State Natural Resources Conservation Council

NRCC Clean Water Projects Design and Implementation Grant Request for Applications

Introduction and Program Goals:

The State Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) is receiving $1,380,000 from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) for a block grant to accelerate statewide implementation and design of selected priority water quality projects from the [DEC Watershed Projects Database](#) in order to achieve measurable improvements to Vermont's water quality. If applicants wish to submit a project not currently in the Watershed Projects Database, please contact your local watershed planner for information about submitting a project to the Watershed Projects Database.

The grant will be used towards water quality design and implementation projects statewide in collaboration with Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDs) and other partners. Through this implementation program, NRCDs and other partners will design and implement projects that have a primary purpose of reducing sediment and/or nutrient pollution through stormwater, floodplains/rivers, lakes, and forestry projects. Additional benefits are encouraged, but all projects must have a *primary* benefit of reducing sediment/nutrient pollution. This program will be open to all eligible organizations and will fund preliminary design, final design, and implementation projects.

Anticipated Timeline:

PLEASE NOTE NRCC cannot execute agreements until its agreement with DEC for this work is executed. NRCC anticipates the agreement will be executed in advance of project decisions, and will let all applicants know if delays will occur in finalizing agreements.

> **RFA Released:** June 10, 2021
> **Q&A session:** June 14
> **Early Round Projects (projects to be completed in calendar year 2021 only):** Due June 18
> **Primary Round Projects:** Due July 5
> **Anticipated Announcements:** June 25 for Early Round, July 23 for Primary Round
> **All Projects must be completed by:** October 1, 2023

Applicants must review the Resources and Guidance materials located in the NRCD programs shared folder/online at VACD.org and the [FY21 CWIP Funding Policy](#) to determine a potential project's eligibility prior to filling out an application. There are additional resources that may be helpful as you fill out your application. Applicants will use the Project Types Table document in the Resources folder/online to find definitions and details on eligible project types, their unique requirements (including required reporting, outcomes, and deliverables) and other details. In addition, all projects must be eligible under the screening document attached to the application template, as well as be compliant with the FY19 CWIP Funding Policy. Finally, project applicants will need to provide documentation of DEC program staff approvals of all applications (may include Tactical Basin Planner, River Scientist, Wetlands Scientist, Stormwater Program, etc. depending on the project, as determined by the Natural Resources Screening

section of the application). Non-NRCD organizations and organizations unfamiliar with the grant are encouraged to contact the program manager, Holden Sparacino (holden.sparacino@vacd.org) before filling out an application.

Applicants may submit single applications for multiple project steps (design and implementation) for a single project to expedite application review. In cases where multiple project steps are awarded, applicants must submit all deliverables and final invoice for each project step and re-confirm DEC program staff approvals prior to starting subsequent steps of work. Some projects may require match/leveraged funds (dependent on project characteristics, applicants must check page 22 of the FY21 CWIP Funding Policy to verify if a proposal requires leveraged funds). Large-scale projects may be more competitive, and applicants may choose to include additional match and/or demonstrate a larger sediment/nutrient reduction, co-benefits, etc. Prioritization of projects will also be considered as applications are reviewed. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate how a project is a high-priority and/or submit applications for projects that are prioritized in assessments or plans (Tactical Basin Plan etc.). All projects will be reviewed by NRCC's review committee and will receive a letter of determination indicating if the project is approved and will receive full funding, is approved with partial funding, or is not approved and will not be funded.

Funding Categories:

A minimum of 1/3 of all funding will be awarded for projects with a total cost of $50,000 or less, excluding match and administrative expenses. Due to this requirement, there will be more of these small-scale projects than larger-scale projects, and small-scale projects may be approved more rapidly than large-scale projects. There is no project budget limit but applicants should note that especially large projects should demonstrate high prioritization, impacts, cost-effectiveness, and/or leveraged funds.

In addition, funding will be allocated across the following three categories. Categories with higher percentages will have more awarded projects in that category, larger projects compared to other categories, or some combination of the two. Please refer to the Project Types Table for more details on these project types, requirements, and deliverables for each:

Category	Details	Percent of Total Project Expenses
Stormwater	Non-three-acre permit related	48.3% (approximately $566,000 project expenses)
Stormwater	Related to the three-acre general permit under operational stormwater general permit 3-9050	27.6% (approximately $323,000 project expenses)
Natural Resources	River/floodplain restoration, forestry, and/or lake shoreland projects	24.1% (approximately $283,000 project expenses)

Project Guidelines:

- Projects must have and demonstrate a primary purpose of improving water quality by reducing nutrient and/or sediment pollution. Applications should state clearly the anticipated water quality benefit from the proposal. Other benefits (aquatic organism passage, habitat restoration, flooding, etc) may make a proposal more competitive, but additional benefits are considered secondary in application reviews.

- Projects and project costs must follow the [CWIP FY21 Funding Policy](#), including eligible project types and applicants.
- Applicants must complete a separate application for each project. Project steps may be bundled (for instance, final design/implementation), please see the application/eligibility form for details. If you are unsure if your project(s) should be submitted as combined or separate applications, reach out to the project manager.
- Projects must be in the watershed projects database prior to applying for this funding.
- Eligible project types include stormwater, rivers, lakes, and forestry projects. Please see the project types table for detailed descriptions of eligible project types.
- Applicants should demonstrate how the project is a high-priority and/or how the project has been identified/prioritized in existing assessments or plans.
- Applicants will complete the eligibility and natural resources screening documents as part of each application.
- Applicants will consult with relevant DEC staff to review permitting needs, identify natural resource concerns, and obtain written approval of the project as part of the application process. Applicants will continue to consult with relevant DEC staff at each design/implementation phase of the project.
- Implementation projects will be required to include an Operation and Maintenance Agreement for the design life of the project, at least 10 years.
- Leveraged funds/match requirements are dependent on project characteristics. Applicants must check page 22 of the [FY21 CWIP Funding Policy](#) to verify if a proposal requires leveraged funds.
- All projects and all deliverables must be completed/submitted by **October 1, 2023**.

Funding Guidelines:

Applicants will complete the budget template found in the shared drive/online and include this with each application. In addition, applicants may include additional documentation including estimates from contractors etc. All eligible costs will be consistent with DEC's Funding Guidelines Document. No match is required, except for stormwater projects in MS4 districts. In those cases, 50% match is required. *Please indicate all leverage (match) or cost sharing in your proposal.*

Applicants for projects costing greater than $50,000 excluding match and administrative fees may choose to provide additional match to make the large-scale application more competitive, and/or choose projects with greater sedimentation/nutrient reduction benefits.

All projects receiving funds will be allowed up to 10% program delivery expenses in addition to project delivery expenses, up to a maximum of $2,500 (10% of a $25,000 proposal) Eligible program delivery expenses include awardee time towards implementing procurement policies, verifying project results and grant reporting, invoicing, and selecting and managing subrecipient contracts. This amount may be included on invoices, but should not be included in the budget template.

Grantees may invoice for actual costs incurred throughout the project monthly or less frequently as necessary. To receive full project funds, the project must adhere to all project and funding guidelines and deliverables outlined in DEC's Funding Guidelines, the Project Types Table, the Application/Screening documents, and the grant agreement.

Funding Restrictions:

Project funds cannot fund the following:
- Any costs not compliant with the [FY21 CWIP Funding Policy](#);
- Tools and/or equipment;
- Office supplies such as, but not limited to, computers, cell phones, etc;
- Uniforms/staff apparel;
- Food/beverage/event space costs (such as for a meeting);
- AmeriCorps host site or member costs (these costs can be counted as leverage/match however);
- Expenditures that occurred before or after the award date and/or period of performance;
- General outreach and/or education;
- Political advocacy;
- Fundraising.

Ineligible projects include:
- Projects with ineligible costs according to CWIP FY21 Funding Policy (available in the link above);
    - Applications with project costs that do not have immediately apparent water quality benefits (materials where less expensive alternatives exist, access paths, extensive stone work, etc) should explain these costs and water quality benefits and/or other reasons the costs are needed (longevity of the project, use of local materials, engineer recommendation, etc) in their application;
- Projects that can be funded through other grant sources (projects may be eligible if other options are exhausted and justification is provided, subject to CWIP approval). Agriculture projects must first pursue other funding sources (e.g., Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board) before pursuing CWIP funds. Municipal road projects must first pursue other funding sources (e.g., Agency of Transportation) before pursuing CWIP funds. Forestry projects must first pursue other funding sources (e.g., U.S. Department of Agriculture and Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation) before pursuing CWIP funds;
- Operation and maintenance activities (e.g., road re-grading/surfacing, street sweeping, catch basin cleaning);
- A project that solely addresses flooding problems, drainage, and/or flood mitigation without addressing nutrient/sediment pollution;
- A project whose primary benefit is aquatic organism passage (AOP);
- An assessment or planning project, including stormwater master planning;
- A dam project;
- A road project (unless funding is not available through municipal grants-in-aid program or other source and the project meets eligibility as a stormwater project);
- Projects dealing with private driveways, unless the project is addressing regulatory requirements of operational stormwater General Permit 3-9050 (i.e., Three-Acre General Permit) and the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) General Permit.
- A river corridor easement or project involving land acquisition (may be used as leveraged funds);
- Stream culvert replacements, unless the project meets the floodplain/stream restoration project definition and standards defined in Appendix B and improves stream geomorphology, as defined/determined by the DEC Rivers Program.
- General outreach and education activities.

- Projects to comply with Acceptable Management Practices (AMPs) for Maintaining Water Quality on Logging Jobs in Vermont on active logging/harvesting sites.
- Projects related to compliance with the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit Minimum Control Measures.
- Projects related to compliance with the MS4 Permit road standards (municipal road projects are eligible for funding through VTrans).
- Projects that treat stormwater associated with new or expanded impervious surfaces.
- A riparian buffer project (unless part of a river corridor restoration or lake shoreland project);
- A project related to compliance with Minimum Control Measures under the MS4 (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System) General Permit;
- A project for achieving compliance with a state permit or state order (except stormwater three-acre specific projects, see below);
- A project that includes new or expanded development that seeks funding for compliance with a state permit or state order to mitigate negative impacts;
- A project that causes long-term impact(s) (beyond construction time) and cannot be permitted;
- A stormwater project on a public K-12 school or college/university property where the 3-acre permit will apply.

Stormwater Projects:

Additional restrictions and guidelines exist for stormwater projects, especially relating to the three-acre permit. The following criteria **only** applies to stormwater projects. Page numbers indicate where more information on a requirement can be found in the FY21 CWIP Funding Policy. '3-Acre' sites are defined by the Stormwater Rule. For more information on 3-acre properties, visit DEC's website.

Non-3-acre sites (any basin)

- Municipal/public property - eligible.
- School property - eligible.
- Private property - eligible, but lower priority than municipal/school projects.

3-acre sites (Lake Champlain/Memphremagog Basins and Stormwater impaired watersheds [pg 14])

- Municipal/public property - all design/permit obtainment and implementation/permit compliance are eligible. Implementation/permit compliance is only eligible if 3-acre permit is in place prior to construction. No stormwater projects "unrelated to" 3-acre permit obtainment or compliance are eligible on these property types. 50% leveraged funds required if MS4 community. Leverage requirement is waived if project is part of a public-private partnership as defined in the funding policy.
- School property - ineligible. School is defined as public or private colleges, and public K-12 schools. Private K-12 schools or other examples are not considered school property for the purposes of this grant.
- Private property - No stormwater projects "unrelated to" 3-acre permit obtainment or compliance are eligible on these property types. All new design/permit obtainment (pg19) projects are eligible. All new implementation projects are eligible if the landowner is in a "stormwater regulatory public-private partnership" (pg 25) according to CWIP definition and the 3-acre permit is in place prior to construction. If a public-private partnership does not exist, 50% leveraged funds required for design, and implementation projects are ineligible.

Possible/Future 3-acre sites (outside Lake Champlain/Memphremagog Basins and [Stormwater impaired watersheds](#) (pg 14))

- Sites with 3 acres or more of impervious surface on a single parcel/lot that are unpermitted or permitted under pre-2002 stormwater management standards are anticipated to be possible/future 3-acre sites. Impervious surface can be estimated using ANR Atlas tools. We encourage grantees to be conservative in their estimates and when in doubt, overestimate total impervious surface acreage. Design and implementation projects for these sites are currently considered non-regulatory (pg 14) with no leveraging required. However, if a site is found to fall under the 3-acre general permit regulations, it must meet the Three-Acre General Permit redevelopment standards by 2033 (pg 14). Projects solely developed to help a property meet permit standards that won't be in place until 2033 are low priority. Subgrantees are encouraged to select and advance the highest priority projects in their region from a water quality benefit perspective using input from their Tactical Basin Planner and priorities identified through sector-based assessments, such as stormwater master plans to achieve local stormwater management priorities. In summary, stormwater projects on possible/future 3-acre sites should only be pursued if considered high priority for the region in an existing plan, and, if pursued to achieve local stormwater management priorities, must meet the Three-Acre General Permit redevelopment standards to be eligible for CWIP funds.
- Municipal/private property - All new projects eligible, considered general stormwater (non-3-acre) projects, should be built to Three-Acre General Permit redevelopment standards (pg 14). See above notes on prioritization of these projects.
- School property - eligible, considered general stormwater (non-3-acre) project. Should be built to Three-Acre General Permit redevelopment standards (pg 14). See above notes on prioritization of these projects. School is defined as public or private colleges, and public K-12 schools. Private K-12 schools or other examples are not considered school property for the purposes of this grant.
- Private property - eligible, considered general stormwater (non-3-acre) project, lower priority than municipal projects. Must be built to Three-Acre General Permit redevelopment standards (pg 14). See above notes on prioritization of these projects.

Award Notification, Grant Agreement, and Payment Schedule:

All applicants will receive written indication of NRCC's decision. An application may be declined, partially awarded, or fully awarded. NRCC will develop a grant agreement with each awardee. This agreement is subject to pre-approval by the Department of Environmental Conservation of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources before it is signed. Grantees must sign and return the grant agreement letter with original signatures. Pending the availability of grant funds, payments will be made as invoices are received, with at least 10% of project costs held until the final report and deliverables are submitted and approved by NRCC.

Submitting Your Application:

Templates and resources (including the project types table that details the requirements for individual project types) can be found online. These should be reviewed prior to submitting an application. Direct any questions on the application process, projects eligibility, etc. to the program manager (contact information below).

You are encouraged to contact the program manager (information below) prior to submitting an application with any questions you have. To submit your application, please attach all necessary documentation (see below) in an email with your application (single PDF preferred) and send via email to the program manager, with the subject "2021 NRCC Clean Water Design and Implementation Grant Application".

Please include the following as part of your application:
- Completed Application and Eligibility Screening form;
- Project Locator Map (including all layers where possible natural resources concerns occur, as determined by the Natural Resources Screening section of the application);
- Documentation of written project approval by all relevant DEC programs found through DEC's project database/natural resource screening tools (email meets this requirement, with the language "approval to proceed with the project" OR "approval with conditions to proceed with the project");
- Completed budget template (located in the Resources folder for the grant);
- Project Design if applicable;
- Itemized quotes received from contractors if applicable; and
- Any additional materials that will help clarify/support the project, including photos, letters of support, maintenance agreements, and/or documentation of landowner/municipal permission.

Notify Holden (holden.sparacino@vacd.org) once your application is ready for review, and with any questions you have.