

# Stewardship Cost Share Program Guidance

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## IMPORTANT MESSAGES



**As part of your cost share agreement, you will be required to post a sign adjacent to the project acknowledging the cost share program and RPBCWD.** The sign will be provided by RPBCWD upon project close-out.



**If you want a purchase to count toward cost share reimbursement, do not make the purchase before you have a signed cost share agreement.** In order to qualify for reimbursement, a receipt must be dated on or after execution of your cost-share agreement. We strongly recommend not signing a contract with a consultant before your cost share project has been approved for funding, unless you are committed to the project regardless of cost share status.



**Review the requirements for your project type before submitting an application.** Pay close attention to specifics in your agreement regarding reimbursable costs. [Review the list of required documents for all projects.](#) If your project is a Habitat Restoration, Natural Shoreline Restoration, or Waterbody Buffer, you will need to submit a design and a maintenance plan with your application.



**Standard Cost Share Recipient: You have 12 months to install a project once you have signed the cost share agreement.** If you cannot install a standard cost share project in 12 months, this program may not be a good fit for you. If you feel that you may need a bit more time to complete your project, reach out to the grant coordinator as soon as possible to discuss potential extension of the installation deadline.



**Mini-Cost Share Recipient: You must install and submit receipts for your project by November 30.** If you have concerns about meeting the November 30 deadline, contact the program coordinator.



**If your project type requires native plants, review the native plant requirements.** Understand what plants are considered native and if the project requires a minimum number of species. For many projects, you will need to provide a detailed plant list including scientific name, bloom time, quantity, container size, and price for each plant species.



**If you apply as a residential property owner, you must fill out and submit the cost share application – a consultant is not allowed to submit an application on your behalf.** Documents from your consultant, such as detailed quote and design plan, may be submitted with your application. The property owner and not a consultant must be the primary contact for the cost share project.



**If you are offered funds for professional maintenance for three years, you must follow through with the commitment to hire a professional for maintenance.** The cost share review committee considers an applicant's intention to hire a professional to maintain a habitat/shoreline/buffer restoration when making a cost share offer. If you don't follow through, we may rescind the cost share agreement and seek reimbursement of any funds disbursed.

## DEFINITIONS

### APPLICANT CATEGORIES

**Residential** To qualify for the residential applicant category, you must OWN and RESIDE on the property for which cost-share funds are sought. If you reside in a multi-unit development (e.g., townhomes, condos), you must own the property (e.g. built structure and/or grounds) for which a cost share is sought. **Renters may be eligible for a mini-cost share award with signed property owner permission.**

**Non-residential** Non-residential property owners are divided into one of these general subcategories:

**Non-profit:** To qualify as a non-profit, you must be a representative of an incorporated nonprofit. The non-profit organization must OWN the property for which a cost share is sought. Examples of non-profits: homeowners associations, lake associations, churches, charities.

**School:** To qualify as a school, you must be a representative of a state-recognized public or private school; the school (e.g. school district) must OWN the property for which a cost share is sought. A homeschool does not qualify as a school for the purposes of the cost share program.

**Business:** To qualify as a business, you must be the owner of a legal entity organized for profit. The business owner must also OWN the property for which a grant is being sought.

**Local government:** To qualify as local government, you must be an employee or official representative of a local unit of government, such as a city, located within RPBCWD. The local unit of government must OWN the property for which a cost share is sought.

## PROGRAM SUMMARY

The Stewardship Cost Share Program fosters stewardship of natural resources through education, financial support, and resources for clean water projects within the jurisdiction of Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District (RPBCWD). A stewardship project must support the district's 10-year watershed management plan goals such as benefits to water quality, habitat, or flood reduction.

The cost share program has two categories:

**MINI-COST SHARE:** Native plant projects on residential property

**STANDARD COST SHARE:** Restoration projects and stormwater best management practices

**Application period:** The typical application season begins in late winter/early spring and runs through the end of October. This may vary depending on availability of funds. For the most up-to-date information about the program, visit the webpage, [rpbcwd.org/cost-share-program](http://rpbcwd.org/cost-share-program). The application period will close as soon as all cost-share funds have been committed. Two application windows have been established with only first-time applicants eligible during the first window. First-time and repeat applicants may apply during the second window.

2026 COST SHARE APPLICATION WINDOWS		
Application Window	Timeframe	Eligible Applicants
1	March 26 – May 15	First-time applicant
2	May 16 – Oct 31	First-time and repeat applicants

**Project installation:** Mini-cost share recipients must install their project and submit receipts by November 30 of the award year. Standard cost share recipients have one year (12 months) to complete their project. If unforeseen circumstances delay a project, the participant may request an extension by email to the grant coordinator, who will decide if an extension is warranted.

**Reimbursement payment:** Cost share funds are distributed in the form of a reimbursement after the project has been installed and reporting requirements have been met. Timing of reimbursement will depend upon where the District is within its monthly financial cycle as checks are only cut once per month.

## WHO MAY APPLY?

### Mini-Cost Share

Residents within RPBCWD may apply for a mini-cost share. Residents include owners or renters with a signed permission form from their landlord.

### Standard Cost Share

An owner of a property located within the district boundary may apply for the Stewardship Cost Share Program. For a residential property, an application must be submitted by the *property owner*. For business, government and nonprofit property owners, an authorized representative may apply on behalf of the property owner.

Eligible applicants include:

- Residential (individual homeowner)
- Non-residential
  - Non-profit organization (includes homeowner and lake associations)
  - Institution (e.g. school)
  - Business
  - Local government (e.g. cities)

See DEFINITIONS **DEFINITIONS** for residential and non-residential.

## WHAT PROJECTS ARE ELIGIBLE?

The Stewardship Program funds water resource improvement and protection projects that have quantifiable benefits to water quality, habitat, and/or flooding. Projects with a greater benefit to water quality or those that achieve multiple District goals will be considered for the maximum cost-share awards. All projects must take place within the watershed district boundary on property owned by the individuals or organization.

### Eligible project types

MINI-COST SHARE		ELIGIBLE LOCATIONS
1.	<b>Native Plant Project</b>	Residential property
2.	<b>Native Plant Project – Shoreland Health</b>	Single-family residential lot or deeded residential lake access lot; shoreland of major lakes*
STANDARD COST SHARE		ELIGIBLE LOCATIONS
3.	<b>Habitat Restoration</b>	Not limited
4.	<b>Lake Shoreline Restoration</b>	Shorelines of major lakes*
5.	<b>Waterbody Buffer Restoration</b>	Adjacent to waterbody (pond, wetland, lake, creek)

6.	<b>Stormwater BMP</b> (To qualify, a project must be listed within and meet specifications in the <a href="#">Minnesota Stormwater Manual</a> )	Not limited
7.	<b>Rain-friendly Lawn</b>	During the 2026 pilot year, only residential participants in the soil health testing program are eligible.

\* Major lakes within the watershed district: Ann, Duck, Hyland, Lotus, Lucy, Mitchell, Red Rock, Rice Marsh, Riley, Round, Silver, Staring, Susan

## What project components are eligible for cost share?

### *Mini-Cost Share*

Mini-cost share project types include native plant projects on residential property. Examples of native plant projects include pocket prairies, pollinator gardens, and native shrub and/or tree plantings. Native plants include all forms such as wildflowers, grasses, sedges, trees, and shrubs. Components eligible for cost share include live native plants (potted, bare root, tuber, etc.), native plant seeds, temporary fencing to protect plants from herbivores, natural mulch for soil protection or moisture conservation, edging, and other items or materials essential to project success. Ineligible components include decorative elements, irrigation supplies, landscaping fabric, in-kind labor or materials, and vehicle mileage/fuel. For questions about eligibility, the applicant should talk to the program coordinator. **At least 75 percent of the reimbursable cost of a project must go toward the purchase of live native plants and seeds.**

### *Standard Cost Share*

Eligible components for a standard cost share project vary by project type. Some projects may be eligible for the cost of the purchase of materials, equipment rental, or services (labor) needed for the project as approved in the cost share agreement. Other project types will be limited in what qualifies as an eligible cost.

When a project application is evaluated, some components or elements may be identified as a non-eligible project cost. For example, aesthetic elements such as stepping-stones and bird baths will be marked as non-eligible. This does not necessarily mean you can't include these elements within your project area, but they will not be eligible for Stewardship Program cost share funds, and you should avoid having these items in your itemized cost estimate. Some project types may cover the purchase of materials, equipment rental, or services (labor) needed for the project as approved in the cost-share agreement. Other project types will be limited in what qualifies as an eligible cost.

Eligible project components may include:

- Consultant design fee (*this is the only cost that may be incurred before a cost share is awarded*)
- Site preparation activities
- Erosion control materials (if mulch is used, only non-dyed mulch is eligible for cost share)
- Seeds and plants
- Professional labor
- In-kind credit (if approved during the application phase; see [In-kind](#) )

### *Mulch Eligibility*

All-natural mulch may be an eligible expense for a project when it is used for erosion control and/or conserving soil moisture for new live plantings. To be eligible, **wood mulch must be non-dyed** as dyes may harm plant and soil health. Consider using weed-free straw mulch as a less expensive option. Note that for projects where habitat restoration is the goal, mulch will only be needed in the installation phase until the plantings begin to fill in and produce their own mulch in the form of dead plant material.

## Right-of-way and other easements

Private property may contain an easement, which allows a city or other entity to use or access the property. Common types of easements include a utility easement, drainage easement, conservation easement, and boulevard right-of-way. Because of potential disturbance within (e. g., utility work; flooding) or prohibitions of an easement, RPBCWD staff will consider proposed projects located within an easement on a case by case basis to see if they are feasible.

## Project estimate/quote requirements

### *Mini-Cost Share*

The mini-cost share project application requires a description of the project and an estimated cost. An itemized list of expenses is not required as part of the application. Recipients should take before/after photos and keep all receipts for the reimbursement request report. Only native plants are eligible for a mini-cost share award. Native plants must be non-cultivated (straight) varieties; in other words, the native plants must be the “wild” form of the plant with no manipulation by humans for enhanced color, bigger blooms, shorter height, or other characteristics.

### *Standard Cost Share*

Whether you develop the project estimate yourself or get an estimate quote from a contractor, your estimate must be itemized with separate line items for materials and labor. On an estimate, we will be looking for:

- Item name
- Item description/purpose
- Quantity
- Price each

If you submit an estimate with a total cost but no line items costs, we will notify you and place your application on hold until you meet requirements. Make sure that any contractor you get a quote from has labor as a separate line item from materials.

**If you plan to hire a contractor to do work beyond the potential cost share project, get a separate quote for this additional work.** A quote from a contractor that includes a lot of non-cost share elements makes it difficult for staff to evaluate the application. Invoices and receipts should also be separate for cost share and non-cost share project work. If staff are unable to match invoices/receipts to the estimate, you will be notified and may have to submit revised invoices.

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Key message: Estimates, invoices, and receipts must be tidy and consist only of cost share project materials and labor.

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## HOW MUCH ARE COST SHARE AWARDS?

The Stewardship Program reimburses costs incurred. This means that the cost share recipient fronts all project costs and is reimbursed by RPBCWD after the project is installed, reporting requirements have been met, and the project has passed inspection. Cost-share means that RPBCWD shares the cost with the recipient and will reimburse a percentage of the project cost, as outlined in the cost share agreement, to the recipient after project completion.

## Maximum award based on applicant category and project type

The maximum award will not be offered to all projects. The award offered to an applicant will be based on benefit of the project to the watershed and how well the project meets watershed district goals. Most project types have scoring sheets that help the cost share review committee decide on percent cost share.

	Residential		Non-residential	
	Maximum cost share percent	Maximum cost share dollars	Maximum cost share percent	Maximum cost share dollars
<b>Mini-Cost Share Projects</b>				
Native Plant Project	95%	\$500	<i>Ineligible for project type</i>	
Native Plant Project – Shoreland Health	95%	\$1,500	<i>Ineligible for project type</i>	
<b>Cost Share Projects</b>				
Habitat Restoration	75%	\$5,000	50%	\$50,000
Lake Shoreline Restoration	75%	\$5,000	50%	\$50,000
Waterbody Buffer Restoration	75%	\$5,000	50%	\$50,000
Stormwater BMP	75%	\$5,000	50%	\$50,000
Rain-friendly Lawn (restricted participation)*	75%	\$5,000	<i>Ineligible for project type</i>	

\* For the 2026 pilot year, only existing participants in the RPBCWD residential lawn soil study may apply.

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Key message: Cost share award decision is based on project's benefit to the watershed. Not all projects will receive the maximum award.

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## HOW OFTEN CAN SOMEONE APPLY?

The Stewardship Program has the following restrictions for applicants and award recipients:

- An applicant may only **submit one cost share application at a time**. If the application is unsuccessful, the applicant may submit a new application.
- An applicant may receive only **one cost share award per calendar year**.
- An applicant may not submit an additional cost share application until a previous cost share project is closed out (final report submitted and inspection passed).

## MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE COSTS

### Mini-Cost Share

No per-item maximum allowable cost has been established for a mini-cost share project. However, at least seventy-five percent (75%) of reimbursable cost must go toward live native plants or native plant seed. Live plants included plugs or potted plants, bulbs/corms, or other live plant forms.

### Standard Cost Share

### Habitat Restoration Project

The maximum allowable cost for a Habitat Restoration Project, such as a prairie restoration, is **\$1.50 per square foot**. The price per square foot includes both site preparation and installation/planting work.

### Other Standard Cost Share Project

Maximum allowable amounts for materials are set for cost-effective use of funds for Shoreline Restoration, Waterbody Buffer, and Stormwater Best Management Practice projects. For plants, buying smaller and less expensive containers means a cost share recipient is more likely to buy young, healthy plants with less risk of disease or root issues. The table below provides an overview of maximum allowable costs. RPCWD reserves the right to modify the list and adjust allowable costs based on market pricing.

Maximum Allowable Costs for Selected Materials		
**Not all items listed are eligible costs for all project types.**		
Item	Maximum allowable cost	Note
Non-woody native plant (wildflower, grass, sedge, rush, etc.)	Up to \$8 per individual live plant or small seed packet; No set maximum for bulk native seed	Small pots and plugs provide the best value. Small plants are young and tend to have fewer root concerns and nutrient deficiencies than large container-grown plants.
Shrub	Up to \$20 per individual live shrub	Plants that are younger and have spent less time growing in containers tend to be healthier. Bare root shrubs are a great value.
Tree	Up to \$500 per live tree	Only non-cultivated varieties of native trees are eligible. See MN DNR for list of native trees. (Exception: cultivars of native elm species are acceptable)
Landscape edging	Up to \$2 per linear foot	Landscape edging may be an allowed cost if it supports project maintenance needs.
Bulk natural wood mulch	Up to \$20 per cubic yard	Due to potential impacts on soil organisms, dyed mulch is not an eligible cost for cost share projects.  There is no set maximum allowable cost for other natural mulches such as straw.
Bulk natural wood mulch with delivery	Up to \$30 per cubic yard	
Bagged natural wood mulch	Up to \$3 per cubic foot (bags are typically 2 cubic feet)	

### How does maximum allowable cost work?

Let's say that a cost share recipient is planning their project and must choose between two different sizes of Yellow Coneflower, *Ratibida pinnata*. The maximum allowable cost for a non-woody native plant is \$8.00 per individual plant. The table below compares the difference in the recipient's out-of-pocket costs between purchasing three Yellow Coneflowers in a three-pack of small pots versus three one-gallon containers.

Item description	Cost per item	Quantity of item	Total Cost	Number of individual plants	Cost per plant (cost/number)	Allowable cost per plant (max. is \$8.00)	Total allowable cost (allowable x number)	Amount reimbursed with a 75% cost share award	Out-of-pocket cost to recipient
3-pack of 3-inch pots	\$21.00	1	\$21.00	3	\$7.00	\$7.00	\$21.00	\$15.75	<b>\$5.25 for three plants</b>
1-gallon container	\$13.00	3	\$39.00	3	\$13.00	\$8.00	\$24.00	\$18.00	<b>\$21.00 for three plants</b>
Purchasing smaller, younger plants (multi-packs, plugs, tray) will save you money! Bonus: Younger plants are usually healthier!									

### Professional maintenance funds awarded for some projects

Habitat Restoration, Lake Shoreline Restoration, and Waterbody Buffer Restoration projects may qualify for additional cost share funds for three years of professional maintenance following project installation.

Only applicants in the homeowner or non-profit categories are eligible for professional maintenance funds. The professional performing the maintenance must have demonstrated experience managing native vegetation for a restoration project.

When we decide to approve a cost share project, we may have based the decision on your intention to hire a professional to perform maintenance, especially with habitat restoration projects where the first three years of maintenance is very important to project success. **We reserve the right to revoke cost share approval if you decide to back out of hiring a maintenance professional.**

*Is my project eligible for Professional Maintenance Funds?*

Standard cost share projects that center around native plant restoration (Habitat Restoration, Lake Shoreline Restoration, and Waterbody Buffer) may qualify for professional maintenance support for three years if the review committee deems it appropriate and the applicant is an individual homeowner or non-profit organization. Mini-cost share projects are NOT eligible for professional maintenance funds.

Some project types and applicant types do not qualify for any professional maintenance funds.

ELIGIBILITY FOR PROFESSIONAL MAINTENANCE FUNDS					
PROJECT TYPE	APPLICANT TYPE				
	Residential	Non-residential			
		Non-profit	Business	School	Government
<b>LARGE PROJECTS</b>					
Habitat Restoration	Likely	Likely	No	No	No
Lake Shoreline Restoration	Likely	Likely	No	No	No
Waterbody Buffer Restoration	Likely	Likely	No	No	No
Stormwater BMP	Depends on BMP	Depends on BMP	No	No	No
Rain-friendly Lawn	No	No	No	No	No

Eligibility for professional maintenance funds for professional maintenance cost share support will be evaluated by the program coordinator based upon the following project characteristics:

1. Be a native vegetation habitat restoration such as prairie, oak savanna, or forest; be a natural lake shoreline restoration or be a buffer of native vegetation for a waterbody.
2. Have a diversity and quantity of native plants that provides significant ecological benefits.
3. Would greatly benefit from habitat maintenance from a professional (large area, complicated or difficult maintenance protocol, etc.).

*An applicant should reach out to the grant coordinator to see if a project may qualify for professional maintenance support.* If eligible and interested, an applicant must submit a detailed quote for three years of professional maintenance from a qualified native plant/habitat restoration professional.

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Key message: Maintenance in the first three years  
of a native vegetation restoration is essential for success.

We may offer funds to support professional maintenance for some projects.

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The amount of the professional maintenance funds will be based on a percentage (up to 30%) of the base cost share award. The maximum reimbursement for professional maintenance per year will be 75% of eligible maintenance costs for that year. Reimbursement for professional maintenance will occur once per year at the end of the growing season after the prescribed maintenance has occurred and receipts have been submitted. **Any awarded professional maintenance funds must be used within 36 months of project installation.**

### *Professional Maintenance Award Example*

<u>Prairie restoration project cost share award:</u>	\$5,000 for project installation (project award)
<u>Professional maintenance award:</u>	Total of \$1,500 (30% of project award)
<u>Distribution of maintenance award per year:</u>	Determined by grant coordinator; not necessarily divided equally among the three years
<u>When maintenance award may be used:</u>	Within 36 months of project installation
<u>How often maintenance award reimbursed:</u>	Once per year at end of maintenance season (autumn)
<u>Maintenance cost reimbursed per year:</u>	Up to 75% out-of-pocket cost

## **REAL ESTATE RECORDING FOR COST SHARE GREATER THAN \$5,000**

If your cost share award is greater than \$5,000, you will need to file a maintenance declaration for the project with your county land records office. The maintenance declaration is a legal document that states you will maintain the installed best management practice.

Please consult your legal advisor for assistance with legal forms and advice. You will need to provide documentation to the coordinator that the maintenance declaration has been recorded.

Below are links to county recording information for counties within the watershed district:

- Hennepin County Real Estate Recording: [www.hennepin.us/residents/property/real-estate-recording-information](http://www.hennepin.us/residents/property/real-estate-recording-information)
- Carver County Land Records and Vitals: [www.carvercountymn.gov/departments/property-finance/land-records-vitals](http://www.carvercountymn.gov/departments/property-finance/land-records-vitals)

### *Why do we require filing of a maintenance declaration?*

A cost share award greater than \$5,000 is a significant investment for the watershed district. To help protect this investment, a recorded maintenance declaration gives the watershed district legal footing to recoup cost if the cost share recipient chooses to significantly alter or remove a cost share-funded project before the end of its life expectancy.

### *Financial Support for Real Estate Recording*

RPBCWD may choose to reimburse a cost share recipient one time up to \$500 for qualifying costs related to drafting and recording a maintenance declaration for an approved cost share project. **The maintenance declaration reimbursement is limited to one time per cost share recipient.** If a cost share recipient is approved for additional Stewardship projects, RPBCWD will not reimburse maintenance declaration recording costs for these projects.

Qualifying expenses include but are not limited to:

- Legal fee(s) related to preparation and review of the maintenance declaration

- Property survey work to define project area as needed for real estate recording requirements
- Real estate recording fee charged by the county

### General Recording Process

The general steps you need to take to draft and file a maintenance declaration include:

1. **Draft the maintenance declaration with your legal advisor.** RPBCWD will provide a template with example content as a starting point. Send your draft document to RPBCWD for review by our legal advisor before finalizing.
2. **Prepare any additional documents that your county recorder office may require.** Check with your county on what is needed. A county may require a legal survey showing the location of the project on your property.
3. **Have your maintenance declaration notarized by the appropriate representative.** RPBCWD has a notary public on staff that can witness your signature at no cost – let us know in advance if you'd like to schedule this service during regular business hours.
4. **Be prepared to pay a recording fee when you file at your county office.** Check in advance if you can file online and what type of payment the office will accept.

## SELLING YOUR HOME AFTER RECEIVING A COST SHARE

If a homeowner sells their home before completing a project, the cost-share agreement becomes null and void. No cost share reimbursement will occur for partially completed project.

If a homeowner sells their home during the maintenance period of a completed project, the cost share agreement including maintenance becomes null and void and does not transfer to the new homeowner.

If you're thinking about applying for a Stewardship Cost Share and are also thinking about selling your home anytime during the new few years, reach out to the grant coordinator before you apply. Depending on the type of project, it may not be in the Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District's best interest to offer cost share funds for a project if the cost share agreement and maintenance requirement is voided because of a property sale.

## NON-ELIGIBLE PROJECTS OR COMPONENTS

Below is a list of projects or components that are not eligible for the RPBCWD Stewardship Program:

- Water conservation: The cost share program does not fund projects that have a primary goal of drinking water conservation. Examples: high efficiency washers, low-flow toilets, or smart irrigation controllers/sensors. For funding assistance with these, check with your city or county.
- Invasive species removals: Projects that solely control or remove aquatic or terrestrial invasive species (e.g. buckthorn) do not qualify for the cost share program if not part of a more comprehensive habitat restoration project.
- Permit-required work: If you are doing work that is required to comply with a permit, you cannot use any cost share funds for this work. *Exceptions*: vegetated shoreline stabilization with native plants; work that goes above and beyond basic permit requirements.
- Aesthetic or decorative elements: Stepping-stones, bird baths, fountains, and other elements not essential to project function do not qualify for cost share reimbursement.
- Expenses from before project is approved: Expenses incurred prior to project approval are not reimbursable (in other words, do not get started until you have signed the cost share agreement).

- **Edging:** Edging may qualify as an eligible cost if necessary for project maintenance. However, the amount the District is willing to reimburse for foot of edging will be based upon the current average price of lower cost edging of available types (e. g., vinyl, metal, brick, or pre-cast concrete.) Higher cost edging such as stone, poured concrete, and steel may be allowed in some project types, but the District will consider the necessity for edging and the comparative cost of lower cost edging.

## PART 1: APPLICATION PROCESS

### SCHEDULE A SITE VISIT

The first step in the application process is to schedule a site visit. Mini-cost share applicants are not required to have a site visit. During a site visit a District representative will visit your property to meet with you and discuss your project idea. After this site visit, you may proceed with the cost share application. **DO NOT BEGIN ANY DESIGN OR CONSTRUCTION WORK UNTIL YOU HAVE A SIGNED COST SHARE AGREEMENT IN PLACE.**

### PLAN YOUR PROJECT CAREFULLY

Cost share awards are based on your proposed project plan and estimated costs. If the completed project cost is higher than your estimate, your cost share award will not be adjusted. You will have to either adjust your plan to compensate or be willing to cover the extra cost yourself.

Any significant adjustments to your project plan after your cost share agreement is in place, must be pre-approved by the grant coordinator. If the final project differs significantly from the project plan, you may no longer be eligible for cost share reimbursement.

### RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR COMMUNITY

As a local government organization funded by taxpayer dollars, RPBCWD must ensure program funds are used efficiently and effectively. Therefore, applications are closely evaluated for use of cost-effective methods and materials.

### APPLICATION MATERIALS

#### Mini-Cost Share

A Mini-Cost Share application is less rigorous than a Standard Cost Share application. A Mini-Cost Share application requires a description of your project idea and estimated cost.

#### Standard Cost Share

A Standard Cost Share application must include a completed application form, photos of project site, a site map to show where the proposed project is located on the property, sketch of project design, and itemized cost estimate.

1. **Application:** Link to application is on the Stewardship Program webpage
2. **Photographs:** Provide two or more photos of **project site before project installation**. Include for all project types.

3. **Site Map:** Provide a map showing outline of project location on your property and dimensions. Include for all project types. An aerial (satellite) image with contour/topographic lines is preferred. Online county property maps are useful for this.
4. **Project Design:** Provide a basic sketch of project design with relevant details based upon your project type. Relevant information may include location of features, planting plan with locations of plantings, specifications for materials, area of disturbance, depth of excavation, length of materials, etc. This may be combined with the site map. Include for all project types.
5. **Itemized Cost Estimate:** If you're hiring a professional to do the work, provide their quote. If you plan to build the project yourself, provide itemized costs and in-kind contributions.
  - a. Detailed, itemized quote of services from professional business with separate line items for materials and labor
  - b. Itemized costs of materials you purchase and/or equipment you rent
  - c. In-kind contributions related to project construction (See "In-kind Credit" below for more information)
    - In-kind labor: Provide estimated number of hours for each person
    - In-kind materials may be considered: Provide a list and approximate value of materials essential to project function

### *Required in application packet for SOME PROJECTS*

6. **Civil Design Plan:** A technical plan/drawing, typically done by an engineer, landscape architect, or landscape designer is required for a Shoreline Restoration or a Stormwater BMP project (rain garden, tree trench, swale, permeable pavement, etc.). Shoreline work must show the ordinary high water (OHW) line.
7. **Native Vegetation Restoration and Maintenance Plan:** Submit this if you are doing a Habitat Restoration, Shoreline Restoration, or Waterbody Buffer project.
8. **If you qualify for and are interested in Professional Maintenance Funds, submit an estimate for 3 Years of Professional Maintenance:** Eligible projects include Habitat Restoration, Shoreline Restoration, and Waterbody Buffer. The grant coordinator will determine if your project qualifies for professional maintenance financial support during the 3-year vegetation establishment phase. If your project is approved for cost share based on having professional maintenance, failing to proceed with professional maintenance is cause for cancellation of the cost share award.
9. **Plant List:** If your project includes plants, we need details. This info will help us evaluate if your plant selections are appropriate for the site. *Be aware of District native plant requirements if your project requires native plants.*
  - a. Quantity and size: How many plants of each species? What size are the plants (plug, pot size, etc.)? If seeds, what is the seeding rate you plan to use?
  - b. Scientific names: Common plant names vary widely so we need scientific names. For native habitat projects, you may use only the natural (wild) forms of native plants (in other words, no cultivated varieties). Seeding mixes also require scientific names.
  - c. Plant grower/nursery: Who grew the plants or seeds? Note that this may be different from the seller (place of purchase).

## IN-KIND CREDIT

### Mini-Cost Share

Mini-Cost Share projects are not eligible for in-kind credit for labor or materials.

## Standard Cost Share

Eligible in-kind labor may include effort involved in physical project installation and does NOT include activities such as shopping and planning. Eligible in-kind materials will be limited to physical items needed for project installation; material goods such as vehicle fuel for travel and items that the cost share recipient already owns for general household use (e.g. hand tools) are not eligible.

In-kind contributions will be counted toward the cost share recipient’s share of project costs. For in-kind labor, hours will be credited at **\$15 per hour for unskilled labor**. For skilled labor (person has professional skills/training/experience relevant to the project), a credit of \$25 per hour may be used for in-kind labor if approved in advance by the cost share program coordinator.

A cost share recipient will not be allowed to earn actual money from their in-kind contributions. In other words, the value of 20 hours of sweat equity may be counted toward total project cost, but you will not actually be paid (“get cash back”) for your labor.

### In-kind Credit Eligibility based upon Standard Cost Share Project Type and Applicant Type

PROJECT TYPE	APPLICANT TYPE			
	Residential*	Non-residential		
		Non-profit*	School	Business; Local government
<b>Habitat Restoration</b>	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible	Not eligible
<b>Lake Shoreline Restoration</b>	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible	Not eligible
<b>Waterbody Buffer</b>	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible	Not eligible
<b>Stormwater BMP</b>	Depends on BMP	Depends on BMP	Eligible	Not eligible
<b>Rain-friendly Lawn</b>	Eligible	Ineligible for project type	Ineligible for project type	Ineligible for project type

**\*Exception:** Minnesota Water Stewards, Master Gardeners, and Master Naturalists may not credit in-kind labor, regardless of project type, toward total project cost if they are using the project to accumulate volunteer hours for one of these programs.

## PUBLIC DATA

All information, including but not limited to applications, conceptual designs, contractor bids, cost estimates, final decisions and specifications, copies of permits and proof of expenditures is subject to disclosure to the public when submitted to the District except where specifically protected as non-public by state law. **Bottom line: Your application is public data.**

## EVALUATION OF APPLICATION

Applications are screened by the grant coordinator to make sure they meet minimum program requirements and include required information; the coordinator will ask applicant for more information if anything is missing. The permit coordinator will also review to see if a permit is needed. Highly technical or complicated projects may be referred to the District’s consulting engineer for review and recommendations.

After screening, applications are forwarded for evaluation by the full cost share review committee, which includes the grant coordinator, technical advisor, and representative(s) from the Citizen Advisory Committee. The group meets as needed to evaluate applications and make funding recommendations.

See the Stewardship Program webpage for application evaluation (scoring) forms used to guide the committee's decision.

Complete applications are evaluated in the order they are received. Incomplete applications are placed on hold until applicant provides requested information. The amount of time it takes to evaluate an application depends upon the number of applications received and cost share review committee schedule.

## COST SHARE PROGRAM GOALS

Projects must demonstrate an improvement over existing conditions for water quality, natural habitat, and/or flood reduction. Projects that minimize impacts rather than improve existing conditions may receive funding up to the difference between the cost of the BMP and the traditional approach.

In general, the Stewardship Program funds projects that:

- Have quantifiable benefits to water quality, habitat, or flood reduction
- Support the District's 10-year Plan goals
- Produce examples that the watershed district can share with others
- Increase awareness of water resource issues
- Increase visibility and general knowledge of clean water projects
- Build community connection through shared actions for clean water

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Key message: Applications are evaluated on how well they meet program goals.

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**Some types of projects have specific requirements. See project type definitions for more information.** For example, habitat restoration projects require the use of native plants. However, rain garden projects do not require native plants (though they are encouraged) but plants must be appropriate for site conditions (sunlight exposure, soil moisture, etc.).

## COST SHARE AGREEMENT APPROVAL PROCESS

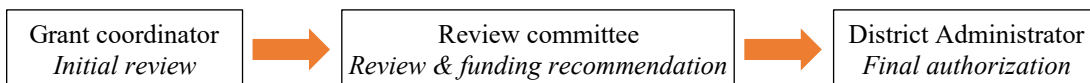
Once the Stewardship Program review committee has a funding recommendation, a cost share agreement is drafted and sent for approval. The level of approval for a cost share agreement depends on the amount of the not-to-exceed value listed in the agreement.

### Review for Mini-Cost Share agreements

The grant coordinator is the primary reviewer of Mini-Cost Share applications. Other staff and members of the Stewardship Program review committee may assist with review.

### Review for Standard Cost Share agreement LESS THAN \$10,000

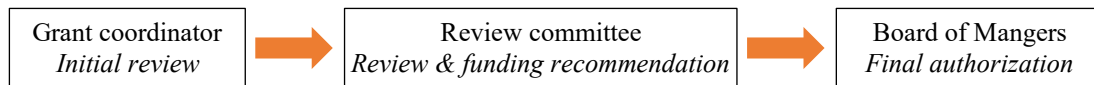
The Stewardship Program review committee make recommendations about project funding. If the recommendation is for a cost share award less than \$10,000, it will be forwarded to the District Administrator for final approval.



### Review for Standard Cost Share agreement for \$10,000 to <\$20,000

If a recommendation is for a cost share award of \$10,000 or greater, the recommendation will be brought to the District Board of Managers for consideration at one of their regular monthly meetings. If managers

approve the recommendation, the RPBCWD administrator may move forward with awarding the cost share.



#### Review for Standard Cost Share agreement \$20,000 or more

If a recommendation is for a cost share award of \$20,000 or greater, the recommendation will be presented at a **Public Hearing** separately or as part of a regular meeting of the District Board of Managers. The Mangers will consider public input from the hearing as part of their decision. If approved, the RPBCWD administrator may move forward with awarding the cost share.



## PERMIT REVIEW

If the District determines your project triggers a watershed district rule, you will need to apply for a permit and demonstrate compliance with applicable RPBCWD rules.

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Key message: If your cost share project requires a District permit, the permit coordinator may decide to waive the permit application fee.

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Examples of actions that may trigger a rule (this is not the full list):

- Excavation, import/export of 50 cubic yards of material or more
- Disturbance of 5,000 or more square feet of land
- Work within a designated wetland
- Work below the ordinary high-water line of a waterbody (e. g., shoreline)
- Dredging or removing sediment of one (1) cubic yard or more from the beds, banks or shores of any public waterbody by any means

Read the full list of watershed district rules at [rpbcwd.org/permits](http://rpbcwd.org/permits).

If you are doing work that is required as part of a permit from the watershed district, you may not apply for a Stewardship Cost Share or other cost share or grant for this work. An exception may be the cost of a native plant restoration to stabilize a shoreline.

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Key message: Stewardship Program cost share money can't be used for a project that you must do.

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**However, cost share may be awarded for projects, or parts of projects, that go above and beyond permit requirements.** (Example: A permit requires you to put in a 15-foot buffer along a waterbody, but you decide you would like to do a 25-foot buffer. You may apply for funding for the extra 10 feet but not the initial 15 feet).

## COST SHARE AGREEMENT

Program participants enter into a binding agreement with the watershed district providing the terms under which cost-share funding is provided. After approval of the project, the agreement is signed by participant(s) and the RPBCWD administrator. Amendment of any of the terms of the agreement will be by mutual agreement signed by all parties to the original contract.

The agreement includes, but is not limited to, promoting and acknowledging District sponsorship, reporting, payment schedule, terms of agreement and use of funds, cost overruns, and cancellation. The agreement also allows district staff access to the project area for evaluation and program promotion.

## PART 2: BUILD YOUR PROJECT

### STICK WITH THE PLAN

RPBCWD will not reimburse costs expended for construction of the project that does not substantially conform to the approved plans, designs, and/or specifications as shown in the cost share agreement. Also, the District will not reimburse costs expended for partial completion of the project. However, District staff will work in earnest with participants to address unexpected conditions, changes in conditions or other eventualities that affect the construction or implementation of a project and will present a modification of the cost-share agreement to the Administrator or Board of Managers when necessary. It is the applicant's responsibility to make the district aware of any proposed changes as soon as possible, but prior to materially deviating from the plan.

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Key message: To be reimbursed, you need to build what  
you agreed to build as stated in your cost share agreement.

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### REIMBURSABLE PROJECT COSTS

The following will be considered as reimbursable project costs if eligible for the project category/type and if they are approved as part of your project scope (plan):

- Materials and professional labor listed in the project scope as shown in cost share agreement
- Equipment rental fees
- You may include estimated state and local taxes from project materials/services within your total project cost.
- In-kind materials or labor ("elbow grease hours") contributed by you or members of your household/organization that are essential to project success (an estimate of in-kind credit MUST be included with your application in order to receive credit)

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Key message: Build your project the way you said you'd build it in the cost share agreement. If you  
don't, we may not reimburse you for the project.

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### NON-REIMBURSABLE PROJECT COSTS

The following are not eligible project costs:

- **Expenses for activities started or purchases made BEFORE your cost share agreement is in place.** In other words, do not begin your project until you have an executed agreement (an executed agreement has been fully signed by all property owners and the District administrator). Exception: Some contractors require a consultation or design fee in advance of beginning a project, and this fee may be counted toward total project cost.
- **Expenses not part of your original scope of work** will not count toward reimbursable cost. In other words, if you decide to expand your project, the expansions are not eligible project costs. If during installation you need to adjust your scope of work, reach out in advance to the grant program coordinator to see what adjustments may be made.
- **Purely decorative or aesthetic elements** such as bird baths, fountains, and stepping-stones do not count toward reimbursable costs.
- **Landscape edging may be ineligible** for reimbursement unless pre-approved as part of project design. Including edging in a project without pre-approval may void your agreement if it interferes with project function such as management of stormwater runoff.
- **Costs above the original estimated project total.** A cost share agreement includes a percent cost-share award and a not-to-exceed amount. The not-to-exceed amount is calculated from multiplying your percent cost-share award and estimated total project cost. If you underestimate the cost of your project, you will need to scale back if you want to stay within your not-to-exceed amount or be prepared to cover that additional cost. If scaling back means significant change to your project plan, your project may no longer meet cost share requirements. Please discuss plans to scale back in advance with the grant program coordinator.

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Key message: If you're unsure a cost is reimbursable or your project costs are greater than expected, reach out to the grant coordinator.

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## PROJECT CONSTRUCTION DEADLINE

A Mini-Cost Share project must be installed no later than November 30 of the award year. All reimbursement requests must also be submitted by this date.

Standard Cost Share project installation must be completed within 12 months of all parties signing the cost share agreement. If unforeseen circumstances delay a project, the cost share recipient may request a time extension in writing to the grant coordinator. The grant coordinator has the discretion to approve or reject an extension to the project installation deadline.

## PART 3: REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS

Reimbursement is made after completion of the project, once reporting requirements have been met, and the project has passed inspection by District representative. Cost share recipients must provide copies of receipts for all costs and reasonable documentation of labor hours contributed if in-kind labor was included in the executed cost share agreement. Claimed expenses will be verified by the District.



## INSPECTION OF PROJECT SITE

For a Mini-Cost Share project, a District representative will stop by to confirm project installation after the recipient submits their project report.

For a Standard Cost Share project, a site inspection to confirm proper installation of project must be performed before reimbursement may proceed. The cost share recipient should reach out to the grant coordinator (or other designated person) to schedule this inspection when the project is nearing completion.

## REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Within 30 days of completion but no later than November 30 of the award year, a Mini-Cost Share recipient must submit a report that includes before photos, after photos, and receipts.

Within 30 days of project completion, a Standard Cost Share recipient must submit a project report that includes the following:

- Completed report form: A link to the online form is located on the cost share webpage
- Proof of purchases: Itemized receipts and/or paid invoices for project costs. **An unpaid invoice does NOT count as a receipt.**
- Photos: Two or more good quality photographs of completed project.
- Other: Other documentation such as list of in-kind labor.

## REIMBURSEMENT REQUEST

After successful project inspection and completion by a cost share recipient of their reporting requirements, the grant coordinator will submit a reimbursement request to the District finance department. All financial requests must go before the District Board of Managers at an upcoming monthly meeting (typically the third Wednesday of the month).

The final step in reimbursement is printing and mailing of a reimbursement check to the cost share recipient – checks are printed only once per month. The cost share recipient may opt to pick up the check in person at the District office during business hours.

## REIMBURSEMENT CALCULATION

### Mini-Cost Share

The Mini-Cost Share award is 95% of project cost up to the set limit. However, at least 75% of the reimbursed amount must go toward the cost of purchasing native live plants or native seeds.

### Standard Cost Share

Final reimbursement amounts are calculated by multiplying the percent award (such as 50%) by the total final project cost, up to the not-to-exceed value provided in the grant agreement. A not-to-exceed value limits the reimbursable amount and helps keep staff within program budget.

If the final project cost is less than the approved project estimate (you came in under budget), the reimbursement will be the applicable percentage of that final cost. However, if the final project cost is greater than the approved project estimate (you went over budget), the reimbursement remains the applicable percentage of the estimated cost and overage is your responsibility.

**EXAMPLE:** You were awarded a 50% cost share of with an approved project estimate cost of \$4,000. The cost share not-to-exceed value on your agreement is \$2,000.

Scenario #1 Under Budget: Your final project cost came in **under budget** at \$3,800 (instead of the estimated \$4,000). Your reimbursement will be **50% of the final cost** of \$3,800. Your cost share reimbursement will be \$1,900.

Scenario #2 Over Budget: Your final project cost came in **over budget** at \$4,600. Your reimbursement will be **50% of the estimated cost of \$4,000**. Your cost share reimbursement will be \$2,000.

## PART 4: OBLIGATIONS AFTER PROJECT INSTALLATION

### MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS

#### Mini-Cost Share

If you receive a Mini-Cost Award, you are required to maintain the project for at least two (2) years.

#### Standard Cost Share

Maintenance of the project is the responsibility of the cost share recipient. Along with the Standard Cost Share agreement, you will be asked to sign a **maintenance agreement**. If your cost share award is greater than \$5,000, you will likely also have to record a **maintenance declaration** on the property with your county recording office (see Real Estate Recording for Cost share greater than \$5,000.) RPBCWD may provide reimbursement for costs incurred with a maintenance declaration.

The duration of required maintenance varies based on applicant type. Homeowners are expected to maintain their cost share projects for at least five (5) years. Non-profits, businesses, schools, and local government (e.g. cities) are required to maintain a project for a minimum of 10 years up to the expected lifespan of the practice; the length of maintenance time will be determined at the time of a cost share offer. RPBCWD reserves the right to request repayment of a cost share if the project is not adequately maintained.

If you have been offered professional maintenance funds as part of your cost share agreement, you will need to verify to the grant coordinator what maintenance has been performed and submit receipts in order to be reimbursed. This process must be done by the end of the maintenance year. Reimbursement will not occur until the professional maintenance for the year has occurred and been verified.

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Key message: You need to take care of your project after it is installed.

If you don't, we will ask you to return the cost share money.

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### Ecologically Friendly Maintenance

Ecologically friendly maintenance is required for projects that require native plants. Below is what RPBCWD defines as ecologically friendly maintenance:

- **Do not use fungicides or insecticides.** These kill "good" and "bad" fungus and insects.
- **Limit herbicide use** to invasive weed control and carefully follow label directions.
- To reduce competition with native plants, **plan to pull or otherwise control weeds** at least three times during the growing season.
- **Limit fertilizer use to those without harmful salts.** Natural fertilizers such as top-dressing with compost or compost tea are preferred. **Native plants usually do not need ANY fertilizer.** Alternative (bee) lawns: Clover and other legumes fix nitrogen in soil, so fertilizer isn't needed.
- **Limit watering** to the establishment phase (first couple of years).

- Select appropriate weather conditions for planting and/or seeding.
- **Provide soft landings (native plants, leaf litter, and plant debris) under trees.** Soft landings support overwintering and pupating insects, which serve an important role in nature including serving as food sources for songbirds.
- **Practice “messy gardening.”** Dead standing plants and fallen leaves provide winter and early spring shelter for beneficial insects, birds, and soil microbes. Leave flower stems no shorter than 18 inches. Even better, don't cut off spent flowers as they provide food for birds year-round.

## ANNUAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

As part of your cost share agreement, you may be asked once a year to submit an online form to update us about your project during your required maintenance period. Information you'll be asked to provide includes:

- General update of project – how's it going?
- Maintenance or inspection activities that have occurred
- Current photographs of project

This form also offers an opportunity for you to ask us questions or bring up any concerns you have. An email reminder will be sent with a link to the annual reporting form. If we don't hear from you or have concerns, we will reach out by phone and/or stop by the property.

In addition, a District representative may visit your property to inspect the project. The conditions for the visits will be outlined in the cost share agreement. If entering your property, we will notify you by knocking on your door or leaving a note or follow up with an email or phone call if warranted.

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Key message: You need to check in once a year after your project has been installed for the number of years outlined in your cost share agreement.

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# APPENDIX A: STANDARD COST SHARE PROCESS CHECKLIST

A to-do list for Standard Cost Share projects such as a habitat restoration, shoreline restoration, waterbody buffer restoration, and rain garden.

## Before you apply

- Visit the Stewardship Program webpage, [rpbcwd.org/Stewardship-Cost-Share](http://rpbcwd.org/Stewardship-Cost-Share), for resources.
- Once you have an idea of what you want to do, submit the online site visit request form.
- A District representative will contact you to schedule the site visit.
- Develop a project plan after your site visit. Reach out to your site visit contact if you would like to discuss your plan.
- Assemble application materials.

## Prepare your application

Gather the materials you'll need for to submit your online application form. Depending on the project type, you may need to include:

- Project design/layout
- Photographs of existing condition of site
- Detailed cost estimate with line items
- Plant list & planting plan (if using plants)
- Maintenance plan

## If your project is approved

- We will send you a cost share agreement. Once this is signed, you may get started on your project!
- You have 12 months from cost share approval to install your project.
- If your cost share is greater than \$5,000, you likely need to prepare and record a property maintenance declaration. For projects not requiring a maintenance declaration, a maintenance agreement will be required. *This needs to be completed and verified to RPBCWD before reimbursement of funds.*
- Keep a list of your expenses and save all project-related receipts.
- Issues come up. If you think you need to change your plan, contact us for pre-approval.
- Take photos! Before, during, and after. You'll need these for your project report.
- As your project nears completion, reach out to schedule a project inspection.

## After you've installed your project

- Complete the project close-out form. Include copies of all your receipts.
- A District representative will perform a project inspection (schedule as project nears completion).
- The grant coordinator will review your project report to make sure it includes receipts and matches your project plan and confirm it's passed inspection before processing reimbursement.
- Financials are processed once a month at the watershed. Once a check request is submitted for you, it may take 1-2 months for you to receive your check.

## Long-term

- Take care of your project! Cost share recipients are required to maintain their projects for the number of years specified in the maintenance section of their cost share agreement.
- Submit a project annual report for the period specified in your cost share agreement.
- After installation, your project will be inspected regularly by a District representative.
- Stay in contact. The Watershed District often offers continuing education on topics like maintenance, and other opportunities to learn and get involved.