

American Rescue Plan State Fiscal Recovery Fund Recommendation Cover Sheet

Please submit this document with any recommendations for funding from Rhode Island's allocation of federal fiscal recovery funds available through the American Rescue Plan Act. This information will be made available to the public along with any detailed documents submitted that describe the proposal. It is encouraged that such documents identify clear goals and objectives and quantifiable metrics.

This is not a formal request for funds, and submission of recommendations does not guarantee a response, public hearing, or appropriation from the General Assembly.

Name of Lead Agency: Rhode Island State Conservation Committee (RISCC)

Additional agencies making recommendation (if applicable):

RIDEM Divisions of Agriculture and Forest Environment

Northern RI Conservation District (NRICD)

Southern RI Conservation District (SRICD)

Eastern RI Conservation District (ERICD)

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Brief Project Description (attachments should contain details)

RISCC and RI's three Conservation Districts are requesting funding for 3.5 FTE for two years which will allow the RISCC and the Districts to assist municipalities manage their soil and water resources for now and future generation.

Total request: \$ 700,000.00 for two years

One-time or Recurring Expense? Recurring at \$325,000 annually

ARPA Eligibility Category (check all that apply) – See link for further information

<https://www.rilegislature.gov/commissions/arpa/commdocs/Treasury%20-%20Quick-Reference-Guide.pdf>

- Respond to the public health emergency and its economic impacts _____
- Premium pay to eligible workers _____
- Government services/state revenue replacement X
- Water/sewer/broadband infrastructure X



RHODE ISLAND STATE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

Proposal from
Rhode Island State Conservation Committee (RISCC) and RI Conservation
Districts

Northern RI Conservation District (NRICD)
Southern RI Conservation District (SRICD)
Eastern RI Conservation District (ERICD)
for

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Eastern RI
Conservation District

Northern RI
Conservation District

Southern RI
Conservation District

Director
RI Department of
Environmental Management

Governor's Appointee

ADVISORS

Coastal Resources
Management Council

RI Association of
Conservation Districts

RI Resource Conservation &
Development Area, Inc.

RI Statewide Planning
Program

RI Department of
Transportation

RI Water Resources Board

URI Cooperative Extension

USDA Farm Services Agency

USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Services

Proposal

The Rhode Island State Conservation Committee (RISCC) and Rhode Island's three Conservation Districts are requesting the General Assembly allocate Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to support our obligations as outlined in RLGL 2-4. The powers and duties of the Conservation Districts and RISCC overlap with many of the eligible uses of the Coronavirus Relief funds and the recently passed federal infrastructure bill. These obligations include a variety of projects to control non-point sources of pollution, improve resilience of infrastructure to severe weather events, create green infrastructure, and protect waterbodies from pollution.

RISCC and the Districts are proposing to add a total of 3.5 FTE to support our obligations to the state and private landowners as part of the Farm Forest and Open Space Act, to provide support to the municipalities, and increase administrative support to our obligations in RIGL 2-4. One full time staff member will be added to each district to write farm conservation plans, manage the Farm Forest and Open Space program, support municipalities with natural resource protection and fulfil our obligations under the enabling legislation Title 2. RISCC and the Districts will increase and reallocate administrative support to better serve the people of Rhode Island while increasing our presence in traditionally underserved communities. The funding request will support these positions for two years.

The proposal is an opportunity to strengthen RISCC's and the Districts' position as valuable natural resource partners while increasing their capacity to provide farm conservation plans for private agricultural and forest land owners. The Districts are nearing the ending of five years of funding from the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) which provided over 100 Farm Conservation Plans and established an exceptional tool to evaluate natural resources and receive technical and financial funds from the

NRCS, to install on-farm best management practices for natural resource protection. These funds would help us to leverage additional funds in order to continue to work toward the over 800 plans that have yet to be written and managed. This project has been an asset to the RIDEM Division of Agriculture in helping them achieve their goals. We will also be able to assist municipalities navigate the myriad of state and federal funding opportunities available in the coming years. With these funds, Conservation Districts can write grants that will positively impact natural resources, thereby leveraging these funds, and allow Conservation Districts to assist municipalities with applying for grants, building partnerships, managing natural resource projects and grant awards. Working with the Conservation Districts is a cost-effective way for municipalities to manage projects and access financial assistance without the need to increase municipal staffing levels or hire expensive consultants.

Proposed Funding Request Budget

Entity	Proposed Allocation of Fiscal Recovery Funds for 2022-2023
RISCC	\$100,000
NRICD	\$200,000
SRICD	\$200,000
ERICD	\$200,000
TOTAL	\$700,000

Background

The Rhode Island State Conservation Committee (RISCC) has been established within the Department of Environmental Management to serve as an agency of the State and to perform the functions conferred upon it by Chapter 2-4 of the Rhode Island General Laws to provide for the conservation of the land and renewable natural resources using those measures that best meet these objectives, including, the control and prevention of erosion, control of floods, the conservation and development of water resources and the improvement of water quality, as well as to protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of this state.

The RI State Conservation Committee provides assistance and support to the three Conservation Districts in their efforts to assist local landowners and municipalities in the proper stewardship of our lands and waters. To this end, the Committee works with state and federal agencies to promote the districts' mission on both the state and national level, while providing administrative and program support.

The Conservation Districts were established in Rhode Island by State Law in 1944. The function of the Districts is to take available technical, financial, and educational resources and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land user for conservation of soil, water, and related resources. They operate on a premise that local people know the most about local needs. The districts do not regulate or enforce laws.

Annual state funding for RISCC and the Districts was completely cut from the State budget in 2015 as part of the revamping of the legislative grant process. The Board members from RISCC and the Districts worked to restore state funding to maintain their obligations to state programs such as the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act. Only a small portion of that funding has since been restored through the DEM budget via the Legislative grant process. Current annual state funding of RISCC and the Districts is a total of \$45,000 combined. This small allocation covers insurance and some other basic overhead and operating expenses. All other work is funded on a project basis. As public bodies

RISCC and the Districts have obligations to the state to maintain a perpetual succession plan in order to continue to carry out their obligations under RIGL 2-4-12.

The State can transfer these funds directly to the RISCC and the Conservation Districts on the guidance and FAQ provided by the US Department of Treasury. The RISCC and Conservation Districts are special units of government, and the state may transfer rescue funds to the special units of government.

We hope by establishing a baseline of funding using the state's relief funds, the state's budget will continue to support a minimum of one full time staff person in each district as well as general operating support for these state enabled bodies. We believe the work we have done and will do over the next several years will justify the minimal line item in the state's overall budget. If successful, the request will secure an increase in annual funding to RISCC and the Districts and establish a new baseline for our annual allocation through the State Designated Grant process.

Justification for the Use of Funds from Interim Final Rules

The Fiscal Recovery Funds interim final rule provides the state with wide latitude to identify investments in water and sewer infrastructure which may include projects on privately-owned infrastructure. The interim final rule does this by aligning eligible uses of the Fiscal Recovery Funds with the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) or Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF).

Many of the types of projects eligible for CWSRF and DWSRF assistance are at the core of the powers and duties of the Districts in accordance with RIGL 2-4-12. These include assisting state and local partners control non-point sources of pollution, improve resilience of infrastructure to severe weather events, create green infrastructure, and protect waterbodies from pollution. Treasury encourages States to consider green infrastructure investments and projects to improve resilience to the effects of climate change. Green infrastructure projects that support stormwater system resiliency include rain gardens that provide water storage and filtration benefits, and green streets, where vegetation, soil, and engineered systems are combined to direct and filter rainwater from impervious surfaces.

The interim final rule allows for the state to transfer funds to a special-purpose unit of government. Special-purpose districts perform specific functions in the community, such as fire, water, sewer or mosquito abatement districts. RISCC and the Conservation Districts are special units of government and are eligible to receive Fiscal recovery from the State.