

Flood Hazard Mitigation (FHM) Grant Assistance Program 2021 Survey and Listening Sessions Results Summary

The Minnesota DNR administers the state's [Flood Hazard Mitigation \(FHM\) Grant Assistance Program](#). The FHM program [was established by the legislature in 1987](#) to provide financial and technical assistance to local governmental units (LGUs) for planning and implementation of capital improvements that reduce flood risk. Since its inception, the program has awarded over \$550 million in cost-share funding to LGUs across Minnesota. These state cost-share funds have been matched by hundreds of millions of federal and local funds.

As part of a larger effort to improve FHM program communication, administration, and delivery to LGUs, the DNR conducted a survey and a series of three moderated LGU listening sessions in early 2021 to gauge LGU familiarity, understanding, and satisfaction of the FHM program, and to solicit stakeholder input for program improvement. This report briefly summarizes the outcomes of the 2021 survey and listening sessions, key takeaways, and actions the FHM program is implementing in response to stakeholder input.

2021 Flood Hazard Mitigation Grant Assistance Program Survey

The DNR developed an 18-question on-line survey intended to solicit stakeholder feedback to improve communication, delivery and understanding of LGU familiarity with and satisfaction of the FHM program. A copy of the survey is included in [Appendix A](#).

With assistance from the League of Minnesota Cities, the Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts, the Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts and the Minnesota Association of County Planning and Zoning Administrators, the survey was e-mailed to watershed district administrators, soil and water conservation district managers, lake improvement district representatives, zoning officials and public works staff throughout the state. Several hundred people received the survey, and 83 responded (~20%) representing the following government entities in eight major watersheds:

- 44 cities (53%)
- 20 soil & water conservation districts (24%)
- 9 watershed districts (11%)
- 7 counties (8%)
- 2 “other” (2%)
- 1 lake Improvement District (1%)

- 1 Regional Water Management Board (1%)

Overall, LGU responses to the awareness of, transparency, fairness, and simplicity of the FDR program were very favorable. Most respondents generally agreed that FHM program staff are knowledgeable, responsive, professional, and courteous.

A large percentage of the respondents expressed an interest in the availability of lists of projects funded, information on the decision-making process for awarding grant funds, and improvements to the grant application.

Other key takeaways from the survey include suggestions for improvements to the FHM program web page, publicizing program fund availability, and clarity on the funding prioritization process. For those interested, a link to a more detailed [summary of survey results](#) is available.

2021 Flood Hazard Mitigation Grant Assistance Program Listening Sessions

In conjunction with the online survey, DNR staff held three listening sessions to hear from LGUs about their experiences and understanding of the program. DNR staff are using the input to improve program delivery, communication, and public understanding of the grant program.

LGUs include cities, counties, special districts, and other public entities that have authority to develop and implement flood-related capital improvements. Invitees to the listening sessions included both those who have participated in the FHM in the past and those who have not participated previously. Listening sessions were limited to 15 LGUs each to allow active participation by all. Originally, two listening sessions were scheduled in January 2021, but due to overwhelming interest from invitees, a third was held.

Each of the three two-hour listening sessions included a mix of LGU representation. These included participants from nine cities, nine counties, 14 watershed districts, 3 lake improvement districts and nine soil and water conservation districts. At each listening session, a DNR moderator posed the following questions to the participants:

- Where do you typically obtain information about this program or similar programs? (e.g., Association meetings? DNR website? Association website? Word of mouth among peers? Called or emailed DNR?)
- How well do you feel you understand the FHM program's purposes?
- How well do you feel you understand the criteria for funding projects?
- How would you characterize your personal experience with the program in the past?
 - Easy to apply for funds? Difficult to apply?
 - Significant benefit to your organization? Not much benefit?
 - Would recommend participation in the grant program to others?
 - Would not recommend?

- If you were not awarded the grant funds you applied for, did you receive an adequate explanation why not?
- If you have not used this program in the past, why not? (No flooding problems? Didn't know the funding was available? Easier to fund locally or from other state/federal funding sources?)
- When you have questions about the program and application process, are you able to get answers? This includes questions about the FHM program and your grant application.
- How difficult was it to complete the application materials? How much staff and consultant time was needed?
- What steps would you suggest to DNR to improve the applicant's experience and program understanding?
- Is there anything else you would like to communicate to the DNR about the FHM program?

Overall, LGU participants with past experience and familiarity with the FHM grant program are very satisfied with the program administration. Those with experience expressed appreciation of program staff's approachability, attentiveness, and responsiveness to local needs.

Most participants indicated that they typically obtain information about the FHM program through DNR field staff, DNR website, professional associations, conferences, consultants, and other agencies. Some expressed a desire to get more information about the program history, eligibility, past funding and prioritization/ranking on the DNR website.

Most had a grasp on the program's purpose of reducing flood risk across the state of Minnesota.

There were mixed responses when asked about understanding of criteria for funding projects. Naturally, those not familiar with the FHM program wouldn't have a grasp on criteria. Those who've experienced the FHM program in the past for the most part expressed understanding of the criteria for funding. Most get that understanding from the DNR website or direct communication with FHM program staff.

When asked about personal experience working with the program, the responses were overwhelmingly positive. Many commented on the ease of the application process, ready access to staff assistance when needed, prompt payment upon reimbursement request, ease of reporting, and accountability. Several LGU participants noted that of the many state and federal grant programs they have experience with, the FHM grant program is far and away the simplest and most efficient, as well as highly effective in reducing exposure to flood risk.

A number of participants suggested program improvements. Suggestions included having listening sessions again in the future, more information on the DNR website, seeking higher levels of funding to reflect known funding needs, providing a list of projects funded in the past, and consideration of an on-line application.

FHM program staff appreciate the important feedback survey respondents and listening session participants provided. Based upon the input, staff are implementing actions to improve program delivery.

Some of these include posting a state map on the website illustrating the locations of past and current flood risk reduction projects and a list of projects funded since the FHM program was established. Other efforts in progress include modernizing the FHM application and providing additional web content about prioritization of projects to receive funding.

Flood Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program Information

For the latest FHM program improvements, news, and updates, please visit the [FHM program web site](#). If you have any questions or comments about the survey, listening sessions or the FHM program, please contact:

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