

Instructions

QUINNIPIAC RIVER FUND GRANT AWARD - FINAL REPORT QUESTIONS

This form is to be completed by all nonprofit organizations that received a grant through the Quinnipiac River Fund.

Grant Details

Grant Details

Organization Name

Southwest Conservation District, Inc.

Grant Description

to support meetings with local stakeholders to develop enhancements to the Quinnipiac Watershed Based Plan.

Total Grant Amount

9,710.00

Report Questions

1. List the specific objectives/outcomes of the project and tell how they were met during the grant period. Also, provide an update on any special conditions of the grant (if applicable).

SWCD started this project with the goal of enhancing the existing Quinnipiac River Watershed Based Plan. Our team worked with stakeholders through a series of online meetings, followup communications, and site visits and tours in subregional watersheds within the Quinnipiac Region. The major final objective was to generate watershed planning documents for a set of these subregional watersheds within the larger Quinnipiac regional watershed. The remainder of this response will detail our process to generate the watershed plan documents.

Our team conducted a series of larger stakeholder meetings via ZOOM. These sessions were a continuation of the meetings conducted by PACE during the previous funding award. There were seven of these meetings held over the course of the award time period. The benchmark for the grant was to host 6 of these larger stakeholder meetings. These meetings usually had between 12 and 17 attendees for the larger sessions. The goal for meeting attendance was 15 attendees per larger meeting.

SWCD was also successful at bringing in additional stakeholder groups to these sessions. The grant had a goal of bringing in at least one new stakeholder to the meeting sessions. Cheshire Land Trust, The Town of Southington, Town of Meriden, and the City of New Haven were new active participants in this series of meetings and followup conversations. Each of these sessions lasted about 45 to 60 minutes based on the agenda and objectives for each session. SWCD created agendas and distributed them to stakeholders prior to each session.

A major objective of these meetings was to hone in on selected subregional watersheds to target for planning efforts. SWCD discussed this at meetings and created a google survey that was distributed to the stakeholder list. Based on these responses, Wharton Brook, Muddy River and Ten Mile River were selected for watershed planning. The Quinnipiac Main Stem was also a favorite of the group, but since the project goal was to enhance the existing Quinnipiac document by targeted smaller watersheds, this was not focused on for watershed planning under this award.

The next action was holding subwatershed meetings with the interested parties for the selected sub regional watersheds (Muddy River, Wharton Brook, and Ten Mile River). SWCD held 3 of these subwatershed meetings via zoom. Our staff also did watershed tours in the selected watersheds. Some of these tours were done with municipal staff others were done based on input from municipal staff and other stakeholders. The goal for the grant was to hold at least 3 of these subregional meetings. Including the tour meetings SWCD hosted 6 of these sessions during the grant period. The focus of these meetings and tours was to learn about areas on the watershed that contain critical natural or recreational resources, any spots with known water quality issues, or other important areas to note in watershed planning efforts.

The SWCD team created ARC GIS maps based on the feedback and information gathered from the stakeholders. These maps gave overviews of each subregional watershed and focused on information around land use, impervious cover, recreational opportunities and other features of the watersheds. These maps also assisted with planning the watershed tours that were conducted by SWCD staff with stakeholder guidance.

Another benchmark for this grant award was to generate a list of potential funding sources. SWCD staff accumulated information on numerous funding sources for watershed work. This list with associated weblinks is included as part of each of the subregional watershed plan "lite" documents. These lists provide opportunities for stakeholders (and SWCD) to pursue for implementation efforts in the subregional watersheds.

Finally our SWCD created 3 priority project and action lists as part of the watershed plan "lite" documents that were generated for the three subregional watersheds. The benchmark for the grant was 3 of these documents. These reports will be shared with all stakeholders at the conclusion of the grant reporting. The plan documents will be posted on the SWCD website and also shared with CT DEEP for their records and files about the Quinnipiac watershed. SWCD team is sharing each report with staff at the Quinnipiac River Fund.

2. Please share your successes, challenges and any lessons learned through the implementation of your project. Were there any unintended consequences or lessons learned that may affect how you operate your program moving forward?

Overall, SWCD is happy with the process and outcomes that this funding opportunity provided for the work. There is strengthened stakeholder knowledge and awareness from the meetings that were held with the group. The watershed plan documents provide road maps for next steps and possible implementations and also provide information for property owners and future interested parties in watershed enhancement work. Creating these plans will be beneficial to the next steps of improving water quality and ecological systems in the watershed.

Through this project SWCD has improved relationships with several stakeholders in the watershed and has created good partnership opportunities to pursue future funding for implementation efforts and projects. These relationships will not only strengthen future grant proposals, but will also be enhancing communication and networking with interested parties in the watersheds.

One challenge that our team discovered while compiling data and information is the lack of water quality data in the selected subregional watersheds. We survey CT DEEP and local groups, plus the municipal MS4 sampling efforts to find data. These efforts resulted in very little information and not enough to do load calculations of water quality parameters. To address these shortfalls, SWCD staff have already begun collecting water quality samples for bacteria analysis in Wharton Brook. An additional solution will be to connect with volunteer groups in the other subregional watersheds to collect samples for processing at SWCD lab in Hamden. These monitoring efforts will help with future planning and watershed improvement activities and projects.

Finally, the largest challenge SWCD faced for this project was loss of staffing in the middle of the activities with stakeholders. SWCD accounted for having a full time staff person and intern for this project. The technical staff person left SWCD for a position with CT DEEP. This shift in staffing and bandwidth caused

the ED to manage the intern for 2 months of the project and assist with GIS mapping reviews and planning for stakeholder meetings. This time and resources were not budgeted for by SWCD. Then the project intern took a full time job with a different organization and SWCD effectively had no staff that were dedicated to the program. This change caused the project to stall in the fall of 2022. SWCD presented this information and shared with other programs and the Foundation in October.

SWCD hired new technical staff in December with a plan to replace the intern position early in 2023. However, the intern was not replaced, due to the inability to find a candidate who had ARCGIS skills comparable for the mapping components of the planning needs. SWCD was also operating on time sensitivity for finishing the project, so decided to absorb the time and tasks that were allocated for the intern to technical staff. This change is reflected in our budget submittal. SWCD technical staff completed the ARCGIS and also research information and available data while communicating with stakeholders between meeting sessions.

Something that SWCD has learned is that many undergraduate and even graduate level students in the sciences have not gained exposure to ARCGIS software. We recently hired a water monitoring intern for the summer who is a rising senior in the biology program and they did not even know what ARCGIS is or what it is used for. Our team will be reaching out to professors that we have networked with and suggest adding ARCGIS to the skills and coursework for science students in their programs. SWCD expectations of applicants may be adjusted for future internship hirings based on the difficulty of finding an intern to complete this project.

A final lesson is that SWCD has confirmed there is a lot of stakeholder interest in improving the Quinnipiac and its tributary watersheds. Creating these 3 plans begins the efforts to encourage even more localized efforts and sets up a template of how future subregional watershed planning could be conducted in other smaller subregional watersheds.

3. What are the opportunities and needs of your organization as it continues to move forward with its work to positively impact the Quinnipiac River?

SWCD and participating stakeholders have learned a lot about the Quinnipiac River watershed through this process. There are ample opportunities of projects to pursue for implementation dollars via grants and other funding opportunities. One of the goals of watershed planning is this outcome. Developing a task list of implementation projects assists with prioritization of groups such as SWCD, watershed associations and municipal land use staff.

Based on the interest and participation in this project and the previous year planning efforts, SWCD believes that the Quinnipiac watershed could benefit from having a paid Watershed Coordinator position. SWCD has a part time staff person working as a coordinator for the Norwalk River, but would need to obtain funding to create stable staffing for the Quinnipiac. Investigating this potential opportunity is another outcome from this project and finding funding for the position would enable continued guidance and movement on next steps with the stakeholder group that has formed through this process.

The aforementioned water monitoring efforts are an additional opportunity for the watershed and SWCD. Our organization has obtained some funding to assist with this program for the remainder of 2023 and to start up sampling in spring of 2023 through the summer. Assistance with publicizing this resource and support that SWCD can offer to the Quinnipiac communities will be beneficial to expanding monitoring efforts.

Finally, an additional next steps and future opportunity would be coordinating stream walk activities in the watersheds investigated for these planning efforts. SWCD has coordinated stream walks in the Farm River during previous watershed planning and our team is capable of doing the work. The existence of active stakeholders further enhances this streamwalking opportunity. Having a watershed coordinator and funding to support the cataloguing of data generated by the stream walks and generating stream walk reports is a final piece to helping to continue the forward momentum in the Quinnipiac watershed in the opinion of SWCD. This suggestion is reflected in the watershed planning reports as well.

Attachments

Financial information (required): Please provide a detailed accounting of how the specific grant dollars were spent based on the budget submitted in the grant application.

Detailed Accounting

tracked budget for project.xlsx

Pictures (optional): Please attach one to three pictures in JPEG format, in the highest resolution possible, of activities that have occurred throughout the grant period as a result of grant funding. By providing pictures, your organization is consenting to unlimited use of the pictures by The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven and/or the Valley Community Foundation in publications in print and online (including www.thequinnipiacriver.com). Please include a description of each photo and, when known, the photographer to be credited.

Picture 1

wharton brook cover page.jpg

Description and Photo Credit

This is the cover page of the watershed planning document that was created from this funding opportunity. The full report has been submitted to the Foundation. This document creates a pathway forward for watershed implementation projects in Wharton Brook. Report and photo by SWCD staff

Picture 2

Ten Mile River Cover Page.jpg

Description and Photo Credit

This is the cover page of a watershed planning document that was created from this funding opportunity. The full report has been submitted to the Foundation. This document creates a pathway forward for watershed implementation projects in Ten Mile River. Report and photo by SWCD staff

Picture 3

Muddy River Cover Page.jpg

Description and Photo Credit

This is the cover page of a watershed planning document that was created from this funding opportunity. The full report has been submitted to the Foundation. This document creates a pathway forward for watershed implementation projects in Muddy River. Report and photo by SWCD staff