Cooperative Weed Management Area Grant Program Q&A
6-27-17

Q: What is a Cooperative Weed Management Area?
A Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) is a partnership of federal, state, and local government agencies, tribes, individuals, and various interested groups that manage noxious weeds or invasive plants in a defined area. Individual CWMAs can vary significantly in their priorities and how they are organized.

Q: What is the purpose of BWSR's CWMA program?
To establish strong and sustainable CWMAs across Minnesota for the collaborative and efficient control of invasive species and protection of conservation lands and natural areas.

Q: What are the key activities of Cooperative Weed Management Area?
Key activities of CWMAs include:

#1 Building Strong Partnerships
- Public landowners, and agencies
- Private landowners
- Local units of government
- Private organizations

#2 Sharing Resources between Partners
- Staff/labor
- Equipment
- Leveraged funds
- Access to lands, roads, gravel pits and/or key decision makers

#3 Effective Outreach/Communication
- Communication back and forth between agencies, landowners, local units of government, and private organizations.
- Educate - ID, prevention, management - also grant writing and plan writing
- Technical transfer - news, tips

#4 Identifying and prioritizing emerging weed threats
- New and/or recently introduced species
- Those changing status
- Possible prioritization methods
- Species based
- Site based
- Based on planned actions

#5 Facilitating management/control of priority species
- Promote sound weed management that promotes multiple landscape benefits (pollinators, native plant re-establishment) etc.

#6 Effective data management/sharing
- Occurrence
- Projects
- Structures/memberships
- Deliverables
- Funding

Q: How does SWCD technical assistance relate to the program?
A: Based on BWSR's Erosion Control and Water Management Program Policy Districts may use more than 20% of CWMA grants for technical assistance, if approved in the grant work plan.

Q: Is there a 25% match requirement for every cost-share agreement?
"The CWMA grant requires a non-state match of at least 25% of the grant amount received, per Section 3.3 of the Erosion Control and Water Management Program Policy (July 2017). Percent-based cost share rates used for contracts with land occupiers should be established in local policy and must not exceed 100%. Flat rates may be used as an alternative to actual costs documented by receipts and invoices if they are approved in the grant work plan and incorporated into a locally adopted policy."

Q: What can be used for in-kind cash value as match?
A: In-kind cash value has to be directly attributed to the project or activity accomplishments. Use the following guidance when determining in-kind cash value:
1. Local staff and administrative costs in excess of the reporting and grant management, project development or technical component of the grant funds received.
2. Conservation practice costs may not be increased beyond the actual costs of technical assistance, design, materials, and installation by the application of match. In no case may conservation practice costs exceed 100% of the actual cost of design, materials, and installation.

Q: Can the 25% local match come from the Local Government applying to BWSR?
A: Yes, the LGU can provide 25% match if the project partners cannot. The 25% match is for the overall grant request. Local in-kind cash value is eligible match.

Q: For grant projects that are approved and funded by the BWSR Board, when can work begin on those grant projects?
A: Work cannot begin on any BWSR grant project until the date when the grant is officially executed by BWSR. The project period starts when the grant agreement is "executed," meaning all required signatures have been obtained. Work that occurs before this date is not eligible for reimbursement with grant funds, and cannot be used as match. Before grant execution occurs, a work plan must be completed by the grantee and approved by BWSR staff.

Q: What type of Agreements should be developed between CWMA partners?
A: CWMA partners are encouraged to sign agreements to formalize their CWMAs and define the roles of each partner. It is up to individual CWMAs to determine what type of agreement to use and what the agreements should contain. Examples of Cooperative Agreements, Memorandum of Understanding and

Hold Harmless Agreements can be found at the following websites: http://www.mipn.org/cwma-resources/

Q: When should Cost-share contracts be used for the program?
A: A cost-share contract must be used when conducting specific, long-term management activities at a property (similar to traditional cost-share projects). In cases where spot treatment of multiple parcels, such as roadside ditches is conducted, or herbicide is provided to partners for treatment, a cost-share agreement is not required, as long as other agreements are established between the SWCD or CWMA partners and the activity is recorded as part of eLINK reporting.

Q: What information should be collected to document grant activities?
A: The use of a log is recommended for this program to keep track of activities and to track match. It is encouraged that CWMA partners keep track of hours worked, their hourly rate (this can be a standard billing rate) and if applicable, acres treated for specific activities (e.g. 7-8-09, 8 hours attending meeting at a rate of $35/hour; or 8-9-08, 6 acres of spotted knapweed sprayed with Plateau herbicide at $40 per acre). Activities can be logged over the term of the grant and then summarized in eLINK as part of interim and final grant reporting.

Q: What is expected for program reporting?

A: The eLINK page of BWSR's website provide detailed guidance for completing program reporting in eLINK, BWSR's grant management system. The eLINK Reporting Requirements At A Glance guidance document indicates which components within the eLINK system should be completed. Interim and final program reporting will be completed in eLINK, similar to other cost-share programs, under the activities proposed in the application and built into the workplan. As part of the close-out, any CWMA agreements, publicity, brochures, maps, plans and other documents developed for the program should be attached in eLINK. Additionally, a fact sheet about the individual CWMA/CISMA program goals and outcomes (as well as any other relevant information) needs to be included on the SWCD's website.

Information about reporting deadlines and grant expiration dates can be found at http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/grants/reporting/reporting.html.

Q: Who is responsible for grant reporting?
A: SWCDs, as the grant recipients, are responsible for timely and accurate grant reporting through eLINK. However, you may add Team Members from your partner organizations to assist with developing the application or workplan, or completing reporting.

Q: How does the payment schedule work for this grant?
A: Grant payments will be made as one payment after work plan approval and execution of the grant agreement provided the grant applicant is in compliance with all BWSR website and eLINK reporting requirements for previously awarded BWSR grants.

Q: The RFP states that prevailing wages apply. What are the grant applicant's responsibilities for compliance?
A: Prevailing wage requirements apply to all state funds used for "projects" that meet the definition identified in M.S 177.42 Subd. 2. As the RFP states, your first source of information for questions about the application of prevailing wage rates should be directed to the Department of Labor and Industry at 651-284-5091, or http://www.dli.mn.gov/LS/

PrevWage.asp. However, the following information may help you better understand these requirements. The responsibilities of a grant recipient are to: (1) be aware of prevailing wage and ensure their project's cost proposals address this requirement; (2) include prevailing wage information in their bid and contract documents; and (3) receive and maintain the payroll reports that contractors will furnish every two weeks. Prevailing wage does not apply to administrative activities of the grant recipient or construction activities directly conducted by a local government, i.e. if an SWCD uses its own staff to plant trees, prevailing wage would not apply, but if they contracted with Joe's Planting Service it would.

Q: Can a grantee's reporting time be covered by the grant?
A: Yes. Grant management and reporting costs are eligible project expenses.

Q: Which Activity Categories in eLINK should I use for developing my CWMA application and workplan?
A: Eligible Activity Categories for CWMA projects are outlined below:

Category	Description
Administration/ Coordination	Staff time for local grant administration and reporting.
Education/ Information	Development and implementation of environmental education activities and programs such as workshops, clinics, publications, websites, presentations, fairs, etc.
Inventory/ Mapping	Inventories and mapping of invasive weed population related data.
Monitoring/ Data Collection	Weed management and restoration monitoring and data collection activities, including database updates.
Planning and Assessment	Invasive species management planning.
Project Development	Project support activities which will directly support or supplement the goals and outcomes of the work plan such as: civic engagement; public outreach; initial contacts, actions, and activities with landowners and/or partners; preliminary information gathering; conservation marketing; or other activities.
Non-structural Management Practices*	On-the-ground weed management or replanting efforts.
Supplies/ Equipment	Acquisition of equipment, hardware, software (e.g. weed mapping software), or supplies.

*Note that all on the ground weed management and replanting efforts should be reported under the "Non-structural practices" activity category in eLINK.

Q: Why did I get an error message saying one of the application fields was empty after I entered the required data and then tried to submit the application?
A: You must save the information to the application before submitting. It may be necessary to scroll to the top or bottom of the page in order to bring the "Save" button into view. If you save while one of narrative questions is blank, the placeholder text "Not Entered" will be inserted; this will need to be replaced prior to submitting the application.

Q: My map was the last thing I created in my application. When I submitted the application, I didn't receive an email notification that my application was submitted. What happened?
A: The map creation function may take several seconds to finish processing. If you try and submit the application before the map creation is done, the eLINK system   considers the application incomplete and does not send out a notification. When the   map creation function is complete, you will see a popup window indicating the map has been successfully saved. At that time, you may submit the application and should receive the proper notification.

Q: Why am I having trouble creating my map?
A1: Google Chrome is not supported by eLINK. The applicant should use Microsoft (MS) Internet Explorer 9 or newer or use Mozilla Firefox.
A2: The system will only allow you to map up to 50 twelve-digit HUCs. As most CWMA application project areas will exceed this limit, we recommend selecting a single HUC. You may either use a centroid for the project location, or the HUC where the applicant office is located.

Q: Help! I lost the narrative portion of my application after I saved the information?
A: Each of the narrative questions within the application has a 2,000 character limit. If any one of those questions is over 2,000 characters, there will be an error message that shows up upon attempting to save. You may have to scroll up or down the screen to see this. If you do not change the character limit but push the save button and go to a different tab, all narrative questions will be lost. If you change the character limit and forget to push the save button and go to another tab, all narrative questions will be lost. Please be sure to check your application for any warning messages before proceeding. (Also see Q5 below)

Q: I wrote my responses to the questions in Word, but when I copied and pasted my answer into eLINK, it was truncated—or didn't save.
A: Word and eLINK may interpret the character counts differently. Avoid using special formatting or characters, such as bulleted lists, bolded font, or symbols (such as "&").

Q: The character limit for answering each application question in eLINK is 2000 characters. Does that include spaces?
A: Yes. A space is considered a character in eLINK.

Q: Can I make changes to a submitted application during the RFP open period?
A: Yes. You will need to change the submitted status to "in process", make changes, and change the status back to "Submit". The status change triggers generating the report, which is added to the Attachments tab and seen by reviewers. Please note that failure to change "Submitted" status will not capture any changes for review team, and applications not in "Submitted" status at the time the RFP closes will not be considered for funding.

Q: Can I access earlier grant applications even if they were not funded?
A: Yes, you can access them by logging into eLINK and from the homepage under the "Grants" module, click on the "Include closed grants" box, enter the appropriate fiscal year's allocation, and click "Go".

Q: Can consultants submit grant applications in eLINK on behalf of LGUs?
A: Yes, there are two ways to accomplish this. One way is for the LGU to start an application and add a consultant to the "team membership". The consultant must have an active eLINK user account in order to be added to the team membership. The second way is for a consultant to request an eLINK user account from the eLINK homepage and indicate the LGU(s) for which they are applying. The LGUs should be aware of this request.

eLINK user accounts should not be shared by multiple individuals; a separate user account should be requested by each individual needing access. It is not necessary to create multiple eLINK user accounts for one individual if access is needed for multiple organizations. To request access to additional LGUs contact elinksupport@state.mn.us.

Q: When attempting to submit my application, I get a message stating, "*For each activity, you must either check the box verifying that there are no pollution reduction estimates associated with the Activity, or enter proposed indicators*." What do I need to do?
A: Within the Application Budget tab, you will either need to ensure that the "Check here if this activity does not include proposed pollution reduction estimates" is checked within the Edit Application Activity" screen (pencil icon), or enter proposed indicators within the "Edit Indicators" screen (orange diamond icon). If your project will include on the ground practices resulting in pollution reductions, indicators must be entered.