

OWEB Watershed Council Support Work Group Report

June 2010

Background

In preparation for the 2011-2013 Council Support cycle, OWEB convened a Watershed Council Support Work Group to improve the application, review process, and reporting requirements without making significant changes. The Work Group is made up of watershed council coordinators, council support application reviewers, and OWEB staff (see attached list). The Work Group began meeting in March and will complete most of its work by mid-June.

OWEB plans to post the revised council support application and supporting materials, including instructions, evaluation worksheets, and other information by early October 2010.

Topics Addressed by Work Group and Results to date

1. Reducing the number of narrative questions in the application so applicants can provide more detailed information on fewer questions.

Six questions from the 2009-2011 council support application were modified from narrative responses to check boxes to reduce the number of narrative questions applicants have to answer. The questions that were simplified focused on organizational structure and will still be evaluated, but in a manner that will take less reviewer time.

2. Simplifying the budget application page.

The Work Group participants and OWEB staff realize it is important for all councils to use a sound, thorough budget development process that looks at projected revenues and expenses and other items that are critical to good fiscal management. However, the group decided that a detailed biennial council budget is not a necessary part of the council support application. For the 2011-2013 cycle, applicants will only be required to submit information on the four budget categories in council support grant agreements: Coordinator Salary and Benefits, Operating Costs, Risk Management and Accountability Assurance, and Fiscal Administration.

OWEB will post, with other council support materials, a budget tool for councils to use to help them develop biennial budgets that do not just account for OWEB funds, but also other sources of funding.

3. Simplifying reporting requirements.

The Work Group's objective was to reduce the amount of final reporting work for council support applicants while ensuring that OWEB still has grantees report on items that are required by our rules. Because OWEB's funding for councils relies greatly on federal Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Funds (PCSRF), OWEB will have to add NOAA-required reporting metrics forms to the 2011-2013 application and grant award reporting requirements. The Work Group discussed these reporting requirements with OWEB staff and offered suggestions on which metrics should be collected and how to make it as easy as possible.

4. Revising the evaluation sheet to ensure applicants get credit for multi-year projects.

The Work Group members thought this was already captured in the application and worked to modify the evaluation instructions to ensure reviewers consider multi-year projects when evaluating the project section of the application.

5. Providing easier to understand instructions for umbrella and multiple council applicants to make the application easier to fill out and easier for reviewers to evaluate.
In the last council support grant cycle, the Council Support Advisory Committee found it difficult to review applications that contained information on multiple councils. The instructions for both applicants and reviewers have been updated. For applicants, instructions more clearly explain how to present information on multiple councils in a consistent manner. For reviewers, the instructions more clearly describe how to evaluate these types of applications.
6. Exploring the suggestion to provide time in the review process for applicants to meet with the council support reviewers.
During the Listening Sessions, several councils requested that OWEB's grant review process include time for applicants to meet with the Council Support Advisory Committee during the evaluation process, to answer any reviewer questions about the application. OWEB offered this opportunity during one of the council support grant cycles. The Work Group discussed this and saw pros and cons. It can be valuable for applicants to be able to clarify their application or answer reviewer questions. However, OWEB asks a lot of its volunteer reviewers, who have a huge workload to review applications and meet for two days to evaluate the applications. After discussion, the Work Group members thought that their efforts to simplify the application may leave the reviewers with fewer questions and less of a need to ask clarifying questions of applicants. The Work Group also discussed the logistics involved in providing interview opportunities and the small likelihood that the interviews would provide applicants with any overall change in their merit ranking. After consideration, the Work Group did not recommend applicant interviews for the 2011-2013 cycle.
7. Revising how match information is provided and making sure it includes both monetary and non-monetary match.
Previously, the application asked about match in three places, a question in the application, the match form, and the budget page. Information about matching funds has been combined into one location, the match form. This was done to make it easier for reviewers to find and evaluate the match information in the application and reduce redundant information.
8. Better aligning the application with the evaluation worksheet so the application is easier for reviewers to evaluate.
Last grant cycle, reviewers found parts of the evaluation worksheet confusing and hard to follow. The Work Group aligned the revised application with the evaluation worksheet to make it more efficient for reviewers.

Watershed Council Support Work Group Participants

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