SUMMARY INFORMATION

Federal Awarding Agency Name: U.S. Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Funding Opportunity Title: Notice of Funding Opportunity for NRCS' Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program competition for Federal fiscal year (FY) 2020.

Announcement Type: Funding Announcement

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NRCS-NHQ-VPA-HIP-19-GEN0010429

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.093

Funding Opportunity Announcement Summary

NRCS is announcing the availability of up to $50 million in Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) funding to create or enhance State and Tribal Government programs that encourage owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-dependent recreation. VPA-HIP is a competitive grants program and only State and Tribal Governments may apply. Projects may be up to three years in duration. The maximum amount for a single award is $3 million. Up to 25 percent of the funding for each award may be used to provide incentives to improve wildlife habitat on enrolled public access program lands.

Application Due Date

Applications must be received by **11:59 p.m. Eastern time on November 27, 2019**.

SUBMISSIONS: Applications must be submitted electronically through grants.gov. Submissions must be received by the time and date due. The agency will rely on system-generated date and time receipt documentation for Grants.gov submissions.

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 applicants 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 choose the appropriate selection in the "Get Registered" section. 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 VPA-HIP website to learn more about the program. Questions about this announcement can be directed to vpa@usda.gov.

A webinar for potential VPA-HIP applicants is scheduled for 3:00 p.m. Eastern time on October 10, 2019. Click here for information on participating in the webinar.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

VPA-HIP is authorized by section 1240R of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839bb-5), as amended by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246), and most recently amended by the Agriculture Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill).

B. Overview

VPA-HIP provides funding to State and Tribal Governments to create or enhance public access programs that encourage owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-dependent recreation.

States and Tribal Governments receiving funding (awardees) must ensure that land enrolled under the public access program has appropriate wildlife habitat that benefits a variety of species and, if needed, support landowners to maintain or enhance appropriate habitat on program lands made accessible to the public. Awardees can use up to 25 percent of VPA-HIP grant funds to provide incentives for wildlife habitat improvement on enrolled program lands. Awardees are required to follow NRCS conservation practice standards for habitat improvement activities. This requirement can be waived if an awardee provides sufficient justification.

The 2018 Farm Bill included a new provision requiring NRCS, to the maximum extent practicable, to expend $3 million of VPA-HIP funding to increase public access on lands covered by U.S.-held wetland easements (enrolled under either the Wetland Reserve Program or the Wetland Reserve Easement component of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program). NRCS requires all awardees to target VPA-HIP outreach to Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) landowners to encourage participation in the public access program. This requirement can be waived if there are no WRE lands available to participate in the geographic area where the project is taking place.

II. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

A. Estimated Funding

This announcement makes available up to $50 million, which is the amount authorized for VPA-HIP for the duration of the 2018 Farm Bill.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

There is no cost sharing or matching requirement for this opportunity. However, as part of their proposal, applicants must describe the State or Tribal public access and habitat improvement program(s) and funding leveraged by VPA-HIP.

C. Start Dates and Performance Periods

Projects may be up to three years in duration. Applicants should plan their projects based on a project start date of April 1, 2020.

D. Type of Federal Award

The agency plans to award grant agreements pursuant to this opportunity.

E. Number of Awards

The agency anticipates making between 25 and 35 awards.

F. Federal Funding Floor and Ceiling Amounts

The funding floor for this announcement is $100,000, and the funding ceiling is $3 million. The funding floor means the minimum agreement funding amount for the Federal share per agreement awarded. The ceiling is the maximum agreement funding amount for the Federal share per agreement awarded.

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Only State and Native American Tribal Governments are eligible to apply for VPA-HIP. Each State or Tribal Government may submit only one application for VPA-HIP.

B. Eligible Projects

VPA-HIP funding is available to establish or expand public access programs to private lands for wildlife-dependent recreation. Examples of wildlife-dependent recreation include hunting, fishing, photography, wildlife viewing, and environmental education and interpretation.

NRCS funding can be used for the following:

- To provide financial incentives to landowners to participate in a public access program.
- To provide infrastructure or equipment (e.g., property identification signs, gates, cattle guards, fencing, kiosks) associated with implementation of the public access program.

- To provide incentives to landowners to improve wildlife habitat on lands enrolled in a public access program. No more than 25 percent of a State or Tribe's VPA-HIP proposed project budget may be used for wildlife habitat incentives.
- To reimburse awardees for technical assistance costs associated with working to enroll landowners in a public access program, or to assist landowners with implementing a habitat improvement project. Technical assistance cannot exceed 10 percent of the overall VPA-HIP funding request.
- To reimburse direct administrative costs associated with implementing the project. Personnel costs are considered technical assistance and will not fall under administrative costs. Examples of direct administrative costs potentially eligible for reimbursement are travel, supplies, and program advertising.
- To reimburse indirect costs of the awardee, as described in section IV.G. of this notice.

See Section IV.F. of this notice for more details of unallowable costs.

If a State or Tribe provides funding to landowners for habitat improvement, landowners must adhere to NRCS conservation practice standards for these activities. This requirement may be waived by NRCS upon request and sufficient justification by a State or Tribe.

If opening dates for migratory bird hunting in a State applying for VPA-HIP funding are not consistent for residents and nonresidents, that State's VPA-HIP funding award will be reduced by 25 percent. This provision does not apply to Tribal awardees.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Address to Request Application Package

All standard forms necessary for this announcement are included in the Grants.gov application package

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

To be considered for funding under this opportunity, an application must contain—

1. **Application Form**—Standard Form (SF) 424, "Application for Federal Assistance." Applicants must use this document as the cover sheet for each proposal. See Instructions for Completing SF-424 located in the Related Documents tab of this announcement on Grants.gov.

2. **SF-424A, "Budget Information - Non-Construction Programs"**—Fill in all spaces as appropriate. Section B, Item 6, Column 1 should reflect the agency funds, and Column 2 should reflect the applicant's matching funds, if any. 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.

3. **Budget Narrative**—In a separate narrative titled "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. Statement(s) of work for any subcontractors and consultants must be included as part of the application.

Budget narratives must state how much each applicant intends to spend on the following activities:

- Financial incentives to landowners to participate in a public access program.
- Infrastructure or equipment (e.g., property identification signs, gates, cattle guards, fencing, kiosks) associated with implementation of the public access program.
- Incentives to landowners to improve wildlife habitat on lands enrolled in a public access program. No more than 25 percent of a State or Tribe's VPA-HIP proposed project budget may be used for wildlife habitat incentives.
- Technical assistance costs associated with working to enroll landowners in a public access program, or to assist landowners with implementing a habitat improvement project. Technical assistance cannot exceed 10 percent of the overall VPA-HIP funding request. All personnel costs will be considered technical assistance.
- Direct administrative costs associated with implementing the project. Examples of direct administrative costs potentially eligible for reimbursement are travel, supplies, and program advertising.
- Indirect costs (see section IV.G. of this notice) eligible for reimbursement by NRCS.

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.

a) As required in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 200, Subpart F, "Audit Requirements," all U.S. States, local governments, federally-recognized Indian Tribal Governments, and nonprofit organizations expending $750,000 or more in Federal award funds in a fiscal year must submit a single audit report for that year through the Federal Audit Clearinghouse's Internet Data Entry System. Therefore, any U.S. State or federally-recognized Indian Tribal Government applying under this opportunity must include one of the following statements in its budget narrative:

   "My organization was required to submit a Single Audit report last year. The reporting period covered was from (insert date) to (insert date). This report, filed under EIN # (insert EIN), is available on the Federal Audit

Clearinghouse Single Audit Database website (https://harvester.census.gov/facweb/) or will be by (insert date)."

OR

"My organization was not required to submit a Single Audit report last year."

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:

   - 2 CFR Part 417, Government wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-procurement)
   -2 CFR Part 418, New Restrictions on Lobbying
   - 2 CFR Part 421, Government wide Requirements for Drug Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)

5. **Certification and Disclosure of Lobbying Activities**—Under Title 31 of the United States Code, Section 1352, an applicant or recipient must not use any federally appropriated funds (both annually appropriated and continuing appropriations) or matching funds under a grant or cooperative agreement award to pay any person for lobbying in connection with the award. Lobbying is defined as influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress connection with the award. Submission of an application also represents the applicant's certification of the statements in 2 CFR Part 418, Appendix A-Certification Regarding Lobbying. If you/your organization have/has made or agrees to make any payment using non-appropriated funds for lobbying in connection with this proposal AND the Federal share exceeds $100,000, you must also complete and submit the SF LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities located at 2 CFR 418, Appendix B. See 2 CFR, Subpart 418.110 for more information on when additional submission of this form is required.

6. **Form AD-3031**-- "Assurance Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants."—Although the text of this document states it is applicable only to corporate entities, USDA policy requires that all entity types complete Form AD-3031.

7. **Proposal**—The proposal consists of two parts: the executive summary and the project narrative.

    a) Executive Summary (1-page maximum)
    On a single page, provide the following information:

    - The applicant entity name.
    - A contact for the project, and his or her email address and phone number. NRCS will use the contact identified as the primary applicant contact.
    - The duration of the project in years.
    - The amount of Federal funding requested.
    - A brief project description. Provide a summary of the activities to be accomplished under the VPA-HIP grant.
    - A brief description of project deliverables.
    - Geographic location—the region or area of the State or Tribal land impacted by the program.

    b) Project Narrative (10-page maximum)
    The project description must include the information below in the following order:

    - Project objectives and deliverables:
      Describe the project's objectives. Provide a list and description of the project deliverables, including number of acres and landowners enrolled using VPA-HIP funding (including WRP/WRE lands), the recreational opportunities offered to the public, and the wildlife habitat improvements facilitated using VPA-HIP funding (if applicable).

    - Project methods:
      Describe how VPA-HIP funding will be used to encourage public access to private farm, ranch, and forest lands for hunting, fishing, and other recreational purposes. Indicate if VPA-HIP funds will create a new program or enhance an existing program. When an applicant is requesting funding to complement an existing State or Tribal program, provide a description of the existing program and include the total amount of program funding, the number of acres and landowners enrolled, and the purposes of the program.

      Describe how the State or Tribe will ensure that the land enrolled in the public access program has sufficient wildlife habitat to support the recreational activities facilitated by the program.

      If applicable, describe how up to 25 percent of the funding requested will be used for wildlife habitat improvement or enhancement activities by landowners. If known, describe the habitat improvement or enhancement activities and list the associated NRCS conservation practice standards.

Every VPA-HIP project must provide targeted outreach to landowners enrolled in NRCS-supported wetland reserve (either WRP or WRE) easements. Describe how this targeted outreach will be carried out and the likelihood of enrolling WRP or WRE lands in public access programs. If no WRP or WRE easement lands exist in the project area, applicants must state this in the proposal to request a waiver from this requirement.

NRCS gives priority consideration to applicants who provide outreach to historically underserved landowners. If applicable, describe these outreach activities. The definition of historically underserved and veteran producers is available on the NRCS website.

Describe how the public will be made aware of the location of the land enrolled in the public access program.

- Project timeline:
  Provide a bulleted list of project actions, milestones, and deliverables.

- Project management:
  List key personnel and describe their qualifications, experience, and their anticipated contributions to the project.

- Project evaluation:
  Describe the methodology or procedures used to evaluate the success of the project.

- 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.

Each page must be on numbered 8½" x 11" paper with one-inch margins. The text of the project narrative must be single spaced and typed in New Times Roman, no smaller than 12-point font and must not exceed 10 pages.

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**. Incomplete and/or noncompliant proposals will not be considered.

C. Unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual excepted from those requirements under 2 CFR Section 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the Federal awarding agency under 2 CFR Section 25.110(d)) 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. The agency 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 the agency is ready to make an award, it 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.

Entities must obtain a DUNS and register in SAM prior to registering with Grants.gov. A description of each is below. Entities are strongly encouraged to apply early for their DUNS number and SAM registration.

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. 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.

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. Submission Dates and Times

Applicants must submit proposals via Grants.gov. Proposals must be received by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time on November 27, 2019. The agency will rely on system generated date and time receipt documentation to determine whether applications meet the submission deadline. Grants.gov provides and automatic acknowledgement when applications are received.

E. Intergovernmental Review

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

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:

- Expenses incurred after the grant agreement between NRCS and the awardee has expired. For example, NRCS cannot reimburse a State or Tribal Government for payments made to a landowner after the expiration of the grant agreement;
- Expenses related to VPA HIP program implementation on anything other than private farm, ranch and forestlands. Municipally-owned, State-owned and Federal lands are ineligible lands for the purposes of this program;
- Duplication of current activities; however, grant funds may be used to expand the level of effort or extend activities beyond what is currently being provided;
- Purchase, rent, or pay for the installation of fixed equipment**,** other than property identification signs, gates, cattle guards, fencing, kiosks, boat ramps, or parking areas directly associated with public access designed to inform and manage such public access, maintain appropriate wildlife habitat, enhance quality of the outdoor experience, and mitigate adverse environmental impact;
- Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project;
- Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the grant;
- Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and amendments thereto;
- Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives;
- Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities;
- 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
- 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 expense allowance should be directed to the Federal Awarding Agency contact person listed in section VII of this announcement.

If opening dates for migratory bird hunting in a State applying for VPA-HIP funding are not consistent for residents and nonresidents, that State's VPA-HIP funding award will be reduced by 25 percent. This provision does not apply to Tribal awardees.

A maximum of 25 percent of each award can be used to provide incentives to improve wildlife habitat on enrolled public access program lands.

Technical assistance cannot exceed 10 percent of the overall VPA-HIP funding request.

G. Indirect costs limitations

1. To be eligible to recover any indirect cost under a Federal award, recipients 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 recipient 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.

2. Applicants not subject to the statutory limitation stated above, which have a current NICRA, must calculate indirect costs using the rate and base specified in their NICRA. An awardee may voluntarily reduce or waive recovery of indirect costs at its sole discretion and must not be encouraged or coerced in any way to do so by the agency. If voluntarily reduced or waived, the awardee 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 awardee'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. Indirect costs may not be recovered under an expired NICRA. However, if an applicant with a current NICRA is subject to the statutory limitation, indirect costs must be calculated as follows. First, multiply the NICRA rate by the base stated in the NICRA to arrive at Amount A. Next, multiply the statutory limit of 10 percent by the total of all direct costs to arrive at Amount B. The lower of Amount A and B is the amount of indirect cost to include on the budget.

3. 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 an awardee 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 percent of MTDC when preparing the budget. If selected for award, a de minimis rate agreement will be executed along with the award.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

A. Proposal Review Criteria

Approach and Goals/ Outcomes (40 points)

- The applicant describes the establishment or expansion of a public access program likely to be successful and met with widespread landowner acceptance.
- The applicant describes a reasonable approach to ensuring that land enrolled under the State or Tribal Government program has appropriate wildlife habitat.

- The application describes how, if applicable, up to 25 percent of funding will be used for wildlife habitat improvement or enhancement activities and how NRCS conservation practice standards will be followed for these activities.
- The project identifies clear, measurable and achievable goals and deliverables.

Outreach Efforts (30 points)

- The application describes a robust outreach plan to advertise to landowners the availability of public access and (if applicable) wildlife habitat incentive funding.
- The proposal includes a compelling plan to target outreach to, and enroll in the public access program, landowners with NRCS-supported wetland reserve easements.
- The applicant describes an approach for communicating to the public the availability of public access and wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities associated with the proposed project.
- The proposal includes outreach activities focused on reaching historically underserved landowners.

Project Management (30 points)

- The applicant has a track record of implementing public access or similar programs and the capacity to implement a successful public access program.
- Project staff has necessary capacity, technical and administrative expertise to help landowners improve wildlife habitat (if applicable).
- The budget is adequately explained and justified, and expenses are allowable.

B. SAM Check

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)).

C. Review and Selection Process

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.

Proposals that pass the initial screening will undergo a technical review carried out by a panel consisting of Federal employees. The technical panel will evaluate each proposal against the criteria in Section V.A. of this notice and then rank all proposals to make recommendations for funding to NRCS leadership. NRCS State Conservationists will also review relevant proposals for duplication of existing efforts, ethical concerns, and overall recommendation. The NRCS Chief makes the final award decisions.

D. Awards Over the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (if applicable)

Notice to applicants:

1. Prior to making a Federal award with a total Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold ($250,000), the agency must review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible

through SAM (the Federal Awardee Performance Integrity Information System, FAPIIS) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313 and 2 CFR 200.205(a));

2. An applicant may review information in FAPIIS accessible through SAM and comment on any information about it that a Federal awarding agency previously entered;

3. The agency will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in 2 CFR 200.205, Federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants.

E. Anticipated Announcement and Federal Award Dates

The agency anticipates announcing or notifying successful and unsuccessful applicants in February 2020 and expects to have awards in place by April 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 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 notification by email. Applicants not selected for funding will also receive feedback on their proposal. This evaluation will be emailed to the contact listed in the proposal within 90 days of the announcement of VPA-HIP 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; a copy of the General Terms and Conditions may be obtained by contacting the Federal Awarding Agency Contacts listed in this announcement.

C. Reporting

Reporting will follow NRCS' General Terms and Conditions but will generally include electronic submission of progress reports, annual financial status reports, and final reports.

If the Federal share of any agreement awarded under this opportunity notice may include more than $500,000 over the period of performance, recipients must also comply with the

post award reporting requirements reflected in Appendix XII of 2 CFR Part 200—Award Term and Condition for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters.

VII. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT

For questions regarding this opportunity, please email: vpa@usda.gov

VIII. OTHER INFORMATION

A. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

Proposals to NRCS are considered 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 requires the NRCS to provide notice to applicants that a third party has requested copies of their business information and requires NRCS to consult with applicants regarding the releasing their records.

B. Government Obligation

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

C. Environmental Review

Every funded CIG project is a Federal action subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NRCS must work with awardees to complete an environmental review of each awarded project before project commencement. In addition, prior to any ground disturbing activities related to VPA-HIP habitat improvement funding, the awardee must work with NRCS staff to complete an Environmental Evaluation (EE) related to those activities. Awardees may be required to prepare and pay for preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), should any 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 applicant's 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.

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.

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