

VOLUNTEER MONITORING LAB ANALYSIS SUPPORT PROGRAM 2026 CALL FOR APPLICATIONS



February 2026

Prepared by:

Monitoring and Assessment Section
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
1520 E. Sixth Avenue
P.O. Box 2000901
Helena, MT 59620-0901

Table of Contents

1.0 Program Summary	3
2.0 Funding Availability	3
3.0 Applicant Eligibility	3
4.0 Project Requirements	4
5.0 Application Requirements	4
5.1 Sampling and Analysis Plan Requirements	4
5.2 Laboratory and Shipping Budget Requirements	5
6.0 Awarded Applicant Requirements	6
6.1 Laboratory Coordination and Chain-of-Custody Requirements	6
6.2 Monitoring Requirements	6
6.3 Deliverable Requirements	6
7.0 Additional Resources	7
Appendix A – Call for Application Schedule	7

1.0 PROGRAM SUMMARY

DEQ's Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Program supports entities that voluntarily participate in water quality monitoring projects in Montana. This competitive funding opportunity helps offset costs of water quality samples analyzed by an accredited analytical laboratory. For more information about DEQ's Volunteer Monitoring Program, visit <https://deq.mt.gov/water/Programs/Monitoring>.

Applicants will submit an application form, draft Sampling and Analysis Plan, and a budget via email or Montana File Transfer Service to the Program Manager (Abbie Ebert; abbie.ebert@mt.gov). DEQ's Volunteer Monitoring Program Manager confirms applicant and project eligibility. A scoring panel of technical experts' will review application materials, provide written feedback on draft Sampling and Analysis Plans, and score overall application package. Applicants will be notified by the Program Manager on scoring panel's decisions and feedback.

Awarded applicants must complete the following steps prior to the first sampling event:

1. Incorporate the scoring panel's feedback on Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP) and budget; then resubmit their final Sampling and Analysis Plan to the DEQ Volunteer Monitoring Lab Analysis Support Program Manager for signatures and approval,
2. Receive an approved Sampling and Analysis Plan from DEQ, and
3. Sign a Memorandum of Agreement with DEQ.

During the monitoring season, awardees coordinate with a DEQ contracted laboratory on bottle orders, sample delivery, chain-of-custody forms, and receiving electronic data deliverables (EDDs) and quality assurance report. DEQ will receive, review, and pay for invoices from the laboratory. Awardees are required to provide deliverables outlined in **Section 6.3**.

2.0 FUNDING AVAILABILITY

DEQ requests applications for up to \$7,000 from volunteer monitoring programs seeking financial assistance with laboratory analysis and shipping costs for water quality monitoring projects.

Note: This program provides laboratory sample analysis and shipping costs only and does not include funding for Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP) development, travel, monitoring time, purchasing and maintaining field equipment, or other operational costs. Volunteer programs may contact DEQ's Volunteer Monitoring Lab Analysis Program Manager to request lending of water quality monitoring equipment.

3.0 APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

All applicants must submit final applications according to the schedule (**Appendix A**) and instructions (**Section 5.0**).

The following entities may be eligible to receive funding:

- Nonprofit Organizations with a Tax-Exempt Declaration of 501(c)(3)
- Governmental Organizations
- Educational Institutions

Applicants must also meet the following minimum qualifications:

- Tax Identification Number
- All application materials received by 5:00 PM on the application deadline (see **Appendix A**).

4.0 PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

This Volunteer Monitoring Laboratory Analysis Support Program Application Call supports projects that are:

- Located in Montana within the State’s jurisdictional areas.
- Monitoring pertains to water quality.
- Monitoring is not for profit.
- Monitoring is voluntary (i.e., is not driven by a regulatory or statutory requirement such as Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination system permit monitoring, superfund, public water supplies, Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), and water quality enforcement cases, other permit/application requirements, etc.).
- Project supports a collaborative approach. The project likely will lead toward water quality improvements or protection.
- Project preferably incorporates one or more people monitoring in a volunteer capacity (unpaid).
- Project has broader, community benefit (i.e., project objectives produce information about Montana’s shared water resources and do not solely or primarily pertain to private water use such as individual wells or ditches).
- Requests for funding are exclusively for costs of laboratory analysis and shipping.

5.0 APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Eligible volunteer monitoring programs must submit to the Program Manager (Abbie Ebert; abbie.ebert@mt.gov) the following application materials:

1. An application form,
2. A draft Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP) as Microsoft Word document,
3. A lab analysis budget that matches the request for funds on the application and aligns with the number and type of samples described in the draft SAP and the parameter price list.

5.1 Sampling and Analysis Plan Requirements

Applicants are required to develop a Sampling and Analysis Plan to guide monitoring efforts. SAPs must include:

- After the title page, returning applicants must add a revision history table to document SAP updates over the time of the project.
- Introduction including a project overview and description of project area
- Outline of project team members and team members responsibilities
- Clearly articulated objectives that are measurable and achievable
- List of parameters that are suitable for achieving the objectives; parameter list must include preferred analytical method, required reporting limits, holding time, container, and preservative.

- Table with a list of monitoring sites, latitude and longitude in decimal degrees, and list of parameters collected at each site.
- Monitoring schedule with timing and number of sampling events
- Concise list of monitoring order of operations
- Data collection standard operating procedures (SOPs)
- Description of type and number of quality control samples (e.g., field duplicates, field blanks)
- Description on how volunteers will be trained to complete monitoring
- Information on the amount and types of quality assurance and quality control samples collected and data quality indicators (see **SAP Template** for examples of data quality indicators)
- Information on data management including record keeping and data reporting
- Description of how data will be analyzed to achieve objectives
- Field form template

Note: If applicants need to request access on private land to complete monitoring, it is the group's responsibility to gain access permission. DEQ does not negotiate access for volunteer monitoring groups. DEQ may cease funding for a project if a group does not comply with trespassing laws.

Refer to the **Sampling and Analysis Plan template** and supplemental guidance documents provided in **Section 7.0**.

DEQ provides written feedback on applicants' draft Sampling and Analysis Plans. Applicants awarded funding are required to modify draft Sampling and Analysis Plan's to incorporate feedback and must obtain Sampling and Analysis Plan approval from DEQ prior to the first sampling event involving lab analysis. Awardees are required to follow the final approved Sampling and Analysis Plan for any samples submitted to the lab under this funding source.

5.2 Laboratory and Shipping Budget Requirements

The maximum amount of funding requested per applicant is \$7,000 and funds may only be used for approved costs (analysis and shipping, approved laboratory). DEQ does not fund awardees directly but rather pays the laboratory for approved analytical and shipping services.

Budgets must reflect the total number of samples for each parameter for which funds are being requested (as described in the Sampling and Analysis Plan, including quality control samples such as field duplicates and field blanks) and the approved parameter and price list (**Lab Analysis Monitoring Suite and Pricing**). Refer to the **Budget Table Template**. DEQ recommends that applicants include their analytical budget as an appendix in their Sampling and Analysis Plan. Microsoft Word or Excel (or similar program) is the preferred format for budget table submittal.

Note: Awardees are responsible for analytical costs incurred beyond those approved by DEQ and must work directly with the analytical lab in advance of submitting additional samples to confirm the prices that will be charged for these additional samples and the account to be used for invoicing for these samples.

6.0 AWARDED APPLICANT REQUIREMENTS

Awarded applicants are required to complete the following steps prior to a monitoring projects first sampling event.

1. Incorporate scoring panels feedback on Sampling and Analysis and budget to incorporate resubmit their final Sampling and Analysis Plan to the Program Manager for programmatic and QA review and approval.
2. Receive an approved Sampling and Analysis Plan from DEQ.
3. Sign Memorandum of Agreement with DEQ.

6.1 Laboratory Coordination and Chain-of-Custody Requirements

DEQ's service providers for laboratory analyses shall be used. Call for Applications and all billing for approved analyses will be coordinated by DEQ with the lab. Upon Sampling and Analysis Plan approval, awardees must contact DEQ's laboratory service provider(s) with bottle order requests and arrange to have the lab ship coolers and sample supplies (e.g., containers and preservatives) to the group. Awardees ship or hand-deliver samples to DEQ's service provider laboratory and must use the lab's Chain-of-Custody Form. Analytical results will be sent directly from the lab to the awardee.

Note: Exceptions to using DEQ's service laboratory may be made on a case-by-case basis pending DEQ review of laboratory credentials, prices, and state procurement guidelines. If an applicant requests use of an alternate lab, it is incumbent on the applicant to provide the DEQ Volunteer Monitoring Lab Analysis Support Program Manager with adequate information to approve the alternate lab, including accreditation credentials, parameter list with analytical method, required reporting limits, prices, and confirmation that the lab can prepare electronic data deliverables in accordance with DEQ's data management requirements.

6.2 Monitoring Requirements

Sampling activities must follow quality assurance and quality control activities described in the approved Sampling and Analysis Plan, including training, sample collection procedures, laboratory analyses, field duplicates and field blanks).

6.3 Deliverable Requirements

All data that is produced using these funds must be uploaded by the awardee to DEQ's MT-eWQX water quality database by the deadline outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement and awardees must submit confirmation of data upload to DEQ's Program Manager. Instructions for data submittal: <https://deq.mt.gov/water/Programs/sw>.

Awardees are required to submit a final report to DEQ's Program Manager by the deadline outlined in the contract. The final report must include:

- A brief summary of completed field activities, including a summary of site visits
- A list of final monitoring sites
- A comparison of planned sampling (as described in the Sampling and Analysis Plan) to actual completed sampling, and an explanation of differences (if any)
- A summary of data and results
- A summary of how the data was analyzed

- A description of how the data was used to achieve the objectives described in the Sampling and Analysis Plan

7.0 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources are available on DEQ's Volunteer Monitoring page:

<https://deq.mt.gov/water/Programs/Monitoring>

- Call for Applications
- Sampling and Analysis Plan Template
- Project ID and Station ID Overview Guidance Document
- Monitoring Methods Selection Guide
- Volunteer Monitoring Planning Catalogue

APPENDIX A – CALL FOR APPLICATION SCHEDULE

Date	Event
Wednesday, 2/11/2026	Call for Applications
Friday, 3/6/2026 at 5:00 pm	Application Materials Due*
Friday, 4/3/2026	DEQ notifies applicants of tentative funding award decisions (pending approval of final Sampling and Analysis Plan) and sends comments on application materials.
Prior to First Sampling Event	Final Sampling and Analysis Plan Approved by DEQ
	MOA signed by DEQ and Awardee
No later than February 28, 2027	Final report and confirmation of data submission to MT-eWQX database are due*

* submit electronically to DEQ VM Lab Analysis Support Program Manager