



Chesapeake & Coastal Service

Boating Infrastructural Grant (BIG)

Program Manual

**Note: This manual does not contain all BIG requirements – only highlights.
Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to read the BIG [Final Rule](#)
(dated May 6, 2015)**

A. Program Description and Requirements

1. Purpose

The BIG Program provides grant funding assistance for the construction, renovation, and maintenance of public and private boating infrastructure tie-up facilities with features for recreational transient (15 days or less) boats 26 feet or more in length that are available to the general boating public. Since the focus of the Program is on larger recreational vessels, a minimum of 6 feet mean low water (mlw) is generally required.

2. Source of Funds

The BIG Program receives federal funding as a percentage of the annual revenues to the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund [26 U.S.C. 4161(a), 4162, 9503(c), and 9504]. The Trust Fund receives revenue from sources including: (1) excise taxes paid by manufacturers on sportfishing equipment and electric outboard motors; (2) fuel taxes attributable to motorboats and non-business use of small-engine power equipment; and (3) import duties on fishing tackle, yachts, and pleasure craft.

3. Administration

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) administers the federal BIG Program under requirements detailed in 50 CFR Part 86, Boating Infrastructure Grant Program; [Final Rule](#) (May 6, 2015).

The Department of Natural Resources (the Department), is designated as the administering agency for Maryland's BIG Program.

4. Who may apply

The Department encourages local units of government and private facilities to participate in this program by submitting grant applications to the Department for eligible transient facilities (note deadlines below).

Under this grant program, USFWS is the "Grantor," the Department is the "Grantee," and the owner of the facility is the "Sub-grantee/sub-recipient".

5. Levels of funding

There are two levels of funding available; *BIG Tier 1 - State* and *BIG Tier 2 - National*:

- *BIG Tier 1 - State* grants provide up to \$200,000 in federal funds per year, per state, and are non-competitive on a federal level. In other words, DNR does not need to compete with other states in order to receive \$200,000 in *BIG Tier 1 - State* funding each year. However, *BIG Tier 1 - State* funding may be competitive within the state if more than one facility in Maryland is seeking *BIG Tier 1 - State* funding.

- *BIG Tier 2 – National* grants, providing up to \$1.5 million in federal funds per project, are available each year on a nationally competitive basis.

Note: *BIG Tier 2 – National* grants are highly competitive so, in order to improve the chances that a particular project will be selected for funding, the funding proposal should be much more in depth and provide much more justification than a *BIG Tier 1 – State* proposal.

Because the Department is the Grantee for both BIG Tier 1 and BIG Tier 2 grants, it is the Department’s decision which potential projects, if any, the Department will support for federal funding.

6. Key BIG Sub-grantee Requirements

The owners of large, recreational, transient vessels pay a significant amount of tax dollars and the BIG Program helps these boaters by enabling them to visit and enjoy boating destinations that they might not otherwise have access to.

The BIG Program is “user pay / user benefit” so strict requirements are in place that help ensure that BIG funding is used only for its intended purpose. Below are several key requirements that sub-grantees should be aware of before pursuing BIG funding.

- The ONLY purpose of the federal BIG Program is to provide boating infrastructure facilities for recreational, transient (15 days or less), vessels 26’ or more in length. Any ineligible usage (i.e.; usage of the facility by recreational vessels less than 26’ in length, long term dockage, or usage by non-recreational vessels) must be pro-rated out of the grant proposal. Additionally, any activity that interferes with the purpose of the BIG Program is expressly prohibited.
- Because BIG-funded facilities accommodate larger vessels, the proposed project area typically must have a minimum of 6 feet of water depth (mlw). **The sub-grantee is solely responsible for maintaining the required minimum depth for the useful life of the project (typically 20-30 years) at the sub-grantee’s own expense.**
- Federal BIG funds provide a reimbursement to a sub-grantee of up to 75% of approved, eligible, project costs. Because *BIG Tier 2 – National* grants are highly competitive, successful proposals typically include more than the minimum 25% match.
- All matching funds (minimum 25%) must come from non-federal sources. Although State Waterway Improvement Funds (WIF) may, possibly, be used as match for publicly owned facilities, State WIF funds cannot be used as match at privately owned marinas, even if the marinas are open to the general public. Privately owned marinas must either provide their own match or find non-state/federal partners.
- The sub-grantee must own or have long-term irrevocable control of the project area for the entire useful life of the project as determined by the design engineer (typically 20-30 years). Additionally, **prior to receipt of BIG funding, a sub-grantee**

(whether a government agency or private entity) must record a “Notice of Grant Agreement” in the property’s deed (see Appendix D). This requirement ensures that any potential purchaser of the facility is notified of the federal interest and associated use restrictions.

- A sub-grantee must charge a reasonable fee (approved by the Department) for boaters using a BIG-funded facility that is based upon prevailing rates of similar local facilities. User fees cannot discriminate against anyone such as by charging user fees that vary based upon boater residence or vessel homeport. Additionally, **the sub-grantee must establish a separate account for all funds received from a BIG-funded facility and must apply those funds to the cost of operating and maintaining the facility. This account is subject to audit by Department.** Any change in fees must be approved by the Department.
- Once USFWS approves a BIG proposal, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Land Control Agreement (LCA) must be executed between the Department and the sub-grantee. An MOU enables the Department to obligate grant funds and specifies the performance period, billing and reporting requirement. The LCA is a legally binding contract which ensures that the sub-grantee will meet all federal and state requirements for the useful life the project. If a sub-grantee is unwilling or unable to comply with all federal/state requirements for the term of the LCA, the sub-grantee would be required to return ALL grant funds to the Department (with no proration).
- The sub-grantee will publicly advertise all aspects of the project for bids including but not limited to engineering, construction, and inspection. All plans and specifications must be approved by the Department before bids are solicited. Bid tabulation and recommended award along with the bids documentation received must be submitted to and approved by the Department before the contracts are awarded.

7. Eligible and non-eligible activities:

Specific program eligibilities are detailed in the BIG Final Rule §86.11 (eligible) and §86.16 (ineligible).

B. Project proposal format and submission process

1. Complete Maryland BIG Program Application for Grant Funding Form (**Appendix A**). Sign and date the original application.
2. The complete application packages must include:
 - a. original Application for Grant Funding Form
 - b. a site map
 - c. itemized costs estimate

d. Any supporting documents (i.e lease agreement, key officials, etc.)

Please be advised that incomplete applications may not be considered for funding.

3. Applications are due by **April 30 each year** and must be submitted to:

Li Lan Carson, Federal Projects Lead
Chesapeake and Coastal Service, Department of Natural Resources
Tawes Office Building, E-2
580 Taylor Avenue, Annapolis, Maryland 21401

C. Review and Selection

Once the Application for Grant Funding is received, Program staff will contact the applicant for a site visit. A site visit will help the Department understand what the applicant is interested in doing as well as the situation at the facility. The Department may conduct a bathymetric survey to verify the water depth requirement (6' mlw) during the site visit.

Program staff will review the applications and make selection(s) of which project(s) will be submitted to USFWS for possible BIG funding. Upon being informed that your project is up for further consideration, the applicant should begin work on putting together a Project Statement as detailed in the annual Notice of Funding Opportunity (typically published by USFWS each May). The deadline for submission of the Project Statement and all supporting documentation to the Department is **August 31 each year or earlier as notified.**

Project Statement preparation is the responsibility of the sub-grantee so please keep in mind that *BIG Tier 2 – National* Project Statements may take several months for you to prepare. For this reason, if you are submitting an application for *BIG Tier 2 – National* funding, it is recommended that you start drafting your Project Statement at the same time you are filling out the state application form.

If you miss the August 31st deadline for submitting the final Project Statement for a potential *BIG Tier 2 – National* project, the Department will submit the application package to USFWS the following year, assuming the federal funding is available and you are still interested in pursuing it.

If you miss the deadline for submitting the Project Statement for a potential *BIG Tier 1 – State* grant, the Department will consider submitting the project to USFWS the following year but, because only \$200,000 per year in *BIG Tier 1 – State* funding is available, your project will be considered along with any others that may be submitted so there is no guarantee that your project will be selected.

D. Notification of Award

If USFWS approves a project for funding, the Department will send a letter of award to the applicant. The Department and the applicant (sub-grantee) will then enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a legally binding LCA which will ensure that the project will remain in compliance with all federal and state requirements for the useful life of the project. A sample of the LCA can be found in **Appendix B**. One condition of the LCA is that a Notice of Grant Agreement must be made part of the facility's deed (see **Appendix C**). After the LCA is fully executed, the Department will issue an Authorization to Proceed, only then the sub-grantee can begin the work.

The sub-grantee is responsible for obtaining all permits for the project, as noted in the LCA. The Department must review and approve all aspects of the project, i.e. plans and specifications, invitation for bids package, bid tabulation and contract award, etc.

E. Monitoring

The Department will monitor progress in accordance with the stated timelines and objectives as set forth in the approved Project Statement. Upon completion of the project, the Department will conduct final inspection. The final inspection date will serve as the beginning time of the LCA. During the term of the LCA, the Department will conduct periodic inspections to make sure the facility is in compliance with BIG Program Rules and Regulations. These inspections may include DNR auditing the relevant financial records for the project.

F. Anticipated Program Timeline

April 30	State Applications due by 4:00 p.m.
May/June	The Department conducts site visits, applications review, etc.
July	The Department informs the applicant(s) whether the project(s) is selected for submission to USFWS
August 31	Complete Project Statement with supporting documents due from the sub-grantee(s) whose project(s) have been selected.
September	The Department Submits grant applications to USFWS via grans.gov, depending on the due date set by USFWS
March/April of the following year	USFWS announces grant award
May/June of the following year	The Department begins working with the sub-grantee(s) to execute the MOU and the LCA

G. Appendices

- Appendix A – Application for Grant Funding Form
- Appendix B – Sample Land Control Agreement
- Appendix C – Sample Notice of Grant Agreement

H. Governing Guidance

- Sport Fishing and Boating Safety Act of 1998
- 50 CFR Part 86, BIG Program; [Final Rule](#), May 6, 2015
- [2 CFR Part 200](#) Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards
- [USFWS Manual Chapters](#)
- Maryland DNR Waterway Improvement Fund Grants Manual