March 24, 2020

COVID-19 Public Health Emergency – Update on Grant Programs Administered by the Financial Assistance Branch in the DWR Division of Regional Assistance

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, DWR is continuing to provide the State of California with its core services of water delivery, flood protection, dam safety and infrastructure maintenance. In addition, we consider our services related to grant delivery and administration extremely important. Our goal is to minimize disruption of our business and your work as much as possible.

This e-mail provides an update on grant program services and answers some questions you may have.

DWR Grant Managers are Now Teleworking

While some DWR employees need to come into the office to perform essential state functions and operations, most of the staff who manage grants in our Financial Assistance Branch and the four DWR Region Offices have moved to teleworking to protect the workplace and community. We are striving to make this change as seamless as possible and to promote continued effective communications and transfer/processing of invoices and other documentation.

We recognize that most of our grantees are also teleworking during this health emergency. Efforts by some grantees to share personal phone and email information to facilitate communication are appreciated; however, DWR prefers its grant managers strictly use DWR email and Skype accounts to do business, rather than sharing their personal information. Phone calls, no matter how short, can be quickly set up via Skype, with the grantee being provided the necessary call-in information. Thank you for understanding.

Site Visits Should Be Postponed

In general, all grant agreement site visits should be postponed due to State travel restrictions for grant managers. If one of your grant projects is undergoing construction of an essential nature, please contact your grant manager to discuss the matter. Weekly construction reports with photos, inspection reports, and other types of documentation summarizing the work completed may be a way to convey the activities virtually. If possible, video documentation can go a long way to providing the grant manager an idea of the activities in progress during the travel restriction.

Contact Us to Discuss Anticipated Grant Project Delays

As with past emergencies, DWR will work with you to accommodate your needs. Please contact your grant manager with special requests related to timing of deliverables, construction delays, etc.
Invoice Processing Delays

We acknowledge past delays in processing invoices in some cases, even before this public health emergency, and the current emergency may create further delays for you and/or DWR. We take your concerns seriously and understand the hardship that payment delays may create, in particular, if you are working with disadvantaged communities, non-profits, and Tribes. If you would like to discuss your particular situation, please contact Carmel Brown, Financial Assistance Branch Chief, at Carmel.Brown@water.ca.gov.

Submit Invoices by April 10 to Minimize Year-End Delays

There is typically a slow-down in State accounting functions at the end of each fiscal year (June 30). Given past trends and the current health emergency, DWR urges submission of any outstanding invoices and associated quarterly reports for review by April 10 to help minimize delays. Please contact your grant manager to discuss your situation.

Use Electronic Signatures to Minimize Delays

The Financial Assistance Branch has been using DocuSign effectively for about a year, and if you haven't taken advantage of this resource, now would be the time to consider it. Due to the health emergency and given that most staff are working remotely, we anticipate a slower turnaround time for processing documents and invoices delivered via regular mail with a wet signature. DocuSign does not require you to download or purchase software; instead, you will receive an email with a link to DocuSign and the ability to electronically sign or initial the invoice. This can even be done via a smart phone, tablet, desktop, or laptop. What normally takes weeks can be turned around in a matter of days. DocuSign does provide an opportunity to receive copies back with the electronic signatures and provides the grantees with the exact same method of documentation as a wet-signature invoice.

Update on Proposition 1 IRWM Implementation Grant Program

We are still hard at work reviewing and processing the numerous Round 1 grant applications received through December 2019, and at this time, we anticipate minor delays in that process. We will continue to send out grant award announcements in batches as they are approved by DWR Executive. These announcements will come through the DWR IRWM list serve and will be published on the program website: https://water.ca.gov/Work-With-Us/Grants-And-Loans/IRWM-Grant-Programs/Proposition-1/Implementation-Grants. To check about the status of your application, please send an e-mail to: DWR_IRWM@water.ca.gov. Using this email address (rather than a specific employee’s email address) will ensure that our IRWM Grant Program staff can track your questions and respond in a timely manner.
Update on Proposition 68 Sustainable Groundwater Management (SGM) Grant Program

On March 13, DWR publicly announced funding awards for the Proposition 68 Sustainable Groundwater Management (SGM) Grant Program (Round 3 Planning grants). On March 18, our staff sent out funding award letters to 53 prospective grantees, and we included a tailored draft grant agreement with each award letter in order to expedite the agreement execution process as much as possible. If you are one of the 37 grantees who are amending an existing agreement, please contact your current assigned DWR grant manager (assignments have not changed) to get the amendment process started. If you are one of the 16 new grantees, please send an email with your questions/information to sgwp@water.ca.gov. Using this email address (rather than a specific employee's email address) will ensure that our SGWM Grant Program staff can keep track of your questions and respond in a timely manner. SGM Grant Program staff have sent out appointments to all 53 grantees for next week. During that meeting, we will go over the self-certification form, instructions on the agreements, and answer questions you may have.

In Closing

Our team in the Financial Assistance Branch hopes you, your colleagues and families stay healthy and safe during this public health emergency. Our staff remain committed to serving your needs, while recognizing that this new work approach is uncharted territory. Thank you in advance for your patience and flexibility as we adapt to this situation.