



United States Department of Agriculture

Delivering Results for Agriculture and Conservation



Conservation Innovation Grants



*March 2020
CIG Orientation*



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Resources
Conservation
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nrcs.usda.gov/



United States Department of Agriculture

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/cig/?cid=stelprdb1045412>



Conservation Innovation Grants

New Grantee Guide

March 2020 Edition



Starting your Project



If you have a fully executed agreement signed by both parties



If you received a pre-award cost letter, do not exceed allowable costs identified in the letter



If you do not yet have a fully executed agreement signed by both parties



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Post Award Management



- Who to contact and when?
- Match
- Payment requests
- Reporting – both financial and technical
- Evaluations
- Agreement modifications
- Environmental compliance and cultural resources
- Communicating project success



Who's who at NRCS



Technical Contact:

Varies

Program Managers:

TJ Wilson - On-Farm Trials

Caroline Sherony - Conservation Innovation Grants

Administrative Contact

A Grants Specialist from the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) business center.

Ann Mulvaney; Jose Berna; Jocelyn Pagan; Brian Queen; Angella Greaves



Who's who at NRCS



When in doubt, email:

NRCSCIG@USDA.GOV



NRCS Technical Contacts



Job of NRCS Technical Contact is to provide technical oversight, to ensure project objectives are being met and the project is meeting milestones.

Main NRCS Project contact

- ☼ NRCS subject matter experts
- ☼ Detailed review of progress reports
- ☼ Keep in regular contact with grantees
- ☼ “Gateway” to NRCS and USDA
- ☼ Approve project changes
- ☼ Project evaluation at conclusion
- ☼ Potential for site visits and routine calls



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Program Manager and National CIG Staff

1st line of support for administrative questions

- General review of all technical and financial (SF-425) reports
- Approve payment requests
- Initiate all agreement amendments
- Manage program communications
- Keep in regular contact with technical contact

CIG Classic Program Manager: Caroline Sherony

OFT Program Manager: TJ Wilson

General email: NRCSCIG@USDA.GOV

FPAC-BC Administrative Contact

Not first line of contact

- Listed on your grant agreement
- Processes amendments, budget changes, extensions, changes in scope, etc.
- Review payment requests and manage requests in ezFedGrants.



Match



- * Federal spending and match spending are reported on differently.
- * Well documented, auditable records, though, need to be maintained on both.
- * Match is reported on in the payment requests (SF-270) and in the federal financial reports (SF-425).
- * Details on how you spent match, though, are not reported on in the SF-270 supporting documentation and the SF-425.
- * Progress reports should contain details, though of both match and federal spending, including if there are minor budget adjustments.
- * Solid documentation, though, needs to be maintained on all of your match (receipts, logs of volunteer hours, etc.).
- * 5% of our projects annually are selected for a match audit.



Payment Requests

– submitting claims to ezFedGrants

- ✿ NRCS completes payment requests within 30 days of submission
- ✿ Grantees can make monthly or quarterly payment requests
- ✿ Generally handled on a reimbursable basis
- ✿ Advances are permissible, but must be requested from CIG program staff in advance
 - ✿ all advances must be liquidated 30 days after they are provided, there is no flexibility on this deadline



Payment Requests

– submitting claims to ezFedGrants

* Requested through ezFedGrants using an electronic version of the SF-270 form

- Requires supporting documentation to give more details on the amounts in SF-270 (auditable documentation must be maintained by grantee)
- SF-270 should also reflect match contribution. Work with your accounting office to ensure this is reflected. May be returned if not reflected or amount is not additive.
- SF-270 instructions available on the CIG grantee page

 ** ezFedGrants Help Desk: ezfedgrants@usda.gov

Payment Requests

– Supporting Documentation



- ✿ Details need to be given beyond the major line items.
(Major line items are: Personnel, Fringe, Travel, Supplies, Contractual, Equipment, Other, Indirect)
 - ✿ E.g. Personnel should give individuals names and the amount charged for their time.
 - ✿ E.g. Travel should include dates, locations, who traveled, and if money was for lodging, per diem, or transportation
 - ✿ Supplies should include major categories and total amounts spent, such as farm supplies, lab supplies, sampling supplies, etc.
- ✿ We do not need copies of receipts!
- ✿ In general ½ - 1 page will be enough information

Reporting Requirements

Two types – Technical and Financial

During active award:

- ➔ Progress Reports – every six months
- ➔ Financial Reports – every year

Project Closeout:

- ➔ Final Technical Report – End of project
- ➔ Final Financial Report – End of project



Reporting Requirements--Progress

- 🦋 Progress report template found on the Grantee page of the CIG website. **Please use the template on our website.**
- 🦋 Submit through ezFedGrants as an attachment to the reporting shell file
 - 🦋 Submitted through nrcscig@usda.gov if technical issues arise
- 🦋 Reporting activity period is every six months.
 - 🦋 E.g. a project which starts April 15th will have a reporting activity period between April 15th to October 14th. The first report will be due on November 14th.

Reporting Requirements--Progress

-  Submit within 30 days of the end of the reporting activity period.
-  Content: document progress toward objectives and describe any deliverables, challenges, delays, early results, list of EQIP-eligible producers engaged, etc.

Financial Reporting

-Standard Federal (SF) form 425



- Fill SF-425 form out directly in ezFedGrant
- Sample and instructions available on the CIG grantee page
- Due annually from start date
- Critically important to report on matching funds. If matching funds are not reported on, would flag your project for a matching funds audit.
- Grantees are obligated to maintain auditable records of matching fund expenditures
- Please email us if you have questions on how to fill in the form.



Financial Reporting – SF 425



Section 10, “Cumulative Transactions”, it is most important to fill in lines F, G, H, I, J, and K

Federal Expenditures and Unobligated Balance:

(Use items d - o for single grant reporting)

d. Total Federal Funds Authorized

\$343,107.00

e. Expenditures (Federal Share)

\$95,825.47

f. Unliquidated Obligation (Federal Share)

\$0.00

g. Total Federal share (sum of e and f)

\$95,825.47

h. Unobligated balance of Federal Funds (line d minus g)

\$247,281.53

Recipient Share:

i. Total recipient share required

\$343,117.00

j. Recipient share of expenditures

\$70,557.82

k. Remaining Share (Share to be provided)

\$272,559.18



Project Reporting—Final Report

Final Reports are a public facing document summary about your project. There are a few critical elements to this document:

- Written in plain language
- Include background/rationale for the project
- Summarizes project objectives, results, and deliverables
- Methods and project challenges are briefly addressed
- A clear description of the project's impact on conservation



Project Evaluations



At the end of a project, NRCS will do an internal evaluation to see if any of the technologies can be incorporated into NRCS standards.

- What is the value and impact of the project to NRCS and conservation more broadly?
- How can NRCS incorporate these results into NRCS activities?
- Is this technology appropriate for another State or Region of the United States?
- Are there lessons learned for NRCS or the CIG program?
- Are there communications opportunities associated with the project results?



Agreement Modifications



Unexpected challenges can arise, requiring official changes to the approved agreement.

Common amendments to agreements:

- No Cost Extensions
- Budget Changes
- Change in scope of work
- Change in key personnel

All are submitted to NRCSCIG@usda.gov.



Agreement Modifications



No Cost Extensions (NCE)

- ✿ The first NCE is easy to get
 - ✿ Recommend request a full year since you can always end earlier than the written end date
- ✿ A second NCE is difficult to get approved, requiring very unique situations.

Budget Changes

- ✿ Only required if the total change between major line items over the whole budget is 10% or greater.
- ✿ Changes under 10% you should still notify the technical contact and report on these changes in your progress reports

Agreement Modifications



Changes in scope of work

- ✿ Changes in objectives, methods, or deliverables need to be discussed thorough with your NRCS technical contact before a request is submitted. These types of changes should be rare.

Changes in Key Personnel

- ✿ If the recipient program contact, recipient administrative contact, or the project director changes, a change request should be completed.
- ✿ No other information needs to be provided, but the qualifications of the new individual should be discussed with the NRCS technical contact before submitting the paperwork.
- ✿ Other key personnel changes should be described in the progress report.



Environmental Compliance and Cultural Resources



- **National Environmental Policy Act**
- **National Historic Preservation Act**
- **Endangered Species Act**
- **Compliance activities must take place prior to any ground disturbance as part of CIG projects.**

Environmental Compliance and Cultural Resources

CIG Classic

Project leads will communicate with NRCS State office staff.

Projects with ground disturbance activities:

- ✿ NRCS staff must complete at least a project-level Environmental Evaluation (EE) before project commences
- ✿ EEs are completed by NRCS state office staff in the relevant project states;
- ✿ The state office staff may, in rare cases, request that the grantee prepare an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement; and
- ✿ The State Office will inform the Grantee when compliance efforts are complete and project work may begin.

Public Affairs and Communicating Project Success

Two NRCS priorities:

- 1) Disseminate CIG project information and successes, and
- 2) Maintain support for the program



Keep NRCS informed of:

-  press releases, publications, or media events that highlight your projects success.
-  any communications activities for which you'd like NRCS's help— leadership quotes, amplification, etc.

USDA uses twitter, blogs, and our website to amplify the success of USDA projects. In addition, we publish a semi-annual CIG Newsletter. Let us leverage these resources for you!

NOTE: Always be sure to give NRCS credit. Our logo is on CIG awardee resource page.

Improving CI&G Communications



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Critical Take Aways:



- NRCSCIG@usda.gov – catch all email to answer all your questions!
- Progress reports due semi-annually
- Financial reports are due annually
- Be sure to email award amendments to the above email
- ezFedGrants questions go to ezfedgrants@usda.gov
- Go to our website for forms and NRCS Logo:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/cig/?cid=stelprdb1045412>



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