

**US Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service**

**Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative
(CCPI)**

**CCPI Partner Proposal
Evaluation Guidance**



Date Issued: April 2010

Fiscal Year 2010 CCPI Partner Application National Evaluation Guidance

Background

Section 2707 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Act) establishes the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) by amending section 1243 of the Food Security Act of 1985 [16 U.S.C. 3843]. The Secretary of Agriculture has delegated the authority to administer CCPI to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is Vice President of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). NRCS is an agency of the Department of Agriculture (USDA). The CCPI is a voluntary conservation initiative that enables the use of certain conservation programs along with resources of eligible partners to provide financial and technical assistance to owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands. In fiscal year (FY) 2010, NRCS will make Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) funds available to owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands who participate in approved CCPI project areas.

As authorized by Congress, this is not a grant program to eligible partners. This is a program whereby approved eligible partners will enter into multi-year agreements with NRCS to help enhance conservation outcomes on agricultural lands and private nonindustrial private forest lands. A purpose of CCPI is to leverage the federal investment in natural resources from authorized conservation programs along with services and resources of non-Federal partners.

Legal Authority:

- Section 2707 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 which establishes the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) by amending Section 1243 of the Food Security Act of 1985 [16 U.S.C. 3843].

Eligible Partners: Federally recognized Indian Tribes, State and local units of government, producer associations, farmer cooperatives, institutions of higher education, and nongovernmental organizations with a history of working cooperatively with producers. Agricultural producers are not eligible CCPI partners and may not submit a proposal under this authority.

Partner Application: Potential partners submit proposals according to the requirements published in the annual notice of request for proposals (RFP) and request program assistance to address resource concerns within a specified geographic project area.

Partner Application Evaluation: The purpose of this guidance is to provide a process by which proposals submitted by eligible partners are screened, evaluated and competitively ranked to allow selection and approval by NRCS. Selection of proposals to be supported through NRCS programs is determined by this evaluation, score, and other considerations cited in the RFP along with the availability of programs and funding.

General Evaluation, Ranking and Implementation Process:

1. Submission of partner proposals:
 - a. All CCPI Proposals are either mailed or delivered by courier to:

Gregory K. Johnson, Director
 Financial Assistance Programs Division
 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
 "CCPI Proposal"
 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Rm 5239-S
 Washington, DC 20250
 - b. Note: CCPI proposals must also be supported by a letter of review from State Conservationists for all states in the proposed project area.
2. Initial Eligibility Review by Program Manager: CCPI Program Manager (PM) ensures that proposals received meet basic eligibility criteria as set forth in the notice of request for proposals (RFP). PM organizes proposals by category, priority, readies materials for review and takes the following actions:
 - a. Verifies complete application submitted (format, length, copies, etc.)
 - b. CCPI basic screening worksheet completed
 - c. Letter to partner:
 - i. Proposal received – Complete and in the review process.
 - ii. Proposal received – Incomplete or does not meet requirements of basic screening criteria.
 - d. Program Manager will refer complete and eligible proposals to Review Panel(s) with assigned priority.
3. Review Panel Actions: Members of the national review panel will evaluate and rank proposals individually using the RFP evaluation criteria as cited in this guidance document. Each proposal will then be evaluated by the panel as one group. Final ranking score will be assigned by consensus of the panel members. Consensus comments and recommendations will be developed and recorded by the designated review team lead with assistance from the PM which includes:
 - a. Individual review
 - b. Group review and consensus development
 - c. Ranking recommendations
 - d. Review team leader and CCPI PM assembles final report and ranking
4. CCPI Review Board Actions: At the national level, the Deputy Chief for Financial Assistance and Community Development (FACD) will chair the Review Board meeting to explain proposed project rankings and their strengths and weaknesses. The CCPI Review Board will review and confirm that the Review Panel rankings are consistent with program purposes and objectives. The CCPI Review Board will make final recommendations for funding to the Chief.
5. Chief Final Review and Selection: Chief will review all findings, ranking and recommendations and make final selection for funding of partner proposals.
 - a. Final selection of proposals to be funded. The Chief directs the Deputy Chief FACD or designated CCPI PM to:
 - i. Send notification letter to partner and deadline for approval of agreement.
 - ii. Coordinate development of partner agreement.
 - b. STC and Partner approve/sign agreement.
 - c. Allocation of CCPI funds to FFIS, ProTracts and coordination of announcement of CCPI program availability with State(s) and partner for producer application.

The following types of review groups will be established:

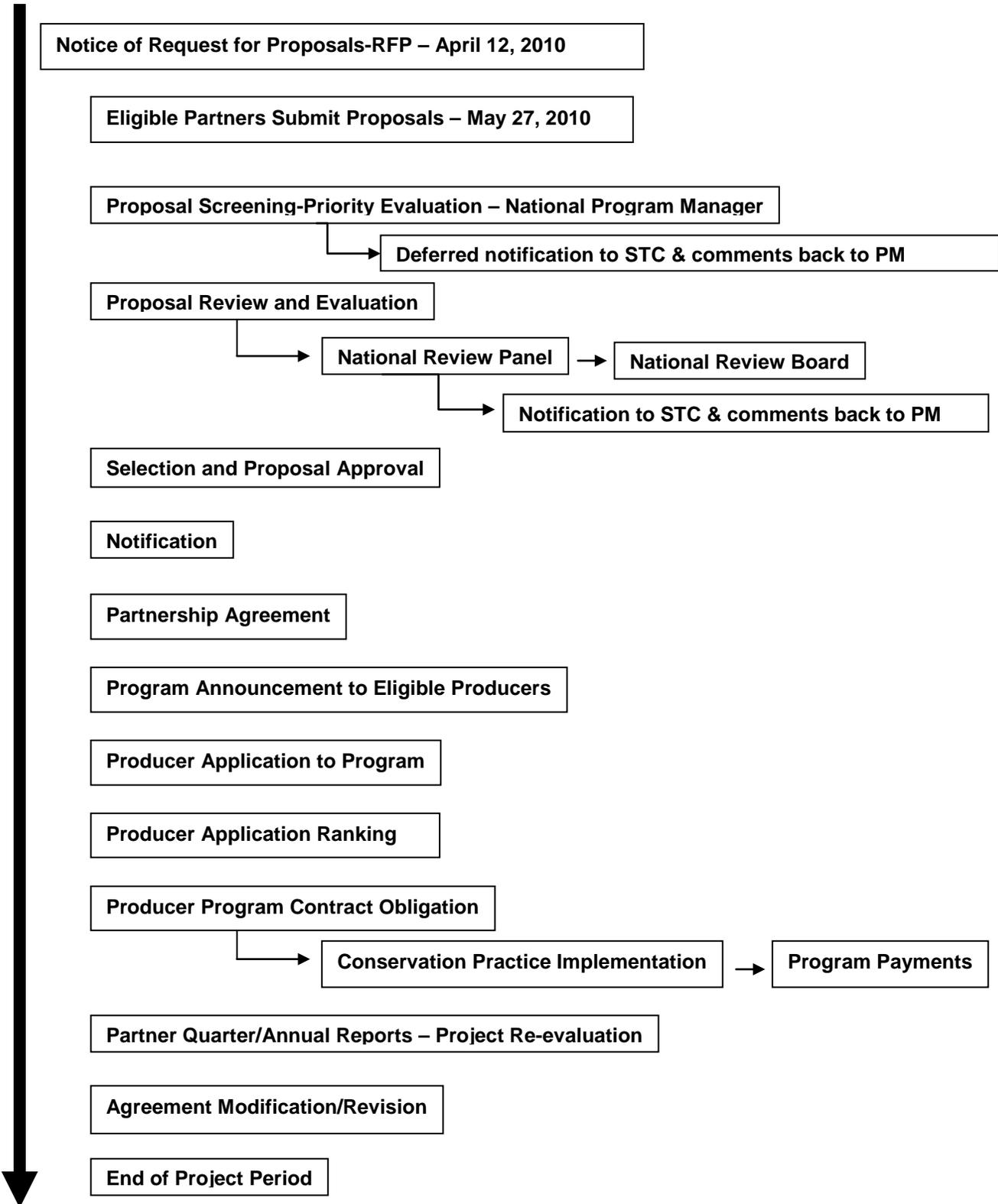
- **National Review Panel(s)** - Program managers, program specialists, and technical specialists from States, National Headquarters and National Centers will be designated to assist with review of eligible partner proposals.
- **National CCPI Review Board** – Comprised of NRCS national leadership: Chaired by the Deputy Chief for Financial Assistance and Community Development (FACD), Deputy Chief for Easements and Landscape Planning (ELP), Deputy Chief for Science and Technology, Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment, one Regional Assistant Chief (RAC), and one State Conservationist (STC). The National CCPI Review Board will certify the Review Panel evaluations and make final funding recommendations to the Chief.

Note: There will be no need for establishment of a State Review Panel or Board during FY2010. The national Review Panel will not include any representatives from outside the agency. Members of Review Panels and Board will be subject to requirements for confidentiality and may only discuss proposals with assigned Program Managers and other review panel members, and any leadership designated by the Deputy Chief for FACD.

Additional CCPI information and guidance for agreements and program administration can be obtained from:

- Director, Financial Assistance Programs Division (FAPD), phone (202) 720-1845.
- <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ccpi/>

General CCPI Process Flowchart:



General Guidelines and Requirements:

Review Panel and CCPI Review Board Information:

- Proposals are reviewed by the designated CCPI Program Manager (PM) in advance of the Review Panel meeting to ensure proposals meet program requirements. The PM shall notify the partner applicant in writing that the proposal was received and prepares one of the following letters for signature by the Division Director, FAPD.
 - Letter notifying the participant the application was received, is complete and is in process of evaluation.
 - Letter notifying the participant the application was received but was incomplete and/or does not meet basic CCPI program requirements. The application may be deferred.
- **STC Contact:** The PM will provide notification to the STC prior to sending deferral letters to partners. The STC may provide comment to the PM.
- **Screening-Prioritization:** The PM will screen, organize and assign priority (High, Medium, Low) for all eligible proposals. The PM will transmit the proposals to members of the Review Panel for evaluation based upon the proposals priority status. High priority proposals will be ranked first, Medium second, Low last. Depending upon funding availability, the agency may choose not to evaluate or rank lower priority proposals based upon funding availability. The PM will notify STCs of initial screening/priority results and STC may provide comment.
- **Proposals will first be evaluated individually** by individual review panel members prior to the group Review Panel meeting. Each member must complete an Individual Reviewer Scoring Sheet and Individual Commentary Sheet for each proposal. (*The blank forms are included in this guidance.*) The PM will provide Panel members with a list of prioritized proposals and funding requested. The panel will evaluate proposals based upon the highest priority and until the available funding is exhausted. This means that if funding is exhausted after ranking prioritized proposals, no additional proposals need to be ranked as there is little chance of the proposal to be funded.
- **Review Panel Actions:** For each proposal, the review panel will discuss the proposals and the preliminary individual scores and agree to final scores, establish consensus “strengths and weaknesses” commentary report (“Group Consensus Commentary Sheet”), and consensus recommendations (Recommended, Consider, or Not Recommended) for each proposal which will be evaluated and ranked.
- **STC Contact:** The PM will provide STCs with the preliminary list of ranked proposals and recommendations. The STC may provide the PM with additional comment. All ranking, consensus recommendations and STC comments will be organized and provided to the Review Board and Chief.
- **Review Panel Facilitators** are either selected/assigned from one of the Review Panel members, or by the designated CCPI Program Manager. The assigned facilitator may be responsible for arranging meeting locations, keeping the team on task, on time to meet deadlines, and will record the final score, strengths and weaknesses on the “Review Panel Consensus Commentary Sheet” developed by the Review Panel for each proposal.
- **Accurate and thorough completion of these documents is critical, as they will be used to provide information to the CCPI Review Board, the Chief, and to provide feedback to applicants following award selections.** (The initial score for each proposal is determined by the review team members. Concurrence is needed for the final score on the “Group Consensus Commentary Sheet.”)

Additional Review Panel, Approval Guidelines and Miscellaneous Information

All members of review panels, facilitators, and other review officials must adhere to the following guidelines:

- Prior to evaluating proposals, each evaluator must sign and submit a Certification and Acknowledgement indicating an understanding of the evaluation procedures and requirements. This certification must be read and understood by the evaluator and returned prior to receiving any proposals. Adherence to the certification is required.
- Evaluators may contact the Program Manager to obtain clarifications regarding an application.
- Evaluators should not discuss with persons outside the agency aspects related to the Review Panel proceedings, even after selection of awards. Questions regarding the review process should be directed to the designated Program Manager. Evaluator identities will be held in the strictest confidence.
- Evaluators should not directly contact a partner applicant; however questions could be directed to the designated Program Manager who may contact the partner for clarification.
- Evaluators may not accept any invitations or gratuities (i.e., meals, gifts, favors, etc.) from any applicant. If an evaluator is offered any invitations, gratuities, or job offers by or on behalf of any applicant, the evaluator will immediately report it to the designated Program Manager.
- Proposals will be evaluated only against the published criteria in the notice of request for proposals (RFP). No new criteria are to be considered by evaluators.
- All proposals will be individually evaluated against the published criteria and initially ranked without consultation between evaluators.
- Screening worksheets and individual and group consensus worksheets are the property of the NRCS for internal use of the agency. Information developed during the evaluation process is not released to the public. Final ranking lists of eligible proposals may be posted to the NRCS national website. Agency decisions regarding evaluation and ranking scores are not appealable.

Forms and Worksheets for Program Manager and Review Team Members:

1. Basic Screening Eligibility Criteria Worksheet (Completed by Program Manager)
2. Technical Rating Standards (scoring guidance for reviewers)
3. "Individual-Group Reviewer Scoring Sheet" (Reviewers make copies and complete for each proposal)
4. "Individual Commentary Sheet" (Reviewers make copies and complete for each proposal)
5. "Group Consensus Commentary Sheet" (Facilitators make copies and compile for each proposal)

Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)

Fiscal Year 2010 CCPI Eligibility Screening Criteria Worksheet – Attachment 1

Introduction:

This worksheet shall be completed by the designated Program Manager (PM) for each partner proposal submitted by the established deadline date and before referral to the Review Panel. This worksheet will provide the PM with guidance for appropriate response to the partner and must be completed in order to provide a timely response for acceptance or denial due to ineligibility.

Detailed AWEP Application Screening Criteria Worksheet			
Applicant Name:		Date Rec	
Address:		State(s)	
City, State ZIP:		County	
Contact person-email:		Phone	
Program Manager:		Application #	

Screening Criteria – All answers must be “YES” to refer the application for evaluation and prioritization

Line	Minimum Requirement (See RFP for details)	Yes	No	Remarks
1	Proposal delivered or submission postmarked on or before RFP deadline?			“No” = Defer Proposal
2	Partner is an eligible entity? (Federally recognized tribe, State, unit of government, producer associations, farmer cooperative, and institution of higher education or other nongovernmental organization (NG) – see RFP – Individual producers are not eligible)			“No” = Defer Proposal
3	Land associated with proposal is eligible (Controlled by producers-See RFP)?			“No” = Defer Proposal
4	The proposal is <u>not</u> a request for direct program funding (FA) to the partner entity (no funding to producers)?			“No” = Defer Proposal
5	Proposal will involve more than one program eligible producer?			“No” = Defer Proposal
6	Proposal is in the proper format and copies per the RFP?			“No” = Defer Proposal
7	The Project Proposal Does Not Exceed Five Years.			“No” = Defer Proposal
	PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS (Addressing all the following):	Yes	No	Remarks
8	The proposal identifies and addresses one or more natural resource concern priorities (SWAPA)?			
9	The proposal includes request for program support to implement at least one or more NRCS approved conservation practice, CSP enhancement, or conservation activity plan (CAP)?			
10	The Proposal includes: • Cover & Summary Items and Objectives/Actions			
11	The Proposal criteria includes: • History working with producers • Detailed geographic description & map • Description of partner objectives, roles, & capabilities • Schedule and finish date • Detailed description of NRCS program resources requested • Detailed description of partner non-Federal resources to be provided • Plan & description for partner provided monitoring & evaluation of project • Suggested producer application ranking criteria • Estimates of producers in project area • List of NRCS approved conservation practices to be supported • Complete description of FA needed each FY of project by practice & program			
12	The Proposal includes a request for letter of review from the STC(s).			
13	The Proposal is complete and each category above is “Yes”:			Yes = Refer for evaluation

	ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL CONSIDERATIONS TO NOTE:	Yes	No	Remarks
13	The Proposal includes: • Request and Description of Program Policy Adjustments To Assist Project.			
14	The Proposal includes: • Partner efforts for outreach to BF/R, SDF/R, LRF/R, or Tribes.			
15	The Proposal includes: • Request for consideration of AGI waiver for project of Special Environmental Significance.			
16	The Proposal includes: • Partner efforts to address renewable energy, energy conservation, climate change or adaptation, or fostering carbon sequestration.			

	Programs Requested:	Yes	No	FY2010 FA Funds Requested	Total Project FA Funds Requested
A	<u>EQIP:</u>				
B	<u>CSP:</u>				
C	<u>WHIP:</u>				

All minimum proposal requirements and criteria have been met. Refer for evaluation or Not referred

Reviewer: _____ Date: _____

Comments:

FY 2010 CCPI

RANKING STANDARDS

For the purposes of this application review evaluation, a **strength** is an aspect of a project proposal that, when compared to a stated evaluation criterion, leaves virtually no doubt regarding the applicant's capability to perform the criterion.

A **weakness** is an aspect of a project proposal that, when compared to the evaluation criterion, provides evidence that the applicant will not be capable of fulfilling the criterion successfully. A **minor weakness** is one, which raises doubts regarding the applicant's ability to satisfy the criterion, but can be easily correctable. A **significant weakness** is one, which leaves no doubt regarding the applicant's inability to satisfy the criterion and cannot be corrected without a major revision to the application. The combination of several minor weaknesses within a criterion may become a significant weakness. A **deficiency** is a material failure of an applicant to address a solicitation requirement or a combination of significant weaknesses in the application, providing evidence that the risk for unsuccessful performance of the statement of work is raised to an unacceptable level.

The Panel will use a 100-point scale to score the project proposals. Each of the four criteria can receive a maximum of 25 points.

- 21 – 25 Superior: Virtually no practical way to improve the application regarding this criterion. Addresses all criteria comprehensively and has strengths with no significant weaknesses. Proposal leaves practically no doubt regarding the applicant's capability to fulfill the criterion.
- 16 – 20 Good: Applicant comprehensively addresses all aspects of the criterion and there are no significant weaknesses. Proposal demonstrates applicant's capability to fulfill the criterion.
- 11 – 15 Satisfactory: Applicant addresses all aspects of the criterion, may have few, but correctable weaknesses, and will likely be able to fulfill the criterion.
- 6 – 10 Marginal: Applicant fails to address some aspects of the criterion, has many potentially correctable weaknesses, but leaves some doubt as to the ability to fulfill the criterion.
- 0 – 5 Unsatisfactory: Applicant fails to address most aspects of the criterion, has significant weaknesses, and correcting these weaknesses would require a major revision. Proposal does not demonstrate applicant's ability to fulfill the criterion.

The Review Panel will only evaluate CCPI project proposals by comparing submitted data against the Evaluation Criteria. No new criteria may be added or considered.

FY 2010 CCPI Proposal – INDIVIDUAL-GROUP REVIEWER SCORING SHEET

Partner Name: _____ Project #: _____

Project Name: _____

Reviewer(s): _____ Date: _____

No.	Evaluation Criteria	Score
1	Producer Participation - Proposal includes efforts to promote a high percentage of producer participation in the project area? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% or more of eligible producers in project area are likely to participate – 25 pts • 60%-79% of eligible producers in project area are likely to participate – 20 pts • 40%-59% of eligible producers in project area are likely to participate – 15 pts • 20%-39% of eligible producers in project area are likely to participate – 10 pts • 10%-19% eligible producers in project area are likely to participate – 5 pts • Less than 10% of eligible producers in project area are likely to participate – 0 pts 	
2	Proposal Leverages Non-Federal Resources – Type of Assistance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal includes provisions for partner contribution of non-Federal financial AND technical assistance to eligible program participants. 25 pts. • Proposal includes provisions for partner contribution of non-Federal financial assistance OR technical assistance to eligible program participants. 15 pts. • Proposal does not include any partner contribution of non-Federal technical assistance or financial assistance to eligible program participants. 0 pts. 	
3	Proposal Leverages Non-Federal Resources – Financial Assistance: (Divide total amount of non-Federal Funding by requested NRCS program funding x 100 = %) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal percentage of non-Federal to Federal funding > 50%. 50 pts. • Proposal percentage of non-Federal to Federal funding = 25% - 49%. 25 pts. • Proposal percentage of non-Federal to Federal funding = 10% - 24%. 10 pts. • Proposal percentage of non-Federal to Federal funding = 9% or less. 5 pts. 	
4	Resource Improvement and Agricultural Activities: - Proposal will result in significant application of conservation practices to address agricultural water quality, water conservation activities or other State, regional, or nation conservation initiatives? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal will address priority conservation activities on 80% or more of the land in project area – 25 pts • Proposal will address priority conservation activities on 50% to 79% of the land in project area – 20 pts • Proposal will address priority conservation activities on 49% or less of the land in project area – 15 pts • Proposal will minimally address priority conservation activities in the project area – 0 pts 	
5	Partner Innovation and Performance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal includes partner efforts to apply or implement non-NRCS approved practices and activities to address identified natural resource concerns (e.g. energy production, climate change, etc.) – 25 pts • Proposal includes partner innovation to deliver services or technical assistance to producers (e.g. marketing plan to encourage adoption of conservation practices) – 20 pts • Proposal includes plan to provide/implement outcome-based plan efforts to implement conservation – 15 pts • Proposal does not provide any significant innovation or performance-based efforts – 0 pts 	
6	Project Completion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal includes efforts to help program participants complete the application of the conservation practices and/or activities in program contracts in one to two years - 25 pts. • Proposal includes efforts to help program participants complete the application of the conservation practices and/or activities in program contracts in three to four years - 20 pts. • Proposal includes efforts to help program participants complete the application of the conservation practices and/or activities in program contracts at end of five year project period - 10 pts. • Proposal will result in program contract implementation in more than five years – 0 pts 	

No.	Evaluation Criteria	Score
7	Regulatory Compliance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal will substantially assist producers meet “on-farm” environmental Federal, State or local regulatory requirements (TMDL, EPA non-attainment area, groundwater depletion area, – 25 pts • Proposal will assist producers meet some “on-farm” environmental related regulatory requirements – 15 pts • Proposal will not assist producers meet “on-farm” environmental related regulatory requirements – 0 pts 	
8	Partner Monitoring and Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proposal includes partner contributions to monitor implementation and/or performance of practices/activities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal includes efforts and reporting which monitor implementation and performance of CCPI funded practices/activities implemented by producers in project area – 20 pts • Proposal includes efforts and reporting which monitor implementation and performance of partner funded or supported practices/activities implemented by producers in project area – 20 pts • Proposal does not include reporting activities which monitor implementation and performance of practices in project area – 0 pts 	
9	General Project Management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milestones and partner deliverables are clearly identified and achievable – 5 pts • Timeline and implementation schedule and reasonable and achievable – 5 pts • Project staff has technical expertise needed – 5 pts • Budget is justified and reasonable – 5 pts • Proposal will address resource concerns on a regional or multi-State basis – 10 pts 	
10	Proposal Includes Ranking Criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal includes environmental related criteria that NRCS can use in ProTracts Ranking Tool (AERT) to prioritize and rank agricultural producer EQIP program applications – 25 pts • Proposal does not include criteria for prioritization or ranking purposes – 0 pts 	
11	Partner Collaboration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal identifies two or more other partners who will collaborate to help achieve project objectives –25 pts • Proposal identifies one other partner who will collaborate to help achieve project objectives – 15 pts • Proposal identifies no other partner who will collaborate to help achieve project objectives – 0 pts 	
12	Special “On-Farm” Project Priorities: Proposal includes practices or partner activities which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote on-farm renewable energy production –10 pts • Promote on-farm energy conservation – 10 pts • Mitigate effects of climate change – 10 pts • Facilitates climate change adaptation – 10 pts • Promotes carbon sequestration – 10 pts • Promotes use of precision agriculture techniques – 10pts • Promotes specialty crop or organic agricultural production – 10 pts 	
13	Partner Outreach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal includes an outreach plan to assure opportunities are provided and/or efforts to increase participation by historically underserved producers and Indian tribes – 25 pts • Proposal does not include an outreach plan or efforts to increase participation – 0 pts. 	
14	Partner Contributions To Help Producer Applicants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal includes efforts by partner to host workshops or provide information outreach (e.g. newsletter, website, etc.) to producers to promote project participation – 10 pts • Proposal includes efforts by partner to provide conservation planning assistance producers – 15 pts • Proposal includes efforts by partner to help producers submit applications to NRCS – 10 pts 	
	Total Score (maximum 485 points)	

FY 2010 CCPI Proposals

INDIVIDUAL COMMENTARY SHEET

Partner Name: _____ Project #: _____

Project Name: _____ Date: _____

Reviewer: _____ Individual Score: _____

(Do not use the enter key in the boxes. Use the arrow down key to start a new statement.)

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Group Consensus Commentary Sheet

Partner Name: _____ Project #: _____

Project Name: _____ Date: _____

Reviewer(s): _____ Group Score: _____

(Do not use the enter key in the boxes. Use the arrow down key to start a new statement.)

Strengths:

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Weaknesses:

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