

# Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program

## 2023 Request for Proposals

Application Form can be found on this webpage:

[https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs\\_Services/ProducerLedProjects.aspx](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/ProducerLedProjects.aspx)

### Deadline

Friday, September 16, 2022 at 11:59 p.m.

Email submissions only (in Microsoft Word format) to:

[Dana.Christel@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Dana.Christel@Wisconsin.gov)

Questions can be directed to:

Dana Christel: (608) 640-7270, [Dana.Christel@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Dana.Christel@Wisconsin.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 that increase on-the-ground practices and farmer participation in local watershed efforts.

### Funding Priorities

As this program continues to grow, our funding priorities will focus on groups that demonstrate innovative and creative approaches to soil health and water quality improvements, including:

- Expansion of cost-share programming to promote innovative practices and management such as planting green, precision conservation management, alternative forages, small grains, perennial agriculture, rotational grazing, agroforestry, low disturbance manure applications, in-season cover crop establishment, etc.
- Projects that promote conservation systems that increase continuous living cover throughout the year.
- Education efforts to learn about conservation systems through on-farm demonstrations and/or research with a comprehensive outreach plan to share results.
- Targeted outreach that promotes the environmental, financial, and community benefits of conservation to farmers, agricultural industry professionals, students, non-farming landowners, or other community members.
- Other projects that demonstrate innovation and growth.

### 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.

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## 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).
  - Participate in our tracking project using, at a minimum, the [DATCP Conservation Tracking Sheet - Basic](#).
    - ➡ Both of these documents can be found by clicking on “Grant awardee forms” on the right-hand side of the PLWPG webpage.
  - 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.
- There is a 25% limit on funding requests for administrative costs. This means that for a \$40,000 project request, up to \$10,000 may be requested to cover administrative costs. Administrative costs are defined on Page 10.

## 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 project area. The definition of eligible farm can be found on Page 10 of this document.
- The group collaborates and enters a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with at least **one** of the following:
  - A county land conservation department
  - The University of Wisconsin-Division of Extension
  - Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
  - A non-profit conservation organization

- Other non-profit organizations as approved by DATCP
- 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, manure composting, low-disturbance manure application methods, rotational grazing, pollinator habitat, nutrient reduction practices, etc.
- Measuring environmental and financial benefits of conservation practices.
- Performing nutrient management planning, training and assessments.
- Developing innovative approaches to manure management or conservation equipment-sharing that increases and/or identifies environmental and financial 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 environmental and financial benefits of utilizing various conservation practices or strategies
- Conducting edge-of-field and/or in-stream water quality monitoring
- Conducting data collection such as well testing, surface water testing, or soil health testing. The group must indicate in their application who they will be partnering with and the methods used to conduct data collection to ensure they are following an accepted sampling protocol.
- 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

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. Note that a field cannot receive a payment for the <b>SAME</b> practice for longer than 3 years.	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
<b>**<u>County land conservation department staff time at a rate of \$25/hour is an eligible cost under this grant as long as the county staff position is NOT already funded by DATCP SWRM grants.</u></b>	County land conservation department staff time that is already funded by DATCP SWRM grants is not eligible for administrative costs or for use as match.
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.	Engineered conservation practices such as water and sediment control basins, grassed waterways, streambank restoration projects, manure storage, wetlands reclamation or creation.
Rental costs for equipment directly associated with research projects, if pre-approved by DATCP	Farm walkovers
Costs associated with monitoring or well testing (capped at \$5,000).	Costs associated with identifying depth-to-bedrock on farm fields.
Out-of-state travel and/or conference registrations (capped at \$1,000).	Other costs deemed by DATCP as not consistent with the purpose of this grant program.
Other costs deemed by DATCP as consistent with the purpose of this grant program.	

## Grant Administration Requirements

### Funding

Funding will be available once the contract is signed by both parties and no earlier than January 1, 2023. Funds expire on December 31, 2023. The grant recipient may submit a formal request to DATCP to extend its grant funds into the next grant cycle if funds are available. Funds can only be carried over for one grant cycle.

### 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 Grant 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. Applicants must indicate where the source of match is derived from on their application. **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.* Matching funds must also 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 (counts toward in-kind only)
- Cost of purchased or rented 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: DATCP SWRM funding, including county staffing grants and NMFE grants, can NOT be used as match. Final reimbursement will be withheld if match isn't properly documented and/or other grant requirements and reporting are not completed and submitted in a timely manner. Up to 50% 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 on activities related to grant implementation.**

### Submitting a Proposal

The application form can be found on the DATCP website:

[https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs\\_Services/ProducerLedProjects.aspx](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/ProducerLedProjects.aspx)

- Applications must be submitted no later than **September 16, 2022**. Applications must be submitted in Microsoft Word format ONLY to Dana.Christel@Wisconsin.gov.

### Application Processing and Evaluation Criteria

A team of 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.

## Evaluation Criteria for Category 1: New, Groups Funded Less than 2 Years

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 &amp; Work Plan</u>	30
	Proposal demonstrates creative and innovative approaches to address water quality issues.	10
	Evidence that 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
	Project identifies emphasis on one or more of the following areas: conservation systems that promote continuous living cover and/or perennial agriculture, targeted outreach to farmers and other watershed stakeholders, and farmer to farmer networking and educational projects and events.	5
3	<u>Anticipated Outcomes</u>	20
	Project clearly defines the products (outreach materials, events, etc.), services (education, technical assistance, incentive programs), or other deliverables necessary to meet the project goals.	10
	Project focuses on activities that improve water quality and soil health.	5
	Adequate metrics are proposed to evaluate project progress and success as they relate to stated goals.	5
4	<u>Organizational Capacity, Farmer Commitment &amp; Partnerships</u>	25
	Farmer leadership and commitment by farmers is evident.	10
	Strong project support by participants, partners, industry and other relevant individuals or organizations.	5
	Efforts by the group are complementary to other groups in their region, as well as to local and state programs, rather than duplicative of existing efforts.	5
	Roles of project partners and collaborators are clearly explained and commitment of support for project is evident. <i>Letters of support for new groups are required.</i>	5
5	<u>Budget</u>	10
	Justification exists for each budget item. Budget items are clear, specific and meet the program requirements.	4
	Budget items and work plan tasks are clearly linked.	3
	1:1 match is identified. Time vs. actual costs provided as match are reasonable. Source of match is identified.	3
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

<b>New group applications are weighted more heavily on the development of work plans, evidence of farmer commitment, viability of the project and communication plans.</b>	<b>Total Points Possible: 100</b>
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## Evaluation Criteria for Category 2: Established, Previously Funded Groups

<b>1</b>	<b><u>Completeness of Proposal (statutory requirements)</u></b>	<b>Yes or No</b>
	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>	
<b>2</b>	<b><u>Goals, Objectives &amp; Work Plan</u></b>	<b>10</b>
	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
<b>3</b>	<b><u>Commitment to Improvement &amp; Innovation</u></b>	<b>20</b>
	Project focuses on the expansion of cost-share programming to promote innovative practices, perennial agriculture practices and/or continuous living cover, and conservation systems, with multiple layered practices rather than individual practices.	5
	Project includes effort for continuous learning and education including organizing field days, participating in on-farm demonstrations, or partnering on research	5
	Project includes targeted outreach that promotes the environmental, financial and community benefits of conservation to farmers, industry professionals, non-farming landowners, youth, or other community members.	5
	Project outlines plan to increase farmer participation in conservation efforts.	5
<b>4</b>	<b><u>Anticipated Outcomes</u></b>	<b>15</b>
	Project clearly defines the products (outreach materials, events, etc.), services (education, technical assistance, incentive programs), or other deliverables necessary to meet the project work plan.	5
	Project focuses on activities that improve water quality and soil health.	5
	Adequate metrics are provided to evaluate project progress and success as they relate to stated goals.	4
	Group provided adequate information for DATCP tracking project in previous year's funding.	1

<b>5</b>	<b><u>Organizational Capacity, Farmer Commitment &amp; Partnerships</u></b>	<b>20</b>
	Farmer leadership and commitment by farmers is evident.	9
	Strong project support by participants, partners, industry and other relevant individuals or organizations. <b>Letters of support are suggested but not required.</b>	6
	Efforts by the group are complementary to other groups in their region, as well as local and state programs, rather than duplicative of existing efforts.	3
	Evidence of past and planned partnership building to advance group efforts	2
<b>6</b>	<b><u>Budget</u></b>	<b>10</b>
	Justification exists for each budget item. Budget items are clear, specific and meet the program requirements.	4
	Budget items and work plan tasks are clearly linked.	3
	1:1 match is identified. Time vs. actual costs provided as match are reasonable. Source of match is identified.	3
<b>7</b>	<b><u>Previously Funded Projects: Advancement + Growth</u></b>	<b>25</b>
	Past performance under previous grant awards and contracts demonstrates that work plan was delivered and objectives were accomplished.	12
	Final reports included quantitative and qualitative deliverables, demonstrated progress, outcomes and results.	5
	Group continues to grow in one or more of the following ways: continuing to explore new practices, systems, and outreach approaches, demonstrated commitment to refining practices or a system, increase in conservation practices implemented in watershed, increase in farmer participation and membership, refining communication and outreach and expanding programming options to reach new farmers.	5
	Reimbursements, reports, and other grant documents were submitted in a timely manner with required supporting documentation.	3
Criteria for existing groups is weighted more heavily on plans for continuous improvement and group evolution, commitment to innovation, and farmer leadership.		<b>Total Points Possible: 100</b>

## Receiving a Grant: Expectations

### Reporting Requirements

- Grant recipients will be required to file an **annual report** using the [DATCP approved template](#). Details of what must be included in the report will also be outlined in the grant contract between the producer-led group and DATCP.
- At least one farmer and one collaborator from the group must attend the DATCP annual **information-sharing workshop**.
- Funded projects must submit their annual report **no later than March 1, 2023**.
- Grant recipients will be required to provide quantitative and qualitative information detailed in the annual report form including submitting the [DATCP Conservation Tracking Sheet - Basic](#). **It is important for grant recipients to review this sheet before beginning any programming to become aware of information they must track for the duration of their grant.** This information helps DATCP and groups evaluate the potential soil and water quality impacts of their projects. For questions on how to fill out this spreadsheet, contact: [Dana.Christel@wi.gov](mailto: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 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. All receipts must be marked with the number of the approved budget category from the contract.

## **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 farms<sup>2</sup> 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 project area. 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). 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.

“**Administrative costs**” may include costs for staff-time or materials to organize and coordinate meetings, field days, incentive programs, managing data, maintaining records, or other tasks directly associated with supporting the function of a Producer-Led group and meeting the obligations of the grant.

## 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 work.
- Review the ranking criteria listed on page 5 of this document 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 comprehensive 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](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/ProducerLedProjects.aspx)