

## Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO)

### SUMMARY INFORMATION

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

**Notice of Funding Opportunity Title:**

Announcement for Program Funding for NRCS’s Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) Classic Program for Federal fiscal year (FY) 2021

**Notice of Funding Opportunity Number:** USDA-NRCS-NHQ-CIG-21-NOFO0001113

**Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA):** This program is listed in the Assistance Listings under the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number 10.912, Environmental Quality Incentives Program

### 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, into technical manuals and guides, or to the private sector.

Applications will be accepted from all U.S.-based non-Federal entities (NFE) and individuals, with the sole exception of Federal agencies (see [section C. 1](#) Eligible Entities). Projects may be between 1 and 3 years in duration. The maximum award amount for a single award in FY 2021 is \$2 million.

### Key Dates

Applications must be submitted through the NRCS **Programs Portal**, a new system for CIG [application submission](#), by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on July 19, 2021. See [section D. 2](#) for more information about gaining access to the Programs Portal and [Appendix A](#) for submitting a proposal.

A webinar for CIG Classic applicants is scheduled for June 8, 2021 at 3 p.m. Eastern Time. Information on how to participate in the webinar will be posted to the [CIG Applicant](#) website. 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](mailto:nrcscig@usda.gov). A “Frequently Asked Question” document based on questions submitted during the webinar or submitted to the Federal awarding agency contact will be posted on Grants.gov at least 2 weeks before the proposal due date.

Note that there are pre-application requirements (e.g., Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number, System for Award Management (SAM) registration, NRCS Program Portal access requirements) in section D.1 of this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO). These requirements can be time-consuming and should be started as soon as possible if an applicant does not already have a DUNS number, SAM registration, or access to the Program Portal.

The agency anticipates making selections in November 2021 and expects to execute awards in February 2022.

### **Federal Funding Floor and Ceiling Amounts**

The funding floor for this opportunity is \$300,000, and the funding ceiling is \$2 million. The funding floor means 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 agreement amount, not any specific budget period.

### **Federal Financial Assistance Training**

The funding available through this NFO is Federal financial assistance. Grants 101 Training is highly recommended for those seeking knowledge about Federal financial assistance. The training is free and available to the public via <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. Farm Production and Conservation (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**

### **1. Legislative Authority**

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) (16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8). The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of EQIP, including CIG, to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). EQIP is funded and administered by NRCS under the authorities of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).

### **2. 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 are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) to agricultural producers, into technical manuals and guides, or to the private sector. CIG generally funds pilot projects, field demonstrations, and on-farm conservation research. On-farm conservation research means 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.

### **3. Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities**

- a. CIG funds the development and field testing, on-farm research and demonstration, evaluation, or implementation of:
  - i. Approaches to incentivizing conservation adoption, including market-based and conservation finance approaches, and
  - ii. Conservation technologies, practices, and systems.
- b. Projects or activities under CIG must:
  - i. Comply with all applicable Federal, Tribal, State, and local laws and regulations throughout the duration of the project,
  - ii. Use a technology or approach that was studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success,
  - iii. Demonstrate, evaluate, and verify the effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability of natural resource conservation technologies and approaches in the field,
  - iv. Adapt and transfer conservation technologies, management practices, systems, approaches, and incentive systems to improve performance and encourage adoption, and
  - v. 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 the use of those technologies and approaches demonstrates clear innovation.

NRCS strongly encourages the submission of CIG proposals addressing the innovative conservation needs of urban farmers in metropolitan areas. Interest in urban agriculture continues to grow, and there is a common need to address complex natural resource concerns related to the climate change, water conservation, and soil health priorities described in section A.4.

NRCS intends to award at least 10 percent of the funds available through this notice to proposals from historically underserved producers or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities (see [section D. 5](#), “Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers”).

#### **4. CIG Classic 2021 Priorities:**

For FY 2021, NRCS accepts proposals that address one or more of the priorities listed below. 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. Water Resources and Increased Resilience: Climate-Smart Strategies**

Climate change has exacerbated many water resource and agricultural production issues for agricultural producers with regional-specific issues emerging due to localized climate impacts. For example, in the West, increased wildfire activity results in higher levels of dissolved solids in some drinking water reservoirs. In the central Midwest, high-intensity storm events can increase water quality concerns stemming from agricultural runoff. In the Coastal regions, rising sea levels and reliance on groundwater sources are leading to saltwater intrusion in some locations. This priority area seeks proposals for technologies and approaches that address climate-smart water quality and quantity issues.

Creative, multidimensional solutions, targeted to local requirements, are needed to increase the resilience of U.S. agricultural production and address water resource issues (water quality, water scarcity, and excess water) that are likely to intensify in the future. Proposals submitted under this priority area must apply innovative technologies in a distinct region—a climate zone, physiographic region, a groundwater management area, a watershed, or other water resource region.

Examples of climate-smart strategies that applicants may consider for this priority area include:

- Concepts that can eventually lead to transformative on-farm production system or land use changes, such as shifting from annual to perennial systems to decrease soil erosion.
- Modifying current crop rotation strategies to better fit new climatic conditions, such as shifts to crops that use less water or are tolerant of wet conditions.
- Developing new, adopting locally unknown, or applying known structural technologies in a new way to deal with climate induced seasonal water changes. New technologies or techniques could detain water on the land in production for

use during a dry season, improve groundwater recharge, or reduce runoff during wet seasons.

Each proposal in this priority area must identify how the agricultural production and water resource problem is related to climate change and identify the parameters (e.g., watershed, groundwater management area, climatic zone, etc.) that distinguish the boundaries of the project area. Quantifiable outcomes of the innovation's impact on improving water resources must be estimated as part of the proposal. Priority consideration will be provided to proposals that include an economic analysis in addition to the conservation evaluation component of the proposal.

#### **b. Soil Health: Climate Mitigation, Adaptation, and Resilience**

Encouraging voluntary adoption of climate-smart agricultural systems and practices that result in measurable and verifiable carbon reductions and sequestration is critical to helping the agricultural sector contribute to climate change mitigation. The same systems and practices can also help producers adapt to changing climate patterns by increasing the resilience of their operations.

The Soil Health Demonstration Trial, part of CIG's On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials, funds projects that demonstrate and evaluate the effects of implementing soil health management systems and practices in a variety of places across a variety of production systems. The CIG Classic priority area described below is intended to explore innovative approaches to push the boundaries and knowledge of the complex interactions between climate change and soil health. Do not submit proposals describing practices, systems, technologies, or other innovations that have already been field tested extensively, as they are better candidates for the On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials.

Proposals submitted under this priority must address one of the two following sub-priorities:

##### **i. Carbon Sequestration**

Sequestered soil carbon, measured as soil organic carbon (SOC), is an important component in reversing current climate change as well as in increasing soil health, soil functioning and other ecosystem services. Soil health management systems (SHMS) are collections of NRCS conservation practices that focus on maintaining or enhancing soil health by addressing four soil health management principles: (1) minimize disturbance, (2) maximize soil cover, (3) maximize biodiversity, and (4) maximize the presence of living roots. Adoption of soil health practices and SHMS designed to take carbon out of the air and accumulate it in soil and plant materials across broad landscapes is critical to making progress toward climate-smart goals.

NRCS is seeking proposals that demonstrate innovative approaches that increase carbon sequestration in soil while maintaining agricultural productivity or improve our ability to measure, quantify, and monitor on-farm carbon sequestration.

Applicants must address one or more of the following themes:

- Approaches that optimize SHMS to sequester carbon.
- Cost-effective sampling or sensor technology to monitor rate of change in SOC or soil organic matter (SOM).
- Innovation in the production and application of high impact soil carbon amendments, such as biochar and compost.
- Identification and management of regional limitations, opportunities, and upper potential thresholds in diverse systems to increase SOC or SOM.

## **ii. Climate Resilience**

Due to rising average temperatures and changing weather patterns, there are increasingly frequent episodes of drought, extreme rainfall, extreme wind and other storm events, pest pressure, and flooding. Resilience in agroecosystems relates to a system's ability to return to a state of normality following disturbances. SHMS incorporate practices that mitigate the effects of disturbances from weather and weather-related extremes and increase the soil system's ability to return to normal functioning, sustaining production and building climate resilience.

NRCS is seeking proposals that demonstrate innovative approaches to improving soil health that increase production system resilience while maintaining agricultural productivity. Applicants must address one or more of the following themes:

- Approaches to analyze and quantify climate resilience in agricultural production systems.
- Comparative studies involving full and transitioning SHMS following natural or simulated extreme weather events.
- Refinement of existing technologies or the development of novel technologies or innovations used to inform management decisions at the field level and to train and educate the public, NRCS staff, and partners about SOC and resilience to climate change.

## **c. Nutrient Management**

### **Improving Nutrient Management Adoption to Meet Watershed or Regional Water Quality Goals**

Addressing nutrient management issues in agricultural settings continues to be challenging. Farmers wrestle with balancing water quality impacts with agricultural production and farm income goals. It is difficult to effectively target existing technologies, strategies, and management practices on a watershed or groundwater resource scale to measurably improve water quality. The diversity of water quality



impairments, farming operations, climate and landscape, and local farmer norms across the nation add to the complexity of this issue.

Current programs incentivize voluntary agricultural producer participation through technical and financial resources, education and outreach, and research. The success of these programs is dependent upon the availability of interested landowners and operators in a given watershed or groundwater management area that adjust their nutrient management techniques to address intrinsic site limitations and implement conservation practices that address their site-specific risk for nutrient loss. Despite the many successes of these programs, impairment of local waters continues to be an issue across the Nation. Inconsistencies in standards and methods related to nutrient application to address site risk complicate the issue, often limiting the potential for measurable improvements at a regional or watershed level.

Focused strategies that overcome regional limitations are needed to facilitate innovative approaches to reduce agricultural impacts to water quality within a priority watershed, groundwater management area, or other water resource region. Proposals submitted under this priority area must apply nutrient management practices and technologies that show promise of resulting in the measurable reduction of excess nutrients over time on a watershed or regional scale. For example, proposed strategies to address excess phosphorous must have a goal of reaching a balance between phosphorus coming into the watershed and phosphorus leaving the watershed. Applicants should consider approaches that engage a diverse group of partners in addition to producers (e.g., government agencies, extension agents, agricultural service providers, conservation professionals, bankers/brokers, and nongovernment organizations (NGO)).

Examples of innovative technologies and approaches that applicants could address through this priority include:

- Technologies and approaches that address offsite nutrient loss at the farm level by implementing more innovative and prescriptive ideas in nutrient management planning to address site-specific conditions more effectively.
- Regionally impactful innovative conservation solutions for private land such as water quality trading programs, innovative conservation finance solutions, or new technologies demonstrated at a community level.
- New collaborations such as farmer-led partnerships or rural-urban partnerships.

Proposals must identify the parameters (e.g., climactic zone, watershed, groundwater management area) used to demarcate the boundaries of the project area in the Geographic Location and Size of Project Area section of the application (see section D. 3 for further information). Quantifiable outcomes of the innovation's impact on improving nutrient management must be estimated as part of the proposal. Priority consideration will be provided to proposals that include an economic analysis in addition to the conservation evaluation component of the proposal.

Improved nutrient management can not only improve water quality, it can also reduce greenhouse gas emissions through reduced nitrous oxide emissions. Applicants are encouraged to include consideration of this climate change co-benefit in their proposals.

#### **d. Grazing Lands Conservation**

Livestock grazing on range and pasture lands is going through a transition as new technology and tools become available. There is great opportunity to fast track innovative tools and technologies for data collection and management and to demonstrate their importance to grazing land management. Through this priority area, NRCS seeks to demonstrate and facilitate the delivery of new tools, technologies, and strategies that can assist in the improvement and the management of both rangelands and pasturelands in the United States. Development of new approaches and technologies that solve wildlife and grazing challenges while enhancing economic efficiency are a priority for livestock operators.

Low-cost, easy-to-use modern tools, such as diagnostic sensors, biosensors, and drones can provide real-time, animal-specific data to inform producers on animal location and performance. Sensors can also monitor forage production and quality and be coupled with other innovative technology, such as virtual fencing, to manage animal nutrient intake and range/pastureland utilization. Systems-level analytical tools could allow for animal care at an individual or herd level by prescriptively managing data on nutrition, marketing, health, weather, and other ranch activities simultaneously. Automated solutions could also provide producers with reliable recommendations quickly, promoting more intensive animal production systems that also improve animal welfare, positively impacting the environment while optimizing producer profitability and minimizing risks. Innovative methodologies and other decision support tools that can assist ranchers with managing and improving grazing lands and silvopasture health will also be considered in this priority.

Examples of innovative technologies and approaches that applicants could address through this priority include:

- Diagnostic sensors and other innovative tools, such as sensors, drones, or other tools developed to measure water quality, air quality, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, rangeland health attributes, and other ecosystem services on grazing lands.
- Newer, nontraditional, innovative methods that address prescriptive/targeted livestock management strategies that reduce wildfire risk, decrease noxious weed populations (such as cheatgrass, medusahead, and African wiregrass), improve critical riparian and wetland habitat areas, minimize drought impacts, and provide options for nontraditional winter-feeding management practices.
- New methods that couple forage and animal production systems that can accurately establish preferred timing, duration, and frequency of animal use with

implemented restoration practices to maintain and enhance newly restored grazing lands.

- Exploration of forages with improved nutrient content and digestibility, forages that can be successfully and easily established with the potential for use as cover crops, or forages that can provide sustenance to animals outside of the traditional grazing season.
- Demonstration of innovative technology such as data processing logistics or the viability of 3D modeling.

In the project narrative methods section of the proposal (see section D. 3), the applicant must describe how it will use metrics that measure potential beneficial and adverse impacts to the environment for the innovation in question. Priority consideration will be provided to proposals that include an economic analysis in addition to the conservation evaluation component of the proposal.

#### **e. Increasing Conservation Adoption**

NRCS Conservation Effects Assessment Project data and analyses show that many farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners implement conservation measures as part of their production system. At the same time, the pace and scale of conservation adoption on working lands must be increased to sufficiently address our more persistent natural resource challenges.

NRCS has spent the better part of its history developing and refining the approximately 170 conservation practice standards that serve as the scientific underpinning of landowner conservation actions. In many ways, the agriculture community has already identified effective actions that can help solve our water quality, air quality, wildlife habitat, water quantity, and other natural resource issues—a remaining challenge has been how to persuade more landowners and land managers to implement known conservation actions.

Proposals submitted under this priority area must address one of the following two sub-priorities:

##### **i. Social Science and Producer/Landowner Decision-Making**

Social science has revealed that how producers make conservation decisions is complex—a variety of social, economic, and experiential factors combine to shape landowner and operator decisions. Approaches for reducing the practical, cultural, technical, and economic barriers to conservation adoption have the potential to substantively impact the pace and scale of conservation adoption.

NRCS seeks applications proposing innovative approaches, drawing on current social science research and methodology, to increase the scale and sustainability of conservation adoption on our nation's farms, ranches, and

forest lands. Social science fields include rural, environmental or development sociology, geography, anthropology, social psychology, or other human dimensions of natural resources and agriculture disciplines and may involve inter- and transdisciplinary approaches.

Proposals should emphasize collaborative, human-centered, and community-based approaches to better understand and overcome those barriers and to drive implementation over the mid- to long-term. The proposed innovative approach must identify a sociological, economic, values-based, or farm management barrier negatively influencing the adoption of a conservation practice or practices and then describe how the proposed approach would help overcome the identified barrier. Applicants must describe how they intend to quantify changes in decision-making, attitudes, motivations, and likelihood of continued conservation implementation as a result of the project.

NRCS is particularly interested in proposals that provide compelling transition management strategies that provide the technical support needed to assist producers successfully, sustainably, and independently transition their operations to more conservation-focused practices. Note that projects in which the primary focus is training and the development of educational materials without a clear link to an innovative approach supported by the behavioral sciences, as well as research proposals lacking an on-the-ground demonstration component, will not be considered for funding.

## **ii. Conservation Finance and Incentives**

In 2015, USDA NRCS launched a new initiative to fund promising conservation finance projects through its CIG. This innovative effort was spurred by the belief that attracting additional private sector funding to private and working lands conservation could increase the pace and scale of conservation adoption by farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners. NRCS also hypothesized that private sector investments in conservation finance approaches could accrue economic benefits to agricultural producers and rural communities. Between 2015 and 2018, NRCS used CIG funding to support projects designed to attract investment and private funding into working lands conservation.

Though this sub-priority, NRCS seeks to continue its support for innovative conservation incentive and finance approaches. Proposals submitted under this sub-priority may propose innovative incentive programs that demonstrate cutting edge approaches to working lands conservation. Examples include projects that use new incentives to increase adoption of edge-of-field (e.g., saturated buffers, bioreactors, drainage water management), quantifiable climate-smart mitigation and sequestration practices (e.g., windbreaks, anaerobic digesters, cover crops, no-till), or to integrate conservation incentives into existing financial instruments (e.g., farm operating loans, crop insurance premiums, regenerative or organic labeling premiums) already

familiar to agricultural producers. New pay-for-performance, pay-for-success, or carbon/greenhouse gas banking approaches also qualify as acceptable.

Proposals are encouraged to describe innovations that attract or leverage additional funding—such as private capital, corporate funding, philanthropic contributions, and other funding sources—to private and working lands conservation. Within the application, describe how the innovation would result in additional conservation implementation and provide new sources of conservation capital for U.S. agricultural producers. In addition to identifying the quantifiable conservation benefits as part of their proposal, applicants must describe how their proposed project aligns with current legal, policy, and regulatory conditions, and how they aim to identify and collaborate with partners and producers critical to the success of the project.

## **B. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION**

### **1. Available Funding**

#### **a. Estimated Funding**

The total amount of Federal funding the agency expects to award through this opportunity is \$15 million.

#### **b. Start Dates and Performance Periods**

Projects may be from one (1) to three (3) years in duration. Applicants should plan their projects based on an estimated project start date of March 1, 2022.

#### **c. Number of Awards**

The agency expects to make between 15 and 25 awards.

### **2. Type of Award**

#### **a. Type of Federal Award**

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

#### **b. Procurement Contracts**

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

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

Applications for renewal or supplementation of existing projects are not eligible to apply under this NFO. 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. Applicant entities identified in the SAM.gov exclusions database as ineligible, prohibited/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)).

All U.S.-based non-Federal entities (NFE) and individuals, with the exception of Federal agencies, are eligible to apply for projects carried out in the United States. “U.S.-based” includes any of the 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).

### 2. Other

Any award made pursuant to this NFO will be made to a single entity. An applicant may submit more than one application.

Projects awarded pursuant to this NFO will be grant agreements. These agreements are not Farm Bill incentive contracts, therefore the awards in and of themselves are not limited by the payment limitation in 16 U.S.C. 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.

#### a. CIG-specific Eligibility

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

- Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions (7 CFR Part 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 Part 1400](#).
- Have control of the land involved for the term of the proposed contract period.

#### b. EQIP Payment Limitation and Duplicate Payments

The following provisions apply to CIG funding:

- CIG funds are awarded through grant agreements. These grant agreements are not EQIP contracts; thus, CIG awards in and of 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 imposes a \$450,000 payment limitation for all payments

made to persons or legal entities under an EQIP contract entered into between FY 2019 and FY 2023.

- 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 above. In addition, all CIG payments are subject to the adjusted gross income (AGI) limitation. All agricultural producers receiving a payment through participation in a CIG project must have an 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. Section 1704(a)(3) of the 2018 Farm Bill 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 waiver. CIG grantees may request waivers for participating producers once their project commences.
- Section 1240B of the Food Security Act of 1985, [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-2](#), prohibits duplicative payments. Accordingly, direct or indirect payments cannot be made for a practice for which an individual or legal entity has already received funds, or is contracted to receive funds through any USDA conservation program (e.g., Conservation Reserve Program, EQIP, Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Stewardship Program). If awarded a grant, grantees must self-certify that payments to producers using CIG funding are not duplicative.

### **c. 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 composed entirely of HU producers.

For the FY 2021 CIG award process, at least 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG are set aside for proposals that entirely benefit Historically Underserved producers. The regulatory definitions of a Historically Underserved 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. 5](#). Applicants competing for the HU set-aside are given an abatement on non-Federal match requirements. Details are in [section D. 7](#).

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.

### **d. 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.

### **3. Cost Sharing or Matching**

This NFO requires applicants to share at least 50 percent of total project costs (includes Federal and non-Federal portion), except for applicants competing for HU funding (see [section D. 7](#)). Applications that do not include the required level of cost-sharing are 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. Refer to section D. of this NFO 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 period of performance end date. Additional details about cost sharing or matching funds/contributions is located at 2 CFR 200.306.

### **4. SAM.gov Exclusions 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. Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number and System for Award Management (SAM) Registration**

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual exempt 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 unique entity identifier (DUNS number) in its application; and (iii) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency. 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, it 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.

DUNS and SAM registrations may take several weeks. Organizations should begin the process early to ensure they have sufficient time to complete registration and meet required application submission deadlines.

**a. Obtain a DUNS Number**

All entities applying for funding must have a DUNS Number from Dun & Bradstreet (D&B). A Dun and Bradstreet DUNS number is a unique, nine-digit sequence recognized as the universal standard for identifying and keeping track of over 70 million businesses worldwide. Applicants must enter the DUNS Number in the data entry field labeled “Organizational DUNS” in the application. Information on how to obtain a DUNS number can be found at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> or by calling 1-866-705-5711.

**b. Register with SAM**

All organizations must register with SAM. SAM registration must be renewed annually. Part of the SAM registration process includes designating an Electronic Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC). SAM is the official Federal system that consolidated the capabilities of Central Contractor Registry, Federal Agency Registration, Online Representations and Certifications Application, and Excluded Parties List System. To register, go to: <https://www.sam.gov>. The Federal Service Desk is available for registration assistance and can be contacted via the Help tab at the website listed above.

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

**2. Electronic Application Package**

Applicants must submit applications through the NRCS Programs Portal at <https://nrcs-sites.secure.force.com/>

Step-by-step instructions are included the CIG Portal Guide which can be access in the Help tab in the portal.

Applicants must identify a single system user to establish credentials for system access. This is the primary individual who will receive application information and updates.

**a. Register with USDA eAuthentication:**

The designated system user must have USDA eAuthentication (eAuth) level-2 credentials to apply through the NRCS Programs Portal. This is a Departmental requirement and is non-negotiable. Individuals with active eAuth accounts do not need to re-register. For individuals needing to register, obtaining a USDA level-2 e-Authentication account can be accomplished from the USDA eAuth home page:

<https://www.eauth.usda.gov/eauth/b/usda/home>

To get started, select “create account” and then “customer.”

**Note:** The eAuth process can take anywhere from one day to several weeks. Applicants should start the process early to ensure that any eAuth delays do not impact their ability to submit a proposal by the deadline.

#### **b. Register with NRCS Programs Portal**

Once eAuth credentials are secured, the next step is to register in the NRCS Programs Portal. To do this, send a registration request to the NRCS Programs Portal system by clicking on the link below and then selecting “Start Here” under “New Users.”

<https://nracs-sites.secure.force.com/>

Complete the data fields as appropriate and then click Submit. If assistance is needed, step-by-step instructions are included in the Help tab in the Portal. In addition, additional tips and instructions are outlined in [Appendix A](#) of this NFO.

- a. NRCS Programs Portal Alternative Access: Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication (e.g., Braille, large print, audio tape) should contact the USDA TARGET Center at: (202) 720–2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.
- b. Technical Issues with NRCS Programs Portal: Once you have accessed the Programs Portal, you may submit a ticket for any technical issues that arise by clicking “Help” in the banner at the top of the page. You can also send an e-mail to [usdafpacbc@servicenowservices.com](mailto:usdafpacbc@servicenowservices.com) or call 970-372-4200. For non-technical issues related to the application process, or if your technical issue is not promptly addressed, e-mail [nrcsig@usda.gov](mailto:nrcsig@usda.gov).

### **3. Content and Form of Proposal Submission**

See [Appendix A](#) for further instructions on how to use the NRCS Programs Portal. The portal has seven separate tabs, each with multiple fields that will need to be completed in full. For proposal questions with longer fields, it is strongly recommended that applicants draft an answer to each question in advance and copy the text directly into the relevant portal field. Note that some proposal elements, such as Figures and Tables and Commitment Letters, will not be entered through fields but will be uploaded as attachments. All attachments must be uploaded in pdf format.

The following are the main tabs and sections in the Portal:

- a. Project Information – This tab outlines the main fields that populate the Federal Standard Form (SF) 424, “Application for Federal Assistance,” a form that needs to be signed off on to complete an application. Most of these fields are short. See

[Appendix A](#) for details on what these fields are.

- b. Abstract – a plain language summary description of your project is required. See Appendix A for further details on the information to be included in this field.
- c. Project Affiliates – All funded and non-funded partners should be listed in this section. Upload commitment and support letters for partners so they attach to that partners field. See Appendix A for further details on the information to be included in this field.
- d. Project Narrative Information – Complete all fields in the Project Narrative section, taking note of maximum length for each field. See [Appendix A](#) for more discussion on each field.

**Note:** all figures and tables will need to be uploaded in a separate pdf and attached to the application through the Portal’s attachment tab.

### **Section 1:**

Summary information about project.

1. Project Goal (150 words): 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.
2. Project Objectives (400 words): List the project’s objectives and how they support achievement of the project goal by describing them as specific, measurable, and time-dependent.
3. Statement of Innovation (100 words): Provide a brief description of the innovative conservation approach or approaches that is the focus of this proposal.
4. Keywords (50 words): Provide at least four keywords helpful in identifying the project or, if funded, used as search parameters.

### **Section 2:**

Project Description. Please be sure the technical merit criteria, described later in this NFO (see section E. 2) are addressed in this section (section 2) and section 3:

1. Project Background (1,200 words): Describe the issue or problem driving the need for 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 so the reviewers will understand why this innovation is compelling.
2. Outcomes & Benefits (1,200 words): Identify the expected benefits and outcomes of the project and forecast the lasting impact of project results to both the targeted audience and conservation in the United States as a whole.
3. Project Design and Methods (1,200 words): Describe clearly the design and methodology of the project. Details on processes that will be used, scientific tests that will be conducted, details on any sampling that will be conducted, and background on why these choices were made, especially if different from convention.

4. Project Deliverables/Products (400 words): Provide a list of specific deliverables and products that directly relate to the project objectives, outcomes, and benefits that reflect the performance and broad applicability of the project and will allow NRCS to monitor project progress. In addition to project-specific deliverables, CIG grantees are responsible for reporting detailed in section F. 4 and:
  - a. 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.
  - b. Submitting a project Fact Sheet at the project's conclusion.
  - c. Participating in a project closing event—this could be a webinar, field day, training event, etc., used to disseminate project results.
5. Geographic Location and Size of Project Area (300 words): 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 to this proposal.

### **Section 3:**

1. Project Action Plan and Timeline (600 words): 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.
2. Technology Transfer (300 words): Describe how the results will be transferred to producers and stakeholders through communications and outreach activities.
3. Project Management (400 words): 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.
4. Team Qualifications (1,200 words): 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 vitas.
5. Project Evaluation (1,200 words): Describe the methodology to be used to evaluate this project and quantify results.

### **Section 4:**

1. Assessment of Environmental Impact (800 words): Describe any physical, chemical, or biological impacts to the environment and its impact from activities of this project. See [section D. 4](#) for more instruction.
2. Declaration of previous Conservation Innovation Grants (800 words): 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 project's results and impact if completed and confirm the project was officially closed out. If the project is ongoing, provide the anticipated results.
3. Historically Underserved Narrative (800 words): This section is only for applicants that are applying to the historically underserved set-aside. Projects may involve historically underserved producers in two ways: They may be applying to the historically underserved set-aside or they may have included historically

underserved producers but are not applying to the set aside. To fill in this section, the applicant should review [section E. 3](#), Historically Underserved Criteria. This set of criteria should be addressed when completing this section.

4. **Producer Involvement (300 words):** Describe the extent to which producers, including any EQIP-eligible producers, will be involved in this project. Describe whether these producers have been identified, and if not yet identified, clearly articulate the process that will be used to identify participating producers.
5. **References (4000 words):** Enter a formatted list of any academic references used to support this proposal.

#### e. Budget Information.

The budget portion of the application consists of four sections, which include a budget narrative and budget table for both the Federal and non-Federal portions of the project. Provide a thorough budget narrative giving adequate details so the project reviewers can assess the budget relative to the project activities. The project tables are additive. It should reflect the budget narrative and give the applicant a way to check their calculations. Additional instructions on how to complete this section is found in [Appendix B](#) and additional information on what is required is expanded on in [section D. 6](#).

**Note:** Applicants must include \$3,000 in the budget for project travel dictated by NRCS (e.g., in-person awardee orientation). 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.

#### f. Templates

This tab includes templates for the Certification Regarding Lobbying and the De Minimis Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (DMICRA). Documents on the Templates tab are uploaded to the Attachments Tab.

#### g. Attachments

All required and elective attachments are added to this tab. This includes organizations' Federal negotiated indirect cost rate agreements, any figures and tables that are referenced in the project narrative, any maps, graphs, or photos, support letters, and any other additional materials determined relevant. Note that commitment letters are not uploaded in this section, but on the Project Affiliates Tab. Materials included in the proposal that are over and above those described herein as acceptable will not be evaluated by peer reviewers.

#### h. Submitting the Proposal

The Programs Portal automatically sends applicants an email to acknowledge receipt at the time of submission. Applicants are solely responsible for ensuring timely submission through the Programs Portal and are strongly advised to allow sufficient time to obtain

USDA eAuthentication and Programs Portal access. Difficulties related to these or other application processes will not result in an extension of the application deadline.

#### **4. Assessment of Environmental Impacts**

If implementation of the proposal is anticipated to have physical, chemical, or biological impacts on the environment, please 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 may result in unacceptable adverse environmental impacts.

Every funded CIG project that involves ground disturbance activities is subject to the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). 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 (EE) related to those activities. Awardees may be required to prepare or pay for preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), should any environmental review find that an EA or EIS is required.

In addition, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) may require a review and consultation by NRCS State or area office with consulting parties (such as the pertinent State Historic Preservation Officer and federally recognized Indian Tribes) prior to the implementation of project activities that have the potential to impact cultural resources. 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 effect to historic properties and, if so, if they are adverse and how the effects 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 CIG project effects. More information on the applicant's role in the 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>.

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

The CIG program provides special consideration to proposals substantially involving or benefitting historically underserved producers. For the National CIG Classic component, at least 10 percent of the total funds available for CIG Classic is set aside for applications from:

- i. An historically underserved producer at the time of application (see <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/outreach/slbfr/> for definitions);
- ii. A community-based organization comprised of, representing, or exclusively working with historically underserved producers for the life of the project;
- iii. An entity developing an innovative conservation approach or technology specifically targeting historically underserved producers' unique needs and limitations for the life of the project; or
- iv. 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 an 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 mark “yes” in the Historically Underserved section of the Project Information tab in the application. In addition, applicants must identify which HU category (paragraphs i.–iv. above) applies to the proposal.

## 6. Budget Narrative

On the Budget tab in the NRCS Program Portal, a budget narrative is required for both the Federal and non-Federal sections of the project budget that explain and justify all requested budget items/costs. Include detail in the application about how the totals on the budget table were determined and demonstrate a clear connection between costs and the proposed project activities. Describe any item that under the applicable Federal cost principles requires the agency's approval and estimate its cost. For details on what to include on each line item, see [Appendix B](#). Cost sharing/matching must be committed at the time of application submission. The budget narrative must show the amounts and sources of match or cost share (including both cash and in-kind contributions). An example budget narrative can be found in Appendix B of this announcement.

- a. For third-party contributions, a letter is required for each contribution, signed by the authorized organizational representative of the contributing organization and the applicant organization. The letter is recommended to be on letterhead from the committing organization, and 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, (5) a description of how the funding will be used, and (6) a statement that the contributor will pay the contribution no later than the end of the award period. Amounts committed should be firm and should not use terms such as “up to” or “estimated” or be committed on a condition aside from the applicant securing the award. The agency may conduct reference checks to ensure that organizations identified are supportive, involved with the project, and following through on their commitment. Cost sharing/match letters can be addressed to the NRCS CIG team

and uploaded in the Partners tab of the NRCS Programs Portal. A commitment letter template has been included in Grants.gov along with this NFO.

- b. As required in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations Part 200, Subpart F, “Audit Requirements,” all U.S. States, local governments, federally-recognized Indian Tribal Governments, and non-profit organizations expending \$750,000 USD 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.
- c. All applicants are hereby notified of the following:
  - Recipients without an approved indirect cost rate are prohibited from charging indirect costs to a Federal award. (Accepting the 10 percent *de minimis* rate as a condition of award constitutes establishing an approved *de minimis* rate.)
  - Failure to establish an approved rate during the award period renders all costs otherwise allocable as indirect costs unallowable under the award.
  - Recipients are prohibited from shifting unallowable indirect costs to another Federal award unless specifically authorized to do so by legislation.

## **7. Cost Share or Matching Funds**

Selected applicants may receive CIG grants of up to 50 percent of their total project cost. CIG recipients must provide a non-Federal funding match or 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 or matching funds must be committed by the applicant.

The match requirement is reduced for applicants applying for the HU set-aside. Applicants for HU funding must provide matching funds that represent at least 33 percent of the total project budget. In the example above, with a \$500,000 CIG funding request, an applicant for the HU set-aside would need to provide at least \$250,000 in matching funds.

Matching funds 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 done 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/matching must be committed at the time of application submission. Cost sharing or matching funds 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 or matching funds/contributions is located at [2 CFR 200.306](#).



All matching funds must be identified in both the budget table and budget narrative components of the application. 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 as described in section D. 6 of this NFO.

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.

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

Under Section 1352 of Title 31 of the United States Code, 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, Certification Regarding Lobbying. If you or your organization have made or agrees to make any payment using non-appropriated funds for lobbying in connection with this application and the Federal share exceeds \$100,000, you must also complete and submit the SF LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities located at 2 CFR 418. See 2 CFR 418.110 for more information on when additional submission of this form is required.

The form, titled "Certification Regarding Lobbying and Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," can be downloaded from the NRCS Programs Portal in the Templates tab.

## **9. Letters of Support**

Letters of support for the project from individuals or entities may be submitted and can be uploaded to either the Affiliates Tab, or the Attachments Tab, depending on if they are considered project partners. Do not submit support letters from NRCS staff.

## **10. Submission Dates and Times and Correspondence**

Applications must be received by 11:59 pm Eastern Time (ET) on July 19, 2021. 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) and will not be reviewed or considered.

The Programs Portal automatically sends applicants an email to acknowledge receipt at the time of submission.

## 11. Withdrawal

Proposals may be withdrawn by written notice at any time before award execution. A letter on official letterhead must be signed by the applicant or an authorized representative and emailed to [nrcscig@usda.gov](mailto:nrcscig@usda.gov).

## 12. Intergovernmental Review

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

## 13. Funding Restrictions

Unless otherwise permitted by law and approved in writing by the agency in advance, Federal funds may not be used to pay for:

- 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 which 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. Renovation or refurbishment of research or related spaces, the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such spaces, and the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities;
- 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); or
- i. Meals, unless they are necessary for the performance of the project, such as meals (normally only lunch) that are a necessary part of the costs of meetings and conferences (i.e. required attendance and continuity of a meeting), the primary purpose of which is the dissemination of information, similar to the costs of transportation, rental of facilities, speakers’ fees, and other items incidental to such meetings or conferences, which are also allowable.  
**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.
- 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 must be 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 one 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.

**Note:** Costs for new equipment above \$5,000 are allowed, but the applicant should be aware of the equipment disposition schedule ([2 CFR 200.313](#)).

This list is not exhaustive. Questions regarding the allowances of particular items of cost should be directed to the agency contact listed in this NFO (see section G).

#### **14. Indirect Costs Limitations**

- a. To be eligible to recover any indirect cost under a Federal award, recipients must either (1) have a current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA) with a Federal agency that has not expired; or (2) qualify for use of the *de minimis* rate authorized by 2 CFR 200.414(f). 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.
- b. Applicants 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.
- c. Entities that are eligible for the *de minimis* rate who already have a *de minimis* rate agreement must use the rate and base specified in the agreement, which is modified total direct costs (MTDC) as defined by 2 CFR 200.68 and also excluding the amount of each subaward exceeding \$25,000. Note that MTDC excludes certain costs from the base to which the rate is applied. A copy of the applicant's *de minimis* rate agreement must be provided with the application. If a recipient is eligible to use the *de minimis* rate, but does not have a *de minimis* rate agreement, use an indirect cost rate of no more than 10 percent of MTDC when preparing the budget. If selected for award, a *de minimis* rate agreement will be executed along with the award.
- d. If voluntarily reduced or waived, the recipient may choose to apply any unrecovered indirect costs as part of their cost share or match. Unrecovered indirect cost means the

difference between the amount charged to the Federal award and the amount which could have been charged to the Federal award under the recipient's approved negotiated indirect cost rate (2 CFR 200.306(c)).

- e. Applicants who are individuals applying for funds separate from a business or non-profit organization they may operate 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.

## **E. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

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

Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Applications that are incomplete, noncompliant, or do not meet the criteria may be eliminated from competition. In that event, the agency will send notification of elimination to the applicant. The agency intends to make a selection and award without conducting any discussions with the applicant 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 make a selection 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.

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

- Technical peer review panels composed of subject matter experts 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.<sup>1</sup>
- The NRCS Chief makes the final award selections.

Risk reviews will be conducted by the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Business Center, Grants and Agreements Division.

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<sup>1</sup> 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, the Deputy Chief for Strategic Planning and Accountability, one Regional Conservationist, one State Conservationist, and the Director of the Outreach and Partnerships Division.

## 2. Technical Criteria

The technical peer review panels use the criteria laid out in this paragraph (2.), using a 100-point scale, to evaluate applications. These criteria will be applied to the whole project, including federally and non-federally funded parts.

### a. Purpose, Approach, and Goals (25 points)

- i. The purpose of the project is clearly explained, the goals and objectives are clearly stated, and the rationale is explicit for why the innovative approach or technology is needed.
- ii. The design and implementation of the project is based on sound methodology and demonstrated technology.
- iii. The project outcomes are stated, measurable, and likely to be achieved.
- iv. Both beneficial and adverse impacts are considered, and a significant level of improvement will be achieved.

### b. Innovative Technology or Approach (25 points)

- i. The project is nationally, regionally, or locally innovative according to the criteria for innovation (see [section A. 2](#)); and
- ii. The application describes the compelling need for the innovative technology or approach.

### c. Project Management (25 points)

- i. The project has a clear management plan for how project activities will get accomplished.
- ii. Timeline and milestones are clear and reasonable in accomplishing the objectives of the project.
- iii. Project staff has necessary technical and administrative expertise.
- iv. The budget is adequately explained and justified, and expenses are allowable, allocable, and reasonable.
- v. Proposal includes robust partnerships with entities that can substantially assist with delivery of project outcomes with clear project management structure and team communication explained.

### d. Benefits and Transferability (25 points)

- i. There is strong potential for results that lead to a positive impact on private lands conservation and the environment.
- ii. An evaluation plan is documented that clearly lays out how project work will be assessed, and the results transferred.
- iii. There is potential for producers and landowners to use or participate in the innovative technology(s) or approach(s).
- iv. There is potential for organizations to benefit from the innovative approach or methods, including (if appropriate) the development of materials such as technical standards, technical notes, handbooks, technology tools, etc.
- v. There is potential to transfer the approach or technology to a broader audience or to other geographic areas or agricultural sectors.
- vi. The project meaningfully includes the participation of historically underserved producers and will benefit historically underserved producers and landowners.

Partner matching contributions are considered an eligibility criterion as described in [section C. 3](#) and [section D. 7](#) of this notice and therefore are not listed in the merit criteria.

### **3. Historically Underserved Criteria**

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:

- a. **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(s) that has impacted the participation or success of the HU community in question.
- b. **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.
- c. **Capacity Building**—The project is designed to impart lasting benefits on the HU community identified.
- d. **Community Involvement**—The designated HU community is involved in project processes or decision making.
- e. **Measurement**—Indicators and metrics of success are included that specifically measure the project's benefits to HU producers.

### **4. Administrative and Risk Criteria**

Notice of selection after merit/technical evaluation does not guarantee that an applicant will receive an award. Following notification of selection for funding (see section F.), the FPAC Business Center, Grants and Agreements Division's staff conducts a final administrative and risk review of those applications. The administrative review includes a check to ensure that NFO requirements were met (e.g., applicant meets eligibility criteria, application was submitted by the established deadline), 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).

In addition, to comply with the requirements at 2 CFR 200.206, the agency will follow, at a minimum, the risk review process described below (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:

- a. **Financial Stability.** The applicant maintains an 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 Part 200. The applicant has a financial management system adequate to segregate and track Federal funds. It has adequate systems in place for proper agreement administration; compliance with the standards outlined in 2 CFR Part 200 Subpart D for procurement, property, and records management; and required financial and performance reporting.
- c. **History of Performance.** If the applicant has previously obtained Federal financial assistance award, it has never failed to materially comply with the Federal award terms and conditions and further that it has never had an award terminated on that basis.

Submission of an application constitutes certification that an applicant meets these standards (items a. through c. above). 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.

## **5. 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 the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM (FAPIIS) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313 and 2 CFR 200.206(a));
- b. An applicant may review information in FAPIIS accessible through SAM and comment on any information about it that a Federal awarding agency previously entered;
- c. The agency will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in 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.

## **6. Anticipated Selection Announcement and Federal Award Dates**

The agency anticipates announcing or notifying successful and unsuccessful applicants in November 2021 and expects to execute CIG agreements in February 2022.

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

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

The agency will provide notice that an application has been selected before it executes the Federal award. The selection notification is not an authorization to begin performance. 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 entity's authorized official for signature.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by email and will receive feedback from the technical peer panel. This feedback will be emailed to the applicant within 90 days of the award announcement. Do not contact NRCS requesting application feedback prior to the end of this 90-day period.

### **2. 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 included in the Related Documents tab of the opportunity on Grants.gov.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service under the Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is required for projects that may affect listed or proposed species or destroy or modify critical habitat. NRCS must complete the ESA consultation, in accordance with Section 7 of the ESA and implementing regulations at 50 CFR Part 402, 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>.

### **3. Patents, Inventions, and Copyrights**

Allocation of rights to patents, inventions, and copyrights shall be in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200. This regulation provides that small businesses normally 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 must normally manufacture it domestically. With regard to 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 (P.L. 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 and use of information and data that is provided to Federal employees and individuals of the public without disabilities. All EIT that is subject to the 36 CFR 1194 standards will have a Section 508 acceptance test and will be validated upon acceptance. All maintenance for EIT that requires upgrades, modifications, installations, and purchases will adhere to the Section 508 standards and 36 CFR 1194. Get in touch with the [agency contact](#) of this NFO with specific questions with regard to the applicability of this section.

#### **4. Reporting**

Reporting will follow the guidelines included in the agency's General Terms and Conditions, which are included in the Related Documents tab of the opportunity on Grants.gov.

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 2 CFR Part 200, Appendix XII, "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.

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

Potential applicants may contact NRCS with questions by emailing [nrcscig@usda.gov](mailto:nrcscig@usda.gov). This inbox is monitored by multiple people.

### **H. USDA NRCS OTHER INFORMATION**

#### **1) 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 the releasing their records.

## **2) 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.

### **U.S. Department of Agriculture Non-Discrimination Statement**

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (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, audiotope, 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. Additionally, 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 by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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

## APPENDIX A

### NRCS Programs Portal Information:

This Appendix reviews some basic instructions and recommendations to make it easier to use the NRCS Partners Portal. A complete Partner User Guide is available in the Related Documents Tab with this NFO on the Grants.gov website as well as on the “Help” tab of the portal itself. This guide will give more details on how to move through the portal.

The NRCS Programs Portal can be accessed at the following website:

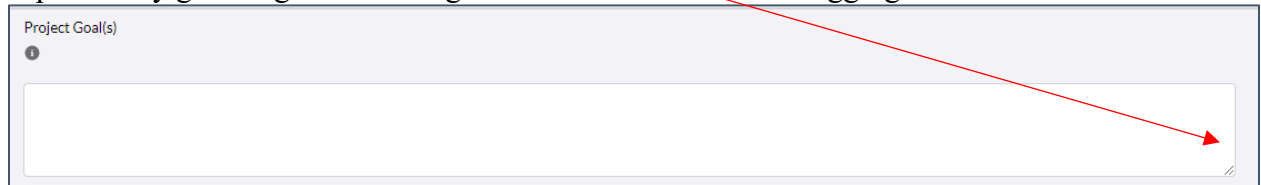
<https://nracs-sites.secure.force.com/>

Once registered, you can access technical help by:

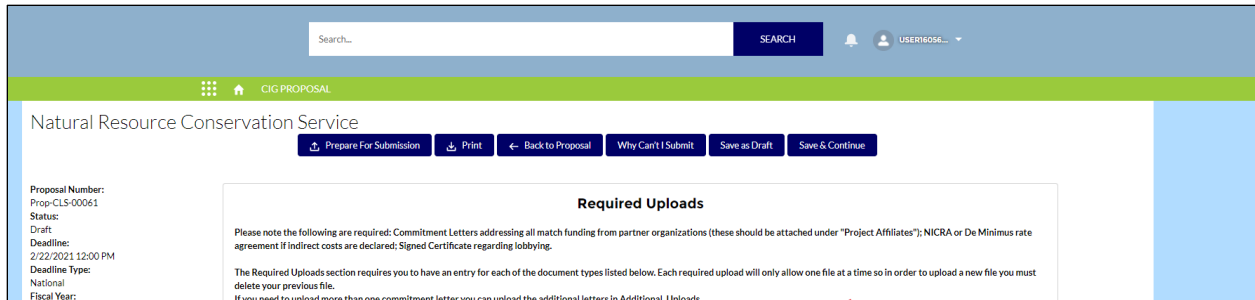
- Submitting a ticket by clicking “Help” in the banner at the top of the page.
- Sending an e-mail to [usdafpacbc@servicenowservices.com](mailto:usdafpacbc@servicenowservices.com) or calling 970-372-4200.

#### USER TIPS:

- We recommend you develop your proposal in a word processing program first and save it, then copy and paste each section into the portal.
- Be aware from the start of drafting your proposal that Figures and Tables will need to be grouped and submitted as one attachment to the proposal and cannot be embedded within the text of the project narrative.
- All fields have a set word count. It is built into the program that you cannot go over the acceptable word count except for the Abstracts field which differs for each program.
- In the “Project Narrative” section, fields will automatically accommodate the full text if copied and pasted into the field. To see all text copied, fields greater than 50 words can be expanded by grabbing the lower right corner of the field and dragging it downward.



- On the top of each screen in the application, there is a row of buttons that will aid you in working on the application if you cannot complete it in one session:
  - To save an application and come back to it later, click “Save as Draft.”
  - To save an application and continue to the next tab, click “Save and Continue.”
  - To check for incomplete fields, click “Why Can’t I Submit.”
  - To prepare an application for submission, click “Prepare for Submission.”



## 1. Portal Access

To Register with NRCS Programs Portal: Once an eAuthentication credentials are secured (see NFO), a request can be submitted to the NRCS Programs Portal system by selecting “Start Here” under “New Users”:

<https://nrcs-sites.secure.force.com/>

Additional instructions can be found in the Help tab in the Portal.

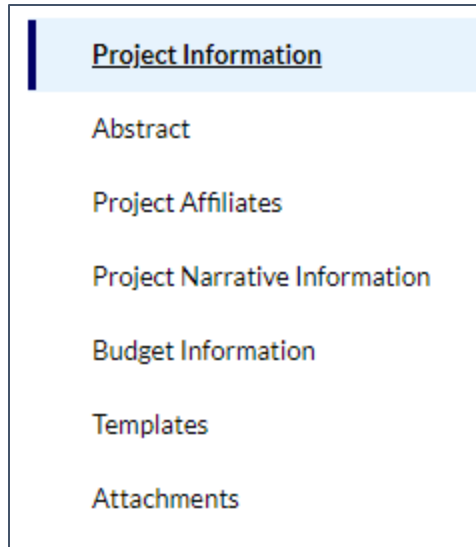
NRCS Programs Portal Alternative Access: Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication (e.g., Braille, large print, audio tape) should contact the USDA TARGET Center at: (202) 720–2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

## 2. Start New Application

To begin a new proposal, once you log in, select “CIG Proposal” on the upper green bar. The screen will have one question “Which proposal would you like to apply for?” with a drop-down menu. Be sure to select “National”. A new proposal number will be generated and you will be put into the application screen.

## 3. Application Tabs and Sections:

The portal is divided into seven tabs, each of which you can access by clicking the tab title on the left hand side of the application. Each tab needs to be visited and completed in order for the application to be accepted; you can return to a tab if needed. These instructions give you the details of what is in each tab. Image of tabs in Portal:



### **A. Project Information Tab**

The following sections and fields are in the Project Information Tab and will need to be completed:

#### General Project Information:

- Project title – Try to keep the title to 10 words or less.
- Applicant entity legal name - Enter the legal name of applicant that will undertake the assistance activity. This is the organization that has registered with the Central Contractor Registry (CCR).
- Organizational Unit – Department – if the organization is large, the team may want to define the part of the organization. This would include a department of a University or a State chapter of a national organization. This field is not mandatory.
- Organizational Unit – Division – This field allows the applicant to further define their unit. This field is not mandatory.
- Applicant type (individual, organization, etc.)
- Application type – there is only one option for this field, “new”.
- Applicant mailing address - Enter address: Street 1 (Required); city (Required); County/Parish, State (Required if country is US), 9-digit zip/postal code (Required if country US).
- Project priority area (choose only one) – you will pull this from Section C. 2 of the NFO.
- Project Sub-priority area – not all priorities will have sub-priorities.
- Lead State – This is the State in which the applicant’s legal address is located.
- Other States involved – All States that will have project activities should be listed here.
- Proposed project start date – This should be 02/01/2022.
- Project duration – Select 1, 2, or 3 years.
- Name and contact information for the main individuals involved in the project grant. This will include their name, title, email, phone and organizational affiliation:

- The person to be contacted regarding this proposal – This should be the person who is best positioned to answer any questions about the proposal.
  - Authorized Representative (AR) – AR, or person authorized to sign legal documents for the applicant. A copy of the governing body’s authorization for this individual to sign this application as the official representative must be on file in the applicant’s office (this document must be presented if requested).
  - Technical Lead – This should be the Project Director, primary investigator, or similar project lead that would be considered responsible for the execution of the technical part of the project and the main point person for the project.
  - Administrative Lead – This should be a project manager or project administrator. It is usually the person responsible for invoicing and other administrative actions or a project manager working closely with the technical lead.
- SAM.gov registration date of expiration – Confirm that the award organization has an active, unexpired, Federal System of Award Management (SAM) number before submitting this application.
  - EIN/TIN – Enter the employer or taxpayer identification number (EIN or TIN) as assigned by the Internal Revenue Service for the award organization.
  - DUNS number – Enter the organization’s DUNS or DUNS+4 number received from [Dun and Bradstreet](#).
  - Congressional district of the applicant entity, as well as congressional districts where projects activities will be carried out. Enter the applicant’s Congressional district and all district(s) affected by the program or project. Enter in the form the 2-character State abbreviation and 3-characters district number, e.g., CA-005 for California 5th district, CA-012 for California 12 district, NC-008 for North Carolina’s 8<sup>th</sup> district. If project work is being carried out in all Congressional districts within a State, enter “all” for the district number (e.g., MD-all for all congressional districts in Maryland). If the project is nationwide in scope, enter US-all.
  - Whether the applicant organization is delinquent on any Federal debt - This question applies to the applicant organization, not the person who signs as the authorized representative. Categories of Federal debt include but are not limited to: delinquent audit disallowances, loans and taxes. If yes, include an explanation in an attachment.
  - Whether the project team has submitted this proposal to any other funding opportunities.
  - Whether this project relates to a current NRCS practice standard – mainly this question is if the project team anticipates this project has the capacity to influence a change in a current practice standard.
  - The number of participating producers (can be an estimate).
  - Whether this project involves any historically underserved (HU) producers.
  - If so, the estimated number of HU producers involved.

## **B. Abstract Tab (250 words maximum)**

Provide a concise project summary, in non-technical language, specifically describing:

- 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 key project deliverables and results; and
- The predicted long-term benefits of the project to conservation more broadly.

Although this field in the Portal allows for more than 250 words, applicants must limit their abstracts to 250 words.

## **C. Project Affiliates Tab**

In this section, a table is constructed of all the partner organizations that will be involved in the project by entering each one in separately. This includes partners such as a sub-awardees or contractors that are providing matching cash or in-kind or an organization involved in the project decision making or assisting in outreach activities, but not necessarily committing match. For partners that are not committing matching contributions but would like to submit a support letter, the support letter can be uploaded in this section.

For each affiliate, you will click on the “+ New Affiliates” button and enter the organization name, name of main contact, address of organization, and if the partner is providing match and the amount of in-kind and cash match. If an affiliate is providing match, upload a commitment letter to this pop-out field for the affiliate.

Commitment letters can be addressed to the NRCS CIG Team, signed by the authorized representative of the contributing organization, and must include:

- (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the project partner,
- (2) the name and address of the applicant organization,
- (3) the title of the project for which the contribution is made,
- (4) the dollar value of the contribution,
- (5) how the contribution will be used for the project, and
- (6) a clear statement of commitment that the contributor will furnish the contribution during the grant period.

A sample commitment letter is included as Appendix C of this NFO.

## **D. Project Narrative Information Tab**

Complete all fields in the Project Narrative section, taking note of maximum length for each field. Project sections are described in detail in Section D. 5.

## **E. Budget Information Tab**

The budget portion of the application consists of four sections, as described below:

1. Federal Budget Table: Complete this table with a description and amount for all expenses that will be charged to the Federal portion of the budget. Multiple line items may be entered under each budget category.
2. Federal Budget Narrative: Enter a narrative description of items included in the budget table above. See Appendix B for details on how to complete this section. Projects that do not give these details will not be accepted to be reviewed for this opportunity. Ensure that each line item included in your budget table is described in your budget narrative.
3. Non-Federal Budget Table: Complete this table with a description and funding source (applicant, State, local, or other) for all expenses that will be covered through in-kind or cash match. Multiple line items may be entered under each budget category.
4. Non-Federal Budget Narrative: Enter a narrative description of items included in the budget table above. See Appendix B for details on how to complete this section. Projects that do not give these details will not be accepted to be reviewed for this opportunity. Please ensure that each line item included in your budget table is described in your budget narrative.

For more information on developing and entering proposal budget information, refer to Appendix B of this announcement.

**Note:** Applicants must include \$3,000 in the budget for project travel dictated by NRCS (e.g., in-person awardee orientation). 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.

## **F. Templates Tab**

This tab includes templates for two documents which are to be downloaded, completed, signed and uploaded to the Attachments Tab:

1. If the applicant plans to count unrecovered indirect costs as part of its matching funds and does not currently have a Federal Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) and plans to use the De Minimis Indirect Cost Rate (DMICR), they should download, complete, sign and upload this completed DMICR request. See [Section D. 14.](#) for further information regarding indirect costs.
2. The Certification Regarding Lobbying is required for all proposals. Download, complete, sign and upload this form.

## **G. Attachments**

1. The following document needs to be attached for all proposals:
  - Attach the required Certification Regarding Lobbying form.
2. If you or your subawards are declaring indirect costs, you will need to attach one of the following for each organization declaring indirect costs:
  - A current NICRA negotiated with a Federal agency.



- A DMICR Request form found on the templates tab, if the applicant plans to request the de Minimis rate for indirect costs.
3. The following attachments should be added if relevant to the application:
- A Figures and Tables document that is a reference to the project narrative.
  - Any maps, graphs or photos that are referenced in the project narrative.
  - Additional materials that were not able to be included with the space allotted in the Team Qualifications and Declaration of Previous Conservation Innovation Grants sections.
  - Any relevant publications that are referenced in the proposal and give critical information in support of the proposal.
  - Letters of support for the project from individuals or entities that are not project. Applicants must not request nor submit support letters from NRCS employees.

### 3) Proposal Submission

Once the application is completed, follow the steps below to submit:

- a. Click “Prepare for Submission” to lock all of the proposal fields. Fields can be unlocked again for further editing if necessary.
- b. After clicking “Prepare for Submission,” the Portal will automatically generate a form SF424 and SF424A based on the application and budget information that was filled in.
- c. Download and review both documents and then sign the SF-424.

**Note:** Be sure when you sign the SF-424 to do either a “wet” signature by printing and then scanning the document or use a digital signature. Electronic “font” signatures are not acceptable.

- d. Upload the SF424 and 424A as directed.

**Note:** Be sure the SF-424 is signed. If you complete this step and find you need to make changes, you will need to “unlock” your proposal and regenerate the SF-424 and SF-424a.

- e. When all actions have been completed, click “Submit.”

**Note:** Once an application is submitted it will be locked for editing. Click “Un-submit” if additional changes are needed before the application deadline. Note that if an application is unsubmitted, applicants must re-review all fields and attachments prior to resubmitting to ensure completeness.

- f. The Programs Portal automatically sends applicants an email to acknowledge receipt at the time of submission. Applicants are solely responsible for ensuring timely submission through the Programs Portal and are strongly advised to allow sufficient time to obtain USDA eAuthentication and Programs Portal access.

**Note:** Difficulties related to these or other application processes will not result in an

extension of the application deadline.

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. All proposals must be completed within the Programs Portal.

## APPENDIX B

This appendix includes guidance on developing proposal budget information in the Programs Portal.

### Creating a Budget

1. The Budget Information section has four parts:

- Two budget tables: one for Federal funding and one for non-Federal funding  
Each table totals all major budget line items (the major line items, taken from the Federal Standard Form 424A are: salary, fringe, travel, supplies, equipment, contractual, construction, other, and indirect costs) by year. The table includes subcategories listed below each major line item that can be customized, giving a clear breakdown of project costs. Each subcategory is completed with estimated annual costs. Individual entries will be automatically added to calculate your total major budget category expenditures and overall project budget. An application cannot be submitted if the budget is greater than the funding ceiling listed in the funding announcement, or if it includes insufficient adequate matching funds.
- Two written budget narratives: one for Federal funding and one for non-Federal funding

**Note:** Each written narrative should align with its budget table. The written part will provide descriptive details on the items listed in the table.

2. Level of Detail:

A budget narrative outlines project details sufficient 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 in determining the information to include:

- 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 Table.—List each individual or team member position.
  - Budget Narrative.—Include the general function or major tasks of each major team member and their time commitment to the project. Include details on cost such as percent of effort, rate of pay, and estimated hours or the basis for the cost determination.
- Fringe Benefits.—List this item separate 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.
  - Budget Table.—List each individual or team member position.

- Budget Narrative.—List what was including in the rate and how the rate was calculated.
- Travel.—
  - Budget Table.—List each trip separately.
  - Budget Narrative.—Explain or give a link to the travel policy that is referenced for the trips. (Is there a Federal, State, or organizational policy that is being used to come up with mileage, per diem, and other costs?) 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 (transportation, lodging, meals, or per diem, etc.) associated with each trip. Provide the derivation of cost estimates so all amounts add up.
- 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, or instruments for measuring samples 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 unit cost and intended use.
- Equipment.—This includes only tangible personal property over \$5,000 per unit with a lifetime over 1 year.
  - Budget Table.—List the equipment name.
  - Budget Narrative.—Within this narrative, explain the reason for why 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, why it is needed, 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.

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

- Contractual.—
  - Budget Table.—List each contractor separately.
  - Budget Narrative.—If contractors will be doing multiple tasks for the award, use separate line items. If a contractor will just be serving one project function, is not considered part of the project team, and will not require a subcontract, a simple description of the contracted work is sufficient. Be sure to identify the name of the contractor, the method of procurement, and the scope of work for the services if not in the proposal narrative. Be aware, contractors do not charge indirect costs. If a partner will be charging indirect cost, they will need to be considered as a sub-award which should be described in the “Other” category.

- Other.—This is a general line item that covers expenditures that do not fit in other categories. This is where subawards are to be included. This category often includes fees like laboratory analysis and tuition. Be sure to identify the individual costs and provide sufficient description to justify the costs. If a sub-award is greater than \$25,000, be sure to include major line item breakdowns.
- Indirect.—Identify the NICRA or *de minimis* rate as applicable.
- 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. Other examples of program income include fees for services performed and the sale of commodities or items fabricated under an award.

### 3. Additional Guidance:

- Sub-budgets for contractors or sub-awardees should be listed as individual line items. For instance, if personnel and indirect are charges for a University sub-award, they should fill two lines in the budget table in the Other section. Be sure to identify and include separate NICRA paperwork and percentages when a sub-awards rate differs from the awardee's rate.
- 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.
- 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 normal to see a small amount of change to the budget numbers. However, all budget changes do require notice to NRCS contacts and submittal of updated budget documents as necessary.
- All costs in the budget must be rounded to the nearest dollar.

Below is an example budget table within the CIG application portal:

Federal Budget					
DESCRIPTION	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	TOTAL	
<b>PERSONNEL:</b>	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$40,000.00	+
Tom Smith, Project Direct	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$20,000.00	🗑️
Mary Johnson, Research	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$20,000.00	🗑️
<b>FRINGE:</b>	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$3,000.00	\$6,000.00	+
35% rate	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$3,000.00	\$6,000.00	🗑️
<b>TRAVEL:</b>	\$3,360.00	\$6,750.00	\$3,360.00	\$13,470.00	+
Plot prep/data collection	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$9,000.00	🗑️
Demonstration Plot	\$360.00	\$360.00	\$360.00	\$1,080.00	🗑️
Scientific Conference	\$0.00	\$3,390.00	\$0.00	\$3,390.00	🗑️
<b>EQUIPMENT:</b>				\$0.00	+
<b>SUPPLIES:</b>	\$4,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$11,000.00	+
Field and lab supplies	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$5,000.00	🗑️
Farm Supplies	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$6,000.00	🗑️
<b>CONTRACTUAL:</b>	\$65,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$22,000.00	\$112,000.00	+
Amazing Graphics	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$12,000.00	🗑️
Innovative Technologies, I	\$60,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$100,000.00	🗑️
<b>CONSTRUCTION:</b>				\$0.00	+
<b>OTHER:</b>	\$21,000.00	\$21,000.00	\$21,000.00	\$63,000.00	+
Sample Testing and Analy	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$60,000.00	🗑️
Publication Costs	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$3,000.00	🗑️
<b>INDIRECT CHARGES:</b>	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	+
32% NICRA rate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	🗑️
<b>TOTAL FEDERAL</b>	<b>\$104,860.00</b>	<b>\$68,250.00</b>	<b>\$72,360.00</b>	<b>\$245,470.00</b>	

**SAMPLE BUDGET NARRATIVE**

**NAME OF AWARDEE**

**Project Title**

**PROJECT TOTAL: \$XXX**

**Federal Portion: \$XXX**

**Non-Federal Contribution: \$XXX**

**A. FEDERAL BUDGET:**

*1. Personnel*

Tom Smith, Project Director, full time, 70% 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: \$5,000      Year 2: \$5,000      Year 3: \$10,000

Mary Johnson, research technician, 20% time (6 calendar months) for 3 years, 67% 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: \$5,000      Year 2: \$5,000      Year 3: \$10,000

*2. Fringe benefits*

67% fringe benefits paid by Federal funds. Fringe benefits rates are 35% for faculty and permanent staff.

*Total Fringe Benefits:*

Year 1: \$1,500      Year 2: \$1,500      Year 3: \$3,000

*3. Travel*

Funds are requested to support travel for plot preparation and data collection trips, and 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/yr).

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 - 3 nights × \$150 per night (\$450); Per-diem \$50/day × 4 days (\$200); Transportation: Airline travel to conference location - \$400/flight + ground transportation - \$50 + parking at airport - \$30 (\$480).

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 (\$100,000)

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

*Total Contractual:*

Year 1: \$65,000            Year 2: \$25,000            Year 3: \$22,000

7. *Construction – None requested*

8. *Other*

Sample Testing & Analysis: Basic nutrient testing and soil health testing will be done annually for all plots. Roughly 40 samples a year at \$500/sample (\$20,000/year).

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

*Total Other Costs:*

Year 1: \$21,000            Year 2: \$21,000            Year 21: \$6,000

9. *Indirect Costs – no indirect costs*



**B. NON-FEDERAL BUDGET:**

*1. Personnel*

Tom Smith, Project Director, full time, 70% 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: \$40,000                      Year 2: \$43,000                      Year 3: \$47,000

Mary Johnson, research technician, 50% time (6 calendar months) for 3 years, 33% paid by non-Federal funds. Establish the field and demonstration plots, function as the project manager, coordinating sub-award work, drafting reports and publications, and participating in all project field days.

Year 1: \$15,000                      Year 2: \$15,000                      Year 3: \$15,000

*Total Personnel:*

Year 1: \$55,000                      Year 2: \$58,000                      Year 3: \$62,000

*2. Fringe benefits*

67% fringe benefits paid by non-Federal funds. Fringe benefits rates are as follows: 35% for faculty and permanent staff.

*Total Fringe Benefits:*

Year 1: \$19,250                      Year 2: \$20,300                      Year 3: \$21,700

*3. Equipment*

Field equipment rental. This is match donated by the partner community groups (see in-kind letter). Will provide all farming equipment (tools, planters, harvesters) for on-farm demonstrations.

Year 1: \$2,000                      Year 2: \$500                      Year 3: \$500

*Total Equipment:*

Year 1: \$2,000                      Year 2: \$500                      Year 3: \$500

*4. Supplies – none*

*5. Contractual*

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

Personnel:

Elizabeth Smith will oversee the outreach to farmers. She will devote 20% of her time all 3 years of the project. 100% 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 to help support program facilitation.

Other:

Workshop rental space will be donated by contractor, 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: \$5,000      Year 2: \$5,000      Year 3: \$5,000

*Total Contractual:*

Year 1: \$23,000      Year 2: \$25,000      Year 3: \$28,000

6. *Construction – None requested*

7. *Other Costs:*

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

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

Legal Fees: Community support groups will pay all legal fees regarding the research of any legal implications on the project. \$4,000.

*Total Other:*

Year 1: \$6,000      Year 2: \$1,500      Year 3: \$1,500

8. *Indirect Costs – Note if NICRA negotiated or if it is the 10% De Minimis rate*

15% NICRA indirect rate applied, see NICRA agreement

*Total Indirect Costs:*

Year 1: \$15,000      Year 2: \$18,000      Year 3: \$18,000

## APPENDIX C

### 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: NRCS CIG Team

**Description of cash contribution:** *Add clear statement the organization is committing, such as: “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 the five farmers to attend State meetings and also contractor work to support website development 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 2021 Conservation Innovation Grants funding period as cash/in-kind match to USDA NRCS CIG grant funds awarded to [name of applicant] for Innovative Conservation project, [*project title*].

Signature of Donor Organization  
Authorized Representative:

Signature of Applicant Organization Authorized Representative: