

# Conservation Innovation Grants On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials



**Fiscal Year (FY) 2022**

**Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO)**

**No. USDA-NRCS-NHQ-CIGOFT-22-NOFO0001212**

## NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY (NFO)

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

**Notice of Funding Opportunity Title:** USDA-NRCS On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials for Federal fiscal year (FY) 2022

**Notice of Funding Opportunity Number:** USDA-NRCS-NHQ-CIGOFT-22-NOFO0001212

**Assistance Listing:** This program is listed on [Sam.gov](https://www.sam.gov) under 10.912, Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The System for Award Management (SAM) is an official U.S. Government website application that collects, validates, stores, and disseminates non-Federal entity information so that non-Federal entities can register to conduct business with the Federal Government and participate in competitions for contracts, grants, and electronic payment processes. Each entity receives a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) that must be used to apply for all Federal awards on Grants.gov.

### Notice of Funding Opportunity Summary

NRCS is announcing the availability of Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials (On-Farm Trials) to stimulate the adoption and evaluation of innovative conservation approaches in partnership with agricultural producers. For 2022, applications will be accepted from eligible entities for projects addressing at least one of the following priorities: irrigation management technologies; climate smart agricultural solutions; nutrient management; and soil health demonstration (SHD) trial. Up to \$25 million is available for On-Farm Trials in 2022. NRCS anticipates that at least \$10 million of On-Farm Trials funding in 2022 will be awarded to entities applying for the SHD component. On-Farm Trials projects may be between 3 and 5 years in duration.

### Key Dates

Applicants must submit their applications through Grants.gov by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on September 22, 2022. For technical issues with Grants.gov, contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov). Awarding agency staff cannot support applicants regarding Grants.gov accounts.

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

A webinar for On-Farm Trials applicants is scheduled for August 10, 2022 at 3pm 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 or mobile app**

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

**Or call in (audio only)**

+1 202-650-0123

Phone Conference ID: 727 879 308#

The agency anticipates making selections by *December 2022* and expects to execute awards by April 1, *2023*. These dates are projected 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 *\$5 million*. The funding floor is the minimum agreement funding amount for the Federal share per awarded agreement. The ceiling is the maximum agreement funding amount for the Federal share per awarded agreement. These numbers refer to the total agreement amount, not a specific budget period.

**Federal Financial Assistance Training**

The funding available through this NFO is Federal financial assistance. Grants 101 Training is highly recommended for additional education on Federal financial assistance. The training is free and available to the public via <https://www.cfo.gov/grants-training/>. The course 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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## **A. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The authorizing statutes and regulations for this opportunity are 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8. CIG's On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials is authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of EQIP, including CIG, to the Chief of the NRCS.

### **1. Overview**

The purpose of On-Farm Trials is to stimulate the adoption and evaluation of innovative conservation approaches in partnership with agricultural producers. For 2022, NRCS is implementing On-Farm Trials through eligible entities, which in turn work collaboratively with NRCS and agricultural producers to implement innovative approaches on private lands. On-Farm Trials supports the implementation of innovative approaches that have a positive conservation impact but which, for any number of reasons, have not yet been more widely adopted by producers.

On-Farm Trials funding is designed to provide technical assistance and incentive payments to producers to help compensate for risks associated with implementation of new conservation practices, systems, and approaches. Evaluation is a key component of On-Farm Trials to ensure that environmental, financial, and social (to the extent possible) impacts of implementing innovative approaches are understood and can be used to inform future NRCS program, policy, and science activities.

The number of participating producers varies among On-Farm Trials projects, often reflecting the expense and complexity of the innovative approaches being implemented. Past projects range in producer participants from five to over a hundred. Single demonstration sites are not appropriate for On-Farm Trials, as projects need a sufficient number of sites for meaningful data collection and evaluation.

NRCS intends to use the results of On-Farm Trials project evaluations and analyses to explore developing new or modifying existing guidance documents, technical tools, conservation practice standards, and NRCS business practices.

NRCS gives priority to projects that implement innovative conservation approaches applicable to a range of agricultural operation sizes and types.

The SHD component of On-Farm Trials (see item A.2.d.) focuses exclusively on implementation of conservation practices and systems that improve soil health. SHD awardees must agree to follow consistent soil health assessment protocols to evaluate the effects of practice and system implementation.

## 2. On-Farm Trials Priorities

Each year, NRCS identifies priority topics for On-Farm Trials. For FY 2022, On-Farm Trials applications must address one of the four priorities described in this section. Proposals may address more than one priority, but each proposal must clearly identify a primary priority. The primary priority selected by an applicant will determine which expert peer panel will review the application.

### a. Irrigation Water Management Technologies

NRCS seeks On-Farm Trials proposals to evaluate innovative water management systems that enhance a producer's ability to monitor irrigation needs effectively, manage irrigation practices efficiently, and increase water savings by using precision technologies. Innovative irrigation systems should focus on balancing producer needs with conservation benefits. Examples of innovative irrigation water management technologies include:

- Tools that measure plant distress or soil moisture and automate irrigation through regular reporting to a centralized system.
- Technologies that combine as-applied irrigation and atmospheric data with crop growth models and soil data using cloud-based systems and devices, allowing producers to assess irrigation needs remotely or from a handheld device.
- Innovative approaches that address obstacles to adopting irrigation water management systems that use water more efficiently. These obstacles may include substantial upfront costs of system installation, accessibility of systems (i.e., availability for purchase at mainstream retailers), ease of installation, and the need for system customization.

### b. Climate Smart Agricultural Solutions

NRCS seeks On-Farm Trials applications that evaluate innovative on-farm approaches to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases (e.g., nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)) or enhancing carbon sequestration from soils and perennial biomass. All selected applications must use quantification methodologies that align with the USDA report titled [Quantifying Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Agriculture and Forestry: Methods for Entity-Scale Inventory](#).

This priority is designed for proposals that are not focused on soil health management principles. Proposals that are focused on soil health management should submit under the SHD priority described in A.2.d.

Examples of innovative Climate Smart Agricultural Solutions approaches and technologies include:

- Technologies that provide energy savings to producers that reduce greenhouse gasses, including using renewable resources to support applying conservation practices.
- Animal manure management and conservation approaches that reduce greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere.
- Animal dietary management that reduces enteric methane emissions to the atmosphere.
- Innovative animal production systems that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Rice methane emission reduction strategies, including land leveling operations and water management techniques.
- Crop management systems that include the use of enhanced efficiency fertilizers and precision agricultural techniques to reduce N<sub>2</sub>O emissions.

### **c. Nutrient Management**

NRCS seeks On-Farm Trials applications that help producers achieve conservation benefits through more efficient nutrient management. Examples of innovative approaches under this priority include:

- Innovative precision agriculture technologies that have been field-validated and have proven stakeholder support but are not widely applied. Such innovations should focus on technologies that provide accurate, real-time data to producers and increase their ability to efficiently manage nutrients.
- Enhanced nutrient management plans, including plans accounting for differences beyond yield potential and soil type, such as site-specific risk for nutrient loss, soil organic matter, soil biological activity, tillage operations, field drainage and drainage water management, irrigation water management, and seasonal effects of weather events.
- Nutrient recovery systems such as bioreactors and multistage drainage strategies to mitigate nutrient losses.
- Whole-farm nutrient budgets that account for all nutrient imports and exports of an operation.
- Use of in-season nutrient management techniques (such as soil and plant tissue analyses along with field observations) to check for plant nutrient deficiencies or toxicity and to mitigate potential nutrient losses.
- Managing nutrients to address the site-specific risk of nutrients leaching to sensitive areas, including groundwater and runoff to surface water.
- Implementation and evaluation of right rate, timing, method, and source (including stabilizer) for reducing nitrogen leaching to groundwater and runoff to surface water.
- Efficiently using all nutrients in organic waste products by using techniques like sludge drying or composting to facilitate the transportation of nutrients over a greater distance, expanding the application area beyond local fields.



#### **d. Soil Health Demonstration Trial (SHD)**

SHD supports on-farm demonstrations of Soil Health Management Systems (SHMS) and production systems being transitioned to a SHMS. A SHMS is a collection of management practices that focus on increasing soil carbon levels and improving soil health by addressing the soil health management principles of: (1) minimizing disturbance, (2) maximizing soil cover, (3) maximizing biodiversity, and (4) maximizing presence of living roots. SHD proposals must indicate which of the four soil health management principles the prospective project would address. Applicants are strongly encouraged to address all four principles.

When implemented together and adapted to a given production system, the principles and practices are synergistic and regenerate, build, and maintain soil health and provide critical ecosystem services. The conservation practices that make up a successful SHMS are adapted to address the diverse production systems, climates, ecosystems, and soils of a variety of operations to effectively build healthy, functioning soil. The objective of the SHD is to identify, document, and evaluate regionally successful approaches and outcomes of fully implemented or transitioning SHMS in varied production systems.

Comparative trials of full SHMS with similar systems that do not incorporate SHMS principles or are transitioning to SHMS are desired. All SHD proposals should include baseline data, controls, and standard assessment methods, including indicators based on NRCS [Technical Note 450-03](#). This information will be considered during the proposal evaluation process (see more details below in the SHD Evaluations and Study section). All cover crops used must be identified by scientific name, common name, and variety (when relevant). SHD applications must also identify at least one of the national SHD sub priorities below. Applicants are encouraged to address multiple national sub priorities, to the extent practicable.

SHD National sub priorities:

- Special Emphasis for 2022: designing SHMS for high disturbance production systems (e.g., potatoes, onions, sugar beets, other root crops).
- Developing SHMS that include applying carbon amendments such as compost or biochar with evaluations of the effects on soil carbon and soil health.
- Improving cover crop management in regions with specific challenges (e.g., timing of planting and termination in water-limited regions or pest management in humid regions).
- Integrating greater diversity in production systems, such as managing soil health on grazing land, perennial vegetation in cropping systems, integrated crop-livestock systems, or other diversification.

- Designing SHMS with adapted nutrient management strategies for improved water quality (e.g., systems that address dissolved reactive phosphorus and other phosphorus in the soil in cold climates and nutrient-threatened watersheds).
- Addressing any of the previous sub priorities within the context of climate change adaptation, resilience, or soil carbon stock changes, with special attention toward collecting data to define and quantify outcomes. If climate mitigation is part of a SHD proposal, the methods for estimating entity-scale emissions should follow the USDA report titled *Quantifying Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Agriculture and Forestry: Methods for Entity-Scale Inventory*.

### 3. On-Farm Trials Evaluations

On-Farm Trials projects under all four priorities consist of two major components: (1) on-farm implementation of innovative conservation approaches and (2) evaluation of the impacts. The evaluation component includes assessment of the environmental, financial, and (to the extent possible) social impacts of implementing the innovations. Awardees must work closely with participating producers to ensure that sufficient data are collected to analyze these impacts, and they must ensure that producer privacy is maintained throughout the project and dissemination of project results.

Applications must describe the proposed evaluation approach, including collecting baseline data and using controls and methods for assessing financial and social impacts.

For economic and financial analyses, applicants are encouraged to consult the resources available on the [NRCS Cost website](#). The NRCS Technical Note 200-ECN-4 provides guidance on developing conservation case studies and should also be considered in preparing the application; it is available on the [NRCS' Developing Economic Case Studies website](#). In addition, a recent Environmental Defense Fund publication, developed with support from NRCS, provides guidance on analyzing farm financial outcomes and is another available resource. The publication is available on the [CIG website](#).

Social evaluations can inform strategies to increase adoption of conservation practices and systems to encourage lasting change beyond the duration of an On-Farm Trials project. Social outcomes analyses consider the factors that go into a producer's decision to undertake conservation activities, how that producer's decision influences other producers, and any broader impacts on communities.

Partners interested in undertaking social evaluations may wish to refer to the Social Indicators Data Management and Analysis (SIDMA) tool. SIDMA was developed by the Great Lakes Regional Social Indicators Team, and provides resources for measuring, organizing, and analyzing social indicators related to conservation practices. While SIDMA was developed for use in water quality projects, extrapolation of its methods to other resource concerns is generally straightforward. To explore and use the online tool,

[visit the SIDMA website](#). Partners who conduct an analysis of social outcomes of their project should make sure that this effort is overseen by a qualified staff person or third party.

Applicants must describe their capability and capacity for carrying out On-Farm Trials evaluations. Applicants are encouraged to partner with organizations and individuals that have experience in carrying out environmental, economic, and social evaluations. Evaluation methods and approaches are subject to negotiation prior to execution of the On-Farm Trials agreement. Applicants must identify in their budget documents the amount of On-Farm Trials funding proposed for evaluation expenses.

#### **4. SHD Evaluations and Study**

Projects funded under the SHD priority must meet additional protocol, data collection, and evaluation requirements. Similar to the broader On-Farm Trials program, SHD projects must include a robust environmental and financial evaluation. However, unlike the broader On-Farm Trials program where a social evaluation is optional, SHD projects must also include an evaluation of the social effects of implementing soil health management systems and practices (see more detail below).

Unique to SHD is the necessity of using common evaluation protocols and methods for assessing soil carbon changes and other soil health outcomes. Eligible entities must:

- a.** Use NRCS standards in field and laboratory methods for soil carbon and other soil health indicator measurements, as defined in the [Technical Note 450-03](#) and [Technical Note 450-06](#). This does not preclude inclusion of additional measurements beyond the identified NRCS minimum data collection requirements. Awardees must collaborate with NRCS soil health experts to ensure consistency in field and laboratory methods.
- b.** Work with State or local NRCS Soil Scientist to verify the soil map unit(s) and component(s) on which the trial site is located.
- c.** Collect current and historic management information from participating producers (tillage, crop rotation, nutrient, and other input applications). A 5-year or longer management history is required to better capture long-term soil health impacts.
- d.** Collect environmental and financial outcome data to include profitability (cost of production, current yield, and historic yield where available). When available, include data such as effects of systems on infiltration rates, ground water recharge, plant available water, runoff, water quality, flooding, pest resilience, weather resilience, air quality, etc.

- e. At a minimum, develop summary information on social outcomes and profiles of participating producers with information about why management changes were adopted, and challenges and benefits of the changes.
- f. To facilitate broader adoption, provide details on how project results will be shared with producer communities, such as through on-farm field days and other activities. Implementing mentor groups to facilitate changing production systems is highly encouraged. Projects should assist with implementation and coordination so that opportunities for idea exchange occur between producers or service providers that have implementation experience and participants who are experiencing change.
- g. Develop regionally-relevant production-specific and climate-specific SHMS templates for future producers, especially in cases where a novel approach is used to address specific resource concerns or challenging conditions.

The standard SHD dataset requirements and methods are available on the [CIG On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials website](#).

Any awarded SHD applications that propose to address carbon sequestration or reduced greenhouse gas emissions must use quantification methodologies that align with the USDA report titled *Quantifying Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Agriculture and Forestry: Methods for Entity-Scale Inventory*.

Entities receiving an On-Farm Trials SHD award are required to provide their evaluation to NRCS as part of an SHD study to be submitted to Congress, as required by the SHD statute. It is incumbent upon SHD partners to inform participating producers that geospatial, soil, conservation practice, and other information will be provided to NRCS and maintained in a confidential Federal database from which aggregated findings will be made available to the public without personally identifiable information. No database information will be shared with the public without a producer's consent. However, names of participating producers and any incentive payments received are subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

## **B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION**

### **1. Available Funding**

The Federal funding agency expects to award approximately \$25 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 3 and 5 years in duration. Applicants should plan their projects based on an estimated project start date of April 1, 2023.

### **3. Type of Award**

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

### **4. Number of Awards**

The agency expects to make between 10 and 20 award(s).

### **5. Procurement Contracts**

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

### **6. Eligibility of Renewal or Supplemental Project Applications**

Applications for renewal or supplementation of existing projects are not eligible to compete with applications for new Federal awards. An application for renewal means an application submitted to continue an existing agreement that meets the objectives and requirements of this NFO. An application for supplementation of an existing project means an application to add components to an existing agreement so that it would meet the objectives and requirements in this NFO.

## **C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

### **1. 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. Eligibility for this opportunity is limited to the following entity types:

- a. City or township governments
- b. County governments
- c. For profit organizations other than small businesses
- d. Native American tribal governments (Federally recognized)
- e. Native American tribal organizations (other than Federally recognized tribal governments)
- f. Nonprofits having a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS (other than institutions of higher education)
- g. Private institutions of higher education
- h. Public and State-controlled institutions of higher education
- i. Small businesses
- j. Special district governments
- k. State governments

Individuals are not eligible applicants.

For-profit entities are eligible for On-Farm Trials if their primary business is related to agriculture. Nonprofit entities are eligible for On-Farm Trials if they have experience working with agricultural producers.

Eligible entities must have access to a sufficient number of producer participants in order to facilitate implementing On-Farm Trials of conservation practices and systems on private lands.

NRCS encourages applications from partners working in urban agriculture settings. Many of the natural resource priority topics described in this announcement are relevant to urban farm operations.

## **2. 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/subawardee 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 incentive contracts; therefore, the awards themselves are not limited by the payment limitation in 16 USC Chapter 58. The applicability of this payment limitation for any payments made to agricultural producers under On-Farm Trials agreements is addressed in C.2.b.

### **a. Producer Eligibility**

Any producer receiving an On-Farm Trials incentive payment must meet the Environmental Quality Incentive Program’s eligibility requirements listed in [7 CFR § 1466.6\(b\)\(1\) through \(3\)](#):

- Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions ([7 CFR § 12](#)).
- Be a person, legal entity, joint operation, Indian tribe, or native corporation who is engaged in agricultural production or forestry management or has an interest in the agricultural or forestry operation as defined in [7 CFR § 1400](#).
- Have control of the land involved for the term of the proposed contract period.

In addition, producers receiving On-Farm Trials incentive payments must meet the adjusted gross income requirements under Section 1001D(b)(1) of the [2018 Farm Bill \(7 U.S.C. 1308-3a\(a\)\(1\)\)](#).

## **b. Incentive Payments**

On-Farm Trials awards must include incentive payments (derived from the NRCS award funding) disbursed to agricultural producers on whose land project activities are being carried out. While On-Farm Trials incentives provided to producers can be a combination of cash and equipment/supplies, all projects must include cash payments directly to producers. These payments compensate producers for adopting and evaluating new conservation approaches. Incentive payments may be comprised of foregone income, land rental, conservation implementation-related equipment, construction costs, evaluation costs, or other considerations necessary to facilitate effective execution of an on-farm trial. Any land rental, equipment rental, or depreciation costs must be adequately justified. **Incentive payments must be paid directly to agricultural producers from entities receiving On-Farm Trials awards. Producers do not enter into contracts with NRCS.**

On-Farm Trials applications must include the overall amount of incentive payments the eligible entity intends to offer, the amount of incentive payments an individual producer may receive, and details on the composition of the incentive payments (e.g., cash vs. equipment/supplies/technical assistance).

The following provisions apply to On-Farm Trials funding:

- NRCS requires that eligible entities work with NRCS staff to ensure that all producers receiving On-Farm Trials incentives are EQIP eligible and in compliance with the Farm Bill's AGI limitation and highly erodible land and wetlands conservation provisions PRIOR TO disbursement of incentives. Non-EQIP eligible producers are allowed to participate in On-Farm Trials projects by providing data, but any direct benefits dispersed can only be applied to EQIP eligible participating producers.
- Section 1704 (a)(3) of the 2018 Farm Bill ([7 U.S.C. 1308-3a\(b\)\(3\)](#)) states the Secretary may waive the AGI limit on a case by case basis, if the Secretary determines that environmentally sensitive land of special significance would be protected as a result of such a waiver. On-Farm Trials awardees may request AGI waivers for producer payments once their project commences.
- Entities receiving On-Farm Trials awards are required to submit producer information and amounts of incentive payments made to individuals annually. This is required by the On-Farm Trials statute and will be a requirement of the award.
- On-Farm Trials incentive payments do not count toward a producer's EQIP payment limitation under the 2018 Farm Bill (7 U.S.C. 1308-3a).

Section 1240B of the Food Security Act of 1985, [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-2\(d\)\(2\)](#), prohibits duplicative payments. Entities receiving an On-Farm Trials award are responsible for ensuring that incentive payments are not provided to a producer for a conservation practice, system, or approach for which the producer has already received, or is contracted to receive, funding through another NRCS or USDA program

**c. NRCS Responsibilities**

Successful On-Farm Trials projects require close collaboration and partnership between awarded entities and NRCS. NRCS will designate a technical contact to serve as the main technical liaison between NRCS and the awardee, and additional NRCS staff are likely to be engaged in On-Farm Trials projects.

NRCS is required to provide technical oversight to each On-Farm Trials project. At a minimum, NRCS is required to ensure that participating producers are EQIP eligible and in compliance with the Farm Bill's Adjusted Gross Income, highly erodible lands, and wetlands conservation provisions. In addition, NRCS is responsible for ensuring that On-Farm Trials projects and activities comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and other Federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

NRCS will work with awarded partners to refine On-Farm Trials evaluation methodologies and will review project results for possible inclusion into NRCS publications and technical documents.

**3. Cost Sharing or Matching**

This NFO requires applicants to provide matching funds of at least 25 percent of the Federal amount requested. For example, an applicant receiving a \$1 million award would need to provide \$250,000 in match. The match requirement is reduced to 10 percent of the Federal award for applicants who qualify for the Historically Underserved (HU) set-aside (see section C. 5, "Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers"). Upon request from the applicant, NRCS may waive the cost share requirement entirely for any applicants that qualifies for the HU set aside and provides a justification of why it is unable to provide any matching funds. This waiver request should be included in the applicant's HU Narrative section of its proposal.

Applications that do not include the required level of cost-sharing will be ineligible for award. Cost sharing may be achieved with contributions of cash, services, materials, equipment, or third-party in-kind contributions. Recipients may also use indirect costs to meet cost-sharing obligations. Refer to Section D ("Application and Submission Information") for information about any required submittals related to match or cost-share requirements. While the pace of cost-sharing/matching may vary throughout the award period, the agency will actively monitor cost-sharing/matching levels as it receives payment requests to ensure the total cost-sharing/matching requirement is



met by the award periods for the performance end date. Additional details about cost-sharing or matching funds/contributions are located at 2 CFR § 200.306.

#### **4. Technical Assistance**

On-Farm Trials applicants must include the portion of the proposed award amount that will be applied to technical assistance. Technical assistance refers to all activities required to implement innovative conservation approaches on farm or ranch land. Technical assistance activities include conservation planning, design and engineering, and quality assurance and verification.

The On-Farm Trials technical evaluation criteria in Section E. of this notice makes clear that NRCS gives preference to partner entities that are able to wholly supply the technical assistance needed for On-Farm Trials projects, either on their own or through working with Technical Service Providers or other qualified entities and individuals.

Proposals must identify the individuals or entities providing technical assistance services and describe their qualifications. If these individuals or entities are not certified Technical Service Providers or NRCS-certified conservation planners, applications must provide sufficient evidence that the individuals or entities are qualified to carry out implementation activities.

#### **5. Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers**

NRCS is committed to the success of our nation's Historically Underserved (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 focused on working with HU producers.

For the FY 2022 award process, at least 10 percent of the total funds available for On-Farm Trials are set aside for proposals that entirely benefit HU producers. This HU set-aside will ensure that equity is incorporated in the planning and delivery of On-Farm Trials projects to align with NRCS's Justice 40 goals.

To qualify under the EQIP rule for the HU set-aside, On-Farm Trials applicants must be:

- i. A community-based organization comprised of, representing, or exclusively working with HU producers for the life of the project;
- ii. An entity developing an innovative conservation approach or technology specifically targeting the unique needs and limitations of HU producers for the life of the project; or
- iii. 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

In the narrative portion of their proposal, applicants applying under ii. must include the name(s) of partners with a history of trusted relationships with HU producers. In addition, the project narrative must clearly describe how the project is designed to target the unique needs and limitations of HU producers.

The regulatory definitions of an HU farmer or rancher may be found at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/outreach/slbfr/>.

To compete for set-aside funds, the applicant must signal their intent by following the instructions in Section D.3. Applicants competing for the HU set-aside are given an abatement on non-Federal match requirements. Details are in Section C.3.

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.

## 6. SAM.gov Exclusion Database

Applicant entities identified in the SAM.gov Exclusions database as ineligible, prohibited/restricted, or excluded from receiving Federal contracts, certain subcontracts, and certain Federal assistance and benefits will not be considered for Federal funding, as applicable to the funding being requested under this Federal program ([2 CFR 200.205\(d\)](#)).

## D. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

### 1. Information for Using SAM.gov and Grants.gov

#### a. Overview

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

For more information about the Grants.gov pre-award phase of the grant lifecycle visit <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants/grants-101/pre-award-phase.html>.

#### b. Register for a SAM account and obtain a SAM number

Check your SAM account registration to make sure it is active. If you do not have an active SAM account and number, follow the steps in Section D.1.d. to obtain the account and number.

**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.**

For more information on SAM, see the item in D.4. entitled “UEI and SAM.”

**c. Register to Apply through Grants.gov**

Carefully review the registration steps and gather information requested prior to beginning the registration process. For assistance with the registration process, contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov).

Organizations must complete all steps in D.1.d to register. Complete organization instructions are included on Grants.gov:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html>.

**Please allow for sufficient time to register for a Grants.gov account in case of scheduled or unscheduled system outages, though registration for a Grants.gov account may typically be completed in 1 day.**

**d. Steps to Register for Grant Systems Prior to Application Submission**

- **Unique Entity Identifier (UEI):** 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 Standard Form (SF) 424.
- **SAM:** Register with SAM. All organizations must register with SAM to apply online through Grants.gov, and SAM registration must be renewed annually. Part of the SAM registration process includes designating an Electronic Business (EBiz) Point of Contact (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 <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-2-register-with-sam.html>.
- **Grants.gov:** Create a Grants.gov account. From the Grants.gov webpage (<https://www.grants.gov/>), click “Register” in the top right-hand corner and follow the on-screen instructions, or refer to the detailed instructions about registration at <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration.html>.

- **Organization Applicant Profile:** Add an Organization Applicant Profile to a Grants.gov account. A profile in Grants.gov corresponds to a single applicant organization that the user represents or an individual applicant. If you work for or consult with multiple organizations and have a profile for each, you may log into 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 <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration/add-profile.html>.
- **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. **Please be aware that the EBiz POC and the person with the AOR role cannot be the same individual; they must be different people.** 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 apply online. For more detailed instructions about creating an EBiz POC authorized profile on Grants.gov, refer to <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration/authorize-roles.html>.
- **Track Role Status:** To track your role request, refer to <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration/track-role-status.html>.

**e. 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. Please be aware that the EBiz POC and the person with AOR role cannot be the same individual; they must be different people. The EBiz POC **must** authorize a person who is able to make legally binding commitments on behalf of the organization as a user with the AOR role. **This step is often missed, and it is crucial for valid and timely submissions.**

**f. 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 within Workspace.

**g. Apply for an Opportunity**

The following is an overview for applying on Grants.gov. For complete instructions on how to apply for opportunities, refer to

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

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

- i. **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, or external drive, then accessed through Adobe Reader.

NOTE: Visit the Adobe Software Compatibility page on Grants.gov to download the appropriate version of the software at

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>

- ii. **Mandatory Fields in Forms:** In the forms, you will note fields marked with an asterisk and a different background color. These fields are mandatory fields that must be completed to successfully submit your application.
  - iii. **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 completed, the information will transfer (i.e., prepopulate) to the other forms.
- **Submit a Workspace:** An application may be submitted through workspace by clicking the Sign and Submit button on the Manage Workspace page, under the Forms tab.
  - **Track a Workspace Submission:** After successfully submitting a workspace application, a Grants.gov Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) is automatically assigned to the application. The number will be listed on the Confirmation page that is generated after submission. Using the tracking number, access the Track My Application page under the Applicants tab or the Details tab in the submitted workspace.

For additional training resources, including video tutorials, refer to <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-training.html>

## 2. 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 or any other method. **Applicants are urged to submit the application package at least 24-48 hours prior to the close date** to provide time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission.

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

All information necessary to apply for this opportunity is included in the [Grants.gov](#) opportunity announcement.

## 3. 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.

To be considered for funding under this opportunity, an application must contain the documents described in the following (D.3.a through D.3.k).

### a. Cover Page

*Applications that fail to provide a cover page will be rejected in the first stage of screening.*

The cover page must not exceed one page. In a document file titled Cover Page, provide the following information:

- The applicant entity name.
- The project title.
- The project duration in years.
- The On-Farm Trials (Federal) funding amount requested.
- The non-Federal contributions amount committed.
- The applicant's technical contact name, phone number, and email (usually the primary investigator, project director, or similar).
- The applicant's administrative contact name, phone number, and email (usually the person responsible for invoicing and other administrative actions).
- The geographic location of the project. List state(s).

- The national priority that is addressed by the project. List **only one** of the following priorities: irrigation management technologies; climate smart agricultural solutions; nutrient management; or SHD trial. If the proposal addresses more than one priority, you must select one primary priority for your application.
- Whether the project team has submitted this proposal to any other active funding opportunities. If yes, please list.
- The number of participating producers that will receive incentives (can be estimated).
- Number of participating HU producers
- Please state if you are competing for the HU set aside and note which of the following applies to the applicant:
  - i. A community-based organization comprised of, representing, or exclusively working with HU producers for the life of the project;
  - ii. An entity developing an innovative conservation approach or technology specifically targeting the unique needs and limitations of HU producers for the life of the project; or
  - iii. 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 an Asian American and Pacific Islander-serving institution (20 U.S.C. 1059g) at the time of application.

**b. Project Abstract**

The project abstract must not exceed one page. In a document file titled “Project Abstract,” provide a concise narrative describing the following in non-technical language:

- The issue or problem addressed by the proposal
- The project objectives
- The innovative conservation approach or approaches that are the focus of the project
- The cropping systems or agricultural operation type targeted for participation
- The number of producers involved
- A summary of the composition and structure of producer incentive payments
- Project deliverables
- Anticipated project results
- A summary of how project results will be quantified through evaluation activities
- The predicted benefits to conservation more broadly

### c. Project Narrative

The project narrative **must not exceed 18 pages**. Each page must be numbered and have one-inch margins. The text of the project narrative must be single spaced and typed in a standard typeface (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, Courier) with no smaller than 12-point font. This page limitation applies to the project narrative only. In a document file titled Project Narrative, provide the project narrative consisting of the following sections in this order:

- **Background:** Provide a short history of the development of the conservation approach or technology presented (cite significant publications as appropriate). Describe any challenges to broad adoption of the approach by agricultural producers.
- **Purpose and Goals:** Describe the purpose and overarching goal(s) of this project.
- **Objectives:** Describe the project’s objectives and how it supports achieving the project goal using specific, measurable, and time-dependent targets.
- **Design and Methods:** Describe the methodology of the On-Farm Trials, including any tools or processes that will be used to implement it. Identify the individuals or entities providing technical assistance services and describe their qualifications.
- **Evaluation:** Describe the methodology used to evaluate this project and quantify results, including proposed methods to evaluate the environmental and economic (and social, if feasible) results of the On-Farm Trials. Describe the individuals and entities scheduled to carry out the evaluation. For applicants of the SHD trials priority only, describe how the applicant and any partners intend to address and complete the NRCS minimum soil health data requirements required of all SHD applicants.
- **Incentive Payments and Producer Involvement:** Estimate the number of EQIP eligible producers proposed to participate in the On-Farm Trials. Describe whether these producers have been identified, and if not yet identified, clearly articulate the process that will be used to identify participating producers. Describe the composition and structure of the incentives that participating producers will receive. Include the amount of incentive payments an individual producer may receive and details on the composition of the incentive payments (e.g., cash vs. equipment/supplies/technical assistance).
- **HU Narrative:** Describe the extent to which HU producers will be involved in this project. In particular:
  - i. State which of the following HU communities will be served by the proposed project and describe how these groups and/or producers will be included in the project.
    - Beginning Farmer or Rancher



- Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher
- Veteran Farmer or Rancher
- Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher
  - American Indians or Alaskan Natives
  - Asians
  - Blacks or African Americans
  - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders
  - Hispanics
- ii. Describe how HU community groups or producers will benefit from the project.
- iii. Describe the potential for project results to impact the broader HU producer community.
- iv. Describe any previous experience working with HU groups or producers.
- **Project Outcomes and Benefits:** Identify the expected benefits and outcomes of the project and forecast the lasting impact of project results. Identify project beneficiaries and how their agricultural operations will be affected by the project's conservation activities.
- **Project Accomplishments and Deliverables:** Provide a list of specific deliverables that can be measured or presented so that both parties know the project is complete.

In addition to project-specific deliverables, CIG grantees are responsible for:

- i. 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.
- ii. Providing a closing event (this could be a webinar, field day, training event, etc., used to disseminate project results).
- iii. Submitting a final project overview describing the results of the On-Farm Trials.
- **Project Action Plan and Timeline:** Provide a list of project actions and deliverables relative to timeframes and associated project milestones through project completion.
- **Communications:** Describe plans for communicating project results to producers and stakeholders.
- **Geographic Location and Size of Project Area:** Identify the geographic location and the estimated size and scope (e.g., acres, farm types, demographics) of the project area. Maps are recommended and can be attached in the Attachments

tab at the end of the application. If project activities are carried out in multiple states, describe which project elements will take place in each state.

- **Project Management:** Describe how the project will be organized and managed. List the project partners and describe their role in the project. Provide brief descriptions of key technical and administrative personnel qualifications, their experience managing Federal awards, and their anticipated contributions to the project. Do not include resumes or curriculum vitae.
- **Assessment of Environmental Impact:** Describe any physical, chemical, or biological impacts to the environment from the activities of this project. Beneficial and adverse impacts are to be considered, highlighting and quantifying the natural environmental resources affected directly, indirectly, or cumulatively. See section F.2. for more instruction.
- **Declaration of previous CIG (if applicable):** If the applicant has previously received and managed a CIG award (either at the National or state levels), 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. Note if this On-Farm Trials proposal builds on a prior CIG Classic award. For applicants with multiple previous awards, list all awards and describe the most recent awards as space allows.
- **References (if applicable):** Enter a formatted list of any academic references used to support this proposal. If your proposal will include information collected from non-Federal sources, ensure the collection meets the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act. Surveys of individuals or entities are generally prohibited without prior approval from the Office of Management and Budget. For additional guidance about allowable and unallowable activities, please visit the following website: <https://pra.digital.gov/do-i-need-clearance/> .

#### **d. Application Form**

Use SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance. See Instructions for Completing SF-424 located at the end of this document.

#### **e. SF-424A, Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs**

Fill in all spaces on SF-424A, as appropriate. Section B, item 6, column 1 should reflect the agency funds, and column 2 should reflect the applicant's matching funds. This form is the summary budget for the project and should include the full project totals on pages 1 and 2. See Instructions for Completing SF-424A located at the end of this document.

#### **f. Budget Table**

In an Excel document file titled "Budget Table," list line-items and amounts from the

budget narrative (refer to APPENDIX E, Budget Table Template). The budget table serves as a reference and calculation check for the amounts budget listed in the budget narrative. The budget table does not replace the need for line-item descriptions and amounts to be included in the budget narrative.

**g. Budget Narrative**

In a document file titled “Budget Narrative,” list and justify the budget line-item totals broken down by year and sorted by the budget categories listed in SF-424A (refer to Appendix C, Budget Narrative Guidance, and Appendix D, Sample Budget Table and Narrative). Detail how the totals for each budget category were determined and demonstrate a clear connection between costs and the proposed project activities. The budget narrative should be broken down into two sections: one section for the Federal portion of the project budget, and one section for the non-Federal portion of the budget. See Appendix D for a sample budget narrative.

A budget narrative should outline project details sufficiently enough to allow reviewers to evaluate the integrity of the proposed spending and should clarify project intent. Budgets should include specific information about the amount and structure of incentive payments to participating producers.

Note: Applicants must include \$6,000 in the budget for project travel dictated by NRCS. These funds can be part of the Federal portion, the applicant’s contributions, or a combination of both. Any additional travel identified by the applicant as necessary for the successful completion of the project must be considered additional to this \$3,000.

**The budget narrative must show the amounts and sources of match or cost share (including both cash and in-kind contributions).**

**h. Cost Share Letters of Commitment (if applicable)**

Cost sharing/matching must be committed at the time the application is submitted. For third-party contributions, a letter is required for each contribution, signed by the authorized organizational representative of the contributing organization. The Letter must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the contributor, (2) the name of the applicant organization, (3) the title of the project for which the contribution is made, (4) the dollar amount of the contribution, and (5) a statement that the contributor will pay the contribution no later than the end of the award period. The agency may conduct reference checks to ensure that the organizations identified are supportive and involved with the project. Cost sharing/match letters should be addressed to the Federal Awarding Agency Contact in Section G of this NFO and uploaded under Other Attachments (listed separately under Optional

Forms) on Grants.gov. The file name should include the term “match letter” and the name of the contributing organization.

**i. Grants.gov Lobbying Form, Certification and Disclosure of Lobbying Activities**

Under 31 U.S.C. § 1352, an applicant or recipient must not use any Federally appropriated funds (either 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 connected with the award. Submitting an application also represents the applicant’s certification of the statements in 2 CFR § 418, Appendix A-Certification Regarding Lobbying. If an applicant or organization has made or agrees to make any payment using non-appropriated funds for lobbying, the applicant or organization must also complete and submit the SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities located at 2 CFR § 418, Appendix B. See 2 CFR § 418.110 for more information on when submission of this form is required.

**j. Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA), If Applicable**

If charging your organization’s negotiated indirect cost rate for cost share, upload the NICRA under Other Attachments (listed as an Optional Form) in the Grants.gov Opportunity Application Package. See Section D.7 for information regarding indirect costs.

**k. Disclosure of Potential Conflict of Interest, If Applicable**

Applicants must maintain written standards of conduct covering conflicts of interest and governing the performance of its 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 there is a real or apparent conflict of interest. A conflict of interest would arise if the employee, officer, or agent, any immediate family member or domestic partner, or any 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 being 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. An organizational conflict of interest means that because of the relationships with a parent company,

affiliate, or subsidiary organization, the applicant is unable or appears to be unable to be impartial in conducting a Federal award action involving the related organization.

#### **4. UEI and SAM**

Each applicant (unless the applicant has an exception approved by the Federal awarding agency under 2 CFR 25.110(d)) is required to: (1) be registered in SAM before submitting its application; (2) provide a valid UEI in the application; and (3) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during an active Federal award or when an application or plan is 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 UEI and SAM requirements. 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 may use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant.

Applicants must obtain a UEI and register in SAM prior to registering with Grants.gov. Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply early for their SAM registration. To register, go to: <https://www.sam.gov>. The Federal Service Desk is available for registration assistance and can be contacted via the Help tab at the previously cited website. Awarding agency staff cannot support applicants regarding UEI or SAM issues.

The Government has replaced the DUNS number with a “new, non-proprietary identifier” requested in, and assigned by SAM.gov. This new identifier is being called an UEI, or the Entity ID.

#### **5. Submission Dates and Times**

Applicants must apply through Grants.gov. Applications must be received by 11:59 pm Eastern Time (ET) on September 22, 2022. An application submitted or resubmitted after the deadline will not be reviewed or considered (an application is considered on time at 11:59.59 pm ET, but it is late at 12:00 am ET).

Grants.gov will provide either an error or a successfully received transmission message in the form of an email sent to the applicant with the AOR role who is 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 applying through Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any issues. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Section D. 2. 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:

- a. An acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov
- b. 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.

## **6. Intergovernmental Review**

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

## **7. Funding Restrictions**

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

- a. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project.
- b. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the award, including time spent applying for this opportunity.
- c. Costs that lie outside the scope of the approved project and amendments thereto.
- d. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives.
- e. Compensation for injuries to persons or damage to property arising out of project activities.
- f. Consulting services performed by a Federal employee during official duty hours when such consulting services result in the payment of additional compensation to the employee.
- g. Capital expenditures for general purpose equipment, buildings, and land or for improvements to land, buildings, or equipment which materially increase their value or useful life. See 2 CFR § 200.439 for additional information.
- h. Management fees and profit. Any funds awarded to for-profit entities must be used for reimbursement of award-related direct and indirect costs only.
- i. Meals may be charged to an award only if they are necessary for the performance of the project. For instance, meals (normally only lunch) that are a necessary part of the cost of meetings and conferences (i.e., required attendance and 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 per diem expenses and should be reimbursed in accordance with the organization's established travel policies, which are subject to statutory limitations or in accordance with Federal travel policies.

- j. 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 general expenses, such as the salaries and expenses of executive officers, personnel administration, and accounting.
- k. Salaries that are not commensurate with level of work. All costs must be reasonable to be allowable (2 CFR § 200.403), and 2 CFR § 200.404 defines a reasonable cost as a cost that, in its nature and amount, 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.

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

## **8. Indirect costs limitations**

- a. By statute, On-Farm Trials funds may not be used to pay for administrative (indirect) expenses of an eligible entity. Indirect costs may not be charged to the Federal budget of an On-Farm Trials award. Applicants may count indirect costs as part of their match.
- b. To be eligible to recover any indirect cost under a Federal award, recipients must either (1) have a current NICRA with a Federal agency that has not expired, or (2) qualify for use of the de minimis rate authorized by 2 CFR § 200.414(f). A State, local, or tribal governmental department or agency unit that receives more than \$35 million in direct Federal funding is not eligible for the de minimis rate.
- c. 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 rate (including provisional) 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. 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. MTDC are 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 under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs, and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$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.
- e. Applicants that have a current NICRA must calculate indirect costs using the rate and base specified in their NICRA. Recipients may voluntarily reduce or waive recovery of indirect costs at their sole discretion and must not be influenced in any way 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.
- f. Recipients are prohibited from shifting unallowable indirect costs to another Federal award unless specifically authorized to do so by legislation.

## **E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

### **1. Review and Selection Process**

Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete or noncompliant applications, or applications not meeting the formatting criteria or not including required materials 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 by the application deadline. 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 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.

Applications that pass the initial screening are then evaluated using a three-part process:

- a. Technical peer review panels composed of subject matter experts evaluate the applications against the On-Farm Trials Technical Criteria in E.2.



- b. NRCS State Conservationists in the states where On-Farm Trials work is proposed evaluate the relevant applications for ethical concerns and potential duplication of effort and provide review comments.
- c. The NRCS Chief makes the final award selections.

## 2. Merit and Technical Criteria

On-Farm Trials technical peer review panels use the following criteria, on a 100-point scale, to evaluate applications:

### a. Project Purpose, Innovation, and Scientific Approach (25 points)

- The project purpose is compelling and the rationale explicit for why On-Farm Trials of the innovative approach are needed.
- The design and implementation of the project, including the method for determining the structure of incentive payments, is sound and based on accepted scientific methodology.
- The innovative conservation approach tested has applicability for a range of agricultural operation sizes and types.
- SHD ONLY: The proposal indicates that all soil health assessments and methodologies are consistent with NRCS-approved assessments and methodologies.

### b. Project Management (25 points)

- Project management staff has experience managing (or demonstrates they can manage) a Federal financial award and working on the ground with agricultural producers, or requisite experience managing similar projects.
- Applicant agrees to be responsible for all technical assistance required to implement innovative approaches with producers. Proposal includes qualifications of identified entities and individuals providing technical assistance to producers.
- The budget is justified and reasonable, and expenses are allowable.
- The proposal includes substantial value-added contributions from the applicant and any partners to leverage the NRCS On-Farm Trials investment.
- The proposal includes a plan for the substantive participation of HU producers.

### c. Evaluation Approach (25 points)

- A scientifically robust evaluation plan is described that incorporates the assessment of economic and social (to the extent possible) outcomes in addition to environmental benefits.
- There is a sufficient plan for developing communications products related to project outcomes, and a plan for disseminating project results to agricultural producers and stakeholders.

**d. Project Outcomes (25 points)**

- Project results are likely to lead to developing new or modifying existing guidance documents, technical tools, conservation practice standards, or NRCS business practices.
- Project results and evaluation are likely to result in more widespread adoption of the approach.

**3. Administrative and Risk Criteria**

Notice of selection after technical evaluation does not guarantee that an applicant will receive an award. Following notification of selection for funding (see Section F), staff from the FPAC Business Center, Grants and Agreements Division, conduct 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 follow this risk review process, at a minimum (additional steps may be taken): the awarding agency will check SAM to ensure that 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 the Federal Awardee Performance Integrity Information System (FAPIS) in SAM (see 41 U.S.C. § 2313 and 2 CFR § 200.206(a)).

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

**a. 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.

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

The applicant has a financial management system that is 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 § 200 D for procurement, property, and records management; and (3) required financial and performance reporting.

**c. History of Performance**

If the applicant has previously obtained a Federal financial assistance award, the applicant 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 E.3.a. through E.3.c.). 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.

**4. Awards Over the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (if applicable)**

- a.** 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 FAPIIS, the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM. 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)).
- b.** An applicant may review information in FAPIIS and comment on any information that a Federal awarding agency previously entered.
- c.** 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.

## **F. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION**

### **1. Federal Award Notices**

The agency will provide notice that an application has been selected before it makes the Federal award. As such, the selection notification is not an authorization to begin work. Any pre-award costs incurred by the awardee will not be reimbursed. 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.

### **2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

All project funds will be used in accordance with 2 CFR § 200 and the General Terms and Conditions, which are available at the following website:

<https://www.fpacbc.usda.gov/about/grants-and-agreements/award-terms-and-conditions/index.html>.

Projects performed pursuant to this opportunity are subject to the National Environmental Policy Act. Following the issuance of the award but prior to any ground disturbing activities related to an On-Farm Trials project, the awardee must work with the NRCS state office to complete an environmental evaluation related to each individual producers' conservation activities under the project. Awardees may be required to prepare or pay for the preparation of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement if an environmental review should find that one 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 § 800), and other related authorities require Federal agencies to determine if a project has the potential to affect historic properties and, if so, how any negative impact might be addressed. The NHPA review and compliance, in accordance with Section 106 of NHPA and implementing regulations at 36 CFR § 800, must be completed by NRCS, and applicants may be required to pay for any cultural resource surveys needed for NRCS to assess the project. More information on the applicant's role in the NHPA Section 106 process can be found on the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation website at <https://www.achp.gov/digital-library-section-106-landing/section-106-applicant-toolkit>.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service under the Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and implementing regulations at 50 CFR § 402 is also required for projects that may affect listed or proposed species or destroy or modify critical habitat. The ESA consultation must be completed by NRCS prior to the implementation of project activities that have the potential to impact species or habitat protected under the ESA. More information on the Section 7 consultation process can be found at <https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/consultations-overview.html>.

Allocation of rights to patents, inventions, and copyrights shall be in accordance with [2 CFR § 200](#). This regulation states that small businesses may normally retain the principal worldwide patent rights to any invention developed with USDA support. In accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 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 must normally manufacture it domestically. Regarding copyright, the grant recipient may copyright any work that is subject to copyright and was developed, or for which ownership was acquired under an award. USDA reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable right to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use the work for Federal purposes and to authorize others to do so.

All tools produced must meet the accessibility of Electronic and Information Technology (EIT) requirements as specified in Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794d) as amended by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (Pub.L. 105-220). Specifically, subsection 508(a)(1) requires that when the Federal Government procures EIT, it must allow individuals with disabilities comparable access to and use of information and data that is provided to individuals 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. [Email the address in Section G](#) with specific questions regarding the applicability of this section.

### **3. Reporting**

Reporting will follow the guidelines included in the agency's General Terms and Conditions, which are available at the following website: <https://www.fpacbc.usda.gov/about/grants-and-agreements/award-terms-and-conditions/index.html>

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 § 200, Award Term and Condition for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters.

Applicants that receive awards pursuant to this opportunity and any sub awardees must comply with the reporting requirements described at 2 CFR § 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 CF. § 170.110(b).

## **G. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY POINT OF CONTACT**

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

Name: Ann Mulvaney  
Grants Management Specialist  
FPAC Business Center  
Email: [ann.mulvaney@usda.gov](mailto:ann.mulvaney@usda.gov) with a copy to [FPAC.BC.GAD@USDA.GOV](mailto:FPAC.BC.GAD@USDA.GOV)

## **H. OTHER INFORMATION**

1. Questions regarding this opportunity must be submitted to the Federal Awarding Agency Contact identified in section G providing the NFO number in the subject line.
2. For technical issues with Grants.gov, please contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov). Awarding agency staff cannot support applicants regarding Grants.gov accounts.

### **3. Freedom of Information Act**

Applications are considered confidential information. Applications are not shared with individuals or entities seeking public disclosure through FOIA without the consent of the applicant. More specifically, Executive Order 12600 and USDA FOIA regulation 7 C.F.R. § 1A 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.

### **4. Government Obligation**

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

5. As required in 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart F Audit Requirements, all U.S. 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.

## 6. USDA 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/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> or at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA providing 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 at:

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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| AOR    | Authorized Organizational Representative                 |
| C.F.R. | Code of Federal Regulations                              |
| CIG    | Conservation Innovation Grants                           |
| DUNS   | Data Universal Numbering System                          |
| EBiz   | Electronic Business                                      |
| EIT    | Electronic and Information Technology                    |
| EQIP   | Environmental Quality Incentives Program                 |
| 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  |
| SHD    | Soil Health Demonstration                                |
| SHMS   | Soil Health Management Systems                           |
| SIDMA  | Social Indicators Data Management and Analysis           |
| UEI    | Unique Entity Identifier                                 |
| U.S.C. | United States Code                                       |
| USDA   | United States Department of Agriculture                  |



## **APPENDIX A – Instructions for Completing SF-424**



SF424 and SF424A  
Instructions for FPAC

## **APPENDIX B – Instructions for Completing SF-424A**



SF424 and SF424A  
Instructions for FPAC

## **APPENDIX C – Budget Narrative Guidance**



Appendix C\_BUDGET  
NARRATIVE GUIDANC

## **APPENDIX D – Sample Budget Table and Narrative**



Appendix D\_Sample  
Budget Table and Na

## **APPENDIX E – Budget Table Template**



Appendix  
E\_Budget\_Table\_Temp

## **APPENDIX F – Applicant Checklist**



Appendix F\_Applicant  
Checklist.docx

## **APPENDIX G – Sample In-Kind Contribution Commitment Letter**



Appendix G\_Sample  
In-kind Contribution C

## **APPENDIX H – Sample Cash Contribution Commitment Letter**



Appendix H\_Sample  
Cash Contribution Co