



National  
Employee  
Development  
Center

Subject: PER - Employee Development  
2004 Education Grants Program

Date: February 24, 2004

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P.O. Box 6567  
Ft. Worth, TX  
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To: Deputy Chiefs  
Division Directors  
Regional Conservationists  
Center and Institute Directors  
State Conservationists  
Director, Pacific Basin Area  
and Caribbean Area  
Training Officers

File code: 360-18

Ofc 817-509-3240  
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### **ACTION REQUIRED BY: APRIL 15, 2004**

The purpose of this memorandum is to announce the 2004 Education Grants Program. All approved training for this program must be completed by September 30, 2005.

Documents in this package include:

- Announcement and Policy Guidance (Attachment A)
- Application (Attachment B)

### **Program Description**

The Education Grants Program is one component of the S.O.A.R. Program (Supplying Opportunities for Advancement and Redirection). The Education Grants Program is a scholarship program which provides developmental opportunities for employees in grades GS 1-10 or wage grade equivalent. The program is designed to give highly motivated employees opportunities for career growth, development and change. We anticipate that this program will meet the needs of both NRCS and participating employees, and will help establish a more diverse and high-performing workforce at all grade levels. The program is nationally administered, competitive and designed to comply with all applicable merit principles. Through this program, eligible employees may submit applications outlining proposals for developmental opportunities. If selected, participants will receive funding for the developmental activities and other related expenses.

Such developmental activities include, but are not limited to, Government and non-Government training (college courses, USDA Graduate School, correspondence courses, training offered by various private organizations, etc.), developmental details and rotational assignments outside of the applicant's geographic area. The training may or may not be related to the applicant's present position. All training activities under this plan **must be related to the mission of NRCS.**

### **Who is eligible to apply?**

Employees of NRCS, who have career or career-conditional status, and who are in positions at grade levels GS 1-10, or wage grade equivalent, at the time of application to the Education Grants Program.

**In accordance with training rule 5 U.S.C. 4107 (a), this program is short-term training only.** Therefore, participation in this program will be limited to two consecutive years. If individuals have already participated during the last two years the program was offered, they need not apply for the 2004 program. This limitation will apply across the board to all NRCS employees in the 2004 program. If in the accomplishment of such training, an employee receives an academic degree, the degree is an incidental by-product of the training.

### **What aspects of the developmental activity will be funded?**

The National Employee Development Center (NEDC) will pay tuition, books and other related expenses for those employees applying and selected for classroom-type training. Training must be **within applicant's commuting area** (or by correspondence, satellite, etc.). Travel and per diem expenses will not be paid for classroom-type training.

NEDC will pay travel and per diem expenses for those employees applying and selected for developmental details or rotational assignments outside of their commuting area.

The employing office will pay salaries of selectees.

### **How many applications can my local organization nominate for national competition?**

The Education Grants Program selection process is two-tiered: a local competition and a national competition. This is necessary because the National Employee Development Center is not equipped to process the literally thousands of applications which could be generated by this program. We also believe that local organizations are well equipped to manage a process, which will result in the selection of the very best candidates.

**Guidelines for the local selection process will be transmitted to training officers under separate cover.**

Local organizations are defined as states, centers, institutes, regional offices, NHQ, the Pacific Basin and the Caribbean Area. A local organization can send forward applications equal to 10 percent of its employees in grades 1-10 or wage grade equivalent. For example, if an organization has 50 employees in grades 1-10, it can forward up to 5 applications. **Applications that have not gone through the "local organization" selection process will not be considered.**

### **How will the selection process work?**

Regional offices, states, centers, institutes, NHQ, the Pacific Basin and the Caribbean Area will employ a local selection process prior to submitting nominated applications to the Education Grants Program. The local selection process must be based on the selection criteria listed below, and the number of selectees limited as explained below. Thus, applications to the Education Grants Program must be submitted locally, where an appropriate number will be selected based on the selection criteria, and then forwarded for national competition.

Once the applications have been selected at the local level, they are to be forwarded to the National Employee Development Center where they will be screened for completeness. The applications will be forwarded to a panel that will change every year. Panels will be comprised of a diverse group of employees from throughout NRCS, including individuals from the technical, management, administrative and executive ranks. The panel will rate and rank the applications based on the selection criteria outlined in the attached program rules.

### **What are the obligations and entitlements if selected for this program?**

Selectees are expected to do their best during the training. No mobility agreement will be required. After the training, the selectee will return to his or her normal duty station and his or her same position.

This program does not entitle a selectee to anything beyond participation in the approved developmental activity. While we expect that an employee's career opportunities will be enhanced through participation in this program, there is no assurance that an employee will be promoted, selected for a new position, reassigned or reap any other short- or long-term benefit.

Copies of grade reports, certificates, etc., must be submitted to NEDC.

All other requirements and restrictions for application to this program are outlined in the announcement. **Administrative offices are to reproduce the attached announcement and application package and send it to all eligible employees as soon as possible.**

Questions concerning the 2004 Education Grants Program should be directed to Janie Wade, Employee Development Specialist, at (817) 509-3258.

/s/

CHARLES R. ADAMS  
Director

Attachments

**2004 NRCS EDUCATION GRANTS PROGRAM  
ANNOUNCEMENT**

**OPENING DATE: February 25, 2004**

**CLOSING DATE: April 15, 2004**

**General:**

The Education Grants Program is a scholarship program that provides developmental opportunities for employees in grades GS 1-10. The program provides highly motivated employees opportunities for career growth. The program is nationally administered, competitive and designed to comply with all applicable merit principles.

**In accordance with training rule 5 U.S.C. 4107 (a), this program is short-term training only. Therefore, participation in this program will be limited to two consecutive years. If individuals have already participated during the last two years the program was offered, they need not apply for the 2004 program. This limitation will apply across the board to all NRCS employees in the 2004 program.**

The program is not intended to provide employees the means to begin and complete either a bachelor or graduate degree. If an employee obtains a degree as a result of courses taken through this program, it is purely coincidental. Employees desiring further funding must compete the next time the program is advertised for no more than two years consecutively.

If you are selected for the 2004 program all training must be completed by September 30, 2005.

**Qualification Requirements**

All applicants must be employees of NRCS, who have career or career-conditional status, and who are in positions at grade levels GS 1-10, or wage grade equivalent, at the time of application to the Education Grants Program.

The most recent Performance Work Plan (Form SCA 4140) for each applicant must document a "results achieved".

All developmental activities for which funding is requested through this program must be related to the mission of NRCS.

**What kind of developmental activities will be considered?**

Employees may apply for funding for traditional (i.e., classroom) developmental activities from any Government or non-Government source except those courses offered by NRCS and listed in the NRCS training catalog. The intent of the program is to provide developmental opportunities that would not otherwise be available (because the employee could not afford to pay, the employing organization could not afford to pay, the employee could only be authorized the training through competition, etc.). Thus, applications should not propose training for which the local organization has already budgeted funds and included on an annual training plan. Training must be within applicant's commuting area (or by correspondence, satellite, etc.) Travel and per diem expenses **will not** be paid for classroom-type training.

Employees may also apply for funding for developmental details or rotational assignments outside of their commuting area. Details and rotational assignments under this program are not intended to interfere with requests for detailees in critical need situations. NEDC **will pay** travel and per diem expenses for those employees applying and selected for developmental details or rotational assignments outside of their commuting area.

Examples Only:

1. Employee applies to take two non-job-related, but mission-related courses on duty time from a local community college.
2. Employee applies to take 6 credit hours from a local university over two semesters during non-duty time.
3. Employee applies to take a series of communication courses from the American Management Association.
4. Employee applies to receive travel and per diem for a 30-day developmental detail in another part of the state in order to gain exposure to urban environmental activities.
5. Employee applies to receive travel and per diem for a 120-day rotational assignment outside of the NHQ administrative function to a field administrative function.

**The applicant prior to submitting an application will make all arrangements for details and rotational assignments. The receiving office must approve the detail or rotational assignment before the application is submitted. If approval is not obtained, the application will not be accepted.**

**Is there a funding limit?**

Applicants may request a **maximum of \$1,500**. Funding requests over \$1,500 will not be considered.

**Training Schedule**

- (1) Classroom training schedules **must be approved by the selectee's supervisor.**
- (2) Scheduling of details and rotational assignments must be approved by the selectee's supervisor and the approving official at the location of the detail or rotational assignment.

**How will selectees be notified?**

Selectees will be notified of their selection by letter from NEDC to their office. (Non-selectees will also be notified by letter to their office.) The notification of selection will include instructions concerning funding, reporting requirements, etc.

**How will the funds be disbursed to selectees?**

NEDC will distribute funds to your local administrative unit, which will distribute funds according to program guidelines.

**Method of evaluation:**

Applications to the Education Grants Program will be submitted locally to training officers. Initial screening will be based on a determination that the applicant meets the basic qualification requirements and the completeness of the application package. Applications will be rated and ranked based on the selection criteria outlined in this announcement by your local personnel office. An appropriate number of applications will be selected for national competition. Once the applications have been selected at the local level, they will be forwarded to the National Employee Development Center(NEDC) where they will be screened for completeness. The applications will be forwarded to a panel for selection. The panel will rate and rank the applications based on the selection criteria outlined below.

**Applications sent directly to NEDC without going through the local selection process will not be considered.**

The following selection criteria will be used:

1. Needed expertise - what developmental need and NRCS mission need the training will meet, e.g., maintaining state of the art in present position, developing skills for anticipated new duties, developing skills applicable to a present or anticipated NRCS mission need for which applicant shows potential to help meet, etc.
2. Return on investment - comparison of the cost of the proposed developmental activity to the benefits to be accrued by NRCS.
3. Motivation of applicant - as evidenced by past self-development activities, collateral duty assignments, community service activities, career advancement, etc.
4. Potential for successful application of newly learned knowledge's and skills - as evidenced by most recent performance rating, awards, other recognition received, supervisor endorsement. Awards and other recognition can be job or non-job related, e.g., volunteer fireman of the year, president of the PTA, etc.
5. Career goals - explanation of long- and short-term career goals, what steps have been taken and will be taken to meet goals, and how the proposed developmental activity will contribute to the achievement of those goals.

**Process:**

Funding for scholarships will be through NEDC. Payment of the selected employee's salary will be the responsibility of the selector's employing organization.

**How to apply:**

All applicants must submit the following in order to be considered for the NRCS 2004 Education Grants Program:

1. Most recent Performance Work Plan (Form SCA 4140), completed, signed and dated by all applicable parties. The appraisal must have been received within 18 months of the date of application submission. The performance rating must indicate a "results achieved".

2. All items in application package must be completed.
3. Letter of endorsement from supervisor (Supervisory Assessment Form attached).  
**You must have your supervisor's approval to participate in this program.**
4. Forward your application to your personnel office for the local competition. Your personnel office will then forward selected applicants to the National Employee Development Center for the national competition.
5. If training is for a detail or rotational assignment signature of approving official at the rotational assignment location is required.
6. OPM Form 1386, Background Survey Questionnaire 79-2 (optional).

**ATTACHMENT B**

**2004 NRCS EDUCATION GRANTS PROGRAM  
APPLICATION**

Candidates will be considered without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status, parental status, or protected genetic information. Candidates will also be considered in accordance with recognized merit promotion guidelines.

**NOTE:** When submitting application, submit only this and the following pages titled Application. **Do not** submit any of the previous pages titled Announcement.

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**Privacy Act Statement**

Sections 1302, 3301, and 3304 of Title 5 of the United States Code provide the authority for requesting this information. Failure to provide the requested information may prevent your name from being considered for the NRCS Education Grants Program.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Residential Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Office Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(No abbreviations/spell out)

Office Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Office Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Pay Plan, Series, Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Present Job Title \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Local organization - usually Human Resource Officer or Training Officer)

1. In the space below, please describe the developmental activity being requested. For a classroom training course, include name of course, name of vendor (university, USDA, OPM, etc.), location and dates of course. Also include a brief description of the course.

**Classroom Training:**

Course Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Vendor Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Training Location \_\_\_\_\_  
Training Dates \_\_\_\_\_  
CourseDescription \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Course Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Vendor Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Training Location \_\_\_\_\_  
Training Dates \_\_\_\_\_  
CourseDescription \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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Course Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Vendor Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Training Location \_\_\_\_\_  
Training Dates \_\_\_\_\_  
CourseDescription \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. For a detail or rotational assignment, include name of position, location and inclusive dates of detail or rotational assignment. Also include a brief description of the position or positions into which you plan to be detailed or rotated. **(The applicant prior to submitting application must make all arrangements for details and rotational assignments. If arrangements are not made prior to application submission, your application will not be considered.)**

**Detail or Rotational Assignment**

Name of Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Inclusive dates of detail or rotational assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of position:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Inclusive dates of detail or rotational assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of position:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Will the proposed developmental activity help you (please circle a, b, or c):

- a. maintain state of the art in your present position
- b. develop skills for anticipated new duties
- c. develop skills applicable to a present or anticipated NRCS mission need.

4. In the space below, please describe the skills you intend to improve or develop (for example, new word processing skills, improved negotiation skills, broadening administrative skills by being detailed from NHQ budget position to field budget position, etc.):

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5. In the space below, please describe what present or anticipated NRCS mission need the proposed developmental activity will help meet (be specific):

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6. What is the cost of the developmental activity: **(maximum allowable \$1500) Actual costs are required, no guestimates will be accepted.**

NEDC **will not pay** travel, relocation, TDY or other per diem expenses related to classroom-type training. **Training must be within the applicant’s commuting area** or by correspondence, satellite, etc.

a. If classroom-type training:

How much is the registration? \_\_\_\_\_

How much are the books, if required? \_\_\_\_\_

If college course, how much is the cost per course hour?

\_\_\_\_\_ X \$ \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_  
hrs. per hr. Tuition

Any other related costs?  
(what kind and how much) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Note: No travel costs for classroom training will be excepted.**

**Grand Total (Total funding amount being requested for Classroom Training)** \_\_\_\_\_

NEDC **will pay** travel and per diem expenses for those employees applying and selected for developmental details or rotational assignments outside of their commuting areas

b. If detail or rotational assignment: (**maximum allowable \$1500**) Actual costs are required, no guestimates will be accepted.

How much will travel expenses be? \_\_\_\_\_

How much will per diem expenses be? \_\_\_\_\_

Any other related costs? \_\_\_\_\_  
(what kind and how much)

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**Grand total (total funding amount being requested for Detail or Rotational Assignment)** \_\_\_\_\_

7. In the space below, please list any developmental activities that are above and beyond normal training required for your current position. This can be subjects such as first aid training, etc.

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8. In the space below, please list any collateral duty assignments you have performed. Include such things as membership on special emphasis committees, EEO counselor, special emphasis program manager, etc.

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9. In the space below, please list and include a brief description of any public or community service in which you have been involved. Include such things as scout troop leader, volunteer for Meals on Wheels, after school tutor, etc.

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10. In the space below, please list and describe any other activities you believe show that you are a highly motivated person.

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11. In the space below, please list any awards and recognition's you have received on the job in the last five years. These could include special act awards; being elected team leader, etc.

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12. In the space below, please list any awards and recognition's you have received in the last five years off the job. These could include being elected PTA president, volunteer of the year, being asked to sing/speak at a civic event, professional societies, etc.

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13. In the space below, please write a brief explanation of your career goals. (For example, your goal might be to become a state conservationist.)

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14. In the space below describe the steps you have taken on your own to achieve your career goals. (For example, your goal might be to become a state conservationist, and you have taken courses in agronomy, administration, etc., and have sought the advice and counsel of your state conservationist, and so forth.)

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15. In the space below describe how your proposed developmental activity will contribute to the achievement of your career goals.

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16. Please have your supervisor complete the attached Supervisory Assessment Form and attach to your application. **(You must have your supervisor’s approval to participate in this program.)**

17. Please attach a copy of your Performance Work Plan (Form SCA 4140) to your application.

18. If applying for a detail or rotational assignment, please have the approving official at the detail or rotational assignment location complete the attached agreement form.

19. Forward your application to your local personnel office. **Do not forward directly to the National Employee Development Center.**

20. Please sign and date your application in the space below.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Detail or Rotational Assignment Agreement

The applicant prior to submitting an application must make all arrangements for details and rotational assignments.

In the event this applicant is selected for the Education Grants Program, we agree to permit the individual to work in our office on a detail or rotational assignment as requested in the application.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Office

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Organizational Head Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Position Title)

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**  
**Education Grants Program**  
**Supervisory Assessment Form**

**Applicant Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisor Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Supervisor Title** \_\_\_\_\_

**To the Supervisor:** Please evaluate the applicant by placing a check after each characteristic to be evaluated in the column that most nearly represents your opinion.. If you lack knowledge to make a definite rating, give your estimate of applicant's ability and also check the column "Inadequate Opportunity to Observe."

How long have you known the applicant? \_\_\_\_\_

|                                 | Below Average | Average | Good | Superior | Inadequate Opportunity to Observe |
|---------------------------------|---------------|---------|------|----------|-----------------------------------|
| Ability to master academic work |               |         |      |          |                                   |
| Ability in oral expression      |               |         |      |          |                                   |
| Ability to write                |               |         |      |          |                                   |
| Motivation                      |               |         |      |          |                                   |
| Maturity                        |               |         |      |          |                                   |
| Self-reliance and independence  |               |         |      |          |                                   |
| Ability to work with others     |               |         |      |          |                                   |

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(Supervisor's Signature)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(Date)**

In the space below or by attachment, please add any comments that will assist in our decision as to whether the applicant should be selected for the Education Grants Program.

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