

NRCC Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
January 18, 2023
8:30 am
Zoom Meeting

Agenda

1. Welcome (Rick)
2. Grant proposals, approvals, and updates
 - o AgCWIP (Emily)
 - Discussion of subgrant development process
 - Discussion of metrics and reporting
 - Review and approval of subgrant agreements
 - o National Fish & Wildlife Foundation/Trees for Streams (Jill/Jess)
 - Upcoming joint training with watershed groups & conservation districts
 - o Enhancement Grant RFP
 - o Other grants updates, as needed
3. FY23 VACD-NRCC Personnel Agreement (Jill/Clare)
 - o Proposed switch to billing for actual
4. FY22 Financial Reporting (Clare)
5. Update on FY23 Budget (Clare)
6. Review FY22 Annual Staff Report to Districts (Jill/Clare)
7. Bank Administrative Updates (Clare)
 - o Bank signer update and change of org name
8. Other business, as required

Attendance: Rick Hopkins, Richard Noel, Chris Von Alt, Clare Ireland, Jill Arace, Jess Miller, Emily Nummer, and Lina Smith.

Grant Proposals, Approvals, and Updates:

AgCWIP: Emily gave a short recap of the grant process to date. The initial district proposals totaled 2.9 million. They were encouraged to think big and generally build capacity. The total amount of the grant is 3 million and was to be sourced to other organizations as well so it had to be scaled back. A budget of \$1,720,000 was developed, and divided between districts based on the demographic factors noted in the worksheet presented. The proposed amount gave each district at least the base amount received the previous year. Then a proportional reduction was given to any district above the baseline. Some were fully funded because of the low ask compared to the number of farms.

There was discussion about the need to build capacity in some districts as well as district performance.

Chris asked if there was any feedback on how this would impact their ability to complete tasks. Emily responded that every district is getting more money than they previously received. She also noted that those who had asked for more had creative ideas for the extra dollars. Clare added that the priority is maintaining staff they already have.

Rick expressed concern about the wide range of awards between districts. He thought there might be a perception that some districts were receiving large awards in comparison to the number of farms in the district. He thought this might draw criticism from within. Clare replied that the number of farms was not the only criteria. The budgets proposed by districts also reflects capacity. We decided not to give more to districts than asked for because it might not be used. Some districts are very ambitious, and others are more conservative in their approach. It's difficult to force growth from the top down, particularly when other districts would be further underfunded by allocating more to the districts that requested less. Emily acknowledged this was a messy process and a learning experience.

The applications were submitted to the Agency so they have had the opportunity to see what the districts applied for initially. This may identify needs they can address.

Chris asked for the sources of the metrics when being asked to consider something like this in the future. He also stated he wished he had more time to review the methods to evaluate before having to approve. Emily noted that the districts have seen these numbers and have agreed to the amounts.

Richard made the motion to accept the budget proposal of \$1.7 million as presented. Chris seconded the motion. Upon a call for a vote, all were in favor.

National Fish & Wildlife Foundation/Trees for Streams: Jess reported that Holden had applied for this grant last year with Watersheds United Vermont to support tree plantings focused on habitat restoration particularly for Eastern Brook Trout. Training has been scheduled for February 22, 9-12. Topics will include habitat requirements, site stewardship, habitat management, and survivorship. Also, Mark Labar from Vermont Audubon will talk about the work they are doing for birds in riparian habitat. The grant is not limited to Eastern Brook Trout even though that is the focus.

The total grant amount is \$200,000 and \$76,500 will go to districts. WUV receives \$95,000 and \$29,000 is going to Council to support Jess's time and a bit of overhead. The obligation is to plant 13.5 acres. Jill noted that Trees for Stream grants have been narrow and it is a struggle to diversify these grants to fund monitoring and replanting. Through work with the Federal agencies, they can be combined with a larger stream restoration project.

Jess went on to explain that in collaboration with Fish & Wildlife she has been selecting which projects are best suited for each of 4 different funders.

Other topics were the problem of increased cost, sourcing and planting of native trees.

Enhancement Grants: Jill reported that we are moving into a new world of funding Clean Water grants that was driven by Act 76. Clean water service providers are beginning to give grants driven by formulas for phosphorus reduction therefore they are called Formula grants.

This new grant will combine Project Development and Design and Implementation. The amount of money available is 2.3 million split 3 ways, which is less than we have had this year. We received more than 1 million in Design & Implementation proposals alone this year. In addition to the water quality phosphorus focus, the new component to these grants is antidegradation (preserving clean water rather than improving polluted water). It also provides for the block grant holders to implement projects

directly but we do not plan to do that. We are required to open these grants to all eligible entities. The bid process will go out in the fall and the process will be similar to current DIBG grants.

Chris made the motion to approve the submission of an enhancement grant proposal, Richard seconded the motion. Upon a call for a vote, all were in favor.

FY23 VACD-NRCC Personnel Agreement: Clare noted that the agreement has not been drafted yet, but she was hoping to get input from the committee on reimbursement from Council to VACD. Previously, there have been two payments totalling the full amount of the agreement. Going forward, it might make more sense for VACD to bill Council for actual costs under this agreement.

Rick asked if this was for a more realistic accounting or as a cost savings? Clare answered that it was in part to do with cash flow. This year, VACD has gotten low in cash at points. VACD billing on a monthly or bi-monthly basis would help improve the cash flow. Jill added that as we are staffing up and getting more complicated, billing actuals would be more transparent.

Richard made a motion to approve the proposed change to billing procedure. Chris seconded. Upon a call for a vote, all were in favor.

FY22 Financial Reporting: Clare noted this is not finished. She will send it to the committee before the next meeting.

The following meetings were scheduled:

Finance Committee Meeting - Thursday, February 2, 2023 - 8:30 am.
Council board meeting - Wednesday, February 8, 2023 at 1:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned.

[Meeting minutes approved by the Finance Committee March 15, 2023](#)