



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-034

Proposal Title: Municipal Wastewater Treatment Facility Operator Toolkit

Project Manager Information

Name: Suzanne Baumann

Organization: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Office Telephone: (651) 757-2798

Email: suzanne.baumann@state.mn.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Provide technical assistance and training resources to statewide municipal wastewater treatment plant operators

Funds Requested: \$449,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2026

LCCMR Funding Category: Environmental Education (C)

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Statewide

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Narrative

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

As long-time operators retire, the wastewater industry is facing a dire shortage of properly trained and certified wastewater operators. Municipalities across the state are desperate to hire and train operators. The difficulty is particularly borne by the small and rural municipalities, where the previous operator was likely the only person with knowledge of how to operate the facility and where they might have difficulty recruiting an operator with experience. Well-trained and knowledgeable operators are vital to ensuring that the facility is operated correctly, pollutants are adequately removed, and the water released doesn't harm human health or the environment. Wastewater operators are entrusted with a huge responsibility to protect Minnesota's waters. If municipalities and their operators aren't properly supported, we risk impacting state water quality and human health.

A wastewater operator must demonstrate the skill, knowledge, experience, and education necessary to operate a system successfully. Technical school wastewater training programs are experiencing declining enrollments, so municipalities are filling operator positions with staff who need training. There is high demand for cost-effective technical resources to support wastewater operations. We want to meet that demand with reliable, accessible, high quality resources. These materials will supplement the MPCA's technical assistance outreach and training capabilities.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

The Wastewater Operator Tool Kit will provide needed technical assistance to wastewater treatment plant operators in three parts:

- 1) Study guides for Class A/B and Class C/D wastewater operator exams. This high demand resource would contain technical information and study materials that will be useful to prepare operators for the test. It would also include a section on test study skills and test taking strategies.
- 2) A grant program available to municipalities to cover the cost of training operators via existing third party online and correspondence courses. This program would remove the financial barrier for municipalities to give their operators access to high quality technical training.
- 3) A mailing to all statewide municipal wastewater facilities with technical assistance resources sent in advance of a MPCA-staffed in-person regional technical assistance event. In advance of the technical assistance event, each facility in the region will receive a hard copy packet of information to provide an announcement of the event, a sticky note with a list of critical resources, and a packet of facility-specific information about the municipality's wastewater permit and applicable guidance documents.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

Wastewater treatment facilities, and the operators that run them, serve their communities by providing an essential and often unrecognized public service. Managing wastewater is critical for the health and safety of any community and protection of water quality. A Wastewater Operator Tool Kit would provide needed support to train and educate operators to ensure the water released doesn't harm human health or the environment. Providing additional resources to municipalities and wastewater treatment plant operators will directly result in protection of Minnesota's treasured water quality resources.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Create study guides for Class A/B and Class C/D wastewater operator exams

Activity Budget: \$266,455

Activity Description:

To support wastewater operators in preparing for and passing operator exams, exam study guides and practice exams will be created. MPCA will provide guidance about the content and the development of the materials will be collaborative between the contractor and MPCA. The final deliverable will be an unlocked word document, using MPCA style, format, and appropriate state branding that will be made available on the MPCA website to all operators preparing for an exam.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Project kickoff/scoping	September 30, 2024
Outline of study guide content	December 31, 2024
Draft 1	February 28, 2025
Draft 2	May 31, 2025
Deliverable of final study guides	August 31, 2025

Activity 2: Create and administer a wastewater operator training grant program

Activity Budget: \$93,095

Activity Description:

Create, administer, and promote a wastewater operator training grant program that provides easy and free access to existing third party online and correspondence training materials for municipal wastewater operators. Goal: have 200 operators take a wastewater training course.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Project kickoff/scoping meeting	September 30, 2024
Program development proposal: Written description, draft mailing and article, and presentation	November 30, 2024
Program development proposal, revised: Written description, draft mailing and article, and presentation	January 31, 2025
Begin administering grant program	February 28, 2025

Activity 3: Technical Assistance Materials Mailing

Activity Budget: \$89,450

Activity Description:

A packet of facility-specific technical assistance materials will be mailed to each municipal wastewater treatment facility in the state (773) in advance of an in-person MPCA-hosted technical assistance event. The packet will be specific to each facility and will include

- 1) an announcement of the regional training date and location and how to reserve a time,
- 2) description and purpose of materials in the mailing,
- 3) a sticky note with links to essential MPCA resources: wastewater operator guidance materials, compliance contacts,

wastewater training and certification resources, and eDMR submittal page,

- 4) a copy of facility-specific permit,
- 5) a copy of MPCA Wastewater permit user's manual,
- 6) a copy of facility-specific specific-submittal action checklist, and
- 7) the appropriate existing guidance materials applicable to the facility.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Project kickoff/scoping meeting	September 30, 2024
Draft 1 announcement, description and sticky note	October 31, 2024
Draft 2 announcement, description and sticky note	November 30, 2024
Final announcement, description and sticky note	December 31, 2024
Mailing Region 1 facilities	January 31, 2025
Mailing Region 2 facilities	March 31, 2025
Mailing Region 3 facilities	June 30, 2025
Mailing Region 4 facilities	September 30, 2025
Mailing Region 5 facilities	December 31, 2025

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Wastewater Operator Exam Study Guides	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Create study guides for Class A/B and Class C/D wastewater operator exams	Yes
Wastewater Operator Correspondence and Online Training Grant Program	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Create and manage a grant program to provide training for statewide municipal wastewater operators	Yes
Wastewater Technical Assistance Mailing Contract	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Coordinate and send a hard copy mailing of technical assistance resources to municipal wastewater facilities in time with a MPCA-provided in-person local technical assistance event	Yes

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

This timeframe will produce products that will stand alone. Ongoing improvements to the products and ongoing dissemination of the products will be achieved through standard MPCA operating budgets and staffing.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Pilot Program to Optimize Local Mechanical and Pond Wastewater-Treatment Plants	M.L. 2018, Chp. 214, Art. 4, Sec. 2, Subd. 04a	\$700,000
Reducing Municipal Wastewater Mercury Pollution to Lake Superior	M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 04h	\$250,000
Optimizing Local Mechanical and Pond Wastewater-Treatment Plants	M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 11b	\$500,000
Groundwater Contamination Mapping Project - Phase II	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 03f	\$800,000
Developing Strategies To Manage PFAS In Land-Applied Biosolids	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 04d	\$1,404,000
Wastewater Pond Optimization Implementation	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 20a2	\$700,000
Chloride Pollution Reduction	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 20a4	\$500,000
Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05h	\$500,000
Replacing Failing Septic Systems to Protect Groundwater	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 10h	\$2,000,000
Pig's Eye Landfill Task Force	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 10j	\$800,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Suzanne Baumann

Job Title: Municipal Wastewater Manager

Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.

Suzanne will oversee the overall management of the project. She has nearly 20 years of experience working on complicated environmental issues with environmental professionals who are directly responsible for protecting Minnesota's treasured water resources. She is passionate about supporting wastewater operators and the municipalities that employ them for the benefit of water quality. Suzanne manages the MPCA's municipal wastewater program; which permits, inspects, and provides technical review for statewide municipal-owned wastewater treatment systems. Suzanne is well versed in project management, budget oversight, and reporting.

Organization: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Organization Description:

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) mission is to protect and improve the environment and human health. The MPCA monitors environmental quality, offers technical and financial assistance, and enforces environmental regulations. The agency finds and cleans up spills or leaks that can affect our health and environment. Staff develop statewide policy, and support environmental education.

Specifically related to this project, the design, construction, and operation of wastewater treatment facilities in Minnesota is regulated by the MPCA. Any entity that proposes to discharge a specified amount of a pollutant into surface or ground waters of the state must apply for a permit. And, in Minnesota, wastewater treatment operators, those responsible for the daily, onsite operation of wastewater facilities and collection systems, must be certified. The MPCA administers the certification program and provides workshops and conferences.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Creating wastewater exam study guides				0		\$266,455
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Creating, promoting, and administering the wastewater training grant program (\$20,000 of the contract amount will be dedicated to covering course fees)				0		\$93,095
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Creating technical assistance event announcement and a packet of facility-specific technical assistance information to each of the municipal wastewater treatment plants in the state (773)				0		\$89,450
							Sub Total	\$449,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-

Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$449,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
---------------	---------------------	-------------	--------------------------------------------------------------

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [398c1ff1-432.docx](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

No map or visual component...

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

Does your project include the design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other capital asset costing \$10,000 or more?

No

Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services, as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7?

No

