



BWSR Grants Streamlining

October 2024

Grants Streamlining

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) staff, in partnership with Minnesota Management and Budget; Management Analysis and Development (MMB;MAD), have been working to streamline BWSR's delivery and structure of grant program requirements.

The need for this work arose due to the growth in the amount of funding for various grant programs coupled with increased opportunities to work with new types of grantees beyond our local government clientele and increased oversight responsibilities over state grants from the Minnesota Office of Grants Management (OGM).

Grants Streamlining

Results of this work will:

Eliminate the use of program policies as a vehicle for program requirements.

Where possible, reduce discrepancies in program requirements from one program to the next.

Define requirements for grantees in Board Orders, the Request for Proposals (for competitive grants) and in the Grant Agreement itself.

Better organize and communicate grant program requirements, the procedures in place to meet those requirements, and helpful guidance.

Grants Streamlining

Reformatting of the Grants Administration Manual (GAM) will move requirements to grant agreements and board orders, while procedures and guidance/recommended practices would stay within the GAM. This is to ensure necessary requirements are part of the agreement and to better clarify procedure from guidance within the GAM.

The work of eliminating program policies has already begun with recent and upcoming grant programs (ex. Pollinator Pathways, Soil Health Programming, Clean Water Fund Competitive). Additional work will be needed to incorporate current program policies into board orders and grant agreements for non-competitive programs such as Conservation Contracts and Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF).

Grants Streamlining

We anticipate a full transition away from program policies to be made for all our grant programs as well as the completion of the GAM reformatting by the beginning of fiscal year 2026 (July 1, 2025).

We recognize these are significant changes to our current way of granting operations and want to be clear about what is going where. So next, we'll walk through a visual and some examples, to learn more about the changes we'll be making to streamline our delivery and structure of grant program requirements.

RFP

Eligibility

Unique Program Requirements

Application Requirements

AGREEMENT

Broad Admin Requirements

GAM

Broad Program Requirements

Broad Admin Requirements

Procedures

Guidance/Best Practices

BOARD ORDER

Eligibility

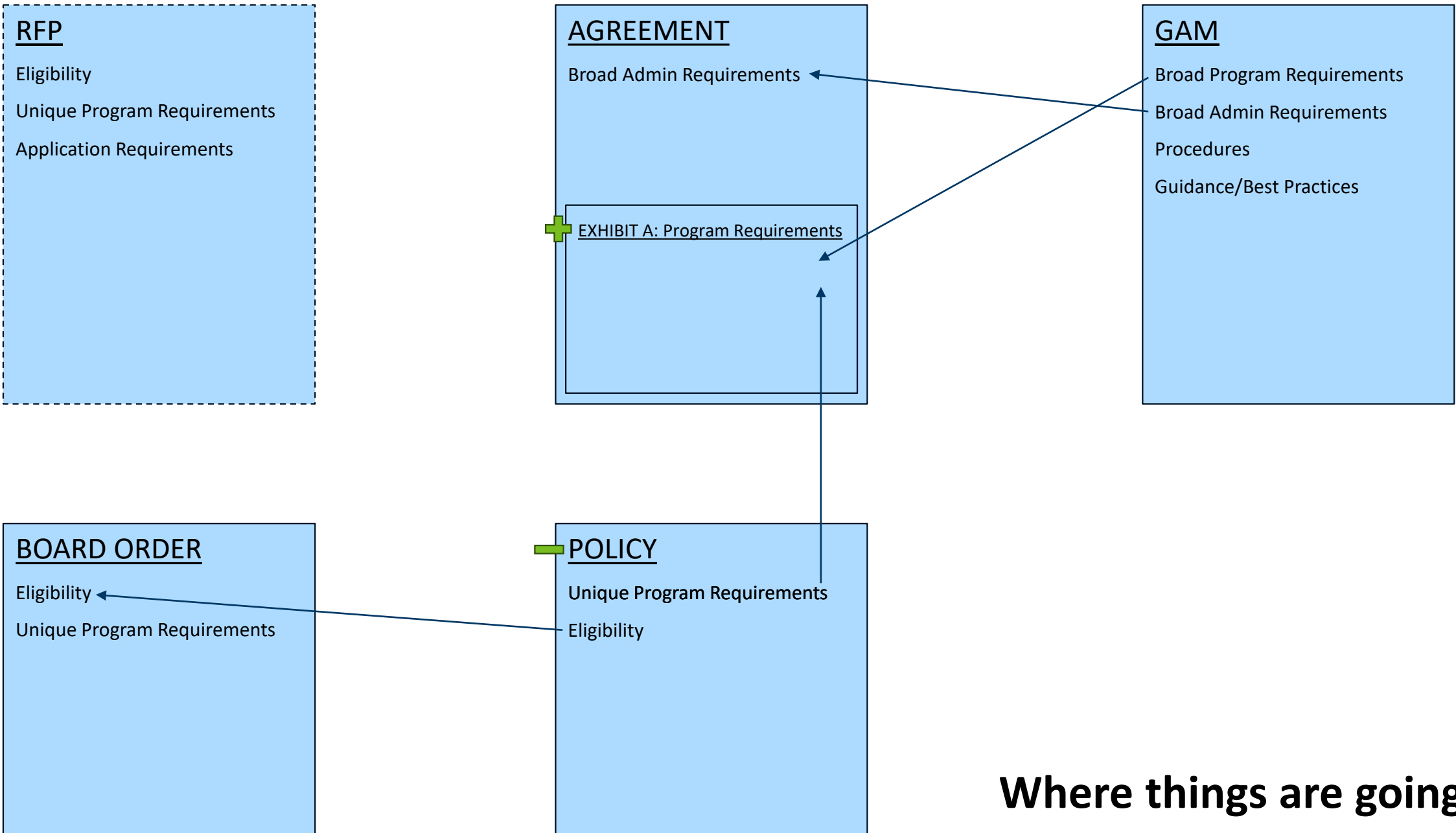
Unique Program Requirements

POLICY

Unique Program Requirements

Eligibility

Current Structure



RFP

Eligibility

Unique Program Requirements

Application Requirements

AGREEMENT

Broad Admin Requirements

EXHIBIT A: Program Requirements

Unique Program Requirements

Broad Program Requirements

GAM

Procedures

Guidance/Best Practices

BOARD ORDER

Eligibility

Unique Program Requirements

Re-packaged

Sample Documents

- Pollinator Pathways Exhibit A; found in Grant Agreement and Grant Profile page
- GAM Chapter; Time and Effort Documentation
 - Current format
 - Reformatted draft

Grant Program Requirements: Pollinator Pathways Grant Program

Match

A non-state match equal to at least 10% of the amount of the grant received is required. Match can be provided by landowners, land occupiers, private organizations, local governments, or other non-state sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind for services or materials contributed to the accomplishment of grant objectives. Funds used for match for this program cannot be used as match for any other state grant program.

Grant Work Plan

A work plan shall be developed in eLINK and must be approved before execution of the grant agreement. The work plan shall reflect each eligible activity that will be implemented, a description of the anticipated activity outcomes or accomplishments, and grant funding amounts to accomplish each of the activities.

Eligible Activities and Expenses

The primary purpose of activities funded through this program is to promote native plantings that establish key corridors for at-risk* pollinators and establishing habitat for benefitting pollinators at scales from local neighborhoods to across watersheds. This will be achieved through efforts to establish habitat and educating Minnesotans about pollinators within pollinator corridors/pathways and building overall interest in ecological landscaping. This program is intended to fund pollinator plantings and to inspire and guide DIY projects.

** A plant or animal is considered "at-risk" when; It is proposed for listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, It is a candidate species for listing; or It has been petitioned by a third party for listing; or It's populations are rare, declining, or may be vulnerable to decline Find a list of [At-Risk Pollinator Species](#) on the Lawns to Legumes Partners webpage.*

Eligible activities can consist of:

- **Project development and public outreach** activities which will directly support or supplement the goals and outcomes of the work plan such as civic engagement: public outreach; initial contacts, action, and activities with landowners/residents and/or partners; preliminary information gathering, conservation marketing or other activities.
- **Establishment of pollinator habitat** projects such as planting beneficial trees and shrubs, pollinator lawns, pollinator meadows, native pocket planting, container planting on impervious surfaces (pavement, rooftops, apartment decks etc.) that are no greater than 5 ac. in size.
 - Eligible project expense include:
 1. **MN Native Plants and Seeds** includes insecticide/neonicotinoid free flowers/forbs, bare root plants, grasses and sedges, trees and shrubs, and seeds.
 2. **Project expenses** including biodegradable weed suppression mulch (non-dyed preferred), compost, fencing or other herbivores portion materials, signage, equipment rental fees, and delivery fees), contractor installation and/or maintenance of project.
- **Program and project support:** education, outreach, marketing, staff time.
- **Education:** development and implementation of conservation education activities and programs such as workshops, clinics, publications, websites, presentations, fairs, etc.
- **Supplies/Equipment:** acquisition of equipment (hand sod kicker, hand shovels, hand rakes and trowels, watering tree gator) or supplies.
- **Administration/Coordination:** staff time for grant administration
- **Technical and engineering assistance** necessary to implement grant activities associated with technical site assessment, surveys, preliminary analysis and design, final design construction supervision, installation, inspection, and completion of projects.

Eligible expenses are those expenses solely incurred through project activities that are directly related to and necessary for producing the project outcomes described in the work plan. Grantee is required to account for the staff time charged to BWSR grants in order to track the expenditure of grant funds and match to ensure the use of the funds is consistent with applicable State and BWSR requirements. Costs that are unallowable to be charged to BWSR grants include but are not limited to:

- Bad debts, late payment fees, and investment management fees
- Donations, fundraising, sponsorships, and acknowledgements
- Entertainment, gifts, prizes, and decorations
- Alcohol
- Interest on loans not authorized under state statute
- Loans of BWSR grant funds
- Lobbying, lobbyists, and political contributions
- Merit awards and bonuses

Requirements for Implementing Conservation Projects

1. **Effective Life.** The effective lifespan of projects must be defined by current and acceptable design standards or criteria for no less than 5 years. The beginning date for a practice's effective life is the same date final payment is approved and the project is considered complete.
2. **Project Assurances.** The grantee must provide assurances that installed conservation practices and projects meet the purposes of the grant program, will remain in place for the lifespan expected based on the standard or professionally accepted practice, and will provide quality benefits for which they were designed. Such assurances may include easements, deed recordings, enforceable contracts, performance bonds, letters of credit, and termination or performance penalties. BWSR may allow replacement of a practice or project that does not comply with expected lifespan requirements with a practice or project that provides equivalent benefits.
3. **Operation, Maintenance, and Inspections.** All practice designs must include identification of operation and maintenance activities specific to the installed practices. An [operation and maintenance](#) plan is critical to ongoing performance of installed practices as well as to planning and scheduling those activities and must be prepared by designated technical staff for the life of the practice. An inspection schedule, procedure, and assured access to the practice site shall be included in the project file as a component of maintaining the effectiveness of the practice.
4. **Permitting.** The grantee is responsible for obtaining and complying with all permits necessary to execute the project. If applicable, grantee will be required to provide sufficient documentation prior to work plan approval that the project expects to receive or has received all necessary federal, state, and local permits and meets all water quality rules, including those that apply to the utilization of an existing water body as a water quality treatment device.

Time and Effort Documentation

Effective Date: 07/01/2023

Responsibility

Grant recipients are required to account for the staff time charged to BWSR grants in order to track the expenditure of grant funds and match to ensure the use of the funds is consistent with applicable State and BWSR requirements. Accounting for staff time is important for budgeting, planning, and reporting.

Recipients of BWSR grants may use one of two options for tracking staff time charged to grants:

1. Direct time tracking.
2. Personnel activity reports (PARs) or the equivalent that constitute after-the-fact determinations of grant activities. Activity reports must be prepared and signed at least semiannually by the employee.

BWSR reserves the right to request additional documentation that accounts for all of the employee's time during the period that staff time is actually charged to the grant. Staff time not charged to the grant does not need to be itemized by activity and can be summarized in an all-inclusive "Other" category of internal accounting systems.

BWSR will not accept position descriptions to account for staff time charged to BWSR grants. All time charged to grants must be actual and not budgeted.

Required Elements

Staff time charged to BWSR grants must be tracked or accounted for as it is reported in eLINK, at two levels:

- **Grant.** When tracking staff time, grants must be identified by grant title in order to distinguish the grant from others administered by the organization (for example, FY15 NRBG - Local Water Management, FY16 SWCD Local Capacity Services, or FY15 Clean Water Fund Targeted Watershed followed by the project or program title). BWSR recommends a naming configuration consistent with the Grant Title in eLINK.
- **Eligible eLINK Activity Category,** including the following:
 - Administration/Coordination
 - Education/Information
 - Inventory/Mapping
 - Monitoring/Data Collection
 - Planning and Assessment
 - Project Development

Additional Requirements of Time and Effort Documentation

Charges for staff time must be based on records that accurately reflect the work performed. These records must:

- Be supported by a system of internal control that provides reasonable assurance charges are accurate, allowable, and properly allocated.
- Be incorporated into the official records of the grantee:
- Be maintained for all employees whose time is being charged to the grant.

Staff time contributed as match must be documented, quantifiable, and able to be distinguished from staff time charged or used as match elsewhere. Best practice is to document staff time used as match by grant title and activity. BWSR monitors the accuracy and allowability of staff time contributed as match.

Examples of Time and Effort Documentation

BWSR provides two direct time tracking system templates and two personnel activity reports (PAR) templates to assist grantees in documenting the time and effort they charge and report to BWSR grants. The templates are provided as examples and grantees are not required to use the templates. Grantees may develop their own time tracking systems or PARs in accord with BWSR policy and guidance.

Example 1: Direct Time Tracking

Direct time tracking is recording hours spent on a BWSR grant on a daily basis, as shown in figures 1 and 2 below.

This spreadsheet template shown in figure 1 below (or [download .xlsx file from BWSR's website](#)) records the hours per day an employee (identified at the top of the sheet) dedicates to each of several BWSR grants during a bi-monthly pay period. Individual BWSR grants are identified and time is tracked to the Activity Category within those grants. Grants and activities are listed in rows, and hours tracked in columns. The template links each employee's sheet to a summary sheet within the workbook that automatically calculates the amounts charged to grants for all employees.

The bi-weekly spreadsheet template shown in figure 2 below (or [download .zip file from BWSR's website](#)) arranges the grants and activities where daily hours are assigned to in columns (across the top of the spreadsheet) rather than in rows. This template differs from the previous template in tracking the time of individual employees in separate workbooks rather than in separate tabs in the same workbook. Hours are summarized per employee, and multiplied against the billing rates of those employees, to calculate amounts charged to grants.

A database can also be used to track time. The advantage of a database is it can be configured to track time at several levels beyond grant and activity. Depending on the program or project, a database can also be configured to automatically assign an employee's activities to the grant funding them.

Time and effort documentation

Effective date: 07/01/2025

I. Procedure

Accounting for staff time is important for budgeting, planning, and reporting. Recipients of BWSR grants may use one of two options for tracking staff time charged to grants:

1. Direct time tracking
2. Personnel activity reports (PARs), or the equivalent that constitutes after-the-fact determination of grant activities. Activity reports must be prepared and signed at least semiannually by the employee.

BWSR reserves the right to request additional documentation that accounts for all of the employee's time during the period that staff time is actually charged to the grant. Staff time not charged to the grant does not need to be itemized by activity and can be summarized in an all-inclusive "other" category of internal accounting systems.

BWSR will not accept position descriptions to account for staff time charged to BWSR grants.

Required time tracking procedures

Staff time charged to BWSR grants must be tracked or accounted for as it is reported in eLINK, at two levels:

1. Grant. When tracking staff time, grants must be identified by grant title in order to distinguish the grant from others administered by the organization (for example, 2025-Local Water Management-NRBG, 2025-Conservation Delivery, or 2025 Watershed Based Implementation followed by the project or program title). BWSR recommends a naming configuration consistent with the grant title in eLINK.
2. Eligible eLINK activity category, including the following:
 - a. Administration/coordination
 - b. Education/information
 - c. Inventory/mapping
 - d. Monitoring/data collection
 - e. Planning and assessment
 - f. Project development
 - g. Regulations/ordinances/enforcement
 - h. Technical/engineering assistance

Charges for staff time must be based on records that accurately reflect the work performed. These records must:

1. Be supported by a system of internal control that provides reasonable assurance charges are accurate, allowable, and properly allocated.
2. Be incorporated into the official records of the grantee:

Staff time contributed as match must be documented, quantifiable, and able to be distinguished from staff time charged or used as match elsewhere. BWSR monitors the accuracy and allowability of staff time contributed as match.

II. Guidance for time and effort documentation

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Summary: Eliminate the use of program policies as a vehicle for program requirements.

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