

Armstrong County Dirt, Gravel & Low Volume Roads Program Quality Assurance Board - Policies and Procedures

The purpose of the Quality Assurance Board (QAB) in Armstrong County is to recommend to the Armstrong Conservation District Board a grant program for Section 9106 of the PA Motor Vehicle Code. The QAB will assist the Armstrong Conservation District in carrying out the Administrative, Educational and Contractual responsibilities of the Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Roads (DGLVR) Program.

The QAB will establish priorities and requirements for funding through the Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Roads (DGLVR) Program. The QAB responsibilities to promote the use of Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) will include review of applications submitted for funding, conducting site visits (as necessary and determined by the QAB) and recommending eligible applications to the Armstrong Conservation District Board of Directors for funding of environmentally sensitive road maintenance practices to address road runoff and sediment to local streams, dust control and items which may cause negative impacts to the streams.

The QAB in Armstrong County will be comprised of a non-voting chairperson and a voting member appointed by the Armstrong Conservation District Board, one voting member or appointed designee from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and one voting member or appointed designee from the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PAFBC).

The established meeting schedule for QAB meetings will be on an annual basis for ALL aspects of the DGLVR Program, usually in September or October for both the Low Volume Roads (LVR) and the Dirt & Gravel (D&G) Roads. Additional meetings may be scheduled on an as-needed basis as determined by the Chairman. Public notice of meetings will be in the newspaper and posted on the Armstrong Conservation District website at www.armstrongcd.org.

Minutes of the QAB meetings will be taken by the District staff, and kept on file with the DGLVR Program files. These files will be kept on record and available to the public pursuant to the Open Records Policy. QAB meetings may be held via conference call or any other electronic means, as long as they meet the public notice requirements

The QAB meetings will be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order. There must be a quorum (at least 2 of the 3 voting QAB members or designees), to vote on any recommendations to the District Board. The QAB chairman may vote to decide a tie.

Any and all policies adopted by the Armstrong QAB will be posted on the District website at www.armstrongcd.org. Written copies of these policies are available upon request.

Finance

Any interest accrued from the DGLVR Program savings account will be transferred at least annually to the construction allocation portion of the Program.

Training and Educational funds must be utilized in the funding year they are received with any remaining monies rolled into construction projects the following year. T&E funds may be used to fund Special Educational Projects such as:

- Purchase and use of equipment to be made available to local road owning entities eligible to participate in the DGLVR Program.
- To purchase promotional items for educational/public awareness purposes.
- To use for any innovative ideas that will benefit the educational and outreach activities of the Armstrong Conservation District regarding the DGLVR Program.
- Training and educational funding will be used to pay for costs associated with ESM workshops, staff training events and the annual Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Roads Program conferences.

- Training and educational funding may be used for staff salary related to trainings, conferences, field days, workshops (at or hosting), technical assistance or other outreach activities.
- Training and educational funding may be used to pay for the hiring of an intern, temporary person, or cost sharing of an AmeriCorps or OSM Vista member to perform DGLVR education and outreach.

QAB Rules of Conduct & Conflict of Interest

The QAB recommended at their July 21, 2000 meeting to the District Board that the current policy of "No District Director, QAB member or District employee shall, as a result of this program, be permitted to obtain financial benefits for him/herself, a member of his/her immediate family or a business with which he/she is associated". Understanding that, this shall not preclude the payment of normal salary and benefits to employees provided in their normal course of employment, as outlined in the most current version of the DGLVR Program Administrative Manual.

In addition, any QAB member, Conservation District Board Member, or staff member, will be excluded from voting on actions that might benefit a road or stream adjacent to his or her property or the property of relatives or businesses in which he or she has an interest. In the event of such a conflict, the QAB member will temporarily assume the role of the non-voting Chairman, and the Chairman will vote in his or her seat (or simply be barred from voting, as determined at the meeting).

Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Roads Program Equal Access to Funds Policy

To encourage and promote equal access to funding, the QAB recommended to the District Board that any state or public entity which owns and maintains roads open to the public within Armstrong County are eligible for funding provided the entity has:

- a) Inventoried their dirt and gravel roads with District Staff, and
- b) Evaluated their dirt, gravel and low volume roads with District Staff and assisted in the creation of worksites within their entity, or conducted and provided an approved Low Volume Road traffic count of 500 vehicles per day or less with a Low Volume Road application.
- c) Have at the minimum, one current elected/appointed or employed individual attend and complete the two-day Environmentally Sensitive Road Maintenance (ESM) Workshop within the last 5 years. The ESM certified individual must be a person in charge of the project design and implementation for the applying road entity. Individuals (interns, secretaries, etc.) not directly involved with the project design and implementation DO NOT qualify as an applicant to be eligible for funding. Engineers on retainer or others who serve multiple public road entities are welcome to attend ESM trainings, but their attendance DOES NOT count toward ESM Certification for an entity they represent.
- d) District Staff will advertise or attempt to notify by regular mail or by electronic means all eligible road owning entities of the availability of Dirt, Gravel and Low Volume Roads Program funds before a new grant round opens.
- e) District staff will also post the road owning entities awarded funds for ESM projects and the road name on the District website.
- f) In order to keep the entity who owns the road eligible for participation in the program, District Staff will advertise or attempt to notify the entities by regular mail or by electronic means of the Regional Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) trainings scheduled each year when made available by the Penn State Dirt Gravel and Low Volume Roads Center.
- g) District staff will advertise or attempt to notify the road owning entities by regular mail or by electronic means about District sponsored training events.

Private Road Owners (individuals and entities)

Privately owned roads, even those open to public use, are not eligible to apply for funds. This applies to roads owned by private individuals, but also includes roads owned by associations, private conservancies, Non-profit companies and other non-public entities. Only public roads owned by an eligible applicant may be considered for funding. A road must also be open to public motor vehicle travel for a minimum of two (2) consecutive weeks annually in order to be eligible for funding.

Written Funding Criteria for Ranking Projects

At the September 8, 2000 Quality Assurance Board meeting, the QAB recommended to the District Board the following criteria should be used for application funding: High Quality Watershed, stocked trout streams, In-Kind contributions of the applicant, and the relative (computer) score. At that same meeting, the QAB also decided that all criteria will receive equal weight in the decision making process. The road owning entities past history of involvement in the program may also be taken into consideration. Past history of involvement includes all aspects of the DGLVR Program such as timeliness of completing a project, following of the submitted work plan, proper installation of ESM techniques, maintenance of previous projects, use of ESM techniques when performing maintenance on other non-project roads, proper administration of paperwork, communicating with the District and attendance to educational trainings conducted by the District. The QAB may recommend the awarding of funds to a road owning entity that has not previously participated in the program to encourage their present and future participation.

District staff will compile all applications for funding into a spread sheet comprised of the specified data and make the spreadsheet, as well as a copy of each application available to each QAB member at least one week prior to the QAB meetings.

Applications for Funding

The one-page DGLVR Grant Application, developed for statewide use, will be made available to all eligible road owning entities. The front of the form requires all the organization's information, worksite ID, problems which need addressed on the site, and the grant amount requested and the estimated in-kind contributions. The application is designed to be used for either the Dirt & Gravel Roads or Low Volume Roads applications by marking the appropriate box (shaded gray) in the upper right hand corner of the application. The remaining items in the gray box will be filled in by the District. The SCC now also requires an additional location map must be submitted with the application. The map will allow QAB members, QAQC auditors and district staff to locate the project more easily. An attachment to the application is provided to list the Grant Request Items and In Kind contributions. The QAB recommends the applicant to use the attachment and the QAB may use this form for scoring purposes. The back of the application is reserved for a simple drawing and a short explanation of the project which is also considered as the work plan of the project. Instructions and application forms can also be obtained from the Penn State Center for Dirt & Gravel Roads website at <http://www.dirtandgravel.psu.edu/index.html>

Each application will be for one previously verified worksite, or continuous project area. The Conservation District will keep all non-funded projects of the current funding year on file for the remainder of that funding year should additional monies become available. There is no restriction to the number of applications an eligible entity may submit, but the QAB reserves the right to limit the number applications a road owning entity may submit on any given funding round. If multiple applications are submitted by a road owning entity, the applicant must mark each application in the order they want the QAB to consider the projects for funding. The unfunded applications will not be considered in the next funding round. The application must be resubmitted each funding round so the road owning entity can review and or revise the application if necessary.

The Conservation District will keep all non funded applications on file for a period of three (3) years from date of submission to create a pool of "Shovel Ready" projects to draw from, should additional other source funds become available or any current year funding remains available. Applicants will be given an opportunity to

review and revise these applications before any funds are awarded but, the worksite must remain the same. Applicants who do not have an awarded project for the current year will be given highest priority. If an applicant duplicates an application, the most current year application will replace the duplicate.

It will also be the policy of the QAB to allow the inclusion of work outside of the entities' road right of way (ROW) provided the work is necessary for the successful completion and continued maintenance of the environmentally sensitive road maintenance practices to address road runoff and sediment to local streams, dust control and items which may cause negative impacts to the streams. Funds can be spent only if the issue cannot be addressed within the ROW. The scope of work and area is limited to ESM practices which directly reduce the impact to the public road. Or, the District has determined it is directly necessary to the successful completion of the project on the public road portion. The grant recipient is required to obtain written permission from the landowner before starting work and submit a copy of the agreement for the District files. A sample SCC approved landowner agreement is available for use from the District or the Penn State Dirt & Gravel Roads Center website. An applicant may use their own agreement as long as it is in a form or manner similar to the SCC approved document. Current SCC guidelines must be followed for work outside of the ROW.

The QAB will have an open sign up period year round. There will be a given deadline (usually August or September) to allow applicants to plan their projects accordingly.

The annual QAB meeting will be held shortly after the given deadline. At that time, all submitted applications will be reviewed, ranked and recommended for funding to the District Board. Road owning entities that have open contracts pertaining to the grant round applications being considered by the DGLVR QAB will not be considered for further funding in the grant round until the existing contract is completed. The QAB funding recommendations will be given to the District Board at the next regularly scheduled Board meeting for final approval. The QAB scoring and review process does not guarantee an application will be fully funded. The process is designed to allow the QAB to partially fund a project to allow the DGLVR Program achieve its goal in the most efficient way possible. The applicants will be notified by letter and provided a proposed contract in conformity with their grant application offer. If deemed necessary by the QAB Chairman, additional QAB meetings may be called to award any remaining funds not allocated during the annual meeting of either Dirt & Gravel or Low Volume Roads.

Funding Procedures

All approved contracts with road owning entities will be signed by the District Manager of the Armstrong Conservation District or his designee. The funds will be distributed by the Conservation District in the following manner:

- The Conservation District maintains a separate savings account specifically for the DGLVR Program. Funds awarded will be transferred from the savings account and be allocated through the Conservation District General Fund.
- Upon execution of the project contract, the District will forward 50% of the grant amount requested to the participating entity. The road owning entity is responsible for retaining receipts, weigh slips, labor accounting, etc. to document the expenditures of the entire grant amount (100%).
- The Road owning entity has up to one week before the next annual application deadline to complete the approved contract pertaining to each particular grant round. If unable to complete by this time, the entity may request in writing for a one year extension on the project. The applicant will be ineligible in participating in either the Dirt & Gravel Roads or Low Volume Roads future funding rounds during the extension. All extension requests must be approved by the District Manager or his designee.
- The SCC statewide policy requires all participants to notify their conservation district prior to beginning work on a project. The QAB will set the amount of time an entity is required to notify the district in the contract with the road owning entity.

The Conservation District will withhold the remaining 50% of the approved grant amount requested until project is complete and has been final inspected by the QAB and/or District personnel. For the project to be considered complete, all site work must be accomplished and stabilized as indicated in the contract in a

manner to be considered satisfactory to achieve the purpose it was designed, as determined by the QAB and/or the Conservation District.

All receipts, weigh slips, labor accounting, etc. must also meet or exceed the total grant amount requested prior to final 50% of funds being released. If totals equal less than the remaining 50%, only the lesser amount will be forwarded to the road owning entity. Grant monies that are unspent by the applicant at the end of two (2) years from the date of the executed contract must be returned in full to the Conservation District unless the District determines extenuating circumstances prevented the full utilization of those funds.

The District makes funds available to participating road owning entities from the DGLVR Fund. Those applications are highly competitive and requires full and accurate cost estimates be developed by the applicant prior to their submittal for potential funding. Once the District enters into a contract with a road owning entity, the District expects the entity to complete the contract within the proposed budget. The District will not provide additional funds should the project costs exceed those proposed by the applicant in the grant application. Funds spent by the entity in excess of the grant amount will count as an in-kind contribution to the project.

Driving Surface Aggregate (DSA)

Driving Surface Aggregate (DSA) meeting SCC specifications is the only approved road driving surface material which may be purchased with DGLVR funds. Placement of DSA must be placed according to the SCC specifications included in the DGLVR Program Administrative Manual. The guidelines can be obtained from the District or the Penn State Dirt & Gravel Roads Center websites.

Turn Back Roads

If a road owning entity wishes to have any paved or tar and chipped roads turned back to dirt and gravel; the road surface in the contract area must be dirt and gravel when the contract work begins. If the road owning entity chooses not to make the surface dirt and gravel, all grant monies must be returned to the Conservation District. The road owning entity will remain ineligible for any future funding until these monies are returned to the Conservation District.

It is acceptable to use either Dirt & Gravel or Low Volume Roads grant funds to turn a road back to dirt and gravel. Applications can be made in either grant round to turn a road back. The turned back road will be placed into the Dirt & Gravel Road Inventory and future projects applied for on the turned back road must be done through the Dirt & Gravel Roads funding portion of the DGLVR Program only.

Low Volume Roads

Act 89 of 2013 included appropriations for Low Volume Roads (LVR) to Section 9106 of the PA Vehicle Code Dirt and Gravel Roads Program. The purpose of expanding the Program is to perform Environmentally Sensitive Road Maintenance to sections of paved or tar & chipped roads and provide funding for environmentally sensitive road maintenance practices to address road runoff and erosion to local streams along with items which may cause negative impacts to the streams.

A Low Volume Road (LVR) is a sealed (tar & chip) or paved road with an average daily traffic count of 500 vehicles or less. A "Traffic Count Validation Form" (TCVF) signed by the applying road entity must be submitted with the application for funding. The road owning entity is responsible for obtaining valid LVR traffic counts. Only traffic count methods approved by the QAB will be accepted with the application. The TCVF document will be retained along with the project files according to the District's record retention policy. The TCVF document can be obtained from the District and the Center for Dirt and Gravel Roads website

Three methods of traffic counts are accepted by the QAB which are Extrapolation, Two Hour and 24 Hour traffic count methods. The applicant must follow proper procedures of each method when performing a traffic count. Failure to follow procedure may result in denial of funding project applications. Instructions for performing a valid traffic count can be obtained from the District and the Center for Dirt and Gravel Roads website. Technical assistance from district staff may also be available if requested by the applicant. Contracting with a business with expertise in traffic flows and counts is an eligible expenditure of the LVR Program. The contractor may use an approved QAB process or submit an alternative methodology for QAB

approval prior to submitting an application. Traffic counts are not permitted in a timeframe or manner which intentionally causes or may cause an artificially low average daily traffic count.

Traffic counts should be conducted only on the proposed project area between intersecting roads. Sites which include intersections may require multiple traffic counts for the project area. Traffic counts only apply to the segment of road between intersections not the entire road. Future projects outside of the counted area require separate traffic counts. Traffic counts are valid for a period of five years providing no significant change in traffic flows or patterns have taken place during the five year period.

The ranking of Low Volume Roads applications will follow the same standards as dirt and gravel roads where permissible. Adjustments to the same dirt & gravel roads standards will be made to apply to low volume roads such as road surface type. Additional criteria which may be considered are the cost effectiveness of a project to the environmental benefit received and any special policies which may apply such as stream crossing replacement policy. The balance between the environmental benefit, road improvement reduced long term maintenance and improved air quality may be considered during the ranking process.

Stream Crossing Structural Replacement Policy

To maximize the purpose of the DGLVR Program, in 2014 the State Conservation Commission (SCC) implemented new policy and procedures to address stream crossing structure replacements. These guidelines focus on replacing undersized and inadequate structures which cause significant environmental degradation. Undersized and inadequate stream crossings increase sedimentation, aggradation, scouring and affect aquatic organism passage which cause negative effects both up and downstream of the structure. Proper sizing of stream crossing structures maximize the benefit and minimize life cycle costs of the structure. The stream bank, bed and flow are stabilized, aquatic organism travel is improved and stream diversion is reduced. Long term maintenance costs are reduced through less overtopping and debris plugging during high water events which reduce failures and increase the life of the structure. Applications for replacing a stream crossing structure must follow current SCC specifications included in the DGLVR Program Administrative Manual. The guidelines can be obtained from the District or the Penn State Dirt & Gravel Roads Center websites. Road owning entities should meet with District staff at least one year prior to submitting an application to allow ample time to complete these DGLVR Program requirements. The QAB or District does not guarantee the stream crossing replacement application will be funded upon the road owning entity's completion of the pre-application requirements for application submittal. The road owning entity is responsible for all costs incurred prior to a contract being offered.

Permits and Other Requirements

All DGLVR Program projects must comply with all federal, state and local regulations. It is solely the responsibility of the road owning entity to ensure all regulations are adhered to and met. This includes federal, state and local permitting requirements. Other items included but not limited to can be Municipal Code regulations such as bidding and prevailing wage, Erosion and Sedimentation Control regulations, PA Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI) regulations, PA One Call, local ordinances and PennDOT standards for road work and safety. The QAB or District Staff are not able to provide these requirements and the road owning entity is responsible to seek advice from their solicitor and the regulating agency. The QAB maintains the right to sanction a road owning entity ineligible for future Program funding for failure to follow or comply with other regulating agencies which may be associated with a project.

Environmental Standards for Products and Practices

Section 9106 (f)(7) of the PA Motor Vehicle Code requires Quality Assurance Boards to adopt standards that prohibit use of materials or practices that are environmentally harmful. The Statement of Policy 83.613 (1) (b) formalizes that requirement. In response, the Armstrong County QAB has adopted standards prohibiting the use of materials or practices which are environmentally harmful or do not meet the programs' "non-pollution" standard. These materials include, but are not limited to: noxious weeds, fugitive emissions, and dust control products which may pose a problem if they enter a waterway. Compliance with all existing environmental laws is a condition of purchase under the contracting agreement between the Conservation District and the road owning entity. An environmentally suitable substitute for dust control, as determined by the State Conservation Commission, may qualify for payment.

(Revised November 2022)