

FY22/23 Clean Water Fund Soil Health Grants

Request for Proposals

March 28, 2022

Request for Proposals (RFP) General Information

In 2021, the Minnesota Legislature, in the first Special Session, passed Chapter 1, article 2, Sec. 6(p) (Clean Water Fund Appropriations) which provided funding for grants to farmers [via local government units] who own or rent land to enhance the adoption of cover crops and other soil health practices in areas where there are direct benefits to public water supplies.

Priority for this program will be given to new adoption and understanding of soil health practices through the following efforts:

- Building local knowledge;
- Facilitating partnerships;
- Demonstrating clean water benefits;
- Identifying methods to increase long term adoption of soil health practices; and
- Scope and scale of implementation efforts in locally prioritized areas that show a direct benefit to public water supplies.

Up to \$3,500,000 is available.

Applicant Eligibility

As defined in the FY 2022 Clean Water Fund Competitive Grant Policy, eligible applicants include:

- Local government units (counties, watershed districts, watershed management organizations, and soil and water conservation districts) or local government joint power boards working under a current State approved and locally adopted local water management plan or soil and water conservation district (SWCD) comprehensive plan.
- Municipalities that 1) have a water plan that has been approved by a watershed district or a watershed management organization as provided under Minn. Stat. 103B.235; or 2) adopted an approved comprehensive watershed management plan developed under Minn. Stat. 103B.801
- Counties in the seven-county metropolitan area are eligible if they have adopted a county groundwater plan or county comprehensive plan that has been approved by the Metropolitan Council under Minn. Stat. Chapter 473.
- Entities that have not adopted a plan as described above, and therefore not eligible to apply, are encouraged to work with an eligible entity if interested in receiving grant funds.

- LGUs are eligible to receive grant funds if they are working under a current water management plan that has been **state approved and locally adopted** when the BWSR Board authorizes the grant awards.

Eligible Core Soil Health Practices

The following core soil health practices are eligible statewide:

- Cover Crops
- Strip-till / No-till
- Perennial Crops
- Stand Diversification
- Perennial Strips
- Agroforestry
- Rotational Grazing

Eligible practices are **NOT** limited to those above. In addition, local priority or supporting soil health practices may be eligible but applicants need to provide justification and obtain Board Conservationist and program manager concurrence prior to application submittal.

For Example: Nutrient Management (NRCS Standard 590) practice(s) would be eligible in the following scenario. The Stormy SWCD is struggling with nitrate rate increases in several public water supplies. They are proposing Nutrient Management practices emphasizing improvement of organic matter as a BMP, and since the area has a high incidence of confined animal facilities they specifically want to implement Manure Management plans in addition to cover crops for operators who apply manure or other nitrogen fertilizer within the Stormy public water supply.

Application Requirements

1. Applications must be submitted electronically in eLINK and must be received no later than 4:30 p.m. on May 9, 2022. Late responses will not be considered. The burden of proving timely receipt is on the respondent.
2. Applications submitted must request state funds that equal or exceed \$30,000. Applications submitted that do not meet this minimum dollar amount will not be accepted.
3. Applications will be submitted in eLINK. Budgets must include the grant funds requested specifically for each activity that is applicable to the proposal. Activity categories may include:
 - a. Agricultural Practice
 - b. Forestry Practices
 - c. Non-Structural Land Management
 - d. Technical and Engineering Assistance
 - e. Administration and Coordination
 - f. Supplies and Equipment
 - g. Project Development

4. Application may include only one image to be submitted within their eLINK application. **Only .jpg, .tiff, or .png file types are allowed.** All other file types of images are not accessible to reviewers.
5. Proposals should clearly articulate which public water supply(ies) is being prioritized 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 comprehensive water 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.
6. As appropriate, outputs should include scientifically credible estimates of pollutant reductions expected as a result of the project, as well as other measures such as acres of wetlands/forest, acres of perennials established, or acres of specific agricultural conservation practices implemented including acres treated by the installation of the practice. ***Applications with unsupported pollution reduction estimates will not be considered.***
7. Applicants should evaluate 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.
8. Applicants who were previously awarded Clean Water Funds and have expended less than 50% of previous Clean Water Fund award(s) at the time of this proposal may need to demonstrate organizational capacity to finalize current projects and complete new project concurrently.
9. A ten percent (10%) non-state match will be required of grant recipients.
10. 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.
11. This proposal is subject to the FY 2022 Clean Water Fund Competitive Grant Policy unless otherwise noted in this RFP.

Proposal Questions

1. A) What resource concerns(s) will this proposal specifically restore or protect? Include how your program will prioritize and benefit public water supplies.
B) Reference the water management plan(s) or other studies and assessments. Provide weblinks to all referenced plans.
2. A) What is/are the primary pollutant(s) this application specifically addresses?
B) Identify your proposed practices and explain why they are the most efficient and effective means to address the identified pollutant(s).

3. A) Has either a pollutant reduction or protection goal been set (via TMDL or other study) in relation to the pollutant(s) or the water resource that is the subject of this application? If yes, please state that goal (as both an annual pollution reduction AND overall percentage reduction, not as an in-stream or in-lake concentration number). If no pollutant reduction goal has been set, describe the water quality trends or risks associated with the water resource or other management goals that have been established. For protection projects, indicate measurable outputs such as acres of protected land, number of potential contaminant sources removed or managed, etc.
 B) Describe the measurable progress achieved through this application? Where applicable, identify the annual reduction in pollutant(s) that will be achieved or avoided for the water resource if this project is completed.
4. Describe how your proposal will enhance new adoption of soil health practices.
5. Describe how you intend to encourage or address long term adoption of soil health practices, including how long term adoption may be encouraged after contracts expire and how it will be tracked;
6. Describe how your proposal will increase local knowledge of soil health through:
 - a) Incorporation and development of partnerships within your program; (For example, partnerships with local co-ops, agronomists, farmer led groups to expand the reach of the programing and to bring additional expertise into the process)
 - b) Education and outreach efforts.
7. Describe the local cost share policy needed to implement your proposal, such as:
 - a) Definition of “new adoption”
 - b) Practices/BMPs
 - c) Payment rate(s)
 - d) Contract length
 - e) Units (Acres, linear feet, etc)
 - f) BMP lifespan
 - g) Other local policies or requirements

Evaluation Criteria

All proposals submitted will be reviewed and selected by Agency staff according to the evaluation criteria below. The maximum score per nomination is 100 points.

Evaluation Criteria	Maximum Points Possible
<u>Prioritization and connection to public water supply:</u> Has the applicant clearly and concisely identified the specific resource and resource concern(s)? Are these items connected via local plan reference(s).	25
<u>Targeting:</u> Are the proposed activities ones which would efficiently and effectively address Primary pollutant(s) or resource concerns.	25

<u>Measurable Outcomes and Project Impact:</u> Goals/Trends and progress made.	15
<u>New Adoption:</u> How do the applicants define this and what efforts are made to emphasize new adopters?	10
<u>Long Term Adoption:</u> What steps is the applicant taking to support successful adoption and encourage long term adoption of practices by the implementers?	10
<u>Education and Outreach:</u> What specific efforts are proposed to enhance local understanding and knowledge around the practices proposed? What efforts are being made to enhance or expand non-traditional partnerships for these purposes?	10
<u>Local Cost Share Policy:</u> Does the applicant have, or have they described the need for a local cost share policy for implementation of the practices which details the appropriate policies and procedures to implement these practices in an efficient and effective manner.	5
Total Points Available	100

Prior to final selection, the Board may engage applicants to resolve questions or to discuss modifications to the project or funding request.

BWSR also reserves the right to select nominations that provide geographic diversity.

Incomplete Proposals

Proposals that do not comply with all requirements, including incomplete or missing proposal components, will not be considered for funding.

GRANT TERMS

Grant Execution

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. Willful or negligent disregard of relevant statutes, rules and policies may lead to imposition of financial penalties on the grant recipient. Successful respondents will be required to complete a detailed budget and work plan in eLINK prior to execution of the grant agreement.

Project Period

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. Grants must be completed by December 31, 2025.

Payment Schedule

Grant payments will be distributed in three installments: the first payment of 50% of the grant amount will be paid after work plan approval and execution of the grant agreement, provided the grant respondents are in compliance with all BWSR website and eLINK reporting requirements for previously awarded BWSR grants. The second payment of 40% of the grant amount will be paid once the grantee has provided BWSR with notification and BWSR has reconciled expenditures of the initial payment. The last 10% will be paid after all final reporting requirements are met, the grantee has provided BWSR with a final financial report, and BWSR has reconciled these expenditures.

Clean Water Fund Project Reporting Requirements

1. All grantees are required to report on the outcomes, activities, and accomplishments of Clean Water Fund grants. All BWSR funded projects will be required to develop a work plan, including detail relating to the outcome(s) of the proposed project. All activities will be reported via the eLINK reporting system. Grant funds may be used for local grant management and reporting that are directly related to and necessary for implementing this activity. For more information go to www.bwsr.state.mn.us/outreach/eLINK/index.html.
2. When practicable, grantees 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 (www.bwsr.state.mn.us/cleanwaterfund/stories/)
3. When practicable, grantees must display the legacy logo on printed and other materials funded with money from the Clean Water Fund. The logo and specifications can be found at <http://www.legacy.leg.mn/legacy-logo>

Grants and Public Information

Under Minnesota Statute 13.599, responses to an RFP are nonpublic until the proposal 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 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.

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 with any of the following scenarios:

1. A grantee is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice due to competing duties or loyalties.
2. A grantee's objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties.

3. 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.

Timeline

- March 28, 2022 – Proposal period begins
- May 9, 2022 – Proposal deadline at 4:30 PM
- May/June 2022 - Review of requests
- August 25, 2022 - BWSR approval
- November 1, 2022 - Work plan submittal deadline
- November 29, 2022 - Grant execution deadline

*Grant agreements will be developed and executed based on available funding.

Questions

Question concerning submittal of an application may be directed to Tom Gile, Tom.Gile@state.mn.us or 507-696-1974.