



2026 Section 205(j) Water Quality Planning Grant

Division of Water Resources
North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality

FY2026 Review Criteria for 205(j) Grant Proposals

Proposals will be initially screened to determine whether they meet the following grant requirements:

- The applicant is a [Council of Governments \(COG\)/Regional Commission](#).
- Project timeline takes place between January 2027 and June 2028

Proposals that meet these requirements will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Water Quality Merit	60
Capability/Confidence	30
Co-benefits	10
Total	100

1. Water Quality Merit (60 points total)

Sixty points allocated for Water Quality Merit will be assigned based on the specific project type (A-E) as found in Section 8 of the application.

- A) Proposals to develop **9-Element watershed restoration plans** for 12-digit HUC or smaller watersheds (reference resources for plan development on the [319 grant program website](#)) should:
 - (20 points) Indicate known general stressors to water quality (e.g., urban stormwater, agriculture).
 - (20 points) Discuss types of practices that would likely address these pollution sources (e.g., stormwater BMPs, agricultural BMPs)
 - (20 points) Indicate any expected plans from project Principal Investigator (PI), partners or other parties to implement the results of restoration plans after the plan is completed.
- B) Proposals to **map stormwater infrastructure** should provide evidence that project PIs are prepared to:
 - (20 points) Clearly demonstrate how mapping stormwater infrastructure will lead to improved water quality (not just flood control) by showing the link between existing stormwater issues and impaired waters. Projects will score higher if they show how mapping products will make it possible to identify illicit discharges or possible stormwater retrofit locations with enough information that next-step project scoping and concept planning can be done.
 - (20 points) Combine any existing information about stormwater system with GPS field data collection on stormwater infrastructure location, condition, size, shape, infrastructure type, etc.
 - (20 points) Create stormwater infrastructure maps, use local knowledge to ground-truth them, and make any needed corrections.
- C) Proposals to **assess water pollution sources** should:

- (20 points) Show that proposed methods are appropriate to monitor the pollutant in question. For instance, if using geospatial methods to identify pollutant hotspots, show that GIS is an appropriate tool for assessing pollutant source.
 - (20 points) Be feasible within this grant's constraints (i.e., monitoring efforts can be conducted in 12-18 months).
 - (10 points) Clearly outline what concrete outputs will result from project.
 - (10 points) Establish unique need/demonstrate that this need is not being addressed otherwise.
- D) Proposals to **share water quality planning knowledge between COGs and member governments**:
- (15 points) Per EPA grant purposes, shall focus primarily on water quality; water quantity can be a co-benefit.
 - (15 points) Should demonstrate clear interest/commitment from all partners.
 - (15 points) Should demonstrate how this is a unique need that is not being met through another organization or project.
 - (15 points) Should have concrete outputs such as structured office- or field-based training (via workshops, one-on-one training, or other methods).
- E) Proposals that **will benefit water quality regionally or statewide and do not fall into one of these categories** will be scored based on:
- (20 points) Their relevance to water quality.
 - (20 points) Concreteness of outputs (e.g., maps, data creation/management, workshop summaries, or other planning deliverable outlining water quality impact).
 - (20 points) Unique need/demonstration that this need is not being addressed otherwise.

2. **Capability/Confidence in Deliverables (30 points)**

- (5 points) **Clarity of Application**: Proposal clearly outlines project's goals, outputs and how deliverables will be achieved. Proposal is complete, concise, and specific.
- (5 points) **Partners**: Proposal includes all partners relevant to the project's goals and explains the role/responsibilities of, and provides budget breakouts for, each. For example, proposals to increase knowledge-sharing between COGs and their member governments should show how all parties will contribute to deliverables.
- (10 points) **Qualifications**: Statement of qualifications shows that applicant, project partners and/or subcontractor are qualified to complete the tasks proposed in the application. (If applicant is subcontracting project tasks, proposal should clearly outline qualifications of both applicant and subcontractor. Applicant will also be requested to share subcontract document with the 205(j) grant program.)
- (10 points) **Existing capacity or clear need in watershed**: Proposed project shows existing local capacity or shows that project will fill a water quality need currently lacking in watershed. This will be gauged using the "Related Projects in Watershed" section and/or detailed project description.

3. **Co-benefits (10 points)**

In addition to the direct water quality benefits, the project identifies and lists the clear and tangible benefits across environmental economic, social, health aspects, and community resilience to the impacted and to downstream communities