

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA)

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Arkansas State Office

ACTION: NOTICE

Accepting applications to assist NRCS Arkansas with enhanced or accelerated implementation of the key conservation objectives described in section I B.

SUMMARY: The NRCS - Arkansas State Office, an agency under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is seeking support from and opportunities to partner with likeminded natural resource conservation partners. The overall intent of this solicitation is to solicit partnerships to help enhance the implementation of key conservation objectives and priorities outlined further in this document.

Proposals will be accepted from Arkansas. NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2017 will be approximately \$4,000,000. Proposals are requested from eligible governmental or non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher learning for competitive consideration of grant awards for projects between one and three years in duration.

This notice identifies the objectives, eligibility criteria, and application instructions. Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete and/or noncompliant applications will be eliminated from competition and notification of elimination will be sent to the applicant. The Arkansas State Conservationist reserves the right not to fund any or all applications. NRCS will accept applications under this notice for single or multiyear applications submitted by eligible entities.

DATES: Applications must be received by NRCS by **4:00 p.m. CST, April 28, 2017.**

ADDRESSES: Applications sent via express mail, overnight courier service, or the United States Postal Service must be sent to the following address: USDA-NRCS, Amanda Mathis, Room 3416, Federal Building, 700 West Capitol Avenue, Little Rock, Arkansas 72201. Applications sent electronically must be sent through www.grants.gov or to amanda.mathis@ar.usda.gov with a copy to Karen.thompson2@ar.usda.gov.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Program Contact

Amanda J. Mathis
Assistant State Conservationist- Partnership Coordinator
Room 3416, Federal Building
700 West Capitol Avenue
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201
Office: 501-301-3162
Email: amanda.mathis@ar.usda.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Public Law 110-246; Food Security Act of 1985, Title XII, Part Subtitle D, Section 1237, Public Law 99-198, 16 U.S.C 3831-3835a. Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, Public Law 74-76, N/A Stat. N/A, 16 U.S.C 590 a-f. Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Section 2602, Public Law 110-246; Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Section 2502, Public Law 107-171; Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, Section 387, Public Law 104-127, 110 Stat. 888, 16 U.S.C 3836a. Subtitle I of Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 as amended by section 2401 of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

CFDA 10.069 – Conservation Reserve Program (CRP): Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, Section 1231, 16 U.S.C 3831-3835a.

CFDA 10.902 – Soil and Water Conservation (CTA): Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, Public Law 74-76, N/A Stat. N/A, 16 U.S.C 590 a-f.

CFDA 10.912 – Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): This program is authorized by Chapter 4 of Subtitle D of Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 USC 3839aa--3839aa-8), effective February 7, 2014., Executive Order Executive Order , Title XII, Part Subtitle D, Public Law 99- 198, 16 U.S.C 3830.

CFDA 10.924 – Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) - Food Security Act of 1985, Public Law 106-224, NA Stat. NA, 16 U.S.C 3838h.

CFDA 10.931 – Agriculture Conservation Easement Program – (ACEP-ALE/WRE): Food Security Act of 1985, Title XII, Part Subtitle D, Section 1237, Public Law 99-198.

B. Overview

The purpose of this announcement is to advertise opportunities to parties who are interested in partnering with NRCS to provide technical services to address the key conservation objectives and focus areas described below. NRCS will accept applications under this notice for single or multiyear applications submitted by eligible entities based in or with substantial operations in Arkansas.

Conservation partners are invited to apply for NRCS assistance with the following key conservation objectives:

1. Projects that provide technical services related to any of the following Arkansas state resource priorities:
 - Water Quantity
 - Water Quality
 - Plant Health
 - Soil Health

Wildlife
Energy

Emphasis will be placed on projects that achieve any of the following:

1. Enhance producer access to technical assistance to address critical conservation needs.
2. Create urban gardening projects that develop urban properties into vegetable production sites.
3. Advance implementation/adoption of irrigation water management techniques.
4. Quantify and/or validate and/or disseminate effects of implemented conservation projects on a geographic or watershed scale.
5. Implement strategies to communicate the value of working lands conservation.
6. Result in completion of natural stream stabilization designs.
7. Advance implementation of components of the Arkansas State Water Plan.
8. Result in completion of land use specific/advanced natural resource plans (i.e. Forestry Management Plans, Highly Erodible Land Conservation Plans, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans and etc.).
9. Leverage non-Federal resources to achieve positive natural resources conservation outcomes.

II. FUNDING AVAILABILITY

The NRCS anticipates that the amount of funding available for this announcement will be approximately **\$4,000,000** in FY2017. Selected recipients will be notified by email. All awards are subject to the availability of funds appropriated by Congress. Awards may include,

- Contribution Agreements with 50 percent contribution from each party, or
- Cooperative Agreements without contribution of funds but where significant NRCS involvement is desired/needed.

In the event cooperative awards are made there will be substantial involvement on the part of the NRCS. This would include NRCS collaboration or participation, or close NRCS oversight and control. This could include:

- a. Authority to suspend work if specifications or work statements are not met;
- b. Review and approval of one stage of work before another may begin;
- c. Review and approval of substantive provisions of proposed sub-grants or contracts beyond existing Federal policy;
- d. NRCS and recipient collaboration or joint participation;
- e. Project monitoring to permit specified kinds of direction or redirection of the work because of interrelationships with and impacts on other projects;
- f. Highly prescriptive NRCS requirements that limit recipient discretion;
- g. Review and approval of key personnel; or
- h. Direct NRCS operational involvement or participation during the activity.

Subject to the availability of funds, the resulting agreements are expected to fund single and multi-year projects, not to exceed three years. Applicants should submit budget applications that fully describe funding requests. Multiyear applications also must be shown completely on page 2, Section D of Standard Form (SF) 424A portion of the application. Subject to the availability of funds, extensions may be granted by unilateral decision of the Government.

III. SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. How to Obtain Materials

The announcement for this funding opportunity can be found on [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). All standard forms necessary for application submission are posted on the following Web sites:

1. [Grants.gov – Forms Repository](https://www.grants.gov)
2. http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/grants_forms.html

B. Applicant eligibility

Applicants must be federally recognized as an Indian Tribe, State or local unit of government, Community Based Organizations, College and/or University, non-governmental organization, or non-profit organization, each capable of providing support in the State of Arkansas.

C. Matching Funds Requirements

There is no designated match requirement for these agreements. However, proposals will be evaluated in part on the relative contribution of non-Federal resources to the project. Non-Federal funds may be derived from any combination of cash, non-cash and in-kind sources. Proposals claiming matching funds must ensure funds are secured at time of application. Proposals must include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties. Additional information about matching funds can be found at 2 CFR 200.

D. Applying for assistance – Content and format

Applications must contain the content, format, and information set forth below to receive consideration for funding. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project/workshop described in their application. Applicants must submit only one original copy of the application in the following format:

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

Applications must include all required forms and narrative sections described below. Incomplete and/or noncompliant applications will not be considered.

1. **Application Form:** (SF 424 Application for Federal Assistance) Applicants must use this document as the cover sheet for each application. SF 424 can be downloaded from [Grants.gov - Forms Repository](https://www.grants.gov).

2. **Proposal Summary:** [Three (3)-page maximum] Applicants must submit a description including the information below:
 - a. Project title;
 - b. Primary area that application pertains to as described in Section 1, Part B of this announcement;
 - c. Project director/contact name, and contact information (including address, email, and telephone number);
 - d. Names and affiliations of application collaborators;
 - e. Project objectives (purpose and goals);
 - f. Project geographic area/location (where application activities will take place);
 - g. Project proposed activities; and
 - h. Project deliverables and benefits.
3. **Proposal Description:** [Ten (10)-page *maximum*] The description must include the following information:
 - a. Proposal background: Describe the issue or problem. Include the geographic area and those who will be affected and benefit from this project proposal.
 - b. Project objectives and methods: Be specific using qualitative and quantitative measures, if possible, to describe the project's purpose and goals.
 - c. Project action plan and timeline: Provide a table listing project actions, timeframes, and associated milestones through project completion. Anticipated start date after June 1, 2017 but subject change. Timeline should be flexible.
 - d. Project Management: Give a detailed description of how the project will be organized and managed. Include a list of key project personnel, their relevant experience, and their anticipated contributions to the project. Identify who will participate in monitoring and evaluating the project.
 - e. Project deliverables/products: Provide a list of specific deliverables and products that will allow NRCS to monitor progress and make payment. In addition to proposal-specific deliverables, selected applicants will be required to provide the following:
 - 1) Semi-annual or annual progress reports;
 - 2) Supplemental narratives or brief updates that indicate progress that explain and support payment requests; and
 - 3) A final report.
4. **Budget Information:** [Four (4)-page maximum.] The budget portion of the proposal consists of the two parts described below:
 - a. SF 424A Budget Information- Non-Construction Programs: Fill in all spaces as appropriate. Section B, Item 6, column 1 should reflect the NRCS funds and Column 2 should reflect the applicant's matching funds. This form is the summary budget for the project. If there is a desire for the applicant to reach a long term partnership through this announcement, please indicate this using the SF 424A to indicate multi-year funding needs.
 - b. Detailed Budget Narrative: Provide a detailed narrative in support of the form SF 424 budget for the project for the overall proposal period. Applicants must prepare this document to identify budget needs. Explain how budget items are essential to

achieving project objectives. Show all funding sources and itemized costs by the following line items on the budget form; personnel costs should include documentation supporting hourly rates. Equipment, supplies and materials need to be itemized with pricing data. If proposed activities will extend past a 12 month period of performance, make sure to identify the funds needed for each funding year period by completing all sections of the SF 424a. Fill in all spaces as appropriate. Section B, Item 6, Column 1 should reflect the NRCS funds and Column 2 should reflect the applicant's matching funds. The budget narrative should support the Federal funds requested and the applicant's matching funds (if applicable). The breakdown of the Federal share and matching funds should be shown separately as in the SF 424A, not combined.

Note: For further instructions on filling out the SF 424A Budget information, go to the following link:

<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/form-instructions/sf-424a-instructions.html>

5. **Indirect Costs:** Applicants wishing to claim indirect costs must have a federally approved indirect cost rate. The approved indirect cost rate must be included in the proposal package to include the following:
 - a. Applicant's written policy for allocating and identifying direct and indirect costs;
 - b. The contact information of the person who prepared application;
 - c. Line item expenditure descriptions describing how the costs are being allocated between direct and indirect costs;
 - d. Applicant's tax identification number; and
 - e. Signed certification attesting that (i) all costs in application are allowable under the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) cost principles; (ii) costs treated as indirect have not been claimed as direct; (iii) similar types of costs have been accounted for consistently; and (iv) the applicant will notify the Federal Government of any account changed that would affect the rate. This certification should be signed by the applicant's approving official or the applicant's chief financial officer.
 - f. The Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, Section 708, limits indirect costs under cooperative agreements between USDA and non-profit institutions, including institutions of higher education, to ten percent of the total direct costs of the agreement. Section 708 authorizes an exception to the 10 percent limit for institutions that compute indirect cost rates on similar basis for all agencies for which the Act makes appropriations. If requested, indirect costs must be justified and may not exceed the ten percent limitation or the current rate negotiated with the cognizant Federal-negotiating agency. Applications from colleges and universities must provide a statement in the budget narrative verifying that the indirect costs requested are in accordance with institutional policies.

6. **Certifications:** All applications must include the document: SF 424B - Assurances, Non-construction Programs. Applicant, by signing and submitting this application, assure and certify that they are in compliance with the following CFR:
 - a. 2 CFR Part 417, Non-Procurement Debarment and Suspension

- b. 2 CFR Part 418, New Restrictions on Lobbying
 - c. 2 CFR Part 421, Requirements for Drug Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)
7. **Required Forms:** The following forms (referenced in above sections) are required:
- a. SF 424 Application for Federal Assistance
 - b. SF 424A Budget Information – Non-construction Programs
 - c. SF 424B Assurances – Non-construction Programs

These can be obtained from the issuing officer or the web sites listed below:

[Grants.gov – Forms Repository](http://www.grants.gov)

http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/grants_forms.html

8. **Additional Pre-award Requirements:** The following items must be obtained prior to entering into an agreement with the Federal Government but do not need to be provided with the application. Applicants are encouraged to apply early for their Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS)/System for Award Management (SAM) number.
- a. **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. 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. Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.
 - b. **SAM:** Official U.S. Government system that consolidated the capabilities of Central Contract Registration/Federal Register, Online Registrations and Certifications Application, and Excluded Parties List System. To register, go to: <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>. Please allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the SAM registration.

E. How to Submit an Application

Applications sent via express mail, overnight courier service, or the United States Postal Service must be sent to the following address: USDA-NRCS, Amanda Mathis, Room 3416, Federal Building, 700 West Capitol Avenue, Little Rock, Arkansas 72201. If you choose to submit your application electronically, visit www.grants.gov/apply and follow the instructions. Applicants may submit their application electronically via grants.gov or email: amanda.mathis@ar.usda.gov with a copy to karen.thompson2@ar.usda.gov. All applications, regardless of how they are submitted, must be received by NRCS **by 4:00p.m. CST on April 28, 2017.**

Note: NRCS is not responsible for any technical malfunctions or Web site problems related to Grants.gov or emailed submissions. Applicants should begin the Grants.gov process or send their email in advance of the submission deadline to avoid problems.

F. Due Date

Applications must be received **no later than 4:00 p.m. CST, April 28, 2017**. The applicant assumes the risk of delays in application delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed applications early via email to ensure timely receipt by NRCS.

G. Acknowledgement of Submission

NRCS will acknowledge receipt of timely applications via email. An applicant who does not receive such an email acknowledgement within 30 days of their submission, but believes he/she submitted a timely application must contact the NRCS program contact below within 30 days of submission deadline. Failure to do so will result in the application not being considered.

H. Withdrawal

Applications may be withdrawn by written notice at any time before selections are made. Applications may be withdrawn by the applicant, or by an authorized representative.

I. Funding Restrictions

The funds granted through this announcement may not be used to pay any of the following costs unless otherwise permitted by law, or approved in writing via the funding instrument 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;
3. Costs which lie 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. Questions regarding the allowances of particular items of cost should be directed to the administrative contact person listed on Part VI.

OMB Circulars will be incorporated by reference and made a part of each agreement awarded under this process. Applicants should refer to OMB Circulars and Cost Principles for additional guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

IV. APPLICATION REVIEW AND NOTIFICATION INFORMATION

A. Review and Selection Process

Initially, all application packages will be reviewed to confirm that applicants are eligible recipients. Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Applications will be evaluated against the specific objectives identified in the opportunity titles identified above. Business evaluations are performed by the grants and

agreements or contract specialist. Technical reviews are performed by the program manager. Failure to identify the specific opportunity title may result in a determination of ineligibility. NRCS staff will evaluate complete proposals based on the Special Award Selection Factors below (120 points possible).

B. Special Award Selection Factors

1. (0 to 10 points) The extent to which the proposal supports one or more of these conservation objectives:
Projects that promote/enhance/foster implementation of the following state resource priorities:
 - Water Quantity
 - Water Quality
 - Plant Health
 - Soil Health
 - Wildlife
 - Energy
2. (0 to 20 points) The extent which the proposal places emphasis to achieve any of the following:
 - Enhance producer access to technical assistance to address critical conservation needs.
 - Create urban gardening projects that develop urban properties into vegetable production sites.
 - Advance implementation/adoption of irrigation water management techniques.
 - Quantify and/or validate and/or disseminate effects of implemented conservation projects on a geographic or watershed scale.
 - Implement strategies to communicate the value of working lands conservation.
 - Result in completion of natural stream stabilization designs.
 - Advance implementation of components of the State Water Plan.
 - Result in completion of land use specific/advanced natural resource plans (i.e. Forestry Management Plans, Highly Erodible Land Conservation Plans, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans and etc.).
 - Leverage non-Federal and non-government resources to achieve positive natural resources conservation outcomes.
3. (0 to 15 points) Partner match contribution.
4. (0 to 10 points) Evidence in the proposal that the design and implementation of project is based on sound methodology and demonstrated technology.
5. (0 to 10 points) Measurability of project outcomes.
6. (0 to 10 points) Potential for successful completion.
7. (0 to 10 points) Project timeline and milestones are clear and reasonable.
8. (0 to 15 points) Project staff has technical expertise needed.
9. (0 to 10 points) Budget is adequately explained and justified.
10. (0 to 10 points) Project benefits to Historically Underserved Producers, Veteran Farmers or Ranchers or community based organizations comprised of or representing these entities.

11. (-5 to 0 points) If equipment or structural components are contained in the proposal they are ancillary to technical and management assistance.
12. (-15 to 0 points) The extent to which the project is dependent upon NRCS field staff inputs (engineering assistance, etc.) for its completion.

C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Applicants will be notified of their award status within approximately 30 days from the deadline date. Applicants who have been selected for funding will receive a letter of official notification. Award dates will be determined by the availability of funds and NRCS workloads. Proposals should have flexible start dates with timelines shown relative to the execution of a grant agreement.

D. Unsuccessful Applications

Applicants whose applications are not selected for funding will be notified of their status within 30 days of the announcement of selections.

V. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Award Notification

Applicants who have been selected for funding will receive official notification from the USDA NRCS Arkansas State Office. However, all selections are contingent upon successful completion of the technical review process and financial review. The official notice will also indicate the need to work with the administrative contact to develop an agreement (under Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977) prior to starting work on the application.

Note: Appropriations Restrictions: Awards made under this solicitation are subject to the provisions contained in the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2012 (P.L. No. 112-55), Division A, Sections 738 and 739, regarding corporate felony convictions and corporate Federal tax delinquencies.

B. Freedom of Information and Privacy Act

Applicants should be aware that some or all of the information submitted in their application may be subject to public disclosure through the Freedom of Information Act. Applicants are advised to mark confidential information, such as proprietary information, to prevent disclosure.

C. Other Requirements

Selected applicants will be required to comply with the NRCS-USDA General Terms and Conditions for Grants and Cooperative Agreements. A copy of this document may be obtained by contacting the Agency Contacts listed in Section VI.

VI. AGENCY CONTACTS

Program Contact

Amanda J. Mathis
Assistant State Conservationist-
Partnership Coordinator
Room 3416, Federal Building
700 West Capitol Avenue
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201
Office: 501-301-3162
Amanda.mathis@ar.usda.gov

Administrative Contact

Karen Thompson
Secretary
Room 3416, Federal Building
700 West Capitol Avenue
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201
Office: 501-301-3137
karen.thompson2@ar.usda.gov

Signed this 24TH day of February in Little Rock, Arkansas

 ACTING STC.

 Michael E. Sullivan
Arkansas State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service

VII. OTHER INFORMATION

The USDA prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)

To file a complaint of discrimination, complete, sign and mail the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form \(PDF\)](#), found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at:

USDA
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410

Or by email at program.intake@usda.gov.

Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities and you wish to file either an EEO or program complaint please contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339 or (800) 845-6136 (in Spanish).

Persons with disabilities who wish to file a program complaint, please see information above on how to contact us by mail directly or by email. If you require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) please contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

[Equal Employment Opportunity Data Posted Pursuant to the No Fear Act -](#)

This is the reporting page for the Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002 (NO FEAR Act), Public Law 107-174.