

Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreements NFO Frequently Asked Questions

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General

Q: What support will USDA-NRCS be able to offer applicants during the application process?

A: USDA-NRCS is happy to answer any general, high-level inquiries that applicants may have regarding the application process. However, USDA is unable to offer specific guidance or advice on how to craft, structure or write one's proposal. In an effort to provide unbiased support to all those interested in the funding opportunity, USDA-NRCS will refrain from providing advice that cannot otherwise be obtained through the resources that have been made publicly available through the funding opportunity on Grants.gov. The Notice of Funding on Grants.gov should provide all information needed to complete an application.

Q: I am searching for the link to the FY2023 funding opportunity webinar and cannot find it. Where is it located?

A: The pre-recorded webinar and other information about this funding opportunity is available at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/partner-with-us/outreach-and-partnerships/equity-in-conservation-cooperative-agreements-2023>.

Q: Where can I get more help if I still have questions about the Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreements or application?

A: Questions can be submitted to FPAC.BC.GAD@USDA.GOV

Q: What are the legislative authorities guiding this program?

A: The authorizing statutes and regulations for this opportunity are the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act - Conservation Technical Assistance Program (16 U.S.C. §§ 590a-f and 590q), the Environmental Quality Incentives program (16 U.S.C. §§ 3839aa to 3839aa-8), the Conservation Stewardship Program (16 U.S.C. § 3839aa-21, et seq.), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (16 USC 3865, et seq).

Q: Who is the awarding agency for this opportunity?

A: USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the awarding agency for this agreement opportunity.

Q: What is the mission of NRCS Outreach and Partnerships Division?

A: The NRCS's Outreach and Partnerships Division provides leadership and funding to ensure that access to all programs and services is fair and equitable, with attention given to reaching historically underserved producers and underserved communities.

Q: What is the purpose of this cooperative agreement program?

A: The purpose of Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreements is to develop community-led conservation projects so that historically underserved producers and underserved communities can access NRCS programs and services and learn of potential career opportunities in agriculture, natural resources, and related sciences.

Q: What are the program priorities?

- **Addressing local natural resource issues.** Outreach activities should support an understanding of the NRCS planning process and program implementation and provide opportunities for historically underserved producers to meet their conservation needs.
- **Promoting potential career opportunities.** Outreach should promote career opportunities in conservation by recruiting students from underserved communities or who attend minority-serving institutions including Historically Black Colleges and Universities, 1862 Tribal Colleges and Universities, 1890 and 1994 Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Asian American/Pacific Islander Serving Institutions. Introduce the principles and benefits of natural resources conservation through education and build an understanding of careers in agriculture, natural resources conservation, and related employment that builds the future of sustainable farming by preparing a diverse, next generation of producers and conservationists.
- **Promoting the adoption of climate-smart conservation.** Outreach should assist historically underserved producers with understanding the support available through NRCS financial and technical assistance programs to help producers mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events through climate smart conservation practices.
- **Encouraging conservation in small-scale and urban agriculture.** Outreach should promote partnerships that improve NRCS's ability to connect with historically underserved producers and underserved communities on small acreage and increase their participation in NRCS conservation programs that meet the community's needs for sustainable food production.
- **Developing conservation leadership skills and opportunities.** Outreach should inform historically underserved producers and underserved communities of leadership programs that will develop community leaders able to help NRCS with identifying local natural resource issues and community conservation priorities, as well as advance NRCS's ability to incorporate underserved community priorities into its implementation of NRCS conservation programs.

Q: Is this a one-time funding opportunity or will there be future opportunities for this program?

A: This is the second funding opportunity for Equity in Conservation Outreach. Future opportunities will be dependent on availability of funding.

Q: Can we propose a national (or multi-regional or multi-state) project with several incubator partners who all will work with their local and state NRCS offices in carrying out the proposed program?

A: Yes, projects can include multiple states, and can be regional or national in scope.

Q. We have staff working in three states, can we do that under one cooperative agreement? If so, would that agreement be with one of the states NRCS offices? Or with NRCS-National Headquarters (NHQ)?

A: These agreements will be managed out of NRCS NHQ by Outreach and Partnerships Division staff, in collaboration with state NRCS staff. The Outreach and Partnerships Division will coordinate engagement with state NRCS staff.

Q. How much training would hired staff need? That is, is the expectation they would be delivering technical assistance for USDA programs (e.g., EQIP) and would need NRCS training? Or could the positions focus more on outreach activities and connecting farmers to resources be they state, federal or private?

A. It is the responsibility of the recipient organization to provide qualified staff to carry out the work plan they propose in their application. It is not expected that all projects be highly technical in nature; they may be more focused on outreach, depending on the goals of the project.

Q. The font size and required font style I am using for the template to complete narratives compared to the tables I am using has different font sizes compared to other sections. I am not sure how to handle this situation.

A. Use the required font size and style for the narrative that you add to the template. Each page must be numbered and have 1-inch margins, be formatted single spaced, and be typed in a standard typeface (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, Courier) with no smaller than 12-point font.

Q: Do you have examples of projects that have been funded under this opportunity?

A: Yes. Equity in Conservation award recipients from last year are on the website at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/partner-with-us/outreach-and-partnerships/equity-conservation-outreach-agreements-fiscal-year-2022>

Q: What is the estimated funding floor and ceiling for this opportunity?

A: The budget range for each agreement is \$100,000 to \$1,000,000.

Q: What is the time period for execution of the agreements?

A: Projects are expected to be completed within 1 to 3 years Applicants

should expect the life cycle to include start up activities, execution, and close out activities (final financial and program reports, accounting, etc.). Applicants are expected to plan accordingly in order to achieve project deliverables within the period specified.

Q: Can I subaward to another entity or to a partner?

A: Yes, subawards can be included in an applicant's budget as a line item under "Other" on the form SF-424A and should include a detailed subaward budget and scope in the Budget Narrative.

Q: What rules apply to subawards?

A: NRCS does not require subawards to be awarded through a competitive process. Subawards must be managed in accordance with <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-D/subject-group-ECFR031321e29ac5bbd/section-200.331>.

Q: Is a contractor more likely a business, where a sub awardee is more likely an organization?

A: The difference between a contractor and a sub awardee depends on the role the entity has in the project, rather than what type of entity they are.

A *contractor* provides goods and services within normal business operations. These goods and services are ancillary to the operation of the federal program. A contractor generally provides similar goods or services to many different purchasers, and normally operates in a competitive environment. This category includes consultants, subcontracts, etc. For example, an organization that provides similar business consulting services to many different types of entities may be a contractor.

A *subaward* is an award provided by a pass-through entity – in this case, the organization receiving the Equity in Conservation Outreach agreement – to a subrecipient for the subrecipient to carry out part of a federal award received by the pass-through entity. It does not include payments to a contractor or payments to an individual that is a beneficiary of a federal program. A subaward may be provided through any form of legal agreement, including an agreement that the pass-through entity considers a contract. For example, a nonprofit in your city, whose mission is directly aligned with your organization, and who is actively involved in planning and conducting outreach activities for your project, might be considered a subrecipient.

Target Area(s)

Q: What is the project location requirement for Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreement projects and can project activities take place outside of the United

States?

A: Projects must be located within the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

Q: Can a project be multistate?

A: Yes. A project could work in a single or multiple target area(s) in any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

Eligibility

The following entities in any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) are eligible to apply for ECO funding:

- Individual
- Native American tribal governments (federally recognized);
- Native American tribal governments (state recognized);
- Native American tribal organizations;
- Nonprofits having a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS (other than institutions of higher education);
- Nonprofits that do not have a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS (other than institutions of higher education);
- Nonprofit private institutions of higher education
- Public and state-controlled institutions of higher education
- Conservation districts

Q: Are soil and water conservation districts eligible for Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreement?

A: Yes, they are eligible as Conservation districts.

Q: Can Individuals apply?

A: Yes. Individuals are eligible to apply for the Equity in Conservation Outreach funding opportunity. However, the opportunity is not intended to provide funding for projects on an individual's farm.

Q: When the eligibility says "individual" can that mean my sole proprietor business?

A: No. Please see 2 CFR 23.110 (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-I/part->

[25/subpart-A/section-25.110](#)):

“Exceptions for individuals. None of the requirements in this part apply to an individual who applies for or receives Federal financial assistance as a natural person (i.e., unrelated to any business or nonprofit organization he or she may own or operate in his or her name).”

You may apply as an individual (a natural person, i.e., unrelated to any business or nonprofit organization that you may own or operate in your name), but for-profit businesses, including sole proprietorships, may not apply.

Q: If I am applying as an individual, do I apply as a consultant

A: You may apply as an individual (a natural person, i.e., unrelated to any business or nonprofit organization that you may own or operate in your name), but for-profit businesses, including sole proprietorships, may not apply

Q: I'm an individual; however, I have my EIN and UEI number. Does that make me eligible?

A: Yes, individuals are eligible to apply for this opportunity.

Q: I am a Hispanic/Veteran household and want to know if I meet the eligibility requirements.

A: Individuals are eligible to apply for this opportunity and would need to submit a proposal consistent with the purpose of the funding opportunity.

Q: I am a for-profit entity, am I eligible for this opportunity?

A: No. For-profit organizations and small businesses are not eligible to apply for the Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreement opportunity.

Q: Can Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) apply for this funding opportunity?

A: Yes, only if the IHE is public or non-profit.

Q: If an institution of higher learning or extension program is considered a non-profit 501(c)(3); can they apply as a non-profit?

A: Yes.

Q: As a non-profit applying for an Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreement Notice of Funding Opportunity, do I have to have an audited financial statement?

A: No.

Q: My non-profit has never been audited; are we eligible to apply as the lead organization?

A: Applicants are not required to have received an audit prior to applying for the Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreement Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO). However, as required in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations Part 200, Subpart F Audit Requirements, all U.S. states, local governments, Federally-recognized Indian tribal governments, and non-profit organizations expending \$750,000 USD or more in Federal award funds in a fiscal year must submit a Single Audit report for that year through the Federal Audit Clearinghouse's Internet Data Entry System.

Q: If we have received an audit, do we need to attach our Single Audit report to the application or provide documentation that it has been uploaded into the Federal Audit Clearinghouse?

A: No.

Q: The Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreements are available to entities and individuals for three-year projects that expand the delivery of conservation assistance to farmers who are beginning, limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers.

I would like clarification on whether farmers can apply directly or are these cooperative agreements only for a "middleman" type organization like a university or nonprofit organization? If the agreements are for "projects that expand delivery ...to farmers", to me this means farmers cannot apply directly. Could you please clarify?

A: Individuals are eligible to apply for funding through this opportunity for projects that are in alignment with the purpose and priorities. However, these funds are not intended for an individual producer or farmer to make improvements to their own land. The funding opportunity "is not" for individuals to make improvements to their personal operations for their sole use.

Q: Are specific organizations already identified to receive this funding?

A: No. All proposals will be evaluated for their alignment with the purpose of this NFO.

Q: If I am interested in working with Native American tribal seafood farmers in tidal lands, would this line of work be eligible for the project?

A: Questions related to the merits of a specific project cannot be addressed. We encourage you to review the purpose and priorities of this funding opportunity to determine if your proposal addresses these areas.

Q: We currently have a NRCS agreement. Does this prevent us from being able to receive

funding through the Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreements?

A: Entities with a current NRCS agreement are eligible to apply for this funding opportunity as long as the entities meet the eligibility requirements and purposes and priority of the NFO. If you did receive funding for a similar project, please describe the purpose of that project and how funds will be used differently under the current proposal.

Q: Is this opportunity only for rural applicants?

A: This opportunity is open to both rural and urban applicants. Please refer to the NFO for specific information about Small Scale and Urban Agriculture.

Q: I am unsure whether the term “applicant” on page nine of the NFO under section two of Eligibility Information refers to a single Project Investigator (PI), or to the institution itself (meaning it is a limited submission call and the university can only submit one proposal application). Can you please clarify?

A: An institution of higher education can only submit one proposal. The applicant would be the university/college, not the PI.

Q: Can you clarify for me whether the program is limited to one application per institution/organization? Or is the limitation just that an individual application may not be submitted more than once, but an institution can submit multiple distinct, different applications?

A: This funding opportunity is limited to one application per entity/organization.

Q: Can a fiscal agent/sponsor apply on my behalf?

A: Yes, the fiscal agent or sponsor can apply on your behalf.

Q: I understand that applicants may only submit one proposal. But may an applicant submit their own proposal and sponsor an application for someone else? There’s another entity that has reached out to me about support with an application. I would like to help them.

A: An entity may only submit one proposal under their Unique Entity Identifier and may not act as a pass-through entity for another organization if already receiving funds for their own project. However, you may partner with another organization to offer them assistance with their proposal, and you may be a sub-recipient of another entity’s award, if the work is substantially different. In this case, the other entity would submit the application on their own behalf, but you could for example contract or volunteer to provide grant-management assistance.

Q: If the applicant fits into multiple eligible applicant categories; how should the Proposal-Application Template be filled out to capture all categories?

A: The applicant may select all the eligible applicant categories that apply on the Proposal-Application Template. We recommend, at a minimum, selecting the applicant type that matches your SAM.gov registration.

Q: I think I heard that women are not included in NRCS's definition of Historically Underserved. I am a female beginning farmer. Am I excluded from applying, or from receiving NRCS benefits specifically targeting beginning farmers?

A: No. Although gender is not a sole determinant of eligibility, women who fall under one of the other categories (Beginning, Socially Disadvantaged, Veteran, or Limited Resource) would be eligible for NRCS funding and programs targeting those groups.

Q: Where can I find out more about who is considered "Underserved"? Are the groups described in the video and NFO the only groups considered underserved?

A: Two executive orders clarify the Executive Office of the President's definition of "Underserved Communities": EO 13985, "Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government", released January 20, 2021; and EO 14091, "Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government", released 02/22/2023.

Q: Can you clarify - for Veteran Farmer and Ranchers - is it required to ALSO have them fit into another category, like Beginning Farmer and Rancher?

A: For Farm Bill program eligibility purposes, NRCS defines a Veteran Farmer or Rancher as someone who has:

- Served in the Armed Forces (as defined in 38 U.S.C. § 101(10)), was released from service under conditions other than dishonorable, and
 - Has not operated a farm or ranch, or
 - Has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 years, or
 - Is a veteran (as defined in section 101 of that title) who has first obtained status as a veteran (as so defined) during the most recent 10-year period.

The term "Armed Forces" are the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Space Force, and Coast Guard, including the reserve components thereof.

A Veteran farmer or rancher who meets the criteria described above does not need to fit into another eligibility category.

Q: Are the recipients from the FY 2022 NFO conservation equity cooperative agreements eligible to apply for this opportunity?

A: Entities with a current NRCS agreement are eligible to apply for this funding opportunity if entities meet the eligibility requirements and purposes and priority of the NFO.

Budget

Q: What can I include in my budget?

A: Budget expenses can include personnel and fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractors, construction, other (including subawards and other direct costs), and indirect costs as described in the NFO. Refer to Appendix C: Budget Narrative Guidance.

Q: What should I include in the Budget Narrative?

A: In a separate narrative titled Budget Narrative or in the application template under budget section, justify all budget items and costs. Detail how the totals on the form SF 424A were determined and provide a description for every allowable cost line item. Descriptions should demonstrate a clear connection between the costs and the proposed project. For example, the narrative should describe the positions, related duties, rates, and the percentage of time to be spent on the project, the number of travel trips, rates, and the average cost per trip, the types of supplies to be purchased, the specific equipment to be purchased, contractor tasks, etc. This is described in greater detail in the NFO. Refer to Appendix C: Budget Narrative Guidance.

Q: Does the Budget Narrative have a specific page length?

A: No. The Notice of Funding Opportunity does not have a specified length for the Budget Narrative. Please provide enough detail for us to understand how you will be spending project funds, and how this relates to the purpose of your project.

Q: Does the page limit also include the Budget Narrative?

A: No. The page limitation only applies to the Project Narrative.

Q: Are there any mandatory costs not mentioned in the Notice of Funding Opportunity that should be added to the project proposal such as mandatory grantee training or gatherings?

A: No.

Q: What is the maximum allowable amount for supplies?

A: There is not a limit to the amount of Federal funding that can be used for supplies. If any single item equal or exceeds \$5,000 it is then considered equipment. Any item with a per unit cost of \$5,000 dollars or above and having a useful life of more than one year is considered equipment under [2 CFR § 200.33](#) and not a supply.

Q: Can a project budget include equipment like a tractor or greenhouse? Is there a maximum allowable amount for equipment?

A: Yes. The purchase, lease or rental of special purpose equipment (equipment whose use is directly related to the purpose of the project) is allowable and there is no maximum threshold. Note that the agency will provide disposition instructions, including sale or return, of any equipment whose depreciated value is over \$5,000 at the close of the project. Entities should carefully evaluate whether rental, lease, or purchase of equipment aligns best with their goals and makes best use of project funds.

Q: What type of equipment is considered “general purpose equipment”?

A: General purpose equipment means equipment which is not limited to research, medical, scientific or other technical activities under <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200> Examples include office equipment and furnishings, modular offices, telephone networks, information technology equipment and systems, air conditioning equipment, reproduction and printing equipment, and motor vehicle.

Q: Is it true that equipment must be leased or rented and not purchased?

A: No. An applicant may include the purchase of special purpose equipment in their project budget.

Q: How is "special purpose equipment" defined?

A: Special purpose equipment is defined as equipment that is used only for research, medical, scientific, or other technical activity under <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200>. This is understood to be equipment whose primary purpose specifically aligns with the mission of the agreement.

Q: Can an applicant rent equipment and lease land from a project partner?

A: Yes. An applicant can rent or lease equipment, building space, greenhouses, or land from a project partner and/or other. The cost of rental or lease can be included in an applicant’s budget as a line item under Contractual.

Q: Can I purchase land as a part of the grant?

A: No, the purchase of land would be considered a capital expenditure, which is unallowable through this funding opportunity.

Q: Can I use agreement funds to purchase food?

A: Food purchases should be limited to costs related to incidental food and refreshments for participants at workshops or trainings. Per diem costs associated with travel should be included under the Travel budget category. Federal funds may never be used to purchase alcohol.

Q: Is the creation of a new position for project coordination an allowable cost?

A: Agreement funds may be used for personnel whose time and effort can be specifically identified and easily and accurately traced to project activities.

Q: How do I determine where to input salary costs on the SF-424A?

A: For personnel salary costs, include the baseline salary figures and the estimates of time (as percentages) to be directly charged to the project. Salaries for personnel employed by the applicant would go on the Personnel line and all other labor costs from sources outside the organization would go under the Contractual section. Any associated fringe benefits should be separated from personnel costs on the SF- 424A

Q: What about fringe benefits?

A: Fringe benefits are allowable provided that the benefits are reasonable and are required by law, non-Federal entity-employee agreement, or an established policy of the non-Federal entity. § 200.431 Compensation - fringe benefits.

Q: What Are Indirect Costs?

A: Indirect costs are the expenses of doing business that are not easily identified with a particular grant, contract, project function, or activity, but are necessary for the general operation of the organization. A negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA) A 10% de minimis rate Sometimes called “facilities and administration” costs or “administrative costs.”

Common examples: office space rent, utilities, labor associated with general management of the organization.

Organizations must treat categories of cost consistently but have discretion whether to consider certain costs as direct or indirect

2 CFR Part 200 and USDA DR 2255-001 set out 2 ways for recipients to recover indirect costs:

Q: What rate should I use for indirect costs?

A: Refer to section D6 and D7 of this NFO for information related to indirect costs.

Q: How do we establish a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA)?

A: Generally speaking, an organization may establish a NICRA through the federal agency that provides the greatest percentage of their funding. This agency is considered the “cognizant federal agency.”

If the organization is unable to obtain a current negotiated rate from the cognizant agency, it may opt to use the de minimis cost rate, which is 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC). These costs include personnel, fringe benefits, travel, supplies, services, and the first \$25,000 of each subaward. Organizations without a current NICRA may use the de minimis rate for this funding opportunity.

Q: What are the Indirect Cost requirements/restrictions for Sub-awardees?

A: Indirect cost budget requests for recipients must either be based on the application of:
(1) their federally approved Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA).
(2) the 10% de minimis rate (10% of Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC)).

Indirect cost budget requests for subrecipients must either be based on the application of:
(1) their federally approved NICRA.
(2) the negotiated indirect cost rate between the pass-through entity (PTE) and the subrecipient; which can be based on a prior negotiated rate between a different PTE and the same subrecipient.
(3) the 10% de minimis rate (10% of MTDC). (Note - If a subrecipient has a federally approved NICRA, then they cannot be forced by the recipient to use the 10% de minimis rate.)

Q: Does a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) include essential overhead costs?

A: 2 CFR Section 200.56 defines indirect or facilities & administrative (F&A) costs as those costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved.

Allowable Cost

Q. Can we request funding for infrastructure and equipment for an underserved and socially disadvantaged community of farmers and landowners? The potential infrastructure and equipment costs might include:

- (1) construction of a barn to store large farming equipment and
- (2) building and equipping a commercial kitchen to process crops for sale and produce food to be distributed to the community in need

Since the project's requested funds would be for infrastructure and equipment (and not for research), would these costs be allowable?

A: These examples are not allowable costs. Costs for this funding opportunity are limited to costs associated with the outreach, education, and the delivery of conservation assistance in managing natural resources.

Q. Would the construction of a pole building on already owned land be an allowable use of funds?

A: The construction of a pole building would be considered a capital expenditure, which is unallowable through this funding opportunity.

Q: Would specialize equipment and supplies be considered allowable costs if used for implementation of Climate Smart Agriculture practices (or other conservation practices that align with the four project priority areas)? And implement conservation practices on farms be considered an eligible expense for this program?

A: If the equipment and supplies are necessary and directly related to the purpose and priorities of this NFO, such as for demonstration sites, then those costs would be allowable. However, these funds cannot be used to implement conservation practices on individual farms for the benefit of individual producers.

Q: Can funds be used for direct financial assistance to farmers, such as a cost-share or up-front grants?

A: Individuals are eligible to apply for funding through this opportunity for projects that are in alignment with the purpose and priorities. However, these funds are not intended for an individual producer or farmer to make improvements to their own land. The funding opportunity “is not” for individuals to make improvements to their personal operations for their sole use.

Matching Funds

Q: Are matching funds required?

A: There is no cost sharing or matching requirement for this opportunity. There is no advantage to applicants who voluntarily provide a match.

Q: While there are no cost sharing requirements, is preference given to proposals who can and are willing to provide a match?

A: There is no competitive advantage to applicants who voluntarily provide a match.

Q: I would like to know if the “Equity in Conservation Outreach” cooperative agreements will be a reimbursement agreement, and will the agreement be a matching agreement?

A: Recipients of agreements will be able to receive payments as advances, reimbursements, or both. This will be explained further to successful recipients of funding. There is no cost sharing or matching requirement for this opportunity.

Q: If an entity needs to secure match funding from "non-federal sources" would this opportunity be considered an eligible match source?

A: Funding through this opportunity is federal funding and is not eligible as match to other federal funds.

Grants.gov Information

Q: How do I find the Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreement funding opportunity on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)?

A: You can find and download the Notice of Funding Opportunity and related documents by going directly to Grants.gov and either 1) conduct a keyword search for “Equity in Conservation Outreach”; 2) enter the Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NRCS-NHQ- or 3) search the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.938.

Q: If I have problems with [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), will USDA-NRCS staff help me submit or accept my application package?

A: No. USDA-NRCS cannot support applicants regarding [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) accounts or provide applicants technical assistance with the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) system. The [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) technical support center can be reached at 1-800-518-4726 or support@Grants.gov.

Q: Do I have to register with Grants.gov before submitting an application through Grants.gov?

A: No, as applications will not be submitted through grants.gov. Applications for this opportunity will only be accepted via email to: sm.fpac.nrcs.dcwa2.opd_applications@usda.gov

Q: Who should I contact for help if I need assistance or have technical difficulties while trying to complete any of the below systems registration steps?

A: These systems are not owned or managed by USDA-NRCS. For direct assistance see contact information below:

1. IRS TIN/EIN concerns: Businesses: 1-800-829-4933 and Non-profit taxes: 1-877- 829-5500
2. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) issues: <https://sam.gov/content/duns-uei> or 866-606-8220
3. SAM.gov assistance and user guides: Go to the [Help tab](#) on the SAM.gov website

Q: Is there a cost to use the System for Award Management (SAM)?

A: No. SAM.gov is an official website of the U.S. government. There is no cost to use SAM. You can use the site for free to register to do business with the U.S. government; update or renew your entity registration; check status of an entity registration; and search for entity registration and exclusion records. More detailed information on how to use SAM is included on the SAM.gov Help page.

Q: Why does my organization need to register with SAM.gov?

A: Registering with the System for Award Management (SAM) is a required step in order for your organization to be able to apply for Federal grants and agreements. The registration process is free. To register for a SAM account, you must have either EIN or TIN. These numbers identify you as a taxpayer. A UEI, Unique Entity Identifier, will be generated as part of your SAM registration. If your organization previously registered in SAM and has received Federal grants or agreement in the past, check to make sure your organization's SAM account is active.

Q: How can I check if we are registered in SAM and have a UEI number? Is the UEI the same as a DUNS number?

A: For System for Award Management (SAM) questions and concerns about Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) contact: <https://sam.gov/content/duns-uei> or 866-606-8220
The unique entity identifier used across the federal government changed from the DUNS Number to the Unique Entity ID (generated by SAM.gov). If you previously had a DUNS number you will need to obtain a UEI from SAM.gov

Application

Q: What is the deadline date for application submission for 2023?

A: All proposals must be received by April 27, 2023 @ 11:59 pm EST. We strongly recommend submitting your proposal before the deadline.

Q: Will all the specifics for submitting an Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreement application be on the website?

A: All instructions and requirements for this funding opportunity are posted on Grants.gov under the Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NRCS-NHQ-ECO-23-NOFO0001222. Once you click on the opportunity, there are four tabs. The very first tab on the left is the "Synopsis" tab, which is an overall view and summary of the agreement opportunity. The main information is located under the "Related Documents" tab – where you can find and download the full Notice of Funding Opportunity with details and instructions along with the Frequently Asked Questions (PDF), General Terms and Conditions, supporting documents and forms, and other instructions. When ready to apply, complete your application and e-mail it, along with all attachments, to: sm.fpac.nrcs.dcwa2.opd_applications@usda.gov

Q: What do I need to include in my application for funding?

A: Please refer to the Notice of Funding Opportunity under the "Related Documents" tab in the Notice of Funding Opportunity at [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).

Q: Is the application downloadable before logging into Grants.Gov?

A: Yes. You do not need to be logged into [Grants.gov](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov) to find and download or for to NRCS website for the link <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/partner-with-us/outreach-and-partnerships/equity-in-conservation-cooperative-agreements-2023>

Q: Where can I find instructions for the Project Narrative?

A: Please refer to section D. Application and Submission Information of the Notice of Funding Opportunity in [Grants.gov](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov) for the content and format of the application submission.

Q: Does the NFO require specific headings in the Project Narrative?

A: Yes. Please use the required Project Narrative Template for your proposal.

Q: Is there a Project Narrative template required or provided?

A: The required proposal template has been provided in Appendix D of the NFO.

Q: Is it okay to use a 10-point font for tables, charts, and footnotes?

A: No. The text of the proposal must be single spaced and typed in a standard typeface (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, Courier) with no smaller than 12-point font and must not exceed 15 pages. We have established this maximum (15 pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. This page limit only applies to the Project Narrative.

Q: Will NRCS accept applications that do not follow the required format?

A: No. Proposals that fail to comply with the required content and format will not be considered for funding. Material exceeding stated page limits and/or formatting structure will not be considered. Incomplete and/or noncompliant proposals will not be considered.

Q: Clarify verbiage in NFO as it currently reads "Ensure that all required information listed in the template is included and does not exceed 15 pages of written text, excluding the budget details and narrative." on page 3 and again on page 10

A: This language should read: "Ensure that all required information listed in the template is included and does not exceed 15 pages of written text, excluding the budget details."

Your proposal narrative will need to be included in the 15-page limitation; however, your budget details do not count toward the 15-page limitation.

Q: Should applications be submitted through Grants.gov or they must be submitted strictly by the email address provided or both?

A: Applicants interested in applying to this NFO **must** submit their application through email to sm.fpac.nrcs.dcwa2.opd_applications@usda.gov; the agency will not accept applications submitted through any other method, including through Grants.gov, or to any other email address. All required documents must be attached in a single email, but do not need to be combined in one attachment. Please state in the subject line that you are applying to the FY 2023 Equity in Conservation Outreach NFO. Applicants are urged to submit early.

Q: Can I apply through the mail instead of electronically?

A: No. Only applications submitted through email will be considered.

Q: Will applications submitted after the deadline be reviewed?

A: Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered for funding.

Q: How will the agency know if my application was submitted on time?

A: NRCS will rely on the email system generated date and time receipt documentation to determine whether applications meet the submission deadline. You will also receive an email notification that your application was received.

Q: Can I apply for Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreement funding and also funding from a different USDA agency and/or Federal agency?

A: Yes. If the projects have specifically different objectives and are not funding the same deliverables, you may apply for multiple federal funding opportunities. Please check with the other Federal programs to ensure that you are not violating their terms and conditions.

Q: What role will NRCS versus the applicant play in developing the workplan for the hired staff? Would staff be stationed at NRCS offices, or would that responsibility belong to (the entity)?

A: The entity is responsible for developing the work plan, hiring staff, and providing office space for their employees.

Q: The NFO is noted as being “non-competitive.” I wanted to confirm that the NFO is open to new applicants or organizations that have not previously received NRCS funding. For other federal funding agencies, “non-competitive” indicates that awards will only be made to current awardees or be restricted to certain, pre-selected applicants. Could you please clarify this?

A: New applicants are welcome and encouraged to apply for this opportunity.

Q: Can you provide further information on what you mean by non-competitive? Are you anticipating being able to fund all the qualified applications that your agency receives?

A: NRCS has determined that noncompetitive awards under this NFO are in the best interest of the Government and necessary to the accomplishment of the goals of the program to provide outreach and technical assistance to historically underserved producers and underserved communities. It is the intent of the agency to fund proposals that meet all the requirements of the NFO and are in alignment with the purpose and priorities identified. If the number of qualified applications received exceeds the available funding, NRCS will prioritize applications based on factors such as entities' experience working with or developing relationships with the populations targeted in this project capacity, and qualifications to accomplish program goals as listed in the NFO.

Priority Consideration

Q: How would an applicant receive higher consideration?

A: Please refer to section E, Application Review Information, for details on criteria that will be utilized when reviewing proposals.

Evaluation and Notification

Q: What happens after I submit my application?

A: USDA-NRCS will conduct an administrative review of all applications to ensure they are eligible and have provided all required application elements. Eligible applications are those that meet the following requirements:

- Submitted by eligible applicants
- Meet all other eligibility criteria
- Submitted on or before the required deadline
- Are complete; and
- Meet required content, format and formatting structure.

Q: How will my application be reviewed?

A: After initial screening, applications that meet the administrative review requirements will be technically evaluated by a review panel. Panel members will review all applications submitted that pass the administrative review, using the evaluation criteria included in the NFO, section E.1, Review and Selection Process.

Q: How many agreements will be awarded?

A: There is no commitment by NRCS to make a specific number of awards.

Q: Will my application be funded at the amount requested?

A: As part of the technical review process, USDA will review applicants' budgets to ensure that all costs are reasonable, allowable and necessary. Applications selected and approved for funding with budgets that are realistic, well justified, and supported will likely be funded at the requested amounts. However, USDA reserves the right to fund applications at a lower amount if USDA determines that the project can be implemented with less funding; or at lesser amounts if Federal funding is not sufficient to fully fund all applications that merit awards. This is subject to availability of funds.

Q: What type of financial and progress reporting is required by awardees?

A: Please review the General Terms and Conditions for financial and performance report requirements posted under the "Related Documents" tab in the Notice of Funding Opportunity at [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).

Q: Will agreement funds be provided to awardees as a lump sum, or will they be reimbursed?

A: Awardees will not receive funding as a lump sum payment. Rather, recipients will receive either reimbursements or advances using a properly completed and executed SF-270, submitted with supporting documentation to either the ezFedGrants system or to the e-mail address specified in the agreement.

Q: When will the awards be made?

A: Per the NFO, we plan to notify applicants of their funding selection around May 30, 2023. However, this may take longer depending on the number of proposals that are received. After selections are made, Outreach and Partnerships Division (OPD) staff will work with selected applicants to develop the Statement of Work and other documents needed to finalize a cooperative agreement. For planning purposes, applicants can use the date of September 29, 2023, as the estimated start date for their projects.