**Clean Water Act Section 319(h) Grants**

The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality Division of Water Resources (DWR) is seeking proposals for the award of federal 319(h) grant funds for fiscal year 2025 to implement watershed restoration plans that will help restore waters impaired by nonpoint sources of pollution. For FY 2025, North Carolina expects to receive **$1.5 million** from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for competitive funding of watershed restoration projects under Section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act.

**Application Information**

**Eligible Applicants**

* State and local governments (including Councils of Government)
* Interstate and intrastate agencies
* Public and private nonprofit organizations and institutions (including academic institutions)
* Tribal entities, with an up-to-date U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-approved Tribal NPS management program plan

Individuals and groups without nonprofit status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, as well as federal agencies, may participate as project partners or receive grant funds as subcontractors working with eligible grantees, but are ineligible to apply for the grant.

**How to Apply**

The 319 grant application form and further information on the program can be found on the [319 website](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/water-planning/nonpoint-source-planning/319-grant-program). All applications must be submitted in electronic format as a Word document.

DWR will accept applications for FY2025 319 funding until **May 30, 2025**. Applicants may also submit a draft application no later than April 4, 2025, to obtain preliminary review and comments from DWR staff. Final applications shall be received by DWR no later than midnight **May 30, 2025** (email to rishi.bastakoti@deq.nc.gov). Proposals received after this time will not be accepted.

Proposals will be reviewed by DWR staff and by a Nonpoint Source Workgroup based on criteria listed on the 319 website. Selected projects will then be contracted at the time that DEQ receives its grant award from the EPA.

**Conditions for Funding Eligibility**

1. **Impaired Waters with Approved Watershed Restoration Plan**

The highest priority of the North Carolina- Nonpoint Source Program is to fund projects that target waters of the state assessed as impaired from nonpoint source (NPS) pollution and published in the most recent edition of the state ‘s List of Impaired Waters. Through this Request for Proposals (RFP), DWR is seeking proposalsfor projects that **implement a DWR-approved watershed restoration plan** to restore **impaired waters** impacted by nonpoint source (NPS) pollution.

When proposing a project, please reference the list of approved watershed plans on the [319 Grant Program website](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/water-planning/nonpoint-source-planning/319-grant-program/nc-watershed-restoration-plans) *or* obtain prior DWR approval for a new watershed restoration plan. From FY24, DWR considers a current EPA-approved Tribal NPS Management Program plan as an acceptable alternative to a 9-Element Watershed Restoration Plan. When addressing agricultural NPS sources within an National Resources Conservation Service National Water Quality Initiative watershed, NRCS Watershed Assessments may serve as an alternative to nine-element plans. However, these assessments must undergo evaluation and approval by DWR /EPA before the application can be accepted. If you wish to implement a watershed restoration plan that is not on this list, you are required to submit your plan and North Carolina 9-Element Plan Checklist to rishi.bastakoti@deq.nc.gov by April 4, 2025. Division staff will then review the plan and determine whether it meets the nine elements. Further guidance on developing watershed plans is also available on the 319 Grant Program website.

If you are considering submitting a watershed plan for approval, impaired waters are those listed as either Category 4 or 5 in either of the two most recent [Integrated Reports](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/water-planning/modeling-assessment/water-quality-data-assessment/integrated-report-files) published by the [DWR Modeling and Assessment Branch](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/planning/modeling-assessment). For this RFP, the 2020 and 2022 Integrated Reports are the two most recent. DWR will also consider proposals for waters included in Category 4 or 5 of the latest *draft* Integrated Report, which for this RFP is the draft 2024 IR. The proposal must address parameter(s) in the IR listing and propose to implement goals and objectives of a DWR-approved Watershed Action Plan that includes the [nine elements required by USEPA](https://files.nc.gov/ncdeq/Water%20Quality/Planning/NPU/319/WatershedMGTPlans_9element/A%20SIMPLIFIED%20GUIDE%20TO%20WRITING%20WATERSHED%20RESTORATION%20PLANS%20AND%20NORTH%20CAROLINA%209%20ELEMENT%20PLAN%20CHECKLIST_Oct2014.pdf).

1. **Protecting Healthy Waters**

Proposals will now be accepted for projects aimed at protecting currently unimpaired waters that may be at risk. This aligns with the increasing national-level recognition of such initiatives within the NPS Program Goals and Priorities. While these projects will not be considered top priority, they will be eligible for funding. If a compelling case is made, they may score and rank high enough in the evaluation process to receive support.

For projects focused on protecting currently unimpaired waters that may be at risk within watersheds where only protective actions are necessary, applicants may propose using an Alternative Plan instead of a traditional 9-Element Watershed-based plan. Relevant existing planning or implementation documents may contribute to the development of Alternative Plans. However, all Alternative Plans must be approved by DWR/EPA to establish eligibility for project funding under this grant, in accordance with EPA guidelines. Applicants are required to submit the Alternative Plan to rishi.bastakoti@deq.nc.gov by April 4, 2025. Division staff/EPA will then review the plan, determine whether it meets the requirements, and notify the applicant of our determination and eligibility status.

**Minimum Eligibility Requirements**

Projects must meet the following eligibility requirements. Entities or projects deemed ineligible under the NPS Program will not receive funding.

Eligible projects must:

* Implement on-the-ground management practices to reduce nonpoint source pollutant loads.
* Demonstrate water quality improvement through estimated pollutant load or concentration reductions.
* Reduce nonpoint source pollution in a water body.
* Align with a watershed-based plan that meets USEPA’s nine minimum elements. In case of Healthy Waters Protection projects, DWR/EPA approved alternative plans will be accepted.
* Secure a funding match by the time of agreement execution.
* Must commit to completing the project within the anticipated timeframe.

**Eligible Projects**

Eligible projects for funding under Section 319 are limited to those that aim to improve water quality and address nonpoint source pollution through various management measures. The activities must directly address the NPS pollutants, causes, and sources identified as priorities in the watershed management plan. Projects may include but are not limited to:

* Targeted nutrient and sediment reduction projects in a single HUC-12 watershed.
* Riparian restoration using bioengineering and/or green methods.
* Wetland and floodplain restoration.
* Storm water management projects.
* Stream restoration using natural channel design methodology and/or low head dam removal.

**Ineligible Projects and Activities**

The following types of activities will not be considered for funding:

* Projects or activities that are part of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System program, such as Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations or Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s)
* Permitted point source-related projects
* Land acquisition
* Development or general updates of watershed management plans
* Funding for education and outreach activities that are not directly related to achieving goals and milestones
* Water quality monitoring, except for monitoring the effectiveness of funded projects
* Projects that only include design work
* Grant money shall not be used to pay for meals or other refreshments at activities or events (such as conferences, meetings, workshops, trainings, field days, or workshops), unless not providing food/drinks would jeopardize the event's goals. In such case, prior authorization must be obtained.

**Emphasis on Measurable Results**

Both the EPA and DWR place a strong emphasis on achieving “measurable results” for projects selected to receive 319 Grant funding. To that end, projects should be sited as close to the impaired reach as possible to best target identified sources of water quality degradation. In addition, proposals involving on-the-ground implementation shall provide documentation assuring sustainable operation and maintenance measures for at least five years.

The EPA requires that projects designed to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment estimate the load reductions resulting from these projects. The 319 Grant Program recommends the following estimation methods:

**Bigger Picture Considerations**

Nonpoint source pollution prevention projects often have benefits for natural resources and local communities, that extend beyond simply reducing pollution. In recognition of the potential for bigger picture/co-benefits, DWR provides additional consideration for projects that bring clear, tangible benefits across environmental, economic, social and health aspects, and community resiliency. Applicants are encouraged to be specific to such benefits to the impacted communities and impacts to downstream communities.

**Monitoring Requirements**

319 proposals shall address an instream evaluation of project effectiveness. To maximize use of 319 project funds for on-ground implementation, DWR encourages practitioners to rely on and report relevant instream data produced by our or other state-approved monitoring entities’ existing monitoring programs to provide this instream evaluation of project effectiveness. The 9-Element plan on which a 319 proposal is based is required to address the effectiveness evaluation, and the 319 proposals should reflect that plan. Thus, 319 proposals are not required to provide instream monitoring, but the 319 program strongly encourages siting projects above and close to existing monitoring locations to maximize potential for measurable gain. It should also be noted that some types of projects call for monitoring of site runoff.[[1]](#footnote-1)

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| --- | --- |
| **Project type** | **Recommended Estimation Methods** |
| Stormwater control measures designed to [Minimum Design Criteria](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/energy-mineral-and-land-resources/stormwater/stormwater-program/stormwater-design-manual) | [EPA STEPL Tool](https://19january2021snapshot.epa.gov/nps/spreadsheet-tool-estimating-pollutant-loads-stepl_.html)[Stormwater Nitrogen and Phosphorus (SNAP) Tool](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/planning/nonpoint-source-management/nutrient-offset-information) (formerly Jordan-Falls Stormwater Nutrient Load Accounting Tool)  |
| Agricultural BMPs | [NCANAT](https://nutrientmanagement.wordpress.ncsu.edu/resources/)[RUSLE2](https://www.ars.usda.gov/southeast-area/oxford-ms/national-sedimentation-laboratory/watershed-physical-processes-research/research/rusle2/revised-universal-soil-loss-equation-2-download-rusle2/) |
| Stream restoration | Various |

**Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP)**

For projects that involve the collection, analysis, or manipulation of data, a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) will be required before work can begin, but it is not necessary in the application process. QAPPs for selected projects must be reviewed and approved by DWR and EPA before the activity commences. Thus, the QAPP development tasks should be listed as early in the project timeline as possible. There must be a deliverable for the development of this plan that states, “the QAPP will be developed and approved by EPA before sampling begins.” See [EPA guidance for QAPPs](https://www.epa.gov/quality/quality-assurance-project-plan-development-tool) for reference.

**Photo-Documentation**

In addition, all funded projects should submit “before” and “after” photos in final reports to visually document changes due to project implementation, for instance of stream appearance after a rainstorm shown before and after project implementation or stream pre- and post- fencing out livestock.

**Project Specific Educational and Outreach Requirements**

When applying for a sub-award under Section 319, the applicant must show the plan to inform and educate the community about the project’s purposes, design of management measures implemented, progress and successes. This can include things like signs, brochures, and presentations. Costs associated with project-specific educational and outreach activities are eligible for grant funding, but they cannot make up more than 10% of the total cost of the project.

**Limited English Proficiency Communities**

Grantees are encouraged to include non-English communications in their outreach strategies to increase public awareness of projects serving communities where English is not the predominant language. Translation costs for this purpose are allowable, provided the costs are reasonable.

**Project Site Report and Operation and Maintenance Plan (O&M)**

Projects involving structural best management practices (BMP) construction will require the grantee to complete a Project Site Report and develop an O&M Plan for each BMP and/or project site. The plan will require the identification of the party(s) responsible for regular maintenance to ensure practices function as intended throughout their lifespan, achieving target NPS pollution reduction levels. The grantee will also be required to review the O&M documents with the responsible party(s) and provide necessary training.

**Funding Acknowledgement**

Grantees receiving Section 319 funds are obligated to credit the 319 NPS Grant Program in publications, signs and project-related publicity. For projects that involve structural implementation, grantees will be responsible for providing on-site signage to identify the project and give credit to the 319 NPS Grant Program.

**Certain Regulatory Compliance Activities Ineligible**

Activities required by a draft or final NPDES permit, MS4 permit, Phase I and Phase II stormwater program requirement are ineligible. Eligible activities include aspects of Phase I and II programs that support but do not directly implement activities specifically required by Phase I or Phase II permits Some eligible stormwater activities include best management practices for pollution prevention and runoff control not specifically required by a draft or final NPDES permit and stormwater projects occurring outside of the NPDES permit area. The 319 Grant will not fund a stream, wetland, or buffer restoration that is a compensatory mitigation requirement or any activities relating to compensatory mitigation.

**Permitting**

The applicant is responsible for obtaining and complying with all permits necessary to execute the project. It is strongly encouraged that applicants reach out to the appropriate regulatory agencies early in the grant application development process to ensure potential projects can meet all applicable regulatory requirements. Successful grant applications include clear explanation of anticipated permitting issues, needs and regulatory process planning and status.

**Funding Availability**

Contingent upon Congressional appropriation, funding for selected projects will be provided by federal fiscal year 2025 Clean Water Act Section 319(h) grant funds. For planning purposes, we anticipate **$1.5 million** from the EPA for competitive funding of watershed restoration projects for FY25. There is no maximum cap on the amount of funding that a project can apply for; however, we recommend that you make your project as cost-effective as possible. The majority of funded projects typically fall in a range from approximately $50,000 to $300,000.

**Matching and Other Requirements**

All projects must include non-federal matching funds of at least 40% of the project’s total costs (i.e. match funds are at least 40/60 or 2/3 of the 319-award amount). Use the following formula to calculate the amount of non-federal match required for your project.

**[(319 dollars requested)/.60] – (319 dollars requested) = required non-federal match**

Alternatively, if you know the amount of grant funds you would like to request, multiply the amount requested by 0.6667 to determine the match required. This number is the minimum 40% match required.

Note that providing more than the minimum 40% match is encouraged and adds weight in the review process.

All project matches must: (1) relate directly to the project for which the match is being applied; (2) be reasonably valued; and (3) be supported by documentation. The match can be from private, state, local or non-profit sources; it cannot be from federal sources or from funds already being used as a match for other federal grants. Any expenses incurred before the agreement is fully executed, including applicant’s expenses for preparing a proposal and final development of workplan, budget, and timeline, are not eligible for match. The match is an indicator of local commitment to a project and is considered in proposal eligibility and ranking. The match may include: (1) Cash Match (Cash contributed specifically to cover the actual cost of the project); (2) In-Kind Match (Contributions made directly in the form of services, resources or goods with dollar value specified to implement the project). Some examples of In-Kind Match services include: personnel/staff salaries and fringe benefits, professional fees, labor, supplies and materials, equipment, office/meeting space rent, office utilities, volunteer hours, structural design, outreach products and events, publications, indirect charges, public land conservation, etc.).

Additionally, "Recycled" Clean Water State Revolving Fund CWSRF dollars under Title VI of the CWA can be used to provide a match for §319 grants. These are funds that have been loaned by the state and subsequently repaid by the borrower to the state. The repaid funds are then recycled by the CWSRF program to provide loans that fund other water quality projects. These recycled funds are not treated as federal funds for the purposes of a cost share requirement or match; therefore, they are eligible to be used as a match for Section319 funds, provided that they, like any other §319 match funds, are used to implement the project for which the match is being applied.

Applicants are also encouraged to identify other state funding sources for work that contributes to watershed improvement, and to partner with other state or local agencies, or with parties funded by those agencies, to leverage such funding or relationships to best effect for water quality improvement. Partnerships demonstrate a commitment from the community that projects will be maintained and have community buy in. Potential funding partners include the [North Carolina Land and Water Fund](http://www.cwmtf.net/) , North Carolina [Division of Mitigation Services](http://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/mitigation-services), local Soil and Water Conservation District offices, or other state or federal NPS programs. See also a  [list](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/planning/basin-planning/use-restoration-watershed-programs/funding) of other watershed funding sources.

**Reduction or Waiver of Required Match**

Eligible Tribal applicants may request a full or partial match waiver for projects; however, applicants must consult with the Grant Administrator before proposal submittal. If the project is recommended for award, DWR will make a final match waiver decision based on the availability of resources.

**Competitive Bid Requirements**

Grant recipients must adhere to competitive bidding protocols (2 CFR sections 200.318 to 200.326) when selecting contractors for goods and services or awarding contracts related to the proposed project. They must maintain documented procurement procedures consistent with federal competitive bidding regulations. DWR may request documentation of compliance if contractors are pre-identified in proposals. For further guidance on federal competitive bid requirements, grant applicants and recipients should refer to the EPA’s Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements (November 2022), available at this link, <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/documents/best-practice-guide-for-procuring-services-supplies-equipment.pdf>

**BABA Materials Mandate**
CWA 319 funds awarded after May 14, 2022, must comply with the Build America, Buy America provisions of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) signed on Nov. 15, 2021. Grant recipients will be required to ensure that, as these terms are defined within and made applicable by [Public Law 117-58](https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ58/PLAW-117publ58.pdf), (a) all iron and steel used in the Project are produced in the United States; (b) the manufactured products used in the Project are produced in the United States; and (c) the construction materials used in the Project are produced in the United States. When creating a budget for a proposal, applicants must take into account their options and impacts. For additional information see [Frequently Asked Questions for BABA](https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-02/OLEM_BABA_FAQs_Final-Feb_15_2023.pdf) .

**Disqualification**

A proposal will be automatically excluded from consideration if:

1. The potential project sponsor's name appears on the recent “Suspension of Funding” list (SOFL) of the [Office of State Budget and Management](https://www.osbm.nc.gov/stewardship-services/grants-management) (OSBM). State agencies are prohibited from entering into new financial assistance agreements with these entities and should withhold funds not yet disbursed until the recipient has been removed from the SOFL.
2. The potential project sponsor has unresolved issues related to previous or ongoing 319 projects.
3. The potential project sponsor does not submit the project proposal by the specified deadline for submission.

**EPA Review**

EPA has final approval authority over all projects selected by DWR for funding. EPA reviews the final scopes of work for consistency with EPA NPS program guidelines, and overall impacts on water quality. Upon receipt of EPA approval, DEQ will issue contracts to successful project sponsors.

**EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 Grant Requirements**

The proposals must comply with the [Nonpoint Source Program and Grants Guidelines for States and Territories](https://www.epa.gov/nps/319-grant-current-guidance), as amended.

**Partnerships**

DWR strongly encourages applicants/grantees to actively involve local communities, groups, property owners, and municipalities in all aspects of the proposal/project. Leveraging local knowledge and assistance is crucial for achieving overall project success and identifying future implementation opportunities. It is advisable that the applicant/grantee consider establishing some sort of agreement or commitment letter with project partner(s).

Applicants must, at a minimum, establish the following collaborations based on the types of Best Management Practices (BMP) implementation activities:

1. Urban/Suburban Stormwater: Engage with local government staff and relevant stormwater professionals.
2. Agriculture: Collaborate with the local Soil and Water Conservation District(s) (SWCD) as a technical service provider.
3. Residential Septic: Partner with local/county health department(s) in the project area.

Furthermore, the project should utilize appropriate technical expertise for implementation and BMP design/construction to ensure practices are technically sound and meet the necessary BMP specifications. Grantees have the flexibility to subcontract or sub-grant portions of their Section 319(h) grant or local matching funds for technical or other services associated with project implementation.

**Project Administration**

As part of developing and finalizing a grant agreement for a selected project, DWR may request that the applicant modify the project scope of work based on comments received during project evaluations and the selection process. The grant recipient must enter into an agreement with the DEQ to establish mutually agreeable terms for completing the project**.** Payment will be made on a reimbursement basis in accordance with the payment schedule and terms contained in the project agreement.

Reimbursement is tied to performance targets. Grant recipients will be required to provide quarterly progress reports to DWR. Projects are expected to be completed in the timeframe of the grant agreement. Time extension will not be granted without specific and appropriate justification, approved in advance. The 319 grant cannot reimburse for project work done outside the term or scope of the grant agreement, including prior to full approval of a grant agreement.

**Deadlines and Administration**

The schedule for reviewing and funding FY 2025 proposals is as follows:

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| --- | --- |
| March 5, 2025 | Request for proposals (RFP) is released  |
| April 4, 2025 | Deadline for draft proposals or 9-Element Plans seeking preliminary staff review |
| May 30, 2025 | Deadline for final proposals; must be received electronically by midnight |
| June 27, 2025 | Applicants notified whether they will be invited for interviews |
| July 22, 2025 | Interviews for finalists  |
| July 23, 2025 | DWR announces selected projects. Move forward with contracting, dependent upon receipt of EPA grant funding to North Carolina. |
| January, 2026 | Contracts executed; projects may start. (Estimated, depending on grant award date to NCDEQ and time for contract preparation.) |

**Unanticipated Program Changes**

Information in this call may be subject to change based on unforeseen changes to EPA or DEQ priorities. If changes become necessary, DEQ will post the changes on the 319 Projects Program website and will distribute notification.

**Guidance for NPS Grants**

The following web pages provide guidance and information for section 319 grant projects:

* 2024 ([current](https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-06/2024_section_319_guidelines_final_1.pdf)) EPA Guidelines for Section 319 Grants
* [Watershed Planning Guidance](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/water-planning/nonpoint-source-planning/319-grant-program#WatershedPlanningGuidance-2716)
* [North Carolina’s Nonpoint Source Management Plan (2018)](https://files.nc.gov/ncdeq/Water%20Quality/Planning/NPU/2018.10.01-NC-NPS-Management-Plan.pdf)
* [Integrated Report (2022)](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/planning/modeling-assessment/water-quality-data-assessment/integrated-report-files)
* [Watershed Planning Map](https://ncdenr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=1b45cde199234725bc2753f0d1261bdf)
* Fifth National Climate [Assessment](https://nca2023.globalchange.gov/chapter/22/)
* [EnviroAtlas](https://enviroatlas.epa.gov/enviroatlas/interactivemap/)

**Still Have Questions?**

Please contact Rishi Bastakoti at rishi.bastakoti@deq.nc.gov. For information on required reporting if your project is selected for funding, see the [319 Grant Program](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/water-planning/nonpoint-source-planning/319-grant-program) website for quarterly report and invoice templates and final report guidelines.

1. Stormwater control measures not designed to the Minimum Design Criteria (see state [Stormwater Design Manua](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/energy-mineral-and-land-resources/stormwater/stormwater-program/stormwater-design-manual)l) should submit a monitoring plan as part of their 319 application. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)