



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Natural Resources Conservation Service



Conservation Innovation Grants Classic Program

Fiscal Year (FY) 2026

CIG Classic

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

No. USDA-NRCS-NHQ-CIGCLASSIC-26-NOFO0001449

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**A. BASIC INFORMATION FOR NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY (NOFO) TITLE:
CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS (CIG) CLASSIC PROGRAM**

1. Federal Awarding Agency Name

U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

2. Announcement Type

Initial Announcement

3. Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Number

[USDA-NRCS-NHQ-CIGCLASSIC-26-NOFO0001449](#)

4. Assistance Listing

This opportunity is included under 10.942, Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) -Classic, searchable at: <https://sam.gov/content/home>.

5. Funding Details

The amount of Federal funding expected to be available for award(s) is \$15 Million. However, the agency retains the discretion to award a larger or lesser amount.

The agency expects to fund between 18-22 awards.

The agency expects the amount of each award to range from a minimum of \$250,000 to a maximum of \$2,000,000.

Applicants should propose projects between 1 and 3 years in duration. Plan projects based on an estimated project start date of September 2026.

6. Key Dates

Application deadline: Submit via Grants.gov by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on July 27, 2026.

A webinar for CIG Classic applicants is scheduled for June 18, 2026 at 3 p.m. Eastern Time. Information on how to participate in the Microsoft Teams webinar can be obtained through the following link and phone number:

<https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/397aeb03-fb5b-4d7b-803d-6753acad2a03@ed5b36e7-01ee-4ebc-867e-e03cfa0d4697>

Email questions on this webinar to nrcscig@usda.gov. Applicants are encouraged to visit the [CIG website](#) to learn more about the CIG program.

The agency anticipates making selections by 4th quarter of calendar year 2026 and expects to execute awards by 4th quarter of calendar year 2026. These dates are estimates and are subject to change.

7. Executive Summary

The CIG program stimulates the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) to agricultural producers through the development of technical manuals, guides, and for practical instruction for the private sector.

Applications will be accepted from all non-Federal entities and individuals based in the United States (see Section B Eligibility).

8. Contact Information

Grants.gov issues - Contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov.

For all other questions, email FPAC-BC Grants and Agreements Division (GAD):

Email: nrcscig@usda.gov with a copy to NFO.FPAC@USDA.GOV

Subject line of email: USDA-NRCS-NHQ-CIGCLASSIC-26-NOFO0001449

Name: Jose A. Berna, Grants Management Specialist, FPAC Business Center (FPAC-BC)

The agency will not address questions about a potential applicant's eligibility nor the merits of a specific proposal.

To protect the integrity of the competitive process, applicants must not contact agency program staff with questions; contact GAD staff as directed above.

Subscribe to receive correspondence issued by GAD. Topics may highlight award-management issues, announce implementation of new policies or procedures, provide guides and tools for applying for awards, etc. To subscribe, visit

https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/subscriber/new?topic_id=USDAFARMERS_4170.

B. ELIGIBILITY

1. Eligible Applicants

This opportunity is open to all non-Foreign applicants, except US Federal Government Entities.

The following applicants are considered ineligible:

- Foreign organizations and foreign public entities, and

- “Partnerships” or other similar groupings (i.e., application must be submitted by a single entity; a partner may serve as a subrecipient).

2. Other Eligibility Considerations

All CIG projects must involve Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) eligible producers or community colleges (as defined in [7 U.S.C 3319e\(a\)](#)) that carry out demonstrations on community college lands.

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

- 1) Must comply with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions ([7 CFR Part 12](#)).
- 2) Must be a person, joint operation, Indian tribe, or Native corporation, or other legal entity that is engaged in agricultural production or forestry management or has an interest in the agricultural or forestry operation as defined in [7 CFR Part 1400](#).
- 3) Must have control of the land involved for the term of the proposed contract period.

Community Colleges, Junior Colleges and State Technical Schools are encouraged to apply.

NRCS Involvement in CIG Projects:

- The CIG program is a competitive program run by the NRCS, therefore NRCS staff should not be involved in the development of proposals in any way, and NRCS should not appear in the application. Letters of support from NRCS and any involvement of NRCS in a proposal will be viewed as a conflict of interest, and these proposals will be removed from the competition. NRCS staff are allowed to give applicants information on other NRCS programs, basic administrative information regarding the CIG program, and technical information not directly tied to a CIG proposal.
- All technical assistance required to carry out a CIG project is the responsibility of the grantee.
- NRCS will designate a technical contact for each grant awarded. 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.

Application Eligibility Considerations:

- Applications must meet submission requirements in section E.
 - For new users of Grants.gov, see [section E.2](#) of this document for information about steps required before submitting an application via Grants.gov.

- If the agency determines more than one version or substantially the same application has been submitted, the agency will only consider the last application submitted prior to the established deadline for purposes of the competition.
- An applicant organization may submit more than one application for different projects or proposing different approaches.

Awards Eligibility Considerations:

- The agency will make awards only:
 - To a single entity.
 - For projects selected following the competitive review process (see [section F.2.](#)).
 - For projects that meet any specified cost share requirement (see item 3 of this section).
 - To entities that:
 - Meet the eligibility criteria (see section B.) by the application deadline (see [section A.6.](#)).
 - Are not debarred, suspended, or otherwise excluded from receiving Federal awards (([2 CFR 200.206\(d\)](#))).
 - Have an active System for Award Management (SAM) registration ([2 CFR part 25](#)).
 - The agency does not determine poses an unacceptable risk related to proper management of a Federal award ([2 CFR 200.206](#)).
- Awards are not Farm Bill incentive contracts and therefore, not limited by the payment limitation in [16 USC Chapter 58](#).

Project Participant/Agricultural Producers Eligibility Considerations:

- Any producer receiving a payment through participation in a funded project must meet the eligibility requirements of 7 CFR Parts [12](#) and [1400](#) and have control of the land involved for the period of performance.
- Any producer receiving a payment through participation in a funded project is subject to the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitation. In addition, they must have an AGI that does not exceed \$900,000. If provided an award, the Recipient must self-certify and maintain records showing that participating producers receiving payments using Federal funding meet the 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. Awardees may request waivers once their project commences.
- [Section 1240B\(d\)\(6\)](#) of the Food Security Act of 1985, [16 U.S.C. 3839aa-2\(6\)](#), 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, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Stewardship Program). If provided an award, the recipient must self-certify that payments to producers using Federal funding are not duplicative.

3. Cost Sharing

Required Cost Share:

- 50 percent of total project costs (total project costs includes Federal and non-Federal funds) should be non-federal cost share.
- Included in the application, not committing the required cost sharing will make the application ineligible.
- 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 share obligations.
 - Funds from another Federal source if the Federal statute authorizing that program specifically allows for it.
- See [2 CFR 200.306](#) for further details about cost share.
- Must be met before the Federal award expires; pace of cost share may vary throughout award period which will be monitored for progress.
- Refer to Attachment portion of [section C.1.g](#) of this NOFO for information about Letters of Support.

C. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The authorizing statutes and regulations for this opportunity is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) ([16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8, 7 CFR 1466, Subpart C](#)).

Unmanned aircraft systems is an unallowable expense.

Overview

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

Project outcomes should benefit a region of a state or a region of the United States, not just one producer or participant. In addition, CIG Classic program funds should not be applied to teaching or training producers on how to access or use existing NRCS financial assistance programs.

Innovative Conservation Projects or Activities

Projects or activities under CIG must:

- 1) Comply with all applicable Federal, tribal, state, and local laws and regulations throughout the duration of the project.

- 2) Use a technology or approach that was studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success.
- 3) Demonstrate, evaluate, and verify the effectiveness, utility, affordability, and usability of natural resource conservation technologies and approaches in the field.
- 4) Adapt and transfer conservation technologies, management practices, systems, approaches, and incentive systems to improve performance and encourage adoption.
- 5) Introduce proven conservation technologies and approaches to a geographic area or agricultural sector where that technology or approach is not currently in use.

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

CIG Classic 2026 Priorities

For FY 2026, NRCS is only accepting proposals that address one or more of the priorities listed in this section. Each proposal must clearly identify a primary priority on the proposal cover page. The primary priority selected by an applicant will determine which expert peer panel will review the application. Project outcomes must be documented by each project, and therefore clear measurements and evaluations are required on how the innovation will impact natural resources.

All projects submitted should have potential to impact agricultural working lands. The following administrative focus areas will be prioritized under each priority area listed below:

- Projects that involve Community Colleges, Junior Colleges and State Technical Schools.
- Projects that integrate precision agriculture.
- Projects that address a holistic approach to farm solutions.
- Projects that integrate elements of agricultural conservation workforce development into their objectives, methods, or technology transfer activities.

The following describes the five priority areas for this funding opportunity.

a. Farmer-Focused Conservation Outcomes

While integrating conservation practices usually leads to beneficial outcomes for the environment, benefits to the producer, their farm, ranch or forest, and their community are not always recognized. Producer decision making about conservation is complex and integrates economic and experiential factors. Conservation adoption by producers hinges on understanding practical, technical, and economic barriers and drivers. A more holistic approach to conservation planning that recognizes and integrates producer perspectives and experiences is key to substantively impacting the pace and scale of adoption of innovative conservation practices.

To improve the realized benefits of conservation practices for farmers and to better align conservation programs with on-farm benefits, each project submitted to this priority area must address both of the following two elements:

- 1) Understanding factors that influence farmers' assessment of the value (e.g., economic, environmental, and production) of adopting conservation practices on their land; and
- 2) Developing innovative technologies, methodologies and approaches to improve natural resources conservation that benefit producers (e.g., indicators, tools, and dashboards for farm management data).

Applications should target holistic conservation outcomes that are producer focused and producer driven. Projects should integrate producer perspectives, experiences, input, and knowledge in their design and adoption of technologies or approaches that make measured improvements in natural resources on working lands. Measurable farmer-focused outcomes, such as the economic impact of conservation on crop yields, input costs, and field operations, should also be included.

Some potential areas of exploration are:

- Barriers to adoption that farmers face and potential solutions with regard to innovative conservation practices that enable positive outcomes.
- Suites of conservation practices, that include innovation in how they are combined or applied, that provide greater benefits to a farming way of life, either economically, operationally, environmentally or some combination, than single approaches.
- Farmer-led Investigations into innovative mechanisms and tools to measure and verify conservation outcomes at the individual farm level and at larger scales.
- Innovative methods and models for producer-led demonstrations of significant conservation outcomes and pathways with potential to scale.
- Local, inter-organizational collaborations that introduce an innovation and better utilize collective resources toward local conservation objectives.

b. Water Management

Water Quantity

Agricultural producers and rural economies in many parts of the nation face dramatic variability regarding water resources. In some communities, there are diminishing supplies of available water, and local supplies of groundwater or surface water are declining. In other communities, intense rain events are causing crop damage, flooding, highly erosive events, and other issues. The underlying causes and the potential solutions vary locally and regionally. NRCS is seeking proposals that demonstrate, evaluate, and quantify the impacts of new technologies, methods, or approaches that can balance, restore, or enhance water use on private lands.

Projects including the following topics will be given higher priority:

- Identify alternate regional cropping systems (crops and crop rotations) that reduce water consumption.
- Explore mechanisms that allow the conversion of cropland to pasture or rangeland, such as using water banks or other mechanisms.
- Explore innovative local or regional technologies that help retain water in the landscape (such as groundwater recharge systems, water reuse technology, or beaver dam analogues) and demonstrate improvement to water quantity in a particular watershed.

Improving Water Quality

A clean and plentiful water supply is essential for agricultural producers to supply the public with adequate food and fiber. Producers can also, through increased adoption of conservation practices and systems, contribute to improved water quality for drinking water, ecosystems, and public recreation. NRCS is seeking proposals that demonstrate innovative approaches that improve water quality while maintaining agricultural productivity.

Proposals should present creative, integrated solutions to address specific water quality improvement on the field- or farm-level and address reduction goals at the local water resource level (e.g., locality, sub-watershed, or groundwater recharge area).

Projects including the following topic will be given higher priority:

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

c. Soil

Land management practices can lead to erosion, subsidence, compaction, salinization, aggregate instability, organic matter depletion & soil organism habitat loss or degradation. High functioning soil ecosystems are critical to successful agriculture and are vital to produce the food and fiber we use every day. The objective of this priority is to implement new technologies and/or approaches to maintain, restore, or enhance soil resources associated with agricultural, grazing lands and forest lands while sustaining productivity.

Projects including the following topics will be given higher priority:

- Projects that explore the conservation effects of products promoting stimulation of soil organisms, including but not limited to beneficial algae, fungi and bacteria.
- Projects that promote the “regeneration” of soil organisms through innovative land management activities.

- Projects that explore the influence of organic amendments on soil health and agronomic outcomes.

d. Habitat Improvement

The greatest threat to aquatic and terrestrial species is the destruction, modification and lack of management of their habitat. Habitat includes the food, water, cover and space necessary for species to complete all or portions of their lifecycle. This priority area focuses on adequate habitat for terrestrial and aquatic fish, wildlife, and invertebrates on working lands. Innovations proposed should help maintain, manage, or restore habitat in ways that help support viable populations of fish, wildlife, and invertebrate species on private forests, farms, and ranches.

e. Conserving ecosystems by managing pest pressure

This priority area is focused on ensuring sustainability of working lands by bringing ecosystems back into balance that have been placed out of balance due to invasive species and other pests. Excessive damage to natural and managed communities from pests (such as undesired plants, insects, diseases, animals, soil borne pathogens, and nematodes) could affect the health of an ecosystem or agricultural system. For favored conservation outcomes, plant communities must be protected from undesirable pests, such as weeds, insects, fungi, bacteria, viruses, and animals. This priority area is focused on innovative ways to prevent, detect or treat pests that significantly impact natural resources on private working lands. Innovations should help prevent, control, or eliminate pest invasions or help restore land and prevent reinvasion.

Examples of suitable projects include:

- Projects that promote native recolonization of highly disturbed habitats, such as after a natural disaster (e.g., fire or invasive removal).
- Projects that protect natural resources during restoration work.
- Projects that promote the long-term sustainability of natural resources as a part of natural resource conservation.
- Projects that improve plant productivity and health and focus on improving the habitat for livestock (including honeybees) or wildlife (native bees, beneficial invertebrates, waterfowl, or migratory birds).
- Projects that improve natural vitality of beneficial insects and invertebrates.

D. APPLICATION CONTENTS AND FORMAT

1. Content and Form of Application Submission

Notes:

- Form instructions and any available templates are provided in the [FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide](#) available in the Related Documents tab of the Grants.gov Application Package on Grants.gov. Instructions provided in this NOFO will reference guidance as appropriate in the [FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide](#).

- To be considered for funding under this opportunity, an application must contain the documents identified below.

Document	Instructions
Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)	see section V.2.*
Project Narrative Attachment Form	see section V.3.*
Project Abstract	see section V.4*
Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)	see section V.5.*
Budget Narrative Attachment Form	see section V.6.*
Other Attachments Form • Current and Pending Support • GADSUM9, Applicant Contact(s) Information • NICRA, as applicable	see section V.7.* see section V.7.1* see section V.7.2* see section V.7.3.*
Attachments • Subawards, as applicable • Letters of Support, if required • Conflict of Interest, as applicable	see section V.8.* see section V.8.1* see section V.8.2* see applicable section below
Grants.gov Lobbying Form	see section VI.9.*
Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)	see section VI.10.*
*Applicable section of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide	

a. Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)

See section V.2. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

b. Project Narrative Attachment Form

- The following instructions are in addition to those included in section V.3. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- The Project Narrative is subject to the attachment requirements noted in section III.2.1 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- The project narrative must not exceed 20 pages. This page limitation applies to the project narrative only. The project narrative should include the following sections:

i. Cover Page - Applications that fail to provide a cover page will be rejected in the first stage of screening. Each cover page should include:

- The applicant entity's name.
- The project title.
- The project duration in years.
- The amount of Federal funding requested.
- The amount of non-Federal cost-share committed (match).

- The name, phone number, and email address for the applicant's technical contact (usually the project director), this person is considered the primary contact for the project by NRCS.
 - The name, phone number, and email address for the applicant's administrative contact (usually an individual in a grants office or project manager working under a project director).
 - The geographic location of the project, be sure to list all states with on-the-ground activities.
 - The priority that is addressed by the project, list only one priority from [Section C\(6\)](#). If the proposal addresses more than one priority, you must select a primary priority. The priority that you select will determine the panel that will review your application.
 - An estimate of the number of participating producers expected to be involved with the project or a statement confirming that community colleges and their land will be involved in this project.
 - Please mark any administrative focus areas your proposal addresses:
 - Involvement of community colleges, junior colleges and state technical schools.
 - Results that inform precision agriculture.
 - A holistic approach to farm solutions.
 - Agricultural conservation workforce development.
 - A brief description (1 to 3 sentences) of the innovation that is the focus of the project (please be concise).
 - If relevant, list any NRCS practice standards that this project could potentially inform (if multiple exist, select the top five).
- ii. **Project goal-** Describe the main purpose for conducting this project. The goal should be compelling and refer to achieving a desired outcome in a set period of time.
 - iii. **Project objectives-** Outline the supporting objectives that will help this project reach the previously listed project goal. Objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART). They should flow out of and support the listed goal.
 - iv. **Project background-** Provide background information that identifies the issue or problem necessitating the proposed innovation and describes any previous work that has been done on the idea or identifies technology that currently exists that may seem similar and outlines the differences. Provide evidence that the proposed innovation has been studied sufficiently to indicate a high probability for success. Be sure to give enough details to demonstrate to the reviewers why this innovation is compelling.
 - v. **Project design and methods-** Clearly describe the design and methodology of the project. Describe details of the processes that will be used, scientific tests that will be conducted, tools that will be developed, any sampling that will be performed, and background on why these choices were made, especially if different from convention. We encourage new grant writers to consider using

a logic model approach to improve clarity of this section. For more on the logic model, see the University of Wisconsin's publication "[Developing a logic model: Teaching and training guide](#)" (Ellen Taylor-Powell and Ellen Henert, February 2008).

- vi. **Project evaluation-** Describe the methodology that will be used to evaluate the project and describe how results will be quantified. It should be clear to the reviewers how project objectives relate to the evaluation.
- vii. **Project Deliverables and Products-** Provide a list of specific deliverables and products that will be produced from this project. The deliverables should directly relate to the project objectives and outcomes, and they should be referenced in the project timeline. The deliverables should reflect the project performance and be tangible to allow NRCS to monitor project progress (e.g., knowledge gained could be written in the deliverable section as a report on a targeted topic). Each objective should have at least one deliverable. In addition to project-specific deliverables, CIG grantees are responsible for:
 - participating in at least one public event (e.g., conference or workshop) during the grant period where the grantee presents on the activities of the project.
 - submitting a project fact sheet at the project's conclusion.
- viii. **Project outcomes and benefits-** Identify the short-term and long-term benefits and outcomes of the project to natural resources, translating how project outcomes could potentially benefit society and impact conservation at large. Please note, project outcomes often relate to the project deliverables but are less predictable (for instance, if a training event is the deliverable, the impact that training event has on producers, such as increased adoption of a new practice, would be the outcome or benefit). In addition to short-term outcomes, forecast the long-term outcomes of project results, giving reviewers an idea of the potential long-term impact of the innovation. Identify project beneficiaries (i.e., agricultural producers) by type, region, or sector; rural communities; or municipalities.
- ix. **Geographic location and size of project or project area-** Identify the geographic location and the estimated size and scope of the project area (e.g., acres and farm types). Maps are recommended. If the project is multistate, describe which project elements will take place in each state.
- x. **EQIP-eligible producer participation-** Each project must involve at least one EQIP eligible farmer that is not the applicant. Estimate the number of EQIP eligible producers that will be involved in the project and describe the extent of their involvement. Describe whether these producers have been identified, and if not yet identified, clearly articulate the process that will be carried out to identify and attract producer participation.
- xi. **Project action plan and timeline-** Provide a list of critical project activities in a timeframe format, relating the activities to the project

deliverables and objectives. Project milestones throughout the project should be highlighted.

- xii. **Project management-** Describe how the project will be organized and managed, including a description of project partner involvement. Include a description of how communication will be structured within the project team to ensure effective project management.
- xiii. **Technology transfer-** Describe how the results will be transferred to producers and stakeholders through communications and engagement activities. (The transfer of technology, such as training producers, is an expected part of every project and therefore should not be the innovation proposed.)
- xiv. **Graphics-** All graphics, including pictures, charts, graphs, and similar items count towards the page maximum.

The following documents do not count toward the above stated page limit:

- xv. **References (no minimum page limit, optional)-** References, bibliographies, and citations are optional but should be included for all documents referred to.
- xvi. **Declaration of Previous Conservation Innovation Grants (2 Page Maximum)-** If the applicant has previously received and managed a CIG award (either at the national or state levels) or has been a partner receiving Federal funding on a CIG award, list the project title, award funding amount, and the year of expiration for each award in the CIG agreement number. Give a short summary of the completed project's results and impact. If the project is ongoing, provide the anticipated results. Indicate if this proposal builds on a prior CIG award. (If you have been awarded more than five grants, you only have to give details on the five most recent awards. Each project should be limited to a half of a page.)
- xvii. **Team Qualifications (up to 1/2 page each individual) -** Provide a brief description of key technical and administrative personnel qualifications, their experience managing Federal awards, and their anticipated contributions to the project. Do not include a resume or curriculum vitae. If a resume or curriculum vitae is included, it will not be considered in the review.
- xviii. **Assessment of Environmental Impacts (no more than one page) -** If the proposal anticipates physical, chemical, or biological impacts on the environment when implemented, describe the impacts and their extent. The description of the potential environmental impacts must address both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action. The length of the description should be commensurate with the complexity of the project proposed and the natural environmental resources impacted directly, indirectly, or cumulatively. Where possible, information on environmental impacts should be quantified, such as number of acres of wetlands impacted, etc. Natural environmental resources include soil, water, air,

plants, and animals, as well as other resources protected by law, regulation, executive order, and agency policy. NRCS may choose not to approve funding for projects that have the potential to result in unacceptable adverse environmental impacts.

Every funded CIG project with anticipated physical, chemical, or biological impacts on the environment or ground-disturbing activity is subject to the National Environmental Protection Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. NRCS must complete an environmental review of each awarded project before project commencement. Applicants may be required to prepare and pay for preparation of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement if the environmental review finds that an assessment or impact statement is required.

c. Project Abstract

See section V.4. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

d. Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)

See section V.5. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

e. Budget Narrative

- The following instructions are in addition to those included in section V.6. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- The Budget Narrative is subject to the attachment requirements noted in section III.2.1 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- Cost sharing – Refer to [section B.3.](#) of this NOFO to determine applicability. If applicable, include details following budget narrative instructions (see section V.6. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide).

f. Other Attachments

- See section V.7. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- Current and Pending Support- See section V.7.1 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for link to available template and instructions.
- GADSUM9, Applicant Contact(s) Information – See section V.7.2 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for link to available template and instructions.
- Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (NICRA) - See section V.7.3 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

g. Attachments

- See section V.8. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- Subawards – if the organization intends to have subawards, see section V.8.1 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.
- Letters of Support – Letters of support (this includes commitment letters) are required for all project receiving match contribution from outside their

organization, please refer to section V.8.2 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

i. **Commitment Letters:**

Projects that have organizations other than the applicant providing cost share to the project are required to include in the application Commitment Letters from these organizations committing their matching cost share. Commitment letters must be signed by the AOR of the contributing organization and must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the project partner; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the contribution is made; (4) the dollar value of the contribution; (5) a description of the work that will be performed that clearly aligns with the budget narrative; and (6) a statement that the contributor commits to furnish the contribution during the grant period. Example letters can be found on the CIG website.

ii. **Support Letters:**

Provided by individuals or entities who want to express their enthusiasm or add credibility for the project. Letters of support should also be written by partners or subawardees to confirm their intent to participate in the project.

The agency may conduct reference checks to ensure that organizations identified are supportive of the project.

- **Conflicts of Interest** – see section j. of this part for further information.

h. **Grants.gov Lobbying Form**

See section V.9. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

i. **Disclosure of Lobbying Activities**

See section V.10. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

j. **Disclosure of Potential Conflict of Interest**

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

If the applicant has a parent, affiliate, or subsidiary organization that is not a state, local government, or Indian tribe, the applicant must also maintain written standards of conduct covering organizational conflicts of interest. Organizational conflict of interest means that because of the relationships with a parent company, affiliate, or

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

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

k. Post Submission and Post Award Documentation

During the administrative review process (refer to [section E.2](#) of this NOFO), 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, revised documents).

Selected applicants will be required to complete an environmental survey before an agreement can be signed to ensure the project does not conflict with any Federal law.

E. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINE

1. Grants.gov Applications

- Applications must be submitted through Grants.gov.
- Grants.gov is a single site to find and apply for grant funding opportunities.
- All forms to prepare and submit an application are available through the funding opportunity on Grants.gov.

2. Grants.gov Requirements and General Guidance

Grants.gov has requirements (e.g., registration and software) that **must be met** ahead of being able to submit an application using Grants.gov. Refer to section II.1. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.

- Applications must be received by Grants.gov by 11:59.59 pm Eastern Time (ET) on the established due date (see [section A.6](#)); an application is considered late at 12:00 am ET and will be rejected.
- If the Apply button in the opportunity is not active (greyed out), [see Unlock the Mystery of the Gray “Apply” Button: Four Scenarios. – Grants.gov Community Blog \(wordpress.com\)](#) for possible scenarios.
- Grants.gov automatically records proof of submission by way of an electronic date/time stamp when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov.
- Grants.gov will send an email to the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) submitting an application when:
 - An error prevents the transmission of the application.

- An application is successfully received by Grants.gov.
- The agency retrieves and downloads the application from Grants.gov and download of submissions.
- For trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov.

F. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

1. Review and Selection Process

The following applications will be accepted for the competitive review process:

- Received by the established deadline.
- Meet eligibility criteria.
- Contains the applicable documents identified in [section C.1](#).
- Compliant with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete, non-compliant, and/or applications not meeting the formatting criteria may be eliminated from competition.

Applicants that do not meet the above criteria will be ineligible for consideration. The agency will send notification of elimination to applicants not meeting the above criteria.

A merit/technical review will be conducted by a technical review board. Reviewers will be selected on their training, experience and specialization in relevant fields and their ability to assess project effectiveness to the targeted audience.

Risk reviews will be conducted by the FPAC-BC, Grants and Agreements Division (GAD). The approving official will make the final award decisions. The approving official for this opportunity is the NRCS Chief.

Additional reviews may be conducted by NRCS state office staff. The reviewer recommendations are certified by the CIG Grants Review Board. The Grants Review Board may also consider whether the award slate includes projects across a variety of regions and partners when making funding recommendations to the NRCS Chief. The CIG Grants Review Board consists of members of NRCS leadership.

Merit/Technical Criteria

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

a. Project Purpose and Proposed Innovation (25 Points)

- 1) The purpose of the project is clearly explained; the goals and objectives are clearly stated.

- 2) An innovation is clearly identified and described, so there is no question as to what the innovation is.
- 3) The project is nationally, regionally, or locally innovative according to the criteria for innovation (see [Section B](#)).
- 4) The application describes a compelling need for the innovative technology or approach. It clearly explains how the innovation will solve a particular problem.

b. Project Approach and Evaluation (30 Points)

- 1) The design and implementation of the project is based on sound methodology and demonstrated technology.
- 2) The project outcomes are stated, measurable, and likely to be achieved.
- 3) Both beneficial and adverse impacts are considered, and a significant level of improvement is anticipated.
- 4) An evaluation plan with milestones is documented that clearly explains how project work will be assessed for quality and effectiveness.

c. Project Management (20 Points)

- 1) The project has a clear management plan for how project activities will be accomplished.
- 2) The timeline and milestones are clear and reasonable for accomplishing the objectives of the project.
- 3) The project is adequately staffed, and the team has the necessary technical and administrative expertise.
- 4) The budget is adequately explained and justified, and expenses are allowable, allocable, and reasonable.
- 5) The proposal includes robust partnerships with entities that can substantially assist with delivery of project outcomes and includes an explanation of how the partnership aligns with the project and how it will be managed.

d. Benefits and Transferability (25 Points)

- 1) There is strong potential for results that lead to a positive impact on private lands conservation and the environment.
- 2) A technology transfer plan is documented that clearly outlines the transfer of new knowledge or technology to a broader audience or to other geographic areas or agricultural sectors and includes how the results will be transferred through useful materials such as technical standards, technical notes, handbooks, technology tools, etc.
- 3) There is potential for producers and landowners to learn about, use, or participate in the innovative technologies or approaches.

Partner cost-share contributions are considered an eligibility criterion as described in [section B.3](#). of this notice and therefore are not listed in the merit criteria.

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

2. Administrative Review and Risk Criteria

The following are criteria that may be reviewed/verified prior to making an award.

- Ensure applicants meet eligibility criteria.
- Application was submitted via Grants.gov by the established deadline.
- Risk review of applicant (see [2 CFR 200.206](#)):
 - Check SAM to ensure the applicant is not suspended or debarred.
 - Review and consider information included in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM (the Federal Awardee Performance Integrity Information System, FAPIIS) (see [41 USC 2313](#) and 2 CFR 200.206(a) (applies to applications to be supported with a total Federal share greater than \$250,000).
 - Assess financial stability of applicants.
 - Determine if applicant has a financial management system adequate to segregate and track federal funds.
 - Review history of Federal financial assistance award performance.
- Proposed costs are allowable, allocable, and necessary.

Based on risk assessment, the agency may impose specific award conditions in accordance with [2 CFR 200.208](#).

G. FEDERAL AWARD NOTICES

Successful Project Notification: The agency will provide notice that an application has been selected before it actually issues the Federal award. **The selection notification does not authorize the applicant to begin performance.** If the applicant chooses to begin project activities, it does so at its own risk; the risk that costs may not be reimbursed.

Notice of Award: The Notice of Grant and Agreement Award (ADS-093) contains information identified in [2 CFR 200.211](#) and is signed by the authorized agency official; it is the only authorizing document and will be provided electronically to the entity's authorized official for signature.

Unsuccessful Project Notification: The agency will provide notice to unsuccessful applicants via an email to the individual listed as the Program Director. This notification will occur following the processing of successful applications.

H. POST-AWARD REQUIREMENTS (ADMINISTRATIVE & NATIONAL POLICY)

All project funds will be used in accordance with [2 CFR Part 200](#) and the General Terms and Conditions, which are available at the following website:

<https://www.fpacbc.usda.gov/about/grants-and-agreements/award-terms-and-conditions/index.html>. The award terms and conditions includes, but is not limited to:

- Unallowable costs
- National policy requirements
 - If projects performed pursuant to this opportunity are subject to any of the following, the agency must work with the awardees on related matters before commencement of activities:
 - National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
 - National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)
 - Endangered Species Act (ESA)
- Build America, Buy America for Construction
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 compliance requirements.
- Reporting requirements:
 - Addresses financial and performance requirements and the reporting frequency and means of submission.
 - Reporting of matters related to recipient integrity and performance.
 - Reporting subaward and executive compensation information.
- 2 CFR 180 – sections [180.335](#) and [180.350](#), include reporting requirements regarding debarment and suspension audit requirements.
- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to the extent permitted by law, will no longer make grants or otherwise fund programs or activities that improperly discriminate on the basis of race or sex, including discrimination in the name of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies. Instead, USDA will prioritize merit and efficiency. USDA recognizes programs and initiatives will have the greatest impact when these programs and initiatives put American farmers, ranchers, and foresters first by:
 - Solving the most pressing challenges they face,
 - Protecting America's food, fuel, and fiber supply to enhance national security,
 - Supporting production of healthy and safe food for consumers,
 - Expanding and developing domestic markets,
 - Training the next generation of agriculturalists, and
 - Fueling innovation to keep American farmers at the forefront of productivity.

I. 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.

3. Award Counterparts

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

U.S. Department of Agriculture Non-Discrimination Statement

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Non-Discrimination Statement is incorporated by reference and can be accessed at the following location: <https://www.usda.gov/non-discrimination-statement>.