

January 17, 2025

To: NRAC Chairs & Liaisons
Cc: OPWC Program Representatives

Re: FY 26 (Round 20) Guidance

Allocations

The allocations for the next round are attached. They are funded in the FY 25-26 state capital budget. NRACs should not award funds from a future round. The director is prohibited from approving an application in which the financial assistance exceeds the NRAC's annual allocation.

Schedules & Methodologies

Slates are due to the OPWC by November 30, 2025. If this date cannot be met, contact your Program Representative as soon as possible as a delay may cause the OPWC to not meet the March 1, 2026 release. Agreements are released early if a project must close quickly. Methodologies may be submitted for approval at any time but allow time for review and expedite turn-around by indicating any substantive changes. When setting your calendar, maximize the solicitation period during the warm weather months for ecological surveys and other information to put applicants at their best competitive advantage.

NRAC Appointments & Rosters

Appointments must comply with [R.C. 164.21](#). In addition to the member from the District Integrating Committee and one representing a soil and water conservation district, the remaining nine members must be appointed from a category of "organizations, units of government, or agencies and shall include at least one member from each of those categories." These are as follows:

- 1) A county, municipal corporation, township, conservancy district, regional or joint district or unit of local government, or regional or joint political subdivision that is located within the geographical jurisdiction of the appointing integrating committee;
- 2) A conservation organization, an environmental advocacy organization, an organization with a primary interest in watershed protection and restoration, the department of natural resources, the environmental protection agency, or the United States natural resources conservation service;
- 3) A city park system or metropolitan park system or a board of park commissioners from a county that is located within the geographical jurisdiction of the appointing integrating committee, a statewide parks and recreation organization, or the United States national park service;
- 4) A statewide organization representing agriculture, an organization representing forestry interests, the department of agriculture, or the United States department of agriculture;
- 5) An organization representing business, local realtors, or a planning agency, including a port authority, located within the geographical jurisdiction of the appointing integrating committee.

The OPWC's counsel has confirmed that if a member appointed under a category should change employment and that member's new employment does not meet that category description, the member must resign. In addition, if a member retires, they are no longer a part of that organization, unit of government or agency anymore and must resign. If you have any questions, please ask but any member that doesn't meet a category is not eligible for reappointment. It is encouraged to share nomination materials with your program representative to ensure eligibility before forwarding them to the district integrating committee. Remember to keep your roster current in WorksWise including your chair.

Program Change – Easements and Improvements - NEW

[OAC 164-2-06](#) is written to give the director flexibility to make modifications to eligible and ineligible projects and activities, a list of which must be maintained by the OPWC. The OPWC has had a long-term policy to not permit improvements to easements except for one-time invasives removal. This policy is modified to allow improvements to easements if both the easement holder and landowner are OPWC-eligible applicants.

Resources

Various documents and links are listed on our webpage, [District Liaison](#), including the following:

- *Roles & Responsibilities*
- *NRAC Nomination Form*
- *Administrative Cost Disbursement Form*
- *Rules and Advisories*

Program Representatives are providing the New Clean Ohio Member Welcome Letter directly to the new member when their contact information is provided in the roster maintained in WorksWise.

Eligibility Determinations

Recall that a previous language change to [R.C. 164.26\(C\)](#) specifies that technical assistance provided by the OPWC director or staff does not constitute approval or denial of an application. This permits the OPWC to legally assist NRACs and applicants before resources are expended by an applicant for a potential project which may ultimately be denied by the director. This does not prevent an application from entering the system that has eligibility concerns. An NRAC should always first review for eligibility prior to scoring. Depending on an NRAC's meeting schedule and process, an NRAC may choose to delegate this responsibility to the liaison. Applications that are ineligible should not be vetted, scored, ranked, and advanced to the director. If the director determines a recommended application to be ineligible, it will be returned to the NRAC to determine the appropriate course of action. Furthermore, applications must comply with all NRAC policies, the Revised Code, and the Administrative Code. An NRAC cannot deviate from any legal requirement.

Application Requirements - NEW

Draft Deed Restrictions

Part of the NRAC review should include the Use and Improvement section of the draft deed restrictions to ensure that planned uses are consistent with program parameters. Some applications are being submitted to the OPWC without language. This is a required document so ensure that what is highlighted below is completed.

§1. Use and Improvement Restrictions. Declarant hereby agrees, for itself and its successors and assigns as owners of the Property, which the Property shall be subject to the following but used and improved only for conservation purposes including any approved appurtenances specified below. In addition, all uses and improvements must be in accordance with the applicable sections of the Ohio Revised Code and the Ohio Administrative Code. Any additional uses and improvements not specified below must be approved by the OPWC in writing and approval must be received prior to commencement of any improvements.

(Add any additional specifics on what the property can and cannot be used for including any eligible future plans.)

Photos

We have added property photos as an OPWC required attachment after noting that not all applicants include them. Photos show us what the properties look like and we also use them to spotlight projects in newsletters and other publications.

Administrative Costs

The Law permits for reimbursement of those costs directly incurred because of the need for labor, materials, supplies, equipment, travel, and support services to perform the committee's or counsel's statutory requirements. This program cannot be used to supplement any other costs or expenses not directly related to the administration of the OPWC's programs.

Best Practices - NEW

- *Site Visits and/or Applicant Presentations* – In combination with the applications, visits and presentations ensure the NRAC is well informed as to the condition of the proposed property and give the NRAC members an opportunity to ask questions of the applicants. Also, seeing the site lessens the likelihood of overlooking potential issues. At a minimum, it is recommended that the liaison and Program Representative visit the sites together. It's also encouraged to suggest applicants include drone footage in a presentation if they have drone access.
- *Annual NRAC Workshops* – This is helpful to increase program awareness with potential new applicants as well as to introduce new NRAC members to the requirements.
- *Minimum Score* – This is required in accordance with [OAC 164-2-12](#); however, the Commission chose at the time of rulemaking not to qualify this. The rule does not provide for a vote to fund a project below the minimum score which should be set at a point to ensure the quality of the statewide program. It is not advisable to go below 50% of the total points available since it defeats the rule's purpose.
- *Review Other NRAC Methodologies* – Looking to make some revisions? Learn from other NRACs on OPWC's website. You may be inspired.

Clean Ohio Conservation Program

FY 26 Allocations

1	\$3,229,479
2	\$2,168,017
3	\$3,514,621
4	\$1,437,994
5	\$2,007,607
6	\$1,251,838
7	\$1,827,497
8	\$1,436,648
9	\$1,653,583
10	\$2,552,618
11	\$2,337,291
12	\$1,162,374
13	\$1,793,590
14	\$1,792,169
15	\$2,157,646
16	\$2,026,924
17	\$2,189,077
18	\$1,932,984
19	\$1,028,044
TT	\$37,500,000