

FY 2018 Clean Water Fund Competitive Grant Request for Proposals (RFP) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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****Submit additional questions to: cwfquestions@state.mn.us**

Most Recent Update: July 27, 2017

General Requirements, Policy, and Eligibility

- Q1: If my organization submitted a Biennial Budget Request (BBR) to BWSR, will my FY 2018 project receive priority consideration?**
A: No. Organizations will not be given additional points in the application ranking criteria if they submitted a BBR in years past. However, BWSR anticipates that in the future, a BBR submittal will become an eligibility requirement to apply for Clean Water Funds Competitive Grants.
- Q2: The RFP states there is a \$30,000 grant minimum. Does this minimum apply as a total request over multiple funding categories?**
A: No, the grant request per application must be at least \$30,000.
- Q3: Do all projects have to include a community engagement and education component?**
A: Yes. Community engagement and education must be incorporated when implementing practices, projects, and activities. Costs associated with these components are eligible for grant funding.
- Q4: Are tribes eligible for Clean Water Funds?**
A: No. BWSR authorities for funding lie within Minnesota State Statute 103B.3369 which defines local governments eligible to receive funding. However, tribes can work in partnership with local governments who do qualify for Clean Water Funds.
- Q5: Are MPCA Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy documents considered a State approved plan?**
A: No. WRAPS documents are not “plans” per se and are not approved and adopted by local governments. The information, analysis, and recommendations contained within

these documents can be referenced in your application and should be used in prioritizing and targeting objectives and action items in local water management plans.

Q6: I don't see a funding category for Conservation Drainage, SSTS abatement, or Livestock Waste Management. Where do I apply for those practices? I also don't see allocations for Accelerated Implementation and Community Partners. Is this correct?

A: For FY2018, those funding categories are not available as stand-alone categories. The practices associated with them are eligible under the Projects and Practices funding category. Use the appropriate practice indicators and other relevant information to show project outcomes. There is a specific funding category for Multi-Purpose Drainage Management.

Accelerated Implementation funds were allocated to TSA Shared Services, Buffer Rule Implementation, Buffer Cost Share, and Capacity Grants for FY18. BWSR anticipates that funds for Accelerated Implementation will be available in the RFP in FY19. The Community Partners category was not allocated Clean Water Funds in this biennium (FY18/19).

Q7: For grant projects that are approved and funded by the BWSR Board, when can work begin on those grant projects?

A: Work cannot begin on any BWSR Clean Water Fund grant project until the date when the grant is officially executed by BWSR. The project period starts when the grant agreement is "executed," meaning all required signatures have been obtained. Work that occurs before this date is not eligible for reimbursement with grant funds, and cannot be used as match. A work plan must be completed by the grantee and approved by BWSR staff before the grant agreement can be signed by BWSR. The work plan is incorporated into the grant agreement by reference.

Q8: In the BWSR grant payment schedule, does the first 50% of the funds need to be spent or encumbered to receive the next 40% payment?

A: Yes, the first 50% of the funds must be expended before requesting or receiving the next payment. For information regarding the payment schedule, please see the BWSR Grants Manual:

http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/grants/manual/#/Grant_Reimbursement/43/top

Q9: Is there a spending limit for administration cost or technical costs?

A: No, there are no specific spending limits per grant budget category. However, costs must be reasonable, direct, and necessary. The grant agreement includes a clause that requires grantees to minimize administration costs. Ensure that costs are allocated to the appropriate budget category.

Q10 (revised): Can ineligible activities be used as non-state or local match?

A: No, activities listed as ineligible in the BWSR FY18 Clean Water Fund Policy may not be counted toward the project match, with one exception. The FY18 CWF policy states that land acquisition and easement costs are eligible match expenses if directly associated with the project and are incurred within the grant period.

Q11: Can BWSR please provide a list of the TMDLs with approved implementation plans and a central web access point for the maps of the drainage areas for these TMDLs.

A: A list of approved TMDLs and associated information regarding implementation plans and drainage areas can be found at the following website:

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/total-maximum-daily-load-tmdl-projects#approved-016cd538>

Q12: The RFP states that prevailing wages apply. What are the grant applicant's responsibilities for compliance?

A: Prevailing wage requirements apply to all state funds used for "projects" that meet the definition identified in M.S 177.42 Subd. 2. As the RFP states, your first source of information for questions about the application of prevailing wage rates should be directed to the Department of Labor and Industry at 651-284-5091, or <http://www.dli.mn.gov/LS/PrevWage.asp>. However, the following information may help you better understand these requirements.

The responsibilities of a grant recipient are to: (1) be aware of prevailing wage and ensure their project's cost proposals address this requirement; (2) include prevailing wage information in their bid and contract documents; and (3) receive and maintain the payroll reports that contractors will furnish every two weeks. Prevailing wage does not apply to administrative activities of the grant recipient or construction activities directly conducted by a local government, i.e. if an SWCD uses its own staff to plant trees, prevailing wage would not apply, but if they contracted with Joe's Planting Service it would.

Q13: What can be used for in-kind cash value as match?

A: In-kind cash value has to be directly attributed to the project or activity accomplishments. Use the following guidance when determining in-kind cash value:

1. Local staff and administrative costs in excess of the reporting and grant management, project development or technical and engineering component of the CWF grant funds received.
2. Conservation practice costs may not be increased beyond the actual costs of technical assistance, design, materials, and installation by the application of match. In no case may conservation practice costs exceed 100% of the actual cost of design, materials, and installation. Land value match may only be used to match structural or installed conservation practices and may only be applied where changes from current land use or land cover are implemented such that water resource protection becomes the new primary objective for the land under consideration.

Q14: Can Clean Water Partnership funds be used as match?

A: It depends. Clean Water Partnership loan funds can be used as match. Clean Water Partnership grant funds cannot because these funds are usually derived from state Clean Water Funds or General Funds.

Q15: Can multiple photos be submitted for an application?

A: Only one application image file in one of the allowable formats may be submitted per application (jpg, gif, tiff, bmp, png). The application image file can only be one page in length. The composition of the application image is up to the applicant.

Q16: Can a design be submitted with an application?

A: Yes. If the design is saved as one of the acceptable application image file formats (jpg, gif, tiff, bmp, png), it may be used as the one allowed application image.

Q17: What are the narrative limits for the application?

A: Each of the questions within the application has a 2,000 **character** limit (approximately 300 words) including spaces. Applications can be constructed as a Word document where characters can be counted and then pasted into the eLINK application form.

Q18: What is the update schedule for the FAQ?

A: The last update of the FAQ will be on Wednesday, August 2, 2017.

Q19: Can Public Facilities Authority (PFA) Stormwater grant funds be used as match?

A: No, PFA grant funds cannot because these funds are partially derived from state Clean Water Funds or General Funds. Loan funds may be used as match.

BWSR Projects and Practices Grants

Q1: Can BWSR give some examples of Projects and Practices grants that were funded previously?

A: A summary of all projects funded with Clean Water Funds, regardless of agency funding source, can be found on the Legislative Coordinating Commission website: <http://www.legacy.leg.mn/projects/project/10> .

Q2: Is snow and ice equipment used in efforts to reduce chloride impairments eligible?

A: Yes, this type of equipment is eligible.

Q3: Is carp removal to improve water quality an eligible activity?

A: Carp removal is an in-lake management activity. As of FY18, all applications that include in-lake management activities are required to have a completed feasibility study to be considered eligible for funding. The feasibility study must include projected effective life of such activities.

Q4: Are non-structural BMPs, such as reduced tillage, eligible for funding under the Project and Practice category, or do practices like that belong in the Accelerated Implementation category?

A: Non-structural BMPs and associated incentive payments related to changes in tillage practices are eligible under the Project and Practices funding category. All CWF projects must meet the minimum effective life requirements identified in the RFP. Incentives may require additional project assurance between the LGU and the recipient to document how this requirement will be met.

Q5: For projects providing incentives or assistance with the installation of buffers on public water bodies or public drainage systems (Minn. Stat. 103E), can Projects and Practices grant funds be used for the establishment of buffers required by statute or rule?

A: Financial assistance, including incentives, using Projects and Practices grant funds may only be used for establishment of the portion of the buffer width or design/seeding specifications that are greater than the minimum required by the applicable statute or rule. Note that the FY 2018 Clean Water Fund Competitive Grants Policy provisions

must be followed including the use of native vegetation. Enhancing an existing buffer by changing the vegetation species composition or density beyond minimum requirements that provides demonstrable improvements in water quality treatment and other secondary benefits is an eligible activity. CWF grant funds may not be used for permanent conservation easement development and long term payments. Landowner participation in existing programs (e.g. CCRP, EQIP) should be considered as a first alternative.

Q6: Are MINNFARM pollution estimates based on the pollution problem at the existing feedlot today or the reduction of pollution after the fix has been implemented?

A: For the purposes of the application, BWSR needs to know the MINNFARM pollution data (index and loading numbers) from the existing feedlot that is currently a pollution problem. For funded projects, the pollution reduction achieved from implementing the fix must be entered into eLINK during the work plan and reporting phases of the grant.

Q7: Are feedlot relocations eligible under Projects and Practices Grants?

A: Yes, feedlot relocation is an eligible practice, with the following conditions:

- The existing eligible feedlot must be permanently closed in accordance with the local and State requirements.
- Payment Limitation: The maximum grant for a feedlot relocation is not to exceed \$100,000. Funding is not eligible for projects already receiving flat rate payment equaling or exceeding this amount from the NRCS or other State grant funds.

Q8: For underground manure storage structures, are the slats that are placed on top of the storage structure eligible for funding?

A: No. Slats are considered a part of the barn or production facility, and are not considered part of the manure storage structure, and are not eligible for funding.

Q9: Do Imminent Threats to Public Health Systems (ITPHS) need to be located on residential property or can they be located on commercial property?

A: ITPHS need to be located on residential property.

Q10: Why can't BWSR figure out the cost effectiveness of my project from the budget and proposed pollution reductions?

A: Cost effectiveness depends on a variety of factors beyond the initial budget and pollution reduction estimates. Applicants use a variety of estimators and models with built-in assumptions for the initial estimates to address an assortment of pollutants that address different scales of problems. In addition, the as-built project(s) may be more effective than anticipated in the application. In many cases, there are multiple options to address the identified problem and external factors that come into play.

Q11: What does BWSR mean by public benefits?

A: The applicant should describe to the best of their ability how the use of Clean Water Funds benefits the resource or water of concern and characterize the scope of those benefits. The benefits can be described geographically, economically, how public use is enhanced directly or indirectly, how human health is protected, or other means and measures that best characterize those benefits.

Q12: Can funds be used to develop a local program for feedlot fixes or buffer installation?

A: Projects and Practices grant funds are for projects that are prioritized, targeted and capable of producing measurable results. Prioritizing and targeting are generally done through the development of water management plans and associated water quality monitoring and analysis. Measuring results generally means having a goal identified for a specific water resource and linking projects and their estimated pollutant reductions to that goal. It is more difficult to estimate the water quality impacts to a specific water resource in a grant application through the installation of widely dispersed best management practices over a large geographic areas.

Other sources of funds including Continuous Signup Conservation Reserve (CCRP) and Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) may be best suited for a more general application of practices installed over a larger geographic area. Using those funds should be evaluated first before seeking Projects and Practices grant funds.

Q13: Can funds be used to provide an incentive payment for a BMP for longer than the grant timeframe? And can any incentive rate be used?

A: All incentivized practices must have a minimum duration of at least 3 years with a goal of ongoing landowner adoption. BWSR may ask to review the incentive rate to ensure it is reasonable and justifiable, supported by grant recipient policy, consistent with prevailing local conditions and that it will be accomplished using established standards. BWSR staff have the authority to accept or deny that rate in the work plan if state funding is being requested and if the incentives proposed are for more than 3 years, BWSR's Executive Director must approve prior to work plan approval.

Q14: What should the required feasibility study for in-lake management practices contain?

- A.** The feasibility study could be the result of a number of studies over several years, but consolidated into a document that can be readily uploaded to eLINK to accompany the submitted grant application. Feasibility studies should assess the effectiveness of an in-lake treatment versus implementing additional watershed treatment practices at this time. Key items the document(s) should address include but need not be limited to:
- a. Lake morphology and depth;
 - b. a summary of water quality monitoring data including analysis of lake sediment cores when applicable;
 - c. modeling to determine amount of external vs. internal phosphorus loading;
 - d. percentage of external phosphorus loading treated and methodology used to determine the percentage;
 - e. social implications of the in-lake management practice, such as receptiveness of the lake community to aquatic vegetative response resulting from improved water quality conditions;
 - f. assessment of aquatic invasive species such as common carp control, curlyleaf pondweed, or other AIS;
 - g. a schedule identifying the anticipated number and amount of treatments/doses;
 - h. cost effectiveness;
 - i. determination of effective life of the management practice and the entity responsible for any future maintenance needed to achieve the effective life;
 - j. explanation of any other in-lake treatment completed in the past 15 years.

BWSR Multipurpose Drainage Management Grants

Q1: Why is BWSR requiring a partnership between a Chapter 103E drainage authority and SWCD?

A: The objective for this requirement is to help integrate on-field and on-farm conservation practices with on-drainage system practices to achieve multiple water management purposes, including reduced drainage system maintenance, erosion control, peak flow reduction and water quality improvement for priority Chapter 103E drainage systems. An associated objective is to promote use of the authority in Section 103E.011, Subd. 5. *Use of external sources of funding*, and other applicable drainage law provisions, to integrate public and private funding for the multiple purposes outlined in the recently updated Section 103E.015, Subd. 1. Environmental, land use and multipurpose water management criteria.

Q2: Can the required minimum 25% match be provided by a combination of drainage system share and/or landowner share?

A: Yes. For example, a priority Chapter 103E drainage system could provide all of the match for a storage and treatment wetland restoration on the drainage system; and/or the drainage system could provide half of the match for an eligible conservation practice on land within the benefited area of the drainage system and the landowner provide the other half of the match; and/or the landowner could provide all the required match for an eligible conservation practice outside the benefited area, but within the watershed of the drainage system. Note that Section 103E.011, Subd. 5 provides “notwithstanding” authority to use funds derived from drainage system assessments, in addition to external sources of funding, outside the benefited area but within the watershed of the drainage system for the purposes identified in Subd. 5. Sources of match must be non-state.

Q3: Can BWSR give some examples of Multipurpose Drainage Management grants that were funded previously?

A: Yes, this program is going into its third year. Wright Soil and Water Conservation District, Red Lake Soil and Water Conservation District, Freeborn Soil and Water Conservation District, Sauk River Watershed District, and Dodge Soil and Water Conservation District all received FY 2016 MDM Grants. Red Lake Soil and Water Conservation District, Sand Hill River Watershed District, Sauk River Watershed District, Bois de Sioux Watershed District, Carver Soil and Water Conservation District and Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance received FY 2017 MDM Grants. Side Inlets and Saturated Buffers were only two of the eligible practices used by these grantees. If you would like more information on the use of conservation drainage practices please refer to the BWSR [Clean Water Stories](#) webpage under “Drainage”.

Q4: Can Multipurpose Drainage Management grant funds be used for the establishment of buffers?

A: Buffers that are required by law (statute, rule or ordinance), incremental buffer strips under Section 103E.021, Subd. 6., or buffer establishment for a saturated buffer are not eligible. However, Eligible Activity 5, *Storage and Treatment Wetland Restoration* allows grant funds to be used for required upland buffers.

Q5: Why can't BWSR figure out the cost effectiveness of my project from the budget and proposed pollution reductions?

A: Cost effectiveness depends on a variety of factors beyond the initial budget and pollution reduction estimates. Applicants use a variety of estimators and models with built-in assumptions for the initial estimates to address an assortment of pollutants that address different scales of problems. In addition, the as-built project(s) may be more effective than anticipated in the application. In many cases, there are multiple options to address the identified problem and external factors that come into play.

Q6: What does BWSR mean by public benefits?

A: The applicant should describe to the best of their ability how the use of Clean Water Funds benefits the resource or water of concern and characterize the scope of those benefits. The benefits can be described geographically, economically, how public use is enhanced directly or indirectly, how human health is protected, or other means and measures that best characterize those benefits.

Q7: Can the applicant apply for any of the eligible practices / activities?

A: Yes.

Q8: Is there a minimum number of practices / activities required to receive all or part of the ranking criteria points for “Effective Combination of Practices”?

A: No, but the objective is to encourage effective “treatment train” type combinations of practices / activities.

Q9: If we apply for Drainage Water Management activities, could the landowner or operator leave subsurface drainage controls (e.g. weir boards) out in the fall and install them before spring runoff for spring flood control?

A: Yes. Although this grant program uses the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards we have been told by NRCS that the present standard allows flexibility for leaving the control boards out in the fall to address issues encountered in cold regions, such as preventing damage to the structures caused by freezing over the winter.

Q10: Is the total cost of a proposed repair project on, along, or in the watershed of a priority Chapter 103E drainage system limited to the total benefits defined by the most recent determination of benefits and damages for the drainage system?

A: No. Although the cost of a drainage system repair project is limited by the total amount of drainage system benefits “on the books”, Section 103E.011, Subd. 5. Use of External Sources of Funding, starts with “notwithstanding other provisions of this chapter” and does not have a limit on the amount of external funds a drainage authority may accept for the purposes of wetland preservation or restoration, creation of water quality improvements, or flood control.

Q11: Can BWSR explain what is meant by partnership in more detail?

A: BWSR is not specifying how the Drainage Authority / SWCD partnership would work, but presumably it would utilize the authorities and strengths of the partners to achieve the program purposes. Potential shared or coordinated partner roles, as applicable, could include, but are not limited to: grant project management; grant fiscal agent; project and conservation practice planning; landowner coordination; design and other technical assistance; manage drainage system proceeding(s) or actions, as appropriate; conservation practice layout and construction oversight; and financial match (cash or in-kind).

Q12: Using a wetland for storage to reduce flood problems requires drawdown capabilities. Flood storage is in the "bounce". Is level management allowed? What kind of drawdown time is allowed in the design?

A: The intent for a storage and treatment wetland restoration is to have primary purposes of storage and treatment (peak flow reduction and water quality), with multi-purposes to include reduced downstream erosion and sedimentation, and a reasonable measure of habitat(s) in the associated flowage and conservation easement. Water level management to maintain a restored wetland, while providing for temporary detention is envisioned. The runoff event bounce drawdown time and potential seasonal normal water level drawdown plan will need to enable appropriate vegetation for water quality treatment and habitat, but are expected to be substantially dependent on site opportunities and constraints.

Q13: Could we fund a created wetland for storage and treatment of surface runoff water that could be used for sub-irrigation during dry periods?

A: No. This grant program will help fund only Storage and Treatment Wetland Restorations.

Q14: Does BWSR have a budget template that we can fill out and submit with our application as required?

A: Yes. That template is found on the Apply for Grants page on the BWSR website.

Q15: How do I attach the require Budget spreadsheet (Multipurpose Drainage Management Grants only)?

A: Within the *Attachments* tab of the application in eLINK, you may add up to five attachments of type "General Attachment". Please note that this attachment type is allowed only for the MDM Grant application.

Q16: If a ditch repair is being completed at the same time as a MDM project, is the cost of the repair considered eligible for match towards the project if it meets the goals of the project. For example, a bank collapse is creating erosion and sediment delivery down stream.

A: Only to the extent that those costs are: 1) over and above repair costs that are the responsibility of the drainage system; 2) contribute to the accomplishment of the grant objectives for water quality improvement and multipurpose drainage system management within the project area, and; 3) are consistent with applicable BWSR CWF match policies. If further clarification is need please contact your Clean Water Specialist.

Q17: For MDM Grants, are 2-stage ditches considered an eligible activity?

A: No, only those practices listed in the RFP are eligible for funding through the MDM grants.

MDA AgBMP Loans

Q1: Can AgBMP Loans be used as match for any of the grant funding categories?

A: No. AgBMP loans can only be used as match for Projects and Practices grants. In addition, AgBMP loans can only be used for the installation of proven Best Management Practices.

MPCA Clean Water Partnership (CWP) Loans

Q1: Does indicating interest in CWP Loans in my application guarantee that I will receive loan funds?

A: No. MPCA will be notified of any CWF applicants who have indicated interest in CWP loans, and will provide interested parties with instructions on how to apply for CWP loans.

eLINK

Q1: Why did I get an error message saying one of the application fields was empty after I entered the required data and then tried to submit the application?

A: You must save the information to the application before submitting. It may be necessary to scroll to the top or bottom of the page in order to bring the “Save” button into view. If you save while one of narrative questions is blank, the placeholder text “Not Entered” will be inserted; this will need to be replaced prior to submitting the application.

Q2: My map was the last thing I created in my application. When I submitted the application, I didn’t receive an email notification that my application was submitted. What happened?

A: The map creation function may take several seconds to finish processing. If you try and submit the application before the map creation is done, the eLINK system considers the application incomplete and does not send out a notification. When the map creation function is complete, you will see a popup window indicating the map has been successfully saved. At that time, you may submit the application and should receive the proper notification.

Q3: Why am I having trouble creating my map?

A1: Google Chrome is not supported by eLINK. The applicant should use Microsoft (MS) Internet Explorer 9 or newer or use Mozilla Firefox.

A2: If you select too many HUCs for your map, it slows down the map processing considerably and currently there is no hour glass or other symbol to alert you to this. Please consider making a smaller, more targeted HUC selection or be incredibly patient.

Q4: Help! I lost the narrative portion of my application after I saved the information?

A: Each of the narrative questions within the application has a 2,000 character limit. If any one of those questions is over 2,000 characters, there will be an error message that shows up upon attempting to save. You may have to scroll up or down the screen to see this. If you do not change the character limit but push the save button and go to a different tab, all narrative questions will be lost. If you change the character limit and forget to push the save button and go to another tab, all narrative questions will be lost. Please be sure to check your application for any warning messages before

proceeding. BWSR recommends creating your application in Word as a backup, and copy/pasting into eLINK.

Q5: I tried to open the application report and received a message saying “Report Generation Failed: Parameter is not valid.” What should I do?

A: You will receive this error message if you attempt to upload a non-image file type for your application image, which cannot be appended into the application report. Upload your image in a common raster image file type, specifically a *.jpeg/*.jpg, *.gif, *.bmp, or *.png.

Q6: Can I make changes to a submitted application during the RFP open period?

A: Yes. You will need to change the submitted status to “in process”, make changes, and change the status back to “Submit”. The status change triggers generating the report, which is added to the Attachments tab and seen by reviewers. Please note that failure to change “Submitted” status will not capture any changes for review team, and applications not in “Submitted” status at the time the RFP closes will not be considered for funding.

Q7: Can I access earlier grant applications even if they were not funded?

A: Yes, you can access them by logging into eLINK and from the homepage under the “Grants” module, click on the “Include closed grants” box, enter the appropriate fiscal year’s allocation, and click “Go”.

Q8: Can consultants submit grant applications in eLINK on behalf of LGUs?

A: Yes, there are two ways to accomplish this. One way is for the LGU to start an application and add a consultant to the “team membership”. The consultant must have an active eLINK user account in order to be added to the team membership. The second way is for a consultant to request an eLINK user account from the eLINK homepage and indicate the LGU(s) for which they are applying. The LGUs should be aware of this request.

eLINK user accounts should not be shared by multiple individuals; a separate user account should be requested by each individual needing access. It is not necessary to create multiple eLINK user accounts for one individual if access is needed for multiple organizations. To request access to additional LGUs contact elinksupport@state.mn.us.

Q9: The character limit for answering each application question in eLINK is 2000 characters. Does that include spaces?

A: Yes. A space is considered a character in eLINK.

Q10: When attempting to submit my application, I get a message stating, “For each activity, you must either check the box verifying that there are no pollution reduction estimates associated with the Activity, or enter proposed indicators.” What do I need to do?

A: Within the Application Budget tab, you will either need to ensure that the “Check here if this activity does not include proposed pollution reduction estimates” is checked within the Edit Application Activity” screen (pencil icon), or enter proposed indicators within the “Edit Indicators” screen (orange diamond icon). If your project will include on the ground practices resulting in pollution reductions, indicators must be entered.