

Conservation Innovation Grants

Frequently Asked Questions FAQ

What is a Conservation Innovation Grant?

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are a source of federal funding provided to individuals, state and local governments, tribes, and non-governmental organizations to help stimulate the development and adoption of innovation conservation approaches and technologies. The CIG program is authorized by the Farm Bill and is administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

CIG funds leverage federal investments in environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural and forestry production. There are three funding sources for CIG—national level CIG and state level CIG, and On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials (On-Farm). The overall goal of CIG projects is to incorporate new and innovative technologies and approaches into NRCS policy, technical manuals, guides or references materials, and to transfer those new approaches to the wider agricultural community. CIG projects may be farm-based, multi-county, small watershed, or statewide in scope.

2. Who administers the CIG Program?

There are three funding sources for CIG—national level, state level, and On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials. The national and On-Farm CIG programs are administered by the NRCS national office based in Washington, D.C. The state CIG program is administered at the discretion of each state conservationist. In Alaska, the CIG program is administered out of the state office headquartered in Palmer.

3. What is the period of performance for a CIG project?

For both the national and state level CIG program, projects can last up to 3 years. Projects must start in the fiscal year they are awarded.

Overview

These FAQs are intended to help potential CIG applicants determine eligibility and learn more about the program.

For specific information about your proposed project or your application, please contact us. We are happy to help you.

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Find out more online:

www.ak.nrcs.usda.gov
www.grants.gov

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4. Who can apply for CIG?

State or local units of government, federally-recognized Indian tribes, non-governmental organizations (i.e. corporations), and individuals are all eligible to apply for CIG funds. Federal agencies cannot apply for CIG.

5. Can an agricultural producer apply for CIG?

Yes, the producer does not necessarily have to own the land but he or she must have control of the land for the term of the grant. The producer must also meet the eligibility criteria for the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

6. Can multiple non-federal agencies join together to submit a CIG application?

Multiple non-federal agencies or non-governmental organizations can work together as collaborators in one project proposal. However, only one agency or organization can be the applicant.

7. Can an applicant submit several CIG applications?

Yes. An applicant can submit several applications however, each project must be a separate application.

8. If I have a current CIG grant can I apply for another CIG?

Yes; however, there must not be overlap or duplication of any previous or current CIG project. When submitting another CIG proposal, the applicant is required to identify any previously awarded CIG projects related to this proposal and any of their principal investors. The applicant must detail the purpose, outcomes to date, and how this new proposal is different to the previous CIG award.

9. Can an applicant apply for a national and state level CIG in the same year for the same project?

Yes. Applying under both the national and state programs increases the likelihood for funding, however; applicants selected under the National CIG will automatically be disqualified for the CIG state component.

10. How much funding could I receive through a CIG?

The grant amount depends on which type of CIG you plan to apply for—national, state, or On Farm. For the state CIG, the State Conservationist may dedicate up to 5 percent of the state's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) allocation to set aside for CIG. NRCS reserves the right to offer more or less funding at the discretion of the State Conservationist. In Alaska, NRCS has made up to \$445,000 available for fiscal year 2020 for CIGs. Applicants may request funds up to 50 percent of the total project cost, not to exceed \$445,000 at the state level.

11. What is the applicants required match for CIG?

Applicants must provide a 1:1 match, which can be either cash or in-kind services, or a combination of both. Cash or in-kind match must come from non-federal sources.

12. Must the matching funds be secured before submitting a CIG application or can it be pending?

Yes! Cost Sharing or matching funds must be committed at the the time of application submission. All matching funds must be identified in the application. Project partners must provide commitment letters for all cash and in-kind matching contributions.

13. Would staff time committed to the project by a project partner be considered cash or in-kind match? What other types of activities or experiences can be considered in-kind match?

Generally, staff time is considered in-kind since that person will be a paid staff member of the organization whether the NRCS proposal is funded or not. In some situations it might be cash: for example, if the staff incurs additional hours specifically for the project or if a person is hired specifically for the purpose of meeting a project requirement, then those hours could be counted as cash, unless their salary is to be paid by the grant. There may be some donated equipment, information, or assistance where cash is not transferred that would be considered in-kind.



14. Can funds from an existing EQIP contract be used as cash match?

No. Cash match must come from non-federal sources.

15. Can indirect costs be counted towards the applicants cash match?

Yes. The indirect costs (IDC) can be counted toward the applicants cash match. The amount of IDC will depend on whether the rate is applied to the entire funded amount or a specific budget category that is supported by the budget narrative. An indirect cost rate not to exceed 10 percent may be approved for applicants without a preexisting, federally-approved indirect cost rate. To be considered for an indirect cost rate not to exceed 10 percent, applicants must submit an indirect cost rate proposal with the application. Note: It is at the agency's (NRCS) discretion whether to allow indirect cost.

16. Our entity has a federally-negotiated IDC for research and public service/extension, can we request our full indirect cost rate on the USDA CIG program?

Applicants wishing to claim indirect costs must have a federally-approved indirect cost rate. The approved indirect cost rate must be included in the application package. If entities have a federally negotiated rate, you may claim indirect costs. Once your indirect cost rate agreement is received, eligible charges to the grant are dependent on that approved rate.

17. Besides applicant eligibility, what other eligibility requirements are there for CIG?

In order to be considered for CIG, four (4) other eligibility requirements must be met, they are:

1. CIG projects must involve agricultural producers (farmers, ranchers, or non-industrial private forest/timber producers). Any CIG funds, direct or indirect, going to an agricultural producer must be EQIP eligible.
2. The applicant must address one of the State Resource Concern Categories outlined in the Announcement for Program Funding (APF). Each State Resource Concern Category has suggested subcategories which are not inclusive. Applicants may submit a proposal that is different than the suggested

subcategory, however the topic must relate to one of the State Resource Concern Categories.

3. Proposals cannot be research projects. CIG does not fund research projects, with the exception of on-farm conservation research. On-farm conservation research is defined as an investigation conducted to answer a specified conservation-related question using a statistically valid design, while employing farm-scale equipment on farm fields.
4. The CIG project must be transferable to NRCS in the development of technical or related technology materials (technical standards, technical notes, guide sheets, handbooks, software, etc.) and adoption in the agricultural community.

18. What are EQIP eligible agricultural producers?

CIG is funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), therefore any CIG funds provided to an individual or entity must meet the eligibility requirements in 7 C.F.R. 1466.6, (refer to the table on the following page).

19. Do agricultural producers need an EQIP contract to participate in a CIG project?

No. Participating agricultural producers are not required to have an EQIP contract to participate in CIG.

20. What is the AGI Limitation?

AGI is the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitation. All agricultural producers receiving a payment through participation in a CIG project must have an AGI that does not exceed \$900,000. Grantees must self-certify and maintain records showing that participating producers receiving payments using CIG funding meet the EQIP eligibility and AGI requirements.

21. Is there a way for researchers to be involved in this grant program?

Even though CIG cannot fund research projects, researchers can offer or collaborate in projects that encompass the development,



Eligibility Requirements	Potential Verification Documentation
Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions (7 C.F.R. Part 12)	Documentation of compliance status can be obtained by the producer at a local USDA Service Center or through the USDA customer service online portal.
Have an interest in the agricultural operation as defined in 7 C.F.R. Part 1400	Documentation of farm interest can be obtained by the producer at a local USDA Service Center or through the USDA customer service online portal, showing that the producer has farm records established.
Have control of the land for the term of the proposed grant period	Documentation can be provided in the form of a deed, lease, or other documents which show the producer has adequate control for the term of the proposed contract period.
All agricultural producers receiving a payment through participation in a CIG project must have an AGI that does not exceed \$900,000.	Grantees must self-certify and maintain records showing that participating producers receiving payments using CIG funding meet the EQIP eligibility and AGI requirements.

evaluation, implementation, and monitoring of conservation adoption approaches or incentive systems; or conservation technologies, practices, systems, procedures, or approaches; or environmental soundness with goals of environmental protection and natural resource enhancement.

the Northern Mariana Islands), and the District of Columbia may apply for the CIG state component the CIG project must be implemented in Alaska.

22. While CIG does not fund research, it does encourage monitoring and data collection for the purposes of outreach and extension (transferability). Does that mean that it is still acceptable to publish the results of the data collected?

Yes. Publishing the results of the data collected is an example of transferability.

23. Can you explain a bit more on the transferability requirement?

NRCS Alaska expects usable results for the investments made to CIG. Therefore, products resulting from CIG projects must be usable for NRCS Alaska field staff, or be incorporated in technical manuals and guidance documents, or provide the next step in resource conservation that will be adopted by the agricultural community.

24. Can a proposed project under the CIG state component be multi-state in scope?

No. Although eligible applicants from all 50 States, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of

25. How is the grant award distributed? Are funds dispersed up front (block grant) or are they reimbursed as services are rendered?

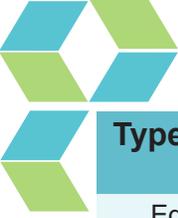
Funding is disbursed on a reimbursable basis. The grantee will submit completed deliverables along with a SF-270 Request for Reimbursement form.

26. Is there a minimum project size (area wide as oppose to statewide) that will be competitive under a state CIG?

Review and the selection of projects are size neutral. The applicant must clearly address the natural resource concern(s) identified in the announcement for program funding and outline clear deliverables and milestones for successful completion, and ensure the transferability of the innovation or method.

27. Can the proposed budget contain the purchase of equipment?

In general, CIG funds may be used to purchase equipment, providing the equipment is an integral part of the innovation or method that is being developed or tested. The table below identifies the applicable federal reference for specific allowable cost for each entity.



Type of Organization	Applicable Federal Cost Principle
Education Institution	2 CFR Part 220
Nonprofit Organization	2 CFR Part 230
State, Local, Indian Tribal Governments	2 CFR Part 225
Commercial Organizations	48 CFR Section 31.2

28. Is there any guidance on sub-contractors arrangements?

The grantee is responsible for all sub-awards and assuring the responsible parties follow the appropriate terms and conditions. All sub-awards are subject to the same federal requirements as the grantee. The grantee is responsible for assuring/monitoring that the sub-awards follow the requirements. The grantee will also be the one penalized if there are issues with sub-award actions. (7CFR 3015 and 7 CFR 3016)

29. Can a USDA ARS or other federal collaborator be listed as co-sponsor for the project?

Federal employees can ONLY serve as technical advisors on CIG projects. They cannot receive funds from CIG for technical assistance, travel, gift etc., nor can federal funds or services be used for match.

30. What involvement might a local NRCS office have in providing guidance for a potential CIG applicant?

CIG is a competitive grants process. NRCS personnel may provide technical and general guidance to potential applicants regarding environmental effects, transferability of the project, program information, and instruction for completing the appropriate forms. NRCS must not engage in the review or the development of the grant application.

31. Where can I find CIG funding opportunities?

Funding notices announcing the availability of funds for both the national and On Farm CIGs are published annually on www.grants.gov and on the NRCS CIG website:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/cig/>

Funding notices announcing the availability of funds for the Alaska State CIG is published annually on www.grants.gov and on the Alaska NRCS CIG website:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ak/programs/financial/cig/>

32. Who should I contact for additional information?

For more information, contact the Alaska CIG Program Manager:
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