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ELIZABETH S. BISER
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Director



July 26, 2024

TO: Executive Directors, Regional Councils of Governments (COGs)

SUBJECT: Request for Proposals for FY 2024 Water Quality Planning Grant Funding under Clean Water Act Sections 205(j)/604(b)

Announcement

Pursuant to Sections 205(j) and 604(b) of the Clean Water Act, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality Division of Water Resources (DWR) is seeking proposals for water quality management planning projects using federal fiscal year 2024 grant funds. As stated in Section 205(j) of the Act, grant funds are to be awarded to Regional Commissions and Councils of Governments “to carry out water quality management planning, including, but not limited to:

- A. Identifying most cost effective and locally acceptable facility and non-point source measures to meet and maintain water quality standards;
- B. Developing an implementation plan to obtain state and local financial and regulatory commitments to implement measures developed under (A); and
- C. Determining the nature, extent, and cause of water quality problems in various areas of the state.”

Only Regional Councils of Government (COGs)/Regional Planning Organizations are eligible to apply for 205(j) grants, however, COGs may partner with any public or private sector organization to implement projects.

Due to provisions made through the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), North Carolina received additional funding for the 205(j) Grant Program and, subject to finalization of the award by EPA, has approximately **\$350,000** to award for water quality planning projects in the 2024 federal fiscal year. As there is no cap on North Carolina’s 205(j) pass-through funding requests, applicants are encouraged to request adequate funds to fully execute proposed projects and to also propose larger projects, such as complete 9-Element plans.



North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality | Division of Water Resources
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DWR Planning staff encourages the following types of projects in particular:

- Development of [9-Element watershed restoration plans](#) for 12-digit HUC or smaller watersheds or updates of existing plans (please see more information on 9-Element Plans below and refer to resources for developing watershed plans on the [319 grant program website](#)).
- Source identification studies, including water quality monitoring, field assessments, modeling, and GIS analyses to support watershed plan development.
- Site-specific design plans for structural water quality practices identified in a 9-Element Plan.
- Water quality planning projects with concrete outputs such as (green and/or gray) [stormwater infrastructure mapping](#), prioritization or design.
- [Projects that benefit water quality regionally](#) or statewide.
- Projects to share water quality management planning knowledge between COGs and their member governments.

9-Element Plan Procedure

To better assist grantees in the completion of a DWR-approved 9-Element Watershed Restoration Plan within the project period, each 205(j)-funded 9-Element Plan project will now be assigned a DWR support staff member at the onset of the project period to advise and answer questions. Your DWR support staff member will be available to meet at least once per quarter and will serve as the primary reviewer for the plan. A draft plan should be submitted to the plan reviewer by the first day of the final quarter of the project period. The reviewer will have a month to provide comments, and the project team will have the remainder of the final quarter to address any concerns and re-submit the plan for approval. *Please account for this procedure in the milestone schedule in the application.*

Bigger Picture Considerations

Water quality management planning projects often have benefits that extend beyond the project scope. In recognition of the potential for bigger picture/co-benefits, DWR provides additional consideration for projects that consider environmental justice and climate change resilience.

- Water quality and climate change impacts can disproportionately affect urban and rural communities that are predominately of color, Indigenous, linguistically isolated, low-income, and/or impacted by other stressors. DEQ believes that communities should not be disproportionately exposed to adverse environmental impacts, and anyone can have a seat at the table in the decision-making process that affects their environment. DWR will encourage fair treatment and meaningful involvement of citizens in 205(j) projects by awarding additional points in scoring to projects that will benefit historically underserved populations, involve them in the process and improve public access to a healthy environment. To identify underserved communities, this program uses the definition adopted by DEQ's Environmental Justice Program as applied through DEQ's Community Mapping System. Applicants are encouraged to use [The Community Mapping System](#) to identify potentially underserved communities. The system



identifies potentially underserved communities by Census block based on Race/Ethnicity and poverty criteria.¹

- There is strong scientific evidence indicating that the Earth’s surface temperatures are warming, and precipitation regimes are shifting. A changing climate has a significant impact on water quality, affecting the timing and quantity of precipitation and snowmelt that feeds our rivers, the temperature of lakes and streams, and nutrient cycling within aquatic environments. Our communities, economy, environment and natural resources are increasingly at risk from the impacts of climate change. To make North Carolina more resilient to both climate and non-climate-related stressors, N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper signed Executive Order 80 (EO80) on Oct. 29, 2018, calling for the integration of climate adaptation and resilience planning into cabinet agency policies, programs and operations. EO80 called for agencies to develop resilience strategies that support communities and sectors of the economy most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and to enhance the state government’s ability to protect human life and health, property, natural and built infrastructure, cultural resources and other public and private assets of value to North Carolinians. Some nonpoint source planning activities can address the impacts of climate change on water quality and quantity. DWR will encourage these types of projects by awarding additional points in scoring to projects that include climate change resilience for communities, native plants, wildlife or ecosystems into planning activities. This includes, but is not limited to, the identification of potential projects that provide and promote resiliency against future storm events and address sea level rise.

How to Apply

Download the application from the Division’s [205j Grant Program Website](#). Submit the completed application to Robin.Hoffman@deq.nc.gov with “[Your COG’s name] 205(j) Grant Proposal” in the subject line by **Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024**. **Please submit the application as a Word document** to enable reviewers to comment easily. Any signed letters of support may be scanned and included as separate attachments.

Proposals will be reviewed based on the evaluation criteria found on the [205\(j\) program website](#). Note that DWR staff may request more information or modifications of selected projects prior to development of a contract. As a reminder, billable work may not begin until contracts are fully executed, and proposed projects should conclude no later than June 30, 2026.

¹ It is selected as a potentially underserved block group if it meets the following criteria for Race/Ethnicity and Poverty:
Racial/Ethnic composition: Share of nonwhites and Hispanic or Latino (of any race) is over fifty percent OR Share of nonwhites and Hispanic or Latino (of any race) is at least ten percent higher than County or State share.
AND
Poverty rate: Share of population experiencing poverty is over twenty percent AND Share of households in poverty is at least five percent higher than the County or State share.



Schedule

2024 205j Timetable for Grant Applicants	
Friday, July 26, 2024	205(j) grant RFP opens
Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024	Deadline for proposals; must be received electronically by midnight
Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024	Applicants will receive review team's questions about their proposals
Thursday, Oct. 10, 2024	Deadline for applicants to answer review team's questions
Tuesday, Oct. 29, 2024	Applicants notified if selected for funding. Move forward with contracting.
Tuesday, Nov. 12, 2024	Deadline for selected applicants to return completed contracting forms to the 205(j) grant manager to enable contracts to be developed on time.
Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2025	Contracts executed; projects may start. (Estimated depending on time for contract preparation.)

Proposals will be scored using review criteria based on their relevance to water quality, concrete outputs, unique need (demonstration that this need is not being funded elsewhere) and co-benefits.

Please do not hesitate to contact grant administrator Robin Hoffman at **919-707-3643** or Robin.Hoffman@deq.nc.gov with any questions or for additional guidance.

