



Maine Healthy Soils Program Soil Health Implementation Grant Questions and Answers Summary

Questions Deadlines	<p>March 14, 2025 no later than 5:00 p.m., local time</p> <p>Submit all questions via online submission</p>
Application Deadline	<p>April 4, 2025, no later than 5:00 p.m., local time.</p> <p>To apply, visit our program webpage.</p>

The below Question and Answer Summary includes all questions asked and answered during the Live Webinar held on February 21, 2025 and all written questions submitted through the on-line form as of 12:00 p.m. on March 5, 2025.

- Can funds cover the cost of labor to implement an equipment purchase?
 - Yes, labor for installation, etc. should be included as part of the equipment vendor quote or as an additional vendor quote.
- Are awards tied to measurable results?
 - Awardees will need to submit annual reports describing use of funds and may enroll in our no-cost soil health testing program as it is available.
- Is this grant impacted by the current federal funding freezes?
 - No, these are state funds.
- There are no more available field visit or soil testing dates, can I schedule a virtual consult to satisfy the program enrollment requirement?
 - Yes, this is fine. As of February 18, 2025 – we are fully booked for site visits and soil testing, so this will be the only way to enroll moving forward. Additionally, if you have had a previous visit or consult with program staff, that interaction counts as enrollment.
- Can we save the online application and come back to it?
 - Yes, you can save the application and come back to it. We understand that the way to do that may not be clear, so **we have posted the application questions on the program website for you to download and review beforehand. We suggest you type your answers to the questions in a word processor and then copy/paste them into the online form when you are ready to submit.**
- Are farmers required to upfront money for this grant.

- There is no match requirement for this grant. This is not a cost-share program. Broadly, awardees will sign a contract and submit invoices to be reimbursed as expenses occur. This process will be outlined in an awardee's contract.
- Can grant funds cover any training required for purchased equipment.
 - Yes, be sure to include this as an expense in the budget section of the application or as a vendor quote. It can be a line item in a vendor quote or a separate vendor quote. All installation, delivery, and training costs must be included in the budget.
- Is training required for purchased equipment?
 - No. If you know how to use the equipment you do not need to pay someone to teach you how. Only include training expenses if you have to pay someone to teach you how to use the equipment you are purchasing.
- Are equipment pieces like drainage tile, chisel plows, and subsoilers for the purpose of rehabbing a compacted field eligible expenses?
 - The RFA states that costs associated with rehabilitating fields are an allowable expense. In the application, you must make the argument that the items you are requesting are going to improve your farm's soil health.
- Would the implementation of wool pelletizers or wood pellets be allowable?
 - Wood pellets are a soil amendment and thus are eligible according to section 1.3 of the RFA. Wood pelletizers are allowable costs, you must make the argument that the items you are requesting are going to improve your farm's soil health.
- The grant term is 3 years, does that mean we can request labor coverage for all three years?
 - Yes, you may choose how you want to spend your funds over the 3-year term. That means you may decide to use your entire award in the first year, or you could spread out usage over two or three years.
- Could I request equipment that would mainly allow me to sell or produce for other farms?
 - Applications will be scored on how well the equipment will improve the soil health of the applicant's farm.
- Are there going to be additional funding cycles for this grant?
 - Yes depending on available funds, we intend to release another round of funding for this grant in the state fiscal year 2026, which runs from 7/1/2025 – 6/30/2026.
- How would I submit documentation for supplemental things like cover crops?
 - For supplies associated with improving soil health like cover crops, soil amendments, etc., there is no requirement to provide supporting documentation. In your budget section, you will have an opportunity to describe your supplies, and you can estimate the total cost you anticipate needing over the course of the grant.
- If I request funds for materials and supplies, but they are more costly than I estimated, am I only allowed to spend on materials and supplies what I specifically requested?
 - No, we understand that there are a number of factors that can affect the cost of supplies – so if you requested 25% of your budget for supplies, but it ultimately costs you 30% of your budget, that is ok.
- If I am awarded a grant, can I use the funds for something other than what I requested in the application?
 - No. Expenses must remain within the terms of the contract, which is associated with your application. This means, for example, that if you request 100% of your

budget for supplies, then you cannot use the funds to purchase a piece of equipment. In this scenario, your contract allows you to purchase supplies only, you were not awarded funds for equipment.

- If I am purchasing used equipment through a private sale, how do I submit a vendor quote?
 - It would be best if it were submitted as a typed invoice, but a written invoice with a signature from the seller (scanned and emailed as a supplemental file), is appropriate, so long as the written invoice includes all of the information required by the RFA.
- Are services eligible expenses, such as getting drainage tile installed?
 - Yes, this is an eligible expense and you must provide a vendor quote for those costs. In the application, you must make the argument that the items you are requesting are going to improve your farm's soil health.
- Are equipment rentals allowable expenses?
 - Yes, this counts as a service, so a vendor quote would be required. If you intend to rent equipment more than once, you may supply a vendor quote and then multiply the quote by the number of years/times you intend to rent it. If this is the case, describe this in the budget section of the RFA.
- Will the Maine Healthy Soils Program be doing any pre- and post- project soil analyses to measure the success of each project?
 - If applicants do not have a soil health test that is 3 years old or younger, they must work with the MHSP to get this testing complete to establish a benchmark for their farm. Alternatively, applicants may request funds for soil health testing in their application, or they may take advantage of the Maine Healthy Soils Program's no-cost soil health testing. This program is first-come, first-served and is fully booked for the 2025 field season. The program webpage has a waitlist for when sign-ups are opened again.
- Can farms access soil health testing independently from the Maine Healthy Soils Program?
 - Yes, farms may submit samples to any soil analysis lab that offers soil health testing, they do not have to do it through our program.
- The application asks for those with soil health test results and a soil health management plan to submit them as part of the application. If we have a soil health management plan but no soil health test, should we submit just the management plan?
 - Yes. If you have a soil health management plan, you should submit it as a supplemental file, regardless of whether you have a recent soil health test.
- Our farm has a lot of materials to make compost but we do not have the equipment to make it and spread it. Are things like tractor loaders and cement pads eligible expenses.
 - These are eligible expenses according to the RFA. In the application, you will be asked to describe the barrier you are facing to improving soil health on your farm and you will be scored on how well your proposed use of funds addresses that barrier.
- The Maine Healthy Soils Program offers virtual appointments, what are those for?
 - Those appointments are to address technical issues on your farm and offer broad soil health technical assistance and education.

- Will there be any cases where grant applications will be contracted but for a lesser amount than what was requested?
 - The Department retains the right to offer an award that is lower than what was requested.
- Could you please share how the payments will be made to the recipients? Will it be one reimbursement at the end of the project, or partial reimbursements along the way? Or other?
 - Awardees will be reimbursed for agreed upon expenses as they are invoiced to the Department by the awardee.
- What will the reporting requirements be if a grant is awarded?
 - Reporting requirements will be outlined in an awardee's contract. This will usually entail a short report submitted to the Department describing how funds were used and how that has impacted your farm's sustainability. These reports will likely be annual for the life of the grant (1 to 3 years).
- If I want to include the development and implementation of a cover cropping plan in my project, but do not yet know what that plan looks like (as we would develop it in conjunction with you), can we still ask for a blanket amount of funding to cover that yet to be determined plan? If so, is there any guidance available on what a reasonable amount would be?
 - Yes, you can include a blanket amount for all elements of your cover cropping plan. The Maine Healthy Soils Program webpage provides a soil health resource hub that includes a tool to determine what cover crops might be best used on your farm and links to publications and fact sheets that may help you determine what additional needs you may have beyond choosing your cover crops.
- Are farms owned by colleges or universities eligible to apply? The farm operates independently and is open to the public.
 - So long as the farm operation functions independently from the university and meets the other eligibility listed in the RFA, such as needing to produce at least \$2,000 of agricultural products with the intention that they be sold commercially or are produced to support community access to agricultural products, it is eligible.
- How is 'living wage' being defined for the purposes of this grant?
 - The review panel will discuss and land on a consensus for their determination of a living wage. They will account for legal structures such as caps on H2A wages, etc. Include in your application a description of how you landed on the wage number you are offering.
- I submitted my application before I received a vendor quote for the equipment I want to purchase, and the quote came in for more money than I requested in my application. What should I do?
 - In general, make sure you have ALL application materials together BEFORE you submit your application. In this case, please include with the vendor quote a statement of what happened and include the updated amount of funds you are requesting. The fund request cannot exceed the maximum allowable request of \$100,000.
- There is no availability to meet to discuss my hay field and pasture rehabilitation before April 4; can I still apply?
 - Yes, you may still apply.
- I have organized my equipment purchases and soil health rationales into a spreadsheet. Can I submit this rather than inputting it all into the Microsoft form?

- Yes that is ok, please note in your form to review the information provided in the spreadsheet as a supplemental file.
- I am wondering if I would qualify for the grant if I have not been a part of Maine healthy soils program and do not have a program in place. I am willing to commit to becoming a part of that but there are not any virtual meeting dates available before the April 4th deadline. Will this disqualify me if my first virtual meeting is after the deadline?
 - You will not be disqualified, simply setting the meeting enrolls in you in the program. Most people do not have a soil health management plan and that is ok. You only need to submit soil health test and management plans if you have them, otherwise the application will ask you to certify that you will work with us to achieve this.
- I have standard soil test results but not a "soil health report", should I include that in my application?
 - No – standard soil nutrient tests are not required. Soil health tests are different from the standard nutrient test in that they measure physical and biological indicators in your soil alongside chemical indicators. The physical and biological indicators include microbial activity, carbon storage, compaction, and water holding capacity. These tests provide a broader overview of your soil health and thus can help you design targeted interventions based on your biggest soil constraints.
- We would like to address two separate, but related, soil health issues on our farm and we intend to apply for funding for specialized equipment for both. One issue supersedes the other in order of importance and timeliness. Will you consider prioritization of equipment & materials purchases in the case where a grant request is partially awarded?
 - If we award partial awards, it will be up to you to decide what to prioritize with the funding level we offer.
- Can the soil health test within the last 3 years be from the University of Maine Analytic Lab? Or does it need to be through MHSP?
 - Any soil health test may be provided, we recognize that folks may have these data from many different organizations.
- It appears that the online application website encompasses the application process with the exception that if I have vendor quotes I will email those as well as a map. Is there anything else with the application process I am missing?
 - No, due to our current IT infrastructure, we cannot allow attachments on Microsoft Forms, so you must email all supplemental files, including a map and a vendor quote, to matthew.boucher@maine.gov using the subject line written in the RFA. If you have a soil health test and/or a soil health management plan, those may also be submitted as supplemental files.
- When providing vendor quotes for equipment purchases, are screenshots of website prices okay? Do we need to also submit freight quotes for shipping the equipment to us, or is it acceptable for us to simply state that we will cover any freight costs, or make an estimate of the freight?
 - Yes, you may submit website screenshots as your vendor quote. You should do your best to include any shipping costs, but it is ok to estimate those costs as a line item in the budget if they cannot be determined by the vendor for some reason. Please describe how you landed on the freight cost in your application if it is not included in the vendor quote.
- I'm struggling to figure out the precise distinction between questions 18, 19, and 27 on the application. 18 ask " Describe how you intend to use these grant funds to improve soil

health. * What do you intend to purchase and how will each purchase improve your farm's soil health? ", 19 asks "19. What soil health practices do you intend to adopt, scale, or improve through these grant funds? * ", and 27 asks "Describe the equipment/service you intend to purchase. * For each piece of equipment/service, include: 1) what it is; 2) the brand and model (if applicable); 3) the vendor you intend to purchase it from; 4) how you will use it to improve soil health; and 5) the total cost". There is a lot of overlap in these three questions. Can you provide clarification on what specifically you're looking for in each question/what we should focus on for each one? Thank you!

- Question 18 should be a brief summary of everything in your budget request. Question 19 should summarize the specific soil management decisions affected by your intended use of funds. Question 27 is the line item budget – provide the information requested and give a brief description of how that item specifically will help you address a barrier to improving or maintaining soil health on your farm.