

FY 20/21 RCPP Classic FAQs

General Questions

1. What are the key differences between RCPP Classic and Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFAs)?

RCPP Classic projects are largely implemented using contracts and easements between NRCS and a producer or landowner. NRCS and partners collaborate on technical assistance and other project components. In AFAs, the Lead Partner (and any supporting partners as identified by the lead partner) is expected to identify participating producers/landowners, contract directly with those producers/landowners, and carry out all required technical assistance (except for inherently governmental functions). In addition, through the AFA provision, NRCS has authority to pursue innovative conservation approaches, such as pay-for-performance, that are not possible under RCPP Classic.

2. Is either funding pool (State/Multi-State & CCAs) more competitive?

While in the FY 2019 RCPP Classic funding cycle we received more proposals in the State/Multistate fund pool, it is difficult to make predictions for the current funding opportunity.

3. If a county is partially within the boundaries of a CCA, can it be included within the RCPP project boundaries?

Any county that falls entirely or partially within the CCA boundaries can be included in a RCPP proposal for the CCA funding pool.

4. Is there any preference to single state versus multi-state proposals?

NRCS has no preference between single state or multi-state proposals. As noted in the funding announcement, for multi-state proposals NRCS gives priority to proposals that include a manageable number of states. History has shown that projects carrying out activities in many states are difficult to manage.

5. Who needs to get eAuth permissions and access to the RCPP portal to submit a proposal?

Only a single POC from the lead partner needs to get eAuth permissions and RCPP portal access. The lead partner will submit the proposal on behalf of all contributing partners, with letters from each contributing partner pledging its support for specific contributions.

6. Can RCPP funding be used to support conservation research?

No, RCPP funding supports implementation of on-the-ground conservation activities and not research. However, partners are welcome to include research activities funded through partner contributions as part of a proposed project.

7. What is the role of NRCS service centers in RCPP projects?

For projects carried out under RCPP Classic, local NRCS offices play a prominent implementation role. NRCS staff in local offices enroll producers and landowners in RCPP contracts and

easements, complete Highly Erodible Lands/Wetlands Conservation determinations, AGI compliance checks, and carry out other project management activities. Local offices are also responsible for completing implementation TA activities, such as planning, design, installation and checkouts of RCPP producer contracts, unless an approved supplemental TA agreement is in place for partners to carry out some or all of these implementation TA activities.

8. Are non-profits eligible to be primary partners?

A for-profit or non-profit entity can be eligible to serve as lead partner if for example they are an organization with an established history of working collaboratively with producers or meet any of the ACEP eligible entity requirements. For a full list of eligible entities see the latest RCPP funding announcement. For questions about specific entities please contact your local RCPP State Coordinator.

9. Is there a minimum amount of land a project needs to work on? Can pilot projects with a limited area coverage on individual but not geographically linked farmland be funded?

There is not a minimum amount of land required for an RCPP proposal. However a project that includes only a single farm or ranch is unlikely to be funded unless the lead partner can justify why the proposed work cannot be carried out under a covered program (ACEP-ALE, ACEP-WRE, CSP, EQIP, HFRP, PL-566) contract with that specific landowner.

10. If we are unable to pull together a proposal for this funding opportunity, when will be the next opportunity to apply?

The next AFA funding opportunity is tentatively scheduled for December 2020 and the next RCPP Classic funding opportunity will likely be released in late summer 2021.

Contributions

11. NRCS desires at least a one-to-one contribution ratio. How is the contribution ratio calculated?

The contribution ration is calculated by dividing the sum of all partner contributions by the sum of all requested NRCS funding, including all NRCS-funded TA.

12. Can a federal agency provide contributions and be a contributing partner?

Yes. Funding from USDA agencies (NRCS, Forest Service, etc.) cannot count as partner contributions but funding from agencies outside of USDA can count as long as the contributions meet requirements included in the funding announcement. The lead partner should ensure that it has the express permission of the funding agency to propose the Federal contributions for the RCPP project.

13. Does financial or technical assistance funded by partner contributions need to adhere to NRCS standards and specifications?

No, only financial and technical assistance activities funded by NRCS must adhere to agency standards, however 1)conservation activities funded with partner contributions, however, cannot degrade a natural resource, and 2) all contributions must meet APF requirements, be included in

negotiated deliverables, and be completed during the term of the PPA. Questions about specific examples should be directed to the appropriate state RCPP Coordinator.

14. Do contributions need to be expended in the same geographic area as the RCPP project? Or can they be used somewhere else as long as there is a nexus between project objectives and resource concerns?

All partner contributions must be expended within the geographic boundary of the RCPP project and be completed during the life of the RCPP project.

Financial and Technical Assistance

15. Can a partner request funding other than a 70/30 split between financial assistance (FA) and technical assistance?

Yes. NRCS may approve a higher FA percentage if the partner can document that all project TA needs can be satisfied with less than a 30% TA rate. In rare circumstances will NRCS approve a request for a TA amount higher than 30%.

16. Can all of the Enhancement TA requested within a proposal fall under a single category (i.e. Project Management)?

Partners may request up to 7% of the total project for Enhancement TA. The full Enhancement TA request can fall under a single activity, however note that partners will be required to ultimately justify and provide supporting documentation for TA activities prior to reimbursement by NRCS.

17. Is a project more competitive if the 18% negotiable TA is given to NRCS vs the partner?

In RCPP Classic there is no preference for NRCS-delivered TA vs partner-delivered TA. Note that any Implementation TA requested by partners must be supported by information demonstrating that a partner or third party has the capability and capacity to deliver the TA.

18. Would an outreach event for landowners qualify as technical assistance?

Please see the NFO for a more complete list of allowable TA activities. Producer outreach activities can either fall under Enhancement TA (if reimbursed by NRCS) or partner contribution.

19. Which entities can receive a supplemental agreement to deliver technical assistance that is reimbursed by NRCS?

Any entity which meets the regulatory definition of a "partner" can potentially receive NRCS funding via a supplemental agreement; NRCS may also use other award mechanism to obligate and expend NRCS use TA via other mechanism (producer contracts and or federal awards). The NRCS state office must review and concur on documentation provided by the lead partner, that a specific entity has the capability and capacity to perform the specific TA activities included in the proposal and RCPP agreement at defensible rates, and that the use of TA for partner led activities is entirely consistent with NRCS ability to ensure that FA awards are managed consistent with program rules.

20. The funding announcement says NRCS reserves 5% of the funding. Is this released at the end of the project or a reduction in funding?

The 5% reserved for NRCS is expended during the life of the project performing inherently governmental functions that assist in the implementation of the project.

Activity Types

Easements

21. For RCPP U.S. held government easements, can another federal agency (other than NRCS) hold these?

No. NRCS is the holder of all RCPP U.S. held easements.

22. Are Grasslands of Special Significance (GSS) easements eligible for 75% reimbursement as is usually permitted under the ACEP-ALE Program?

For RCPP entity-held easements, NRCS will not provide more than 50% of the value of the easement. RCPP easements are distinct from ACEP-ALE and ACEP-WRE easements, with different characteristics and flexibilities (e.g. RCPP Entity-Held Easements do not provide any special consideration for ACEP GSS easements.)

23. Can the lead partner request a variance to eliminate the partner cash match requirement for certain easements?

There is no partner cash requirement for any easements included in FY 2020/2021 RCPP Classic projects. For U.S.-held easements, partners are welcome to supplement NRCS funding, but it is not required. For entity-held easements, NRCS will pay up to 50% of the easement value. The remainder can be made up of any combination of landowner donation and partner cash.

24. If an entity has an approved ACEP-ALE conservation easement template, can the template be used for RCPP?

No. RCPP easements are now distinct from ACEP easements. NRCS has posted minimum deed terms (MDT) for RCPP entity-held easements. However, MDT for RCPP are program specific, and a one-for-one substitution should not be anticipated unless the sole purpose of the entity held easement is identical to ALE. Is the lead partner on an RCPP project required to hold easements if the project funding is going largely to purchasing easements?

25. In states that do not offer HFRP, can an RCPP project include HFRP-like easements?

RCPP easements are not tied to a specific land use but instead based on who holds the easement, the purpose of the deed (which could be "HFRP" like), how restrictive the deed terms are, and whether or not it contains a U.S. government right of enforcement.

Land Rentals

26. Where can a partner find NRCS land rental rates?

RCPP rental awards will be based on one of two rental practice types: RFRN and RFRP. Each year, payments available in RFRN based producer contracts shall be limited to 100% of the state

Agricultural Land Values and Cash Rents Cash Rent as determined by the National Agricultural Statistics Service for the most similar land uses (Irrigated Farmland, Non-Irrigated Farmland, or Range/Pasture Land). Payments available in RFRP based producer contracts shall be limited to 100% of project specific rates as proposed by state/partner based on the NRCS payment schedule methodology (which addresses factors such as labor, materials, forgone income etc.).

Watershed Projects

27. Can a RCPP proposal include a watershed project without an existing approved watershed plan?

Yes, however because RCPP projects are limited to five years the partner would need to document how they realistically expect to obtain approval of a watershed plan and complete the proposed construction within five years.