State Natural Resources Conservation Council
DEC Enhancement Project Development Grant
Request for Applications - FY2024

Summary and Purpose

The State Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) invites eligible entities to submit applications for funding under its Enhancement Project Development Block grant from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The EPDG program is part of the larger Enhancement Development Design and Implementation grant (EDDIBG) awarded to NRCC.

The purpose of this grant is to support project development activities across the State of Vermont with the goal of developing new projects to move forward towards funding design and implementation and for the development efforts needed between the phases of enhancement projects.

Timeline

    RFA release: April 11, 2025
    Webinar: Webinar
    Application Due Date: May 1, 2025
    Award Announcements: May 19, 2025

Questions regarding this RFA should be addressed to NRCC Grants and Finance Manager Lina Smith at lina.smith@vacd.org.

In addition to this RFA, applicants should review the materials located at: www.VACD.org/2025-project-development-grant

Eligibility

All projects under the Clean Water Initiative Program must meet one of the following objectives:

- Minimize Anthropogenic Nutrient and Organic Pollution
- Protect and Restore Aquatic and Riparian Habitats
- Minimize Flood and Fluvial Erosion Hazards
- Minimize Toxic and Pathogenic Pollution and Chemicals of Emerging Concern

Additionally, all projects must meet the following 3 criteria:

1. Activities must meet the Project Development Definition:

   Scoping work on any non-regulatory project type to determine feasibility, constraints, and overall suitability for implementing the project. This typically includes reviewing site assessments or other project identification tools and prioritized plans, conducting site visits, refining project scope and phasing, developing conceptual maps and drawings, estimating pollutant reduction benefits, confirming landowner/municipal interest, identification of – and possible engagement with – other stakeholders, partners, and likely concerned parties (e.g. neighbors, funders, regulators), identifying the prospective responsible operations and maintenance party, consulting with DEC staff, and determining project budget and permit needs (local, state and federal), natural and cultural resource constraints, co-benefits, and other project considerations, site constraints and feasibility factors (e.g. rights-of-way, infrastructure, invasive species presence, hazardous materials concerns) in advance of design or between design phases.

   The performance measure is number of projects explored for design and/or implementation.

2. Project must be non-regulatory
3. Project must meet at least one of the following statutorily-defined purposes for Water Quality Enhancement Grants:

   1. Protect high quality waters

      Per the 2017 Vermont Water Quality Standards (§ 29A-105 (c)) "high quality waters" are waters the existing quality of which exceeds any applicable water quality criteria. The VTDEC uses monitoring and assessment data to assess individual surface waters in relation to Vermont Water Quality Standards as outlined in the 2016 DEC Assessment and Listing Methodology. The four categories currently used to assess Vermont's surface water are full support, stressed, altered and impaired. Waters that currently exceed or support designated and existing uses and meet water quality standards are placed into the full support or stressed categories. Waters that do not support uses and do not meet standards are placed into the altered or impaired category. All altered and impaired water bodies are clearly listed in the relevant Tactical Basin Plan or one can find the list of impaired and altered waters here: State of Vermont 2018 303(d) List of Impaired Waters (epa.gov) For the purposes of the *EDDIBG* sub-initiative, "high quality waters" are defined as any waters not listed as altered or impaired in the relevant Tactical Basin Plan. Any eligible clean water project located upstream of a "high quality water" body is considered to have the potential to protect "high quality waters."

2. Maintain or improve water quality

3. Restore degraded or stressed waters

   See the list of impaired waterways in Vermont to determine whether or not your project is in the area with degraded or stressed waters: https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/map/assessment (list of impaired waters is mid page).

4. Create resilient watersheds and/or communities.

   Projects that assist with a community's resilience against the ecological responses to a changing climate (e.g., extreme droughts or rains, excessive heat, biodiversity decline, etc.) are eligible as long as they meet all other eligibility criteria.

5. Support the public's use and enjoyment of the State's waters

   Signage, condensed access, and/or targeted outreach and education surrounding a specific project are all considered eligible project components and primary project benefits to "support the public's use and enjoyment of the State's waters." Other restoration-focused activities may also de facto "support the public's use and enjoyment of the State's waters" by making the waters more swimmable, fishable, and/or drinkable.

Eligible Project Types

Eligible project types: (See the Project Types Tables for detailed descriptions of eligible project types)

- Floodplain/stream restoration
- Lake Shoreland
- Wetlands Restoration
- Stormwater
- Agricultural Pollution Prevention
- Forestry
- Roads/Stormwater Gully
- Roads Projects
- Dam Removal
- Riparian Buffer Planting

Please note that EPDG funding can support projects in any basin across Vermont. However, proposed projects located outside of a watershed with access to Water Quality Restoration Formula Grants (Champlain and Memphremagog Basins) will have priority for project development funds.

If the proposed projects are in a watershed with access to Water Quality Restoration Formula Grants, (Champlain and Memphremagog Basins) they still may be eligible for EPDG funding, but you must indicate in the application why the proposed set of development projects is best suited for the Enhancement Project Development Grant funds.

Entities Eligible to Apply

Eligible Entities	Ineligible Entities
Vermont Municipalities Regional planning commissions Natural resource conservation districts Non-profit organizations State Agencies State colleges and universities Public Hospitals and medical centers Public schools	Private citizens, individuals Private for-profit businesses and industries Private for-profit colleges and universities Federal agencies

What is Project Development

Project Development is a two-fold process that includes (1) **General Project** Scoping to select identified projects for development as well as (2) **Specific Project Development** to gather the information and commitments needed to determine project feasibility and readiness to proceed.

It is understood that project development may not always result in projects moving forward to implementation. In some cases, project support may be pursued but cannot be secured. Permitting may result in the recognition of insurmountable resource conflicts, or other scenarios. Documenting this process will benefit overall efforts and fulfill the requirements of these awards. In cases where it is clear that a project will not move forward to design/implementation early in the process or in cases where projects require fewer resources than budgeted, applicants may report project information and coordinate with the program manager to use remaining funds towards the development of another project. You may apply to develop a single project, multiple projects, and/or a combination of general scoping and specific projects.

General Project Scoping does not require the identification of specific projects to develop at the outset. The results of general project scoping should be a list of projects to develop. General project scoping should lead to specific project development and a Project Development Findings report (PD-FR) should be submitted for specific child projects developed as a deliverable.

Examples of *Allowable General Project Scoping Activities (not an exhaustive list)*

- Review the Watershed Projects Database or existing plans and prioritization documents or tools (such as Stormwater Master Plans (SWMP), Flow Restoration Plans, Phosphorus Control Plans, Lake Wise Assessments, River Corridor Plans, Tactical Basin Plans, Functional Floodplain Initiative tool, and the Watershed Projects Database) to find projects to develop,

- Discuss potential projects with Tactical Basin Planners to gauge priority,

- Respond as needed to landowner water quality questions and concerns and conduct landowner site visits to develop strategies for river restoration and protection opportunities that may turn into a project for development,

- Follow up regularly with potential project landowners to gauge interest,

- Educate and communicate with new municipal staff or town committee members on existing River Corridor or Stormwater Master Plans to gauge interest in selecting and pursuing top priority projects.

Specific Project Development activities include the research and communications necessary to advance a specific project. These communications and research activities between project phases may also be supported as Project Development. Specific project development may require revision or update to the project scope as it was originally identified. Specific project development findings should be reported through the PD-FR for every child project developed

Examples of *Allowable Specific Project Development Activities (not an exhaustive list)*

- Work with DEC staff to refine project scope to ensure proposed project is the preferred cost-effective project/best management practice (BMP) solution for a given water quality concern.
- Identify and contact the appropriate landowner and secure landowner support.
- Identify and contact the operation and maintenance (O&M) responsible party and secure their support.
- Work with partners or available online tools to estimate potential water quality pollution benefits and project costs (if not already identified in prior-funded design/scoping work).
- Review potential natural and cultural resource concerns and permit needs for the project.
- Contact any other relevant stakeholders to review potential project barriers.
- Meet with town staff and select board (if a municipal project) to encourage implementation of specific high priority projects from a sector-based assessment and discuss potential grant funding.
- Develop very basic project concept drawings or preliminary designs for the purposes of communicating with stakeholders and landowners and securing support.
- May support Cost Benefit Analysis to apply for FEMA funding. Please discuss with program manager.

Ineligible Project Development Activities:

Program funds will *not* fund the following:

- Assessment and planning work. Ineligible activities include performing Lake Wise assessments, road erosion inventories, stream geomorphic assessments, developing prioritized plans like stormwater master plans or lake watershed action plans. These activities are supported under separate CWIP spending initiatives.
- Design work or work supporting the design or implementation phase of a project. Project Completion tasks for design and implementation phases are supported under separate Project Types. Project Development funds may support tasks between design phases but not within or during a design phase. Some limited concept drawings or designs are allowable if they are needed to determine project viability or secure landowner support, but work cannot result in completion of 30%+ designs.
- Any activity otherwise supported though active workplans under Tactical Basin Planning contracts to statutory partners pursuant to10 V.S.A. § 1253(d)(3).
- Grant writing. Sub-grantees may use funds to gather all the necessary information that might be requested on a funding application but may not charge their time to any DEC Project Development block grant for writing any applications.
- General, untargeted outreach and education.
- Outreach and partnership formation to establish a stormwater regulatory public-private partnership as defined in the CWIP SFY23 Funding Policy

Reporting Requirements and Deliverables

1. [ANR Online Clean Water Project](#) - New Project Form for any nonregulatory and feasible projects that underwent development work that are absent from the Watershed Projects Database.

2. Project Development findings submitted which includes:
   a. Completed Final Performance Report
   b. Completed [Project Development Findings Report](#)
   c. Completed [Project Eligibility Screening forms](#) for all developed child projects deemed feasible and ready to proceed.

Reviewing the PD Findings Report before applying for this funding will help to understand the allowable work under this grant program and the expected information that will result from the development work.

Watershed Project Database Identification Number

Projects must apply for and receive a Watershed Projects Database identification number to be eligible for this funding. To request a Project Development WPD-ID, you will use the

[ANR Clean Water New Project Form](#)

Project Title: Please name your EPDG project with a general name. i.e. *CNRCD Enhancement Project Development Work*

Project Type: Even though you will be exploring multiple different project types for the actual work you complete, for this WPID, you must choose Project Development as the project type.

Description: Provide a brief ~4 sentences on the types of activities you plan to complete under this grant. For example: "Our group plans to explore 4 stormwater projects identified in a SWMP with the goal of advancing 2 high priority projects to be ready for design funding"

Location, watershed or sub-basin: Please specify general geographic regions you will be working in. Please be sufficiently broad to capture the breadth of the area you are working in.

The N-Form is generally set up to provide information for one discrete project, please do your best to fill out the form as general as possible to cover the entire suite of projects that you are applying for.

Watershed Planners will need up to 2 weeks to provide applicants with a WPD-ID. Please complete the N-Form as early as possible and it must be submitted before you submit your application. You may submit your application with a WPD-ID number pending but please note it will be needed before we are able to award funding.

At the end of the EPDG, you will use the New Project N-Form again to receive WPD-IDs for projects that have been developed and ready for the next project phase.

Budget Guidelines

There is $75,000 in available NRCC Enhancement Project Development Funds and there is no set limit that can be requested.

Your budget proposal should include: hours and billable rate, miles and mileage rate, anticipated contractual expense, and the total amount proposed. Indirect costs of up to 10% total allowable direct costs may be included in your budget. Match is not required, but it is welcome.

EPDG funds can be used as a required match for other funders. If you plan to use this funding as a match for other received awards, please indicate this in the application.

Award Notification, Grant Agreement, and Payment Schedule

All applicants will receive an email indicating NRCC's decision. An application may be declined, partially awarded, or fully awarded. Pending availability of DEC funds, NRCC will develop a grant agreement with each awardee.

  One or two payments will be provided as follows:

> **Interim Payment (Optional)** Cost-reimbursable pending submission/approval of brief interim report no more than 1 paragraph in length (a partially completed matrix may serve as the interim report) and invoice.

> **Final Payment**: Cost-reimbursable pending submission/approval of completed scope of work, final report, deliverables and invoice

Payments will be at actual cost. If projects are not completed as approved and as defined by the scope of work, the sub-grantee will be required to return all funds to NRCC.

There are two other Funding Program Administrators for Enhancement Project Develop Funds: Watersheds United Vermont (WUV) and Mount Ascutney Regional Commission (MARC). The funding requirements are the same for all entities, though the application and grant administration process may vary somewhat. We encourage NRCDs to apply through NRCC, RPCs through MARC and Watershed Groups through WUV. However, all eligible entities can apply through any Enhancement Grant Funding Program Administrator.

Submitting Your Application

Please complete the application form and email it to NRCC Grants and Finance Manager Lina Smith at lina.smith@vacd.org