

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE(USDA)

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

**ACTION: NOTICE**

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

**SUMMARY:** The Louisiana NRCS, an agency under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is seeking support from natural resource conservation partners to work together to help enhance conservation delivery in Louisiana. The overall intent of this announcement is to solicit partnerships to help enhance the implementation of key conservation objectives and priorities outlined further in this document.

Proposals will be accepted from entities delivering conservation programs and services in Louisiana. NRCS anticipates the amount of funding available for this announcement will be up to approximately **\$5,000,000** awarded to multiple FY2019 recipients. All awards are subject to the availability of funds appropriated by Congress at the time of award. Proposals are requested from eligible entities, non-profits, governmental or non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher learning for competitive consideration of awards for projects between one and five years in duration.

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

**DATES:** Applications must be received by NRCS by **4:00 p.m. CST, Friday, May 10, 2019.**

**ADDRESSES:** Applications sent via express mail, overnight courier service, or the United States Postal Service must be sent to the following address: USDA-NRCS, Mellowdee Tibbs, 3737 Government Street, Alexandria, LA 71303. Applications sent electronically must be sent through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) or to [mellowdee.tibbs@la.usda.gov](mailto:mellowdee.tibbs@la.usda.gov) with a copy to [Theresa.killings@la.usda.gov](mailto:Theresa.killings@la.usda.gov)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT**

**Program Contact**

Mellowdee Tibbs  
Management Analyst  
(318)473-7904  
Email: [mellowdee.tibbs@la.usda.gov](mailto:mellowdee.tibbs@la.usda.gov)

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**

**I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION**

**A. Legislative Authority**

Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Public Law 110-246; Food Security Act of 1985, Title XII, Part Subtitle D, Section 1237, Public Law 99-198, 16 U.S.C 3831-3835a. Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, Public Law 74-76, N/A Stat. N/A, 16 U.S.C 590 a-f. Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Section 2602, Public Law 110-246; Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Section 2502, Public Law 107-171; Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, Section 387, Public Law 104-127, 110 Stat. 888, 16 U.S.C 3836a. Subtitle I of Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 as amended by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-334).

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

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

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

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

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

CFDA 10.072 – Wetland Reserve Program (WRP): 16 U.S.C. 3837-3837f

CFDA 87-051 – Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act) (33 U.S.C. 1321(t)(2)).

## **B. Overview**

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

Technical assistance services are defined as: technical expertise, information, training, education, and tools necessary for a producer to be able to successfully implement, operate, and maintain the conservation of natural resources on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses. The term includes:

- Technical services provided directly to farmers, ranchers, and other eligible entities, such as conservation planning, technical consultation, and assistance with design and implementation of conservation practices; and
- Technical infrastructure, including activities, processes, tools, and agency functions needed to support delivery of technical services, such as technical standards, resource inventories, training, data, technology, monitoring, and effects analyses. Information regarding technical assistance can be found at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cta/>

Technical assistance does *not* include research.

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

- 1) Provide technical assistance to private landowners specifically Veterans seeking to participate in the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE) and added staff capacity to the NRCS Financial Assistance Program Team. This added capacity will address critical conservation needs such as education and outreach, servicing applications, application ranking, setting up farm records, partner agency cooperation, and follow-up assistance.
- 2) Provide technical assistance to private landowners to participate in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and added staff capacity to the NRCS Financial Assistance Program Team. This added capacity will address critical conservation needs such as status reviews of existing CRP contracts, conservation planning, education and outreach, servicing applications, setting up farm records, partner agency cooperation, and follow-up assistance.
- 3) Provide Technical assistance to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement and use of best available science to ensure the efficient use of Gulf restoration funds to include all 3 items listed below:
  - Evaluating the efficacy of using multiple funding streams to fund a single large-scale restoration and/or conservation project/program beyond what could be achieved through a single funding source.
  - Developing project and program concepts that may be pursued for funding in future FPL(s), thereby potentially accelerating implementation of those selected for funding.
  - Harmonizing projects and programs within a defined geographic area, including a watershed/estuary system, that are temporally and spatially aligned with ecosystem function.
- 4) Provide conservation program support assistance in NRCS Field Offices, reducing the burden of program management on conservation planning staff.
- 5) Conduct at least three (3) soil health focused symposia across Louisiana to educate agricultural producers on the importance of soil health to environmental sustainability and profitability. Each of these three symposiums will focus on one primary Louisiana cropping system, and will be hosted in the dominate cropping area to accommodate travel for producers:
  - Row Crops (corn, soybeans, cotton, wheat, sweet potatoes, etc.) – Northeast LA
  - Sugarcane – Southeast LA
  - Rice – Southwest LA

Each symposium will be at least one full day. Livestock integration will be a significant component of each of these training events.

- 6) Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center (PMC) staff assistance  
To provide support addressing USDA/NRCS Plant Materials Program (PMP) conservation needs by assisting the PMC in developing technology and information for the effective use, establishment and maintenance of plants for a wide variety of natural resource conservation needs such as:

- Propagation of native plant materials, establishment and maintenance of seed and plant production fields.
- Irrigation, fertilization and applying of pesticides as assigned on a routine basis.
- Monitoring of plantings, harvesting and data collection of studies/trials.
- Routine communication with PMC Manager if there are any factors affecting the integrity of the study.

To provide support for field management and ground maintenance by:

- Maintaining grounds in and around production fields in the form of grass cutting, mechanical weed removal, hand pulling of weeds and chemical means of weed control.
- Maintain the safety and security of PMC equipment and plants and notify the PMC Manager of any significant deficiencies.
- Responsible for proper operation, maintenance and general repair of the various kinds of farm agricultural equipment.

To provide technical assistance for outreach activities such as:

- Conducting tours and trainings on information of native plants for conservation uses.
- Organizing native plant workshops emphasizing plant identification, establishment and management techniques, and other technical transfer activities as directed.

7) Utilize Outreach efforts to increase participation in NRCS programs and services by socially disadvantaged, limited resource, women, veterans and beginning farmers and ranchers in Louisiana through the following methods listed below:

- Conducting Conferences, Joint USDA Outreach meetings, Annie's Project, Women in Ag Conference, Farmers Cooperatives Workshops utilizing planning, and promotional techniques
- Host Multi-Parish Conservation Events, Regional Summit, Conservation Demonstration Tours Rural Farmers Market in targeted parishes utilizing news articles and other media outlets to promote the events
- Establishment, maintenance and distribution of local produce from community gardens for targeted audiences (including veterans, women, seniors, youth while increasing awareness of the benefits within the younger population
- Engage youth and community stakeholders in the implementation of a walking trail and wetland park within a defined geographic area
- Establishment of urban gardens and walking trails to facilitate rehabilitation of our veteran's population to promote healthier lifestyles while promoting urban gardening

8) Provide wildlife habitat/wildlife management technical assistance to private landowners and provide support for related conservation programs to increase wildlife habitat implementation. Work will result in added staff capacity to NRCS field offices. This added capacity will address critical conservation needs such as status reviews of existing program contracts, conservation planning for new/existing clients, education and outreach on wildlife programs/practices, wildlife related practice design and implementation and follow-up assistance. Added capacity will provide support within the geographic area to include the following Parishes: Caddo, Bossier, Webster, Claiborne, Bienville, Desoto, Red River, Natchitoches, Grant, and Rapides Parishes within Louisiana.

## II. FUNDING AVAILABILITY

NRCS anticipates that the amount of funding available for this announcement will be up to approximately **\$5,000,000** awarded to multiple FY2019 recipients. Selected recipients will be notified by email. All awards are subject to the availability of funds appropriated by Congress at the time of award. All awards are subject to the availability of funds, within focus area of contributing programs, appropriated by Congress at the time of award. Awards may include:

- Contribution Agreements with 50 percent contribution from each party (unless a Statement of Financial Burden requesting waiver of 50 percent contribution, not to exceed 75 percent Federal share, is requested and approved by the Louisiana NRCS State Conservationist), or
- Cooperative Agreements\* without contribution of funds but where significant NRCS involvement is desired and/or needed.

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

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

The resulting agreements are expected to fund single and multi-year projects, not to exceed five years. Applicants should submit budget applications that fully describe funding requests. Multi-year budgets must be outlined completely in the SF 424A-Budget Information Non-Construction Programs.

## III. SUBMISSION INFORMATION

### A. How to Obtain Materials

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

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

### B. Applicant eligibility

Applicants must be federally recognized as an Indian Tribe, State or local unit of government, Community Based Organizations, College and/or University, non-governmental organization, non-profit organization, or an organization or entity with an established history of working cooperatively with producers on agricultural land, as determined by NRCS, to address local conservation priorities. All applicant categories must be capable of providing support in the State of Louisiana.

### C. Matching Funds Requirements

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

#### **D. Applying for assistance – Content and format**

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

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

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

1. **Application Form:** (SF 424 Application for Federal Assistance) Applicants must use this document as the cover sheet for each application. SF 424 can be downloaded from [Grants.gov - Forms Repository](https://www.grants.gov/forms-repository).
2. **Project Summary:** [Two (2)-page maximum] Applicants must submit a description including the information below:
  - a. Project title;
  - b. Primary emphasis area that application pertains to as described in Section 1, Part B of this announcement;
  - c. Project director/contact name, and contact information (including address, email, and telephone number);
  - d. Names and affiliations of application collaborators;
  - e. Project objectives (purpose and goals);
  - f. Project geographic area/location (where application activities will takeplace);
  - g. Project proposed activities; and
  - h. Project deliverables and benefits.
3. **Project Description:** [Four (4)-page *maximum*] The description must include the following information:
  - a. Proposal background: Describe the issue or problem. Include the geographic area and those who will be affected and benefit from this project proposal.
  - b. Project objectives and methods: Be specific using qualitative and quantitative measures, if possible, to describe the project’s purpose and goals.
  - c. Project action plan and timeline: Provide a table listing project actions, timeframes, and associated milestones through project completion. Anticipated start date after August 1, 2019 but subject change. Proposals should have flexible start dates with timelines shown relative to the execution of an agreement.
  - d. Project Management: Give a detailed description of how the project will be organized and managed. Include a list of key project personnel, their relevant experience, and their anticipated contributions to the project. Identify who will participate in monitoring and evaluating the project.

- e. Project deliverables/products: Provide a list of **specific** deliverables and products that will allow NRCS to monitor progress and make payment. In addition to proposal-specific deliverables, selected applicants will be required to provide the following:
    - 1) Semi-annual or annual progress reports;
    - 2) Supplemental narratives or brief updates that indicate progress that explain and support payment requests; and
    - 3) A final report.
  - f. References, bibliographies, and citations, if included, do not count towards the 12-page maximum.
4. **Budget Information:** [Four (4)-page maximum.] The budget portion of the proposal consists of the two parts described below:
- a. SF 424A Budget Information- Non-Construction Programs: Fill in all spaces as appropriate. This form is the summary budget for the project. If there is a desire for the applicant to reach a long-term partnership through this announcement, please indicate this using the SF 424A to indicate multi- year funding needs. If proposed activities will extend past a 12-month period of performance, make sure to identify the funds needed for each funding year period by completing all sections of the SF 424a. Fill in all spaces as appropriate. Section B, Item 6, Column 1 should reflect the NRCS funds and Column 2 should reflect the applicant's matching funds. The budget narrative should support the Federal funds requested and the applicant's matching funds (if applicable). The breakdown of the Federal share and matching funds should be shown separately as in the SF 424A, not combined.
  - b. Detailed Budget Narrative: Provide a detailed narrative in support of the budget for the project, broken down by each project year. Discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed activities. Justify the project cost effectiveness and include justification for personnel and consultant salaries with a description of duties. Personnel costs should include documentation supporting hourly rates. Equipment, supplies and materials need to be itemized with pricing data. Statement(s) of work for any subcontractors and consultants must be included as part of the application. The budget narrative should include both the Federal funds requested and the applicant's matching funds.
- The format of the budget narrative can be in a chart, spreadsheet, table, etc. It should be readable on letter-size, printable pages. The information needs to be presented in such a way that the reviewers can readily understand what expenses are incurred to support the project.

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

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

5. **Indirect (Facilities and Administrative) Costs:** To be eligible to recover any indirect cost under a Federal award, the non-federal entity (NEF) 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 minimus rate authorized by Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations (2 CFR) Section 200.414(f).
- To qualify for the de minimus 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 minimus rate.

NFEs that are eligible for the de minimus rate who already have a de minimus rate agreement must use the rate and base specified in the agreement, which is modified total direct costs (MTDC) as defined by 2 CFR Section 200.68. Note, that MTDC excludes certain costs from the base the rate is applied to. See the instructions for completing the SF-424A “Budget Information” form and budget narrative in section IV below for additional details. A copy of the applicant’s de minimus rate agreement must be provided with the application. If an NFE is eligible to use the de minimus rate, but does not have a de minimus rate agreement, use an indirect cost rate of no more than 10% of MTDC when preparing the budget. If selected for award, a de minimus rate agreement will be executed at the same time the agreement is. Applicants wishing to use the de minimus rate must submit a signed statement certifying that the entity 1) has never had a NICRA previously and 2) specifically request a de minimus rate agreement.

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 non-Federal entity's approved negotiated indirect cost rate [2 CFR Section 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.

**The Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, Section 708, limits indirect costs under cooperative agreements between USDA and *non-profit institutions, including institutions of higher education*, to ten percent of the total direct costs of the agreement regardless of an approved NICRA.**

## **6. Certifications and Required Forms:**

All proposals must include the following signed certification forms, which are available at Grants.gov:

- a. AD-3030 Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants. Must be submitted if entity is a corporate non- profit or for-profit corporation as indicated in the applicants System for Award Management (SAM) registration.
- b. AD-3031 Assurances Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants. Must be submitted if entity is a corporate non-profit or for-profit corporation as indicated in the applicants SAM registration.
- c. SF-424B, Assurances for Non-Construction Programs. Must be completed by all applicants.
- d. Certification Regarding Lobbying. Must be completed by all applicants.
- e. SF LLL Disclosure of Lobbying Form. Must be completed by all applicants.

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

Grants.gov – Forms Repository  
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/grants\\_forms.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/grants_forms.html)

7. **Additional Pre-award Requirements:** The following items **must** be obtained prior to entering into an agreement with the Federal Government but do not need to be provided with the application. Applicants are encouraged to apply early for their Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS)/System for Award Management (SAM) number.
  - a. **DUNS Number:** A Dun and Bradstreet DUNS number is a unique nine-digit sequence recognized as the universal standard for identifying and keeping track of over 70 million businesses worldwide. Applicants must obtain a DUNS number. Information on how to obtain a DUNS number can be found at: <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> or by calling 1-866-705-5711. Please note that the registration may take up to 5 business days to complete.
  - b. **SAM:** Official U.S. Government system that consolidated the capabilities of Central Contract Registration/Federal Register, Online Registrations and Certifications Application, and Excluded Parties List System. To register, go to: <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>. Please allow a minimum of 7 days to complete the SAM registration.

NRCS may not make a Federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time NRCS is ready to make a Federal award, NRCS may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant.

#### **E. How to Submit an Application**

Applications sent via express mail, overnight courier service, or the United States Postal Service must be sent to the following address: USDA-NRCS, Mellowdee Tibbs, 3737 Government Street, Alexandria, LA 71303. If you choose to submit your application electronically, visit [www.grants.gov/apply](http://www.grants.gov/apply) and follow the instructions. Applicants may submit their application electronically via grants.gov or email: [mellowdee.tibbs@la.usda.gov](mailto:mellowdee.tibbs@la.usda.gov) with a copy to [theresa.killings@la.usda.gov](mailto:theresa.killings@la.usda.gov). All applications, regardless of how they are submitted, must be received by NRCS **by 4:00p.m. CST on Friday, May 10, 2019.**

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

#### **F. Due Date**

Applications must be received **no later than 4:00 p.m. CST, Friday, May 10, 2019.** The applicant assumes the risk of delays in application delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed applications early via email to ensure timely receipt by NRCS.

#### **G. Acknowledgement of Submission**

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

**H. Withdrawal**

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

**I. Funding Restrictions**

The funds granted through this announcement may not be used to pay any of the following costs unless otherwise permitted by law or approved in writing via the funding instrument in advance of incurring such costs:

1. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project;
2. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the award;
3. Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and amendments thereto;
4. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives;
5. Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities;
6. Consulting services performed by a Federal employee during official duty hours when such consulting services result in the payment of additional compensation to the employee; and
7. Renovation or refurbishment of research or related spaces, the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such spaces, and the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

This list is not exhaustive. Questions regarding the allowances of particular items of cost should be directed to the administrative contact person listed on Part VI.

OMB Circulars will be incorporated by reference and made a part of each agreement awarded under this process. Applicants should refer to 2 CFR 200 for additional guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

**IV. APPLICATION REVIEW AND NOTIFICATION INFORMATION****A. Review and Selection Process**

Initially, all application packages will be reviewed to confirm that applicants are eligible recipients. Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. NRCS *will not* consider incomplete applications or those that do not meet the requirements set forth in this notice, and applicants will be notified that NRCS is not considering their application. Applications will be evaluated against the specific objectives identified in the opportunity titles identified above. Business evaluations are performed by the grants and agreements or contract specialist. Technical reviews are performed by the program manager. Failure to identify the specific opportunity title may result in a determination of ineligibility. NRCS staff will evaluate complete proposals based on the Special Award Selection Factors below (120 points possible).

**B. Special Award Selection Factors**

1. (0 to 30 points) The extent which the proposal places emphasis to achieve any of the following:
  - Provide technical assistance to private landowners specifically Veterans seeking to participate in the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE) and added staff capacity to the NRCS Financial Assistance Program Team. This added capacity will address critical conservation needs such as education and outreach, servicing

applications, application ranking, setting up farm records, partner agency cooperation, and follow-up assistance.

- Provide technical assistance to private landowners to participate in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and added staff capacity to the NRCS Financial Assistance Program Team. This added capacity will address critical conservation needs such as status reviews of existing CRP contracts, conservation planning, education and outreach, servicing applications, setting up farm records, partner agency cooperation, and follow-up assistance.
- Provide Technical assistance to enhance collaboration, coordination, public engagement and use of best available science to ensure the efficient use of Gulf restoration funds to include all 3 items listed below:
  - Evaluating the efficacy of using multiple funding streams to fund a single large-scale restoration and/or conservation project/program beyond what could be achieved through a single funding source.
  - Developing project and program concepts that may be pursued for funding in future FPL(s), thereby potentially accelerating implementation of those selected for funding.
  - Harmonizing projects and programs within a defined geographic area, including a watershed/estuary system, that are temporally and spatially aligned with ecosystem function.
- Provide conservation program support assistance in NRCS Field Offices, reducing the burden of program management on conservation planning staff.
- Conduct at least three (3) soil health focused symposia across Louisiana to educate agricultural producers on the importance of soil health to environmental sustainability and profitability. Each of these three symposiums will focus on one primary Louisiana cropping system, and will be hosted in the dominate cropping area to accommodate travel for producers:
  - Row Crops (corn, soybeans, cotton, wheat, sweet potatoes, etc.) – Northeast LA
  - Sugarcane – Southeast LA
  - Rice – Southwest LA

Each symposium will be at least one full day. Livestock integration will be a significant component of each of these training events.

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  - Propagation of native plant materials, establishment and maintenance of seed and plant production fields.
  - Irrigation, fertilization and applying of pesticides as assigned on a routine basis.
  - Monitoring of plantings, harvesting and data collection of studies/trials.
  - Routine communication with PMC Manager if there are any factors affecting the integrity of the study.

To provide support for field management and ground maintenance by:

- Maintaining grounds in and around production fields in the form of grass cutting, mechanical weed removal, hand pulling of weeds and chemical means of weed control.
- Maintain the safety and security of PMC equipment and plants and notify the PMC Manager of any significant deficiencies.
- Responsible for proper operation, maintenance and general repair of the various kinds of farm agricultural equipment.

To provide technical assistance for outreach activities such as:

- Conducting tours and trainings on information of native plants for conservation uses.
  - Organizing native plant workshops emphasizing plant identification, establishment and management techniques, and other technical transfer activities as directed.
- Utilize Outreach efforts to increase participation in NRCS programs and services by socially disadvantaged, limited resource, women, veterans and beginning farmers and ranchers in Louisiana through the following methods listed below:
    - Conducting Conferences, Joint USDA Outreach meetings, Annie's Project, Women in Ag Conference, Farmers Cooperatives Workshops utilizing planning, and promotional techniques
    - Host Multi-Parish Conservation Events, Regional Summit, Conservation Demonstration Tours Rural Farmers Market in targeted parishes utilizing news articles and other media outlets to promote the events
    - Establishment, maintenance and distribution of local produce from community gardens for targeted audiences (including veterans, women, seniors, youth while increasing awareness of the benefits within the younger population
    - Engage youth and community stakeholders in the implementation of a walking trail and wetland park within a defined geographic area
    - Establishment of urban gardens and walking trails to facilitate rehabilitation of our veteran's population to promote healthier lifestyles while promoting urban gardening
  - Provide wildlife habitat/wildlife management technical assistance to private landowners and provide support for related conservation programs to increase wildlife habitat implementation. Work will result in added staff capacity to NRCS field offices. This added capacity will address critical conservation needs such as status reviews of existing program contracts, conservation planning for new/existing clients, education and outreach on wildlife programs/practices, wildlife related practice design and implementation and follow-up assistance. Added capacity will provide support within the geographic area to include the following Parishes: Caddo, Bossier, Webster, Claiborne, Bienville, Desoto, Red River, Natchitoches, Grant, and Rapides Parishes within Louisiana.
2. (0 to 15 points) Partner match contribution.
  3. (0 to 10 points) Evidence in the proposal that the design and implementation of project is based on sound methodology and demonstrated technology.
  4. (0 to 10 points) Measurability of project outcomes.
  5. (0 to 10 points) Potential for successful completion and benefit to NRCS mission.
  6. (0 to 10 points) Project timeline and milestones are clear and reasonable.
  7. (0 to 15 points) Project staff has technical expertise needed.
  8. (0 to 10 points) Budget is adequately explained and justified.
  9. (0 to 10 points) Project benefits to Historically Underserved Producers, Veteran Farmers or

Ranchers or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities.

10. (-5 to 0 points) If equipment or structural components are contained in the proposal they are ancillary to technical and management assistance.
11. (-15 to 0 points) The extent to which the project is dependent upon NRCS field staff inputs (engineering assistance, etc.) for its completion.

### **C. Review and Selection Process**

Proposals that pass the initial screening are evaluated using a two-part process:

1. Technical peer review panels composed of subject matter experts evaluate the proposals. The technical peer review panels forward their recommendations to the State Conservationist.
2. The State Conservationist makes the final award selections based on the recommendations of the peer review panels.

### **D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates**

Applicants will be notified of their initial award status within approximately 30 days from the deadline date. Applicants who have been selected for funding will receive a letter of official notification. Award dates will be determined by the availability of funds and NRCS workloads.

**Proposals should have flexible start dates with timelines shown relative to the execution of an agreement.**

### **E. Unsuccessful Applications**

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

## **V. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION**

### **A. Award Notification**

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

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

### **B. Freedom of Information and Privacy Act**

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

### **C. Other Requirements**

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

## **VI. AGENCY CONTACT:**

Mellowdee Tibbs  
Management Analyst  
3737 Government Street  
Alexandria, LA 71303  
Phone: (318) 473-7904  
Email: mellowdee.tibbs@la.usda.gov

Signed this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ in Alexandria, Louisiana

Amanda Mathis  
Acting, Louisiana State Conservationist  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

## **VII. OTHER INFORMATION**

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

To file a complaint of discrimination, complete, sign and mail the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form (PDF), found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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

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

Equal Employment Opportunity Data Posted Pursuant to the No Fear Act -  
This is the reporting page for the Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002 (NO FEAR Act), Public Law 107-174.