

# Rural Decentralized Water Systems Grant Program | 2022 Application Guide

## Instructions and notice to applicants:

- This guide is intended to help you, but you do not have to use it in order to submit an application.
- Using the application guide will not favorably impact your application.
- Regardless of whether or not you use the guide, you must complete and submit all required federal forms and registrations, and include documentation that supports applicant and project eligibility claims, priority points, and verifications of reserved and matching funds.
- You also must ensure you provide complete responses to all questions in the application.
- Incomplete applications **will not** be considered for funding.
- Certifications, statements, and other standard terms used in this guide (examples include “you,” “I,” “we,” “it,” “applicant,” “entity,” and “grantee,” among others) refer to the **legal entity** applying for the Decentralized Water Systems grant. By checking, signing, or otherwise acknowledging these elements, you confirm they are true and correct.
- To be considered for Rural Decentralized Water Systems grant funding, you must submit your complete, signed application and all required documents to no later than **11:59 p.m. eastern time on July 31, 2022**.

**A note about website links:** For ease of reference, this guide provides links to relevant, useful information hosted outside the USDA domain. Please be aware that, when you access information through a link provided in this document, you are subject to the copyright and licensing restrictions of those sites. All links in this document were active as of June 2022.

Table of Contents

- Instructions and notice to applicants:..... 1
- Section 1: Rural Decentralized Water System Grant..... 3
  - 1.1 Introduction..... 3
  - 1.2 Authorization..... 4
  - 1.3 Fiscal Year 2022 Funding Availability..... 4
  - 1.4 Contacts ..... 4
  - 1.5 Online Resources ..... 4
- Section 2: Loans and Subgrants Eligibility ..... 4
  - 2.1 Individual Eligibility Differs from Organizational Eligibility..... 4
- Section 3: Application Submission Process ..... 5
  - 3.1 Electronic Filing ..... 5
  - 3.2 Actions Required Prior to Submitting Your Application ..... 5
  - 3.3 Application Window ..... 5
- Section 4: Requirements for a Complete Application..... 5
  - 4.1 Preparing Your Application..... 5
  - 4.2 Application Components..... 6
- Section 5: The Application Review Process..... 10
  - 5.1 Acknowledging Receipt of your Application..... 10
  - 5.2 Evaluating your Application ..... 10
  - Section 5.3 Scoring Criteria..... 10
  - 5.4 Application Selection ..... 12
  - 5.5 Possible Application Actions..... 12
  - 5.6 Appeals Process..... 12
- Appendix: Rules and Regulations ..... 12
- Civil Rights Information ..... 13

# Section 1: Rural Decentralized Water System Grant

## 1.1 Introduction

As part of the Rural Development mission area, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utilities Service (RUS) supports and encourages rural economic growth that does not endanger our environment. We provide capital and technical assistance to help communities bring safe drinking water and environmentally-sound waste disposal solutions to rural Americans with the greatest need.

Our goal is not only to make funds available to those communities most in need of clean water and waste treatment solutions, but also to ensure facilities used to deliver drinking water and wastewater services are safe and affordable. The Rural Decentralized Water Systems (DWS) Grant Program is vital to USDA's efforts to help rural Americans who lack access to public water or wastewater treatment facilities.

However, a central water system may not be the only – or best – solution to a rural area's drinking water or wastewater treatment challenges. Distance or physical barriers (such as difficult terrain) can make building and operating public central water and wastewater systems more expensive in remote areas. Many rural, geographically-isolated households without water or wastewater services are better served by individual wells or wastewater systems.

The DWS Grant Program is intended to help eligible rural households that make less than 60 percent of the state nonmetro median household income offset the cost of household water wells and wastewater systems. With the DWS program, USDA makes grants to qualified private, nonprofit organizations which then establish lending programs – loans and subgrants – that support individual household water wells and wastewater systems.

The organization must contribute at least 10 percent of the grant request to capitalize the revolving fund. Eligible individuals can then use the loans and subgrants to build or upgrade a household water well or wastewater system. With terms of up to 20 years at 1 percent interest, loans of up to \$15,000 are available. Subgrants of up to \$15,000 can be used to address reasonable costs.

In this guide, you will find the following information:

- Application process and deadlines
- Components of a completed application
- Scoring criteria and application review process

## 1.2 Authorization

The DWS program was established in the 2002 Farm Bill (Section 6012 of Public Law 107-171 – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbMN>).

The authorizing statute is in United States Code 7 U.S.C. 1926e, available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbe7>.

DWS program regulations are in Title 7, part 1776 of the Code of Federal Regulations (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbep>).

The regulations listed above take precedence over the interpretation of any information in this guide.

## 1.3 Fiscal Year 2022 Funding Availability

The exact amount of funding available for Fiscal Year 2022 is not known. FY 2022 appropriations provided for \$5 million, but additional funding as a result of carryover or grant recoveries might also become available.

## 1.4 Contacts

USDA Rural Development's Water and Environmental Programs (WEP) staff administers the DWS program. If you have questions, contact the WEP staff early in your application process.

Email: [Water-RD@usda.gov](mailto:Water-RD@usda.gov)

Phone: (615) 714-8883

## 1.5 Online Resources

Additional information about the DWS Grant program is available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbzn>.

Additional application guidance is available in the Fiscal Year 2022 Funding Opportunity Notice (FOA) available at this link: <https://www.grants.gov/>.

# Section 2: Loans and Subgrants Eligibility

## 2.1 Individual Eligibility Differs from Organizational Eligibility

Individuals can receive loans and subgrants from DWS grant awardees, but cannot, themselves, receive a DWS grant. To be eligible to apply for DWS loans and subgrants, an individual must meet definitions in 7 CFR part 1776.3, available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbzS>.

Eligible individual criteria includes being a member of a household with a combined income of not more than 60 percent of the median nonmetropolitan household income

for the state or territory in which the person resides, using five-year income data from the American Community Service (ACS), or other U.S. Census Bureau data.

## Section 3: Application Submission Process

### 3.1 Electronic Filing

Applications must be filed electronically using Grants.gov (available at this link: <https://www.grants.gov>). The DWS application package can be found by searching for the grant opportunity number located on the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbzn>.

**NOTE:** USDA Rural Development Rural Utilities Service will not accept applications by email or fax. If you have questions, see Section 1.4 for contact information.

### 3.2 Actions Required Prior to Submitting Your Application

You are required to get a Unique Entity ID (UEI) and maintain active registration in the U.S. Government's System for Award Management (SAM) database, available at this link: <https://sam.gov/content/home>. Your registration must be renewed and revalidated every 12 months for as long as you have an active loan, guaranteed loan, or grant with USDA Rural Development.

To ensure your information is current, accurate, and complete, and to prevent SAM account expiration, reviews and updates must be performed within 365 days of the initial account activation date. The registration process can take up to 10 business days to complete. Additional information about the System for Award Management is available in 2 CFR Part 25, available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbS4>. You can also check the "Help" section at SAM.gov.

### 3.3 Application Window

The FY22 application window opens on June 21, 2022. To be considered for FY22 funding, your application must be time-stamped electronically on grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. eastern standard time on the filing deadline July 31, 2022.

**Late or incomplete applications are not eligible for funding.**

**NOTE:** If a receipt date falls on a weekend or a federal holiday, the deadline will be extended to the next business day.

## Section 4: Requirements for a Complete Application

### 4.1 Preparing Your Application

All applicants must be eligible entities, and must submit a complete application by the deadline stated in Section 3.3. For additional information, see 7 CFR 1776.5 – "Eligibility to receive a DWS grant" – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbS6>. Additionally,

applicants must have no delinquent federal debt and no outstanding judgments to repay a federal debt.

Grant funds can be used for the purposes listed in 7 CFR 1776.1 (“Purpose” – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbhW>) and 7 CFR 1776.12 (“Use of DWS Grant proceeds” – available at: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbh5>), as prescribed in 7 CFR 1776.13 (Administrative expenses, available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJbh6>) and 7 CFR 1776 Subpart C (DWS Loans – available at <https://go.usa.gov/xJbhM>).

In order to prepare the budget and successfully complete other parts of your application, you must consult the cost principles and general administrative requirements for grants pertaining to your organization type (See 2 CFR Part 200 “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJjq4>).

You must also demonstrate compliance – or intent to comply – with a number of public policy requirements using certification or other means stated.

## 4.2 Application Components

### Required Forms

1. The following required forms are available at <https://sam.gov/content/home> or <https://www.grants.gov>:
  - a. Standard Form 424 – Application for Federal Assistance (Non-construction – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJj3P>)
  - b. Standard Form 424A – Budget Information – (Non-Construction Programs – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJj3P>)
  - c. Standard Form LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJj3K> - PDF)
  - d. Form RD 400-1 – Equal Opportunity Agreement (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJj3Z> - PDF)
  - e. Other forms and information as listed in 7 CFR 1776 (information available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJj34>)

### Project Proposal

Your project proposal must outline the project with enough detail to provide a reader with a full understanding of your proposed funding program. The proposal must explain what you will accomplish by lending funds to individual well and wastewater treatment owners. It must demonstrate the feasibility of the proposed revolving loan program in meeting DWS program objectives.

Your proposal must cover the following elements:

1. **Project Summary** – Present a brief project overview. Explain the purpose of your project, how it relates to the purposes of the DWS program, how you will execute it, what it will produce, and who will direct it.
2. **Needs Assessment** – Describe why the project is necessary. Clearly identify economic, social, financial, or other problems your project will solve. Demonstrate the well or wastewater systems owners need for financial and technical assistance. Quantify the number of prospective borrowers, or provide statistical or narrative evidence that a sufficient number of borrowers exists to justify the grant award. Describe the service area. Provide information on the median household income of the area and other demographical information. Address community needs.
3. **Project Goals and Objectives** – Clearly state your project goals. The objectives must clearly describe your goals and be concrete and specific enough to be to be quantitative or observable. They must also be feasible and relate to the purpose of the DWS loan and subgrant program.
4. **Project Narrative** – This must be more detailed than your project summary. Demonstrate your experience and expertise in promoting the safe and productive use of individually-owned household water well systems and wastewater treatment systems. In describing what your project will achieve, indicate whether its influence will be broad. Your narrative must:
  - a. Document your ability to manage and service a revolving loan fund. You must describe the systems in place for a loan's full life cycle, from origination through servicing. If a servicing contractor will handle the loan portfolio, that arrangement and the services provided must be described.
  - b. Show evidence of the availability of funds from sources other than the DWS grant, itself. Describe the contributions the project will receive from your organization, local, state, and other federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private industry, and individuals. The documentation must describe how these contributions will be used to pay your operational costs and provide financial assistance for projects.
  - c. Demonstrate that your organization has secured commitments of significant financial support from other funding sources.

- d. List the fees and any other charges your borrowers will be assessed.

## **Workplan**

Your work plan or scope of work must describe the tasks and activities that will be accomplished with available resources during the grant period.

It must show the work you plan to do to achieve the intended outcomes, goals, and objectives set out for the DWS program. Describe any unusual or unique features of your project, such as innovations, reductions in cost or time, or extraordinary community involvement. Your plan must:

- a. Describe the work to be performed by each person.
- b. Provide a schedule or timetable of work to be done.
- c. Show evidence of previous experience with the techniques to be used, or illustrate their successful use by others.
- d. Outline the revolving loan program. Include specific loan and subgrant purposes, the application process, priorities, borrower eligibility criteria, limitations, fees, interest rates, terms, collateral requirements, and servicing policies. You can do this by providing a copy of your program operation policies, but you must include all of the information listed here.
- e. Outline the criteria for awarding subgrants, including specific subgrant purposes and the subgrant application process.
- f. Provide a marketing plan.
- g. Explain how you will transfer funds to individual borrowers.
- h. Describe ongoing or follow-up activities that will occur after project completion (such as monitoring and reporting borrowers' accomplishments).
- i. Using your project objectives, describe how project results will be evaluated.
- j. List all personnel responsible for administering the DWS program. Include a statement of each person's qualifications and experience.
- k. Address the process for complying with environmental requirements for multitier actions listed in 7 CFR 1970 (Environmental Policies and Procedures – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJjYM>).

## **Budget and Budget Justification**

The written justification for projected costs must explain how you determined budget figures for each category. It also must indicate which costs are to be covered by grant funds, and which costs will be met by your organization or non-DWS sources. The justification must account for all expenditures in your narrative, and it must reflect appropriate cost-sharing contributions. The budget justification must explain your

proposed (or already in use) budget and accounting system. The administrative costs for operating the budget must be expressed as a percentage of the overall budget. The budget justification must provide specific budget figures, rounding to the nearest dollar. You can consult 2 CFR part 200 (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJjq4>) for information about appropriate cost principles for each budget category.

### **Required Information Not Found on Standard Application Forms**

In addition to completing all standard application forms, you must submit the following supplementary materials:

1. **Evidence of legal existence:** Provide satisfactory documentation that your organization is legally recognized under state and federal law as a private, nonprofit organization. The documentation also must show you have the authority to enter into a grant agreement with USDA Rural Development's Rural Utilities Service, and to perform the activities proposed under the grant application. Among other things, satisfactory documentation includes certificates from the Secretary of State, copies of state statutes or laws establishing your organization, and copies of your organization's articles of incorporation and bylaws. **NOTE:** Letters from the IRS awarding tax-exempt status are **not** considered adequate evidence.
2. **A list of your board of directors and officers** – Submit a certified list of directors and officers. Include their respective terms of service.
3. **IRS tax-exempt status** – Submit evidence of this status from the IRS
4. **Debarment and suspension rules** – You must disclose this information in accordance with 2 CFR Part 417 (Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJjgs>)
5. **Drug-free workplace** – Workplace identification is required in accordance with 2 CFR Part 182 (Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace – financial assistance – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJj4C>) and 2 CFR Part 421 (Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace – financial assistance – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJj4T>). All the organization's known workplaces must be identified by including the actual street address of buildings (or parts of buildings) or other sites where work under the award takes place.
6. **Audit** – In accordance with 2 CFR Subpart F (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJDqN>) submit your organization's most recent, independently-conducted audit.
7. **Financial information and sustainability** – submit the following:
  - a. Balance sheets, income statements, and cash flow statements covering the last three years. **NOTE:** If your organization was formed less than

three years ago, submit financial statements from the date it was formed up to the present, including pro-forma statements at the time the organization was established.

- b. Projected income and cash flow statements for the last three years, supported by a list of assumptions showing the basis ONLY for the revolving loan fund projections. Also include a separate set of financial projections illustrating the organization's total operations.
8. **Additional supporting information** – Submit information to support and describe your plan for achieving DWS grant objectives. This information is regarded as essential for understanding and evaluating your projects, and can include such things as letters of support, resolutions, policies, and so on. This supplemental information can be presented in appendices to your proposal.

## Section 5: The Application Review Process

### 5.1 Acknowledging Receipt of your Application

All applications are reviewed for completeness. If your application is determined to be incomplete, you will be notified in writing within 30 days, and your application will be returned with no further action. If your application is determined as ineligible, we will return it with an explanation.

### 5.2 Evaluating your Application

A team comprised of USDA Rural Development Rural Utilities Service employees independently evaluates all applications and proposals. The team scores applications using criteria outlined in Section 5.3, and bases its recommendations on factors such as eligibility, clarity, detailed information, application completeness, and conformity to application requirements.

### 5.3 Scoring Criteria

In accordance with the information in this application guide, your application and supporting information will be used to determine your priority for available DWS funds. Points are given only for well-documented factors in your application package, and these must meet the objective associated with each factor as outlined in 7 CFR Part 1776.9 (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJDcG>).

Here are the scoring criteria and points system:

1. Degree of expertise and experience promoting the safe and productive use of individually-owned household water well systems, wastewater treatment systems, and groundwater – **up to 30 points**

2. Degree of expertise and successful experiencing making and servicing loans to individuals – **up to 20 points**
3. Percentage of applicant contribution. Points are based on written evidence of the availability of funds from sources other than the proceeds of a DWS grant to pay part of the cost of a loan recipient’s project.  
In-kind contributions will not be considered. Funds from other sources as a percentage of the DWS grant and points corresponding to those percentages are as follows:
  - a. 0 – 9 percent                      ineligible
  - b. 10 – 25 percent                    5 points
  - c. 26 – 30 percent                    10 points
  - d. 31 – 50 percent                    15 points
  - e. 51 or more percent                20 points
4. Extent to which your work plan demonstrates a well-thought-out, comprehensive approach to accomplishing the objectives of the DWS program, clearly defines who will be served by your project, and appears likely to be sustainable – **up to 20 points**
5. Extent to which your goals and objectives are clearly defined, are tied to the need as defined in your needs assessment, and are measurable – **up to 10 points**
6. Lowest ratio of projected administrative expenses to loans advanced – **up to 10 points**
7. Administrator’s discretion, which can include such factors as:
  - a. Helping rural communities – particularly disadvantaged communities – recover economically from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic
  - b. Ensuring all rural residents have equitable access to Rural Development programs and benefit from RD-funded projects
  - c. Reducing climate pollution and increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change through economic support to rural communities

Administrative points are awarded solely on the above three factors; five points each – **up to 15 points**.

More information about USDA Rural Development’s priority points is available at this link: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/priority-points>.

## 5.4 Application Selection

USDA Rural Development Rural Utilities Service will rank all qualifying applications by general eligibility and final score. Applications are selected based on rank and funding availability. USDA reserves the right to not award DWS grant funding if applications are incomplete or earn low scores. All applicants will be notified of their selection status by email.

## 5.5 Possible Application Actions

USDA Rural Development will decide among the following:

- Eligible, and selected for funding
- Eligible, but offered fewer funds than requested
- Eligible, but not selected for funding
- Ineligible

## 5.6 Appeals Process

In accordance with 7 CFR Part 1900, Subpart B (available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJDaW>), applicants generally have the right to appeal adverse decisions. However, some adverse decisions – such as a denial due to lack of available DWS grant funds – cannot be appealed.

Applicants can request review by the National Appeals Division (NAD). The appeal must be received within the proper timeframe, in writing, and filed with the appropriate NAD regional office. A list of regional offices is available at this link:

<https://go.usa.gov/xJDaN>. You can call NAD toll-free at (877) 487-3262.

## Appendix: Rules and Regulations

- 7 CFR Part 1776: Rural Decentralized Water Systems – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJDC8>
- 7 CFR Part 1900, Subpart B: Adverse Decisions and Administrative Appeals – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJDaW>
- 7 CFR Part 1970: Environmental Policies and Procedures – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJjYM>
- 2 CFR Part 200: Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJjq4>
- 2 CFR Part 400: Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJDrv>

- 2 CFR Part 417: Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJjgs>
- 2 CFR Part 421: Requirements for a Drug-free Workplace (Financial Assistance) – available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xJj4T>
- Code of Federal Regulations – available at this link: <https://www.ecfr.gov/>

## Civil Rights Information

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family or parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary. Those with disabilities who need alternative means of communication (for example, Braille, large print, audiotape, and American Sign Language, among others) can contact the responsible agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY), or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Program information also can be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, available at this link: <https://go.usa.gov/xzzfV>, and at any USDA office. Or, write a letter addressed to USDA and provide all of the information requested in the form. Call (866) 632-9992 to request a copy of the complaint form. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) postal mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 (2) fax: (202) 690-7442, or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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