

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program

Request for Proposals FY 2022

Application Form

https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/ProducerLedProjects.aspx

Deadline

Monday, September 27, 2021

Electronic submissions only (**in Microsoft Word format only**) to:

Rachel.Rushmann@wi.gov

Questions can be directed to:

Rachel Rushmann: 608-590-7357, Rachel.Rushmann@wi.gov

The Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection (DATCP) provides funding to producer-led groups that focus on nonpoint source pollution abatement activities through the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program (PLWPG).

Program Goal: To improve Wisconsin's soil and water quality by supporting and advancing producer-led conservation solutions by increasing on the ground practices and farmer participation in these efforts.

Important Notes

Grants are reviewed on a competitive basis based upon the ranking criteria outlined in this Request for Proposals, so **please review the criteria very carefully**. There are separate criteria for groups funded by DATCP two years or less (Category 1) and groups funded for more than two years (Category 2).

Remember this program supports producer-led efforts, so ensuring that your group is truly led and driven by its participating producers and that your application clearly describes the leadership role of those producers is extremely important.

Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 2
Eligibility Requirements	Page 2
Eligible Projects	Page 3
Eligible and Ineligible Costs	Page 3
Funding Priorities	Page 4
Grant Administration Requirements	Page 4
Submitting a Proposal	Page 5
Application Processing and Evaluation	Pages 5-8
Receiving a Grant: Expectations	Page 8
Conservation Tracking Project Requirements	Page 9
Contract Requirements	Page 9-10
Definitions	Page 10
Application Tips and Checklist	Pages 11-12

Introduction

The PLWPG has the following requirements:

- The maximum annual award per producer-led group/legal entity is \$40,000.
- There is a 1:1 match requirement, meaning for every dollar requested through this program, groups must show a dollar will be provided by another source.
- Successful applicants will be required to submit the following:
 - An annual report using a [DATCP provided template](#) (template subject to change if necessary)
 - ***New as of 2021 funding*** Participate in our tracking project using, at a minimum, the [DATCP Conservation Tracking Sheet – Basic](#)
 - Both of these documents can be found on the right hand side of the webpage under “Grant awardees”.
- A signed grant contract. No funding commitment is final until the contract is signed by all parties and no activities are reimbursable until a signed contract is in place.

Eligibility Requirements

An Applicant must be a producer-led group that meets **all** of the following criteria:

- The producer-led group includes at least five agricultural producers, each of whom operates an eligible farm, within the same watershed.
- The group collaborates and enters a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with at least **one** of the following:
 - Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
 - A county land conservation committee or local land conservation department
 - The University of Wisconsin Division of Extension or UW-Discovery Farms
 - *A non-profit conservation organization*
- The group assists themselves and other agricultural producers in the watershed to voluntarily conduct nonpoint source water pollution abatement activities.
- The group contributes matching funds at least equal to, but not less than, the amount requested (1:1 match).

Eligible Projects

Eligible projects include a combination of any of the following nonpoint source abatement activities:

- *For new groups only:* Startup costs associated with group formation, including work planning, mission statement development, goal setting, etc.
- Providing incentive payments to producers to implement conservation practices such as cover crops, no-till or reduced tillage systems, buffer strips, grassed waterways, manure composting, low-disturbance manure application methods, etc.
- Measuring economic and environmental benefits of conservation practices
- Performing nutrient management planning, training and assessments
- Developing innovative approaches to manure management, storage, stacking, or conservation equipment-sharing, which increases and/or identifies economic and environmental benefits of such practices
- Hosting education and outreach activities such as hosting conferences, workshops or field days
- Increasing farmer participation through one-on-one meetings and peer mentorship
- Collaborating with partner(s) for on-farm research that identifies economic and environmental benefits/opportunities of utilizing various conservation practices or strategies
- Conducting edge-of-field and/or in-stream water quality monitoring
- Conducting baseline data collection such as well testing
- Performing farm assessments to evaluate farm, manure, and nutrient management practices and identify solutions to environmental impacts
- Other activities deemed by the department as consistent with the purpose of this grant program
 - Activities that deviate from the above listed projects need DATCP approval **before** incurring the cost of that activity

For ideas on how to expand your cost-share or incentive program, see the [“Advancing Producer-Led Watershed Projects and Incentive Programs”](#) on the [Producer-Led Webpage](#).

Eligible Costs	Ineligible Costs
Development of work plan and goals, educational/training events, development of incentive program, farm assessments, etc.	Equipment purchases
Incentive payments for conservation practices	Real estate purchases
Facility rentals, meals, and expenses directly related to hosting field days, workshops or conferences	Repayment of loans or mortgages
Staff costs for coordinating project including expenses for salaries and wages, contract and consulting services, and mileage at allowable state rates. The maximum reimbursable amount for any type of labor expense is <u>\$25/hour</u> . Mileage reimbursement is set by the state rate.	Rent or contract payments for time periods extending beyond the term of the grant contract
Creation of marketing and outreach brochures, handouts, newsletters, factsheets, mailings, etc.	Administrative or overhead costs that are not direct costs of the grant project
Materials and supplies directly associated with the project	Lobbying activities

Incentive payments for equipment rentals of innovative technologies used/shared by all farmers within the producer-led group. For example, covering costs for renting a no-till drill	Other costs deemed by DATCP as not consistent with the purpose of this grant program
Rental costs for equipment directly associated with research projects, if pre-approved by DATCP	
Costs associated with monitoring or well testing (capped at \$5,000)	
Out-of-state travel and/or conference registrations (capped at \$1,000)	
Other costs deemed by DATCP as consistent with the purpose of this grant program	

Funding priorities

As this program continues to grow our funding priorities will focus on groups that demonstrate innovative and creative approaches to water quality improvements.

Our funding priorities include:

- Expansion of cost-share programming to promote innovative practices and management such as alternative forages or other grain crops, planting green, precision conservation management, rotational grazing, agroforestry, low disturbance manure applications, cover crops, etc.
- Stacking practices to utilize and promote conservation systems, rather than individual practices
- Education efforts to learn about conservation practice benefits for specific watershed areas through on-farm demonstrations, trials and research
- Targeted outreach that promotes the financial and environmental benefits of conservation to farmers and other industry professionals
- Other projects that demonstrate innovation and growth

Grant Administration Requirements

Funding

Funding will be available once the contract is signed by both parties and no earlier than January 1, 2022. Funds expire on December 31, 2022. The grant recipient may submit a formal request to DATCP to extend its grant funds into the next grant cycle if funds are available.

Collaborating Entity and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Requirement

All applicants must have or develop a MOU with one of the required entities listed in the "Eligibility Requirements" section (page 2 of RFP) at the time of application. [An example MOU is available on DATCP's Producer-Led webpage.](#) **For new and existing groups, a copy of the MOU must be submitted with the grant proposal unless we have a current MOU on file.** If requested and approved in advance by DATCP, the MOU may be developed after the submission of the grant proposal but prior to the grant contract development.

Eligibility for Cost-Share Practices

The Producer-Led program does NOT fund payments to farmers on the same acres for the same practice beyond three years. Allowable acres are acres that have not otherwise been funded by the Producer-Led Watershed Protection program and/or by any other local, state or federal programs for that same exact practice and/or management methods for more than three years.

For example, if a farmer received a cover crop incentive payment on a field planted to a rye cover crop after corn silage harvest for three years in a row, that field would be ineligible for incentive payments for planting a rye cover crop the fourth year. However if the farmer wanted to plant a multi-species mix cover crop after corn silage, or try interseeding in corn silage, that same field would be eligible the fourth year as this is considered a different conservation practice.

The producer led group is expected to track this information and be able to make it available to DATCP upon request.

Fiscal Manager

If the producer-led group does not meet the definition of a legal entity (see definitions on page 8), a fiscal manager who does meet the legal entity definition can be designated to accept and manage the funds on behalf of the producer-led group. Your collaborating entity and fiscal manager (if applicable) do not need to be the same entity.

Matching Funds and Source of Match Requirement

Match must be identified in the Budget Request section of the application. Match contributors, outlining their intended support and donations needs to be identified. **Matching funds must be directly related to the work of your producer-led group and within the watershed that the work is being completed.** Matching funds also must be at least equal to the total requested grant funds (1:1 match). *Example: Total requested funds of \$40,000 requires a \$40,000 match.* Applicants must indicate where the source of match is derived from. Matching funds must be documented in the annual report submitted to DATCP. Matching funds can come in the form of any combination of the following acceptable matching contributions:

- Funds from other grantors and/or sponsorships
- Time spent at a rate of \$25/hour including staff time, farmer time, outreach, research, administrative, technical and education services
- Cost of purchased of conservation or research equipment to be utilized by the entire producer-led group and its participants
- Cost-share on practice implementation (i.e., the farmer's portion spent on cover crops can be used towards match)
- In-kind contributions for services or resources from organizations other than the producer-led group and collaborator can be included, e.g. donated facility rentals

***Please note: State funds cannot be used as match. Up to 50% of an in-kind match is allowable. For example: if you request \$20,000, the match can be up to \$10,000 of in-kind contributions such as services provided by partner entities or time spent. Applications will be evaluated on how much time vs. actual costs are provided as match.**

Submitting a Proposal

The application form can be found on the DATCP website:

https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/ProducerLedProjects.aspx

- ➡ Applications must be submitted no later than **September 27, 2021**. Applications must be submitted in Microsoft Word format ONLY to Rachel.Rushmann@wi.gov.

Application Processing and Evaluation Criteria

DATCP staff and advisors to the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program will review and score submitted proposals on a competitive basis. There are separate criteria for groups funded by DATCP two years or less (**Category 1**) and groups funded for more two years (**Category 2**) outlined below. **Category 1** applications are weighted more heavily on the development of work plans, goals, farmer involvement, viability of the project and plans for communication. **Category 2** applications, due to their experience, are evaluated more heavily on farmer involvement and leadership, level of conservation adoption, communication and outreach efforts to increase participation, tracking and reporting progress.

CRITERIA FOR CATEGORY 1 GROUPS

1	<u>Completeness of Proposal (statutory requirements)</u>	Yes or No
	Proposal includes all required documentation and fulfills program goals and priorities.	
	Proposal meets all program eligibility requirements.	
	Project demonstrates a plan to increase on-farm conservation efforts within watershed area.	
	Letters of commitment are provided by match contributors.	
	A MOU with at least one of the required collaborating entities is provided.	
	Collaborating entities listed as non-profits fit the definition for this program.	
	<i>**All requirements of Criteria 1 MUST be met in order to rank application</i>	
2	<u>Goals/Objectives/Work Plan/Innovation</u>	25
	Proposal demonstrates creative and innovative approaches to solve/address water quality issues.	10
	Work plan is or will be developed and is clearly linked to project goals and desired outcomes.	5
	Goals of the project align with the goals and objectives of the group.	5
	Viability of project is evident.	5
3	<u>Anticipated Results/Metrics Provided</u>	25
	Project demonstrates that it will increase nonpoint source abatement activities to improve water quality.	9
	Project demonstrates that it will increase farmer participation in conservation efforts.	6
	Project incorporates a viable method for tracking and measuring project results in short and long term.	5
	Adequate metrics are provided to evaluate project progress and success as they relate to their stated goals.	5
4	<u>Support/Commitment</u>	20
	Farmer leadership and commitment by farmers is evident.	10
	Strong project support by participants, partners, industry and other relevant individuals or organizations.	6
	Efforts by the group are complementary to other local and state programs rather than duplicative.	2

	Letters of support are included from project partners identifying their roles and commitment of support for the project. <i>Letters of support for new groups are required.</i>	2
5	<u>Budget</u>	15
	Justification exists for each budget item. Budget items are clear, specific and meet the program requirements.	5
	Budget items and work plan tasks are clearly linked.	5
	1:1 match is identified. Time vs. actual costs provided as match are reasonable. Source of match is identified.	5
6	<u>Communications</u>	15
	Project outlines plan to increase farmer participation in conservation efforts.	8
	Applicant clearly defines how project information will be shared with the agriculture community and non-farming public.	7
		100 points total

CRITERIA FOR CATEGORY 2 GROUPS

1	<u>Completeness of Proposal (statutory requirements)</u>	Yes or No
	Proposal includes all required documentation and fulfills program goals and priorities.	
	Proposal meets all program eligibility requirements.	
	Project demonstrates a plan to increase on-farm conservation efforts within watershed area.	
	Letters of commitment are provided by match contributors.	
	A MOU with at least one of the required collaborating entities is provided.	
	Collaborating entities listed as non-profits fit the definition for this program.	
	<i>**All requirements of Criteria 1 MUST be met in order to rank application</i>	
2	<u>Goals/Objectives/Work Plan</u>	10
	Work plan exists and is clearly linked to project goals and desired outcomes.	5
	Goals of the project align with the goals and objectives of the group.	3
	Project demonstrates funding need.	2
3	<u>Innovation</u>	20
	Project focuses on the expansion of cost-share programming to promote innovative practices	5
	Project focuses on stacking practices to utilize and promote conservation systems, rather than individual practices	5
	Project includes education efforts such as on-farm demonstrations, trials and research	5

	Project includes targeted outreach that promotes the economic and environmental benefits of conservation to farmers and other industry professionals	5
4	<u>Anticipated Results/Metrics Provided</u>	15
	Project demonstrates that it will increase nonpoint source abatement activities to improve water quality.	5
	Project demonstrates that it will increase farmer participation in conservation efforts.	5
	Adequate metrics are provided to evaluate project progress and success as they relate to their stated goals.	5
5	<u>Support/Commitment</u>	20
	Farmer leadership and commitment by farmers is evident.	10
	Strong project support by participants, partners, industry and other relevant individuals or organizations.	6
	Efforts by the group are complementary to other local and state programs rather than duplicative.	2
	Letters of support are included from project partners identifying their roles and commitment of support for the project. <i>Letters of support are suggested but not required.</i>	2
6	<u>Budget</u>	10
	Justification exists for each budget item. Budget items are clear, specific and meet the program requirements.	5
	1:1 match is identified. Time vs. actual costs provided as match are reasonable. Source of match is identified.	5
7	<u>Communications</u>	10
	Project outlines plan to increase farmer participation in conservation efforts.	6
	Applicant clearly defines how project information will be shared with the agriculture community and non-farming public.	4
8	<u>Previously Funded Projects</u>	15
	Past performance under previous grant awards and contracts was satisfactory.	3
	Final reports included quantitative and qualitative deliverables, demonstrated progress, outcomes and results.	3
	Group continues to grow in participation.	3
	Group continues to find ways to expand programming and conservation efforts.	3
	Group participated in the annual information sharing workshop.	2
	Reimbursements were submitted in a timely manner with required supporting documentation.	1

Receiving a Grant: Expectations

Reporting Requirements

Grant recipients will be required to file an **annual report** using the [DATCP approved template](#) as well as have at least one farmer and one collaborator from the group attend the DATCP annual **information-**

sharing workshop. Details of what must be included in the report will also be outlined in the grant contract between the producer-led group and DATCP. Funded projects must submit their annual report no later than March 1, 2023. Grant recipients will be required to provide quantitative information detailed in the annual report form as well as participate in the newly developed tracking system (details below) for the producer-led projects. This system will be completed by DATCP staff in partnership with UW and will provide groups with information on potential nutrient and soil loss reductions resulting from the implementation of installed conservation practices.

Conservation Tracking Project Requirements

Since the inception of the PLWPG Program in 2016, producer-led groups have played important roles in promoting and implementing conservation practices that help improve water quality throughout the state.

Tracking and quantifying our successes as we continue to build this program and support farmers' efforts is imperative moving forward. In 2019, DATCP initiated this tracking project to address these questions, while also providing a more detailed picture of the program's impacts to waters of the state.

The content below explains **the minimum level of information required** from each group to track and evaluate our progress as a program. The more detailed information we receive from groups, the more robust our analysis and subsequent communication of our efforts can be. A DATCP spreadsheet is available on our webpage to track this information: [Conservation Tracking Sheet – Basic or Conservation Tracking Sheet – Advanced](#). Groups are required at a minimum to fill out the basic tracking information spreadsheet but it is encouraged to provide greater levels of detail of information to help further evaluate progress using the Advanced spreadsheet.

For acres of conservation installed through incentive payments and cost-share programs paid by the PLWPG program:

- Farm/Landowner Name
- Operation Type
- Current Crop Rotation
- Practice Cost-Shared/Incentive Paid
- Detail of Practice Installed
- Previous Management Related to Practice (tillage, manure, etc.)
- Number of Acres Planted
- Number of Acres Cost-Shared/Incentive Paid (if applicable)
- Payment per Acre
- Total Paid to Farmer

For questions on how to fill out this spreadsheet, contact: Dana.Christel@wi.gov.

Funding Distribution and Reimbursement Information

Awards will be distributed through a reimbursement process upon receipt of the reimbursement request(s) and required receipts and other supporting documentation for both the reimbursement request.

Reimbursement may only be requested for activities completed after the signing of the grant contract. Please note: DATCP will no longer be offering upfront stipend payments.

A detailed invoice of expenses including **all** receipts for expenses, purchases made or services provided will be required at the time funding reimbursement requests are made. When requesting reimbursement, grant recipients must use the [DATCP reimbursement request form](#) and submit all receipts and invoices associated with their reimbursement request. The reimbursement request form and instructions are located on the right hand side of the DATCP producer-led webpage.

Conservation Compliance

Grant Recipients must comply with all federal, state, or local laws, ordinances, regulations or formal guidelines, including but not limited to those related to soil and water conservation requirements, licensing fees or taxes, in effect during the period of your contract. Grant Recipients must ensure the five listed farms and any persons identifying as a member who receive a financial benefit from this grant also comply with these provisions. Any information received regarding violations or non-compliance may be used when evaluating applications.

Open Records

Applications submitted for funding and all related contracts and reports shall be subject to disclosure under the Public Records law. If the grant applicant or recipient requests any information be deemed a trade secret, the document should be labeled using "trade secret" and the requested status should be noted to DATCP when the document is submitted. DATCP shall notify the grant recipient if a public records request is made for the information claimed to be trade secret by the grant recipient. Such information may be kept confidential by DATCP only as authorized by law (see s. 19.36(5), Wis. Stats.).

Other Considerations

All applications submitted in response to this RFP become the property of DATCP. The agency reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish, otherwise use, and to authorize others to use materials produced under this grant agreement.

DATCP also reserves the right to:

- Post content from funded applications to the DATCP website.
- Use photos, outreach materials and publications generated by groups or taken by DATCP staff, project collaborators or others to promote program successes and activities.
- Share group lead's contact information for related purposes and projects.
- Reject any or all applications received.
- Waive or modify minor irregularities in applications received, after prior notification and agreement of applicant.
- Amend program specifications after their release, with appropriate written notice to potential applicants.
- Require a good faith effort on the part of the applicant to work with DATCP subsequent to project completion to develop or implement project results in Wisconsin.
- Withhold any payments if contract conditions are not met.

Definitions

*A "**producer-led group**" is a group of at least five farmers that operate eligible farms² who work collaboratively on nonpoint source abatement activities within a watershed.*

*An "**eligible farm**" means a farm that produced at least \$6,000 in gross farm revenues during the taxable year or a total of at least \$18,000 in gross farm revenues during the preceding three years.*

*The size of a **watershed** is not defined for the purposes of this grant program, however, every farmer in your group must reside within the same watershed. For example, the watershed you choose to work in could be a HUC 10 (from 40,000 to 250,000 acres) or a HUC 12 (10,000 to 40,000 acres). Limiting your group's efforts to a smaller watershed size may enhance the likelihood of success in achieving watershed goals. A map is provided on our program webpage to help you determine what watershed your group resides in.*

A “**non-profit conservation organization**” means a nonstock corporation, charitable trust, or other entity whose purposes include the acquisition of property for conservation or agricultural preservation purposes, that is described in section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, that is exempt from federal income tax under section 501 (a) of the Internal Revenue Code, and that is a qualified organization under section 170 (h) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

A “**legal entity**” includes a corporation, partnership, company, or association registered by the department of financial institutions or a nonprofit organization with tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Application tips

As you develop your grant application and work to create the strongest application possible, consider the following tips and suggestions.

- Be clear and concise, but tell your story. Members of the review panel may not work with you directly and will need background information on your project to fully understand the intentions of your project.
- Review the ranking criteria listed on page 5 of this RFP to make sure you are addressing all applicable criteria in your application.
- Ensure you included all of the items listed in the Application Checklist (below).
- Include measurable outcomes and methods to track results.
- Develop a strong work plan and achievable goals.
- Describe strategies to increase farmer participation.
- Farmers: include complete descriptions of your operation, why you want to participate and what your role will be to demonstrate farmer leadership within the group.
- Include a clear and realistic budget and budget explanation so reviewers can understand what each line item will be used for and how it relates to the overall project.
- Develop a diverse project and application that includes actual practice implementation, outreach and a way to track results.
- Have an industry partner review your application before you submit.
- If you are an existing group, be sure to explain specifically how DATCP funds will be used and what was accomplished using previous funds.

Applicant Checklist

A complete application in Microsoft Word format includes:

- Application form with all required fields completed
- Budget that includes:
 - Match contributions at least equal to the requested grant amount
 - Staff time requests on separate line items
 - Electronic signatures by lead farmer and fiscal manager (if applicable)
 - Letter(s) of commitment or correspondence provided by all match contributors
- A MOU signed by all necessary parties



Resources including example budgets, projects, and applications, model MOUs, etc. are available on the DATCP Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant webpage:
https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/ProducerLedProjects.aspx