

Program Contracts System (ProTracts)

Task Guide #3

Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool

April 16, 2009

The purpose of this guide is to provide business information on the setup and use of the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool (AERT) for the following programs: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

BACKGROUND

Any person may submit an application for participation in EQIP or WHIP. All applications will be entered in Program Contracts System (ProTracts). However, only ELIGIBLE applications will be ranked by the AERT.

The state conservationist, in consultation with the Kansas Technical Committee, will develop ranking tools to prioritize and subsequently fund applications addressing priority natural resource concerns. The supervisory district conservationists (SDCs) and district conservationists (DCs) will select the highest ranked applications after the application evaluation period cut-off for funding, based on applicant eligibility and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) ranking process.

AERT OVERVIEW

The AERT, integrated with ProTracts, provides a consistent framework, both across the NRCS and across the programs of EQIP and WHIP to implement the application ranking process. The framework includes the following functions:

- Cost effectiveness tools using Practice Average Cost (PAC) data in SmarTech
- Comparison of environmental benefits using Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE) in SmarTech
- Selection of resource concerns
- Magnitude of benefits and cost effectiveness
- Consideration of national priorities and state and local issues

Program applications for EQIP or WHIP can not be approved in ProTracts without being ranked by the AERT, per policy in Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Conservation Program Contracting (CPC), Section 512.25(A).

The AERT is accessed through ProTracts and is directly integrated with CPPE and PAC in SmarTech. The Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) application is also coupled with these applications.

The AERT is comprised of four sections from which points are given: Efficiency, National Priorities, State Issues, and Local Issues.

Note: A blank ranking tool worksheet can be printed from the **Ranking** menu and is useful to generate a hard copy to take to the field to review with participants. However, participants will be required to sign the ranking worksheet printed from the AERT in ProTracts.

RANKING INFORMATION

The application ranking information is accessed through ProTracts **View Application**.

The screenshot shows the 'EQIP 2008 Application' screen in ProTracts. The 'Ranking' menu option is highlighted with a red circle. The application details are as follows:

- Program:** EQIP 2008
- Application Number:** 74621509
- Application FY:** 2009
- Applicant:** HILLYER
- Location:** Noharts Creek
- Signup Date:** 12/29/2008
- Application Status:** Eligible
- Legal Description:** Legal Description
- Application Date:** 3/27/2009
- Land Enrolled in Other Programs:** No
- Application Type:** Conventional
- Land Ownership:** Private
- FA Fund Code:** 09 Water Quality
- Planner:** Matt L Sprick
- Applicant Certification of Land Control:** Deed
- Ranking Score:** 395.45
- Application Priority:** None
- Tracking Code:**
- Predominant Crop Type:** Corn
- Estimated Cost:** \$17,668.00
- AGI Eligible Applicants:** 100.0000%
- AGI Eligible Cost:** \$17,668.00
- Resource Concern:** Water Quality: Excessive Suspended Sediment and Turbidity in Surface Water
- Predominant Livestock Type:** No Livestock
- Application Cost:** \$17,668.00
- Conservation Plan:** Consplan
- Treated Acres:** 77
- Cost List:** KSBrownEQIP 200809-09 - EQIP 09 Water Quality/LSW
- Owner:** Free
- Land Irrigated 2 of last 5 years:** No
- Expiration Date:** 12/31/2011

The **Ranking** menu option on the Application screen is active when the following information has been entered for the application and saved:

- **Program** is EQIP 2008 or WHIP 2008
- Application status is **Pending** or **Eligible**
- **Application Fiscal Year (FY)**
- **Applicant** has been selected from Service Center Information Management System (SCIMS)
- **FA Fund Code**
- **Application Type**
- **Signup Date**
- **Legal Description**
- **Servicing Office**
- **Land Enrolled in Other Programs**
- **Land Ownership**
- **Location**
- **Applicant Certification of Land Control**
- **Predominant Crop Type**
- **Predominate Livestock Type**
- **Treated Acres**
- **Irrigated Land 2 out of last 5 years**

What triggers “re-rank”

Ranking Score:

- If a ranking tool used to evaluate an application is edited (returned to draft status) after it has been released, all applications associated with that ranking tool **must** be re-ranked.
- Promoting a deferred application causes all ranking information associated with the application to be deleted.
- Changing a fund code requires a re-ranking because each fund code is tied to a specific ranking tool.

APPLICATION STATUS RULES

- Only applications that have met all eligibility criteria (land and producer) will be ranked.
- An application may be ranked more than one time with the same tool, if the contract status is **Pending** or **Eligible**. Only the latest ranking data is saved. Historical ranking data is not saved.
- Applications, having a status of **Pre-approved** or **Approved** can not be re-ranked without first using **Manage Applications** to change the status to **Eligible** or **Pending**.
- Promoting a **Deferred** application causes all ranking information associated with the application to be deleted. Counties should not promote deferred applications until all potential appeals have been exhausted.

EFFICIENCY SCORE

- The efficiency section requires the entry of the land use, resource concern(s), and conservation practice(s). Select only the practices that are planned for treatment of the resource concern identified on the application acres.
- Cost efficiency ensures that the applications selected for funding are providing the most benefit for the cost associated with the conservation practices to be implemented.
- The efficiency score takes values from the CPPE matrix and cost information from the PAC table in SmarTech to weigh the effect of a conservation practice on solving the resource concerns.
- The efficiency score equation is:

$$\frac{(\text{CPPE practice effect} \times \text{practice service life})}{\text{Sum of associated PAC}} \times \text{Cost efficiency multiplier}$$

- PAC used in the efficiency score reflect the average cost of the typical practice amount being implemented in a state, not for the actual practice reporting unit (e.g., foot, number, acre). (Example: terrace - \$18,000 would be entered as the average cost per typical practice amount [10,000 feet] being installed at \$1.80 which is reporting unit per foot cost.) This cost is for comparing the efficiency of one practice with another. When practice reporting units are per foot and others per number or per acre, the only consistent way of comparing overall practice efficiency is to compare practices on an equal scale using the cost of the typical practice amount being implemented. This aligns practice costs at a uniform level for comparing efficiency. Practice costs in the payment schedule for contracting purposes however will remain by actual practice reporting unit. (PAC are entered in SmarTech and reviewed for each practice each FY.)

- **Resource Concerns**

Resource Concern:
Plant Condition: Productivity, Health and Vigor
Soil Erosion: Irrigation-induced
Water Quantity: Inefficient Water Use on Irrigated Land

Resource Concerns

Note: Resource concerns are generated directly from the ranking tool and are now un-editable. Resource concerns can only be changed by re-ranking the application and selecting new concerns.

- **Practices**

- Practices that are selected for the application ranking process must be the same as the practices that are contracted (contract items). The ProTracts rule checker compares the practice codes of the contract items with the practices that were selected for ranking. If the practices match, then the rule checker continues checking the application.
- If a practice is selected for ranking, but the application has no corresponding contract item, the rule checker will display a warning message such as:
 “Nutrient Management was selected for application ranking, but the application has no corresponding contract item. This practice must be added to the application.” Applications will not pass the rule checker until the practices match.
- If the application has one or more contract items for practices that were not ranked, the rule checker will display a warning message such as:
 “Contract item(s) 5, 9, 11 are for practices that were not selected for application ranking. You must re-rank the application with these practices.” Application will not pass the rule checker until the practices match.

NATIONAL PRIORITIES SCORE

- The meaning of “considerable,” when addressing national priorities, means that the practice(s) chosen have a positive CPPE value for the resource concerns being addressed by the national priority.

STATE ISSUES SCORE

State issue questions are used to determine the applications that are a benefit to state priorities.

LOCAL ISSUES SCORE

- Local issues will not be used for FY 2009 ranking of EQIP and WHIP.

TIE BREAKERS

- Area zone managers (AZMs) will use the **Assign Tracking Code** function available within ProTracts if a tie breaking situation is present. This utility assigns tracking codes to applications after an application signup period ends. The tracking code is a random number assigned to each application for a FY. Tracking codes can be used to break ties between applications with equal ranking scores. If two or more applications have the same ranking score and priority, the applications are then sorted by tracking code. The application with the highest tracking code will be selected for funding. SDCs and DCs should contact the appropriate AZM if tracking codes are needed. **NOTE: In the example below, Application Priority will not be used in Kansas.**

Ranking Score:	<input type="text" value="256.82"/>
Application Priority:	<input type="text" value="Medium"/>
Tracking Code:	<input type="text" value="28663"/>

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURES ON RANKING SHEETS

- All participants will receive their application ranking score from the appropriate administrative office responsible for the ranking.
- Participant signature is required on the ranking sheet.
- The signed ranking sheet is an additional requirement that must be met before manually checking the **Other Eligibility** box in **Applicant Info**.

MONITORING STATUS OF APPLICATION RANKING

Application Maintenance - Ranking

Find Applications | Ranking | Draft Items | Rejected Obligations | Closed Offices | Clear Selections | Search

Program: All Programs | Fiscal Year: All | State: KS | Counties | Field Offices | Locations | GO

Ranked Applications | Estimated Cost
 Unranked Applications | Total Cost (calculated)

Application Status

All | Ineligible
 Pending | Disapproved
 Eligible | Deferred
 Preapproved | Cancelled
 Approved

- In ProTracts, under menu options, **Applications** and **Application Maintenance**, SDCs and DCs can evaluate and monitor the status of their ranking activities.
- Searches can be conducted by ranked or unranked applications, application status, and the results can be exported to Microsoft Excel, if needed.

WHERE TO GET HELP

- Questions, comments, and requests for training should be directed to area or state-designated support staff.