



Putting Local Water Management Plans to Work

BWSR INTRODUCES PROCESS TO ELEVATE AND SIMPLIFY FUNDING OF LOCAL WATER MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Listening sessions held over the past two years have provided the following perspectives about BWSR grants:

- Grants are often written to fit into available funding categories, rather than local priorities
- Funding categories seem to change every year
- Competitive processes do not provide any assurance that the local priorities will be supported
- Local water plans should be used in developing the State budget
- A reduction in grant administrative costs is desired; and
- Incentives to local governments to plan ahead when developing projects is prudent.

We also know that competition and accountability expectations for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Constitutional Amendment dollars continues to increase.

With these factors in mind, we have developed a new budget request and grant process for both program operations and competitive grants, without increasing the time demands on state and local personnel.

BUILDING LOCAL PRIORITIES INTO THE AGENCY BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST (BBR)

Problem:

Under current budget development and appropriation processes, local water management plans become relevant only after funds are appropriated and therefore, applicants must squeeze their priorities into available funding categories. We think this is backwards.

Current Biennial Budget Request Process:



Solution:

The best way to ensure that State funds are used to address the most important water management issues, is to know those priorities before funds are appropriated. With this in mind, the process should look more like this:

Proposed Biennial Budget Request (BBR) Process:



The BBR process puts local plans where they should be in State water management implementation: at the front-end for establishing funding priorities; and at the back-end by providing funds to implement these State approved, locally adopted action plans.

The change will put local water management plans and priorities where we think they ought to be, *at the beginning of the State budget process.*

How are we going to implement this solution? We have been developing changes to BWSR grant making built around a tool called the Biennial Budget Request (BBR). Through the BBR, BWSR will request information every other year on what local governments think they can reasonably accomplish over the subsequent three years. The format will look very similar to the current competitive fund application process, but without so much detail. BWSR will use this information to develop its biennial budget and inform the appropriations process.

MOVING FROM ANNUAL TO BIENNIAL GRANTS ADMINISTRATION

Problem:

Making grants available every year consumes considerable resources of both BWSR and local governments. The recent increase in Clean Water Funds provides another opportunity to look for ways to change grants processes to further reduce administrative burdens.

Also, annual grants programs create a lack of continuity in water management efforts because local governments must plan and develop projects and activities on an annual basis. This short term focus is not consistent with the 25-year program established by the Constitutional Amendment nor is it an effective way to manage an organization, workforce or natural resources as it in effect forces a 'reset' button to be pushed every year.

Solution:

Allocate a majority of State water management implementation funds to local governments once every two years. This change will reduce administrative burdens and encourage local governments to increase their project development horizon.

What's Different?

- *Every other year you will complete a BBR.*
- *Most grants will be issued biennially.*
- *The BBR will replace the SWCD annual plan and Natural Resources Block Grant Allocation and Contribution Statement*

For most local governments, completing a BBR will not result in additional work. This is because it will be replacing existing requirements for soil and water conservation districts (annual plans) and counties (Natural Resources Block Grant Allocation and Contribution Statement).

WHAT CAN YOU DO NOW?

There are several things you can do now to prepare.

- You can continue to receive updates by signing up at <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNBWSR/subscriber/new?pop=t>.
- The BWSR website (<http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/grants/index.html>) will be regularly updated with new information, check it out to stay informed.
- You can review your water management plan with an eye to the priorities you might include in your BBR.
- In addition, you can contact your BWSR Board Conservationist to discuss your priorities and ask for advice.

WHEN WILL THESE CHANGES BE IMPLEMENTED?

We are continuing to develop the details of these changes to BWSR water management grant programs. Current plans are to implement training on the biennial budget request in April and begin loading the local priorities into the system starting in May 2012. Information will need to be submitted by the end of June for BWSR to develop the budget request in August and September 2012. The goal is for local priorities to be funded in the appropriations made for the State FY2014-15 biennium.

Additional information will be provided in the coming months as our preparations continue.

BWSR is making these changes because we believe it is necessary to ensure that funds continue to be provided to support the implementation of local water plans which, in turn, support State water management objectives.