

# Pilot Distributed Wastewater Grant Program Application Guidelines



## PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

In FY 2023-2024, the Florida Legislature awarded the Northwest Florida Water Management District (District) \$2,000,000 “to implement a distributed wastewater treatment systems grant program for impaired watersheds” (Line Item 1711A). The program is labeled as “pilot” because it is a new funding source and because of the unique characteristics of distributed wastewater projects.

## STATE AND DISTRICT PRIORITIES

As outlined in Chapter 373, Florida Statutes, one of the District’s core missions includes protecting and improving the quality and quantity of water resources and natural systems across northwest Florida. This mission is supported by the Governor’s Executive Orders [19-12](#), [23-06](#) and the [Protecting Florida Together](#) initiative. The District supports and complements these efforts with a minimum flows and minimum water levels (MFLs) program, Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) plans, and collaboration with DEP and other partners on Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs).

The focus of this pilot grant program is to demonstrate, through cost-effectiveness and water quality data, the benefits of alternative approaches to wastewater treatment, particularly in areas not suitable for central sewer facilities.

## ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants and grant recipients are governmental entities as described in [s. 287.012\(14\), F.S.](#), and public wastewater utilities, nonprofit wastewater utilities, and other nonprofit organizations as defined in [s. 215.97\(2\)\(m\), F.S.](#), within the District’s 16-county region.

The District recognizes that the technology supporting distributed wastewater projects may be developed uniquely by private entities and encourages such entities to partner with an eligible applicant.

## DEFINITION, ELIGIBLE PROJECTS AND REQUIREMENTS

### A. Definitions

For the purposes of this program, distributed or decentralized wastewater systems are those wastewater treatment facilities that are not central sewer or Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems (OSTDS) projects and that are designed to achieve secondary treatment standards and provide a minimum of 80% total nitrogen removal before discharge to a subsurface application system.

## B. Eligible Projects Activities

Eligible project activities are those that implement a distributed or decentralized wastewater pilot project, including:

- Suitability studies/plans\*
- Engineering, permitting, project management, administration, and outreach
- Construction/installation
- Monitoring/Sampling
- Specific operational costs incentives\*\* for up to 24 months following construction

\*Suitability studies would examine where, how, and why distributed wastewater treatment systems may work within a particular jurisdiction or area versus a feasibility study, which typically would be narrower in focus looking at how a specific project would fare at a specific location.

\*\*Does not include standard operational costs such as electricity, land leases, etc. Some distributed wastewater systems have monthly and/or annual operating expenses specifically tied to the type of technology employed. For example, remote monitoring activities.

## C. Match Requirements

Although grant funding provided may cover 100 percent of the total project cost, a 50 percent match of the overall project cost is encouraged for projects that do not serve financially disadvantaged communities. Eligible match funding includes local sources, in-kind contributions, and companion projects. Match funding and other local contributions will be considered in project rankings. Match funds will transfer to a contract requirement, so only include committed funds.

## D. Additional Project Requirements

Additional project requirements include:

- All installation and/or construction projects must include a monitoring plan. The monitoring must include at least three sampling points at the project inflow site, outflow site and a downgradient location. Samples collected must be analyzed for a minimum of Total Nitrogen, Biological Oxygen Demand, and Total Suspended Solids. Sampling must include pre- and post-project conditions. If awarded funds, the applicants will be required to develop a standard quality assurance plan using a [template](#) provided by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.
- Public outreach is required for the project, including a public outreach plan as a deliverable.
- See ***General Conditions for Receiving Funds*** for more information.

## WATER RESOURCES INFORMATION

Information to assist in completing applications is provided on the District's and DEP's websites. The ***Application Form*** includes links to locating proximity to waters not attaining water quality standards.

Additional programs and links are below.

- Florida Department of Environmental Protection: <https://floridadep.gov/>. See the Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration for Total Maximum Daily Loads, Basin Management Action Plans, Reasonable Assurance Plans, and TMDLs.
- Northwest Florida Water Management District: <https://www.nwfwater.com/>. See the Water Resources pages for Minimum Flows and Minimum Water Levels, Surface Water Improvement and Management, and Agriculture.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

All applications will be reviewed and evaluated based on the criteria noted below.

Evaluation Criteria	Description (as applicable to each project type)
1. State and District Priorities	(1) Project benefits an impaired watershed; (2) Will benefit waterbodies with adopted BMAPs, TMDLs, MFLs or on the District's MFL priority list; (3) Implements other District plans or priorities, such as a SWIM Plan.
2. Project Outcomes and Benefits	(1) Provides direct water quality benefits; (2) Provides multiple water resource benefits (i.e., water reuse and water quality); (3) Complements other wastewater or water quality projects; (4) Clearly quantifies nutrient reductions or measurable improvements in water quality; (5) Has additional benefits to the community (e.g., socio-economic).
3. Cost effectiveness, cost sharing, and resource strategies	(1) Demonstrates cost-effectiveness (2) Represents a quality return on investment, i.e., the amount of local cooperator funding leveraged by the state grant, while recognizing funding limitations of economically disadvantaged communities; (3) Project is part of a local sponsors' strategy to address water quality issues; (4) Is part of a local or regional plan or budget; (5) The degree to which applicant has leveraged additional funding sources to complete the project.
4. Applicant capacity, local commitment, and readiness for implementation	(1) Is ready to proceed and can be implemented in a timely manner; (2) Has demonstrated local commitment to the project, e.g., match funding; (3) Is committed to complete project within 24 months or less; (4) If previous District grant recipient, projects and project activities have been on schedule and on budget; (5) Has anticipated potential obstacles or challenges and has a plan or strategies in place to overcome them; (6) Provides information demonstrating that the seasonal high-water table will be a minimum of 12 inches from the bottom surface of the drainfield.

## ECONOMICALLY DISTRESSED/FINANCIALLY DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

An economically distressed county or community is defined in [s. 288.0656, F.S.](#), under the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI). An economically distressed, or "financially disadvantaged small community" is also defined in [s. 403.1838\(2\), F.S.](#) For more information, visit [www.floridajobs.org/business-growth-and-partnerships/rural-and-economic-development-initiative/rural-definition/rural-communities](http://www.floridajobs.org/business-growth-and-partnerships/rural-and-economic-development-initiative/rural-definition/rural-communities) or call (850) 717-8506.

## APPLICATION PROCESS AND SUBMITTAL

A notice of funding availability (NOFA) is announced through email, the District's website ([www.nwfwater.com](http://www.nwfwater.com)), and in the Florida Administrative Register ([www.flrules.org](http://www.flrules.org)). Interested parties may obtain the application form from the District's website.

Applications with supporting materials shall be transmitted by email to: [grants@nwfwater.com](mailto:grants@nwfwater.com). It is recommended that applications be sent with read receipt enabled. Please note the maximum electronic mail size that can be received is 15 MB. All applications must be received on or before the due date noted in the **Funding Cycle Schedule** below.

#### FUNDING CYCLE SCHEDULE

Activity	Date(s)
Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) Posted	July 21, 2025
<b>Application Due Date</b>	<b>September 22, 2025</b>
Evaluation of project applications	September - October 2025
Funding recommendations presented to the District Governing Board	October 2025
Notice of funding status to applicants	October 2025

*\*Funding applications must be received no later than 11:59 PM Eastern Time.*

#### PROJECT SELECTION AND AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

The District will review all applications for basic minimum requirements and eligibility then evaluate projects according to the **Evaluation Criteria**. Staff recommendations will be presented to the District's Governing Board for approval. Recommendations may include partial funding of specific segments of project submittals. All applicants will be notified of final project funding decisions consistent with the **Funding Cycle Schedule**.

Note that communication between District staff and an applicant about a particular project does not imply funding for that project. **No funding decisions are final until 1) approved by the District Governing Board, 2) approved by DEP (if applicable), and 3) notice has been received in writing from the District.**

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information or assistance, please contact:

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