



United States Department of Agriculture

# Introducing RCPP and the FY 24 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO)



April 9, 2024

Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

[nrcs.usda.gov/](https://nrcs.usda.gov/)

# RCPP Program Purpose (Summarized and Simplified!)

- Directs NRCS to enter into “**partnership agreements**” to address conservation needs (RCs/**Conservation Benefits**) on farm bill eligible lands via activities authorized in other USDA conservation programs.
- Partnership agreement defines roles of both partners: NRCS and a “lead partner”



# This presentation is a high cut overview of RCPP and the current Notice of Program Availability.

- Open from now through 7/2/24
- \$1.5 Billion available (yep Billion, with a B)
- \$100M targeted for Tribal projects
- Project maximum \$25M; minimum is \$250K
- Initial FA TA split is 75% FA and 25% TA\*
- FA can be used for\*\*:
  - Land Management or Rentals (think EQIP/CSP/short-term-CRP like)
  - US or Entity Held easements
  - Watershed/Infrastructure (think PL-566)



# How Can Tribes Participate: Partner, Producer or Both

Varying levels of participation require different levels of commitment and capacity:

- **Tribes can participate as producers, if a project exists in their area.**
  - More-or-less like participating in an EQIP, CSP, or easement contact.
- **Tribes can participate as lead or collaborating partner.**
  - Increasing demands fall on partners based on role in project, and project particulars.
  - Potential partners must consider what they can/would like to do:
    - Use partner staff and or contractors to meet (limited) project management responsibilities (including outcomes and contribution reporting)
    - Use partner and or contracts to deliver **technical assistance to support FA delivery** (TA-I)
    - Use partner and or contract for delivery of financial assistance to NRCS requirements (TA-I)
- **Tribes may be able to be both a producer beneficiary and a partner. More on that later.**



# Who Can Apply to Become a “Lead Partner”?

## From 7 CFR 1464.5 (b)

1. An agricultural or silvicultural producer association or other group of producers;
2. A State or unit of local government, including a conservation district;
3. **An Indian Tribe;**
4. A farmer cooperative;
5. An institution of higher education;
6. A water district, irrigation district, acequia, rural water district or association, or other organization with specific water delivery authority to producers on agricultural land;
7. A municipal water or wastewater treatment entity;
8. An organization or entity with an established history of working cooperatively with producers on agricultural land, as determined by the Secretary, to address -
  - i. Local conservation priorities related to agricultural production, wildlife habitat development, and NIPF management; or
  - ii. Critical watershed-scale soil erosion, water quality, sediment reduction, or other natural resource concerns;
9. An eligible entity as identified by NRCS pursuant to [7 CFR part 1468](#).



# So...what would we have to do...and what would we get?!

RCPP does not grant funds to partners or producers.

Rather partners **MUST**:

- **Propose** a Project: defining Project Area and Targeted Conservation Benefits
- **Collaborate** with NRCS on project delivery:
  - Roles and responsibilities vary base on proeject type (AFA vs. Classic)
- **Deliver** Contributions (FA and/or TA)
- **Report** on contributions and project outcomes

Partners **MAY**:

- **Earn** RCPP TA for providing eligible tasks (in support of FA delivery or project management)
- **Earn** FA for Delivering FA to NRCS requirements



# Project Type: RCPP Assistance Delivery Models

## Classic

- NRCS reimburses producers directly for Financial Assisted (FA) activities.
- NRCS often delivers a majority of Technical Assistance (TA) in support of producer contracts and easements.
- Partner's primary role is to provide outreach, measure impact, and deliver partner contributions to amplify NRCS funding.

## Alternative Funding Arrangements/Grants

- Partner installs practices for producers or reimburses producers for FA activities.
- Partner delivers all project TA in support of producer contracts and easements.
- NRCS supports limited to non-delegable tasks such as confirming the eligibility of producers and land, AGI verification, and compliance with NEPA/HEL/WC.



# RCPP Delivery Model:

- Both project types require compliance with program requirements AND other federal laws (NEPA, civil rights, etc.)
  - **RCPP funds can not pay for “partner administrative expenses” (and NFO limits admin related contributions), so partners must have solid cost data and be able to track and report on it.**
  - RCPP FA generally requires plans, designs prepared to satisfy practice standards, NPPH, NEM, NEPA, etc.
  - RCPP TA primarily available to support FA





# How Technical Assistance Works

## Implementation Technical Assistance (TA-I):

### Primary use of RCPP TA: must ensure FA delivered to spec

- Typically ~18-25% of the total federal share of the project.
- For support of FA activities such as planning, practice survey, layout, design, installation, and certification.
- Generally must “take work off” NRCS plate and meet NRCS specs.

## Enhancement Technical Assistance (TA-E) T

- Historically limited to no more than 7% of the total federal share of the project; “hard” limit removed from NFO.
- For project-wide support of the project including outreach, communications, outcomes assessment, and project management **if and only if NRCS determines enough TA-I exists to deliver FA to spec**



# What about partner contributions?

- RCPP's statute requires partners provide a significant portion of the overall costs of a project.
- **Current NFO does NOT require specific ratio of contributions to RCPP funding.**
- Contributions can be cash or in-kind.
- **Non-USDA** federal activity (cash or in-kind) potentially eligible as contribution. **Assistance provided by USDA is not.**



# What are the Eligible FA Activity?

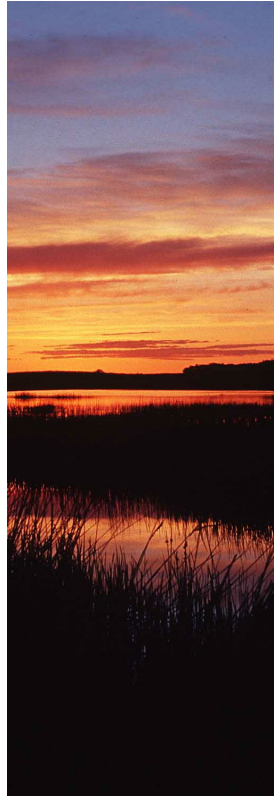
Activity Type	Similar Program Authorities
Land Management (Practice or Enhancement Based)	EQIP ACEP-WRE/HFRP - restoration component- PL-566 – land treatment activities
Rental (Actual cost forgone income, not an incentive)	CRP
US-Held Easement (Templated deeds)	ACEP-ALE/WRE & HFRP (easement acquisition component)
Entity-Held Easement (Templated Min. Deed Terms/Requirements)	ACEP-ALE/WRE & HFRP (easement acquisition component)
Watershed Project (PR&G+)	PL-566



# Environmental Responsibilities

- NRCS conservation practice standards form the environmental and scientific basis for the majority of NRCS land management work.
- NRCS can not delegate decision making with respect to environmental compliance (e.g. NEPA, Section 106)
- Use of practices streamlines NEPA compliance in many cases.
- To use truly innovate methods ie inconsistent with existing NRCS practices or approved watershed plan, NEPA analysis is required at the RCPP project level.

Note: An environmental assessment or environmental impact statement is likely to be required.



# RCPP Funding: Additional Considerations

## All Projects:

- RCPP FA only available for work that has been installed and meets specs e.g. rentals and pay for performance follow this same “complete work only” model.

## AFA vs. Classic

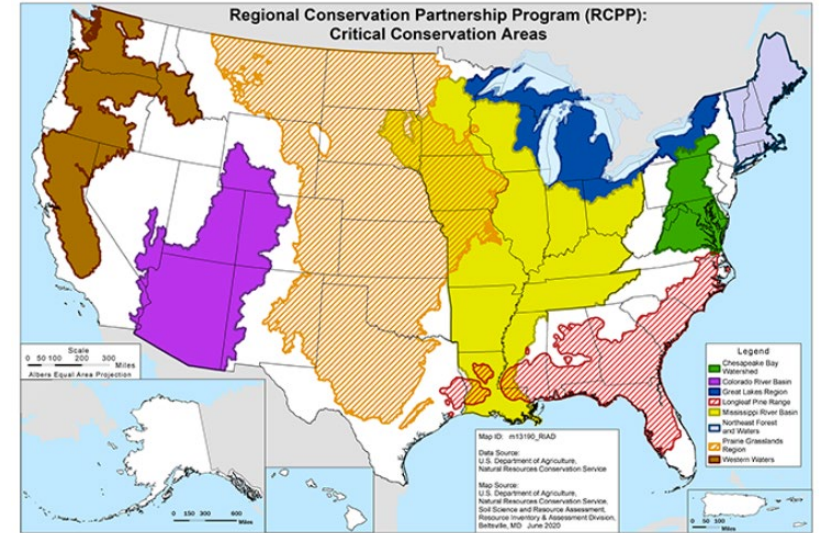
- All AFA project work must be completed and billed during project term.
- In Classic, some awards can outlive PPA

## IRA (~\$1.2 B) vs. Farm Bill (~300 M)

- IRA vs. FB funding determination made by NRCS based on partner proposal; **proposals determined to address IRA priorities will be offered IRA funding.**
- **IRA funds must be earned and paid out by September 2031 (affecting term of awards in both Classic and AFA projects)**

## State/Multi-State vs. Critical Conservation Areas

- 50/50 split required by Farm Bill
- **Some CCAs undersubscribed, current NFO may fund up to 65% CCA projects.**
- CCA project boundary’s may include all or part of a county, so long as CCA boundary includes at least a portion of each county in Project Area.



# Can a Partner (Tribal or otherwise) be both TA Provider and FA award beneficiary?

Sometimes. Proposal and partnership agreement must address how potential conflict of interest situations will be avoided.

If Partner will seek FA:

- Proposal must document intent to use FA on (eligible) partner controlled eligible lands.
- Proposal should document location and level of past planning/work on any sites where RCPP funded work on partner controlled lands is anticipated.
- Project negotiations and budgeting will require separation of TA and FA duties to prevent conflicts of interest e.g. no partner TA-I if partner will apply for FA...
- Specific requirements vary by FA activity and Project type (**basics on next slide**)



# Can a Partner (Tribal or otherwise) be both TA Provider and FA award beneficiary (cont'd)?

Activity Type	Classic	AFA
Land Management and Rental	Partner generally limited to either FA or TA, not both. If partner to seek FA, can't participate in application competitive ranking, etc.	Partner generally responsible for TA, so unless proposal calls out FA award to partner, no way to avoid conflict of interest (in ranking) if partner to seek FA; also may require more than usual NRCS TA-I in AFA planning, design etc.
US Held Easements	Partner rarely has TA role, FA generally allowed.	N.A.
Watersheds	Project negotiations must clearly document NRCS approvals at critical steps to prevent appearance of conflict e.g. plan, design, and installation must each have NRCS involvement.	Project negotiations must clearly document NRCS approvals at critical steps to prevent appearance of conflict e.g. plan, design, and installation must each have NRCS involvement.
Entity Held Easements	Partner generally allowed to earn FA; partner capacity to earn TA limited by FA award terms*	Partner generally allowed to earn FA; partner capacity to earn TA limited by FA award terms*



# Where should I send potentially interested partners and/or go from more info:

- **RCPP Website:**

- [www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/rcpp-regional-conservation-partnership-program](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/rcpp-regional-conservation-partnership-program)

- **Partner Webinars:**

**Registration Required!** General information for applicants submitting proposals; same info at each:

- **April 23, 2024 RCPP Applicant Outreach Webinar: 2pm to 4pm EDT**

**Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/e2f45f75-7ea4-410b-b1c9-567537cd2454@ed5b36e7-01ee-4ebc-867e-e03cfa0d4697>

- **May 30, 2024 RCPP Applicant Outreach Webinar: 2pm to 4pm EDT**

**Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/226dcb51-0b57-43b1-b340-95e535238713@ed5b36e7-01ee-4ebc-867e-e03cfa0d4697>





# What assistance is available to help interested tribes apply?

- **Every potential application (tribal or otherwise) should start with materials on web, and then**
- **Talk to lead state RCPP coordinator/STC (in detail!)**
- **Additionally, underserved partners interested in applying with a CCA can apply for (free!) proposal writing assistance via process posted on how to apply page (and communicated to coordinators via email on 4/4/2024):**
  - Basically a 1-page application submitted via email to the RCPP inbox.
  - Proposal development services to be provided via a contractor, under a NHQ (nationally) funded contract.
  - Applications for assistance will be processed on a first-come, first served basis.
  - Up to 20 applications will be supported based on current contract.



# Sample RCPP Project Designs: Progressively greater control and responsibility for partner with each successive option...

- 1) RCPP Classic, NRCS TA-I delivery (w or without Partner TA-E)
- 2) RCPP Classic, Shared TA-I delivery
- 3) RCPP Classic, Tribal Led FA delivery (with or without partner TA-I)
- 4) RCPP AFA, Partner led LM Practice Based
- 5) RCPP AFA, Partner led Watershed Infrastructure



# Sample RCPP Project Design 1: RCPP Classic, NRCS TA-I delivery (w or without Partner TA-E)

- **Most “Familiar” (EQIP, CSP, ACEP) like:**
  - Partner **proposal establishes**: 1) project area 2) resource concerns
  - Partner **responsible**: 1) reporting project outcomes and 2) delivering/reporting contributions
  - NRCS responsible: 1) ranking 2) contracting 3) planning, design, oversight of producer installation, and checkout of RCPP funded activities (LM, Rental, etc.)
  - **Partner does not need any special expertise with NRCS practices/planning procedures**

Simplest for partners, still establishes opportunity for **project specific contracts** throughout multi-year RCPP project life, from project budget (vs. wide-open competition and “regular” annual sign-ups)



# Sample RCPP Project Design 2: RCPP Classic, Negotiated TA-I delivery (w or without Partner TA-E)

- **Still pretty “Familiar” (EQIP, CSP, ACEP) like:**
  - Partner **proposal establishes**: 1) project area 2) resource concerns
  - Partner **responsible**: 1) reporting project outcomes and 2) delivering/reporting contributions 3) delivering negotiated TA per Supplemental Agreement (SA) terms.
  - NRCS responsible for determining how much TA to procure from partner.
  - **Partner will need expertise with NRCS practices/planning procedures if to delivery TA-I**

Greater responsibilities for partner(s)



# Sample RCPP Project Design 3: RCPP Classic, Partner led LM Practices

- **In RCPP Classic, most Land Mgt FA contracts MUST be between NRCS and a producer, however:**
  - In some tribal-led situations, NRCS can contract with a tribe directly for the tribe to deliver FA on behalf of eligible producers.
  - This is called a Type II Supplemental Agreement, and is similar to an EQIP AFA (but not quite like an RCPP AFA....)
  - **In this model (like elsewhere): RCPP funds can be used (only) to pay up to 100% of actual costs, excluding all partner administrative expenses.**

Greater responsibilities for partner(s)



# Sample RCPP Project Design 4: RCPP AFA, Partner led LM Practices per NRCS processes and standards

- **In RCPP AFA, partners interested in Land Mgt are strongly encouraged to:**
  - **Build RCPP funded FA delivery around NRCS practice standards and national planning procedures**, regardless of “payment units”/how partners actually plan to pay producers.
  - Absent the practice/NPPH procedures, anticipate project EA (anticipate 1-2 years of “pre-implementation” time, with limited TA per NFO.)
  - **Partner must proposed detailed processes to “mimic” all NRCS responsibilities: sign-ups, producer eligibility verification, TA coordination (to ensure NRCS specs met), FA coordination (to ensure specs met), checkout, etc.....**
  - Greater responsibilities for partner(s) but if reliant on practice standards, not necessary to complete detailed impact and environmental analysis of proposed activities...



# Sample RCPP Project Design 5:

## RCPP AFA, Watershed and/or Project EA Approach

- In RCPP AFA, partner interested in Land Mgt/Watersheds have option to propose new/novel activities...which will require a plan/Environmental Assessment or even more “pre-work...” :
  - RCPP is not a research program.
  - Impacts of any “novel” or “innovative” RCPP funded physical activities (FA) must be based in proven implementation techniques and fully analyzed for NEPA and (where water is involved) Principles Requirements, & Guidelines (PR&G) Anticipate 2+ years of “pre-implementation” time...with limited TA per NFO.
  - Partner must proposed detailed processes to “mimic” all NRCS responsibilities: sign-ups, producer eligibility verification, TA coordination (to ensure NRCS specs met), FA coordination (to ensure specs met), checkout, etc.....
  - Greater responsibilities for partner(s) but if reliant on practice standards, not necessary to complete detailed impact and environmental analysis of proposed activities...





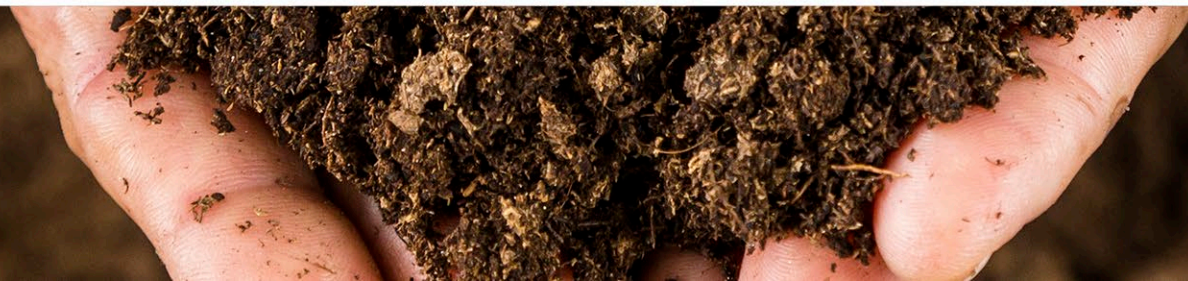
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# Questions

For more information please visit: [How to Apply](#)

For a list of State RCPP Coordinators please visit the [How to Apply](#) page and go to the section called "Resources for Submitting a Proposal".

National RCPP Team: [RCPP@usda.gov](mailto:RCPP@usda.gov)



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# Land Management

- **What** – Land treatment practices or enhancements, including restoration of land in easements, **based on NRCS practices**
- **TA Needs – Typically high TA needs ~25% of FA**
  - **Partner TA** – Partners knowledgeable in the NRCS planning process can potentially help with planning, design and installation of practices.
  - **NRCS TA** – At a minimum NRCS TA is needed for design approval, practice checkout, and quality control.
- **Contract Types**
  - **Producer Contracts** between NRCS & eligible producers/landowners.
  - **Supplemental Agreements** between NRCS & partners (AFA and specific eligible, but limited scenarios for Classic)\*



# Rental

- **What** – Payment for forgone income associated with a producer action completed to address a project resource concern
- **Limit** Cannot duplicate forgone income payments made through Land Management practices or easements...but can support deferral of ag activity preceding easement closing, or extend establishment period of a conservation practice within these limits.
- **TA Needs – Low TA needs**
  - **Partner TA** – Typically no opportunity for partner TA (in classic, limited in AFA)
- **Contract Types**
  - **Producer Contracts** between NRCS & eligible producers/landowners.
  - **Supplemental Agreements** with partners (AFA only).



# US-Held Easement (Classic Only)

- **Max Federal Share of Easement Acquisition Cost (Dependent on specifics of individual deed/appraisal)**

- **Very low TA needs <5% of FA**

- **Partner TA** – Partners may provide limited pre-application support. (all restoration via LM, so...no easement planning TA for easement itself or tied to USE budget itself).



# Entity-Held Easement

- **Max Federal Share of Easement Acquisition Cost – 75/50/25 (Dependent on inclusion of US Right of Enforcement & Benefit to HU Producers)**
- **TA Needs – Very low TA needs <5% of FA**
  - **Partner TA** – Partners may provide limited pre-application support if they will not be the entity holding the easement.\*



# Watershed Projects

- **What – Structural works to address watershed-scale issues**
- **TA Needs –**
  - High TA needs...but per NFO, typically not 100% RCPP fundable
  - **Partner TA** – Partner is responsible for most TA activities and use RCPP funding for most TA activities under Watershed Projects.
  - **NRCS TA** – Limited to approval authority for planning, design, and environmental responsibilities (including NEPA).

**Note:** Principles, Requirements, and Guidelines (PR&G) apply to most if not all RCPP Watershed activity. RCPP proposal must outline how they will be met during project term, and what if any waivers to NRCS Watershed Manual Processes will be potentially required should also be noted in proposal (requires familiarity with Watershed Manual to ensure potential for success during term of RCPP project.)

