

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Bureau of Recreation and Conservation (BRC)
Administrative Policy/Grant Guidelines

SUBJECT: Riparian Forest Buffer Grant- Administrative Instructions and Process

EFFECTIVE DATE: 3/1/17

REVISED DATE: 6/25/19

Background: The following is an overview of the Bureau's grant process for implementing riparian forest buffer grant projects. The term "**Grantee**" refers to a grant applicant that has been awarded a grant.

Grant Administration Roles and Responsibilities

Local Project Coordinator

The Grantee designates the Local Project Coordinator. The Bureau considers this coordinator to be the official contact person on all matters related to the administration of the grant project. All official correspondence will be sent to the Local Project Coordinator. If the Grantee's Local Project Coordinator changes during the course of the project, the Grantee must provide the assigned Bureau Project Manager with written notification, on Grantee's letterhead, of the change, including the name, title, mailing and email addresses, and daytime telephone number of the new Local Project Coordinator.

Bureau Project Manager

The Bureau assigns a staff member to serve as the Project Manager to work with the Local Project Coordinator to successfully complete the grant project. It is the Bureau Project Manager's responsibility to provide information and assistance to the Grantee to ensure that the project is completed, that grant program requirements are met, and that the project can be successfully closed out. All correspondence and communications regarding the project should be directed to the Bureau Project Manager.

Project Service Forester

DCNR's Bureau of Forestry assigns a forester from a district forest office to serve as the Project Service Forester to work with the Local Project Coordinator to ensure that all riparian forest buffer projects are designed and installed appropriately. Correspondence and communications regarding the development and construction of the project should be sent to both the Bureau Project Manager and the Project Service Forester.

Grant Administration Process

It is BRC's intent to provide each Grantee with as much assistance as needed, on a step-by-step basis, to ensure a successful project. There are steps requiring the Grantee to wait for DCNR's review and approval before proceeding to the next step. The standard process for implementing a riparian forest buffer grant is as follows:

A. Notice of Selection and Contracting

- DCNR sends a "Notice-of-Selection" letter to the Grantee notifying them that a grant has been awarded and stating the funding amount.
- DCNR conducts a pre-contracting call with Grantee to confirm necessary information for the grant agreement such as the designated Local Project Coordinator, Match (if applicable), Project Scope, Grant Agreement Dates and next steps in the Grant Process.
- A fully executed copy of the Grant Agreement is sent to the Grantee by DCNR, signifying the beginning of the project management process.
- Upon receipt of a fully executed grant agreement, Grantees are eligible to receive a partial payment of 50% of the grant amount.

NOTE: If the grantee incurs any project costs prior to receiving a fully executed grant agreement, they do so at their own risk.

B. Grant Instructions

- The Bureau Project Manager sends written correspondence to the Grantee providing applicable special instructions and an electronic link to grant program policies and necessary [forms and guidance documents](#) that may be helpful in completing a riparian forest buffer project. This letter includes details related to the grant payment request process.
- Shortly after this letter is sent, the Bureau Project Manager will contact the grantee to schedule a conference call. During this conference call, the Grantee, designated Local Project Coordinator (if different than the Grantee), the Bureau Project Manager, and the Project Service Forester, will review general program information and discuss individual project questions, or concerns.

Grantees are reminded to review the initial letter with their project team, including their Solicitor/Attorney, as applicable, prior to the DCNR conference call.

C. Project Design Submission Review and Approval

After reviewing the initial grant guidance letter with the DCNR project manager, the Grantee may proceed with securing landowners for the riparian forest buffer projects, if necessary. Once a site is selected and secured through title, lease or easement, or landowner agreement, the grantee may begin developing a design submission for that riparian forest buffer site. The Grantee shall submit a separate design submission for each riparian forest buffer site. The Grantee shall **submit two copies** of the design submission—one to the Bureau Project Manager and one to the Project Service Forester. **The design submission shall include the following items:**

- **Planting Plan**—layout plan of the site including details related to soils and site preparation; buffer width and length, tree/shrub species, size, and spacing; specific materials and planting methods; seedling protection; and any other details, photos, or specifications necessary to adequately explain the buffer design. Planting plans must meet DCNR's [minimum guidelines](#).
- **Proof of Ownership or Control**—
 - properties owned by the Grantee: Certification of Title form
 - properties controlled by the Grantee through a long-term lease or easement: Certification of Title form and a copy of the lease or easement
 - properties that are not owned or controlled by the Grantee: executed landowner agreement. Grantees are encouraged to use the [DCNR Landowner Agreement template](#).
- **Maintenance Plan**—details regarding post planting establishment activities (roughly 1-3 years) such as invasive species control and herbicide use; and long-term maintenance (roughly 3+ years) to meet the grant requirement of ensuring the buffer's continuance for at least 25 years. Target survival rate should be at least 70%. The Plan shall also include who will perform the activities and what is expected of the landowner.
- **Multifunctional Buffer Considerations-** *(if applicable)* details appropriate for managing multifunctional buffers, including access (foot, mechanized etc), maintenance, or anticipated harvest practices.
- **Budget**—Estimated cost of buffer materials, labor, and post planting establishment related to the site. The budget should include all cash and non-cash costs to be considered for grant funding and as grant match *(if applicable)*.
- **Timeline**—Estimated schedule for major project milestones such as outreach, site design, site preparation, buffer planting, post planting establishment etc.

NOTE: Every buffer that will be paid for using DCNR grant funds or Grantee match (cash or non-cash; if applicable) needs to be included in a submitted and approved site design.

The DCNR Bureau Project Manager and Project Service Forester will review and discuss the design submission components. *(within roughly 1 month of receipt)*

- If the design submission components are acceptable and/or if there are only minor issues to resolve, the DCNR Bureau Project Manager will provide a written authorization (approval to proceed) for the Grantee to proceed with the project.
- If the submission is substantially incomplete or there are major issues, DCNR will provide review comments and request a revised submission prior to providing an approval to proceed.

D. Project Completion Site Visit(s)

The **Grantee is responsible for taking photos** of each project site upon installation of the riparian forest buffer. Upon completion of all project sites related to the grant scope of work, the Grantee is responsible for emailing photos, with descriptive labels, of all sites to the Project Service Forester.

The Grantee is also responsible for contacting the Project Service Forester to **schedule an on-site inspection of a representative sample** of the buffer project sites. *(considerations for site selection may include buffer type, design, setting, unique concern or success etc.)*

A satisfactory inspection of all project sites related to the DCNR grant is required before DCNR can close-out the grant, whether sites were inspected via photograph review or in-person visits.

The DCNR Project Service Forester will provide the Grantee and the Bureau Project Manager with written verification of the photograph and in-person inspection results. Should remediation work be required at any site, it will be outlined in this letter and it must be completed before the grant expires. The grantee shall provide photos of the completed remediation work to the DCNR Project Service Forester and the Bureau Project Manager. The grant cannot be closed out until all required remediation work is completed satisfactorily and photographic evidence of the remediation is submitted.

E. Grant Close-out

- Upon successful completion and inspection of all riparian forest buffer project sites, the Grantee shall **submit the following documentation to the Bureau Project Manager**.
 - **Final Payment Request Form**-- completed by the Grantee and signed by the Local Project Coordinator **after all project invoices have been paid in full**. The DCNR Bureau Project Manager may request additional supporting documentation from the Grantee, such as invoices, proof of payment, contracts etc., as necessary, to assist with project review.
 - Documentation of a satisfactory **site inspection** by the Project Service Forester
 - **Photos** of all project sites completed using DCNR funding or grant match *(if applicable)*
 - **GIS shapefile** of each buffer project site

- Submit buffer location and characteristic data into DEP's Stream ReLeaf reporting system <http://www.ahs.dep.pa.gov/streamreleaf/>

NOTE: In accordance with the Grant Agreement, the Final Payment Form and any requested documentation is to be supplied by the Grantee within 60 days of completion of the scope of work.

- Upon receipt and satisfactory review of the closeout documentation, the Bureau Project Manager will provide the Grantee with a written final close-out letter, authorizing the final payment allocation due the Grantee and the close-out of the project.

Grant Payments and Payment Request Forms

Grant payments are distributed to Grantees at three (3) primary project milestones.

1. Upon acceptance of an executed grant contract—(50%, Partial Payment Form)
2. Upon request, after approval to proceed with the first buffer site is provided by the Bureau Project Manager--(40%, Partial Payment Form)
3. Upon completion of the scope of work and submission and approval of all necessary project documentation—(10%, Final Payment Form)

All grant payment requests are to be made using a DCNR grant payment request form. Since payment forms are amended regularly, a new one should be downloaded from the [guidance document link](#) each time you pursue a grant payment.

The two types of grant payment forms are:

- **Partial Payment Request Form:**
 - Grantees shall use this form to request 50% of their grant funding upon receipt of an executed contract.
 - Grantees shall also use this form to request up to an additional 40% of the grant amount (beyond the initial 50% payment) after the approval to proceed with the first buffer site is provided by the Bureau Project Manager
- **Final Payment Request Form:**
 - DCNR will not disperse the final 10% of the grant amount until all invoices are paid in full and the scope of work is 100% complete. In order to draw down the final 10% of the grant funding, the Grantee must submit a final payment request form along with all required final close out documents.

All payment request forms shall be signed by the designated Local Project Coordinator and emailed to: mailto:RA-NR_BRCPAYMENTS@pa.gov

For additional details related to DCNR grant payments see the [Payment Request Processing Policy](#)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Progress Reports

Bi-annual progress reports on all project activities are due to the Bureau Project Manager on January 1 and July 1 of each year during the grant agreement. The progress report should include a summary of the grant-related activities for the reporting period submitted on the [DCNR progress report form](#) and an updated Planting Tracking Sheet. Additional reporting may also be requested of PENNVEST grantees for program evaluation purposes. More information on that reporting will be shared as it is available. Costs associated with the collection of the requested information are considered to be an eligible project expense covered by the grant funds.

Procuring Labor and Materials

Grantees are reminded that labor and materials for all riparian forest buffer projects included in the grant agreement scope of work must be procured openly and competitively.

- **Municipal Grantees:** If the Grantee is a political subdivision or other entity for which open and competitive bidding procedures have been established by law, to include the Municipal Code, the Grantee shall comply with those procedures, as applicable to the project being funded.
- **Non-Profit or any organization not covered by bidding laws:**
 - Grantees with grant allocations between \$20,000 - \$100,000
 1. Grantees will be required to obtain (3) formal written quotes.
 2. Quotes must be formalized and may be directly solicited, publicly advertised in a newspaper of general publication and/or by utilizing a public electronic construction bidding venue.
 - Grantees with grant allocations over \$100,000
 1. Grantees will be required to use open and competitive purchasing procedures related to the use of these public funds for any grants, sub-grants, contracts, subcontracts and/or other agreements for construction.
 2. Bid documents must be formalized and publicly advertised in a newspaper of general publication and/or by utilizing a public electronic construction bidding venue.

The Bureau may require the Grantee to submit proof of compliance with these procedures. Upon written request and for good cause shown, the Bureau may, at the Bureau's sole discretion, permit the Grantee to use an alternative procedure for solicitation of bids.

If other state or federal funds are being used by the organization as a match for the DCNR project, please ensure that the guidelines of all funding sources are reviewed and followed.

For additional details related to DCNR's procurement policy, please see the [Competitive Bidding/Purchasing Procedures Policy](#).

Sub-agreements

If a Grantee further distributes DCNR funding to other partners, DCNR must approve those sub-agreements to insure funding source and activity eligibility. Please submit sub-agreements to the Bureau Project Manager for approval PRIOR to execution.

All sub-agreements/subcontracts must include the grant agreement *Nondiscrimination/Sexual*

Harassment Clause.

The Grantee shall retain copies of all fully signed sub-agreements for a period of three (3) years from the date of the final payment in the case of a program audit. Sub-agreements may also be requested by the Bureau Project Manager at any time during the project period.

Project Signage

For riparian forest buffers installed on public property, the Grantee must erect an appropriate sign acknowledging that the site improvement was completed with financial assistance from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. The sign shall also acknowledge the funding source. See Appendix A of the grant agreement for the funding source of the grant. **Refer to the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation's [Sign Policy](#) for further instructions and examples.**

For riparian forest buffers installed on private property, DCNR funding acknowledgement signage is not required, however is still encouraged to assist with long term asset stewardship.

Grant Agreement Amendments/ Project Changes

Requests for changes to the approved scope of work, time line, deliverables, grant agreement period, or grant amounts should first be discussed with the Bureau Project Manager. If the Bureau Project Manager agrees that an amendment is needed, an official request should then be submitted in accordance with the grant agreement. In rare cases, it may be possible to request additional funding for cost overruns, but this is rare and is subject to the availability of funding.

Interest Income

All grant funds must be maintained in a separate interest-bearing account. Any interest or other accumulations earned by this grant must be separately identifiable in the accounting of the funds received under the Grant Agreement. Subject to prior written approval of the Bureau, the Grantee may use the interest or other accumulations earned on the grant funds for grant activities. Income earned and expended shall be recorded as part of the grant closeout documentation. Any unused interest or other income remaining at the completion of the project activities shall be returned to DCNR.

Record Keeping

All original records related to the project shall be maintained for a period of three (3) years from the date of the final payment and made available for a possible program audit. Any costs presented in the closeout information, not verifiable by an audit, may be disallowed as an eligible project cost.

It is important that you maintain records of all types of approved cash and non-cash costs throughout the grant administration process. For in-house professional staff and donated professional and volunteer services, it is recommended that you institute a tracking mechanism that includes the following information: name of person performing work, day and date of work, description of work performed, hours worked, hourly rate, and total value of work performed.

Complete records include all project-related invoices and records of payment. Additional documentation may include:

- Original payroll and accounting records relative to non-cash services.
- Activity logs and time sheets relative to non-cash services.
- Signed letters from firms, groups, or persons providing donated and volunteer services describing the type and amount (i.e. hours and rates) of services provided.

This policy remains in effect until revised or rescinded.