Federal Awarding Agency Name: DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE-
AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service; Commodity Credit Corporation

Funding Opportunity Title: Conservation Collaboration Grants or Agreements Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Announcement for Program Funding – MINNESOTA, NEBRASKA, NORTH DAKOTA, SOUTH DAKOTA, and WISCONSIN

Initial Announcement

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NRCS-Multi-State-Central-CCG-001

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number:
10.902 Conservation Technical Assistance
10.912 Environmental Quality Incentives Program
10.924 Conservation Stewardship Program
10.931 Agricultural Conservation Enhancement Program
10.069 Conservation Reserve Program

SUMMARY:

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is announcing potential availability of grants and agreements for the purpose of leveraging NRCS resources, addressing local natural resource issues, encouraging collaboration and developing state- and community-level conservation leadership. Proposals will be accepted for projects located in the following states: Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2018 will be:

STATE	ESTIMATED TOTAL AVAILABLE BY STATE	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	ANTICIPATED # of GRANTS/AGREEMENTS
Minnesota	$4,000,000	$25,000	$1,000,000	18
Nebraska	$1,000,000	$20,000	$1,000,000	10
North Dakota	$4,000,000	$10,000	$1,500,000	15
South Dakota	$4,800,000	$20,000	$1,000,000	20
Wisconsin	$2,500,000	$100,000	$2,500,000	10

Proposals are requested from Federally recognized tribal governments, State and local units of government, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher learning for competitive consideration of grant or agreement awards for projects between 1 and 3 years in duration.

This notice identifies the objectives, eligibility criteria, and application instructions for projects. Proposals will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete and/or noncompliant proposals will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be sent to the applicant.

DATES:

Proposals must be received by 5:00 pm Eastern Standard Time on April 13, 2018. Proposals in the possession of NRCS will be scored as they are received and, if eligible, added to a ranking list of projects for funding consideration throughout FY 2018. Funding decisions will be made by the respective NRCS State Conservationist, informed by the ranking list and the availability of funding in the programs whose CFDA numbers are listed above.

SUBMISSIONS:
A complete application must be submitted to the email address below for the respective state of the project location.

Nebraska
NRCSNEBProposals@nrcs.usda.gov

North Dakota
jill.howard@nd.usda.gov with a carbon copy to lisa.lund@nd.usda.gov

Minnesota
MN.NRCS.CCGA@nrcs.usda.gov

South Dakota
sd.nrcs.proposals@nrcs.usda.gov

Wisconsin
WI.NRCS.Technical@wi.usda.gov

Please note that the grants.gov requires use of the Workspace feature to fill out Standard Forms.
Please allow extra time to register in the new Workspace. An overview of Workspace can be viewed at grants.gov (WEBINAR - Getting Started with Workspace: Become a Workspace Wizard).

You can download individual PDF forms in Workspace. The individual PDF forms can be downloaded and saved to your local device storage, network drive(s), or external drives, then accessed through Adobe Reader.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication (e.g., Braille, large print, audio tape) should contact the USDA TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

PROPOSAL FORMAT:
Proposals over seven (7) pages, not including letters of support and federally required forms, will be rejected. Proposals must be New Times Roman, 12 font, and be single spaced. Proposals must be divided into the following sections:

- **I.** Summary: 250 words maximum (1/2 page)
- **II.** Introduction: One (1) page maximum
- **III.** Needs Assessment: One (1) page maximum
- **IV.** Program Objectives: One (1) page maximum
- **V.** Methodology: Two (2) page maximum
- **VI.** Budget: One (1) page maximum
- **VII.** Evaluation: 250 words maximum (1/2 page)

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT THE RESPECTIVE STATE'S EMPLOYEE(s):

MINNESOTA
Jennifer Sweeney, Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy
Phone: (651) 602-7930
E-mail: jennifer.sweeney@mn.usda.gov

Ryan Galbreath, State Resource Conservationist
Phone: (651) 602-7879
E-mail: ryan.galbreath@mn.usda.gov

NEBRASKA
Julie Crew, Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy
Phone: (402) 437-4131
E-mail: julie.crew@ne.usda.gov

NORTH DAKOTA
Jill Howard, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships
Phone: (701) 530-2073
E-mail: jill.howard@nd.usda.gov

SOUTH DAKOTA
Denise Gauer, Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy
Phone: (605) 352-1243
E-mail: denise.gauer@sd.usda.gov

WISCONSIN
Eric Allness, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives
Phone: (608) 662-4422, Ext 246
E-mail: eric.allness@wi.usda.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

Agricultural Conservation Enhancement Program: Food Security Act of 1985, Title XII, Part Subtitle D, Section 1237, Public Law 99-198, as amended by Agricultural Act of 2014, Title II, Part Subtitle D, Section 2301, Public Law 113-79, 128 Stat. 731 -744, 16 U.S.C 3865 - 3865d (CFDA No. 10.931).

Conservation Reserve Program: 16 U.S.C. 3831-3836, 7 CFR 704, 7 CFR 1410; Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, P.L.107-171 (CFDA No. 10.069).

Conservation Stewardship Program: 16 U.S.C. Section 3838 (CFDA No. 10.924).

Conservation Technical Assistance: 16 U.S.C. 590a-590f, 590q, 7 CFR part 610 (CFDA No. 10.902)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program: Federal Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, P.L. 104-127, as amended; Food Security Act of 1985, Subtitle D, Title XII, 16 U.S.C. 3830 et seq.; Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, P.L. 107-171 (CFDA No. 10.912)

B. Overview

The purpose of Conservation Collaboration Grants or Agreements is to leverage NRCS and partner resources to:

1. Improve soil health.
2. Improve water quality.
3. Provide habitat for local wildlife species of concern.
4. Improve the environmental and economic performance of working agricultural lands.
5. Assist communities and groups to build and strengthen local food projects that provide healthy food and economic opportunities.

Emphasis will be placed on projects that:

1. Build technical capacity to implement Farm Bill Conservation Programs.
2. Build technical capacity of NRCS and partner field conservation employees.
3. Build the capacity of local partners to develop and implement effective projects.
4. Leverage non-Federal and non-government resources to achieve positive natural resources conservation outcomes.

NRCS will accept proposals under this notice for single or multiyear projects, not to exceed three years, with the work to be performed in the state funding the proposal. Eligible entities include Federally recognized tribal governments, State and local units of government, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher learning.

Proposals will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete and/or noncompliant proposals will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be sent to the applicant. Complete proposals received by applicable deadlines will be evaluated based on the IV. SUBMISSION INFORMATION FOR PROPOSALS**,** (B) (Content and Format). Evaluated proposals will be forwarded to the NRCS State Conservationist who will make the final selections.

II. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2018 varies by state as identified below, although the availability and composition of available funds has not yet been determined.

STATE	ESTIMATED TOTAL AVAILABLE BY STATE	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	ANTICIPATED # of GRANTS/AGREEMENTS
Minnesota	$4,000,000	$25,000	$1,000,000	18
Nebraska	$1,000,000	$20,000	$1,000,000	10
North Dakota	$4,000,000	$10,000	$1,500,000	15
South Dakota	$4,800,000	$20,000	$1,000,000	20
Wisconsin	$2,500,000	$100,000	$2,500,000	10

Conservation Collaboration Grants /Agreements are expected to fund single and multi-year projects, not to exceed 3 years.

Cooperative awards may be used to administer funds. 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.

III. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

A. Applicant Eligibility

Applicants must be a Federally recognized tribal governments, State and local units of government, non-governmental organizations, or institution of higher learning. Applicants for renewal or supplementation of existing projects are eligible to compete with applications for new Federal awards. NFEs may submit more than one application as long as the proposals are for different projects. NFEs may receive more than one award.

- In addition to the listed Eligible Applicants (III – A Applicant Eligibility) MINNESOTA will be accepting proposals from for profit business. There is a restriction in the funding for ACEP, for profit businesses are eligible to submit bids for ACEP-WRE projects, such as Easement Monitoring. Funding restrictions limit the use of ACEP-ALE for land acquisitions preventing for profit business from receiving ACEP-ALE funding.

B. Project Eligibility

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..

C. Matching Funds Requirements

There is a no match requirement for these grants/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.

Matching funds must be 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. Grant Administration

Funds will be awarded through grant or cooperative agreement whichever is deemed appropriate for the project.

E. Activities Limitation and Implementation

Activities supported through these grants or agreements will be limited to those which are within authorities of contributing programs administered by the NRCS.

IV. SUBMISSION INFORMATION FOR PROPOSALS

There is no pre-proposal process for this announcement. All standard forms necessary for submission are posted on the following Web site: Grants.gov - Forms Repository.

A. How to Obtain Materials

The announcement for this funding opportunity can be found on the following web sites: www.grants.gov and state NRCS websites.

B. Content and Format

Proposals 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 described in their application. All federally required forms and letters of support must be submitted at the time of application.

Applicants must submit only one original copy of the application in the following format.

Proposals must be divided into the following sections and are limited to the number of pages stated per section:

I. Summary: 250 words maximum (1/2 page)
II. Introduction: One (1) page maximum
III. Needs Assessment: One (1) page maximum
IV. Program Objectives: One (1) page maximum
V. Methods: Two (2) page maximum plus Deliverables Table
VI. Budget: One (1) page maximum
VII. Evaluation: 250 words maximum (1/2 page)

Each page must be on numbered 8½" x 11" white paper that has one-inch margins. The text of the application must be typed in New Times Roman, no smaller than 12 font, and be single spaced.

Proposals that fail to comply with the required content and format will not be considered for funding. **Material exceeding stated page limits and/or formatting structure will not be considered**. Proposals must include all required forms and narrative sections described below. Incomplete and/or noncompliant proposals will not be considered.

FORMS

The following forms must be submitted at the time of application. All forms are included as part of the application package posted on Grants.gov. Forms must be signed and dated. All forms can be downloaded from the Grants.gov - Forms Repository.

1. **Proposals**: Applicants must ensure the proposal is divided in the seven sections and adheres to the Proposal requirements identified below.

2. **Standard Form (SF) 424 Application for Federal Assistance** (Standard Form 424): Applicants must use this document as the cover sheet for each proposal.

3. **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.

4. **SF 424B - Assurances, Non-construction Programs:** Applicants, by signing and submitting an application, assure and certify that they are in compliance with the following Federal regulations:

   a. 2 CFR Part 417, Government wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-procurement)
   b. 7 CFR Part 3018, New Restrictions on Lobbying
   c. 2 CFR Part 421, Government wide Requirements for Drug Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)

5. **AD-3031 Assurances Regarding Felony Conviction or Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants**: The authority for requesting the following information for USDA agencies and offices is in sections 745 and 746 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Pub. L. 114-113, as amended and/or subsequently enacted. The information will be used to document compliance with appropriations restrictions.

5. **GASB 061416 Certification Regarding Lobbying**: The applicant certifies no Federal appropriated funds have been used for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee in connection with awarding of any Federal contract or grant.

PROPOSAL

I. **Project Summary**: *(First page of grant application. 1/2 page maximum.)* A good summary will provide a frame of reference for the reviewer as they begin the review process. It should be clear, concise, and interesting. The summary should be one to three paragraphs long and include the Project Title. The summary should include one or two sentences about each of the following: the applicant organization, the need motivating the request as defined in Section I.B. the project start and end dates, the measurable outcomes and methodology, other organizations that will be involved, and the project total cost, funds already obtained, and the amount requested in this proposal.

II. **Introduction:** (Letters of Support, federally required forms, and one (1) page narrative maximum.) This section should introduce your organization to the reviewer and lend credibility to your organization's ability to successfully manage a federal agreement. The response should be succinct, offer a good balance between quantitative and qualitative information, and be free of unnecessary verbiage. It should include a brief history of the organization, including its mission statement and goals, important past events or accomplishments, a description of your clientele, including demographic information, organizational funding sources. Describe your history of successfully managing these federal and non-federal agreements, including meeting and complying with reporting requirements, submitting final acceptable technical reports, and reporting on progress made in achieving the results under those agreements

III. **Needs Assessment:** (One (1)-page maximum.) The problem statement, or needs assessment, is critical to the success of your application. It is the justification for your proposal and should focus on the condition that your proposal will address. Use care to ensure your proposal make no unsupported assumptions. Your Needs Assessment should demonstrate the tie-in to the organizational mission and goals, describe the issue or problem, and the history of, and need for, the proposed innovation, provide statistical and authoritarian evidence that clearly supports the need identified in the proposal and supports a high probability for success, and make a compelling case for the project funding based demonstrated client needs.

IV. **Program Objectives:** (One (1)-page maximum.) This section of the proposal should demonstrate project outcomes, not project activities. You should be using language that **supports** *increasing, decreasing or reducing* the problems identified in the needs assessment. Avoid including topics that pertain to *providing, establishing, or developing* a method to address the problem. Your objectives should include at least one objective for each problem identified in the Needs Assessment. Each objective must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and contain a timeline for completion. An example objective would be: *At the end of the 3-day workshop, 70% of participants will demonstrate at least a 30% increase or better in pre/post-test exams*. Be sure to describe how the outcomes will be measured.

Please note that underserved populations identified in this section as primary beneficiaries of the grant's outcomes, such as veterans, culturally specific populations, women, limited resource farmers/ranchers, socially disadvantaged, etc., will receive additional points during the ranking process. Explain how these entities will benefit.

V. **Methods**: (Deliverables Table plus two (2)-page narrative maximum.) Methods, activities and procedures explain to the reviewer the steps that will be taken to complete the objectives identified in the previous section. This section demands clarity and justification in describing how the objectives will be met. Use care to present a reasonable number of activities that can be completed within the grant period. Clearly describe the program client and the program activities, their sequence, and explain your reason for choosing this combination of activities. Provide a detailed description of how the project will be organized and managed. Include a list of key project personnel, their relevant education or experience, and their anticipated contributions to the project.

Explain the level of participation required in the project by government and non-government entities and identify who will participate in monitoring and evaluating the project.

Please note that demonstrating innovative methods will receive additional points during the ranking process.

VI. **Budget Information:** (SF-424Aand one (1)-page maximum narrative.) The budget portion of the application consists of the two parts described below. Careful planning of your budget will reduce the number of changes needed during the grant period. Miscellaneous expenses and equipment needs should be itemized. Provide a detailed narrative in support of the budget for the project, broken down by each project year. Discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed activities. The format of this information, which can be in a chart, spreadsheet, table, etc., should be readable in 8 ½" by 11" printable pages. The information needs to be presented in such a way that the evaluators and NRCS can readily understand what expenses will be incurred to support the project.

The breakdown of the Federal share and matching funds should be shown separately as in the SF-424A, not combined. Explain how budget items are essential to achieving project objectives. The budget narrative should support the Federal funds requested and the applicant's matching funds. See IV. B. Forms for additional information on the required budget forms.

a. Indirect Costs

(1) Non-profit organizations and universities awarded a cooperative agreement will be limited to a 10% indirect cost rate in accordance with Section 704 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act.

(2) To be eligible to recover any indirect cost under a Federal award, the NFE must either 1) have a current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA) with a Federal agency that has not expired or 2) qualify for use of the de minimis rate authorized by 2 CFR 200.414(f). In order to qualify for the de minimis rate, the NFE must have never had 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.

NFEs with a NICRA must calculate indirect costs using the rate and base specified in their NICRA. Costs from both the Federal and non-Federal shares are used. The resultant total amount of indirect costs is entered in Section B, Row J, of the SF-424A (Budget Information). A NFE 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 NFE may choose to apply any unrecovered indirect costs as part of their cost share or match. Unrecovered indirect cost means the difference between the amount charged to the Federal award and the amount which could have been charged to the Federal award under the NFE's approved negotiated indirect cost rate (2 CFR 200.306(c)). A copy

of the applicant's current NICRA must be provided with the application. If the NFE does not have a current NICRA, indirect costs may not be recovered under an expired NICRA.

NFEs that are eligible for the de minimus 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. Note, that MTDC excludes certain costs from the base to which the rate is applied. See the instructions for completing the SF-424A "Budget Information" form and budget narrative in section IV below for additional details. A copy of the applicant's de minimus rate agreement must be provided with the application. If an NFE 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. If selected for award, a de minimis rate agreement will be executed at the same time the grant agreement is. Applicants wishing to use the de minimis rate must submit a signed statement certifying that the entity 1) has never had a NICRA previously and 2) specifically request a de minimis rate agreement.

b. Matching**:** Proposals must include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from non-Federal third parties. The matching funds should align with the funding identified on the SF-424A.

Match

For third-party contributions, a separate letter of support is required for each contribution, signed by the authorized organizational representative of the contributing organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the contributor, (2) the name of the applicant organization, (3) the title of the project for which the contribution is made, (4) the dollar amount of the contribution, and (5) a statement that the contributor will pay the contribution during the grant period.

"In-kind" refers to non-cash contributions of goods or services made by third-party individuals or organizations to support projects. Examples of "in-kind" contributions include work done by unpaid volunteers and donations of supplies, facilities, or equipment. In-kind contributions must be necessary to accomplish program activities and verifiable.

The value of applicant contributions to the project will be established in accordance with the applicable cost principles. Applicants should refer to OMB Circulars and Cost Principles for additional guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

NOTE: NRCS may conduct reference checks to ensure that organizations identified are supportive and involved with the project.

VII. **Evaluation: (**One half (1/2)-page maximum.) This section should clarify your objectives, define the ease with which they can be measured, and clearly state the criteria

for how success will be measured using quantifiable methods. Your evaluation methods should determine the extent to which the program has achieved its stated objectives and the extent to which the objectives contributed to the program success. Further, your evaluation should determine whether the delivered program was consistent with the initial plan and identify which program activities individually contributed to the effectiveness of the program.

Additional Pre-award Requirements

Each applicant is required to: (i) Be registered in 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 or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency. NRCS may not make a Federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time 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.

a. 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. Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.

b. 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/. Please allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the SAM registration.

c. How to Submit an Application

Application packages must be submitted electronically to the e-mail addresses noted below for the respective state of the project location:

Nebraska
NRCSNEBProposals@nrcs.usda.gov

North Dakota
jill.howard@nd.usda.gov with a carbon copy to lisa.lund@nd.usda.gov

Minnesota
MN.NRCS.CCGA@nrcs.usda.gov

South Dakota
sd.nrcs.proposals@nrcs.usda.gov

Wisconsin
WI.NRCS.Technical@wi.usda.gov

You are encouraged to review the FAQ and naming convention guidelines prior to submitting your proposal. The grants.gov user guide is available at: http://www.grants.gov/help/html/help/index.htm#t=Get_Started%2FGet_Started.htm.

Please note that all applicable forms must contain a valid signature prior to submission.

C. Due Date

Proposals must be received by 5:00pm Eastern Standard Time on April 13, 2018. Proposals received after this time may not be reviewed or considered.

D. Acknowledgement of Submission

NRCS will acknowledge receipt of proposals via e-mail. An applicant who does not receive such an email acknowledgement within 15 days of their submission, but believes he/she submitted a timely proposal must contact the NRCS program contact within 30 business days of the submission deadline. Failure to do so will result in the proposal not being considered.

E. Withdrawal

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

F. Funding Restrictions

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;
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 Agency Contacts.

G. Patents, Inventions, and Copyrights

Allocation of rights to patents and inventions shall be in accordance with 2 CFR 200This 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 200, this provision will also apply to commercial organizations for the purposes of CIG. USDA receives a royalty-free license for Federal Government 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 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.

H. Natural Resources and Historic Property Review Requirements

1. The Council on Environmental Quality's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations at 40 CFR parts 1500 to 1508 and the NRCS regulation that implements NEPA at 7 CFR part 650 require that an environmental review be prepared for Federal actions that may have environmental effects. NRCS financial assistance requires compliance with these regulations. As part of the application packet, applicants are required to provide environmental information pertaining to their project if there will be actions with potential to affect the environment to help NRCS determine the appropriate documentation required to comply with NEPA and NRCS regulations. If the application is selected for funding, the NRCS Program Contact, Technical Contact and NRCS Environmental Liaison will coordinate with the selected applicant concerning documentation for compliance with NEPA. The selected applicant will be required to prepare and pay for the preparation of the appropriate NEPA document (e.g., Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement if required for NEPA compliance). Grant funding cannot be approved until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met.

2. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 and 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 yes, if they are adverse and how the effects may be addressed. This NHPA review and compliance in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA and implementing regulations at 36 CFR Part 800 must be completed by NRCS and may not be delegated. This compliance process includes consultation with SHPOs, Tribes, THPOs, NHOs, and the appropriate preservation community regarding identification, evaluation of NRHP eligibility, evaluation of effects, and if the effects are adverse, treatment. This treatment may include avoidance or other forms of mitigation of adverse effects. This mitigation will occur after the grant is awarded but before it is implemented.

IV. APPLICATION REVIEW AND NOTIFICATION INFORMATION

A. Review and Selection Process

Review

Proposals will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete, noncompliant, and/or proposals not meeting the formatting criteria will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be sent to the applicant. Complete proposals received by applicable deadlines will be evaluated based on the Proposal Evaluation Criteria identified in the instructions in Section IV. Evaluated proposals will be forwarded to the NRCS State Conservationist who will make the final selections.. NRCS staff will evaluate complete proposals based on these Proposal Evaluation Criteria (180 points possible):

I. SUMMARY (30 points)**:** The extent to which the summary clearly summarizes the request, is no longer than ½ page, and addresses the following criteria:

1. Identifies the grant applicant
2. Includes a statement on capability to implement the proposal
3. Includes a statement on problem addressed in the grant
4. Includes a statement on objectives
5. Includes a statement on methods
6. Includes the total cost, funds already obtained, and the amount requested in this proposal

II. INTRODUCTION (20 points)**:** The extent which the proposal describes the applicant's organization, is no longer than 1 page, and addresses the following criteria:

1. Describes the applicant's organizational purposes and goals
2. Describes the applicant's programs and activities
3. Provides evidence of the applicant's accomplishments and qualifications
4. Supports qualifications in the activity areas in which funds are sought (e.g.: research, training, etc.)
5. Describe the capacity to implement the proposal

III. NEEDS ASSESSMENT (25 points)**:** The extent which the proposal describes the need or problem to be solved, is no longer than 1 page, and addresses the following criteria:

1. Relates to purposes and goals of the applicant agency
2. Is of reasonable dimensions – not trying to solve all the problems of the world
3. Is developed with input from clients and beneficiaries
4. Makes no unsupportive assumptions
5. Makes a compelling case
6. Identify focal area(s) within the project area or priority criteria

IV. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES (25 points)**:** The extent which the proposal describes the outcomes and benefits of the grant in measurable terms, is no longer than 1 page, and addresses the following criteria:

1. At least one objective for each problem or need committed to in problem statement
2. Includes when and how outcomes will be measured
3. Describe the population that will benefit
4. Underserved communities will benefit from this project
5. Objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and contain a timeline for completion

V. METHODS (40 points)**:** The extent which the proposal describes the activities to be completed to achieve the desired objectives, is no longer than 2 pages, and addresses the following criteria:

1. Clearly describes program activities that constitute a solution
2. States reasons for selections of activities
3. Activities and outcomes are transferable to other organizations
4. Describes staffing of program and brief staff job descriptions
5. NRCS assistance is minimal for project success
6. Project methodology is innovative
7. Leverages private and/or public-sector partnerships
8. Presents a reasonable scope of activities that can be conducted within the budget, time and resources of the program

VI. BUDGET (25 points)**:** The extent which the proposal describes the cost required to achieve the desired objectives, including personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, in-kind contributions, indirect costs, and requested NRCS financial assistance, is no longer than 1 page, and addresses the following criteria:

1. Is detailed
2. Includes a narrative
3. Contains significant match in the form of cash, non-cash, or in-kind services from applicant and/or contributing organizations
4. Includes NRCS, partner, and other contributions
5. Reimbursement of Indirect Costs are 10% or less

6. Identify NRCS time and number of staff

VII. EVALUATION (15 points)**:** The extent which the proposal presents a plan for determining the degree to which objectives are meet and methods are followed is no longer than 1/2 page, and addresses the following criteria:

1. Presents a plan for evaluating accomplishments of objectives
2. Presents a plan for evaluating and modifying methods over the course of the program
3. Clearly states criteria of success – Describes how will success be measured
4. Define how progress will be reported and technical representative kept informed

B. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

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.

C. Unsuccessful Applicants

Applicants whose proposals do not meet the criteria listed above will be notified of their status within 30 days of the evaluation of their proposal. All other proposals that are not funded will be notified no later than August 31, 2018.

V. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Award Notification

Applicants who have been selected for funding will receive official notification from the respective NRCS State Office.

Notification for selection is not an authorization to begin performance. A Notice of Grant and Agreement Award signed by the respective State Conservationist provided to the selected recipient is the authorizing document to begin.

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 and739, regarding corporate felony convictions and corporate Federal tax delinquencies.

B. Reporting Requirements

Selected applicants will be required to submit a SF-425, Federal Financial Report to the NRCS administrative contact, no later than 30 days after the end of each quarter and 90 days after completion of project. In addition, every 6 months the selected

applicant must submit a written performance progress report to the NRCS program, technical, and administrative contacts. **NRCS will provide a template for the formatting that must be used in the report.** This report is distinct from the quarterly financial report described above. Each progress report shall cover work performed during the previous 6-month period and include, at a minimum:

- Summary of progress, including the results to date and a comparison of actual accomplishments with proposed goals (milestones) for the period and, where project output can be quantified, a computation of the costs per unit of output
- Current problems or unusual developments or delays
- Reasons why goals and objectives were not met, if appropriate
- Additional pertinent information including, where appropriate, analysis and explanation of cost overruns or high unit cost
- Any time extensions
- Any changes to the project's original objectives, methods, or timeline with a summary of the justification for the changes.
- Lessons learned that inform future project activities or broader efforts in the project's topic area.

The final report is due to the NRCS program, technical, and administrative contacts 90 days after completion of the project. This report is distinct from the performance progress reports described above. **NRCS will provide a template for the formatting that must be used in the Final report.** The final report will summarize the project and describe methods, quality control, findings, and recommendations.

C. Freedom of Information and Privacy Act

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

D. 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.

F. 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.

VI. AGENCY CONTACTS

MINNESOTA
Jennifer Sweeney, Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy
Phone: (651) 602-7930
E-mail: jennifer.sweeney@mn.usda.gov

Ryan Galbreath, State Resource Conservationist
Phone: (651) 602-7879
E-mail: ryan.galbreath@mn.usda.gov

NEBRASKA
Julie Crew, Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy
Phone: (402) 437-4131
E-mail: julie.crew@ne.usda.gov

NORTH DAKOTA
Jill Howard, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships
Phone: (701) 530-2073
E-mail: jill.howard@nd.usda.gov

SOUTH DAKOTA
Denise Gauer, Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy
Phone: (605) 352-1243
E-mail: denise.gauer@sd.usda.gov

WISCONSIN
Eric Allness, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives
Phone: (608) 662-4422, Ext 246
E-mail: eric.allness@wi.usda.gov

Signed this 7th day of February in St. Paul, Minnesota.

CURTIS ELKE Digitally signed by CURTIS ELKE
Date: 2018.02.07 16:27:38 -06'00'

CURTIS ELKE
Acting State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Signed this _____ day of _____ in Lincoln, Nebraska.

CRAIG DERICKSON Digitally signed by CRAIG DERICKSON
Date: 2018.02.14 06:59:38 -06'00'

CRAIG DERICKSON
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Signed this _____ day of _____ in Bismarck, North Dakota.

MARY PODOLL Digitally signed by MARY PODOLL
DN: c=US, o=U.S. Government, ou=Department of Agriculture, cn=MARY PODOLL, 0.9.2342.19200300.100.1.1=12001000696242
Date: 2018.02.07 16:31:07 -06'00'

MARY PODOLL
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Signed this _____ day of _____ in Huron, South Dakota.

JEFFREY ZIMPRICH Digitally signed by JEFFREY ZIMPRICH
Date: 2018.02.14 07:08:57 -06'00'

JEFFREY J ZIMPRICH
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Signed this _____ day of _____ in Madison, Wisconsin.

ANGELA BIGGS Digitally signed by ANGELA BIGGS
Date: 2018.02.13 14:11:25 -06'00'

ANGELA BIGGS
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service

VII. OTHER INFORMATION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (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, audiotape, 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.