

Q&A – FY2024 ROUND 2

NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION REDUCTION

This document will be periodically updated between now and April 5th as DEQ responds to questions regarding the FY2024 Nonpoint Source Pollution Reduction Call for Applications. As DEQ staff respond to questions from the public, we frequently provide answers that could apply to a broad spectrum of projects. This Q&A document is intended to provide make these answers more accessible to other applicants who may have similar questions. Please reach out to Meagan Gilmore at 406-755-8981 or meagan.gilmore@mt.gov if you have additional questions.

Q: This is new timing for NPSW funding. Will that influence when funds are available?

A: Refer to the Call document for the timeline, but funds are anticipated to be available by this Fall (2024).

Q: I am planning on supplying Letters of Support for my project, but the WRP author is a consulting firm or another related entity. Should I still have them supply a letter?

A: If applicable, procure Letters of Support from the WRP author, but more important is demonstrating support from project partners, stakeholders, or landowners related to the project.

Q: What if the stream I want to work on has not been assessed by DEQ or is not included in my watershed's Watershed Restoration Plan?

A: Reference other available literature documenting water quality impairment, or reference close downstream impairments that apply to your project. You can also reference the WRP to see if it generally covers approaches to address a pollution type if the stream is not included in the WRP.

Q: The Call states that funding for this opportunity comes from the DNRC House Bill 6(1) and EPA 319 funds. Am I supposed to apply directly to one or the other?

A: You do not apply for different sources of funding. DEQ will determine the ratio of state and federal funds for each awarded contract based on applications, proposed budgets and other funding requirements.

Q: If awarded, are we required to follow a particular competitive process for selecting subcontractors? Is there a threshold that would initiate the need for a competitive process? Do we need to follow "state procurement laws"?

A: Yes. Our contract language states that "Any subcontracting of services under this Contract must be done in a competitive manner and ensure that subcontractor rates are justified and documented". We do not require a specific process, other than that it must be in a competitive manner, and you must ensure that subcontractor rates are justified and documented. For the full contract language you can check here:

[Attachment C - Example Contract and Scope of Work Template \(mt.gov\)](#)

Q: If this round of nonpoint source funding is lumping RRG funds into it, could we use the nonpoint source funds as non-federal match toward another federal grant? If, so how much? What's the ratio of 319 funds vs RRG in this call?

A: The ratio of EPA 319 funds and DRNC RRG funds under this funding opportunity is approximately half and half. Depending on the applications and proposed budgets, DEQ will work the budget scenarios to ensure as many high-quality projects are funded as possible, and all match requirements are met. Specific funding awards will not be known until after application review. Please reach out to us with more specific questions or scenarios.

Q: Does match have to be secured prior to applying for Nonpoint Source Project funding?

A: No. This is not a requirement. However, applicants should at least have some idea of where they may be able to obtain matching funds.

Q: Will the amount of matching funds offered affect the score an application receives? (Min required is 10%, recommended is 40%)

A: The Scoring Sheet contains a single question, worth 5 points of 100 that reads: "Does the project include appropriate levels of landowner and partner involvement, including, where reasonable, contributions of time, money and other resources?". This question may be used to add or subtract points based on the amount of match being offered.

Q: Does a grazing management plan have to be NRCS approved if developed under a Nonpoint Source Pollution Reduction contract?

A: No, it does not. However, we would require the grazing management plan still be specific to the project area and new changes made under the contract. DEQ could still fund a larger all-encompassing grazing management plan that would be approved by NRCS if the landowner wishes.

Q: Do landowner agreements have to be in place prior to applying for Nonpoint Source Project funding?

A: No. Landowner agreements are frequently listed as a task to be done once a 319 contract is signed.

Q: To whom should letters of support be addressed?

A: We are flexible, as long as it's clear that the letters pertain to the project for which you are seeking funding. "DEQ", "DEQ 319 Grant Review Panel", and "Meagan Gilmore" are probably the most common.

Q: Should I ask the folks providing letters of support to send them directly to DEQ, or should I ask them to send them to me so I can submit them with the rest of the application?

A: DEQ will accept them either way. However, it is good practice to have them sent to you to upload, just so you can make sure they don't get lost in the mail. Letters of support received by DEQ after 5pm on October 6th will not be considered.

Q: My watershed group would like to do some riparian revegetation work on a couple of streams within our watershed. We have spoken with a few landowners, but probably won't have any specific project sites secured prior to when applications are due. Can we go ahead and apply for funding now, and identify specific project sites later?

A: This may be allowable within the scope of the FY2024 Call for Applications, but the project would not likely compete well. It would probably be better to wait to apply until sites have been clearly identified and landowner support can be verified. The one possible exception to this recommendation would be if you were to apply for funding to run a mini-grant program. However, mini-grant programs must have a multi-county focus.

Q: Can Nonpoint Source Project funds be used to fund projects on Tribal lands?

A: Yes, provided that the projects will reduce nonpoint source pollution in a stream, lake or wetland that flows off Tribal lands and then contributes to an impairment identified on Montana's 2020 List of Impaired Waters?

Q: Does DEQ consider an EPA-approved Tribal nonpoint source plan as being equivalent to a DEQ-accepted Watershed Restoration Plan for the purposes of determining Nonpoint Source Project funding eligibility?

A: Yes.

Q: My organization recently had to cancel an existing Nonpoint Source Project contract because the landowner backed out. Will this negatively affect our chances of getting future funding?

A: Generally speaking, No. There are some things that are beyond the control of the sponsoring organization. Landowners can change their minds, a flood could come through and wipe out the project site, and anticipated sources of match can fall through. Provided that you didn't deliberately insult the landowner, bust open a dam to cause the flood, or tried to rely on lottery tickets to come up with match, your opportunities for future funding will not be impacted.

Q: Can poor performance on previously held state funding agreements affect my organization's chances of acquiring Nonpoint Source Project funding?

A: Yes.

Q: Can Nonpoint Source Project funding be used to support project design and engineering, even when construction might not occur under the same contract?

A: Yes.

Q: If I complete design work or construction before signing a Nonpoint Source Project contract, can I claim those expenses as match or bill them against the contract?

A: No.

Q: When can Nonpoint Source Project funding be used to pay for water quality monitoring?

A: Only when monitoring the water quality effects of a particular project. 319 funds cannot be used to support watershed characterization studies, pollution source identification monitoring, or long-term trend monitoring.

Q: Can I use Nonpoint Source Project funds to buy lunch for volunteers at an event?

A: No. These funds cannot be used to purchase food.

Q: If I am in the process of developing a Watershed Restoration Plan, but don't yet have one, can I still apply for Nonpoint Source Project funding?

A: If you do not have a DEQ-accepted WRP or an EPA-approved Tribal nonpoint source plan by the application deadline, you must submit a draft prior to applying for funding. DEQ staff will review the draft and estimate the likelihood of it being ready prior to October, 2024.

Q: For grant administration, does DEQ require time tracking for this task, submission of a timesheet, and an hourly rate justification like DNRC? Or can I just apply for the blanket 10%/\$12,000 (whichever is cheaper) and just request 10% of the invoiced amount on each report?

A: Nonpoint Source Project funds, including those applicable to grant administration, are provided on a reimbursement basis. In other words, funding requested needs to be tied to specific expenses incurred, and those expenses need to be tied to work done to implement the specific activities identified in the contract. DEQ generally doesn't require submission of a timesheet and an hourly rate justification. However, we do expect contractors to be able to document expenses if asked to do so (e.g. in the event of an audit).

Q: If I have an Americorps volunteer working on a project, can I report the difference between a published value of volunteer labor rate and the Americorps volunteer's federal stipend rate as nonfederal match?

A: Yes.

Q: I was wondering if education and outreach deliverables are a requirement for on-the-ground projects? Or if we did not include education and outreach plan for the project, would this negatively impact consideration of our application?

A: Yes, we do require all applicants for on-the-ground project funding to include an education and outreach task. There is a \$5k cap on funding for this task. Typically, we see folks do things like holding a site visit tour for local landowners to try and interest other people in doing similar work on their land, or perhaps post updates and photos of project progress on the group's website or Facebook account, or even organize a work day where the public can come work on some aspect of the project. The nice thing about in-person E&O activities is that you can count participant's time as non-federal match. For example, if you have 10 volunteers show up to help plant a new riparian buffer, and they all work for 4 hours, you can estimate what it would have cost to hire 10 workers to come provide labor (about \$20 per person, per hour, for 4 hours, or about \$800) and then report that figure as non-federal match.

Q: Does DEQ have a specific rate for calculating the value of volunteer labor (e.g., for calculating in-kind match from volunteer participation)?

A: No. The rule of thumb we recommend is to use an estimate what it would cost to go out and hire someone (salary + benefits) to do the same work.