

Federal Awarding Agency Name: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, Tennessee State Office

Funding Opportunity Title: Conservation Agreements Fiscal Year (FY) 2019
Announcement for Program Funding – TENNESSEE

Initial Announcement

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NRCS-TN-CCA-19-GEN0010181

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number:

10.069 Conservation Reserve Program
10.902 Conservation Technical Assistance
10.912 Environmental Quality Incentives Program
10.924 Conservation Stewardship Program
10.931 Agricultural Conservation Enhancement Program

SUMMARY:

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is announcing potential funding availability for cooperative, grant and contribution agreements with the intent of leveraging NRCS resources, addressing local natural resource issues/concerns, encouraging collaborative efforts and developing state and local level conservation leadership. Proposals will be accepted for projects located in the state of Tennessee. NRCS anticipates that the amount available for support of this program in FY 2019 will be:

STATE	POTENTIAL TOTAL AVAILABLE	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	ANTICIPATED # of AGREEMENTS
Tennessee	\$1,000,000	\$10,000.00	\$375,000.00	10

Proposals are requested from State and local government units, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher learning for competitive consideration of agreement awards for projects between one (1) to five (5) years in duration.

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

DATES:

Proposals must be received by 5:00 pm Central Standard Time on Tuesday, July 15, 2019. Proposals received after 5:00 pm on July 15, 2019 will not be considered and immediately eliminated from competition. 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 2019. Funding decisions will be made by the 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 following individual:

Darvis Jordan, Management Analyst, Email: Darvis.Jordan@usda.gov

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 nine (9) pages, not including letters of support and federally required forms, will be rejected. Proposals should be Times New Roman, size 12 font, and single spaced. Proposals must be divided into the following sections:

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Charlene Winters, Grants Management Specialist
Phone: (919) 873-2162
E-mail: Charlene.Winters@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 2826a. Subtitle I of Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 as amended by section 2401 of the Agriculture Act of 2014.

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).

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).

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

B. Overview

The purpose of these Conservation Agreements is to leverage NRCS and partner resources to:

1. Increase awareness regarding effective conservation practices.
2. Improve soil health.
3. Improve water quality.
4. Improve the environmental and economic performance of working agricultural lands.
5. Develop quality conservation plans for effective grazing land practices.
6. Assist communities and groups to plan and implement effective conservation practices that strengthen local food and agricultural projects.
7. Develop, plan and implement effective forestry practices and standards.

Emphasis will be placed on projects that:

1. Build technical capacity to implement Farm Bill conservation programs.
2. Establish Demonstration Farm Networks.
3. Build technical capacity of NRCS and field level conservation employees.
4. Build the capacity of local partners to develop and implement effective projects.
5. Develop and implement effective outreach and conservation education opportunities.
6. Leverage non-Federal and non-government resources to achieve positive natural resources conservation outcomes.
7. Provide technical and administrative services supporting conservation practices benefiting forestlands, grasslands and farmlands.

NRCS will accept proposals under this notice for single or multi-year projects, not to exceed five years in duration. Eligible entities include State and local government units, non-profit organizations, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher learning.

Proposals will be screened for completeness and compliance under 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

The NRCS anticipates that the amount of funding available for this announcement will be up to \$1,000,000 in FY 2019. Selected recipients will be notified by email. All awards are subject to the availability of funds appropriated through Congress. Awards may include:

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

A cooperative agreement includes involvement on the part of the NRCS. This would include NRCS collaboration or participation, or close NRCS oversight and control. This could include but is not limited to:

- 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-agreements 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 that impacts on other projects.
- f. Highly prescriptive NRCS requirements that limit recipient discretion.

- g. Review and approval of key personnel.
- h. Direct NRCS operational involvement or participation during the activity.

The Resulting Agreements are expected to fund single and multi-year projects, not to exceed five years in duration.

III. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

A. Applicant Eligibility

Applicants must be a State and local government unit, non-governmental organization, or institution of higher learning. Applicants for renewal or supplementation of existing projects are eligible to compete with applications for new Federal awards. A non-federal entity (NFE) may submit more than one application if the proposals are for different projects. NFEs may receive more than one award.

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, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Stewardship Program, etc.).

C. Matching Funds Requirements

There is a no match requirement for the Grant and Cooperative Agreements. Contribution Agreements, if awarded, would require a 50% contribution from each party. 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. Agreement Administration

Funds will be awarded through grant, cooperative and contribution agreements.

E. Activities Limitation and Implementation

Activities supported through these 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 the NRCS Tennessee website: [www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov](#)

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 third-party funding support must be submitted at the time of application.

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

- I. Summary: One (1) page maximum
- II. Introduction: One (1) page maximum
- III. Needs Assessment: One (1) page maximum
- IV. Objectives: One (1) page maximum
- V. Methods: Two (2) page maximum
- VI. Budget: One (2) page maximum
- VII. Evaluation: One (1) page maximum

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

The required federal forms (i.e. SF-424, SF-424A, SF-424B, AD-3031, Certification Regarding Lobbying) and any third-party funding support letters, are to be placed after the Evaluation section. The entire proposal submission shall be contained within one (1) PDF file document.

Proposals that fail to comply with the required content and format will not be considered for funding. **Material exceeding stated page limits 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 complying with the following Federal regulations:
 - 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 \(Financial Assistance\)](#)

NONPROCUREMENT DEBARMENT AND SUSPENSION

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.
6. **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 agreement.

PROPOSAL

- I. **Summary** (one (1) page maximum): The 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 include the Project Title. The summary should include narratives about each of the following: applicant organization, the need motivating the request, project start and end dates (period of performance), measurable deliverables, outcomes and methodology, other organizations that will be involved, project total cost, funds already obtained, and the amount requested in this proposal.
- II. **Introduction** (one (1) page maximum): The introduction should introduce your organization to the reviewer and lend credibility to the 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 and a description of clientele including demographic information as well as organizational funding sources. Describe history of successfully managing federal or 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 the application. It is the justification for the proposal and should focus on the condition the proposal will address. Use care to ensure the proposal makes no unsupported assumptions. The 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. **Objectives** (one (1) page maximum): The objectives should demonstrate project outcomes, not just 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. The 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 agreement outcomes, such as veterans, culturally specific populations, women, limited resource farmers, socially disadvantaged, etc., will receive additional points during the ranking process. Explain how these entities will benefit.

- V. **Methods** (two (2) page maximum): The 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 agreement period. Clearly describe the program client and the program activities, their sequence, and explain the 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** (two (2) page maximum): The budget information should be carefully planned to reduce the number of changes needed during the agreement period. Miscellaneous expenses and needed equipment should be itemized. Provide a detailed narrative in support of the budget for the project, broken down by each project quarter or 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. 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.

The breakdown of the Federal share and matching funds should be shown separately on the SF-424A. See Forms section for additional information on the required SF-424A budget form.

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). 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). An 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 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. 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 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 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 agreement 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 (1) page maximum): The evaluation should clarify the objectives, define the ease with which they can be measured, and clearly state the criteria for how success will be measured using quantifiable methods. The 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, the 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 System for Award Management (SAM) before submitting an 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. 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. 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 Apply:**

Application packages must be submitted electronically to the following e-mail address:

Darvis.Jordan@usda.gov

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

A. Due Date

Proposals must be received by 5:00 pm Central Standard Time on Monday, July 15, 2019. Proposals received after 5:00 pm on July 15, 2019 will not be considered and immediately eliminated from competition.

B. 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.

C. 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.

D. 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:

- a. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project.
- b. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the agreement.
- c. Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and amendments thereto.
- d. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to any objectives or deliverables outlined in the project.
- e. Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities.
- f. 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.
- g. 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 cost items should be directed to the listed agency contact person.

E. Patents, Inventions and Copyrights

Allocation of rights to patents and inventions shall be in accordance with 2 CFR 200. This regulation provides that small businesses normally may retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA support. 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. About copyrights, 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.

F. Natural Resources and Historic Property Review Requirements

- a. The Council on Environmental Quality's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulation 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). Agreement funding cannot be approved until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met.
- b. 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 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 agreement is awarded but before it is implemented.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW AND NOTIFICATION INFORMATION

A. Review and Selection Process Review

Proposals will be screened for completeness and compliance under 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 submitted will be evaluated by NRCS and placed into one of the following categories based on the predominate focus of the proposal:

- Category A: Staffing Support for Conservation Technical Assistance and Farm Bill Program Delivery
- Category B: Establish Demonstration Farm Networks
- Category C: Technical Assistance for Tribal Lands
- Category D: Education, Outreach, Training
- Category E: Technology
- Category F: Other

Proposals slotted within each category will be evaluated and ranked against other proposal submissions within the same category. Funding allocations designated between the categories will be depended upon available funds, and the quantity the quality of proposals contained within each category. Complete proposals received by the submission deadline will be evaluated based on the criteria listed below. The NRCS State Conservationist will make the final award selections.

SUMMARY (5 points): The extent to which the summary clearly summarizes the request, is no longer than one (1) page, and addresses the following criteria:

- Identifies the applicant
- Includes a statement on capability to implement the proposal
- Includes a statement on problem(s) addressed
- Includes a statement on objectives
- Includes a statement on methods
- Includes the total cost, funds already obtained, and the amount requested in this proposal

INTRODUCTION (5 points): The extent which the proposal describes the applicant's organization, is no longer than one (1) page, and addresses the following criteria:

- Describes the applicant's organizational purposes and goals
- Describes the applicant's programs and activities
- Provides evidence of the applicant's accomplishments and qualifications
- Supports qualifications in the activity areas in which funds are sought (e.g. conservation planning, training, etc.)
- Describes the capacity to implement the proposal

NEEDS ASSESSMENT (20 points): The extent which the proposal describes the need or problem to be solved, is no longer than one (1) page, and addresses the following criteria:

- Relates to the purposes and goals of the applicant agency
- Is of reasonable dimensions
- Is developed with input from clients and beneficiaries
- Makes no unsupported assumptions
- Makes a compelling case
- Identifies focal area(s) within the project area or priority criteria

OBJECTIVES (20 points): The extent which the proposal describes the outcomes and benefits of the agreement in measurable terms, is no longer than one (1) page, and addresses the following criteria:

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

METHODS (20 points): The extent which the proposal describes the activities that will be completed to achieve the desired objectives, is no longer than two (2) pages, and addresses the following criteria:

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

BUDGET (20 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 two (2) pages, and addresses the following criteria:

- Is detailed
- Includes a narrative
- Contains significant match in the form of cash, non-cash, or in-kind services from applicant and/or contributing organizations
- Includes NRCS, partner, and other contributions

- Reimbursement of indirect costs are 10% or less

EVALUATION (10 points): The extent which the proposal presents a plan for determining the degree to which objectives are met and methods are followed is no longer than one (1) page, and addresses the following criteria:

- Presents a plan for evaluating accomplishments of objectives
- Presents a plan for evaluating and modifying methods over the course of the program
- Clearly states criteria of success and describes how success will be measured
- Defines how progress will be reported and how the technical representative will be kept informed

B. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Award dates will be determined by the availability of funds and NRCS workload. Proposals should have flexible start dates with timelines shown relative to the execution of an 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, 2019.

VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Award Notification

Applicants who have been initially selected for funding will receive official notification from the NRCS Tennessee State Office within 30 days following the proposal submission deadline.

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

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. 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 60 days after completion of project. In addition, the selected applicant must

submit a written performance progress report to the NRCS program, technical, and administrative contacts. The performance progress report should accompany the SF-425 but is distinct from the quarterly financial report described above. Each progress report shall cover work performed during the quarter 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 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 60 days after completion of the project. This report is distinct from the performance progress reports described above. 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 Cooperative Agreements. A copy of this document may be obtained by contacting the agency contact listed.

E. Notice to Applicants

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

VII. AGENCY CONTACTS

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Phone: (919) 873-2162
Email: Charlene.Winters@usda.gov
Quality Assurance Branch 1
Grants and Agreements Division
Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Business Center
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

NRCS Tennessee
Darvis Jordan, Management Analyst
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U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Tennessee

VIII. 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 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.