**State Natural Resources Conservation Council**

**2024 Clean Water Project Design and Implementation Block Grant Request for Applications**

# Introduction and Program Goals:

The State Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) has received funding from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to continue its statewide Design and Implementation Block Grant (DIBG). The purpose of the grant is to protect and improve Vermont’s water quality. The grant will support water quality design and implementation projects put forward by Vermont’s 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDs), watershed groups, municipalities, and others. The proposed stormwater, floodplains/rivers, lakes, and forestry projects must have a primary purpose of reducing sediment and/or nutrient pollution. The program is open to all eligible organizations and will fund preliminary design, final design, and implementation projects,

## Timeline:

**Applications will be considered on a rolling basis until available funds are exhausted.**

**All projects must be completed by** **December 10, 2024**

Questions Regarding this RFA should be addressed to VACD Grants and Finance Manager at

lina.smith@vacd.org.

In addition to this RFA, applicants should review materials located in the NRCD programs section at VACD.org and the [FY21 CWIP Funding Policy](https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/erp/docs/2021-02-04_FINAL_FY21_CWIPFundingPolicy_signed.pdf) to determine a potential project’s eligibility prior to filling out an application. Applicants will use the Project Types Table and FY21 CWIP Funding Policy 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 Project Eligibility and Readiness Screening Form and compliant with the FY21 CWIP Funding Policy. Finally, project applicants will need to provide documentation of DEC program staff approvals of all projects (may include Watershed Planner, River Scientist, Wetlands Scientist, Stormwater Program, etc. depending on the project), as determined by the Project Eligibility and Readiness Screening Form.

Some projects may require match/leveraged funds (dependent on project characteristics, applicants must check page 22 of the [FY21 CWIP Funding](https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/erp/docs/2021-02-04_FINAL_FY21_CWIPFundingPolicy_signed.pdf) [Policy](https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/erp/docs/2021-02-04_FINAL_FY21_CWIPFundingPolicy_signed.pdf) to verify if a proposal requires leveraged funds. Applicants should demonstrate how a project is a high-priority and/or submit applications for projects that are prioritized in assessments or plans (Tactical Basin Plan, Stormwater Master Plan, River Corridor Plan, etc.). All projects will be reviewed by NRCC’s review committee and will receive a written notice indicating whether the project is approved and will receive full funding, is approved with partial funding, or is not approved and will not be funded.

# Available Funds:

The budget for each project is limited to $15,000.

# Project Guidelines:

* Eligible project types include floodplain/stream restoration, lake shoreland, wetland, stormwater, agricultural pollution prevention, forestry, stormwater gully and some road projects. Please see the Project Types Table and additional information for detailed descriptions of eligible project types.
* Projects must 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,](https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/erp/docs/2021-02-04_FINAL_FY21_CWIPFundingPolicy_signed.pdf) including eligible project types and applicants.
* Applicants must complete a separate application for each project.
* Projects must be in the watershed projects database prior to applying for this funding.
* 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 must complete the Project Eligibility and Readiness Screening Form as part of each application.
* Applicants must 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 must 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](https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/erp/docs/2021-02-04_FINAL_FY21_CWIPFundingPolicy_signed.pdf) to verify if a proposal requires leveraged funds.
* All grant recipients and subcontractors must pass debarment checks.
* All projects must be completed by **December 10, 2024**, and reports, deliverables and invoices submitted by **December 20, 2024.**

#  Budgeting and Invoicing:

Applicants must complete a Project Budget Template for each project and include it with their application. Applicants may include additional documentation including estimates from contractors, etc. All eligible costs will be consistent with DEC’s 2021 CWIP Funding Policy. No match is required, except for stormwater projects in MS4 districts, where 50% match is required. Please indicate all leverage (match) or cost sharing in your proposal.

Applicants should include all costs associated with project completion as direct costs, including liaising with landowners and stakeholders, implementing procurement policies, managing subcontracts, verifying project results, and grant reporting and invoicing. In addition, applicants may receive 10% *de minimis* indirect costs on Total Modified Direct Costs. See the budget template for assistance with this calculation.

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 FY 2021 CWIP Funding Policy, the Project Types Table, the Project Eligibility and Readiness Screening Form, and the grant agreement.

# Funding Restrictions:

Project funds cannot fund the following:

* Any costs not compliant with the [FY21 CWIP Funding Policy](https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wsm/erp/docs/2021-02-04_FINAL_FY21_CWIPFundingPolicy_signed.pdf);
* 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;
* Grant writing.

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;
* Projects addressing the regulatory requirements of operational stormwater General Permit 3-9050 (i.e., Three-Acre 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 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:
* A project that includes new or expanded development that seeks funding for compliance with a state permit or state order to mitigate negative impacts; and
* A project that causes long-term impact(s) (beyond construction time) and cannot be permitted.

# Project Selection Criteria

Projects will be selected for funding using the following criteria:

**Project Importance**: Nutrient and/or sediment reduction - Will the proposed project lead to significant nutrient and/or sediment reduction? Is the project in an area with a TMDL or nutrient or sediment impairment? The primary purpose of all projects must be nutrient and/or sediment reduction.

Will the proposed project lead to additional water quality improvements and provide co-benefits as identified in planning and prioritization documents, e.g. Tactical Basin Plans, River Corridor Plans, and Stormwater Master Plans?

**Project Scale**: Can the proposed project work be completed with the proposed grant dollars available or are sufficient matching funds available to cover the difference?

**Project Likelihood**: Does the project design and/or implementation have a high chance for success? Are there barriers to this work being completed? What is the financial risk if that is the case? How likely will the project be completed on time?

**Project Need**: Is there a demonstrated need for the work? And do the DEC design and implementation funds fill a need where other funds are not available?

**Project Budget**: Is the project cost effective for the scope of work proposed? Stormwater project types will be prioritized.

# Award Notification, Grant Agreement, and Payment Schedule:

All applicants will receive written notification of NRCC’s decision. An application may be declined, partially awarded, or fully awarded. NRCC will develop a grant agreement with each awardee. Grantees must sign and return the grant agreement 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 Eligibility and Readiness Screening Form and 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.

To submit your application, please submit 2 documents:

1. The Project Budget Sheet in excel format.
2. All other necessary documentation **as a single pdf** in an email to NRCC Grants and Finance Manager Lina Smith at lina.smith@vacd.org with the subject "2024 NRCC Clean Water Design and Implementation Grant Application".

Include the following in your application:

* + Completed Eligibility and Readiness Screening Form
	+ Completed Application 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 Project Budget Template
	+ Project Design if applicable
	+ Itemized quotes received from contractors if applicable
	+ Any additional materials that will help clarify/support the project, including photos, letters of support, Operation & Maintenance agreement, and/or documentation of landowner/municipal permission.