

m BOARD OF WATER
AND SOIL RESOURCES

Soil Health Supplemental Staffing Grants



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PURPOSE

The Minnesota Office for Soil Health (MOSH) identifies a set of principles for soil health:

- Keep the soil covered
- Minimize disturbance
- Keep living roots in the ground
- Diversify rotations
- Integrate livestock when/where feasible

The purpose of this phase of programming is to create additional local points of contact to work with landowners on increasing utilization of soil health practices and systems that advance the principles of soil health.

1. **Trusted Local Expertise.** Among the common themes that emerged in stakeholder discussions for the state soil health action framework are the challenges of building expertise in soil health practices and meeting demands for that expertise, across both the public and private sectors. This grant program is designed to direct state resources toward staffing that can help meet these needs at the local level.
2. **Expand public-private partnerships across multiple sectors and activities.** Public agencies, NGOs, and private companies share many goals for improving soil health across the agricultural sector. In addition to supporting new staff positions, partnerships can expand and enhance collaboration in the areas of research and market and supply chain development.
3. Support and increase **mentorship and peer-to-peer learning support** through positions and people who can facilitate connections and farmer-driven learning opportunities.

WHAT IS NEW FOR 2024

1. This is a new grant which is proposing to fund supplemental staffing needs associated with accelerating implementation of soil health practices and systems.
2. Supplemental capacity is added in Fiscal year 2024 or later.
3. Awarded funds would be available through December 31, 2027.
4. There is no match requirement.
5. This RFP, the *BWSR Grants Administration Manual* and the grant agreement will provide the framework for this program and there is no additional program policy.

TIMELINE

No late submissions or incomplete proposals will be considered for funding. Applications must be submitted by 4:30 PM Wednesday February 8, 2024. Late responses will not be considered. The grant applicant is responsible for proving timely submittal.

Grant Cycle	Grant Cycle Dates
Application period open	November 15, 2023 – February 8, 2024
BWSR authorizes grant awards	By March 21, 2024
BWSR sends grant agreements to recipients	April 2024
Work plan submittal deadline	May 13, 2024
Grant Execution Deadline	June 10, 2024

GRANT ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

The following entities are eligible:

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) individually or in partnership working under a current State approved and locally adopted local water management plan, comprehensive watershed management plan or soil and water conservation district comprehensive plan.

Applicable plans must be current when the Board approves awards to be eligible to receive grant funds as defined under the Board’s Local Water Plan Status and Grant Eligibility Policy. Applicants must also be in compliance with all applicable federal, State, and local laws, policies, ordinances, rules, and regulations.

Applicants who have previously received a grant from BWSR must be in compliance with BWSR requirements for grantee website and eLINK reporting before grant execution and payment.

FUNDING AVAILABLE AND MATCH

The appropriation language governing the use of these funds is in Laws of Minnesota 2023, Regular Session, Chapter 40, Article 2, Section 6(O) and Laws of Minnesota 2023, Regular Session, Chapter 60, Article 1, Section 4(K). Final funding decisions will be dependent on the actual funds available and the need to meet USDA NRCS-RCPP award requirements.

No match is required.

Funding availability will be partially dependent on USDA NRCS-RCPP awards and associated considerations. We anticipate awarding up to \$25,000,000 of state funding for this grant program.

The Clean Water Fund was established in Minnesota Statute 114D.50 to implement part of Article XI, Section 15, of the Minnesota Constitution, with the purpose of protecting, enhancing, and restoring water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams in addition to protecting ground water and drinking water sources from degradation. These funds must supplement traditional sources of funding and may not be used as to substitute for other funds. existing activities or programs.

ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Consists of the employee's base hourly rate plus the costs of benefits, leave, and facilities; and administration costs necessary to keep a person employed and an office running.

STAFFING

Funds may be used to employ the proportion of an FTE or FTEs or for contractual staffing arrangements with other public or private sector organizations dedicated to Soil Health related Outreach, Education, Training and Technical support which also supplement the capacity of the district to deliver existing programming and the additional proposed soil health related activities.

PROJECT START UP

Awarded positions may request up to \$10,000 (prorated per full FTE) for ONE TIME position startup costs which can include but are not limited to office supplies, computers or other needed materials to ensure the position can be functional upon starting their duties. (See the *BWSR Grants Administration Manual* to ensure billing rates take these expenses into account when billed directly to the grant.)

GRANT MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

All grant recipients are required to report on the outcomes, activities, and accomplishments. A reasonable use of grant funds may be requested for local grant management and reporting that are directly related to and necessary for supporting the proportion of FTEs or contractual staffing.

SUPPLEMENTAL

While soil health supplemental capacity itself may have been added in FY 24 only expenses incurred after the execution of the grant agreement are eligible for payment.

SOIL HEALTH STAFFING APPLICATION QUESTIONS

ANSWERS TO EACH QUESTION ARE LIMITED TO 2000 CHARACTERS. THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS NEED TO BE ANSWERED IN ELINK. THE CHARACTER LIMIT IN ELINK IS NOT THE SAME AS MICROSOFT WORD.

1. Describe how the proposed staffing creates supplemental capacity in your office, office/partnership to assist landowners in implementing soil health systems and to deliver soil health related programming. Include the proportion of an FTE(s) for which you are requesting funding.
2. How will your proposed position(s) create new, expand existing, or enhance existing partnerships with a common vision of increasing utilization of soil health systems on production lands?
3. What specific efforts are planned to enhance local understanding and knowledge around utilization of Soil Health Practices and systems?
4. What specific efforts will be implemented to increase direct landowner outreach and engagement?
5. How will the position demonstrate or acquire sufficient technical expertise (e.g., Job Approval Authority, Technical Service Providers, etc.) to assist landowners in implementing soil health practices?
6. Describe the connection this position has with a state approved, locally adopted plan which provides goals for soil health related implementation.
7. How will you ensure that the added capacity will be used to deliver of soil health related tasks?

DRAFT Soil Health Staffing Program	
Scoring Criteria	Maximum Points Possible
<u>Creating Supplemental Capacity:</u> The applicant clearly and concisely identified how the proposed staffing creates supplemental capacity to assist landowners in implementing soil health systems and to deliver soil health related programing.	30
<u>Partnerships:</u> The applicant intends to create new, or expand or enhance existing partnerships with a common vision of increasing utilization of soil health systems on production lands.	25
<u>Education and Outreach:</u> The applicant proposes specific efforts to enhance local understanding and knowledge around the soil health practices proposed. The applicant proposes specific efforts to increase direct landowner communications and engagement.	20
<u>Additional Expertise:</u> The applicant has ensured that the position will have credentialed technical expertise (e.g., Job Approval Authority, Technical Service Providers) or related experience to assist landowners in implementing soil health practices.	5
<u>Local Priority:</u> The applicant has participated or is participating in the implementation of a state approved, locally adopted plan that includes goals or actions for soil health related activities.	10
<u>Soil Health Focus:</u> The applicant has described the steps that will be taken to assure that the supplemental capacity will be used to deliver soil health related outcomes that make progress towards identified goals for soil health related activities.	10
Total Points Available	100

BWSR reserves the right to consider other factors in award allocations such as but not including geographic distribution or consideration of federal funding awards and related programing.

APPLYING FOR A GRANT

HOW TO SUBMIT A QUESTION

Questions regarding grant applications should be directed to your Board Conservationist; a map of work areas and contact information is available at [BWSR Work area Maps](#). Questions may also be submitted by email to cwfquestions@state.mn.us. Responses may be posted on the BWSR website as a “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ) document and updated weekly throughout the RFP.

HOW TO APPLY USING ELINK

1. Set up your eLINK user account

Proposals need to be submitted via [eLINK](#). Eligible applicants without a current eLINK user account must register for an account at <https://elink.bwsr.state.mn.us> no later than seven days prior to the proposal deadline. For eLINK related

questions, first visit the eLINK section of the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#) page. If your question is not addressed here, please contact elinksupport@state.mn.us.

2. Complete your funding request (proposal)

See the “[Completing a Funding Request in eLINK](#)” under the “eLINK Training Videos” tab on the eLINK webpage to view a 11-minute online module describing how to complete a Funding Request within eLINK.

- As part of the proposal, eLINK will require applicants to map the location of the proposed project area.
- Answers to each question is limited to 2,000 characters. Due to differences in how programs are encoded, be aware that the character limit in eLINK is not the same as Microsoft Word or other text editors.
- Proposals may include only one image to be submitted within their eLINK application. Only .jpg, .tiff, or .png file types are allowed.

Applicants must provide answers to the following questions as part of their proposal submitted in eLINK. The questions are related to the ranking criteria categories, which determine how proposals are scored by reviewers. The ranking criteria can be found in the “Application Review” section of this RFP.

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

- Proposals may receive partial funding based on eligibility or availability of funds. Prior to final selection, the Board may engage applicants to resolve questions or to discuss modifications to the project or funding request. Applications may receive partial funding for the following reasons: 1) an absence of or limited identification of specific project locations, 2) budgeted items that were not discussed in the application or have no connection to the central purpose of the application were included by an applicant; 3) to address budget categories out of balance with the project scope; 4) application contains ineligible components; and 5) insufficient funds remaining in a grant category to fully fund a project. Prior to final selection, the Board may engage applicants to resolve questions or to discuss modifications to the project or funding request.
- Proposals that do not comply with all proposal requirements will not be considered for funding, as provided below:
 - Components of the proposal are incomplete or missing;
- If appropriate proposals should clearly articulate what water resource is being targeted in the application. Proposals should demonstrate significant, measurable project outputs and outcomes targeted to critical pollution source areas that will help achieve water quality objectives for the water resource of concern; be consistent with a watershed management plan that has been state approved and locally adopted or an approved total maximum daily load study (TMDL), Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS), Groundwater Restoration and Protection Strategy (GRAPS), surface water intake plan, or well head protection plan.
- Proposals should ensure they are citing the soil health related elements of current, state approved and locally adopted plan(s) for the project area(s). For example, once a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan is adopted for an area, the County Water Plan or SWCD Comprehensive Plan can no longer be referenced for that watershed area since it is no longer the applicable plan in the project area, even if it continues to be used elsewhere in the county where a CWMP has not yet been developed and adopted. Improper plan references will negatively affect the prioritization score.
- Applicants should consider the impacts that climate change (such as fluctuating precipitation patterns and drought) may have on the ability of the proposed project to meet objectives and whether the proposed project increases landscape resiliency.

- Proposals from applicants that were previously awarded Clean Water Funds will be considered during the review process for applications submitted in response to this RFP. However, applicants that have expended less than 50% of previous award(s) at the time of this application will need to demonstrate organizational capacity to finalize current projects and to complete new projects concurrently.

APPLICATION REVIEW

BWSR staff initially review all applications for eligibility. Eligible applications will be reviewed and ranked based on the criteria in this RFP by an interagency scoring team.

The Executive Director is authorized to make final award decisions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

State Grant Policy 08-01, (see <https://mn.gov/admin/government/grants/policies-statutes-forms/>) Conflict of Interest for State Grant-Making, also applies to BWSR grantees. Grantees' conflicts of interest are generally considered organizational conflicts of interest. Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

- A grantee is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice due to competing duties or loyalties,
- A grantee's objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties, or
- A grantee or potential grantee has an unfair competitive advantage through being furnished unauthorized proprietary information or source selection information that is not available to all competitors.

PRIVACY NOTICE

Under Minnesota Statute 13.599, responses to an RFP are nonpublic until the application deadline is reached. At that time, the name and address of the grantee, and the amount requested becomes public. All other data is nonpublic until the negotiation of the grant agreement with the selected grantee is completed. After the application evaluation process is completed, all data (except trade secret data) becomes public. Data created during the evaluation process is nonpublic until the negotiation of the grant agreement with the selected grantee(s) is completed.

GRANT RECIPIENT INFORMATION

PROJECT PERIOD

Notification of grant award will be in the form of an automated notification from the BWSR eLINK system or an email from BWSR Grants staff to the grantee. Notifications are sent to the Day-to-Day Contact(s) identified by the organization within the eLINK system. This notification includes instructions for further processing of the grant agreement and may also contain grant-specific information such as requirements for completing work plans, disbursement terms, or additional required documentation for processing the grant. Read these instructions carefully as requirements can vary by grant and fiscal year.

BWSR will use grant agreements, and an associated work plan, as contracts for assurance of deliverables and compliance with appropriate statutes, rules, and established policies. BWSR reserves the right to require a work plan revision or grant agreement amendment for changes in scope. Willful or negligent disregard of relevant statutes, rules and policies may lead to imposition of financial penalties on the grant recipient. Upon receiving the notification of grant award, which indicates

approval of an application, and prior to beginning work on the grant project(s) and receiving grant funds, the applicant is required to do the following:

1. Complete an IRS W-9 form or register as a vendor in SWIFT, the state's accounting system, and submit other required documentation within 30 days of award notification.
2. Sign a grant contract agreement indicating their intention to complete the project(s) contained in the application. The agreement also authorizes BWSR to monitor progress of the grant. The grant contract agreement must be signed within 30 days of being sent to the grantee.

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.

Grant contract agreement templates can be reviewed on the [Office of Grants Management Forms and FAQs website](#).

All grants must be completed by December 31, 2027. If a project receives federal funds, the period of the grant agreement may be extended to equal the length of time that the federal funds are available, subject to limitation. Applicants using federal funds are encouraged to contact BWSR soon after the award of funds to ensure the grant agreement can be developed appropriately.

If a project receives federal funds, the period of the grant agreement may be extended to equal the length of time that the federal funds are available subject to limitation. Applicants using federal funds are encouraged to contact BWSR soon after the award of funds to ensure the grant agreement can be developed appropriately.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

Grant payments will be distributed via annual installments to the grantee. The payment for the first calendar year of the grant amount will be paid after work plan approval and execution of the grant agreement provided the grant applicant is in compliance with all BWSR website and eLINK reporting requirements for previously awarded BWSR grants. The subsequent payments will be made annually prior to the beginning of each calendar year funded.

REPORTING AND ADMINISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

- All grantees receiving funds for BWSR programs must follow the *BWSR Grants Administration Manual*, which can be found at <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/grants/manual/>
- All grant recipients are required to report on the outcomes, activities, and accomplishments of Clean Water Fund grants. Outputs will serve as surrogates for outcomes and will be reported as estimated pollutant reductions and progress towards goals based on the best available information.
- All BWSR funded grants are managed through eLINK. All proposals will be submitted electronically through eLINK. Successful applicants will be required to complete a work plan in eLINK. All required reporting will be completed through eLINK. For more information go to <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/elink>.
- BWSR Clean Water Funds will be administered via a standard grant agreement. BWSR will use grant agreements as contracts for assurance of deliverables and compliance with appropriate statutes, rules and established policies.
- In the event there is a violation of the terms of the grant agreement, BWSR will enforce the grant agreement and evaluate appropriate actions, up to and including repayment of grant funds at a rate up to 100% of the grant agreement.
- When practicable, grant recipients shall prominently display on their website the legacy logo. Grant recipients must display on their website either a link to their project from the Legislative Coordinating Commission Legacy

Site (<http://legacy.leg.mn>) or a clean water project summary that includes a description of the grant activities, including expenditure of grant funds and measurable outcomes.

- When practicable, grant recipients must display a sign with the Legacy Logo at the project site or other public location identifying the project was built with assistance from Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. When practicable, grant recipients must display the Legacy Logo on printed and other media funded with money from the Clean Water Fund. The logo and specifications can be found at <http://www.legacy.leg.mn/legacy-logo>.
 - The grantee board is the authority and has the responsibility to approve the expenditure of funds within their own organization. The approval or denial of expenditures of funds must be documented in the Grantee Board's meeting minutes.
 - Grant reporting, fiscal management, and administration requirements are the responsibility of the grant recipient.
 - BWSR recommends all contracts be reviewed by the grant recipient's legal counsel.
-