United States Department of Agriculture

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Innovation Grants Fact Sheet

February 2007

Overview

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is a voluntary program intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. Under CIG, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds are used to award competitive grants to non-Federal governmental or non-governmental organizations, Tribes, or individuals. CIG is authorized under EQIP. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers CIG.

Benefits

CIG enables NRCS to work with other public and private entities and individuals to accelerate technology transfer and adoption of promising technologies and approaches to address some of the Nation's most pressing natural resource concerns. CIG will benefit agricultural producers by providing more options for environmental enhancement and compliance with Federal, State, and local regulations.

How CIG Works

Funding for CIG is announced each year through an Announcement of Program Funding (APF). Funds for single- or multi-year projects, not to exceed three years, will be awarded through a nationwide competitive grants process. CIG competitions will emphasize projects that have a goal of providing benefits over a large geographic area. These projects may be watershed-based, regional, multi-State, or nationwide in scope. Applications should describe the use of innovative technologies or approaches, or both, to address a natural resource conservation concern or concerns. The natural resource concerns eligible for funding through CIG will be announced in the APF, and may change annually.

All CIG applications must include a letter of review from the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist(s). State Conservationists will review proposed projects for potential duplication of effort, ethics concerns, consistency with overall EQIP objectives, and the expected benefits to EQIP implementation in their state(s).

Applications are evaluated by a technical peer review panel and scored against criteria identified in the APF. Scored and ranked applications will be forwarded to an NRCS Grant Review Board. The Grant Review Board will make recommendations for project approval to the NRCS Chief. Final selections will be made by the Chief. Awards will be made through a grant agreement.

At least 50 percent of the total cost of the project must come from non-Federal matching funds (cash and in-kind contributions) provided by the grantee. The grantee also is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully complete the project. NRCS will provide technical oversight for each project receiving an award.

North Dakota State Component

In addition to the nationwide grants competition, the State component of CIG will be available in North Dakota in fiscal year 2007. For FY2007, approximately $300,000 is available for the North Dakota CIG competition. The State component will emphasize projects that have a goal of providing benefits within the State of North Dakota. Projects may be farm-based, multicounty, small watershed, or Statewide in scope. Individual projects funded through the ND CIG State Component in fiscal year 2007 may not receive more than $75,000 from NRCS. Proposals must be received in the ND NRCS State Office by 4:00 p.m., Central Standard Time (CST) on Friday, April 6, 2007.

Eligibility
CIG applications will be accepted from State or local units of government, Federally recognized Tribes, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. Applications will be 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).

Proposed projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers. CIG funds that are used to provide direct or indirect payments to individuals or entities to implement structural, vegetative, or management practices are subject to the $450,000 EQIP payment limitation.

CIG is not a research program. Instead, it is a vehicle to stimulate the adoption of conservation approaches or technologies that have been studied sufficiently to indicate a likelihood of success, and are likely candidates for eventual technology transfer. CIG will fund projects targeting innovative on the ground conservation, including pilot projects and field demonstrations. Technologies and approaches that are commonly used in the geographic area covered by the application, and which are eligible for funding through EQIP, are not eligible for funding through CIG. Proposed projects must conform to the description of innovative conservation projects or activities published in the APF.

Following are two general examples of projects that would be eligible for funding under CIG:
• Market-based environmental credit trading projects addressing one or more natural resource concerns; and
• Community-based solutions to watershed-based or regional natural resource concerns that cannot be addressed by a single producer, or by a group of producers taking individual on-farm actions.

Beginning and Limited Resource Farmers, and Tribes
NRCS recognizes the need to provide special consideration to underrepresented or historically underserved producers. CIG offers two programmatic exceptions intended to encourage the participation of beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers, and Tribes, in CIG. Each year, up to 10 percent of National CIG funds may be set aside for applicants who are beginning or limited resource farmers or ranchers, or Tribes, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities. The second exception allows applicants from any of the underrepresented groups to derive a higher percentage of project matching funds from in-kind contributions.

How to Apply for CIG
Once funds for CIG become available, an APF is posted on the federal eGrants portal, www.grants.gov. The APF also may be accessed from the NRCS website at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig. The APF will specify the information required from applicants. Complete applications must be mailed or submitted electronically to the NRCS National office at the address's identified in the APF. Proposals must be received in the NRCS National Headquarters by 5 p.m., Eastern Standard Time (EST) on February 2, 2007.

For More Information
If you need more information about CIG, please contact Tessa Chadwick, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Room 5237-S, Washington, D.C., 20250; phone: (202) 720-2335; e-mail: tessa.chadwick@wdc.usda.gov. Additional information, including *Federal Register* notices, is available on the World Wide Web at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig.

For the CIG State component in North Dakota, please contact Ronald Herr, 220 E Rosser Ave, P.O. Box 1458, Bismarck, ND, 58502; phone (701) 530-2051; e-mail: ronald.herr@nd.usda.gov. Additional information is available on the internet at: http://www.nd.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/CIG/CIG_index.html.