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July 24, 2026

TO: Executive Directors, Regional Councils of Governments (COGs)

SUBJECT: Request for Proposals for FY 2026 Water Quality Planning Grant Funding under Clean Water Act Sections 205(j)/604(b)

Announcement

Pursuant to Section 205(j)/604(b) of the Clean Water Act, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality Division of Water Resources (DWR) is seeking proposals for water quality planning projects using federal fiscal year 2026 grant funds. As stated in Section 205(j) of the Act, grant funds are to be awarded to Regional Commissions and Councils of Governments "to carry out water quality management planning, including, but not limited to:

- A. Identifying most cost effective and locally acceptable facility and non-point source measures to meet and maintain water quality standards;
- B. Developing an implementation plan to obtain state and local financial and regulatory commitments to implement measures developed under (A); and
- C. Determining the nature, extent, and cause of water quality problems in various areas of the state."

Only [Regional Councils of Government \(COGs\)/Regional Planning Organizations](#) are eligible to apply for 205(j) grants, however, COGs may partner with any public or private sector organization to implement projects.

Due to provisions made through the federal Infrastructure, Investment, & Jobs Act (IIJA), North Carolina received additional funding for the 205(j) Grant Program and has approximately **\$350,000** to award for water quality planning projects in the 2026 federal fiscal year. As there is no cap on NC's 205(j) pass-through funding requests, applicants are encouraged to request adequate funds to fully execute proposed projects and to also propose larger projects, such as completing or updating 9-Element plans.

The award and amount of grant funds are conditioned on availability of funding. DWR reserves the right to wholly fund, partially fund, or not fund any proposal or any component of any 205(j) grant proposal.



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Division Planning staff encourage the following types of projects in particular:

- Development of 9-Element watershed restoration plans for 12-digit hydrologic unit code (HUC) or smaller watersheds or updates of existing plans (please see more information on 9-Element Plans below and refer to resources for developing watershed plans on the [319 grant program website](#)).
- Update of existing 9-Element watershed restoration plans to reflect current watershed conditions, new or changed impairments, new implementation strategies, and/or renewed stakeholder involvement. Priority will be given to 9-Element plans 10 years old or older; proposals for updating plans should be based on existing, [DWR approved, 9-Element watershed restoration plans](#).
- Source identification studies, including water quality monitoring, field assessments, modeling, and GIS analyses to support watershed plan development.
- Site-specific design plans for structural water quality practices identified in a 9-Element Plan.
- Water quality planning projects with concrete outputs such as (green and/or gray) stormwater infrastructure mapping, prioritization or design.
- Projects that benefit water quality regionally or statewide.
- Projects to share water quality planning knowledge between COGs and their member governments.

9-Element Plan Procedure

To better assist grantees in the completion of a DWR-approved 9-Element Watershed Restoration Plan within the project period, each 205(j)-funded 9-Element Plan project will now be assigned a DWR support staff member at the onset of the project period to advise and answer questions. Your DWR support staff member will be available to meet at least once per quarter and will serve as the primary reviewer for the plan. A draft plan should be submitted to the plan reviewer by the first day of the final quarter of the project period. The reviewer will have a month to provide comments, and the project team will have the remainder of the final quarter to address any concerns and re-submit the plan for approval. *Please account for this procedure in the milestone schedule in the application.*

Bigger Picture Considerations

Nonpoint source pollution planning projects often have benefits for natural resources and local communities, that extend beyond simply reducing pollution. In recognition of the potential for bigger picture/co-benefits, DWR provides additional consideration for projects that bring clear, tangible benefits across environmental, economic, social and health aspects, and community resiliency. Applicants are encouraged to be specific about such benefits to the impacted communities and impacts to downstream communities.

How to Apply

Download the application from the Division's [205j Grant Program Website](#). Submit the completed application to grant administrator Robin Hoffman by email at Robin.Hoffman@deq.nc.gov with "[Your COG's name] 205(j) Grant Proposal" in the subject line by **Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026, at 11:59 PM EDT. Please submit the application as a Word or PDF document** to enable reviewers to comment easily (any signed letters of support may be scanned and included as separate attachments). Applicants with proposals addressing more than one main purpose or covering unrelated subjects should submit each one as a separate, stand-alone application package. Please contact the grant administrator if you are uncertain or have questions about your proposal.



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Proposals will be reviewed based on the evaluation criteria found on the [205\(j\) program website](#). Note that Division staff may request more information or modifications of selected projects prior to development of a contract. As a reminder, billable work may not begin until contracts are fully executed, and proposed projects should conclude no later than June 30, 2028.

Schedule

2026 205j Timetable for Grant Applicants	
Friday, July 24, 2026	205(j) grant RFP opens
Thursday, Sept. 17, 2026	Deadline for proposals; must be received electronically by 11:59 PM EDT
Thursday, Oct. 1, 2026	Applicants will receive review team's questions about their proposals
Thursday, Oct. 8, 2026	Deadline for applicants to answer review team's questions
Week of Oct. 26, 2026 (estimated; based on DWR grant selection committee meeting date)	Applicants notified if selected for funding. Move forward with contracting.
Friday, Nov. 6, 2026 (estimated; based on notification of award date)	Deadline for selected applicants to return completed contracting forms to the 205(j) grant manager to enable contracts to be developed on time.
Friday, Jan. 1, 2027	Contracts executed; projects may start. (Estimated depending on time for contract preparation.)

Proposals will be scored using review criteria based on their relevance to water quality, concrete outputs, unique need (demonstration that this need is not being funded elsewhere), and co-benefits.

Please do not hesitate to contact grant administrator Robin Hoffman at **919-707-3643** or Robin.Hoffman@deq.nc.gov with any questions or for additional guidance.



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