USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Conservation Innovation Grants Classic Program

Fiscal Year 2023 Notice of Funding Opportunity



No. USDA-NRCS-NHQ-CIGCLASSIC-23-NOFO0001311

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO)

SUMMARY INFORMATION

Deadline date modifications: pgs. 1 and 30
Grants.gov user role instruction correction: pg. 17

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

Notice of Funding Opportunity Title: Announcement for Program Funding for NRCS's Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) Classic Program for Federal fiscal year (FY) 2023

Notice of Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NRCS-NHQ-CIGCLASSIC-23-NOFO0001311

Assistance Listing: This program is listed in the Assistance Listings (previously referred to as the Catalog of Federal Financial Assistance) on Sam.gov under 10.912, Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

The System for Award Management (SAM) is a web based, Governmentwide application that collects, validates, stores, and disseminates business information about the Federal Government's trading partners in support of the contract awards, grants, and electronic payment processes.

Notice of Funding Opportunity Summary
NRCS is announcing the availability of up to $15 million in CIG funding to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) to agricultural producers through the development of technical manuals, guides and for practical instruction for the private sector.

Applications will be accepted from all non-Federal entities and individuals based in the United States (see Section III(A) Eligible Applicants). Projects may be between 1 and 3 years in duration. The maximum award amount for a single award in FY 2023 is $2 million.

For new users of Grants.gov, see Section IV(A) for information about steps required before submitting an application through Grants.gov.

Key Dates

Applicants must submit their applications through Grants.gov by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on **November 3**, 2023. For technical issues with Grants.gov, contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov. Awarding agency staff cannot support applicants regarding Grants.gov accounts.

For inquiries specific to the content of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO) requirements, contact the Federal awarding agency (Section VII of this NFO). Please limit questions to specific information contained in this NFO (such as dates, page numbers, clarification of discrepancies, etc.). Questions related to eligibility or the merits of a specific proposal will not be addressed.

A webinar for CIG Classic applicants is scheduled for September 12, 2023 at 2pm Eastern Time. Information on how to participate in the Microsoft Teams webinar can be obtained through the following link and phone number:

Join on your computer, mobile app or room device
Click here to join the meeting
Or call in (audio only)
+1 202-650-0123
Phone Conference ID: 621 758 351#

Applicants are encouraged to visit the CIG website to learn more about the CIG program. Questions about this announcement can be directed to: nrcscig@usda.gov.

The agency anticipates making selections by January 15, 2024 and expects to execute awards by May 31, 2024. These dates are estimates and are subject to change.

Federal Funding Floor and Ceiling Amounts

The estimated funding floor for this opportunity is $250,000, and the estimated funding ceiling is $2 million. The funding floor is defined as the minimum agreement funding amount for the Federal share per agreement awarded. The ceiling is the maximum agreement funding amount for the Federal share per agreement awarded. These numbers refer to the total Federal funding amount requested, not the total project budget, which includes a non-Federal share generally referred to as "match."

Federal Financial Assistance Training

The funding available through this NFO is Federal financial assistance. Grants 101 Training is highly recommended for additional instruction on Federal financial assistance. The training is free and available to the public through https://www.cfo.gov/grants-training/. It consists of five modules covering each of the following topics: (1) laws, regulations, and guidance; (2) financial assistance mechanisms; (3) uniform guidance administrative requirements; (4) cost principles; and (5) risk management and single audit. FPAC agencies also apply Federal financial assistance regulations to certain non-assistance awards (e.g., non-assistance cooperative agreements).

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Attachment A – Cover Letter Template
Attachment B – Instructions for Completing SF424
Attachment C – Instructions for Completing SF424A

I. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

CIG is authorized under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) (16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8). The Secretary of Agriculture has delegated the authority to administer EQIP, including CIG, to the Chief of NRCS. EQIP is funded and administered by NRCS under the authorities of the Commodity Credit Corporation.

B. Overview

The purpose of CIG is to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG projects present innovations that are expected to result in the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and inventive approaches to agricultural producers (such as market-based systems) into technical manuals and guides and to be used in the private sector. CIG generally funds pilot projects, field demonstrations, and on-farm conservation research. On-farm conservation research is defined as an investigation conducted to answer a specific applied conservation question using a statistically valid design while employing farm-scale equipment on farms, ranches, or private forest lands.

C. Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities

1. CIG funds development and field testing, on-farm research and demonstration, evaluation, or implementation of:

    a. approaches to incentivizing conservation adoption, including market-based and conservation finance approaches; and

    b. conservation technologies, practices, and systems.

2. Projects or activities under CIG must:

    a. comply with all applicable Federal, tribal, state, and local laws and regulations throughout the duration of the project;

    b. use a technology or approach that was studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success;

    c. demonstrate, evaluate, and verify the effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability of natural resource conservation technologies and approaches in the field;

    d. adapt and transfer conservation technologies, management practices, systems, approaches, and incentive systems to improve performance and encourage adoption; and

e. introduce proven conservation technologies and approaches to a geographic area or agricultural sector where that technology or approach is not currently in use.

Technologies and approaches that are eligible for funding in a project's geographic area using an EQIP contract for an established conservation practice standard are ineligible for CIG funding, except where using those technologies and approaches demonstrates clear innovation.

NRCS strongly encourages the submission of CIG proposals that address the innovative conservation needs of urban farmers in metropolitan areas as well as projects focused on climate change. These topics can be submitted as long as they also address at least one of the priority areas described in Section I(D).

NRCS intends to award at least 10 percent of the funds available through this notice to proposals from historically underserved (HU) producers or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities (see Section IV(C)(6), "Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers").

D. CIG Classic 2023 Priorities

For FY 2023, NRCS is only accepting proposals that address one or more of the priorities listed in this section. Each proposal must clearly identify a primary priority on the proposal cover page. The primary priority selected by an applicant will determine which expert peer panel will review the application.

1. Forestry

Forests play a significant role in reducing carbon dioxide through carbon sequestration. Forests store carbon in trees, shrubs, and soil. Forest management and tree planting, included as part of an agroforestry system, support tree growth and increase carbon storage. This priority area will accept proposals for climate smart forestry and agroforestry in one of the following two areas:

a. Agroforestry (alley cropping, silvopasture, forest farming or multistory cropping, riparian forest buffers, and windbreaks shelterbelts) integrates trees into crop and livestock systems to address conservation needs, increase carbon storage, and build sustainable agricultural systems. Agroforestry systems can be expensive to implement, and it may take several years before the producer benefits financially from the conservation practice. There is a lack of tools to help producers weigh the costs and benefits of transitioning to agroforestry systems. Projects will be given higher priority that develop innovative tools for landowners that include:

- economic tools to help producers determine the financial benefits of adopting agroforestry. Tools should integrate entry costs, return on investment (such as improved production, income diversification, energy reduction), and conservation benefits (wildlife habitat, moisture management, soil health, odor mitigation, or reduced heat stress in livestock), and

- conservation practices and intermediate activities to help offset implementation and transition costs.

b. Forests face increasing stress from extreme weather including longer and warmer seasons, drought, and precipitation intensity. To support forest landowners with maintaining healthy forests, assistance is needed in selecting native tree species adapted to climate shifts. Projects will be given higher priority that include both of the following:

- a regionally specific guide (or guides) that helps private forest landowners and forest managers incorporate climate change considerations into forest management and climate adaptation efforts, and
- databases of suitable native tree and shrub species for seed zones within the specific region of the guide.

2. **Habitat Conservation and Restoration for Wildlife and Invertebrates**

This priority is focused on innovations to identify, improve, and expand habitats for wildlife and native beneficial invertebrate populations critical for ecosystems, agriculture, or other natural resource services. Native insect and invertebrate populations are plummeting with more than one million species under threat of extinction in the coming decades (Cardoso, 2020).[1] This decline impacts entire ecosystems as well as producers who depend on crop pollination. Higher priority will be given to projects that have a large impact on invertebrate conservation or can leverage other resource opportunities that have stackable conservation benefits.

The following are examples of projects, but accepted proposals are not limited to these examples:

a. Grassland management, including innovative ways to manage grasslands to increase wildlife or invertebrate food abundance

b. Agroforestry, such as managing native tree and shrub communities that improve stream rehabilitation and increase riparian wildlife or invertebrate populations

c. Cover crop systems that help manage beneficial invertebrates, such as

- systems that maximize beneficial invertebrate production for wildlife or to provide ecosystem services, and
- formulation of seed mixes for cover crops that support native invertebrate populations or specific species beneficial for crop pollination and plant health.

d. Replanting with native plants, including

- economic studies on the costs and benefits of using native plants for habitat restoration, and

[1] Cardoso, Pedro, et. al, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320719317823

- identifying native or non-invasive non-native host plants that support insect populations that feed wildlife where native plant species can replace invasive species.

e. Climate resilience through improved techniques to establish support for invertebrates and wildlife and climate-resilient plants that address drought and water retention aspects.

f. Urban Agriculture, such as

- using beneficial insects for pest control, and
- substituting native varieties for urban vegetation to support native beneficial invertebrates and improve socio-ecological benefits (e.g., shade, pollinator habitat, privacy, stormwater management)

All projects should include some level of economic assessment that shows the cost of innovation and should be related to agricultural systems.

3. **Managing Agricultural Lands to Improve Local Water Quality**

Water quality issues persist nationwide, particularly issues related to the loss of nutrients from agricultural lands. For example, subsurface nitrogen and soluble phosphorous loss contributes to water quality impairment in local receiving water bodies. This can negatively impact the use of those water bodies for community drinking water systems, recreation and tourism opportunities, and healthy aquatic habitats for fish, plants, and wildlife.

Traditional agricultural land management might not consider risks to receiving water bodies. Current agricultural nutrient management decisions are often based on field production goals and recommendations from universities, crop consultants, and agrichemical dealers. However, the impacts of field loss of nutrients on the receiving aquatic systems can vary greatly among different watersheds or groundwater recharge areas. Farm management of water and nutrients on a field-by-field bases, without attention to how nutrient loss affects the local receiving waterbody, creates a disconnect that could in some circumstances result in a negative outcome for local water resources (i.e., the receiving water body or groundwater recharge area).

NRCS seeks creative, integrated solutions to address specific water quality improvement or protection goals at a local water resource level (e.g., locality, soil and water conservation district, sub-watershed, or groundwater recharge area). Proposals submitted under this priority area will apply strategies, operational processes, and decision support tools to

a. identify and address nutrient reduction goals at a local water resource level and tie those reduction goals to conservation and management at the field level (and vice versa), and

b. provide comprehensive, site-specific nutrient loss risk assessments and management plans for specific water quality improvements or the desired outcomes at the local water resource level

NRCS prioritizes projects that result in a system of conservation and management practices at the field level that (1) demonstrate water quality improvement or protections at the local water resource level and (2) evaluate agricultural economic and production impacts and benefits to individual producers.

The following are examples of projects, but acceptable proposals are not limited to these:

a. A water body consistently experiences harmful algae bloom outbreaks that impact the quality of livestock water. A decision support tool is developed for producers to connect their nutrient management plan to the downstream goal of reducing harmful algae blooms, which may be more stringent than the current recommendations.

b. Drinking water wells in a rural community are experiencing excess nitrate, which is leading to cases of 'blue baby' syndrome. Data show that the excess nitrate is likely coming from intense dairy operations in the groundwater recharge area of the drinking water wells. The project develops a conservation strategy to mitigate the excess nitrate loss from the dairies while maintaining their economic viability.

c. Agricultural production is increasing or shifting in a watershed that contributes to a waterbody with high ecological, recreational, and tourism value for the local community. A decision support tool is developed to avoid excess nutrient contributions from the watershed to protect the waterbody, incorporating local agricultural businesses such as agrichemical dealers and crop consultants.

4. **Energy Conservation**

Agricultural producers typically rely on a range of energy sources. They use energy directly (e.g., electricity or propane) and indirectly (e.g., fertilizer or feed). Most producers can increase the energy efficiency of their equipment, systems, and management strategies. Many producers can capture or convert onsite renewable resources to meet some portion of their energy needs. Few producers have a clear path to evaluate their operation, develop a priority sequence that mixes energy efficiency and renewable resource improvements, and implement the necessary actions to move towards energy self-sufficiency. A robust analysis for a producer should increase the potential to deliver high resource and economic benefits with reduced life-cycle costs.

NRCS seeks proposals for approaches to conserve energy for agricultural producers that help them achieve (or get closer to) energy self-sufficiency (i.e., net zero energy). Successful applicants will demonstrate merit in one or more of the following sub-priorities.

a. Holistic approaches to improve energy efficiency and enhance the use of renewable energy resources tested at multiple producer operations

b. Significant gains (compared to standard practice) in one or more of the following areas:

- energy efficiency for one or more energy-using systems (e.g., irrigation, field operations, poultry ventilation, grain drying, or parlor operations).
- use of onsite renewable resources to meet onsite energy needs
- use of advanced control systems to maximize the benefits of energy-efficient equipment and systems with onsite renewable resource systems

For this priority area, evaluators will also consider how well the proposal addresses the following items:

- an estimate of what fraction of producers currently rely on the standard practice relative to the innovative approach proposed (base this estimate on the relevant geographical area of the proposed project and include the basis of the estimate)
- Measurement & Verification (M&V) protocols to support conservation benefit claims.
- energy benchmarks or energy use index data to improve results
- alternative funding mechanisms (e.g., prescriptive lists and rebates) that may streamline adoption of the proposed energy conservation practices, reduce administrative burdens, or both.

5. **Economics**

Every conservation plan provides an opportunity to do more with every dollar. Applying economic methods and financial tools can help producers find ways to get more resource and dollar benefits from every dollar spent on conservation.

A more holistic approach to conservation that identifies key core practices to build from or that uses sets of practices (as opposed to individual practices) may help to foster more conservation with little additional cost. Understanding how costs and benefits change with compounded practices is the emphasis of this priority area.

This priority area will find synergies with practices that already exist and assess the financial and environmental benefits to those synergies. The innovation will be in the compounding of practices that are not currently combined. The following are examples of projects, but applications are not limited to these examples:

a. A range planting to further improve erosion control immediately after a biomass project took trees from a range site

b. Inter-organization collaborations to better use economic dollars

- These projects will combine projects that are normally performed separately and assess the economic and conservation benefits of this combination.

- Priority will be given to projects that focus on climate change benefits in conservation practices. The conservation practices addressed do not have to be established government practices. Projects will be prioritized that have high quality on-farm economic evaluation in addition to their potential impact to conservation. Each project should include some type of in-depth economic analysis such as sensitivity analysis [2] or marginal analysis [3] within their project methods and evaluation.

6. **Strengthening Conservation through Indigenous Knowledge**

Incorporating indigenous knowledge and stewardship methods into conservation planning processes can reveal innovative conservation methods and practices that are culturally relevant to tribal nations and indigenous peoples. Indigenous conservation management systems and practices, including culturally traditional crops or indigenous management practices, can increase future agriculture and forestry resilience. The attention of this priority area is innovative ideas that can increase conservation in the United States based on indigenous knowledge, priorities and perspectives.

Priority will be given to projects that address conservation needs for tribal and other indigenous lands. Proposals must address one or more of the following sub-priorities:

a. innovatively translating existing conservation practices (i.e., conservation practices currently represented in agricultural or forestry landscapes) to meet the needs of tribal nations or indigenous peoples using indigenous knowledge;

b. introducing indigenous cropping systems or cultural crops (e.g., perennial plantings or rotations such as agroforestry, systems that integrate perennial grains into rotation, or transition to xeric farming);

c. fostering the conservation of culturally relevant species (e.g., bison, sugar maple, camas, river cane, salmon) or promoting tribal food sovereignty;

d. employing innovative or repurposed planning tools, guidance documents, or climate smart agriculture and forestry adaptation practices that use traditional ecological knowledge in a dynamic response to a changing climate;

e. demonstrating the conservation benefits of indigenous forestry management with the implementation of agroforestry and multistory cropping systems (also known as forest farming); and

[2] A sensitivity analysis addresses what would happen if part of a plan is changed a little bit and then this change, in a model, is repeated many times to understand potential outcomes (i.e., value analysis, risk analysis, expected value analysis, etc.).
[3] A marginal analysis addresses what would happen if a plan is augmented and uses modeling to see what would happen to resources and dollars with each possible addition to the plan.

f. improving livestock and ecosystem management through indigenous uses of silvopasture and grazing management systems.

II. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

1. Estimated Funding

The Federal funding agency expects to award approximately $15 million through this opportunity. However, the agency retains the discretion to award a larger or lesser amount.

2. Start Dates and Performance Periods

Projects may be between 1 to 3 years in duration. Applicants should plan their projects based on an estimated project start date of May 31, 2024.

3. Number of Awards

The agency expects to make between 15 and 20 awards.

B. Type of Award

1. Type of Federal Award

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

2. Procurement Contracts

The agency does not expect to award procurement contracts associated with this NFO.

3. Eligibility of Renewal or Supplemental Project Applications

Applications to renew or supplement existing projects are not eligible to compete with applications for new Federal awards. An application to renew is an application submitted to continue an existing agreement that meets the objectives and requirements of this NFO. An application to supplement an existing project is an application that adds components to an existing agreement so that it will meet the objectives and requirements in this NFO.

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applicants and applications must meet eligibility criteria by the application deadline to be considered for award. Eligible applicant type is determined by the implementing program

statute. Applicant entities identified in the SAM.gov exclusions database as ineligible, prohibited or restricted, or excluded from receiving Federal contracts and certain Federal assistance and benefits will not be considered for Federal funding, as applicable to the funding being requested under this Federal program (2 CFR 200.206(d)). Neither foreign entities nor individuals are eligible to apply for this opportunity

This opportunity is open to all domestic non-Federal entities and individuals based in the United States for projects carried out in the United States. "Based in the United States" includes all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

B. Other

Any award made pursuant to this NFO will be made to a single entity. Applicants that apply as "partnerships" or other similar groupings must clearly describe the relationship between the applicant and the "partner" parties. In all but exceptional cases, an awardee/sub-awardee relationship must be reflected in the award.

An applicant organization may submit more than one application for different projects or that propose different approaches. In the case of applications submitted as revisions or corrections to a previously submitted application under this NFO, the agency will consider the last application submitted prior to the established deadline.

Awards made pursuant to this NFO are not Farm Bill program contracts; therefore, the awards in and of themselves are not limited by the payment limitation in 16 USC Chapter 58. However, any agricultural producers receiving a payment through participation in a project awarded under this NFO must meet the eligibility requirements of 7 CFR Part 12 and 7 CFR Part 1400 and have control of the land involved for the term of the proposed award period.

1. Specific CIG Eligibility

All CIG projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers that meet EQIP's eligibility requirements listed in 7 CFR 1466.6(b)(1) through (3):

a. Must comply with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions (7 CFR Part 12).

b. Must be a person, joint operation, Indian tribe, or Native corporation, or other legal entity that is engaged in agricultural production or forestry management or has an interest in the agricultural or forestry operation as defined in 7 CFR Part 1400.

c. Must have control of the land involved for the term of the proposed contract period.

2. EQIP Payment Limitation and Duplicate Payments

The following provisions apply to CIG funding:

a. CIG funds are awarded through grant agreements. These grant agreements are not EQIP contracts; thus, CIG awards themselves are not limited by the payment limitation found at Section 1240G of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839aa-7), which limits payments to $450,000 for all legal entities, including individuals, that entered an EQIP contract between FY 2019 and FY 2023.

b. All agricultural producers receiving a payment through participation in a CIG project must meet the eligibility requirements of 7 CFR 1466.6(b)(1) through (3) noted previously. In addition, producers receiving a payment for participating in a project must meet the adjusted gross income requirements under Section 1001D(b)(1) of the 2018 Farm Bill (7 U.S.C. 1308-3a(a)(1)). All agricultural producers receiving a payment through participation in a CIG project must have an adjusted gross income (AGI) that does not exceed $900,000. If awarded a grant, grantees must self-certify and maintain records showing that participating producers receiving payments using CIG funding meet the EQIP eligibility and AGI requirements. Under 7 CFR part 1400, the Chief may waive the AGI limit on a case-by-case basis, if the Chief determines that environmentally sensitive land of special significance would be protected as a result of such waiver. CIG grantees may request waivers for participating producers once their project commences.

c. Section 1240B of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-2, prohibits duplicative payments. Accordingly, direct or indirect payments cannot be made for a practice when an individual or legal entity has already received funds or is contracted to receive funds through any USDA conservation program (e.g., Conservation Reserve Program, EQIP, Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Stewardship Program, etc.). If awarded a grant, grantees must self-certify that payments to producers using CIG funding are not duplicative.

3. **Historically Underserved (HU) Farmers and Ranchers**

NRCS is committed to the success of our nation's HU producers, businesses, and partners. HU producers play a vital role in securing a healthy agricultural economy for our country and are momentous leaders in protecting, enhancing, and sustaining our valuable natural resources. NRCS encourages proposal submissions from entities that represent or are composed entirely of HU producers.

For the FY 2023 CIG award process, at least 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG are set aside for proposals that benefit HU producers. These HU funds (referred to as the HU set aside) will ensure that equity is incorporated in the planning and delivery of CIG projects to align with NRCS's Justice 40 goals. Projects that benefit HU producers also qualify for a reduced rate of matching funds, as detailed in Section IV(C)(6). The regulatory definitions of the HU

farmer or rancher categories are located at the NRCS HU Farmers and Ranchers web page.

To compete for the HU set-aside funds, applicants must indicate their intent on the cover page and complete an HU narrative section as described in Section IV(C)(6).

Applicants competing in the HU set aside must meet all other requirements of this announcement, including addressing at least one CIG priority listed in this notice.

4. **Technical Assistance for CIG Projects**

All technical assistance required to carry out a CIG project is the responsibility of the grantee. NRCS designates an NRCS employee as a technical contact for each grant award. Technical contacts provide oversight activities during the project such as site visits, reviewing performance reports, financial reports, and audits to ensure that standards, objectives, terms, and conditions for the projects are accomplished. Technical Contacts also evaluate project results and work with grantees on any relevant end-of-project efforts to disseminate project results. NRCS employees, however, are not substantially involved in carrying out grant activities.

C. Cost Sharing or Matching

This NFO requires applicants to share 50 percent of total project costs. Project costs therefore, include Federal and non-Federal shares. The non-Federal share, or "match" provided by the applicant has to be a minimum of 50 percent of the total project costs, except for applicants competing for the HU set aside (see Section IV(C)(6)). Applications that do not include the required level of cost-sharing will be ineligible for award and will be eliminated from the competition through an initial proposal screening. Cost sharing may be achieved with contributions of cash, services, materials, equipment, or third-party in-kind contributions. Recipients with unrecovered indirect costs may also use those to meet cost-sharing obligations. Funds from another Federal award cannot be used as match except where the Federal statute authorizing a program specifically provides that Federal funds made available for such a program can be applied to matching or cost sharing.

Additional details about cost sharing or matching funds can be found at 2 CFR 200.306. Refer to Section IV of this NFO for information about any required submittals related to match or cost-share requirements. While the pace of cost-sharing or matching may vary throughout the award period, the agency will actively monitor cost-sharing or matching levels as it receives payment requests to ensure the total cost sharing or matching requirement is met by the end date of the award performance period. Additional details about cost sharing or matching funds are located at 2 CFR 200.306.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Information for New Users of Grants.gov

1. Overview

While a Grants.gov account is not required to download an NFO and related documents, it is required to submit an application. If your organization has never applied through Grants.gov, please be aware that there are several steps you must take to register your organization before you can submit an application. **Completing those steps can take a significant amount of time, so plan accordingly.**

For information about the Grants.gov pre-award phase of the grant lifecycle, see the Grants.gov pre-award phase web page.

2. Register to Apply through Grants.gov

Carefully review the registration steps and gather information requested prior to beginning the registration process to avoid last-minute searches for required information. For assistance with the registration process, contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov.

Organizations must complete all steps to register (steps IV(A)(3)(a) through (e)). Complete organization instructions are included on the Grants.gov Organization Registration web page.

Although creating a Grants.gov account online can take only minutes, SAM registrations may take several weeks. Therefore, organizations should begin the process early to ensure they have sufficient time to complete registration and meet required application submission deadlines.

Individuals are not subject to the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) or SAM requirement and may begin with step (c), Create a Grants.gov Account.

3. Steps to Register

a. Obtain a UEI: All entities applying for funding must have a UEI issued by SAM.gov. Applicants must enter the UEI in the data entry field labeled "UEI" on the SF-424.

b. Register with SAM: All organizations must register with System for Award Management (SAM) to apply online through Grants.gov. SAM registration must be renewed annually. Part of the SAM registration process includes designating an Electronic Business point of contact (EBiz POC). **The EBiz POC plays an integral part in the organization's Grants.gov registration and application process.** The individual in that role must authorize all other roles in Grants.gov. For more detailed instructions for registering with SAM, refer to the Grants.gov "Step 2 Register with SAM" web page.

c. Create a Grants.gov Account: From the Grants.gov webpage, click "Register" in the top right-hand corner and follow the on-screen instructions or refer to the detailed instructions on the Grants.gov Applicant Registration web page.

d. Add an Organization Applicant 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. If you work for or consult with multiple organizations and have a profile for each, you may log in to one Grants.gov account to access all your grant applications. To add an organizational profile to your Grants.gov account, enter the UEI for the organization in the UEI field while adding a profile. For more detailed instructions about creating a profile on Grants.gov, refer to the Grants.gov .

e. EBiz POC Authorized Profile Roles: After you register with Grants.gov and create an organization applicant profile, you must establish roles for individuals in the organization. The authorized organizational representative (AOR) role is critical; it gives an individual permission to complete and submit applications on behalf of the organization. Without this role, the organization cannot submit any applications. The request for role assignment will be routed to the organization's EBiz POC for approval. Once approved, the AOR can submit an application online. For more detailed instructions about creating a EBiz POC authorized profile on Grants.gov, refer to the EBiz POC Authorizes Profile Roles web page.

Track Role Status: To track your role request, refer to the Grants.gov Track Profile Role Status web page.

4. **Electronic Signature**

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 **must** authorize people who are able to make legally binding commitments on behalf of the organization as a user with the AOR role. **This step (step IV(A)(3)(e)) is often missed, and it is crucial for valid and timely submissions.**

5. **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 NFO, you can create individual instances of a workspace. An applicant can start an application in Workspace and return to work on it later.

6. **Apply for an Opportunity**

The following is an overview of applying through Grants.gov. For complete instructions on how to apply for opportunities, refer to the Grants.gov Workspace Overview web page.

a. Create a Workspace. Creating a workspace allows you to complete an application online and route it through your organization for review before submitting.

b. Complete a Workspace. Add participants to the workspace to work on the application together, complete all the required forms online or by downloading PDF versions, and check for errors before submission. The Workspace progress bar will display the status 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.

- 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 Grants.gov Adobe Software Compatibility web page to download the appropriate version of the software.

- Mandatory Fields in Forms: In the forms, you will note fields marked with an asterisk and a different background color. These fields are mandatory and must be completed to successfully submit your application.

- Complete SF-424 Fields First: The forms are designed to fill in common required fields across other forms, such as the applicant's name, address, and UEI. Once it is completed, the information will transfer (i.e., prepopulate) to the other forms.

c. Submit a Workspace. Submit your application 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 ensure that you have enough time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission.

d. 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 the Grants.gov Applicant Training web page.

B. Electronic Application Package

Applicants interested in applying to this NFO must submit their application through Grants.gov; the agency will not accept applications submitted by email, fax, courier, or any other method. Applicants are urged to submit early to the Grants.gov system.

For technical issues with Grants.gov, contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov. Awarding agency staff cannot support applicants regarding Grants.gov accounts.

Address to Request Application Package

All information necessary to apply for this opportunity is included in the Grants.gov opportunity announcement.

C. Content and Form of Application Submission

The agency may choose not to consider applications that are incomplete or that fail to comply with the required content, format, and page limits.

Applications must contain the content, format, and information set forth in this section to receive consideration for funding. Submit a separate application for each project if submitting more than one. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the application.

Applicants must submit a single copy of the application in the following format:

- each page of the document must be numbered, letter-sized (8.5 x 11 inches), and use a white background that has 1-inch margins; and
- the text of the application must be typed, single spaced, black, and in a standard font (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, Courier, or similar) no smaller than 12-point.

1. **Application Form**

   Complete SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance. See Instructions for Completing SF-424 in Attachment A to this NFO.

2. **Cover Page (1 page maximum)**

   Applications that fail to provide a cover page will be rejected in the first stage of screening. On a single page, provide the following information in the order outlined:

   a. The applicant entity's name.

   b. The project title.

   c. The project duration in years.

   d. The amount of Federal funding requested.

   e. The amount of non-Federal cost-share committed (match).

f. The name, phone number, and email address for the applicant's technical contact (usually the project director), this person is considered the primary contact for the project by NRCS.

g. The name, phone number, and email address for the applicant's administrative contact (usually an individual in a grants office or project manager working under a project director).

h. The geographic location of the project, be sure to list all states with on the ground activities.

i. The priority that is addressed by the project, list only one priority from Section I(D). If the proposal addresses more than one priority, you must select a primary priority. The priority that you select will determine the panel that will review your application.

j. If the selected priority has more than one sub-priority, identify the sub-priority by number and name.

k. An estimated number of participating producers expected to be involved with the project.

l. Identify if the project is competing for HU set aside (see Section IV(C)(e) for further definition).

m. An estimated number of HU producers expected to be involved with the project.

n. A brief description (1 to 3 sentences) of the innovative conservation approach or approaches that is the focus of the project (please be concise).

o. If relevant, list any NRCS practice standards that this project could potentially inform (if multiple exist, select the top five).

3. **Project Abstract (1-page maximum)**

   Provide a concise project summary (in nontechnical language) that captures the issue or problem that the project will address, the project goal, the innovative approach to be employed (including the role of participating partners), the anticipated project results and key deliverables, and the predicted impact to conservation more broadly.

4. **Project Narrative (15-page maximum)**

   The project narrative must cover all proposed activities to be carried out using both the Federal and non-Federal matching funds. Activities related to the project but beyond the scope of the CIG project budget should be described in the background section only.

The project narrative description must include all the following information (a - m), in this order.

a. **Project goal**. Describe the main purpose for conducting this project. The goal should be compelling and refer to achieving a desired outcome in a set period of time.

b. **Project objectives**. Outline the supporting objectives that will help this project reach the previously listed project goal. Objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART[4]).

c. **Project background**. Provide background information that identifies the issue or problem necessitating the proposed innovation. Provide evidence that the proposed innovation has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success. Be sure to give enough details to demonstrate to the reviewers why this innovation is compelling.

d. **Project design and methods**. Describe clearly the design and methodology of the project. Describe details of the processes that will be used, scientific tests that will be conducted, tools that will be developed, any sampling that will be performed, and background on why these choices were made, especially if different from convention. We encourage new grant writers to consider using a logic model approach to improve clarity of this section. For more on the logic model, see the University of Wisconsin's publication "Developing a logic model: Teaching and training guide" (Ellen Taylor-Powell and Ellen Henert, February 2008).

e. **Project evaluation**. Describe the methodology that will be used to evaluate the project and describe how results will be quantified. It should be clear to the reviewers how project objectives relate to the evaluation.

f. **Project Deliverables and Products**. Provide a list of specific deliverables and products that will be produced from this project. The deliverables should directly relate to the project objectives and outcomes, and they should be referenced in the project timeline. The deliverables should reflect the project performance and be tangible to allow NRCS to monitor project progress (e.g., knowledge gained could be written in the deliverable section as a report on a targeted topic). In addition to project-specific deliverables, CIG grantees are responsible for:

   - Participating in at least one event (e.g., conference or workshop) during the grant period where the grantee presents on the activities of the project; and

   - Submitting a project fact sheet at the project's conclusion.

g. **Project outcomes and benefits**. Identify the short-term and long-term benefits and outcomes of the project, translating how project outcomes could potentially

[4] SMART objectives are described by several organizations. The CDC web page on Writing SMART Objectives provides and example and more information on SMART objectives.

benefit society and impact conservation at large. Please note, project outcomes are often the result of the project deliverables (for instance, if a training event is the deliverable, the impact that training event has on producers, such as increased adoption of a new practice, would be the outcome or benefit). In addition to short-term outcomes, forecast the long-term outcomes of project results, giving reviewers an idea of the potential long-term impact of the innovation. Identify project beneficiaries (i.e., agricultural producers) by type, region, or sector; HU producers and communities; rural communities; or municipalities.

h. **Geographic location and size of project or project area**. Identify the geographic location and the estimated size and scope of the project area (e.g., acres, farm types, demographics). Maps are recommended. If the project is multistate, describe which project elements will take place in each state.

i. **EQIP-eligible producer participation**. Estimate the number of EQIP eligible producers that will be involved in the project and describe the extent of their involvement. Describe whether these producers have been identified, and if not yet identified, clearly articulate the process that will be carried out to identify and attract producer participation. If competing in the set aside for HU projects, include an estimate on the number of HU producers scheduled to participate in the project.

j. **Project action plan and timeline**. Provide a list of critical project activities in a timeframe format, relating the activities to the project deliverables and objectives. Project milestones throughout the project should be highlighted.

k. **Project management**. Describe how the project will be organized and managed, including a description of project partner involvement. Include a description of how communication will be structured within the project team to ensure effective project management.

l. **Technology transfer**. Describe how the results will be transferred to producers and stakeholders through communications and outreach activities.

m. **Graphics.** Graphics (including pictures, charts, graphs, and similar items) count towards the 15-page maximum. An additional three pages of graphics can be added to the end of the proposal if grouped together.

5. **References**

   References, bibliographies, and citations (if included) do not count towards the 15-page maximum.

6. **Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers (2 Page Maximum)**

   The CIG program provides special consideration to proposals substantially involving or benefitting historically underserved (HU) producers. For the National CIG Classic

component, at least 10 percent of the total funds available are set aside for applications from the following four categories:

a. an HU producer at the time of application (see the NRCS Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers web page for definitions);

b. a community-based organization comprised of, representing, or exclusively working with HU producers for the life of the project;

c. an entity developing an innovative conservation approach or technology specifically targeting HU producers' unique needs and limitations for the life of the project; or

d. an 1890 or 1994 land-grant institution (7 U.S.C. 3222 *et seq.*), Hispanic-serving institution (20 U.S.C. 1101a), or other minority-serving institution, such as a historically Black college or university (20 U.S.C. 1061), a tribally controlled college or university (25 U.S.C. 1801), or Asian American and Pacific Islander-serving institution (20 U.S.C. 1059g) at the time of application.

An applicant seeking to apply to the HU set aside must identify as such on the cover page of their application. In addition, applicants must identify which HU category (a - d) applies to their proposal.

Projects that are applying to the HU set aside are required to include additional project information on the HU component of the project. All projects applying for the HU set aside will be assessed by an additional set of criteria (Section E.3).

Applicants applying under and qualifying for the HU set aside are eligible for a reduced project match of one-third of the total project budget, or 50 percent of the Federal request. For example, an HU-qualifying entity requesting $500,000 in Federal CIG funding would need to provide at least $250,000 in matching funds. In this example, the total project costs would equal $750,000, the federal portion would equal $500,000 and the matching funds would equal $250,000.

Applicants who do not qualify for the HU set aside are responsible for at least 50 percent of the total project budget as applicant share. See Section III(C) "Cost Sharing or Matching" for more information.

Upon request from applicants, NRCS may waive the cost share requirement entirely for any applicants that qualify for the HU set aside and provide a justification of why they are unable to provide any matching funds. This waiver request should be included in the applicant's HU Narrative section of its proposal.

Applicant entities that are not applying to the HU set aside but would like to further describe the participation of HU producers can do so in this section. Otherwise, for projects not applying for the HU set aside, this section is optional.

7. **Declaration of Previous CIG**

   If the applicant has previously received and managed a CIG award (either at the national or state levels) or been a partner receiving Federal funding on a CIG award, list for each award the CIG agreement number, the project title, award funding amount, and the year of expiration. Give a short summary of the completed project's results and impact. If the project is ongoing, provide the anticipated results. Indicate if this proposal builds on a prior CIG award.

8. **Team Qualifications**

   Provide a brief description of key technical and administrative personnel qualifications, their experience managing Federal awards, and their anticipated contributions to the project. This does not count towards the 15-page maximum, but each person's description should be limited to a half page. Do not include a resume or curriculum vitae. If a resume or curriculum vitae is included, it will not be considered in the review.

9. **Assessment of Environmental Impacts**

   If the proposal anticipates physical, chemical, or biological impacts on the environment when implemented, describe the impacts and their extent. The description of the potential environmental impacts must address both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action. The length of the description should be commensurate with the complexity of the project proposed and the natural environmental resources impacted directly, indirectly, or cumulatively. Where possible, information on environmental impacts should be quantified, such as number of acres of wetlands impacted, amount of carbon sequestration estimated, etc. Natural environmental resources include soil, water, air, plants, and animals, as well as other resources protected by law, regulation, executive order, and agency policy. NRCS may choose not to approve funding for projects that have the potential to result in unacceptable adverse environmental impacts.

   Every funded CIG project with anticipated physical, chemical, or biological impacts on the environment or ground-disturbing activity is subject to the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. See Section VI(B) of this announcement for more information. NRCS must complete an environmental review of each awarded project before project commencement. Applicants may be required to prepare and pay for preparation of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement, should the environmental review find that an assessment or impact statement is required.

10. **Budget Information, (12-page maximum)**

    The budget portion of the application consists of three parts: a standard form (SF) 424A; a detailed budget narrative, and a budget table. See the following section for details.

a. **Standard Form 424A (SF-424A), Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs**

SF-424A, "Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs," is included as part of the application package posted on Grants.gov. In section B, item 6, column 1, the agency funds should be reflected. Column 2 should reflect the applicant's matching funds. This form is the summary budget for the project. See "Instructions for Completing SF-424A" located in the "Related Documents" tab of this announcement on Grants.gov. Refer to Section IV of this opportunity for information regarding indirect costs. Errors in the SF-424A with regard to classifying costs may be negotiated after selection.

b. **Budget Narrative and Table**

In a separate document titled "Budget Narrative," explain and justify all requested budget items and costs. (Refer to the budget narrative guidance located in the Appendix A.) Detail how the totals on the SF-424A were determined and demonstrate a clear connection between costs and the proposed project activities. For personnel salary costs, include the baseline salary figures and the estimates of time (as percentages) to be directly charged to the project. Describe any item that under the applicable Federal cost principles requires the agency's approval and estimate its cost. The pages included as the budget narrative do not count toward the page limit. Errors in the budget narrative with regard to classifying costs may be negotiated after selection. Refer to the Budget Narrative Guidance located at the end of this document regarding procurement standards when including contracts for goods or services. **Sole-source contracting is prohibited without proper justification.** See Procurement Standards located at 2 CFR 200.317-327.

Statement(s) of work for any subcontractors, subawardees 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 budget narrative must be in text format as well as contain a detailed table (further instructions and an example can be found in Appendix A). It should be readable and on letter-size (8.5 x 11 inch), 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 each year.

c. **Indirect Costs Recovery**

If requesting indirect costs, provide the calculation specifying the amounts used in applying the base (the base specified in the applicable rate agreement) by the applicable rate. The calculation can be displayed in different formats but must capture the components (i.e., amounts used in determining the base and the rate applied to the base).

To be eligible to recover any indirect costs under a Federal award, recipients must either (1) have a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA) with a Federal

agency that has not expired, or (2) qualify for using the de minimis rate authorized by 2 CFR 200.414(f) and described in this section. For-profit entities (if eligible to apply) must obtain a NICRA from their cognizant agency. USDA will not accept an indirect cost agreement negotiated or approved by the Defense Contract Audit Agency.

Any non-Federal entity (except state and local governments that receive more than $35 million per year in Federal funding) that does not have a current negotiated (including provisional) rate may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. No documentation is required to justify the 10 percent de minimis indirect cost rate, simply indicate in your budget narrative that the recipient elects to use the de minimis rate. The MTDC is all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first $25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards). 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 $25,000. 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.

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 once elected 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.

d. **Cost Share or Matching (Non-Federal portion of budget)**

Selected applicants may receive CIG grants of up to 50 percent of their total project cost. CIG recipients must provide a non-Federal funding cost-share amount at least equal to the amount of Federal funding requested. For example, if an applicant requests $500,000 in CIG funding, at least $500,000 in non-Federal cost-share must be committed by the applicant.

The match requirement is reduced for applicants applying for the HU set aside. Refer to Section IV(C)(6) of this announcement for more details.

Cost-share may be committed by the applicant, project partners, or both and can be any combination of cash and in-kind contributions. Examples of in-kind contributions include work performed by unpaid volunteers and donations of supplies, facilities, or equipment. In-kind contributions identified in the project budget must be quantifiable, verifiable, and necessary to accomplish program activities.

Cost sharing must be committed at the time of application submission. Cost sharing must meet the criteria stated at 2 CFR 200.306 and be valued in

accordance with 2 CFR 200.306(d). Additional details about cost sharing is located at 2 CFR 200.306.

All cost-share funds must be identified in the SF-424A, the budget table and budget narrative components of the application (see Appendix A). Project partners (other than the applicant) must provide commitment letters for all cash and in-kind matching contributions. A separate commitment letter is required for each cash or in-kind match contribution. A template for commitment letters can be found in Appendix B.

Commitment letters must be signed[5] by the authorized organizational representative of the contributing organization and must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the project partner; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the contribution is made, (4) the dollar value of the contribution; and (5) a statement that the contributor commits to furnish the contribution during the grant period. A sample commitment letter can be found in Appendix B.

Applications without signed written commitments covering the full value of the matching contribution are deemed incomplete.

The value of applicant contributions to the project is established according to Federal cost principles. Applicants should refer to 2 CFR 200.306 for additional guidance on matching funds, in-kind contributions, and allowable costs.

e. **Indirect Cost Limitations**

Applicants not subject to a statutory limitation that have a current NICRA must calculate indirect costs using the rate and base specified in their NICRA. A recipient may voluntarily reduce or waive recovery of indirect costs at its sole discretion and must not be encouraged or coerced in any way to do so by the agency. A copy of the applicant's current NICRA must be provided with the application. Indirect costs may not be recovered under an expired NICRA.

Recipients are prohibited from shifting unallowable indirect costs to another Federal award unless specifically authorized to do so by legislation.

Individuals applying for funds separate from a business or non-profit organization are not eligible to charge indirect costs to their award. If you are an individual applying for funding, do not include any indirect costs in your proposed budget.

f. **NRCS Travel**

[5] Signatures can be manual, scanned manual signatures, or electronic (verified as described in U.S.C. 3504, Sec. 1710). Names merely typed in script fonts or other unverified electronic signatures will not be accepted and the communications will not count towards the match total.

Include $6,000 in the budget for project travel required by NRCS in the first year. These funds are required and can be part of the Federal portion, the applicant's matching funds, or a combination of both. Any additional travel required to complete the project is considered additional to this $6,000.

g. **Build America, Buy American**

The "Buy American" preference applies to Federal financial assistance awards that include construction components, even if the award is funded by both Federal and non-Federal funds. Subawards should conform to the terms and conditions of the Federal award from which they flow. A "Buy American" preference only applies to articles, materials, and supplies that are consumed in, incorporated into, or affixed to a construction project. Refer to the FPAC General Award Terms and Conditions web page for additional information.

Refer to the Budget Narrative Guidance (Appendix A) for information about making contract or subaward determinations.

11. **Grants.gov Lobbying Form**

Under Title 31 of the United States Code, Section 1352, an applicant or recipient must not use any federally appropriated funds (both annually appropriated and continuing appropriations) or matching funds under a grant or cooperative agreement award to pay any person for lobbying in connection with the award. Lobbying is defined as influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the award. Submission of an application also represents the applicant's certification of the statements in 2 CFR Part 418, Appendix A – Certification Regarding Lobbying.

12. **Statement of Current and Pending Support.**

Submit a "Statement of Current and Pending Support" for each key team member who will participate in the project. Use the template located in the "Related Documents" tab of the opportunity.

13. **SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities**

SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities, must be submitted only if you/your organization have made or agrees to make any payment using non-appropriated funds for lobbying. See 2 CFR 418.110 for more information on when additional submission of this form is required.

14. **Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement** (if applicable)

If charging indirect costs using a NICRA (including costs designated as cost share), upload the NICRA under "Other Attachments" (listed as an Optional Form) in the Grants.gov Opportunity Application Package.

15. **Disclosure of Potential Conflict of Interest**

In accordance with 2 CFR 400.2, applicants must maintain written standards of conduct covering conflicts of interest and governing the performance of their employees in the selection, award, and administration of Federal awards. No employee, officer, or agent may participate in the selection, award, or administration of a Federal award if he or she has a real or apparent conflict of interest. Such a conflict of interest would arise when the employee, officer or agent, any member of his or her immediate family, his or her partner, or an organization which employs or is about to employ any of the parties referenced, has a financial or other interest in, or a tangible personal benefit from, an applicant considered for a Federal award. The standards of conduct must provide for disciplinary actions to be applied for violations of such standards by officers, employees, or agents of the applicant.

If the applicant has a parent, affiliate, or subsidiary organization that is not a state, local government, or Indian tribe, the applicant must also maintain written standards of conduct covering organizational conflicts of interest. Organizational conflict of interest occurs when an applicant is unable or appears to be unable to be impartial in conducting a Federal award action involving a parent company, affiliate, or subsidiary organization, related to the applicant's organization.

Applicants must disclose in writing any potential conflicts of interest to the USDA awarding agency or pass-through entity. Include the name of the individual, the name of the entity with which the individual has a conflict, the nature of the financial or other interest, the value of the interest, and a description of how the interest relates to your application. Upload disclosures under "Other Attachments" (listed separately under "Optional Forms") in Grants.gov. **If no conflict exists, no submission is required.**

16. **Unique entity identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM)**

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual excepted from those requirements under 2 CFR 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the Federal awarding agency under 2 CFR 25.110(d)) is required to: (i) be registered in SAM before submitting its application; (ii) provide a valid UEI in its application; and (iii) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency. The agency may not make a Federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements, and if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the agency is ready to make an award, the agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant.

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

To register for SAM, go to: https://www.sam.gov. The Federal Service Desk is available for registration assistance and can be contacted through the "Help" tab at the website listed above.

Awarding agency staff cannot support applicants regarding UEI or SAM issues.

D. Submission Dates and Times and Correspondence

Applicants must apply through Grants.gov. Applications must be received by 11:59 pm Eastern Time (ET) on **November 3**, 2023. An application submitted or resubmitted after the deadline is late (an application is considered on time at 11:59.59 pm ET, but it is late at 12:00 am ET). Late submissions will not be reviewed or considered.

Grants.gov will provide either an error or a successfully received transmission in the form of an email sent to the individual with the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) role attempting to submit the application. The Grants.gov Support Center reports that some applicants end the transmission because they think that nothing is occurring during the transmission process; be patient and give the system time to process the application.

If you have trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any issues. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Section IV(B) for Grants.gov contact information.

For applications successfully transmitted to Grants.gov before the deadline, the applicant with the AOR role who submitted the application will receive:

- an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov, and
- an email with the official date/time stamp (this stamp is used to determine if the application was received prior to the deadline) and Grants.gov

When the agency successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov and acknowledges the download of submissions, Grants.gov will also provide an electronic acknowledgment of receipt of the application to the applicant.

E. Intergovernmental Review

This funding opportunity is not subject to Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." When completing the SF-424, check block c, "Program is not covered by E.O. 13272."

F. Funding Restrictions

Funds may not be used to pay any of the following costs unless otherwise permitted by law and approved in writing by NRCS in advance of incurring such costs:

1. Profit and management fees. Any funds awarded to for-profit entities must be used for reimbursement of award-related direct and indirect costs only.

2. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project.

3. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the award, including time spent applying for this opportunity.

4. Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and amendments thereto.

5. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives.

6. Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities.

7. 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.

8. Capital expenditures for general purpose equipment, buildings, and land or for improvements to land, buildings, or equipment that materially increase their value or useful life. See 2 CFR 200.439 for additional information.

9. Meals may be charged to an award only if they are necessary to perform the project. For instance, meals (normally only lunches) that are a necessary part of the costs of meetings and conferences (i.e., required attendance for the continuity of a meeting), the primary purpose of which is the dissemination of information, are allowable, as are costs of transportation, rental of facilities, speakers' fees, and other items incidental to such meetings or conferences.

   Note: Meals consumed while in official travel status do not fall in this category. They are considered to be per diem expenses and should be reimbursed in accordance with the organization's established travel policies subject to statutory limitations or in accordance with Federal travel policies.

10. Costs normally charged as indirect costs may not be charged as direct costs without proper justification and agency approval. Proper justification includes documentation that the costs meet the criteria for allowability (see 2 CFR 200.403). Examples of such costs include rent, utilities, depreciation on buildings and equipment, the costs of operating and maintaining facilities, and general administration and expenses, such as the salaries and expenses of executive officers, personnel administration, and accounting.

11. Salaries that are not commensurate with level of work are unallowable. All costs must be reasonable to be allowable (2 CFR 200.403), and 2 CFR 200.404 defines a cost as reasonable if, in its nature and amount, it does not exceed that which would be incurred by a prudent person under the circumstances prevailing at the time the

decision was made to incur the cost. Salaries determined not to be reasonable compared to the level of work will be unallowable.

12. Software produced by non-domestic entities. Project budgets must not include costs (whether Federal costs or cost-share) for software developed by non-domestic entities if it will be used by the Federal government or hosted on Federal systems.

13. Refer to Section IV for applicable indirect cost restrictions, if any.

This list is not exhaustive. For additional information please refer to 2 CFR Part 200, subpart E, Cost Principals.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

A. Review and Selection Process

Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete, noncompliant, or applications not meeting the formatting criteria may be eliminated from competition. In that event, the agency will send notification of elimination to the applicant. The agency intends to select and award without conducting any discussions or allowing applicants to correct deficiencies or omissions in their applications. Consequently, applicants must ensure their applications are complete and accurate. However, while the agency intends to select without contacting applicants, it reserves the right to request applicants to revise their applications to correct deficiencies or omissions that it identifies. If this occurs, the agency will conduct discussions with all applicants, identify deficiencies and omissions for all, and give applicants an opportunity to submit a revised application by a common cut-off date. The agency may also contact individual applicants to clarify certain components of their applications.

Proposals that pass the initial screening will then undergo merit and technical reviews conducted by a technical review board nominated by the approving official. Proposals will be evaluated using a four-part process:

- Technical peer review panels composed of subject matter experts will evaluate proposals against the CIG technical criteria (see Section E.2).

- NRCS state conservationists evaluate the relevant applications for ethical concerns and potential duplication of effort and provide review comments.

- The CIG Grants Review Board certifies the peer panel evaluations and makes award recommendations to the Chief. The Grants Review Board may also consider factors such as geographic and partner diversity when making funding

recommendations to the NRCS Chief. The CIG Grants Review Board consists of members of NRCS leadership.[6]

- The approving official will make the final award selections. The approving official for this opportunity is the NRCS Chief.

Risk reviews will be conducted by the FPAC Business Center, Grants and Agreements Division.

B. Technical Merit Criteria

The technical peer review panels use the criteria laid out in this section, using a 100-point scale, to evaluate applications. These criteria will be applied to the whole project, including federally and non-federally funded parts.

1. **Purpose, Approach, and Goals (25 points)**

   a. The purpose of the project is clearly explained, the goals and objectives are clearly stated.

   b. The design and implementation of the project is based on sound methodology and demonstrated technology.

   c. The project outcomes are stated, measurable, and likely to be achieved.

   d. Both beneficial and adverse impacts are considered, and a significant level of improvement will be achieved.

2. **Innovative Technology or Approach (25 points)**

   a. An innovation is clearly identified and explained, so there is no question as to what the innovation is.

   b. The project is nationally, regionally, or locally innovative according to the criteria for innovation (see Section I(C)).

   c. The application describes a compelling need for the innovative technology or approach.

3. **Project Management (25 points)**

   a. The project has a clear management plan for how project activities will get accomplished.

[6] The Grants Review Board consists of the Deputy Chief for Programs (Chair), the Deputy Chief for Soil Science and Resource Assessment, the Deputy Chief for Science and Technology, one Regional Conservationist, one State Conservationist, and the Director of the Outreach and Partnerships Division.

b. The timeline and milestones are clear and reasonable for accomplishing the objectives of the project.

c. Project is adequately staffed, and the team has the necessary technical and administrative expertise.

d. The budget is adequately explained and justified, and expenses are allowable, allocable, and reasonable.

e. Proposal includes robust partnerships with entities that can substantially assist with delivery of project outcomes and includes an explanation of how the partnership aligns with the project and how it will be managed.

4. **Benefits and Transferability (25 points)**

a. There is strong potential for results that lead to a positive impact on private lands conservation and the environment.

b. An evaluation plan is documented that clearly explains how project work will be assessed and the results transferred.

c. A technology transfer plan is documented that clearly outlines the transfer of new knowledge or technology to a broader audience or to other geographic areas or agricultural sectors and includes useful materials such as technical standards, technical notes, handbooks, technology tools, etc.

d. There is potential for producers and landowners to learn about, use, or participate in the innovative technology(s) or approach(s).

e. The project meaningfully includes the participation of HU producers and will benefit HU producers and landowners.

Partner cost-share contributions are considered an eligibility criterion as described in Section III(C) and Section IV(C)(9) of this notice and therefore are not listed in the merit criteria.

C. Historically Underserved Criteria

To confirm eligibility for the HU set aside, proposals competing for the HU set aside are evaluated against additional criteria to assess the extent to which such proposals will successfully engage and benefit HU producers. The HU criteria are:

1. Description. The HU community served by the project is identified and the proposal includes a clear explanation of how the project will address any existing or historical barrier that has impacted the participation or success of the HU community in question.

2. Commitment. The applicant and partner organizations demonstrate a strong commitment to serving HU producers. The organization or its members or partners have a history of working with HU producers or have explained why the team is well suited to working with HU producers.

3. Capacity Building. The project is designed to impart lasting benefits on the HU community.

4. Community Involvement. The designated HU community is involved in project processes or decision making.

5. Measurement. Indicators and metrics of success are included that specifically measure the project's benefits to HU producers.

D. Administrative and Risk Criteria

Notice of selection after the evaluation does not guarantee that an applicant will receive an award. Following notification of selection for funding (see Section VI), staff from the FPAC Business Center, Grants and Agreements Division conducts a final administrative and risk review of selected applications. The administrative review includes, but is not limited to, a check to ensure that NFO requirements were met (e.g., applicant meets eligibility criteria, application was submitted through Grants.gov by the established deadline, etc.), and proposed costs are allowable, allocable, and necessary. During this process, it may be necessary to request further documentation from the applicant (e.g., organizational information as part of the risk assessment, more detail regarding proposed costs, etc.).

In addition, to comply with the requirements at 2 CFR 200.206, the agency will conduct, at a minimum, the following risk review (additional steps may be taken). The awarding agency will check SAM to ensure the applicant is not suspended or debarred, which would preclude receiving an award. In addition, prior to making a Federal award with a total Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold ($250,000), the agency must review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM (the Federal Awardee Performance Integrity Information System, FAPIIS) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313 and 2 CFR 200.206(a)).

An applicant must meet the following standards to be considered for award:

1. **Financial Stability**

   The applicant maintains adequate financial resources or cash flow to meet its financial obligations on a routine basis in order to successfully complete any agreement it may be awarded.

2. **Quality of Management Systems and Ability to meet Management Standards prescribed in 2 CFR Part 200**

The applicant has a financial management system adequate to segregate and track Federal funds and has adequate systems in place for (1) proper agreement administration; (2) compliance with the standards outlined in 2 CFR Part 200 Section D for procurement, property, and records management; (3) and required financial and performance reporting.

3. **History of Performance**

   If the applicant has previously obtained a Federal financial assistance award, it must never have failed to materially comply with the Federal award terms and conditions and, furthermore, must have never had an award terminated on that basis.

Submission of an application constitutes certification that an applicant meets these standards (items 1 through 3). The agency may request documentation to substantiate the certification. Based on risk assessment, the agency may impose specific award conditions in accordance with 2 CFR 200.208.

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

1. Prior to making a Federal award with a total Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold ($250,000), the agency must review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through FAPIIS. FAPIIS is a federal database intended to serve as a Governmentwide source of information about the prior performance and compliance of Federal procurement contractors, grantees, and cooperative agreement holders (see 41 U.S.C. 2313 and 2 CFR 200.206(a)).

2. An applicant may review information in FAPIIS and comment on any information that a Federal awarding agency previously entered.

3. The agency will consider any comments provided by the applicant in addition to the other information in FAPIIS when making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in 2 CFR 200.206, Federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants.

VI. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Federal Award Notices

The agency will provide notice that an application has been selected before it actually makes the Federal award. As such, the selection notification is not an authorization to begin work. The Notice of Grant and Agreement Award (ADS-093) signed by the authorized agency official is the only authorizing document and will be provided electronically to the awardee’s authorized official for signature.

Both successful and unsuccessful applicants will be notified of the award decision by email.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

All project funds will be used in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200 and the General Terms and Conditions, which are available at the FPAC Award Terms and Conditions web page.

Projects performed pursuant to this opportunity may be subject to the National Environmental Policy Act. If applicable, NRCS must work with awardees to complete an environmental review of each awarded project before project commencement. In addition, prior to any ground-disturbing activities related to NRCS funding, the awardee must work with NRCS staff to complete an environmental evaluation related to those activities. Awardees may be required to prepare or pay for preparation of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement, should any environmental review find that an environmental assessment or impact statement is required.

In addition, a National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 review and consultation by an NRCS state or area office with consulting parties (such as the pertinent state historic preservation officer and federally recognized Indian tribes) may be required prior to the implementation of project activities that have the potential to impact cultural resources. NHPA Section 106, its implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 800), and other related authorities, require Federal agencies to determine if a project has the potential to cause an impact to historic properties and, if so, the extent of any adverse impact and how it may be addressed. The NHPA review and compliance in accordance with Section 106 of NHPA and implementing regulations at 36 CFR Part 800 must be completed by NRCS and applicants may be required to pay for any cultural resource surveys needed for NRCS to assess project effects. More information on the applicant's role in the NHPA Section 106 process can be found on the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation website.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is also required for projects that may affect listed or proposed species or destroy or modify critical habitat. The ESA consultation in accordance with Section 7 of the ESA and implementing regulations at 50 CFR Part 402 must be completed by NRCS prior to implementing project activities that have the potential to impact species or habitat protected under the ESA.

C. Patents, Inventions, and Copyrights

Allocation of rights to patents, inventions, and copyrights shall be in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200. This regulation states that usually small businesses may retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA support. In accordance with 2 CFR Part 200, this provision will also apply to commercial organizations for the purposes of CIG. USDA receives a royalty-free license for Federal use, reserves the right to require the patentee to license others in certain circumstances, and requires that anyone exclusively licensed to sell the invention in the United States usually must manufacture it domestically. Regarding copyright, the grant recipient may copyright any work that is subject to copyright and was developed or acquired under an

award. USDA reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable right to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use the work for Federal purposes and to authorize others to do so.

All tools produced must meet the accessibility of Electronic and Information Technology (EIT) requirements as specified in Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794d) as amended by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (Pub. L. No. 105-220). Specifically, paragraph 508(a)(1) requires that when the Federal Government procures EIT, it must allow Federal employees and individuals of the public with disabilities comparable access to use information and data that is provided to Federal employees and individuals of the public without disabilities. All EIT that is subject to the 36 CFR 1194 standards will have a Section 508 acceptance test and will be validated upon acceptance. All maintenance for EIT that requires upgrades, modifications, installations, and purchases will adhere to the Section 508 standards and 36 CFR 1194. Get in touch with the agency contact of this NFO with specific questions regarding the applicability of this section.

D. Reporting

Reporting will follow the guidelines included in the agency's General Terms and Conditions, which are available at the FPAC Award Terms and Conditions web page.

If the Federal share of any agreement awarded under this opportunity notice may include more than $500,000 over the period of performance, recipients must also comply with the post award reporting requirements reflected in Appendix XII of 2 CFR Part 200 – Award Term and Condition for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters.

Applicants that receive awards pursuant to this opportunity and any subawardees must comply with the reporting requirements described at 2 CFR Part 170 unless an exception applies. Applicants must ensure they have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with those requirements. A list of exceptions can be found at 2 CFR 170.110(b).

Reporting details are included in the fully executed grant agreement. Reporting will generally include electronic submission of semiannual progress reports, annual financial status reports, and final reports

E. Audit Requirements

As required in 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart F Audit Requirements, all US states, local governments, Federally recognized Indian tribal governments, and non-profit organizations expending $750,000 or more in Federal award funds in a fiscal year must submit a single audit report for that year through the Federal Audit Clearinghouse's Internet Data Entry System.

VII. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT

For questions regarding this opportunity, please contact the following individual with the NFO number in the subject line:

Name: CIG Staff
Email: nrcscig@usda.gov
Send a copy to: FPAC.BC.GAD@USDA.GOV

VIII. OTHER INFORMATION

Questions regarding this opportunity must be submitted to the Federal awarding agency contact identified above by email with the NFO number in the subject line.

For technical issues with Grants.gov, please contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov. Awarding agency staff cannot support applicants regarding Grants.gov accounts.

A. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

Applications are considered confidential information. Applications are not shared with individuals or entities seeking public disclosure through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) without the consent of the applicant. More specifically, Executive Order 12600 and USDA FOIA regulation 7 CFR Part 1, Subpart A, requires the awarding agency to provide notice to applicants that a third party has requested copies of their business information and requires the awarding agency to consult with applicants regarding releasing their records.

B. Government Obligation

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

Any award made pursuant to this NFO may be executed in any number of counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.

C. U.S. Department of Agriculture Non-Discrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and USDA civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family or parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice

and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. In addition, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at https://www.ascr.usda.gov/filing-program-discrimination-complaint-usda-customer and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA through one of the following:

mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410

fax: (202) 690-7442

email: program.intake@usda.gov

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGI	Adjusted Gross Income
AOR	Authorized Organizational Representative
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CIG	Conservation Innovation Grants
EBiz	Electronic Business
EIT	Electronic and Information Technology
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FAPIIS	Federal Awardee Performance Integrity Information System
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
FY	Fiscal Year
HU	Historically Underserved
MTDC	Modified total direct costs
NFO	Notice of Funding Opportunity
NICRA	Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
POC	Point of Contact
SAM	System for Award Management
SF	Standard Form
UEI	Unique Entity Identifier
U.S.C.	United States Code
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

APPENDIX A: CREATING A BUDGET

This appendix includes tips and a sample budget table and budget narrative. To ensure consistency in proposals and proposal reviews, applicants are required to use this budget table and narrative format in their proposals. An Excel spreadsheet and editable document version of these files are attached to this announcement.

Creating a Budget Narrative

A CIG budget narrative has two parts:

1. A detailed written narrative that provides a description of all the items listed in the table for both the Federal and non-Federal portion of the table. This narrative should align with the budget table, described next.

2. A table totaling all major budget categories and minor budget line items by year (the major categories should align with those on the SF-424A: salary, fringe benefits, travel, supplies, equipment, contractual, construction, other, and indirect costs). The table includes subcategories listed below each line item, giving a clear breakdown of project costs. The table should contain both Federal and non-Federal portions of the project budget.

Budget Details

A budget narrative outlines the project with sufficient details to allow reviewers to evaluate the integrity of the proposed spending and clarifies project intent. The level of detail for each line item may vary, but consider the following when determining what information to include:

1. Personnel. Only employees of the applicant organization should be listed in this section. If a project contributor has not yet been hired, the position title can be provided in lieu of a name.

    - Budget Narrative: Include the general function or major tasks of each major team member, their time commitment to the project, and their rate of pay so that the amount requested can be easily verified. Cost can also be displayed as full-time equivalents.

    - Budget Table: List each individual's name and team member position.

2. Fringe Benefits. List this item separately from personnel in the budget. Fringe benefits include the costs of leave (e.g., vacation, family-related, sick, or military), employee insurance, pensions, and unemployment benefit plans. If all individuals will receive the same fringe benefit rate, you can list them all as one item. If they have different fringe benefit rates, list each individual separately.

    - Budget Narrative: List what was included in the rate and the percent of salary that is charged to attain the rate.

- Budget Table: List each individual or team member position and the rate for them.

3. Travel. Travel policy for per diem, transportation, and mileage rates needs to be clarified. If you are using Federal GSA rates, indicate that. If you are using an organization or state policy, indicate that as well and provide a link to that policy in the budget narrative.

    - Budget Narrative: Outline each trip separately and include the reason for the travel, the length of the trip, the team members expected to travel, and the major costs associated with each trip (e.g., transportation, lodging, meals, per diem, etc.). Provide the derivation of cost estimates so all amounts add up.

    - Budget Table: List each trip separately.

4. Supplies. List the general supply categories that will be charged. For instance, if the team will be doing soil health monitoring, include items such as soil sampling supplies and instruments for measuring samples that should be included. Smaller supplies (e.g., workshop printouts and markers) need not be broken down by individual units, but for larger supplies, include a description with the unit cost and intended use.

5. Equipment. This includes only tangible personal property over $5,000 per unit with an expected lifetime of over 1 year.

    - Budget Narrative: Within this narrative, explain the reason this equipment needs to be purchased, a description of the type of equipment and supplier, what it will be used for, who will be allowed to use it, and how long it will be used. Equipment is considered the property of the Federal Government and a disposition schedule will be required at the end of the project.

    - Budget Table: List the equipment name.

    Note: Rental equipment should be listed in the Contractual category and equipment under $5,000 should be listed in the Supply category.

6. Contractual. If contractors will be doing multiple tasks for the award, use separate line items. However, a simple description of the contracted work is sufficient if a contractor will just be serving one project function, is not considered part of the project team, and will not require a subcontract.

    - Budget Narrative: Be sure to identify the name of the contractor, the method of procurement, and the scope of work for the services if they are not included in the proposal narrative. Be aware that contractors do not charge indirect costs. If a partner will be charging indirect costs, those costs will need to be considered a subaward, which should be described in the “Other” category.

    - Budget Table: List each contractor separately.

7. Other. This is a general line item that covers any expenditure that does not fit in another category, such as subawards, laboratory analysis, and tuition. Be sure to identify the

individual costs and provide sufficient description to justify the costs. If a subaward is greater than $25,000, be sure to include major line-item breakdowns.

8. Indirect. Identify the NICRA or de minimis rate as applicable.

9. Program Income. If the awardee plans to accrue income from grant-supported activities (e.g., workshop registration fees), this program income must be estimated and added to the budget. Program income cannot be considered for match as it is not assured. Other examples of program income include fees for services performed and the sale of commodities or items fabricated under an award.

10. Additional Guidance:

    Sub-budgets for contractors or subawardees should be listed as individual line items. For instance, if "Personnel" and "Indirect" are charges for a University subaward, they should fill two lines in the budget table in the "Other" section. Be sure to identify NICRA percentages when a subaward rate differs from the awardee's rate.[7]

    Budget narratives may reference information included in other parts of the proposal. Do not repeat the information as part of the budget narrative but direct the reader to the project narrative section. Be sure the entire budget narrative refers to specific costs, and do not describe general aspects of the project.

    While drafting the budget, keep in mind that an agreement amendment is not required for post-agreement budget changes of 10 percent or less of the total project budget (Federal and non-Federal portions). Therefore, it is understood that the numbers are estimates, and it is acceptable to see a small amount of change to the budget numbers if awarded. However, all budget changes do require notice to NRCS contacts and may require submittal of updated budget documents.

    All costs in the budget must be rounded to the nearest dollar.

[7] NICRA paperwork for sub-awards are not required with the application, just an indication of the percentage charged for indirect costs.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE BUDGET NARRATIVE

Name of Applicant
Project Title
Project Total: $772,456
Federal Portion: $384,654
Non-Federal Contribution: $387,802

FEDERAL BUDGET:

1. Personnel

Note, a 3 percent annual salary increase has been included for all personnel.

Tom Smith, Project Director, full time, annual salary $89,000, 70 percent paid by Federal funds, will advise the project team, assist with demonstration plot establishment, data collection and analysis, and participate in project field days.

Year 1: $62,300 Year 2: $64,169 Year 3: $66,094

Mary Johnson, research technician, 20 percent time, $55,000 annual salary, 50 percent paid by Federal funds. Establish the field and demonstration plots, function as the project manager, coordinate sub-award work, draft reports and publications, and participate in all project field days.

Year 1: $5,500 Year 2: $5,665 Year 3: $5,835

Total Personnel Year 1: $67,800 Year 2: $69,834 Year 3: $71,929

2. **Fringe benefits**

Federal funds pay 67 percent fringe benefits. Fringe benefits rates are 35 percent for faculty and 45 percent for permanent staff.

Tom Smith – Faculty rate of 35 percent:

Year 1: $20,871 Year 2: $21,497 Year 3: $22,142

Mary Johnson – Staff rate of 45 percent:

Year 1: $3,317 Year 2: $3,416 Year 3: $3,519

Total Fringe Year 1: $24,188 Year 2: $24,913 Year 3: $25,661

3. **Travel**

   Per diem and transportation rates used are from XXX Universities Travel Policy, which can be found here:

   [Add website or share copy of travel document unless using Federal GSA rates]

   Funds are requested to support travel for plot preparation and data collection trips, as well as travel to four field days within the states of New York and Pennsylvania. Estimated 5,000 miles per year at a rate of $0.60/mi.

   Year 1: $3,000 Year 2: $3,000 Year 3: $3,000

   Funds are requested for overnight hotel stays at demonstration plot locations at the state hotel rate of $90 per night, 4 times per year ($360/year).

   Year 1: $360 Year 2: $360 Year 3: $360

   Funds are requested in the second and third year for three individual trips each year to scientific conferences based on the following estimates: Lodging for 3 nights at $150 per night ($450); Per-diem $50/day for 4 days ($200); Transportation: Airline travel to conference location at $400/flight plus ground transportation at $50 plus airport parking at $30 ($480).

   Unknown Year 2: $3390 Year 3: $3390

   Total Travel: Year 1: $3,360 Year 2: $6,750 Year 3: $6,750

4. **Equipment – none**

5. **Supplies**

   Field and lab supplies: Funds are requested for the purchase of soil temperature and moisture probes and data logging systems ($2,000). Funds are also requested to purchase weed suppression technologies, seeds, and irrigation supplies for field plots ($6,000). Funds are also requested for various lab supplies and sampling equipment ($3,000).

   Total Supplies: *Year 1: $4,000 Year 2: $4,000 Year 3: $3,000*

6. **Contractual**

   Two separate contractors:

   - Contract with Amazing Graphics and Marketing ($12,000)

   Marketing team will use innovative digital marketing tools to reach producers and help gain interest. Team will develop graphics and video production to support program recruitment and teaching tools.

- Contract with Innovative Technology ($18,000)

Contractor will help develop online tools to assist producers with conservation practices.

Total Contractual: Year 1: $10,000 Year 2: $10,000 Year 3: $10,000

7. Construction – None requested

8. Other

Land rental – demonstration plots on farmer land will have a rental cost of $50/acre/year totaling $1,500 annually.

Publication Costs: Funds are requested for the development and publication of various materials including extension publications, costs associated with peer reviewed journals, and costs associated with copies of brochures made in house. ($1,000/year)

Total Other Costs: Year 1: $2,500 Year 2: $2,500 Year 21: $2,500

9. Indirect Costs

Team is applying the 10 percent de minimus rate.

Total Indirect Costs: Year 1: $11,185 Year 2: $11,800 Year 21: $11,984

NON-FEDERAL BUDGET:

1. Personnel

Note, a 3 percent annual salary increase has been included for all personnel.

Tom Smith, Project Director, full time, annual salary $89,000, 30 percent paid by non-Federal funds, will advise the project team, assist with demonstration plot establishment, data collection and analysis, and participate in project field days.

Year 1: $26,700 Year 2: $27,501 Year 3: $28,326

Mary Johnson, research technician, 20 percent time, $55,000 annual salary, 50 percent paid by non-Federal funds. Establish the field and demonstration plots, function as the project manager, coordinate sub-award work, draft reports and publications, and participate in all project field days.

Year 1: $5,500 Year 2: $5,500 Year 3: $5,500

Total Personnel: Year 1: $32,200 Year 2: $33,166 Year 3: $34,161

2. **Fringe Benefits**

   Non-Federal funds pay 33 percent fringe benefits. Fringe benefits rates are 35 percent for faculty and 45 percent for permanent staff.

   Tom Smith – Faculty rate of 35 percent:

   Year 1: $10,280 Year 2: $10,588 Year 3: $10,906

   Mary Johnson – Staff rate of 45 percent:

   Year 1: $8,168 Year 2: $8,413 Year 3: $8,665

   Total Fringe Benefits: Year 1: $18,448 Year 2: $19,001 Year 3: $19,571

3. **Equipment - None**

4. **Supplies – none**

5. **Contractual**

   - Contract with Super Non-Profits ($61,000)

   Elizabeth Smith will oversee the outreach to farmers. She will devote 20 percent of her time all 3 years of the project. 100 percent of her time will be non-Federal. She will oversee all elements of this part of the project, including contacting and recruiting farmers, organizing outreach events such as field days, and on-farm assistance.

   Temporary half-time admin support for program facilitation.

   Workshop rental space will be donated by contactor, with an estimated value of $100 per day.

   Year 1: $18,000 Year 2: $20,000 Year 3: $23,000.

   - Soil Conservation District

   The local soil and water conservation district will support the project by helping to build partner relationships with local producers.

   Year 1: $10,000 Year 2: $10,000 Year 3: $10,000

   Total Contractual: Year 1: $28,000 Year 2: $30,000 Year 3: $33,000

6. **Construction:** None

7. **Other Costs:**

   General services (web development, printing, accounting, administrative, and project management) estimated $5,000 annually.

Sample Testing and Analysis: Basic nutrient testing and soil health testing will be done annually for all plots. Roughly 50 samples a year at $500/sample ($25,000/year).

Legal Fees: Community support groups will pay all legal fees regarding the research of any legal implications on the project. $5,000 annually.

Total Other: Year 1: $35,000 Year 2: $35,000 Year 3: $35,000

8. Indirect Costs

Note: If NICRA is negotiated or if it is the 10 percent de minimis rate, the 10 percent de minimis rate is applied.

Total Indirect Costs: Year 1: $11,365 Year 2: $11,717 Year 3: $12,173

FEDERAL BUDGET

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Personnel	$67,800	$69,834	$71,929	$209,563
Tom Smith	$62,300	64,169	66,094	$192,563
Mary Johnson	$5,500	$5,665	$5,835	$17,000
Fringe	$24,188	$24,913	$25,661	$74,762
Faculty	$20,871	$21,497	$22,142	$64,510
Staff	$3,317	$3,416	$3,519	$10,252
Travel	$3,360	$6,750	$6,750	$16,860
Plot prep/data collection	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$9,000
Demo plot overnight trips	$360	$360	$360	$1,080
Conference trips	$0	$3,390	$3,390	$6,780
Supplies	$4,000	$4,000	$3,000	$11,000
Field Supplies	$1,000	$1,000		$2,000
Farm Supplies	$2,000	$2,000	$2,000	$6,000
Lab Supplies	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000	$3,000
Contractual	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000	$30,000
Amazing Graphics	$4,000	$4,000	$4,000	$12,000
Innovative Technology	$6,000	$6,000	$6,000	$18,000
Other	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500	$7,500
Publication and copying	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000	$3,000
Land rental	$1,500	$1,500	$1,500	$4,500
Indirect	$11,185	$11,800	$11,984	$34,969
De Minimis (10 percent)	$11,185	$11,800	$11,984	$34,969

NON-FEDERAL BUDGET

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Personnel	$32,200	$33,166	$34,161	$99,527
Tom Smith	$26,700	$27,501	$28,326	$82,527
Mary Johnson	$5,500	$5,665	$5,835	$17,000

NON-FEDERAL BUDGET					
Fringe	$18,448	$19,001	$19,571		$57,020
Faculty	$10,280	$10,588	$10,906		$31,774
Staff	$8,168	$8,413	$8,665		$25,246
Contractual	$28,000	$30,000	$33,000		$91,000
Super Non-Profits	$18,000	$20,000	$23,000		$61,000
Soil Conservation District	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000		$30,000
Other	$35,000	$35,000	$35,000		$105,000
General services	$5,000	$5,000	$5,000		$15,000
Testing and analysis	$25,000	$25,000	$25,000		$75,000
Legal Fees	$5,000	$5,000	$5,000		$15,000
Indirect	$11,365	$11,717	$12,173		$35,255
De Minimis (10 percent)	$11,365	$11,717	$12,173		$35,255
TOTAL	$125,013	$128,884	$133,905		**$387,802**

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE PLEDGE AGREEMENT

Applicant Cash/In-kind Contribution Commitment

Donor Organization:	Name Address City, State, Zip code
Applicant Organization:	Name of applicant
Project Title:	Name of project title
Attn:	CIG Program Staff

Description of cash contribution: [Add clear statement of what the organization is committing, such as the following example.]

The X Trust is committing $182,000 in cash and in-kind support to this project from general fundraising support (corporate giving, foundations, fundraising events, etc.). Funds will be used to support five farmers, attend state meetings, and support contractor work on website and app development." The funding breaks down into the following budget line items:

- Travel: $2,000 in-kind
- Contractual: $180,000 cash

Pledge Statement: The [add name of organization] pledges to make this contribution over the USDA NRCS 2023 Conservation Innovation Grants funding period as cash/in-kind cost-share to USDA NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants funds awarded to [name of applicant] for Innovative Conservation project [*project title*].

Signature[8] of Donor Organization Authorized Representative

Letter should be on organization letterhead.

[8] Signatures can be manual, scanned manual signatures, or electronic (verified as described in U.S.C. 3504 §1710). Names merely typed in script fonts or other unverified electronic signatures will not be accepted and the communications will not count towards the match total.

APPENDIX C: APPLICATION PACKAGE CHECKLIST

Important: Proposals Missing Any of These Required Items Will Not Be Considered

☐ UEI Registration – should register at least 3 weeks before the application due date.

PROPOSAL

☐ 1. Standard Form (SF) 424, "Application for Federal Assistance"
☐ 2. Cover Page (see page 17 for all details that should be in this document)
☐ 3. Project Abstract (one page maximum)
☐ 4. Project Narrative (15 pages maximum)
   a. Project goal
   b. Project objectives
   c. Project background
   d. Project evaluation
   e. Project design and methods
   f. Project deliverables/products
   g. Project outcomes and benefits
   h. Geographic location and size of project area (include a map if possible)
   i. EQIP-eligible producer participation
   j. Project action plan and timeline
   k. Project management
   l. Technology transfer plan
   m. Graphics
☐ 5. References/citations (if applicable)
☐ 6. Team Qualifications
☐ 7. Declaration of Previous CIG Awards (if applicable)
☐ 8. Historically Underserved Narrative (if applicable)
☐ 9. Assessment of Environmental Impacts

BUDGET INFORMATION

☐ 10. Completed SF-424A, "Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs"
☐ 11. Detailed Budget Narrative (see template in Appendix A), maximum 12 pages
☐ 12. Detailed Budget Table (see Appendix A)
☐ 13. Indirect Costs: Submit documentation of a federally approved indirect cost rate (NICRA), a previous de minimis rate agreement, or a request to establish a de minimis rate agreement (see section IV(C)(10)).
☐ 14. Non-Federal Commitment Letters (see template in Appendix B): required for projects with cost-share funds coming from a third party. Each letter needs to be signed and give a clear amount of commitment.
☐ 15. Support Letters: Be sure to include any letters of support that lend credibility to your project idea.
☐ 16. Grants.gov Lobbying Form, Certification and Disclosure of Lobbying Activities