

WATER & WASTEWATER GRANT INFORMATION

Doug Buresh, ARRA Circuit Rider 1

Last time I wrote about financing projects through the Nebraska Water Wastewater Committee. The majority of this funding comes from WWAC stakeholder's normal loan and grant programs. I will expand on that and discuss some of the other grant programs available. Not all systems will qualify based on population and income guidelines. If you do not qualify, I can sympathize. As you all know, budgets are tight everywhere. All communities and districts are not alike. The reason for these qualifications is to give assistance to those who need it most.

The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ), in coordination with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Division of Public Health (NDHHS-DPH), has several financial assistance programs which are funded through the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund and the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund. Here are the specific grant programs available. Once again, it is very important to submit your annual Needs Survey for water and sewer projects to be eligible.

Wastewater Facility Planning Grants

These grants are available for systems with a population of 10,000 or less who have been identified with a financial hardship. Up to \$20,000 can be used to hire consultants for engineering studies to assess the current system and develop strategies for future use. These cover 90 percent of the eligible facility plan project costs. Contact Nebraska Environmental Partnerships at (402) 471-3193.

Small Community Matching Grants

These grants are made in conjunction with loans to systems with a population of 10,000 or less who have completed their Needs Survey and have been placed on the Intended Use Plan. Your Median Household Income (MHI) needs to be under the state's MHI to be eligible. Maximum amount of this grant is \$25,000. Contact NDEQ Wastewater Facility Section, SRF Unit at (402) 471-4206.

Wastewater Emergency Grants

NDEQ is able to provide emergency grant funding from the Administrative Cash Fund. These grants cannot be used for routine repairs or maintenance of facilities. They may be combined with a loan. Contact NDEQ Wastewater Facility Section, SRF Unit at (402) 471-4206.

Planning Grants: Drinking Water Preliminary Engineering Reports

For publicly-owned water systems with less than 10,000 population. The maximum grant for individual communities is \$15,000 per system with a 10 percent match by the community. The maximum grant for a regional system is \$25,000 and a 20 percent match by the system. Contact Nebraska Environmental Partnerships Coordinator at (402) 471-3193.

Source Water Protection Grants / Wellhead Protection Implementation Grants

Eligible applicants are political subdivisions that operate public water systems serving a population of 10,000 or less. This year's program had approximately \$100,000 available and the application deadline was August 6, 2010. Projects must provide long-term benefits to drinking water quality, quantity, education and/or security. There is no match requirement, but a cash or "in-kind" match is encouraged. Contact Source Water Protection Grants Program at (402) 471-6988.

Public Water System Security Grants

These grants provide funds to public water systems serving a population of 10,000 or less to provide increased security. The grants are funded on a first come first serve basis. Maximum grant is \$5,000 and the system must provide a 10 percent match. NDHHS-DPH sends out letters about May 1 to all eligible systems.

Drinking Water Emergency Funding

NDEQ is able to provide emergency funding as a grant, loan, or as a combination of grant and loan from the Administrative Cash Fund. Documentation that the emergency jeopardizes the public water system's ability to provide an adequate supply of safe drinking water on a continuing basis is required. Approval of the project must also be obtained from NDHHS-DPH. This funding may not be used for routine repair of maintenance. Contact NDEQ at (402) 471-2186.

The **Nebraska Environmental Partnerships** program is a unique state-coordinated program designed to help small communities meet the challenges of complex environmental regulations, limited financial resources, aging infrastructure, aging population, and "small towns getting smaller." NEP typically works with communities of fewer than 1,000. All recommendations made by NEP are based on each community's specific needs. Local community leaders determine the extent of NEP's involvement and decisions remain up to the community. NEP's services include identifying financially feasible solutions to problems, assisting in finding funding sources, and helping to implement solutions. Contact Nebraska Environmental Partnerships Coordinator at (402) 471-3193.

USDA Rural Development also has specific grant programs for water and wastewater systems. SEARCH Grants are a new program for smaller communities. This program will provide financial assistance to the most eligible communities based on need. It will eventually take the place of their Predevelopment Planning Grants.

SEARCH Grants

Up to \$30,000 for predevelopment planning for water or waste disposal needs, with no matching funds required. These funds can be used for feasibility studies, design assistance, and technical assistance. Applicants must have a population of 2,500 or less and be financially distressed. The applicant will have to write a narrative detailing project objectives and timetables.

Predevelopment Planning Grants

These grants will be phased out next year. They may also be used for water or wastewater. Maximum grant of \$15,000 or 75 percent of project costs, whichever is less. Systems must be below the state's rural Median Household Income to be eligible.

Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants

For communities under 10,000 population who have less than 100 percent of the state's rural Median Household Income. \$500,000 maximum grant when a significant decline in water quantity or quality has occurred within two years. \$75,000 maximum grant to make emergency repairs and/or replacement of facilities on existing systems. Grants may make up 100 percent of project costs. Contact your nearest USDA Rural Development office for any of these grant programs.