

2024 RCPP INFORMATION WEBINAR SERIES

SESSION 4: RCPP CLASSIC
NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

MAY 23, 2024

**WE WILL START
PRESENTATION 2 MINUTES
AFTER THE HOUR**



AGENDA

- Announcements
- Application Assistance Extension
- Town Hall Webinar Series Overview
- Today's Topic: RCPP Classic Narrative Questions
 - Note: Very similar presentation focuses on AFA-narrative questions will be held June 6, 2024. Remember the FA delivery model is very different, so today's discussion is very focused on RCPP Classic.
- Q&A

RCPP Creating Your Proposal Webinar Series



Session 4 Survey

Please share your feedback
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ANNOUNCEMENTS



Application Assistance Extension

*The deadline to apply for
application assistance for projects
that support underserved entities in
critical conservation areas is now:*

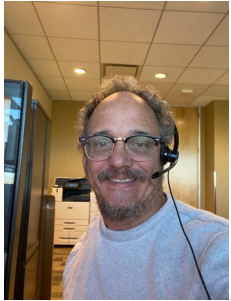
Friday, May 31, 2024

Interested partners to email application (from RCPP "How to Apply" webpage) to RCPP inbox: rcpp@usda.gov.



INTRODUCTIONS

USDA AND METAPHASE COLLEAGUES



SETH FIEDLER



MARIA COLLAZO



TAMMY TIMMS



ERIK BEARDSLEY



SARA HENDERSON



BRIE HEBRON



Your RCPP State Coordinator is the best resource for questions about RCPP.

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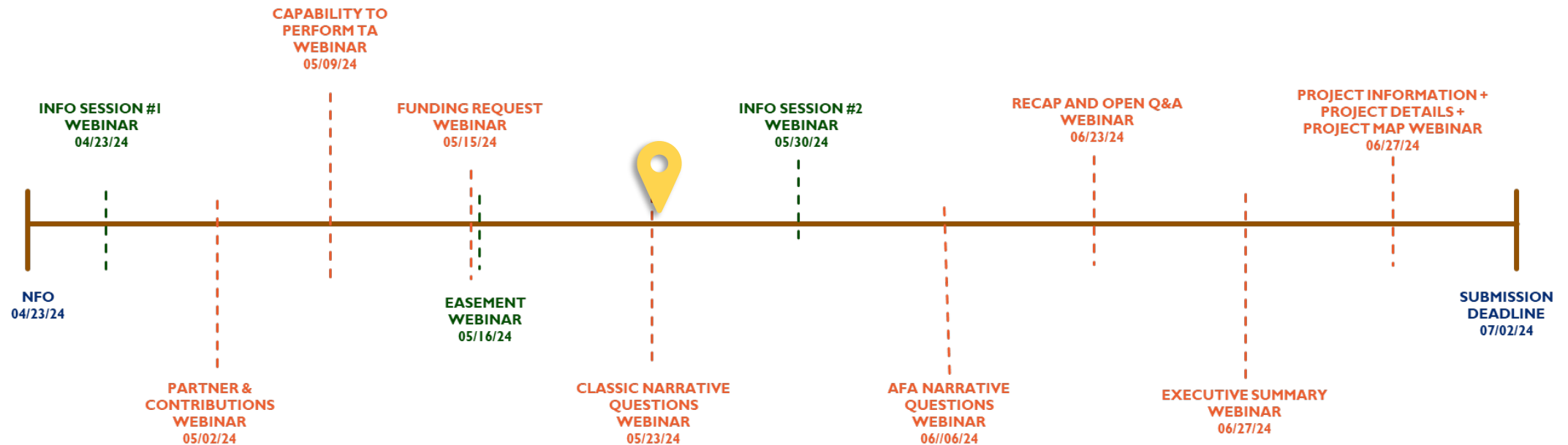
CREATING YOUR PROPOSAL WEBINAR SERIES

OVERVIEW

PROPOSAL SUPPORT WEBINARS

AN 8-WEEK SERIES TO CREATE YOUR PROPSAL

Each week applicants may choose to attend sessions in the Creating Your Proposal Webinar Series. Each webinar will focus on a specific portion of the proposal, followed by a Q&A session. Webinar topics flow in the suggested order for proposal work.



WHERE ARE YOU TODAY?

TOPICS COVERED AND REMINDERS

Decision Points

1. **CCA vs State/Multistate Application:** Deciding the type of application
2. **Classic vs Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA):** Deciding what type of funding pool will you apply for
3. **Partners & Contributions:** Deciding what contributions will support the project and who will provide them?
4. **Capacity to Perform Technical Assistance (TA):** Deciding who will perform technical assistance



Our focus today is on RCPP Classic narrative questions. There will be a separate [webinar for AFA narrative questions](#) on June 6, 2024.



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RCPP CLASSIC NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

OVERVIEW

CONSIDERATIONS FOR NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

SAMPLE RESPONSES TO NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

A REMINDER: RCCP PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated using three key components.

1. **Impact:** How will the project address resource concerns in the proposed geographic area?
2. **Partner Contributions:** How will contributions amplify the impact of NRCS funding?
3. **Partnership & Project Management:** How well does partner understand RCCP program requirements? What will partner expertise bring to project?



Successful RCCP applicants will:

- Bring an array of financial and technical capabilities to projects
- Demonstrate understanding of RCCP program requirements and document experience working effectively and collaboratively with agricultural producers and landowners
- Propose sustainable and measurable approaches to achieving compelling conservation outcomes



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RCPP CLASSIC NARRATIVE QUESTIONS OVERVIEW



There are 18 narrative questions included in the RCPP Classic Funding Application.

A list of these narrative questions are included in RCPP FY2024 Proposal Guide for Partners in Appendix C.

Applicants must use these questions to help tell explain how project will:

- Address a specific priority resource concern
- Delivery NRCS assistance per program requirements
- Amplify NRCS funds and activities
- Document NRCS and Partner TA-I roles, Partner TA-E asks
- Address ranking and evaluation criteria in NFO



The questions are listed in a different order in the RCPP FY2024 Proposal Guide for Partners than they appear in the RCPP portal application.

USING QUESTIONS TO TELL A STORY

The 18 RCPP Classic Narrative Questions that can be readily "grouped" into six topics:

- Resource Concerns and Conservation
- Financial Assistance (FA) Activities and Contract Types
- Project Area and Proposed Work
- Outcomes
- Partners and Contributions
- Outreach

Only the Lead Partner can "decide" on the correct response for their proposal.



Successful projects will:

- Present a compelling proposal without excessive repetition.
- Include thoroughly discussed conceptual responses to each question with NRCS to help identify areas of misalignment between partner "read" of question and NRCS "need" for specific types of information.
- Directly answer questions.



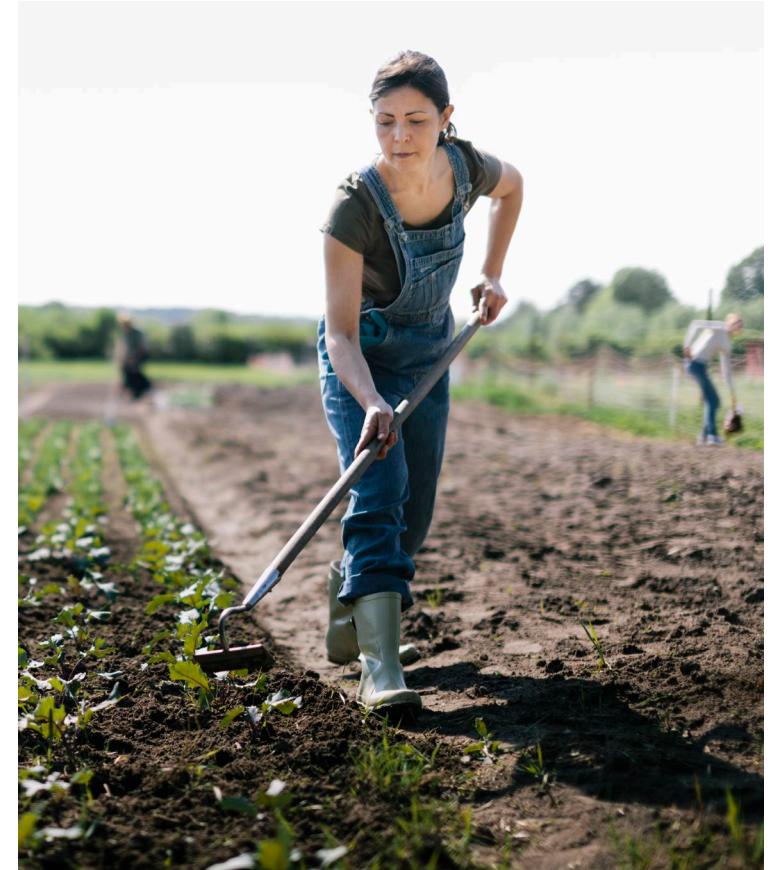
QUESTIONS ABOUT RESOURCE CONCERNS AND CONSERVATION

QUESTIONS NUMBERED ACCORDING TO THE FY 2024 PARTNER PROPOSAL GUIDE - APPENDIX C NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1. Describe the compelling need for the project and an overview of how the project will generate targeted conservation benefits. For proposals within a CCA please note how the project will address one or more of the CCA priority resource concerns.

QUESTION 5. Describe how this proposal will benefit and/or address one (or more) of the priority areas/considerations listed in the NFO.

QUESTION 15. Describe how this project will help agricultural and forest producers implement climate-smart conservation activities and/or otherwise address climate change mitigation and adaptation. If the project will utilize NRCS' climate smart and agricultural activities identify them and the metrics that will be used for measuring and reporting either a reduction in greenhouse gases or carbon sequestration.



RESOURCE CONCERNS AND CONSERVATION EXAMPLES: 1/3

QUESTION 1: Describe the compelling need for the project and an overview of how the project will generate targeted conservation benefits. For proposals within a CCA please note how the project will address one or more of the CCA priority resource concerns.



Responsive Answer

More than 150 years of intensive, mechanized agriculture has impaired soil health on project corn and soybean farms e.g., soil organic matter has declined from estimated {X}% in 1900 to {Y}% in 2022 {per source} Cover crops are proven to help reverse this trend, adding up to {X}% to soil organic content per year in typical project area soils. RCPP funds in this project will be used to support cover crop contracts with Farm Bill eligible producers. Project will rely on NRCS delivery for approximately 60% of FA and most TA-I. Partner FA contributions will reduce producer out-of-pocket FA expenses and support project management via a blend of contribution and NRCS funded TA-E.

Does not recognize meaning of RCPP terms (i.e., resource concerns).



Not a Responsive Answer

Project will help producers stay on the land.

Does not address the question and define an eligible resource concern.

Does not document model with potential for success.

Does not demonstrate scope (e.g., no limit on targeted lands).

RESOURCE CONCERNS AND CONSERVATION EXAMPLES: 2/3

QUESTION 5: Describe how this proposal will benefit and/or address one (or more) of the priority areas / considerations listed in the NFO.



Responsive Answer

Based on NRCS payment schedule rates for cover crop, a combination of RCPP FA and partner contribution FA should be able to support treatment of {X} acres of cropland, approximately 25% of the estimated eligible acres in project area, increasing annual cover crop to an estimate 45% of total acres in project area. The long-term goal set in {Areawide Plan X} is 50%. Additionally partner outreach, which will be structured around contribution-only demonstration plots and field days, has been proven {in prior partner project Y} to increase producer commitment to sustained cover crop plantings by more than 30%.



Not a Responsive Answer

Cover crops are good for soil organic matter. Increase in soil organic matter has been shown to do {Y}.

Does not relate to project area (how "fixed" will problem be after project).

Does not get beyond generalities.

Does not paint a compelling picture of a cohesive project model.

RESOURCE CONCERNS AND CONSERVATION EXAMPLES: 3/3

QUESTION 15: Describe how this project will help agricultural and forest producers implement climate-smart conservation activities and/or otherwise address climate change mitigation and adaptation. If the project will utilize NRCS' climate smart and agricultural activities identify them and the metrics that will be used for measuring and reporting either a reduction in greenhouse gases or carbon sequestration.



Responsive Answer

Partner will work closely with contracted producers to document net changes in agricultural inputs (including but not limited to fuel consumed and fertilizer applied). Fuel savings of up to {X}% {Y gallons/acre/year} are expected to provide corresponding reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Fertilizer reductions will ... {list benefits here}.



Not a Responsive Answer

Cover crop is included on NRCS climate smart commodity practice list and will be included in every producer contract in this project.

Does not get beyond generalities to "how" i.e., does not document partner understanding of issue or paint compelling picture of project benefits.

Does not relate to ag operations in project area (i.e., what will project change that will change local agriculture operations) .

QUESTIONS ABOUT FA ACTIVITIES AND CONTRACT TYPES

QUESTIONS NUMBERED ACCORDING TO THE FY 2024 PARTNER PROPOSAL GUIDE - APPENDIX C NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 2. Describe the RCPP financial assistance (FA) activity types (e.g. land management, rental, entity-held easements) in proposed project and document anticipated conservation benefits of each. Document rationale for each proposed FA contracting method (e.g. LM producer contracts vs. supplemental agreements; EHE due diligence via NRCS on-call, vs. SA), and relative benefits of each included contracting method.

QUESTION 16. In RCPP Classic, land management (LM) financial assistance (FA) funding is typically contracted by NRCS via program contracts directly with eligible producers, including landowners. If this project proposal anticipates partner delivery of RCPP funded LM FA, additional program requirements apply. If this project will include partner delivery of LM FA, document why partner delivery is being proposed and how associated program requirements, particularly limits on use of Type II Supplemental Agreement, will be addressed.



FA ACTIVITIES AND CONTRACT TYPES: EXAMPLES 1/2

QUESTION 2. Describe the RCPP financial assistance (FA) activity types (e.g. land management, rental, entity-held easements) in proposed project and document anticipated conservation benefits of each. Document rationale for each proposed FA contracting method (e.g. LM producer contracts vs. supplemental agreements; EHE due diligence via NRCS on-call, vs. SA), and relative benefits of each included contracting method.



Responsive Answer

FA in this project will be delivered exclusively via land management rental (LMR) program contracts, as this mechanism is well suited to securing direct producer involvement and buy-in to the targeted practice (cover crop).



Not a Responsive Answer

Partner will use a mix of land management funding and entity held easement funding to address project resource concerns.

Does not establish rationale for either FA activity.

Does not document limits on FA activity that might support project viability (e.g., Practices, deed types.

Does document eligible contracting mechanism(s).

FA ACTIVITIES AND CONTRACT TYPES: EXAMPLES 1/2

QUESTION 16. In RCPP Classic, land management (LM) financial assistance (FA) funding is typically contracted by NRCS via program contracts directly with eligible producers, including landowners. If this project proposal anticipates partner delivery of RCPP funded LM FA, additional program requirements apply. If this project will include partner delivery of LM FA, document why partner delivery is being proposed and how associated program requirements, particularly limits on use of Type II Supplemental Agreement, will be addressed.



Responsive Answer

Type II Supplemental Agreement(s) will be used to support irrigation related producer contracts in this project; Type II planned to complete land leveling for producers who rank out for LMR Irrigation Water Management (IWM) program contracts; short term access will be secured {by partner} from interested producers as part of partner application processing/bundling.



Not a Responsive Answer

Partner will hire contractors to deliver work and/or use our staff to install practices for producer benefit.

Does not document an eligible FA purpose supporting use of Type II satisfy regulatory requirements for partner delivery of FA in RCPP Classic.

Does address access or eligibility issues associated with producer land.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PROJECT AREA AND PROPOSED WORK

QUESTIONS NUMBERED ACCORDING TO THE FY 2024 PARTNER PROPOSAL GUIDE - APPENDIX C NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 3. Describe the rationale for the proposed project area boundary (map). Provide an estimated number of eligible producers in the project area and document the percentage of those producers expected to receive direct benefits from project.

QUESTION 9. Does the proposal include prioritizing project funding for particular locations or producers based on a scientific assessment or research-based plan? If so, please describe how the approach will be implemented within the RCPP classic model.

QUESTION 17. Identify any specific work, properties, or beneficiaries which the lead partner has determined would further objectives of this RCPP project (i.e. list specific parcels targeted for easements, participants' lands targeted for land management, rental or watershed activity)? Listed items will be considered "pre-selections," Note: inclusion here does not guarantee an FA award but may obviate the need for the need for further competition. Additionally, if project partners, members or their relatives own any of these properties, document those relationships here.



PROJECT AREA AND PROPOSED WORK: EXAMPLES 1/3

QUESTION 3. Describe the rationale for the proposed project area boundary (map). Provide an estimated number of eligible producers in the project area and document the percentage of those producers expected to receive direct benefits from project.



Responsive Answer

Project area boundary established in recognition of 1) common resource issues and 2) historic producer participation rates. (We use EQIP, which typically receives applications from less than 5% of eligible producers apply in any given year.) Our analysis suggests that even if historically how participation rates continue into this project, available funding should be sufficient to address issues on 25% of eligible acres in the project area {managed by similar % of producers} over five-year project.



Not a Responsive Answer

Project area is the state of Iowa, which faces widespread resource concern issues

Does not limit project area so as to establish potential to significant address a shared issue in a share geography.

Does not establish a realistic treatment goal.

PROJECT AREA AND PROPOSED WORK: EXAMPLES 2/3

QUESTION 9. Does the proposal include prioritizing project funding for particular locations or producers based on a scientific assessment or research-based plan? If so, please describe how the approach will be implemented within the RCPP classic model.



Responsive Answer

No. Partner will defer to NRCS ranking processes – no special tool or plans are available to refine ranking.



Not a Responsive Answer

We will use the Iowa state wildlife plan to select parcels.

Does not recognize how CART (the tool NRCS uses to do rankings in Classic) works.

Does not recognize limits on partner influence on ranking in RCPP classic (limited to 25% of CART program points).

PROJECT AREA AND PROPOSED WORK: EXAMPLES 3/3

QUESTION 17. Identify any specific work, properties, or beneficiaries which the lead partner has determined would further objectives of this RCPP project (i.e. list specific parcels targeted for easements, participants' lands targeted for land management, rental or watershed activity)? Listed items will be considered "pre-selections," Note: inclusion here does not guarantee an FA award but may obviate the need for the need for further competition. Additionally, if project partners, members or their relatives own any of these properties, document those relationships here.



Responsive Answer

Project's EHE budget is targeted for two parcels which, if determined eligible by NRCS, will be appraised and enrolled in the first year of project. If either easement parcel is determined ineligible, EHE funds will be moved to Land Management (LM) budget via PPA amendment. LM funding will include up to \$300,000 for restoration work on EHE parcels, which will be managed as a discrete LM ranking tool from general LM sign-up, where balance of FA will be delivered.

Does not address prioritization between seven parcels or address other funds in project



Not a Responsive Answer

The {X} plan identifies seven target parcels.

Does not document specific eligible work / locations.

Does not document Type plan if not eligible.

QUESTIONS ABOUT OUTCOMES

QUESTIONS NUMBERED ACCORDING TO THE FY 2024 PARTNER PROPOSAL GUIDE - APPENDIX C NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 4. Describe proposed approach for evaluating the success of the project, including specific environmental outcomes. If applicable, also include social and economic outcomes that will be modelled, surveyed, or measured.

QUESTION 8. Describe why the desired implementation approach will most effectively and efficiently achieve conservation outcomes. For example, will this project utilize covered program templates, processes, or authorities? If so which ones? Conversely, will the project benefit from inclusion of new/flexible elements of RCPP (e.g. an entity held wetland easement, or an innovative new practice)? If so, what, if any coordination has been completed with NRCS to minimize delays associated with proposed flexible project elements?



OUTCOMES EXAMPLES : 1/2

QUESTION 4. Describe proposed approach for evaluating the success of the project, including specific environmental outcomes. If applicable, also include social and economic outcomes that will be modelled, surveyed, or measured.



Responsive Answer

Partner will randomly select 10 LMR contract awardees whose contracts must include edge of field monitoring for five years; IWM and Nutrient Management practices annually for three years, starting after first year (when only edge-of-field monitoring will be scheduled). Partner will establish a baseline for each producer's fertilizer use per {document process}. Partner will compare and contract these baseline data with edge-of-field monitoring data collected by producer to help 1) inform producer management and 2) support project wide nutrient modelling to help identify soils and operational characteristics most conducive to significant nutrient reduction/surface water quality enhancement opportunities.



Not a Responsive Answer

Partner will model reduced {N,P,K} applications based on the {X} model, and installed practices.

Does not recognize document the process modelling will follow.

Does not document benefit / practical implications modelling.

OUTCOMES EXAMPLES : 2/2

QUESTION 8. Describe why the desired implementation approach will most effectively and efficiently achieve conservation outcomes. For example, will this project utilize covered program templates, processes, or authorities? If so which ones? Conversely, will the project benefit from inclusion of new/flexible elements of RCPP (e.g. an entity held wetland easement, or an innovative new practice)? If so, what, if any coordination has been completed with NRCS to minimize delays associated with proposed flexible project elements?



Responsive Answer

The project will use ranking to prioritize specific conservation practices {list here} with known benefits to {project resource concern}. The project area has been specifically tailored in recognition of both common resource problems, and documented producer demand {source}, so as to optimize meaningful reduction in (resource concern issue) during brief project life.



Not a Responsive Answer

Partner will develop a pay for performance model that will incentivize producer participation.

Does not present a compelling process (process does not exist and is not clearly documented in proposal).

Does not document benefit/practical implications of modelling.

Does not document extent of issue or solution i.e., asserts, but does not document expected producer engagement or scope of impact on issue.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTNERS & CONTRIBUTIONS

QUESTIONS NUMBERED ACCORDING TO THE FY 2024 PARTNER PROPOSAL GUIDE - APPENDIX C NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 6. Describe the rationale for the partners included in this proposal. Highlight partners' ability to provide resources and/or expertise to support project objectives. Highlight any partner(s) with established producer relationships and provide examples of how they've contributed to similar successful projects. Describe lead partner's experience managing and tracking the delivery of third-party contributions (if included in the proposal).

QUESTION 7. Describe how partner contributions add value to the proposed project to leverage and multiply the benefits of the potential committed RCPP funding e.g. cash payments to producers based on NRCS typical costs to reduce producer out of pocket expenses, NRCS certified planner to provide planning, design and checkout assistance, certified eligible entity under ACEP-ALE for ALE like proposals, scientific modeling capacity.

QUESTION 18. Describe the lead partner's experience and current staff expertise managing Federal funding awards or similar conservation projects, including the execution of deliverables and engagement with agricultural producers including private landowners to get conservation on the ground.



PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTIONS EXAMPLES: 1/3

QUESTION 7. Describe how partner contributions add value to the proposed project to leverage and multiply the benefits of the potential committed RCPP funding e.g. cash payments to producers based on NRCS typical costs to reduce producer out of pocket expenses, NRCS certified planner to provide planning, design and checkout assistance, certified eligible entity under ACEP-ALE for ALE like proposals, scientific modeling capacity.



Responsive Answer

Partner will provide FA contributions to producers selected for land management award following certification and checkout of contracted activities. Additionally, partner will provide all TA-E as contribution, and is prepared to hire commercial contractors (as needed) to support TA-I based on NRCS field office staff capacity, and specific demands {e.g. planning engineering etc.} associated with producer contracts as the are selected and awarded.



Not a Responsive Answer

Partner will waive indirect costs up to \$X.

Does not document partner understanding on NFO based caps on indirect cost contributions (only possible on TA provided, up to NICRA/10%).

Does not present benefit of contributions.

PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTIONS EXAMPLES: 2/3

QUESTION 6. Describe the rationale for the partners included in this proposal. Highlight partners' ability to provide resources and/or expertise to support project objectives. Highlight any partner(s) with established producer relationships and provide examples of how they've contributed to similar successful projects. Describe lead partner's experience managing and tracking the delivery of third-party contributions (if included in the proposal).



Responsive Answer

Lead Partner is experienced in managing large federal awards {list projects, their duration, federal and total budgets} and will coordinate project. The Lead Partner and collaborating partners [list] have planners (4) and engineers (2) on staff, each with a minimum of 4 years experience planning and designed to NRCS land mgt practice requirements, including on {list NRCS projects}. Collaborating partner {Y} has foresters on staff, who though not versed in implementation per NRCS specs, have more than 30 years combined forest management planning and will support forest inventories.



Not a Responsive Answer

Partners have lots of experience doing federal projects. Partner {Y} will support outcomes assessment.

Does not document specific partner roles.

Does not document partner qualifications.

PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTIONS EXAMPLES: 3/3

QUESTION 18. Describe the lead partner's experience and current staff expertise managing Federal funding awards or similar conservation projects, including the execution of deliverables and engagement with agricultural producers including private landowners to get conservation on the ground.



Responsive Answer

Lead Partner has completed 2 and continues to manage 3 comparable RCPP / climate smart projects {list name, lead state}. Additionally, lead has since establishment in {X}, managed more than {X} millions dollars in other federal awards, and delivered \${Y} in "require match." For {X} total programs.



Not a Responsive Answer

Partner has been in existence since and has lots of experience in {Y}.

Does not quantify experience.

Does not relate experience to RCPP or similar conservation programs where appropriate, or "own" differences/explain relationships.

QUESTIONS ABOUT OUTREACH

QUESTIONS NUMBERED ACCORDING TO THE FY 2024 PARTNER PROPOSAL GUIDE - APPENDIX C NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 10. Describe proposed producer outreach activities designed to identify, inform, and enroll eligible producers and entities in RCPP contract activities.

QUESTION 11. Describe partner capacity to identify agricultural producers who have not participated in NRCS programs and outreach plan to encourage their participation in the proposed project.



PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTIONS EXAMPLES: 1/2

QUESTION 10. Describe proposed producer outreach activities designed to identify, inform, and enroll eligible producers and entities in RCPP contract activities.



Responsive Answer

Lead Partner has completed a preliminary analysis of tracts in project area based on assessor's records and will contact all landowners in project area based on county records. Additionally, partners have identified seven venues for annual outreach events {county fair, cooperative meetings, SWCD meetings, etc.} and will engage with producers at each. Additionally, partners will collaborate with FSA and NRCS and local news media to get word out to eligible producers about sign-ups out. Project will NOT rely on partner led sign-ups; as RCPP Classic, we do not see significant advantage to a second application process.



Not a Responsive Answer

Partner will work to identify producers in area and publish announcements in local media.

Does not document any local specifics.

Does not establish any clear path forward.



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PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTIONS EXAMPLES: 2/2

QUESTION 11. Describe partner capacity to identify agricultural producers who have not participated in NRCS programs and outreach plan to encourage their participation in the proposed project.



Responsive Answer

Lead Partner has staff in each county within project area; staff are locally based, and familiar with producers in project area, and their conservation needs. Partner will compare published lists of EQIP producer beneficiaries to {Big Daddy Seed company customer list} to identify producers who've not previously participated in EQIP (the most LMR like FA activity in RCPP). "Missed" producers will be cross referenced with county GIS records for owners of tracts larger than 40 acres to identify commercially viable corn/soybean sized parcels.



Not a Responsive Answer

Partner will host booths at fair and local events, etc.

Does not document any local specifics.

Does not establish any clear path forward.

RESOURCES

Support for Your Proposal

- [Your State Coordinator](#)
- [RCPP FY2024 Proposal Guide for Partners](#)

Tools for Working With Your State Coordinator

- [RCPP State Conservationist Questionnaire](#)



Your [RCPP State Coordinator](#) is the best resource for questions about RCPP.

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Q&A

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