

Water Activities Work Group

DEQ 319 Project Grant Review Procedures Guidance

October 3, 2005

BACKGROUND

The Water Activities Work Group (WAWG) is an informal subgroup of the Montana Watershed Coordination Council (MWCC). The term “informal” is used, as the group does not operate under by-laws, has no regulatory or policy setting functions, and its membership consists of those agencies and individuals who have an interest in coordinating locally-based water resource protection and improvement activities.

The purpose of the Water Activities Work Group as defined by the MWCC is to “Act as a multidisciplinary, scientific and technical review committee for Section 319 nonpoint source management projects administered by the Department of Environmental Quality Nonpoint Source Program. Consider other issues relating to water activities and watershed management coordination as appropriate or upon referral of the full MWCC.” (2002-2003 Work Plan).

In 2004 the MWCC requested the WAWG to review its work plan, which consisted of reviewing the WAWG membership and seeking further representation. MWCC encouraged the WAWG to discuss opportunities to expand its activities outside of 319 project review to better coordinate watershed-based water resource “activities”.

The WAWG met three times in 2004 to further discuss this topic (June 1, October 20, December 16). One of those meetings included observation of, and discussion with the Montana Water, Wastewater and Solid Waste Action Coordinating Team. This group (also informal in nature) meets regularly to coordinate and address community infrastructure needs. At the December 16th meeting, the WAWG discussed a draft goal of “improving funding source collaboration in water resource protection/improvement efforts (i.e. watershed activity funding collaboration)”.

At the December 16th meeting, three general “areas of need” were identified: centralized or coordinated funding application process; grant information (sources, purpose, deadlines, etc.); and need for funding agency coordination/collaboration. Two subgroups agreed to work on these areas of need. One group will address the grant application coordination (Montana Grants Application Subcommittee), and the other group will address the grant information and funding agency coordination (Funding Source Information/Coordination Subcommittee).

After the January 19, 2005 WAWG 319 Project Review meeting it was requested that DEQ develop rules or guidance for the 319 grants review process. It was suggested that with the informal nature of and changes to the membership of the group, that this would assist individuals in participating appropriately in the review process.

GENERAL TIMELINE FOR 319 PROJECT GRANTS

Late May: “Call for 319 Project Grants” drafted and sent to WAWG
Early June: WAWG Meeting to discuss draft “Call for Grants”
Early July: MDEQ issues formal “Call for 319 Project Grants”
October: Draft 319 project grant applications due
MDEQ review and comment on draft applications
Opportunity for WAWG review and comment
December: Final 319 project grant applications due
January: WAWG meeting to review and rank 319 project grant applications
February: MDEQ sends “Notification of intent to award” or “Sorry” letters and formalizes Project Implementation Plans
March: MDEQ submits 319 consolidated Projects Grant Application to EPA
June: MDEQ/Grantee contracts signed for 319 Project Grants

PROJECT GRANTS REVIEW PROCESS FOR SECTION 319

1. The Governor of the State of Montana has identified MDEQ as the State Agency responsible for preparing and directing the State’s Nonpoint source Management Program under Section 319 of the Federal Clean Water Act.
2. MDEQ will draft the “Call for Grant Applications” and request WAWG comment prior to issuing the “Call”.
3. MDEQ will give due consideration to comments provided on draft Call for Grant Applications”.
4. MDEQ has the responsibility for submitting the State’s annual projects grant submittal to the US EPA for review and approval.
5. MDEQ is the final decision authority for which grant applications are submitted for EPA funding and at what level.
6. MDEQ staff will provide comment on draft project grant applications. Those comments, as well as the draft project grant applications will be available for WAWG review on DEQ’s NPS website. DEQ staff will be available to answer calls from WAWG members regarding staff comments.
7. WAWG members may provide questions to the DEQ Contracts Manager (Rob Rung) for the applicants prior to the annual WAWG review and ranking meeting. This will allow the applicants an opportunity to answer those questions in their presentation.
8. MDEQ will provide a letter to project applicants summarizing MDEQ and WAWG’s comments on their draft grant application.
9. MDEQ will provide staff to review and provide DEQ’s perspective on individual projects and compiled ranking to the WAWG at the annual ranking meeting.
10. Project applicants will be invited to the annual WAWG ranking meeting to present their project. Presentations are limited to 15 minutes.
11. WAWG reviews the projects and makes ranking and funding recommendations that are usually adopted by DEQ/EPA, but, for program reasons, may be modified.

12. Grant applicants are welcome to attend the WAWG ranking discussion, but may not participate in the discussion. During the grant ranking process WAWG members may not consult with grant applicants, per the State's RFP requirements.
13. MDEQ will consider the recommendations of the WAWG with respect to compiled ranking and funding level.
14. MDEQ will provide a letter to project applicants summarizing MDEQ and WAWG's comments and ranking on their final grant application.
15. MDEQ will provide a summary of the WAWG recommendations to the group, in addition to a summary of funded projects and their funding level.

GENERAL WAWG 319 REVIEW CONDUCT GUIDELINES

- WAWG members who have projects that their group or agency may financially benefit from if they are funded, will leave the room when that project is being discussed.
- Project applicants are directed not to vote on or rank their own proposed project(s) either individually or in the compiled ranking.
- Project applicants that are not members of the WAWG are encouraged to stay and listen to WAWG's review/discussion of their project.
- It is expected that WAWG 319 reviewers will "check their personal interests at the door". Reviewers should base their evaluation of proposed projects based on technical soundness, timely completion, the applicants ability to perform, implementation of the State's NPS Plan, cost effectiveness and environmental value of the projects.