



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act Forest Landowner Support Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO): Landowner Payment Programs for Carbon Stewardship Practices

SUMMARY INFORMATION

Federal Awarding Agency Name

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service: Inflation Reduction Act Forest Landowner Support

Notice of Funding Opportunity Title

Landowner Payment Programs for Carbon Stewardship Practices

Notice of Funding Opportunity Number

USDA-FS-2024-IRA-FLS-04 at [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)

Assistance Listing

This opportunity for Inflation Reduction Act Forest Landowner Support is provided under the Assistance Listing 10.731: Inflation Reduction Act Landscape Scale Restoration.

SAM.gov Registration

All applicants must have an active registration with the System for Award Management ([SAM.gov](https://www.sam.gov)) and maintain active registration throughout the life of the award. This is the government-wide web-based system that supports contracts, grants, and the electronic payment system. This requirement for registration may be found at 2 CFR § 25.200.

Notice of Funding Opportunity Summary

This NOFO is the fourth Inflation Reduction Act Forest Landowner Support funding opportunity. Awards will support payments to private forest landowners for carbon stewardship practices. Funding is provided through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (Public Law No: 117-169, Subtitle D, Sec. 23002 (a)(4)).

Summary of Application Requirements

All applications must be submitted via [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and should include the following documents:

- Cover Page
- Proposal Narrative
- Table of Proposed Practices
- Detailed Budget
- Budget Narrative
- Letter(s) of Collaboration (if applicable)
- Match Verification (if applicable)
- Standard Forms 424 and 424A
- Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (if applicable)

See '[Application Requirements](#)' section below for a detailed description of these requirements.

Key Dates

Application materials can be found on Grants.gov (Opportunity Number USDA-FS-2024-IRA-FLS-04). The deadline for application submission is September 30, 2024.

For inquiries specific to the content of this NOFO, contact SM.FS.LandownerIRA@usda.gov. Please include 'Carbon Stewardship NOFO' in your subject line. Details on office hours and other supporting information for this funding opportunity will be posted to the USDA Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act Forest Landowner Support website:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/state-private-forestry/coop-forestry/ira-forest-landowner-support>.

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

Landowner Payment Programs for Carbon Stewardship Practices

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this funding opportunity is to provide financial compensation to private forest landowners for the implementation of practices that provide measurable increases in carbon sequestration and storage, as directed by the Inflation Reduction Act (Public Law No: 117-169, Subtitle D, Sec. 23002 (a)(4)).¹ State forestry agencies and nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply for funding to administer these landowner practice payment projects. Eligible applicants are responsible for proposing practice lists and project designs that will optimize carbon sequestration and storage while also sustaining other critical benefits that forests provide.

States and nonprofit organizations applying to this opportunity are encouraged to explore or develop innovative practices that are not currently addressed by carbon markets. The carbon benefits of proposed practices must be supported by the best available science. Additionally, the adoption of these practices must represent a change in the way that participating landowners are managing their forests; landowners cannot receive payments for practices that represent 'business-as-usual' management. In addition to demonstrating their carbon benefits, strong proposals will emphasize opportunities for shared learning, replicability, and ability to scale.

Throughout this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), practices that provide measurable increases in carbon sequestration and storage will be referred to as 'carbon stewardship practices.' The USDA Forest Service has prepared guidance regarding carbon stewardship practices eligible for payment under this funding opportunity (see '[Practice Guidance](#)' section below). This guidance was designed to accommodate diverse forest landscapes, ecological conditions, climate projections, economic contexts, and environmental stressors. Applicants are encouraged to use this guidance to develop a carbon stewardship practice list that is specific to their geography and priorities.

Carbon Stewardship Practices

Forests play a critical role in mitigating climate change by both sequestering (absorbing) and storing carbon. Forest management actions can greatly influence the amount of carbon sequestered and stored in soils, trees, and other forms of vegetation. Carbon stewardship practices enhance the carbon benefits of forests while sustaining a diversity of ecosystem services.

The USDA Forest Service defines carbon stewardship as actions, informed by science, that provide for increased carbon uptake and storage or increased stabilization through land-use and vegetation management strategies. Thoughtful carbon stewardship seeks to optimize carbon within the context of ecosystem integrity and climate adaptation, not to maximize carbon at the expense of forest health or habitat.²

¹ [Public Law No: 117-169, Subtitle D, Sec. 23002 \(a\)\(4\)](#)

² [USDA Forest Service Carbon Stewardship Introduction](#)

Carbon stewardship practices, and their associated impacts, vary across site conditions. For example, carbon stewardship in a fire-adapted stand of ponderosa pine requires a different suite of activities than in an eastern oak-hickory woodland. It is also important to consider the timescale of carbon benefits associated with carbon stewardship. Depending on the practice, site condition, and forest type, carbon benefits may be realized immediately or over the course of decades. In some cases, a carbon stewardship practice may even lead to a near-term decrease in carbon stocks followed by a long-term increase at a much greater scale. Thinning a dense stand, for example, may result in an initial decrease in carbon stocks while enhancing resilience to wildfire, insects, and disease, thus stabilizing and increasing carbon over the long term. Effective carbon stewardship considers the suite of environmental, social, and economic benefits that a given forest provides.

For more information on carbon stewardship and its significance in forest ecosystems, please visit: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/sustainability-and-climate/carbon>.

ELIGIBILITY

To apply for this NOFO, an entity MUST have an active SAM.gov registration at the time of application and must provide their Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

Eligible Applicants

The following entities are eligible to submit proposals for landowner practice payment projects:

- State forestry agencies or their equivalents
- Nonprofit organizations³

Eligible Recipients of Practice Payments

Private forest landowners are eligible to receive practice payments from the eligible applicants listed above. There are no acreage restrictions on landowners receiving practice payments through this funding opportunity.

One of the goals of the Inflation Reduction Act is to engage underserved landowners in climate mitigation efforts. If proposing to engage underserved landowners as recipients of practice payments, please see the [appendix](#) for relevant definitions and tools.

Eligible Lands for Practice Implementation

Practices supported by this funding opportunity must be implemented on **private forest land**. This land must meet the following criteria:

- Is owned by an eligible recipient of practice payments (defined above).
- Is rural. Rural land is defined as land *outside* of United States Census areas with 50,000 or more people. Please use the [Landscape Scale Restoration Project Planning Tool](#) to confirm that the proposed land(s) is within an eligible rural geography.

³ In the case of projects implemented by nonprofit organizations, the USDA Forest Service will retain both decision-making authority and financial oversight for the duration of the project.

- Has existing tree cover or is suitable for growing trees.

NOTE: Tribal land held in trust by the federal government on behalf of Tribes and individual Tribal members is considered eligible.

Eligible Practices

Practices eligible for payments will be determined by each entity applying to this NOFO. As part of their proposal, each applicant will submit a list of eligible practices. These practices should adhere to the requirements listed in the [‘Practice Guidance’](#) section below.

Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

Grant funds (including practice payments) cannot be used to support the following activities:

- Construction and capital improvements, including but not limited to facilities, infrastructure, roads, buildings, culverts, dams, ponds, and major earthwork projects.
- Land acquisition projects, *including conservation easements*.
- Equipment purchase. Equipment purchases are rarely eligible, requiring approval prior to award and additional recordkeeping by the awardee. Equipment is defined as an article of nonexpendable, tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$10,000⁴ or more per unit.
- Lobbying, litigation, or political advocacy.
- Incorporation fees; brokers' fees; or fees to promoters, organizers, management consultants, attorneys, accountants, or investment counselors in connection with the establishment or reorganization of an organization.
- Basic research, which is defined in 2 CFR § 422.1 as, “systematic study directed toward fuller knowledge or understanding of the fundamental aspects of phenomena and of observable facts without specific applications towards processes or products in mind.” Basic research includes applied research, which 2 CFR § 1108.45 defines as, “efforts that attempt to determine and exploit the potential of scientific discoveries or improvements in technology, such as new materials, devices, methods and processes.”
 - Technical transfer, education, and outreach activities associated with applying research may be included in the proposal.

FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

Funding Availability

The USDA Forest Service anticipates awarding up to \$50 million through this NOFO. Each eligible applicant may request up to \$5 million. Final awards may be adjusted based on proposed scope and funding availability.

Match Contribution

The Inflation Reduction Act (Sec. 23002(b)) requires a match from non-federal sources of no less than 20 percent of the total project cost; total project cost includes both federal and non-federal funding. Proposals should include a written description of non-federal contributions and

⁴ Effective October 1, 2024.

signed support letters or other forms of match verification. Match can include administrative costs and in-kind project contributions from the applicant and/or their partners.

The USDA Forest Service will consider requests for reduced match on a case-by-case basis. Specifically, a match waiver or reduction will be considered if at least 40 percent of landowners receiving practice payments are underserved and/or 40 percent of acres benefiting from funded practices are owned by underserved landowners. In these cases, waiver requests must include detailed plans for underserved landowner engagement and specific, data-driven projections of landowners to be reached. The groups considered underserved in the context of this funding opportunity are described in the [appendix](#).

Performance Period

Recipients are encouraged to implement and execute all activities by December 31, 2028. However, the proposed period of performance for project activities can be up to five years.

Reporting Requirements

Financial and narrative progress reports must be submitted semi-annually. Timely submission of financial and progress reports for each award is required. Grant payments will be withheld until missing reports are received and approved. Progress reports should highlight direct quantitative and qualitative investment activities and outcomes and should include illustrative impact stories. Geospatial data files that outline the project area and any other relevant data will be required as part of regular reporting.

PROJECT DESIGN

The mechanics of practice payment projects supported by this funding opportunity are largely at the discretion of the applicants. Applicants should propose project designs that are well suited to their capacities, partner networks, landscape priorities, and landowner needs. These funds can support the creation of new projects or the expansion of existing projects, so long as the requirements laid out in this NOFO are met. The following section outlines requirements and recommendations related to project design.

Practice Payments

These Inflation Reduction Act funds are meant to provide direct support to landowners interested in adopting carbon stewardship practices, with an emphasis on activities that are not currently supported by carbon markets. **At least 80 percent of federal funds awarded through this NOFO should be reserved for practice payments to landowners.** Applicants are encouraged to leverage both federal and non-federal funds, where possible, to maximize positive impact and minimize the burden on landowners.

Applicants should determine appropriate payment rates for the practices that they intend to support. Rates might be based on anticipated implementation costs, the amount required to incentivize landowner participation, and/or carbon stewardship outcomes. Applicants are welcome to calculate their own rates, or to utilize rates published by a federal or state agency,

research institution, or other trusted source. Payment rates per practice should be included in submitted proposals.

Project Administration and Management

The purpose of these funds is to support practice payments to landowners. Applicants may propose to use up to 20 percent of funds for administrative and project management costs. At least 80 percent of funds should be reserved for practice payments to landowners.

Applicants should retain records of practice implementation and payment issuance to landowners following established retention schedules.

Management Plans

Implementation of proposed practices should be supported by an appropriate level of long-term planning (ten years or more) that addresses current conditions and ecosystem function (both within the property and in the surrounding landscape), different resources found on the property (e.g., riparian zones, threatened and endangered species habitats), and the landowner's forest management goals. In designing practice payment projects, applicants should specify the types of plans that they consider to be acceptable for supporting practice implementation. Note that practice-level planning is a presumed component of practice implementation and may be included in the rates assigned to each practice. Existing management plans (e.g., Forest Stewardship Plans) should be referenced in practice plans as applicable.

Partnership Opportunities

Applicants are encouraged to engage partners in project delivery. Partnerships have the potential to expand applicant capacity for a range of activities, including but not limited to landowner outreach, carbon stewardship education, management planning, practice implementation, and monitoring. Applicants may find local partnerships to be particularly valuable, given the opportunity to learn from experts in their target geographies. Proposals should include a letter of collaboration from each listed partner (see '[Application Requirements](#)' section).

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Proposed practices should reflect the goals of applicants and the landowners whom they serve. Applicants should articulate how implementation of proposed practices will specifically advance goals related to carbon stewardship.

Practice Requirements

All carbon stewardship practices proposed by applicants as eligible for payments should adhere to the requirements below.

- 1. Practices should lead to increased carbon sequestration and storage over time.**

Proposed practices should lead to increases in carbon sequestration and storage beyond customary practices on comparable land. This includes practices that can be shown to be

effective in avoiding future emissions in the context of ongoing risks to current forest carbon stocks such as drought, wildfire, insects, and disease. Strong proposals will cite relevant peer-reviewed articles to justify both their practice selection, as well as the timeframe on which carbon benefits are anticipated.

2. Increases in carbon sequestration and storage should be measurable.

Applicants should be prepared to quantify the estimated carbon benefits associated with the practices that they propose. Methodologies for estimating carbon benefits must be submitted alongside proposals. For more information, see the '[Carbon Benefit Quantification](#)' section below.

3. Practices should support overall ecosystem health, rather than maximizing carbon sequestration and storage to the detriment of other benefits.

Sometimes a practice that supports one ecosystem service (e.g., carbon sequestration) can threaten another. Applicants should consider the consequences of proposed practices on the entire forest ecosystem. If risks associated with practice implementation are identified, plans for addressing these risks should be presented. This risk analysis should encompass any cultural uses/values, in addition to ecosystem services, that may be impacted by proposed practices.

4. Practices should be designed for site-specific conditions.

A practice that supports carbon sequestration and storage in one geography may have the opposite effect in another. Proposed practices should be designed to accommodate local conditions (e.g., forest type, soil type, wildfire risk, insect and disease threat), as well as relevant laws, regulations, and tribal treaty rights.

5. Practices should be resilient to future changes in climate and weather conditions.

Applicants should propose practices that are not only well-suited to today's conditions, but also anticipated conditions in the coming decades. Reforestation efforts, for example, should emphasize tree species that are adapted to a range of possible future conditions, considering projected temperatures, water availability, extreme weather events, and more.

6. Practice implementation and maintenance should be feasible and cost-effective for applicants and the landowners whom they serve.

Some management practices require extensive implementation or maintenance efforts. Practices that are too expensive or time-consuming for landowners to sustain beyond the grant period are discouraged. The same is true of practices whose costly implementation significantly restricts the number of landowners served. Strong proposals will include key cost-benefit considerations associated with proposed practices.

In addition to these requirements, please review the '[Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds](#)' section of this NOFO. Practices cannot involve any of the activities listed in this section. These include construction and capital improvements, as well as land acquisition projects.

Practice Selection

Applicants are encouraged to consult existing resources for identifying and selecting carbon stewardship practices. The Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science (NIACS), a multi-institutional partnership led by the USDA Forest Service, has developed a suite of resources to support land management entities in identifying actions to meet diverse goals. Among these, the [Adaptation Workbook](#) provides a structured process for designing land management strategies that respond to the anticipated local impacts of climate change. The Adaptation Workbook outlines five steps, starting with goals and objectives, that can be used to consider climate impacts for a particular geography and help intentionally connect climate impacts to actions for climate resilience, adaptation, and mitigation.

NIACS has also worked with diverse partners to develop a series of adaptation ‘menus’ which provide topical lists of potential adaptation actions based on scientific literature and expert input. The menus are compilations of key forest adaptation strategies and can provide a starting point from which land managers can determine the practices that are best suited to their environments and priorities. Each menu lists overarching strategies, general approaches, and **specific practice examples** (or ‘tactics’) and cites peer-reviewed literature, linking various land management activities to climate adaptation outcomes. The [Forest Carbon Management Menu](#) may be particularly useful, as its strategies are closely aligned to the purpose of this funding opportunity. The Carbon Menu, first published in a 2019 peer-reviewed article in the *Journal of Forestry*, was built to support land managers in identifying actions that “enhance the ability of a particular forest ecosystem to both adapt to anticipated changes and sequester carbon into the future.”⁵ Applicants are encouraged to refer to the [interactive version](#) of the Forest Carbon Management Menu when exploring ideas for potential practices.

Applicants are welcome to select practices that fall beyond the scope of the Forest Carbon Management Menu, so long as these practices meet the requirements listed above. Applicants are encouraged to use these funds to explore practices not currently supported by carbon markets.

Practice Submission

Applicants should submit proposed practices and associated justifications using the table below. Applicants are encouraged to be as specific as possible when filling out this table. Eligible practices may fall under familiar umbrella categories, such as ‘tree planting’ or ‘forest stand improvement.’ For this funding opportunity, applicants should break down these categories, describing in greater detail the practices that landowners will implement.

⁵ [Ontl et al., 2019](#)

Goal	Practice	Carbon Stewardship Rationale	Time to Carbon Benefit (Estimated Range)	Evidence for Carbon Benefit	Additional Considerations	Payment Rate (Dollars per Acre)

Carbon Benefit Quantification

Applicants must estimate the anticipated carbon benefits associated with their projects. **For estimating carbon benefits, applicants are welcome to either (A) utilize the [USDA Entity Guidelines Level 1 approach](#) or (B) propose their own methodology.** If the Entity Guidelines' Level 1 approach to carbon benefit estimation encompasses an applicants' proposed practices, this approach is encouraged, as it provides the USDA Forest Service a consistent method for quantifying the carbon benefits of projects supported by this funding opportunity. However, the list of practices covered by Level 1 is limited. Applicants proposing to implement practices not covered by Level 1 should propose their own methodology.

All applicants should submit as part of their proposal an initial, conservative estimate of the anticipated carbon benefits associated with their project. This estimate should reflect calculations based on either (A) the Entity Guidelines Level 1 approach or (B) the applicant-proposed methodology. Estimated carbon fluxes on impacted acres should be reported at the following intervals: 5, 10, 20, and 50 years after practice implementation. Please note that estimates will need to be updated at a frequency set forth in the federal agreement.

(A) USDA Entity Guidelines Level 1 Methodology

USDA has recently updated its technical guidance around greenhouse gas accounting.

Applicants should refer to the report, 'Quantifying Greenhouse Gas Fluxes: Methods for Entity-Scale Inventory.'⁶ This report is referred to in this NOFO as the 'Entity Guidelines.'

Chapter Five of the Entity Guidelines, Methods for Managed Forest Systems, offers a series of methodological options, or levels, for quantifying greenhouse gas fluxes associated with forest management activities.⁷ These levels reflect a range of complexity for users with different capacities, available data, and precision needs. Level 1 is the most accessible, with an accompanying Excel workbook that automates computation using built-in lookup tables that draw from resources such as the USDA Forest Service's Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program's Nationwide Forest Inventory.⁸

Level 1 offers a standardized, user-friendly approach for estimating carbon benefits from reforestation, avoided deforestation, extended rotation, and harvest, as well as basic

⁶ [Quantifying Greenhouse Gas Fluxes: Methods for Entity-Scale Inventory | USDA](#)

⁷ Chapter 5: [Methods for Managed Forest Systems | USDA](#)

⁸ [The Level 1 Excel workbook can be downloaded here \(zip file linked within the Abstract\).](#)

projections of carbon stocks and flux. While initial estimates of potential emissions from wildland fire are also offered under the Level 1 approach, they currently exclude post-fire carbon flux and account for fire probabilities. Applicants seeking to implement avoided wildfire emissions activities should base their carbon quantification estimates on more spatially specific, temporally relevant modeled simulations of fire emissions scenarios.

(B) Applicant-Proposed Methodology

Applicants are welcome to employ different published methods or test new approaches to carbon benefit quantification with adequate justification and documentation. There is no expectation that applicants will propose registry-approved carbon benefit quantification methodologies currently used in carbon markets. **Applicants that opt not to apply methods from the Level 1 Entity Guidelines must submit a proposed approach for carbon quantification with their application.** The methodology description should not exceed one page and should contain the following information:

- A description of the proposed methodology with rationale for its selection. This should include a description of the carbon pools and greenhouse gases that will be considered.
- The proposed monitoring plan, including a strategy for updating carbon benefits at least annually for the duration of the federal agreement.
- Data sources, tools/protocols, and/or citations for relevant literature. Where proprietary data or tools are employed, they should be noted.
- A point of contact/subject matter expert who can respond to questions if more information is needed.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications are to be submitted through Grants.gov by searching for grant opportunity number USDA-FS-2024-IRA-FLS-04.

Grants.gov recommends submitting your application package at least 24-48 hours prior to the close date to provide sufficient time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission. Please see the [appendix](#) for detailed instructions on Grants.gov application submission and receipt procedures.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

This section outlines required application components. The USDA Forest Service may choose not to consider applications that fail to comply with required content, format, and page limits, or those that are incomplete. All required forms are standard and may be accessed through Grants.gov. Each page must be numbered and have one-inch margins. The text of the proposal narrative must be single spaced and typed in a standard typeface (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri) with no smaller than 12-point font.

Required Documents

1. Cover Page
2. Proposal Narrative

3. Table of Proposed Practices
4. Detailed Budget
5. Budget Narrative
6. Letter(s) of Collaboration (if applicable)
7. Match Verification (if applicable)
8. Standard Forms 424 and 424A. These forms need not be submitted as separate attachments in Grants.gov, but rather are filled out and completed via Grants.gov.
9. If applicable, Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA, see [appendix](#) for additional information)

Cover Page

The proposal cover page should include the following:

- **Title:** Provide a descriptive title for this proposal (50 characters or less, excluding spaces). Use this full title consistently on all submission communications and supplemental documents until an official application number is assigned by the USDA Forest Service.
- **Applicant:** Provide the name of the entity applying for federal funding. This must match the entity name on the associated SAM.gov registration.
- **Contact Information:** Provide the name, title, address, phone number, and email address for the individual acting as the applicant's main point of contact.
- **Abstract:** Include a concise summary of the proposal (150 words or less) that includes goals, target geographies, key partners, and expected accomplishments.

Proposal Narrative

The proposal narrative should not exceed twelve pages (if selecting Option A for component #6 below) or thirteen pages (if selecting Option B) and should include the following components.

1. **Project Goals (1/2 page):** Describe the primary goals for the proposed project. Goals might be related to landowner participation, anticipated carbon stewardship impact, and/or application of best available science (among others).
 - How do these goals support the core purpose of this funding opportunity?
 - How do proposed practices reflect these goals?
 - How will progress toward these goals be assessed?
2. **Context (1 page):** Concisely communicate any essential background and contextual information.
 - How does your agency or organization currently engage landowners in implementation of practices that provide measurable increases in carbon sequestration and storage?
 - What is the target geography for the proposed activities?
 - What are the ecological characteristics of the target geography? Describe forest types, mitigation potential, climate conditions, and climate vulnerabilities.
 - Describe target landowners present in this geography and their land management needs.

- Are there any other previous or ongoing initiatives relevant to this proposal? If yes, describe (e.g., demonstration projects, other Inflation Reduction Act funding).
- 3. Project Design (1-2 pages):** Describe the core features of the proposed project. See [‘Project Design’](#) section above.
- What landowner outreach, education, and technical assistance are planned to support the project?
 - How will any landowner planning needs be addressed? See [‘Management Plans’](#) section above.
 - Describe the anticipated payment process both from the landowner’s perspective and from your organization’s perspective, including record-keeping and financial oversight.
- 4. Implementation Plan (1-2 pages):** Describe key activities and milestones with an associated timeline.
- What are anticipated key activities and milestones? Include a detailed timeline for the proposed performance period (<5 years).
 - How will practice implementation, maintenance, and impact be monitored?
 - What targets does your organization have for numbers of enrolled landowners and acres?
- 5. Proposed Practices and Payment Rates (1-3 pages):** Describe proposed practices and payment rates. This section of the narrative should provide context that is additional to the separately attached table of proposed practices. See [‘Practice Guidance’](#) section above.
- How do proposed practices reflect the [‘Practice Requirements’](#) listed above?
 - How are proposed payment rates determined?
 - How does your organization incorporate considerations of the cost and time requirements for both practice implementation and maintenance into the proposed practice list? See [Practice Requirement #6](#) above.
- 6. Carbon Benefit Quantification Methodology:** Describe the proposed approach to quantifying carbon benefits from proposed practices. See [‘Carbon Benefit Quantification’](#) section above.
- **Option (A): USDA Entity Guidelines Level 1 Methodology**
Are proposed practices addressed by the Entity Guidelines Level 1 methodology? If so, confirm that this tool will be used to assess carbon benefits.
 - **Option (B): Applicant-Proposed Methodology**
If an alternative is proposed, please provide (in one page or less):
 - A description of the proposed methodology with rationale for its selection. This should include a description of the carbon pools and greenhouse gases that will be considered.
 - The proposed monitoring plan, including a strategy for updating carbon benefits at least annually for the duration of the federal agreement.

- Data sources, tools/protocols, and/or citations for relevant literature. Where proprietary data or tools are employed, they should be noted.
 - A point of contact/subject matter expert who can respond to questions if more information is needed.
- 7. Carbon Benefit Estimation (1 page):** Provide an initial, conservative estimate of anticipated carbon benefits associated with the proposed project.
- According to the proposed quantification methodology, what are the estimated carbon benefits of the project at 5, 10, 20, and 50 years after practice implementation? Share carbon fluxes in metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂eq).
 - How do these estimates differ from those associated with customary practices on comparable land (in other words, ‘business-as-usual’ management)?
 - What are the biggest operational or environmental threats to achieving estimated carbon benefits?
- 8. Capability and Capacity (1/2 page):** Describe existing organizational capacity and any planned expanded capacity.
- What capacity does your organization currently have to conduct landowner outreach, technical support (e.g., practice plan development, practice implementation support), landowner selection and communication, payment issuance, assessment of carbon stewardship outcomes, and general project oversight?
 - Where is current capacity insufficient for proposed activities? Describe strategies to address capacity deficiencies, including a timeline for doing so.
 - How do articulated project goals guide capacity-related planning?
- 9. Collaboration (1/2 page):** Describe the network of partners and other entities that will support project implementation.
- How will the project leverage partnerships to support implementation? Please include a letter from each key partner. See [‘Letter\(s\) of Collaboration’](#) section below.
 - How will relevant technical assistance providers (e.g., NRCS field agents, conservation district staff, consulting foresters, state forestry staff) learn about this project? Consider how to best enhance awareness and coordinate related efforts.
- 10. Match (1/2 page):** Describe all planned matching contributions of non-federal funds.
- What non-federal funding will be provided for the project?
 - Describe how matching funds will be used. Will they be used as payments to landowners, or solely for administration and management?
 - Is a match reduction or waiver being requested? If yes, provide a justification. See [‘Match Contribution’](#) section above.

Table of Proposed Practices

Identify and justify proposed carbon stewardship practices eligible for payments following the format of the table provided in the [‘Practice Submission’](#) section above.

Detailed Budget

Each proposal should include a detailed budget. Awardees are encouraged to spend all funds awarded through this NOFO within four years. Budget categories include the following:

- **Personnel**
This line item includes direct compensation to individuals for time worked. The salaries of administrative and clerical staff should normally be treated as indirect costs.⁹
- **Fringe Benefits**
Fringe benefits can be included as a separate line item or can be included as part of the Personnel line item, as long as the applicant is consistent in this.
- **Travel**
Travel for applicant's employees only.
- **Supplies**
Supplies refer to tangible personal property. This category *does not* include equipment,¹⁰ the purchase of which is discouraged. It *does* include tree purchase not completed under a contract for service.
- **Contracted Services** (e.g., contract for service, equipment rental)
- **Other**
Includes practice payments to landowners.
- **Indirect Costs**
Indirect costs may be determined using a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, if established. In the absence of a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, an applicant may elect to use the de minimis rate of 15 percent¹¹ applied to modified total direct costs. See [appendix](#) for more information on indirect cost rates.

Budget Narrative

Explain and justify all requested budget items/costs. List in detail how the totals in the budget were determined and demonstrate a clear connection between costs and proposed project activities. Additional expenditures beyond payments to landowners should be described in detail, including rationale. For personnel salary costs, include base-line salary figures and estimates of time to be directly charged to the project. Note that it is possible that applicants will be awarded less funding than initially requested. Please comment on the project's scalability downward. Is there a funding threshold below which a project would not be viable? Where would you focus awarded funds in a downscaled scenario?

⁹ Direct charging of these costs may be appropriate only if all of the following conditions are met: (1) Administrative or clerical services are integral to a project or activity; (2) Individuals involved can be specifically identified with the project or activity; (3) Such costs are explicitly included in the budget or have the prior written approval of the Federal awarding agency; and (4) The costs are not also recovered as indirect costs.

¹⁰ An article of nonexpendable, tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$10,000 or more per unit.

¹¹ Effective October 1, 2024.

Letter(s) of Collaboration

A letter of collaboration is required from each partner described in the proposal. Strong letters of collaboration should:

- Describe the partner's role in proposal development;
- Share the partner's reason for participating, including the ways in which the proposed activities align to their organizational goals;
- Describe the partner's specific role in the project, including resource contributions; and
- Clarify whether the partnership is new or existing, as well as the expected term of the partnership.

Match Verification

Attach signed support letters or other forms of match verification.

Standard Forms 424 and 424A

Required forms SF-424 and SF-424A. These forms need not be submitted as separate attachments in Grants.gov, but rather are filled out and completed via Grants.gov.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness, and compliance with USDA Forest Service policies. Proposals will then be evaluated based on the extent to which they meet the following criteria:

1. The proposal articulates clear project goals that support the core purpose of this funding opportunity.
2. The proposal provides sufficient context to justify the proposed project, including an overview of relevant initiatives, as well as a description of target landowners and target geographies.
3. The project design is described in detail, aligns with goals, and indicates viability and potential to scale.
4. The proposal includes a detailed implementation plan that describes the operations and execution of the planned project.
5. Carbon stewardship practices are well described, with a clear rationale for each provided. Proposed practices are:
 - a. Aligned to the six [Practice Requirements](#) (see '[Practice Guidance](#)' section above);
 - b. Supported by the best available science;
 - c. Well-suited to the target geography, including its specific climate vulnerabilities and mitigation potential; and
 - d. Innovative (not customarily implemented in target geographies/by target landowners).
6. The process for determining practice payment rates is clear, including consideration of implementation and maintenance costs.
7. The carbon benefit quantification methodology is well described and appropriate for the proposed practices and target geography. If the Entity Guidelines will be used, the proposed practices are covered by the Level 1 approach.

8. Reasonable carbon benefit estimates are provided at the requested intervals. The proposal identifies threats to achieving estimated carbon benefits and plans for responding to these threats.
9. The applicant either has the required capacity to implement the proposed project or clearly describes an achievable plan to build capacity to a sufficient level to implement the project.
10. Proposed partnerships are robust and demonstrate substantive involvement.

The USDA Forest Service will also account for portfolio balance (e.g., geographic location, practices supported, landowners engaged) in determining proposal selection and funding levels.

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For inquiries specific to the content of this NOFO, please contact SM.FS.LandownerIRA@usda.gov.

The USDA Forest Service will host virtual office hours during the application period. Information regarding these sessions will be shared to the [USDA Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act Forest Landowner Support website](#).

APPENDIX

Underserved Landowner Definition

For these IRA provisions, the USDA Forest Service defines underserved as landowners from one or more of the following groups (definitions below):

1. Beginning Farmers, Ranchers, or Forest Landowners¹²;
2. Farmers, Ranchers, or Forest Landowners Living in High Poverty Areas¹³;
3. Federally Recognized Tribes¹⁴;
4. Limited Resource Producers¹⁵; and/or
5. Veterans.¹⁶

1. Beginning Farmers, Ranchers, or Forest Landowners

- Not owned/operated a farm, ranch, or non-industrial private forest land; or
- Has operated a farm, ranch, or non-industrial private forest land for not more than 10 consecutive years; and
- All members/owners individually qualify as beginning farmers, ranchers, or forest landowners.

When self-determining their eligibility, landowners should consider whether:

- a. Within the last 10 years, they inherited the land from someone who died;
- b. The land was newly purchased land within the last 10 years; or
- c. They obtained a new farm number and tract number from FSA in the past 10 years.

2. Farmers, Ranchers, or Forest Landowners Living in High Poverty Areas

High poverty areas are [defined by the USDA](#) as areas with a poverty rate of 20 percent or more in a single time period. There are multiple tools available to assist in the identification of high poverty areas listed below.

3. Federally Recognized Tribes or Alaska Native Corporations/Villages

In many geographies, Tribes and Tribal members may represent a significant proportion of underserved landowners. It is important for the USDA Forest Service to maintain a government-to-government relationship with Tribes, which is reflected in the federal Tribal process for the regularly appropriated Landscape Scale Restoration Program and will be developed for new IRA programs. To honor and build those relationships, the USDA Forest Service will continue to prioritize outreach and engagement with Tribal governments and communities. We recognize that many state forestry agencies also have robust Tribal engagement plans and strong relationships in place.

4. Limited Resource Producers

¹² [Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](#); [From Title 7- Agriculture 7 USC 2279](#); [Inflation Reduction Act](#)

¹³ [Inflation Reduction Act](#)

¹⁴ [Section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act \(25 U.S.C. 5304\)](#)

¹⁵ [Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](#); [Inflation Reduction Act](#)

¹⁶ [Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](#); [From Title 7- Agriculture 7 USC 2279](#); [Inflation Reduction Act](#)

- With direct or indirect gross farm/forest product sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous two years, and
- Who has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years.
- Landowners can voluntarily self-identify using the [Limited Resource Farmer/Rancher Self Determination Tool](#).

5. Veterans

A veteran has served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Space Force, or Coast Guard, including the reserve component thereof; was released from service under conditions other than dishonorable; and:

- Has not owned land for more than 10 years; or
- Who first obtained status as a veteran during the most recent 10-year period.

High Poverty Area Identification Tools

Applicants should use the screening tools and data sets described below to identify high poverty areas.

Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool

The White House Council on Environmental Quality's [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) (CEJST) identifies disadvantaged communities using indicators of burden. Communities that are at or above the threshold for one or more environmental, climate, or other burdens and at or above the threshold for an associated socio-economic burden are identified as disadvantaged. The tool also identifies communities as disadvantaged if they are on land within the reservation boundaries of Federally Recognized Tribes. Applicants and project implementers should use CEJST to identify areas of geographic prioritization for outreach, technical assistance, and program implementation.¹⁷ The additional data sets listed below may also be utilized as complementary reference.

USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) Poverty Area Measures

The [USDA Economic Research Service \(ERS\) Poverty Area Measures](#) identify counties and census tracts with high (20.0 percent or more) and extreme (40.0 percent or more) poverty rates over various timeframes in the period from 1960 to 2019. This information is used to derive persistent and enduring poverty area measures for the same levels of geography. Forest landowners located within these tracts meet the USDA definition of forest landowners living in high poverty areas.

U.S. Counties with Continuous High Poverty, 1960 - 2019

¹⁷ For more information, see OMB, CEQ, & CPO, [M-23-09, Memorandum Re: Addendum to the Interim Implementation Guidance for the Justice40 Initiative, M-21-28, on using the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool \(Jan. 27, 2023\)](#)

As of 2019, there were 304 counties—13 percent of the counties with high poverty in 1960—that consistently had poverty rates of 20 percent or more over the last 60 years (see chart [here](#)). The majority—264 counties—are rural counties and are clustered in the Appalachian States; the Black Belt in the South; the Mississippi Delta; the Ozarks region of Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and southeast Kansas; the Southwest; and in counties with large American Indian and Alaska Native populations.

GAO Report to Congressional Addressees on Targeting Federal Funds: Information on Funding to Areas with Persistent or High Poverty

The Government Accountability Office was asked to review federal funding allocated to persistent-poverty counties and high-poverty areas. This [report](#) examines characteristics of areas with persistent or high poverty. As of 2017, persistent-poverty counties were predominantly rural and more frequently located in the South than in other regions. GAO identified 409 persistent-poverty counties (13 percent of all counties), roughly 50 percent of which were rural. In contrast, high-poverty census tracts—which represented 28 percent of all census tracts—were frequently urban (74 percent).

Indirect Cost Rates

Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA)

If the applicant has a NICRA, the NICRA rate can be used to determine indirect costs. A copy of the NICRA must be submitted with the proposal.

De Minimis Rate

Any non-federal entity that does not have a current NICRA (including provisional) may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 15 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC), which may be used indefinitely. No documentation is required to justify the use of the 15 percent de minimis indirect cost rate. As described in 2 CFR § 200.403, costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If chosen, this methodology must be used consistently for all federal awards until such time as a non-federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the non-federal entity may apply to do at any time.

Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC)

For calculation of indirect costs, applicants should utilize MTDC, unless otherwise specified in a NICRA. MTDC includes all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$50,000¹⁸ of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs, and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$50,000. Other items may only be excluded when necessary to avoid a serious inequity in the distribution of indirect costs, and with the approval of the cognizant agency for indirect costs.

¹⁸ Effective October 1, 2024.

Grants.gov Application Submission and Receipt Procedures

Please read the registration instructions carefully and prepare the information requested **well in advance of the application deadline**.

Organizations must have an active System for Award Management (SAM) registration, which provides a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), **and** a Grants.gov account to apply for grants. Creating a Grants.gov account can be completed online in minutes, but **SAM registration may take several weeks**. Therefore, an organization's registration should be done in sufficient time to ensure it does not impact the entity's ability to meet required application submission deadlines.

How to Register to Apply through Grants.gov

The below information summarizes Grants.gov registration instructions. For further details, refer to: grants.gov/applicants/.

- 1) *Register with SAM*: All organizations (entities) applying online through Grants.gov must register with the System for Award Management (SAM). As part of SAM.gov registration, entities determine points of contact, including an Electronic Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC). Failure to register with SAM will prevent your organization from applying through Grants.gov. SAM registration must be renewed annually. Additionally, take careful note of the EBiz POC designation, as this individual plays a critical role in Grants.gov account setup.
- 2) *Create a Grants.gov Account*: Follow the on-screen instructions provided to create a grants.gov account.
- 3) *Add a Profile to a Grants.gov Account*: A profile in Grants.gov corresponds to a single applicant organization the user represents (i.e., an applicant) or an individual applicant submitting on their own behalf. If you work for or consult with multiple organizations, you can have a profile for each organization under one Grants.gov account. In such cases, you may log in to one Grants.gov account to access all your grant profiles. To add an organizational profile to your Grants.gov account, enter the UEI (Unique Entity Identifier) for the organization in the UEI field.
- 4) *Authorize Profile Roles*: After registering with Grants.gov and creating an Organization Applicant Profile, the applicant's request for Grants.gov roles/access is sent to the EBiz POC. The EBiz POC must then log in to Grants.gov and authorize the appropriate roles, including the Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) role. The AOR role includes permission to complete and submit applications on behalf of the organization. Once an individual has been assigned the AOR role, that individual will be able to submit an application online on behalf of the entity any time.

A Note on Electronic Signatures: When applications are submitted through Grants.gov, the name of the organization applicant with the AOR role that submitted the application is inserted into the signature line of the application,

serving as the electronic signature. *The EBiz POC of the organization must authorize people who are able to make legally binding commitments on behalf of the organization as users with the AOR role; **this step is often missed and it is crucial for valid and timely submissions.***

How to Submit an Application via Grants.gov

Grants.gov applicants can apply online using Grants.gov Workspace. Workspace is a shared, online environment where members of a grant team may simultaneously access and edit different webforms within an application. For each funding opportunity announcement, you can create individual instances of a Workspace.

For an overview of applying on Grants.gov using Workspaces, refer to:

<https://grants.gov/applicants/workspace-overview/>

- 1) *Utilizing a Workspace:* See above link for a video tutorial on creating a Workspace. Add participants to a Workspace to complete all the required forms online or by downloading PDF versions and check for errors before submission. The Workspace progress bar will display the state of your application process as you apply. As you apply using Workspace, you may click the blue question mark icon near the upper-right corner of each page to access context-sensitive help.
 - a. *Adobe Reader:* If you decide not to apply by filling out webforms, 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.

Note: Visit the Adobe Software Compatibility page on Grants.gov to download the appropriate version of the software (at no cost) at:
<https://grants.gov/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility>
 - b. *Mandatory Fields in Forms:* In the forms, you will note fields marked with an asterisk and a different background color. These fields are mandatory fields that must be completed to successfully submit your application.
 - c. *Complete SF-424 Fields First:* These forms are designed to fill in common required fields across other forms, such as the applicant's name, address, and SAM UEI. Once completed, the information will transfer to the other forms.
 - d. *Upload required documents:* See '[Application Requirements](#)' above for details.
- 2) *Submit Application through Workspace:* An application may be submitted through Workspace by clicking the Sign and Submit button on the Manage Workspace page, under the Forms tab. **Grants.gov recommends submitting your application package at least 24-48 hours prior to the close date to provide you with time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission.**

- 3) *Track a Workspace Submission*: After successfully submitting a Workspace application, a Grants.gov Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) is automatically assigned to the application. The number will be listed on the Confirmation page that is generated after submission. Using the tracking number, access the Track My Application page under the Applicants tab or the Details tab in the submitted Workspace.

For additional training resources, including video tutorials, refer to:

<https://grants.gov/applicants/applicant-training>

Applicant Support: Grants.gov provides applicants 24/7 support via the toll-free number 1-800-518-4726 and email at support@grants.gov

Timely Receipt Requirements and Proof of Timely Submission

The applicant with the AOR role who submitted the application will receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov with the successful transmission of their application. This applicant with the AOR role will also receive the official date/time stamp and Grants.gov tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

When the USDA Forest Service successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov, and acknowledges the download of submissions, Grants.gov will provide an electronic acknowledgment of receipt of the application to the email address of the AOR representative. Proof of timely submission shall be the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application. Applications received by Grants.gov after the established due date for the program will be considered late and will not be considered for funding.