organization monitoring activities (including communication of regional monitoring data and analyses).
 - e) Data management activities needed to improve data sharing with MassDEP.
 - f) Salary for staff overseeing or conducting actions that increase the organization's or coalition's capacity to perform monitoring of surface waters specific to the Eligible Project including, but not limited to training and outreach planning, preparation, and implementation.
3. Actions to develop regional and long-term monitoring programs or networks, including:
- a) Purchase of monitoring equipment specifically intended for regional and long-term monitoring.
 - b) Training of organization personnel to perform actions specific to developing regional and long-term monitoring programs.
 - c) 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.

Funding Availability: MassDEP currently anticipates that up to \$200,000 in total grant funding may be available for the WQMG program in SFY2025, which ends on June 30, 2025. MassDEP reserves the right not to award the total funding currently available for this grant program, and all awards are subject to the availability of appropriations and/or other funding sources. Grant awards may range from \$20,000 (minimum) to \$75,000 (maximum) per application as an individual organization or coalition, although the Grant Review Team for the WQMG program reserves the right, in its discretion, to: (1) grant smaller awards to proposals of exceptional merit; and (2) grant awards smaller than requested by grant applicant(s) based on the availability of funds. MassDEP currently anticipates that three (3) to eight (8) grants will be awarded through this program. Should additional funds become available, MassDEP reserves the right to increase the maximum obligation to some or all contracts executed as a result of this RFGP, or to execute contracts with qualified applicants not funded in the initial selection process.

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Accordingly, more than eight (8) grants may be awarded if total available funds exceed \$200,000.

The estimated start date for all grant contracts is late January 2025 (the formal start date will be the date the grant contract is fully executed and will be noted in the Notice to Proceed issued following contract execution). The funding provided through this grant program is available only for Eligible Expenses incurred during SFY2025 (July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025). The SFY2025 grant funding awarded through this Program is on a reimbursement basis, and Eligible Entities must provide all supporting documentation required by MassDEP indicating that all Eligible Expenses were incurred during SFY2025.

Grant Application Process: The WQMG program section on MassDEP's website contains a WQMG program Request for Grant Proposals (RFGP) document that describes the steps of the application process, all project proposal and qualification requirements, the preferred format for proposals in response to this Grant Opportunity, and an Estimated Grant Calendar; see <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/grants-financial-assistance-watersheds-water-quality>.

Application Deadline: All applications must be received by MassDEP by **5:00 p.m. E.S.T. on Friday, October 11, 2024**. Applications received after the deadline will be rejected automatically. Application must be submitted electronically, via email, to the **WQMG Coordinator**, Dr. Robert F. Smith at WQMG@Mass.Gov.

Evaluation Criteria: The evaluation criteria components for MassDEP's review and scoring of Grant Proposal Responses are as specified in the WQMG program RFGP.

Question and Answer Period: Written questions can be submitted via email to MassDEP at WQMG@Mass.Gov. Questions are due by September 18, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. E.S.T. A complete question and answer document will be posted on the MassDEP Website (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/grants-financial-assistance-watersheds-water-quality>) by September 30, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. E.S.T.

Additional Information: For additional information regarding the WQMG program, please refer to the MassDEP website link: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/grants-financial-assistance-watersheds-water-quality>.