

Conservation Partnership Initiative Fact Sheet

Overview

The Conservation Partnership Initiative (CPI) is a voluntary program established to foster conservation partnerships that focus technical and financial resources on conservation priorities in watersheds of special significance and other geographic areas of environmental sensitivity. Under CPI, funds are awarded to State and local governments and agencies; Indian Tribes; and non-governmental organizations that have a history of working with agricultural producers. The CPI is a component of the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program, established under authorities provided by the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1935, 16 U.S.C. 590a et seq. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers CPI.

Benefits

Of the critical natural resource concerns facing the agriculture and the environment, many require solutions that look beyond the borders of individual farms and ranches, or the common ways that natural resource conservation programs are implemented. Changes in land use, industry structure, and geographic concentration have led to environmental degradation in some locations that may best be addressed on a watershed or regional scale. The CPI is established to encourage the formation of partnerships to devise and implement watershed or regional solutions to pressing natural resource priorities associated with agriculture and rural settings.

How CPI Works

Funding for the CPI is announced through a Request for Proposals (RFP). For 2004, up to \$1,000,000 is available for project planning. Funds will be awarded through a nationwide competition. The CPI will fund projects that focus technical and financial resources on conservation priorities in watersheds of special significance and other geographic areas of environmental sensitivity.

The CPI is administered in two phases. First, applicants submit proposals for project planning funds to the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist. State Technical Committees evaluate proposals and make recommendations to NRCS State Conservationists, who select proposals for submission to NRCS National Headquarters. Applications will be evaluated by a CPI Review Board using criteria related to the purpose and goals of the project, the soundness of the design of the planning and implementation phases, and the overall management of the project. The CPI Review Board will make recommendations for awards to the Chief. Final selections will be made by the Chief.

For applications selected by the Chief, CPI planning funds will be allocated to the appropriate State Conservationist who will make the award to the Project Director through a grant agreement. Grant agreements awarding funds will be signed by the Project Director and the appropriate State Conservationist.

Following successful completion of the project planning phase, project implementation begins using funding secured or provided by project partners. CPI projects are expected to secure implementation funds from a wide range of potential partners from local, State, and Federal governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Applications must address at least one of the four CPI conservation priorities for 2004. These priorities are:

- Terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat
- Coastal resources
- Livestock nutrient management
- Minor/specialty crop pest management

In addition, applications must describe projects that are consistent with the following four CPI objectives. CPI projects must encourage:

- producers to cooperate in the installation and maintenance of conservation practices that affect multiple agricultural operations;
- producers to share information and technical and financial resources;
- cumulative conservation benefits in geographic areas; and,
- the development and demonstration of innovative conservation methods.

Applicants may request up to \$200,000 (but not less than \$100,000) in funding through CPI for the project planning phase. Applicants must provide a 1:1 match using non-NRCS funding. Up to 100 percent of the match may come from in-kind contributions.

Eligibility

Applications are solicited from entities that would coordinate a CPI project, including State and local governments and agencies; Indian Tribes; and non-governmental organizations that have a history of working with agricultural producers. The initiative may be implemented and applications accepted from all 50 States, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Basin Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

Limited Resource and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, and Tribes

Each year, NRCS intends to select for one of the CPI awards a proposal that addresses at least one of the CPI conservation priorities as it impacts limited resource or beginning farmers and ranchers, or Tribes. In the event that no proposal of this type merits selection, the award will be given to a proposal from the general pool of applicants.

How to Apply for CPI

Once funds for CPI become available, an RFP will be published on the NRCS website, at www.nrcs.usda.gov, and on the Federal eGrants portal, www.grants.gov. The RFP will specify the information required from applicants. Complete applications must be mailed to the appropriate NRCS State office at the address identified in the RFP.

For More Information

If you need more information about CPI, please contact Kari Cohen, Financial Assistance Programs Division, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 14th and Independence Ave., SW., Room 5239-S, Washington, DC 20250. Phone: (202) 720-2335; Facsimile: (202) 720-4265; Email: cpi@usda.gov Subject: Conservation Partnership Initiative RFP; or consult the NRCS Web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cpi> .

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