

2023-2024 Watersheds United Vermont DEC Project Development Block Grant Grant Guidance for Watershed Groups

Applications Due: December 7, 2022

WUV will announce funding decisions by **December 21, 2022**

For project development efforts January 2023 through June of 2024. All project work, invoicing and reporting must be complete by **June 30, 2024**.

Purpose:

Watersheds United Vermont is administering our 2023-2024 Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Project Development Block Grant to subgrant funds to watershed groups and other nonprofit implementers to develop water quality improvement projects. Funds should be used for getting landowners, municipalities and other partners “on board” with projects to improve water quality and to move projects towards design and implementation. WUV will administer a grants program to select eligible projects for funding (see eligibility criteria in the table below).

We recognize that project development work involves exploring multiple project opportunities. We also recognize that project development work can shift and change over time as new project opportunities become available and as other projects, once explored, are determined not to be feasible. We are therefore allowing your organization to apply for funding in the following ways:

1. For the **general project scoping** of a set of projects connected to a certain aspect of work (ex. scoping all stormwater projects identified in a stormwater master plan or reviewing the watershed project database for specific project type or location). Any general project scoping activity must lead to specific project development for projects that are scoped and identified as eligible for development activity.
2. For the development of **specific projects** or a suite of projects that may take significant coordination between the landowner and/or other partners. The funding can't be used for preliminary or final design, but can be used in between design phases.

Project Development Overview:

For this funding source, project development has two types of allowable tasks *(1) general project scoping and (2) specific project development* (see below for full definition of each type of project development). If groups are applying for general scoping funds, they must also apply for specific project development funds to develop the scoped projects to the point they are ready for design and/or implementation. Applicants can apply for only specific project development funds if distinct projects or sets of distinct projects have already been identified. Groups can apply in the same application for both types of project development work. We understand that project development may result in groups determining that a project is not feasible to move forward for design or 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. Sub-grantees will be expected to gather all possible information they can and then

provide details on existing barriers to project advancement. Sub-grantees should strive to identify barriers as early as possible in the project advancement process to limit investments in infeasible projects.

All Project development funds must be spent on projects that, when implemented, will lead to improved water quality. This includes projects in the following categories:

Stormwater Projects

Riparian Buffer Planting Projects

Dam Removal/Culvert Replacement

River Restoration Projects

Lakeshore Restoration Projects

Wetland Projects

General Project Scoping

The general project scoping portion of project development aims to identify projects for development. This is intended to be for a relatively small portion of your project development activities. General project scoping activities are those that, initially, cannot be linked to a specific project or suite of projects but provide the sub-grantees with a list of specific projects to develop. It may also be any tasks necessary to confirm potential Project Eligibility, Project Equity and Inclusion, Project Importance, and Project Efficiency as defined in Project Development Prioritization Criteria section of this guidance document (pg. 6). Please note that general project scoping support should be considered an add-on rather than standalone subgrant. **Recipients of general scoping support are required to also apply to develop specific projects.** Allowable general project scoping activities are those that clearly lead to the expected sub-grantee deliverables listed for general project scoping funds (pg. 4) and that are not otherwise ineligible in the CWIP SFY 21 Funding Policy: https://watershedsunitedvt.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/2021-02-04_FINAL_FY21_CWIPFundingPolicy_signed.pdf.

Example Allowable General Project Scoping Activities (not an exhaustive list):

1. Review the Watershed Projects Database or existing plans and prioritization document (such as Stormwater Master Plans (SWMP), Flow Restoration Plans, Phosphorus Control Plans, Lake Wise Assessments, River Corridor Plans, Tactical Basin Plans, and the Watershed Projects Database) to find projects to develop
2. Discuss potential projects with Tactical Basin Planners to gauge priority
3. 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
4. Follow up regularly with potential project landowners to gauge interest
5. 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

The purpose of the specific project development portion of project development grant is to provide the sub grantee with the information and commitments needed to bring a project successfully into design or implementation. Specific project development activities include the research and communications necessary to advance a specifically identified project. Most project development work occurs prior to 30% design, however, some projects may already have 30% or 100% designs and may need some further development activities to move the project forward. For example, if a 30% design plan was completed a few years back, and landowners or other situations have changed, additional work might be needed before the project is ready for 100% design funding. These communications and research activities between project phases are also supported under this grant. Allowable activities are those that clearly lead to the expected deliverables listed for specific project development funds as outlined in this grant guidelines document (pg. 4). Specific projects or groups of specific projects can be applied for under this funding without also applying for scoping funds.

Example Allowable Specific Project Development Activities (not an exhaustive list):

1. 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.
2. Identify and contact the appropriate landowner and secure landowner support.
3. Identify and contact the operation and maintenance (O&M) responsible party and secure their support.
4. 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).
5. Review potential natural resource concerns and permit needs for the project.
6. Contact any other relevant stakeholders to review potential project barriers.
7. 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.
8. Develop project concept drawings, memos, or preliminary designs for the purpose of determining project feasibility and communicating with stakeholders and landowners to secure support. Concept drawing and designs cannot meet the threshold of a 30% design.

Ineligible Activities for 2023 Project Development Block Grant Funding

1. Project Development is not assessment and planning work. Ineligible activities include performing Lake Wise assessments, road erosion inventories, stream geomorphic assessments, or developing prioritized plans like stormwater master plans or lake watershed action plans. These activities are supported under separate CWIP spending initiatives.
2. Project Development is not design work, nor is it the work supporting the design or implementation phase of a project. Project Completion tasks for design and implementation phases are supported under separate CWIP spending initiatives.
3. 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.

4. Project Development is not any activity otherwise supported through Tactical Basin Planning contracts to statutory partners pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 1253(d)(3). If you have questions on the difference between your Tactical Basin Plan and Project Development funding, please contact WUV directly.
5. Project Development is not 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 this grant for writing any applications.
6. Project Development is not general, untargeted outreach and education.
7. Project Development is not outreach and partnership formation to establish a stormwater regulatory public-private partnership as defined in the CWIP SFY21 Funding Policy https://watershedsunitedvt.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/2021-02-04_FINAL_FY21_CWIPFundingPolicy_signed.pdf.
8. Project development work is not allowed on projects not focused on improving water quality.
9. Project Development funding cannot be used for any project requiring a 3-acre permit or any other project obligated under the law.

Funding Details

WUV has ~\$125,000 available for the implementation of project development work under this grant round. In the application you will see the following suggested funding requests for general project scoping and specific project development work:

General Project Scoping: **\$500 - \$2,000**

Specific Project Development: ~ **maximum request of \$15,000**

The provided numbers above are meant to be approximate guides that will fit most project development work scopes. However, we are aware that certain groups may be performing project development work on a broad scope of project types and may require more funding than the stated ranges. If your budget is higher than the listed maximums, please make sure to clearly state the need and reasoning in the budget narrative section of the application.

Completing your Application:

All completed applications must be emailed to both Lyn Munno (watershedsunited@gmail.com) and Christian Pelletier (christian@whiteriverpartnership.org) by **December 7, 2022**.

The application for this funding is separated into two parts, a general scoping project development section and a specific project development section. Please read the following possibilities for how you can structure your application.

1. Applying for general scoping and predicted specific project development work based on the scoping work. Applicants can submit an application that outlines the scoping work they will complete and based on the scoping work can complete the specific project development part of the application and budget with predicted activities based on scoping. This will result in a specific project development section of the application that will not include WPID for the specific projects. An example of this type of application would be using general scoping funds to review a River Corridor Plan with ~40 projects in it and identifying 5 projects from the plan that specific project development funds will be used on to see if those projects can be advanced to design phases.
2. Applying for specific project development without scoping. If applying for only specific project development work, the applicant can skip the scoping part of the application. If applying in this method, the applicant can apply for distinct projects or a bundle of targeted projects (e.g. the top 5 high priority stormwater projects in a Stormwater Master Plan, since these 5 projects from the Stormwater Master Plan are identifiable and you are not scoping the entire Stormwater Master plan, this would fall under specific project development). If an applicant is applying for multiple projects or bundles of specific projects, we ask that they separate their request into project types (stormwater, buffer, river planting, etc).
3. Applying for a combination of the 2 types of applications outlined above. An applicant can submit an application with general scoping and the predicted specific project development for one project type (e.g. stormwater) and also have distinct specific project development projects or bundles of specific development projects for project types where the scoping phase is not necessary.

Required Deliverables:

The section below describes the final reporting requirements for the Project Development Block Grant in addition to the final reporting requirements. WUV asks that sub-grantees provide an interim check-in to WUV that constitutes a summary of work completed at least once a year. If awarded funds, grant agreements will specify exact dates for the interim check-ins and final deliverables.

Sub-grantees that receive **general project scoping funds** must provide the following deliverables as an interim report before you proceed with the specific project development activities:

1. A brief narrative summary of tasks performed, and resources reviewed to find projects for development and to determine Project Eligibility, Project Equity and Inclusion, Project Importance, and Project Efficiency. For this deliverable, sub-grantees are just asked to summarize what resources they used to explore the potential for a project to advance equity and inclusion, as they understand those terms.
2. A list of proposed projects to develop with specific project development funding. Sub-grantees must provide this list of projects to WUV before they start the specific project development activities for that project type.

Sub-grantees that receive **specific project development** funds must provide the following for each project as final deliverables:

1. A completed Standard Batch Import File (BIF) for any projects that received funding for development that are not yet in the Watershed Projects Database. See WUV block grants website: <https://watershedsunitedvt.org/resources/block-grants> to view the Standard BIF.
2. A completed Project Development BIF for all projects that received funding for development. See WUV block grants website: <https://watershedsunitedvt.org/resources/block-grants> to view the Project Development BIF. Note this document is different than the standard BIF. Most of the detailed project development reporting will be conducted in the Project Development Specific BIF.
3. Site photo(s) (if available). Projects determined to be infeasible do not need to submit site photos.
4. ANR Locator Map. Projects determined to be infeasible do not need to submit a locator map.

Invoices and Payments:

This grant is cost reimbursable. Grant recipients will need to provide WUV with invoices for expenses in order to receive reimbursement. Groups can submit invoices for project expenses at any time throughout the grant agreement. WUV will request that groups at least submit one invoice per year during the grant term for this project work - at the time of the yearly interim or final report. We also request that groups update WUV if you do not expect to spend all allocated dollars in order for WUV to reallocate funds to other watershed groups. WUV can only pay for eligible project types and eligible project expenses (pg. 15, https://watershedsunitedvt.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/2021-02-04_FINAL_FY21_CWIPFundingPolicy_signed.pdf).

WUV will submit compiled invoices to DEC and will pay watershed groups immediately upon receipt of funds from DEC. Please provide WUV hours and rates and breakdown of expenses on your invoice (or in a separate spreadsheet) and list contractor expenses separately. You will need to provide WUV invoices/receipts from any contractors.

We understand how project priorities and opportunities can shift throughout a grant period, especially for project development and that projects can take more or less time than anticipated. If you need to shift allocated funding totals between project types, you must contact WUV for approval.

Expense tracking for general scoping project development does not have to be broken down to different project types.

Please note there is no required match under this funding source and match will not be used to evaluate applications. However, groups will be asked to track and report on any voluntary match.

Required Prioritization Criteria

DEC requires WUV to be using the following prioritization criteria when selecting entities and projects to fund. These prioritization criteria are new to this round of funding and WUV must use these prioritization criteria to evaluate project requests. Please review the criteria and use the information here to help craft your application responses.

Prioritization for recipients of **general project scoping** support must include (but is not limited to):

1. Sub-grant applicant's experience and proven ability to turn general scoping into specific project development efforts;
2. Sub-grant applicant's demonstrated history of relationship-building with landowners in the community where work is proposed;
3. Proposed scope of work for general project scoping support must meet the project development general scoping definition from this guidance document; and
4. Sub-grant applicant's self-reported status as a minority or women Led organization, and the extent of engagement with an Environmental Justice Focus population (as defined by Vermont Environmental Justice Legislation Act 154 of 2022 (S.148)* or an otherwise historically under-represented group (as identified by the applicant**).

*Refer to S.148 As Passed for Definitions of Environmental Justice, Environmental Justice Focus Population and Meaningful

Engagement:<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/Docs/ACTS/ACT154/ACT154%20As%20Enacted.pdf>

**Applicants are invited to describe why the groups they are coordinating with are considered historically under-represented as they understand that term.

Prioritization for **specific project development** funds for any projects that do not yet have a 30% design (or are in-between design phases) must include the following prioritization criteria: Project Eligibility, Project Equity and Inclusion, Project Importance, and Project Efficiency defined below:

Project Eligibility (must consider all of these):

1. Proposed specific project development work from a sub-grantee applicant must meet the Project Development definition from this grant guideline;
2. From information available, project must seem to have a primary purpose of improving water quality;
3. Proposed projects for development must be non-regulatory; and
4. Project must be identified in the Watershed Project Database, in a sector-based assessment or comparable strategic planning/assessment process (for example a Stormwater Master Plan, River Corridor Plan or Lake Watershed Action Plan), or otherwise be approved by the block grant holder as a result of general project scoping work.

Project Equity and Inclusion (consider at least one of these):

1. Will the project improve localized water quality conditions and other co-benefits for an Environmental Justice Focus population (as defined by Vermont Environmental Justice Legislation Act 154 of 2022 (S.148) or an otherwise historically underrepresented group (as identified by the applicant)? Does the project engage with and allow decision- making from an Environmental Justice Focus population (as defined by Vermont Environmental Justice Legislation Act 154 of 2022 -S.148) or an otherwise historically underrepresented group (as identified by the applicant)?

Refer to S.148 – linked above

2. Does the project ensure no disproportionate negative impacts on an Environmental Justice Focus population (as defined by Vermont Environmental Justice Legislation Act 154 of 2022 (S.148) or an otherwise historically underrepresented group (as identified by the applicant)?

Project Importance (consider at least one of these):

1. Will the proposed project lead to nutrient and sediment pollutant load reductions, other water quality improvements, and co-benefits (if information is readily available)?
2. Does the project address a pollutant of concern in a stressed or impaired/altered sub- basin as mentioned in a Tactical Basin Plan?
3. Is the project listed as a high priority in the Watershed Project Database or relevant sector-based assessment or comparable strategic planning/assessment process?

Project Efficiency (consider at least one of these):

1. Is the specific project development work proposed reasonable given the budget?
2. Is the proposal cost-competitive in terms of \$/project developed?