

AWEP Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Does the 12 page limit include “letters of support” or are they not counted?

Partner proposal should include letter of review from the STC and may be accompanied by letters of support, but will not be counted towards the 12 page limit of the actual proposal. Letters of support may also be sent in separately to Gregory Johnson using the RFP address and we will include these with the partner proposal information that will be shared with the Review Board. Letters of support are not used in the competitive scoring and ranking process, but may be considered by the review board and Chief during the final selection process.

2. The federal register provides information related to “practices”. Can you further explain “activities”? Would this be an area where financial support could be secured for an “activity” if the partner provides adequate justification? (e.g. – additional financial assistance related to the retirement of a water right) Is “activities” used to refer to “conservation activity plans”?

Specifically for EQIP and AWEP “Activities” refers to conservation activity plans or CAPs, which are eligible for program payment to help producer develop a special kind of conservation plan prepared by a certified Technical Service Provider (TSP). In the event there is a nationally approved practice/CAP that NRCS is not currently offered in a State, it is the partner’s responsibility to make a formal request to NRCS that the approved practice/CAP be added to the payment schedule in order to address the needs as outlined in the partner’s AWEP proposal. All practices or activities supported through EQIP or AWEP must an NRCS approved conservation practice which can be found at the following web site: www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/standards or for CAPs at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/cap.html. There is no statute authority provided in EQIP or AWEP that allows program payments to be made for any other “activity” that is not tied to a FOTG practice.

3. “Activities may also include actions associated with an agricultural operation or other activities conducted by an AWEP partner which may or may not be associated with an NRCS conservation practice or program support.” (Quoted from the AWEP RFP). Can you give some concrete examples of this and further explain the intent of this? Is what you’re getting at here that the partner may have other required items, but what NRCS pays on are the practices that meet NRCS standards and specs?

An example of an activity which NRCS may not be able to provide technical or financial assistance for is found in the RFP; question (3) Partnership capacity “(d) Demonstrate the ability to monitor and evaluate project effects on natural resources.” NRCS does not have resources or authority to conduct sophisticated monitoring activities to determine effects of practice application or impacts of AWEP projects. Through the AWEP ranking process, priority will be given to project proposals where the partner agrees to provide resources, services or conduct activities to monitor and evaluate effects of conservation practices and activities implemented through the project. The intent is to describe in the proposal what activities that the partner intends to offer through the partnership (e.g. “in-kind” contribution). Other examples of activities could include water use data being collected and stored monthly over the life of a contract for evaluation, monitoring sediment load downstream from where nutrients are being

spread, or providing a professional engineer or technician on site during construction of conservation practices.

4. Where can I find a list of AWEP priority areas?

The AWEP web site at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/awep has the list of priority areas by county and State.

5. Who should letters of support for AWEP project proposals be addressed to?

Letter of support can be addressed to either of the following:

Dave White, Chief
AWEP Proposal Support
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, DC 20013

Or:

Gregory K. Johnson,
Director, Financial Assistance Programs Division
AWEP Proposal Support
Natural Resources Conservation Service,
1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Room 5239 South Building,
Washington, DC 20250

6. What does "leveraging other nonfederal resources" mean in terms of contributions from other federal funds received or used by the partner in AWEP projects? Do these other federal resources count towards leveraging resources in the AWEP evaluation process?

A partner can leverage other "federal resources" to help implement a project, but none of those resources will garner them any points in the evaluation process. In addition, NRCS program funds paid to producers through AWEP in program contracts does not count as leveraged resources either. In the evaluation process, NRCS is looking for leveraging "non-federal" resources - preferably hard cash, but to a degree, other non-federal services (e.g. technical assistance, planning services; donation of equipment to implement practices; monitoring, etc.) can add some point value as well.

7. Do new businesses meet the requirements of the AWEP grant?

AWEP is not a grant opportunity and none of the AWEP funding goes to or through the AWEP partner. If your business meets the requirements of a Non-governmental organization (NGO) per the IRS definition in the Request for Proposals, then you may be an eligible entity that may submit an AWEP proposal. Generally, "for profit" businesses do not meet the IRS requirements for a NGO organization.

8. Will the same scoring system used last year be used again this year?

The scoring last year for ranked projects was about 65 to 225 (Max 275). A similar scoring process will be used this year. However, this year's evaluation was modified to provide higher priority (higher scores) to projects which focus on water conservation issues as well as other priority factors such as leveraged resources and the total points that can be earned is now 445.

9. Are existing AWEP projects eligible to request a time extension and additional funds through an amendment, or do the sponsors need to submit a completely new proposal?

It really would not be fair to allow an existing project partner to "extend" their partnership agreement beyond what the original proposal outlined. Partners with existing projects should submit a new proposal through the RFP process.

10. Would county-owned agricultural land qualify under this grant?

Possibly. Publically owned lands that are under the control of an eligible producer (farmer, rancher, forestry, Tribe) could be eligible for program funds under this authority if the producer can show control through a lease or similar legal document. Partners receive no funding through AWEP and all financial assistance funds are provided directly to producers through individual contracts.

11. How is the determination of priority areas established? If significant, how often is this prioritization reviewed and what is the process for seeking it to be changed?

It would not be possible to predict how much influence this one factor will be in this evaluation/ranking of the proposal in comparison with other project proposals. It is a competitive evaluation process and each proposal is dependent upon what that partner is including in their project. Location in a priority area may or may not be significant depending upon all the potential factors and project features that a partner may wish to offer. This year, NRCS did provide more points and recognition of potential projects which were located in the legislative intended priority areas. As Congress established the priority areas, NRCS does not expect any change to them. Based upon the partner proposal map and location description, NRCS will make the determination if the project is in a priority area and any associated ranking points. Note you can download the evaluation criteria and ranking guidance from the AWEP web site to see all the points that can be assigned through the evaluation process (www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/awep/).

12. How can a group of producers submit a "joint application"?

A group of eligible producers may each submit a separate CPA-1200 application, but it contains the exact same resource concern, practices, etc that all the landowners share in common. The group of producers informs NRCS that all applications are for a single project. The entire project is ranked as one application to arrive at the same score for each of the applicants. Additional information and explanation can be provided by your local NRCS office.

13. Are entities who have never applied for funds eligible to apply or are entities that have previously been funded only eligible?

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Both eligible entities who have applied previously and those that have never applied may submit a new proposal per the notice for requests for proposals (RFP).