

## Summary Information

**Federal Awarding Agency Name:** U.S. Department Of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC)

**Funding Opportunity Title:** Notice of Funding Opportunity for NRCS' Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) National competition for Federal fiscal year (FY) 2019

## Initial Announcement

**Funding Opportunity Number:** USDA-NRCS-NHQ-CIG-19-GEN0010208

**Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number:** 10.912, Environmental Quality Incentives Program

NRCS is announcing the availability of up to \$12.5 million in CIG funding to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. Applications will be accepted from [eligible entities](#) in any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands). All U.S.-based non-federal entities (NFE) and individuals are invited to apply, with the sole exception of federal agencies. Projects may be between one and three years in duration. The maximum award amount for a single award in FY 2019 is \$2 million.

**APPLICATIONS DUE DATE:** Applications must be received by 5 p.m. Eastern Time on July 30, 2019.

**SUBMISSIONS:** Applications must be submitted electronically through [grants.gov](#). Submissions must be received by the time and date due. Late submissions will not be reviewed or considered. The agency will rely on system generated date and time receipt documentation for Grants.gov submissions. [Click here for more on how to submit an application.](#)

The grants.gov electronic submission interface is called Workspace. Workspace is the standard way for organizations or individuals to apply for federal grants in grants.gov. Workspace allows an applicant grant team to access and edit different forms within an application simultaneously. In addition, the forms may be filled out online or as a PDF. An overview of Workspace can be viewed at grants.gov ([WEBINAR - Getting Started with Workspace: Become a Workspace Wizard](#)).

Please allow extra time to register in Workspace because there are several preliminary registration steps before an applicant can submit the application. To register, go to [www.grants.gov](#), click on "Applicants", then click on "Get Registered." If you have completed a prior grants.gov application, you may already have completed the registration process. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication (e.g., Braille, large print, or audio tape) should contact the USDA TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Applicants are encouraged to visit the [CIG website](#) to learn more about the program. Questions about this announcement can be directed to [nrcsig@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:nrcsig@wdc.usda.gov).

A webinar for CIG applicants is scheduled for 12 p.m. Eastern on June 11, 2019. [Click here](#) for information on participating in the webinar.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

### **I. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

#### **A. Legislative Authority**

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program is authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) (16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8). The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of EQIP, including CIG, to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). EQIP is funded and administered by NRCS under the authorities of CCC.

#### **B. Overview**

The purpose of CIG is to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) to agricultural producers, into NRCS technical manuals and guides, or to the private sector. CIG generally funds pilot projects, field demonstrations, and on-farm conservation research. On-farm conservation research is defined as an investigation conducted to answer a specific applied conservation question using a statistically valid design while employing farm-scale equipment on farms, ranches or private forest lands.

#### **C. Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities**

CIG funds the development and field testing, on-farm research and demonstration, evaluation, or implementation of:

- Approaches to incentivizing conservation adoption, including market-based and conservation finance approaches; and
- Conservation technologies, practices, and systems.

Projects or activities under CIG must comply with all applicable federal, tribal, state, and local laws and regulations throughout the duration of the project; and

- Use a technology or approach that was studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success;
- Demonstrate, evaluate, and verify the effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability of natural resource conservation technologies and approaches in the field;
- Adapt and transfer conservation technologies, management, practices, systems, approaches, and incentive systems to improve performance and encourage adoption;
- Introduce proven conservation technologies and approaches to a geographic area or agricultural sector where that technology or approach is not currently in use.

Technologies and approaches that are eligible for funding in a project's geographic area using an EQIP contract for an established conservation practice standard are ineligible for CIG funding, except where the use of those technologies and approaches demonstrates clear innovation.

Up to 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG in 2019 is set aside for proposals from Historically Underserved producers, veteran farmers or ranchers, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities ([click here](#) for more information about the 10 percent set-aside).

#### **D. CIG 2019 Priorities**

NRCS accepts proposals that address one or more of the National priorities listed below.

##### **1. Increasing the pace and scale of conservation adoption**

NRCS [Conservation Effects Assessment Project](#) data and analyses show that many farmers, ranchers and forest landowners implement conservation measures as part of their production system. At the same time, the pace and scale of conservation adoption on working lands must be increased to sufficiently address our more persistent natural resource challenges.

NRCS has spent the better part of its history developing and refining the approximately 170 conservation practice standards that serve as the scientific underpinning of landowner conservation actions. In many ways, the agriculture community has already identified effective actions that can help solve our water quality, air quality, wildlife habitat, water quantity and other natural resource issues—a remaining challenge has been how to persuade more landowners and land managers to implement known conservation actions.

NRCS seeks applications proposing innovative conservation approaches to increase the pace and scale of conservation adoption on the Nation's farms, ranches and forest lands. Applications must address at least one of the following sub-priorities:

- Innovative INCENTIVE PROGRAMS that demonstrate cutting edge approaches to working lands conservation. Examples include projects that use new incentives to increase adoption of edge-of-field practices (e.g., saturated buffers, bioreactors, drainage water management, etc.) or integrate conservation incentives into existing financial instruments (e.g., farm operating loans, crop insurance premiums) already familiar to agricultural producers.
- Innovative projects that ATTRACT ADDITIONAL FUNDING--such as private capital, corporate funding, philanthropic funding, and other funding sources--to private and working lands conservation. Applicants should describe how the innovation would result in additional conservation implementation or provide new sources of conservation capital for producers.
- Innovative approaches that leverage best practices in SOCIAL and DECISION SCIENCE to evaluate new and more effective ways to engage producers in agricultural conservation, including on-the-ground implementation. Proposed innovations should reflect prior work in the field of motivating producer decision-making and incorporate the unique motivations and constraints of agricultural producers.

- Innovative efforts to QUANTIFY THE FINANCIAL BENEFITS of conservation implementation, including developing outreach products and approaches to disseminate project results to producers and producer networks.

## **2. Water Quantity**

Agricultural producers and rural economies in many parts of the Nation face diminishing supplies of available water. The underlying causes of supply restrictions, and the potential solutions, vary locally and regionally. In some areas, local supplies of groundwater are declining; in others, surface water supplies are overtaxed. Some producers face increased competition for water from other users such as energy producers or homeowners. In some cases, producers may be able to shift their operations to non-irrigated systems. Other producers may be able to switch to more available sources of irrigation water.

NRCS is seeking proposals that demonstrate, evaluate, and quantify the impacts of new technologies, methods or approaches that can balance, restore, or enhance agricultural water use while maintaining productivity. Potential focus areas under this priority include:

- Technologies or approaches that increase groundwater recharge without impacting production and yield.
- Conservation approaches that enhance and improve water reuse and recovery efforts.
- Technologies that use automated soils/vegetation/water sensors to provide real-time data to producers to enable better and faster water quantity decisions.
- Irrigation, water transfer and water recovery measuring technologies that provide timely data to better manage water resources.
- The use of data sources (e.g., snowpack, precipitation, lidar) or technologies to generate more local and granular data that help better manage water resources.

## **3. Pollinator Habitat**

Pollinators are essential to much of our Nation’s food production and they provide many ecological benefits in agricultural landscapes. NRCS works with landowners to implement conservation activities to help landowners and land managers achieve desired outcomes for pollinators. CIG proposals must address one of the following sub-priorities:

### *Leverage pollinator habitat to improve agricultural production*

The integration of pollinator habitat into agricultural systems can provide both production and pollinator benefits.

- Beneficial insects—applicants are encouraged to identify and demonstrate the use of approaches that support the growth of beneficial insect groups (e.g. predators, parasites) that provide biological control for agricultural pests. Applications must document plants that mutually support pollinators and beneficial insects, determine which beneficial insects benefit from pollinator plantings, develop simple monitoring protocols for beneficial insects that can be used by producers to test the effectiveness of biological controls on pest populations, and document both financial and yield impacts.

- Honey bee habitat—Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate approaches for maintaining habitat to support managed honey bee health. Projects should focus on one of the following: 1) demonstrate and document plantings that support honey bees before and after crop production; 2) provide nectar and pollen during critical gaps in the honey bee summer resting period, i.e., early to mid-spring and mid to late fall. Applications must propose approaches for documenting plant species and successful establishment methods, attractiveness to honey bees, and impacts on honey bee health.
- Native pollinators—Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate approaches for establishing and maintaining habitat for native pollinators that provide pollinator services for agricultural production as a replacement for, or to supplement the use of, managed pollinators. Applications must identify the native pollinator species and the crops they pollinate, the plant species required to support native pollinators, and the level of pollination services provided.

#### *Improving plant habitat for Monarchs*

Monarch butterfly populations are at record low numbers in the West, and close to record low numbers in the East. Innovations such as approaches for establishing and maintaining habitat along major migration corridors and developing pasture and rangeland management systems that support monarch habitats can help support monarch populations.

- Applicants are encouraged to develop and/or expand methods of establishment for native milkweed and specific plant species that are preferred by Monarchs as nectar resources, particularly to address challenges of milkweed and nectar plant establishment in arid environments.
- Applications may also address interseeding of milkweed and other forb species into established grass plantings to increase plant diversity and benefits to Monarchs and other pollinators.

Applications must identify optimal growing conditions and microhabitats, improve knowledge of geographic range and bloom time of plant species and how they coincide with the migration of Monarchs, determine the most successful and economic method(s) for establishment with a focus on non-irrigated or minimally irrigated conditions, and work with industry partners to increase availability of milkweed and key nectar species seeds and plants.

#### *Integrate innovative grazing and haying systems to promote pollinator habitats*

Conservation grazing and haying has been shown to improve the sustainability and ecology of pasture and range plantings and has the potential to revitalize pollinator communities in addition to providing other conservation benefits in agricultural systems.

- Applicants are encouraged to identify, develop, and improve grazing and haying strategies and practices that enhance and maintain resources for managed and native pollinators.
- Projects must address one or more of the following:
  - identify host plants, nesting sites and the overwintering habitat that pollinators depend on.
  - investigate the value of various native seed mixes for both livestock and pollinators.

- investigate grazing frequency/duration/intensity to meet livestock forage objectives, soil health, plant community goals, and pollinator / beneficial insect resources.
- use different grazing or haying management approaches to shape plant communities for increased plant structure diversity, reduced biomass and nitrogen, and increased abundance of blooming wildflower.
- develop management systems that balance the nutritional needs of both livestock and pollinators, and document economic value of innovative grazing or haying systems.

#### **4. Urban Agriculture**

NRCS serves all types of agricultural producers – large to small, conventional to organic, rural to urban. As American agriculture continues to grow in new directions, NRCS conservation assistance is growing along with it. Urban farms come with unique conservation challenges and opportunities. NRCS conservation activities can support urban farmers in their efforts to produce local, healthy, and sustainably-grown food for their communities. Current urban ag-appropriate NRCS practices help improve soil health, address irrigation and water conservation needs, help farmers with weeds & pest management, and promote the establishment of high tunnels to extend the growing season.

NRCS requests proposals that demonstrate innovations in the conservation of natural resources in urban agricultural contexts. Potential focus areas under this priority include:

- Demonstrate the use of innovative methods or approaches to establish and maintain pollinator habitat (for both managed and native species) for urban agriculture.
- Demonstrate innovate rainwater or water reuse approaches that mitigate food safety concerns and reduce costs for urban farms.
- Develop innovative approaches to address elevated moisture and humidity levels in aquaponic systems, including water reuse systems.
- Demonstrate innovative approaches or technologies that conserve energy on urban agriculture operations.
- Demonstrate low-cost innovative approaches or management practices to help make usable soils with heavy metals or other common urban soil contaminants.
- Demonstrate innovative approaches to support the establishment of small-scale livestock operations in urban agricultural contexts.

## **II. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION**

It is anticipated that a total of up to \$12.5 million in funding will be available for this announcement. The funding minimum for a single award is \$150,000 and the maximum for a single award is \$2 million.

Awards made through this announcement will be executed through a grant agreement between NRCS and the awardee.

NRCS accepts proposals for projects of one to three years in duration.

### **III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

#### **A. Applicant Eligibility**

All U.S.-based non-Federal entities (NFE) and individuals, with the exception of Federal agencies, are eligible to apply. Individuals and entities may submit more than one application and may receive more than one award.

#### **B. Project Eligibility**

All CIG projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers that meet EQIP's eligibility requirements listed in [7 CFR § 1466.6\(b\)\(1\) through \(3\)](#):

- Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions (7 CFR Part 12).
- Be a person, legal entity, joint operation, Indian tribe, or native corporation who is engaged in agricultural production or forestry management or has an interest in the agricultural or forestry operation as defined in [7 CFR Part 1400](#).
- Have control of the land involved for the term of the proposed contract period.

#### **C. EQIP Payment Limitation and Duplicate Payments**

- The following provisions apply to CIG funding: CIG funds are awarded through grant agreements. These grant agreements are not EQIP contracts; thus, CIG awards in and of themselves are not limited by the payment limitation found at section 1240G of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-7, which imposes a \$450,000 payment limitation for all payments made to persons or legal entities under an EQIP contract entered into between FY 2019 and FY 2023.
- All agricultural producers receiving a payment through participation in a CIG project must meet the eligibility requirements of 7 CFR § 1466.6(b)(1) through (3) noted above. In addition, all CIG payments are subject to the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitation. All agricultural producers receiving a payment through participation in a CIG project must have an AGI that does not exceed \$900,000. If awarded a grant, grantees must self-certify and maintain records showing that participating producers receiving payments using CIG funding meet the EQIP eligibility and AGI requirements. Section 1704 (a)(3) of the 2018 Farm Bill states the Secretary may waive the AGI limit on a case by case basis, if the Secretary determines that environmentally sensitive land of special significance would be protected as a result of such waiver. CIG grantees may request waivers once their project commences.
- Section 1240B of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-2, prohibits duplicative payments. Accordingly, direct or indirect payments cannot be made for a practice for which an individual or legal entity has already received funds, or is contracted to receive funds through any USDA conservation program (e.g., Conservation

Reserve Program, EQIP, Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Stewardship Program). If awarded a grant, grantees must self-certify that payments to producers using CIG funding are not duplicative.

#### **D. Cost Sharing/Matching Requirements**

CIG recipients must provide a non-federal funding match or cost-share amount at least equal to the amount of federal funding requested. Applications that do not include cost-sharing will be ineligible for award. Cost sharing may be achieved with contributions of cash, services, materials, equipment, or third party in-kind contributions. See [Section IV, subsection 8](#) of this announcement for information on cost share/match.

#### **E. Historically Underserved Producers and Veteran Farmers or Ranchers**

For the 2019 CIG award process, up to 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG are set aside for proposals from Historically Underserved producers, veteran farmers or ranchers, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities. The definition of Historically Underserved and Veteran producers is available on [the CIG website](#).

To compete for set-aside funds, applicants must signal their intent by following the instructions [here](#). These applicants must meet all other requirements of this announcement, including addressing at least one CIG priority [listed in this notice](#).

Funds not awarded through this set-aside will revert to the pool of non-set-aside funds.

#### **F. Technical Assistance for CIG Projects**

Conservation Innovation Grants are Grant Agreements and as such do not provide for substantial involvement between NRCS and the grantee in carrying out the activity contemplated by the federal award. The technical assistance required to carry out a project is the responsibility of the grantee. NRCS designates an NRCS employee as a Technical Contact for each grant award. Technical contacts provide oversight activities during the project, such as site visits and reviewing performance reports, financial reports, and audits. Beyond these oversight activities, technical contacts will not be substantially involved in carrying out grant activities.

#### **G. SAM.gov Exclusions Database**

Applicant entities identified in the SAM.gov Exclusions database as ineligible, prohibited/restricted or excluded from receiving Federal contracts, certain subcontracts, and certain Federal assistance and benefits will not be considered for Federal funding, as applicable to the funding being requested under this Federal program (2 CFR 200.205(d)).

### **IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

There is no pre-proposal process for this announcement. All standard forms necessary for CIG application submission are included in the [grants.gov](#) application package.

## **A. Executive Order (EO) 12372**

This funding opportunity is not subject to Executive Order 12372, “Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.”

## **B. Content and Format**

Applications must contain the content, format, and information set forth below to receive consideration for funding. Submit a separate application for each project if submitting more than one. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. Applicants must submit a single copy of the application in the following format:

- Each page must be on numbered, letter-sized (8½” x 11”) paper using a white background that has one-inch margins; and
- The text of the application must be typed, single spaced, black, and in a font no smaller than 12-point.

Applications that are incomplete or fail to comply with the required content and formatting requirements will not be considered for funding.

### *1. Project Abstract (1 page maximum).*

On a single page, provide the following information:

- The applicant entity name.
- The duration of project in months.
- The amount of federal funding requested.
- The amount of non-federal cost-share/match funding committed.
- The project title.
- The geographic location of the project.
- A brief project description - describe in non-technical language the issue or problem, the objectives to address the issue or problem, the innovative approach to be employed (including the role of participating partners, if applicable), how the impact will be quantified, and the predicted benefits or deliverables of the project.
- The national priority that is addressed by the project. List one priority from section I.D. above. If the proposal addresses more than one priority, please use your discretion to select the primary priority. The priority that you select will determine the panel that will review your application. For each priority area, a review panel will be established with expertise in subject matter relevant to the priority topic.
- An indication if applicable that you wish to compete for the 10 percent set-aside described [here](#).
- A technical and administrative contact for the project (if both are the same person, please note this). NRCS will use the technical and administrative contacts identified as the primary applicant contacts.

## 2. Standard application form.

“Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance” and instructions to complete it are included in the application package posted on grants.gov.

## 3. Project Narrative (15-page maximum).

The project description must include the following information in order. A sample project description is included in the application package on grants.gov.:

- a. Project background: Describe the issue or problem driving the need for the proposed innovation. Provide evidence that the proposed innovation has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success of the project.
- b. Project objectives: Be specific using qualitative and quantitative measures, if possible, to describe the project’s purpose, goals, and objectives. Describe how the project is innovative. If the project is addressing a NRCS Conservation Practice Standard, or proposing a new standard, please state this explicitly and identify the standard.
- c. Project methods: Describe clearly the methodology of the project and the tools or processes that will be used to implement the project.
- d. Geographic location and size of project or project area: Identify the geographic location and the relative size and scope (e.g., acres, farm types, demographics, etc.) of the project area. Maps are recommended.
- e. EQIP eligible producer participation: Estimate the number of EQIP eligible producers involved in the project, and describe the extent of their involvement.
- f. Project action plan and timeline: Provide a bulleted list of project actions, timeframes, deliverables and associated milestones through project completion. Applicants should develop their timelines based on a project start date of January 2, 2020.
- g. Project management: Give a description of how the project will be organized and managed, including a list/description of project partners. Include a list of key technical and administrative personnel, their qualifications and experience managing federal awards, and their anticipated contributions to the project. Also, include a description of how communication will be structured within the project team to ensure effective project management. Do not include resumes or CVs.
- h. Project deliverables/products: Provide a list of specific deliverables and products that will allow NRCS to monitor project progress and approve payments. The proposal must include a set of technical deliverables designed to evaluate the performance and broader applicability of the project. In addition to project-specific deliverables, selected grantees are responsible for:
  1. Participation in at least one event (e.g., conference or workshop) during the grant period where the grantee presents on the activities of the project, with notification of the NRCS technical contact;
  2. A final fact sheet for use in public settings;
  3. Closing event – could be a webinar, field day, training event, etc., with notification of the NRCS technical contact.
- i. Project evaluation: Describe the methodology or procedures used to evaluate the project, determine technical feasibility, and quantify the results of the project.
- j. Benefits or results expected and transferability: Identify the results and benefits derived from the project. Identify project beneficiaries, i.e., agricultural producers by type,

region, or sector; Historically Underserved producers and communities; rural communities; and/or municipalities. Describe how the results will be communicated to others via outreach activities and how these entities will benefit. Forecast the lasting impact of project results.

- k. Graphics – including pictures, charts, graphs and similar items – count towards the 15-page maximum.
- l. References, bibliographies, and citations, if included, do not count towards the 15-page maximum.

#### 4. *Assessment of environmental impacts.*

If implementation of the proposal is anticipated to have physical, chemical, or biological impacts on the environment, please describe the impacts and their extent. The description of the potential environmental impacts must address both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action. The length of the description should be commensurate with the complexity of the project proposed and the natural environmental resources impacted directly, indirectly, or cumulatively. Where possible, information on environmental impacts should be quantified, such as number of acres of wetlands impacted, amount of carbon sequestration estimated, etc. Natural environmental resources include soil, water, air, plants, and animals, as well as other resources protected by law, regulation, executive order, and agency policy. NRCS may choose not to approve funding for projects that may result in unacceptable adverse environmental impacts.

Every funded CIG project is a Federal action subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NRCS must complete an environmental review of each awarded project before project commencement. Applicants may be required to prepare and pay for preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), should the environmental review find that an EA or EIS is required.

In addition, a National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 review and consultation by NRCS State or area office with consulting parties (such as the pertinent State Historic Preservation Officer and federally recognized Indian Tribes) may be required prior to the implementation of project activities that have the potential to impact cultural resources. NHPA Section 106, its implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 800), and other related authorities, require federal agencies to determine if a project has the potential to cause an effect to historic properties and, if so, if they are adverse and how the effects may be addressed. The NHPA review and compliance in accordance with Section 106 of NHPA and implementing regulations at 36 CFR Part 800 must be completed by NRCS and applicants may be required to pay for any cultural resource surveys needed for NRCS to assess CIG project effects. More information on the applicants role in NHPA Section 106 process can be [found here](#).

Consultation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and/or the National Marine Fisheries Service under the Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is also required for projects that may affect listed or proposed species or destroy or modify critical habitat. The ESA consultation in accordance with Section 7 of the ESA and implementing regulations at 50 CFR Part 402 must be completed by NRCS prior to the implementation of project activities that have the potential to impact species or habitat protected under the ESA. More information on the Section 7 consultation process can be [found here](#).

5. *Budget Information, (12-page maximum).*

The budget portion of the application consists of two parts, as described below:

- a. Standard Form (SF) 424A Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs. The SF-424A is included as part of the application package posted on Grants.gov. Section B, Item 6, Column 1 should reflect the agency funds, and Column 2 should reflect the applicant’s matching funds. This form is the summary budget for the project. See Instructions for Completing SF 424A located in the Related Documents tab of this announcement on Grants.gov.
- b. Detailed Budget Narrative. Provide a detailed narrative in support of the budget for the project broken down by each project year. Detail how the totals on the SF-424A were determined and demonstrate a clear connection between costs and the proposed project activities. Justify the project cost effectiveness and include justification for personnel and consultant salaries with a description of duties. Statement(s) of work for any subcontractors and consultants must be included as part of the application. The budget narrative should include both the federal funds requested and the applicant’s matching funds.

The budget narrative must be in text format with no charts, spreadsheets, or tables. It should be readable on letter-size, printable pages. The information needs to be presented in such a way that the reviewers can readily understand what expenses are incurred to support the project.

**Note:** Please include \$3,000 in the budget for awardee travel required by NRCS. These funds are required and can be part of the Federal portion, the applicant’s matching funds, or a combination of both. Any additional travel required for completion of the project must be considered additional to this \$3,000.

6. *Funding Restrictions*

CIG funds may not be used to pay any of the following costs unless otherwise permitted by law or approved in writing by the Authorized Departmental Officer in advance of incurring such costs:

1. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project;
2. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the grant (preaward costs);
3. Costs which lay outside the scope of the approved project and amendments thereto;
4. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives;
5. Compensation for injuries to persons or damage to property arising out of project activities;
6. Consulting services performed by a federal employee during official duty hours when such consulting services result in the payment of additional compensation to the employee; and
7. Renovation or refurbishment of research or related spaces, the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such spaces, and the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

This list is not exhaustive. For more details, refer to [2 CFR 200](#).

Profit is not an eligible project cost. Therefore, any funds awarded to for-profit entities must be used for reimbursement of award related direct and indirect costs only.

Individuals applying for a CIG award may not include any indirect costs in the proposed budget.

#### *7. Indirect (F&A) costs.*

To be eligible to recover any indirect costs under a federal award, an applicant must either 1) have a current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA) with its cognizant federal agency that has not expired or 2) qualify for use of the de minimis rate of 10% of the modified total direct costs (MTDC) as authorized by 2 CFR 200.414(f). In order to qualify for the de minimis rate, the applicant must not have, or have previously held, a NICRA. A State, local, or tribal governmental department or agency unit that receives more than \$35 million in direct federal funding is not eligible for the de minimis rate.

Applicants with a NICRA must calculate indirect costs using the rate and base specified in their NICRA. The total amount of indirect costs is entered in Section B, Row J, of the SF-424A (Budget Information). A copy of the applicant's current NICRA must be provided with the application. If the applicant does not have a current NICRA, indirect costs may not be recovered under an expired NICRA. A new NICRA can be negotiated with its cognizant federal agency, which is the agency that provides the applicant entity its largest amount of federal funding.

Entities that are eligible for the de minimis rate who already have a de minimis rate agreement must use the rate and base specified in the agreement, which is modified total direct costs (MTDC) as defined by 2 CFR 200.68 and also excluding the amount of each subcontract exceeding \$25,000. Note that MTDC excludes certain costs from the base to which the rate is applied. A copy of the applicant's de minimis rate agreement must be provided with the application. If a recipient is eligible to use the de minimis rate, but does not have a de minimis rate agreement, use an indirect cost rate of no more than 10% of MTDC when preparing the budget and state in the budget narrative that a de minimis rate agreement is requested. If selected for award, a de minimis rate agreement will be executed along with the award.

An applicant may voluntarily reduce or waive recovery of indirect costs at their sole discretion and must not be encouraged or coerced in any way to do so by the NRCS. If voluntarily reduced or waived, the applicant may choose to apply any unrecovered indirect costs as part of their cost share or match. Unrecovered indirect cost are the difference between the amount charged to the federal award and the amount which could have been charged to the federal award under the applicant's approved negotiated indirect cost rate (2 CFR 200.306(c)).

#### *8. Cost Share or Matching Funds.*

Selected applicants may receive CIG grants of up to 50 percent of their total project cost. CIG recipients must provide a non-federal funding match or cost-share amount at least equal to the amount of federal funding requested. For example, if an applicant requests \$50,000 in CIG funding, at least \$50,000 in non-federal cost-share or matching funds must be committed by the applicant.

Matching funds may be committed by the applicant, project partners, or both and can be a combination of cash and in-kind contributions. Examples of in-kind contributions include work done by unpaid volunteers and donations of supplies, facilities, or equipment. In-kind contributions identified in the project budget must be quantifiable, verifiable, and necessary to accomplish program activities.

Cost sharing/matching must be committed at the time of application submission. Cost sharing or matching funds must meet the criteria stated at 2 CFR 200.306 and be valued in accordance with 2 CFR 200.306(d). Additional details about cost sharing or matching funds/contributions is located at 2 CFR 200.306.

All matching funds must be identified in both the SF-424A and budget narrative components of the application. Project partners (other than the applicant) must provide commitment letters for all cash and in kind matching contributions. A separate commitment letter is required for each cash and/or in-kind match contribution. Commitment letters must be signed by the authorized organizational representative of the contributing organization and the applicant organization and must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the project partner; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the contribution is made, (4) the dollar value of the contribution; and (5) a statement that the contributor commits to furnish the contribution during the grant period. A sample commitment letter is included as part of the application package on grants.gov.

Applications without signed written commitments covering the full value of the matching contribution are deemed incomplete.

The value of applicant contributions to the project is established according to federal cost principles. Applicants should refer to [2 CFR 200.306](#) for additional guidance on matching funds, in-kind contributions, and allowable costs.

#### *9. Declaration of previous CIG projects involvement and past performance.*

If the applicant (lead contact, not the broader entity) has previously received and managed a CIG award (either at the National or State levels), please list the following for each award:

- Project Title
- CIG agreement number
- Award funding amount
- Year of Award

#### *10. Declaration of Historically Underserved and veteran farmers or ranchers.*

To compete for the funding set aside for Historically Underserved producers or veteran farmers or ranchers, or a community-based organization comprised of or representing these entities, applicants must self-certify. Historically Underserved producers or veteran farmers or ranchers can do so with a simple declarative sentence such as:

“I qualify as a (Historically Underserved producer) (veteran farmer) (veteran rancher)(community-based organization representing...) and wish to compete in the set-aside funding pool.”

In addition to the self-certification statement, community-based organizations comprised of or representing Historically Underserved producers or veteran farmers or ranchers must provide a brief description of the entity and the types and numbers of producers the organization intends to service through the project.

Refer to the [section of this notice](#) that describes the funding pool set aside for Historically Underserved producers and veteran farmers or ranchers.

#### 11. *Certifications.*

All proposals must include the following signed certification forms, which are available at [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov):

- AD-3030 Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants. USDA policy requires all applicants to complete the form.
- AD-3031 Assurances Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants. USDA policy requires all applicants to complete the form.
- SF-424B, Assurances for Non-Construction Programs. Must be completed by all applicants.
- Certification Regarding Lobbying. Must be completed by all applicants.

#### 12. *Letters of support*

Letters of support for the project from individuals or entities that are not project partners may be submitted and should be placed at the very end of the application package.

#### 13. *Risk Review Documentation*

NRCS may request additional documentation from selected applicants in order to evaluate the financial, management, and performance risk posed by awardees as required by 2 CFR 200.205. Based on this risk review, NRCS may apply to a CIG award special conditions that correspond to the degree of risk assessed.

### **C. DUNS and SAM Numbers**

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual excepted from those requirements under 2 CFR §25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the federal awarding agency under 2 CFR §25.110(d)) is required to: (i) Be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) before submitting its application; (ii) provide a valid unique entity identifier (Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number) in its application; and (iii) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal award, application, or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency. NRCS may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant complies with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements and, if an applicant does not fully comply with the

requirements when the NRCS is ready to make a federal award, NRCS may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant.

NFEs must obtain a DUNS and register in SAM prior to registering with Grants.gov. NFEs are strongly encouraged to apply early for their DUNS number and SAM registration.

1. **Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number:** A Dun and Bradstreet DUNS number is a unique, nine-digit sequence recognized as the universal standard for identifying and keeping track of over 70 million businesses worldwide. CIG applicants must obtain a DUNS number. Information on how to obtain a DUNS number can be found at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> or by calling 1-866-705-5711.
2. **System for Award Management (SAM) Registration:** SAM is the official Federal system that consolidated the capabilities of Central Contractor Registry, Federal Agency Registration, Online Representations and Certifications Application, and Excluded Parties List System. To register, go to: <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>. The Federal Service Desk is available for registration assistance, and can be contacted via the Help tab at the website listed above.

#### **D. How to Submit an Application**

Submitting a CIG application through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) requires a number of tasks. There are several preliminary registration steps before an applicant can submit the application. To register in the grants.gov system, go to [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), click on “Applicants,” and then click on “Get Registered.”

If you have completed a prior grants.gov application, you may already have completed the registration process.

Please allow sufficient time to register in grants.gov, and for possible system delays. An overview of Workspace can be viewed through grants.gov ([WEBINAR - Getting Started with Workspace: Become a Workspace Wizard](#)).

Below are instructions for accessing the forms necessary to complete an application in grants.gov:

- Go to [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).
- Select the “Applicants” tab.
- Select the “Apply for Grants” heading.
- Click on “Get Application Package.” Follow all steps.
- All necessary forms are included within the grants.gov “Application Package.”
- Provide the “Funding Opportunity Number” listed on page 1 of this announcement or return to the “[Search Grants](#)” section.

Applications not received by the submission due date and time will not be accepted. All applications must contain all of the elements of a complete package and meet the requirements described in this announcement. Grants.gov provides instructions for submitting the required application items through the portal. An application’s receipt date and time will be determined

by the respective system-generated documentation of receipt date and time (grants.gov provides date and time stamps for all proposals submitted through the portal).

NRCS is not responsible for any technical malfunctions or website problems related to grants.gov or emailed submissions. If you encounter issues with grants.gov, please contact the grants.gov help desk at (800) 518-4726 or [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov). The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in application submission through grants.gov and therefore is encouraged to submit your application early to ensure there is time to work out unforeseen issues.

#### **E. Due Date**

Proposals must be received by 5 p.m. Eastern Time on July 30, 2019. Application receipt date and time will be determined by the respective system-generated documentation of receipt date and time (grants.gov provides date and time stamps for all proposals submitted through the portal). The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in application receipt.

#### **F. Withdrawal**

Proposals may be withdrawn by written notice at any time before award execution. Written notice of withdrawal must be signed by the applicant or an authorized representative.

### **V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

Proposals will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this announcement. Incomplete or noncompliant proposals will be eliminated from competition prior to initiation of the peer review process.

#### **A. Application Evaluation Criteria**

##### Risk Criteria Evaluation

In accordance with 2 CFR 200.205, NRCS will review risk posed by applicants. This screening process includes:

- 1) Confirming the NFE does not have an active exclusion in SAM precluding it from eligibility receipt of an award (i.e., suspended or debarred; see [2 CFR Part 180](#) and [7 CFR Part 417](#)).
- 2) Confirming the NFE does not have adverse information located in the [Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System \(FAPIIS\)](#).

##### Merit Criteria Evaluation

The technical peer review panels use the following criteria, using a 100 point scale, to evaluate applications:

1. Purpose, Approach, and Goals (25 points)
  - a. The purpose of the project is clearly explained and the rationale is explicit for why the innovative approach or technology is needed.
  - b. The design and implementation of the project is based on sound methodology and demonstrated technology;
  - c. The project outcomes are stated, measurable, and likely to be achieved; and

- d. Both beneficial and adverse impacts are considered and a significant level of improvement will be achieved.
2. Innovative Technology or Approach (25 points)
  - a. The project is innovative (national, regionally, and/or local) according to the criteria for innovation in the CIG funding announcement.
3. Project Management (25 points)
  - a. Timeline and milestones are clear and reasonable;
  - b. Project staff has necessary technical and administrative expertise;
  - c. The budget is adequately explained and justified, and expenses allowable; and
  - d. Proposal includes robust partnership with entities that can substantially assist with delivery of project outcomes with clear project management structure and team communication laid out.
4. Benefits and Transferability (25 points)
  - a. An evaluation plan is documented that clearly lays out how project work will be assessed and the results transferred:
  - b. There is potential for producers and landowners to use or participate in the innovative technology(s) or approach(s);
  - c. There is potential for NRCS to benefit from the innovative approach or methods, including (if appropriate) the development of materials such as technical standards, technical notes, handbooks, technology tools, etc.;
  - d. There is potential to transfer the approach or technology to a broader audience or to other geographic areas or agricultural sectors; and
  - e. The potential for successful transfer, through planned project activities, to Historically Underserved producers and communities.

Partner matching funds are considered an eligibility criterion as described in [this section of the notice](#), and will not be considered in the evaluation.

## **B. Review and Selection Process**

Proposals that pass the initial screening are then evaluated using a four part process:

- NRCS State Conservationists/Area Directors provide evaluations of each application for which work is proposed to be carried out in their respective State. If a project is multi-State in scope, all State Conservationists/Area Directors in the project area will review the application. NRCS State office contact information is available at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

State Conservationists/Area Directors will consider potential duplication of efforts, ethical concerns, and merit criteria, and will provide comments for each reviewed application. State Conservationist/Area Directors reviews are considered by the Grants Review Board and the Chief, as appropriate, when making award recommendations and selections.

- Technical peer review panels composed of subject matter experts evaluate the proposals. Proposals are evaluated against the CIG Proposal Evaluation Criteria [listed here](#).
- The technical peer review panels forward their recommendations to the CIG Grants Review Board, which certifies that the recommendations of the peer panels are consistent with NRCS State Conservationist evaluations. The Grants Review Board may also

consider the other factors listed below when making funding recommendations to the Chief. The CIG Grants Review Board consists of members of NRCS leadership including--the Deputy Chief for Programs (Chair), the Deputy Chief for Soil Science and Resource Assessment, the Deputy Chief for Science & Technology, the Deputy Chief for Strategic Planning and Accountability, one Regional Conservationist, one State Conservationist, and the Director of the Outreach and Partnerships Division.

- The NRCS Chief makes the final award selections based on the recommendations of the State Conservationists, Peer Panels, and the Grants Review Board.

### **C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates**

NRCS anticipates announcing CIG selections through a USDA press release no later than November 2019. Applicants should plan their projects based on a project start date of January 1, 2020.

## **VI. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION**

### **A. Federal Award Notices**

#### **Successful Applicants**

A successful applicant can expect to receive official notification by email. Awardees may not begin their project until a fully executed grant agreement has been signed by both NRCS and the awardee. The notice of federal award form (NRCS-ADS-093) signed by the authorized agency official is the only authorizing document, and will be provided electronically to the applicant's authorized official. Any pre-award costs incurred by the awardee will not be reimbursed.

#### **Unsuccessful Applicants**

Applicants whose proposals are not selected for funding will receive feedback on their proposal. This evaluation will be emailed to the technical and administrative contacts listed in the proposal within 90 days of the announcement of CIG selections. Please do not contact NRCS requesting an evaluation prior to the end of this 90-day period.

### **B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

All project funds will be used in accordance with 2 CFR 200 and NRCS' *General Terms And Conditions Grants And Cooperative Agreements*. A copy of the *General Terms And Conditions Grants And Cooperative Agreements* document may be obtained by contacting the Agency Contacts listed in [Section VII](#) below.

#### **Patents, Inventions, and Copyrights**

Allocation of rights to patents, inventions, and copyrights shall be in accordance with [2 CFR Part 200](#). This regulation provides that small businesses normally may retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA support. In accordance with 2 CFR Part 200, this provision will also apply to commercial organizations for the purposes of CIG. USDA receives a royalty-free license for federal use, reserves the right to require the patentee to license others in certain circumstances, and requires that anyone exclusively licensed to sell the

invention in the United States must normally manufacture it domestically. With regard to copyright, the grant recipient may copyright any work that is subject to copyright and was developed, or for which ownership was acquired, under an award. USDA reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable right to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use the work for federal purposes and to authorize others to do so.

All tools produced must meet the accessibility of Electronic and Information Technology (EIT) requirements as specified in Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794d) as amended by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-220). Specifically, subsection 508(a)(1) requires that when the federal government procures EIT, it must allow federal employees and individuals of the public with disabilities comparable access to and use of information and data that is provided to federal employees and individuals of the public without disabilities. All EIT that is subject to the 36 CFR 1194 standards will have a Section 508 acceptance test and will be validated upon acceptance. All maintenance for EIT that requires upgrades, modifications, installations, and purchases will adhere to the Section 508 standards and 36 CFR 1194. [Contact the CIG program contact](#) with specific questions with regard to the applicability of this section.

### **C. Reporting**

Reporting details are included in the fully executed grant agreement. Reporting will generally include electronic submission of semiannual progress reports, annual financial status reports, and final reports.

Because the Federal share of an award made under this announcement may include more than \$500,000 over the period of performance, potential applicants should review the post award reporting requirements reflected in 2 CFR 200 Appendix XII—Award Term and Condition for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters.

## **VII. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT:**

Potential applicants may contact NRCS with questions. The email address below is accessed by multiple people, so someone will respond even if others are unexpectedly absent during critical periods.

Email: [nrcsig@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:nrcsig@wdc.usda.gov)

USDA-NRCS  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Room 5242  
Washington, DC 20250

## **VIII. OTHER INFORMATION**

### **A. Freedom of Information and Privacy Act**

CIG proposals are considered to be confidential information. Proposals are not shared with individuals or entities seeking public disclosure through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) without the consent of the applicant. More specifically, Executive Order 12600 and USDA FOIA regulation 7 CFR Part 1, Subpart A require the NRCS to provide notice to applicants that a third party has requested copies of their business information, and requires NRCS and to consult with applicants regarding the releasability of their records.

### **B. State Component**

The USDA NRCS CIG program has two components – the National Competition and State Competitions. This announcement is for the National Competition component. Visit individual NRCS State websites for more information about CIG State competitions.

### **C. Notice to Applicants**

The Federal Government is not obligated to make any Federal award as a result of this announcement. Only authorized federal officials can bind the Federal Government to the expenditure of funds.

### **U.S. Department of Agriculture Non-Discrimination Statement**

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at <https://www.ascr.usda.gov/filing-program-discrimination-complaint-usda-customer> and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call

(866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

1400 Independence Avenue, SW

Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or

(3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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