

2017 RCPP Full Proposal Guide

The 2017 Announcement for Program Funding (FY17 APF) describes the implementation guidance for NRCS Program rules, regulations, definitions, proposal requirements, and proposal review process. This guidance is based on the legislation of the 2014 Farm Bill Program Authorization for Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

RCPP is not a grant. An RCPP award will direct NRCS Program funds and activities matched by partner funds and activities to be used for the shared priorities of the proposal. The following will help you move an asked-back pre-proposal to a full proposal. This full proposal, if awarded, will be the foundation for an agreement between NRCS and the lead partner to accomplish the proposal outcomes.

NRCS must operate within the confines of Congressional Laws and agency policies. Ensure that you work with your NRCS Point of Contact (POC) to understand and address the following:

- All requested funding for the proposal should consider:
 - Funding contributed by each cooperating partners
 - What are the roles, expertise, and value of the people who will charge their time to the project?
 - How will partner match contribute toward conservation on eligible land?
 - Funding contributed by NRCS
 - All conservation activities, land, and participants must meet program requirements.
 - How much NRCS federal funding, Financial Assistance (FA), is needed for conservation on eligible land?
 - What is the NRCS estimated personnel costs, Technical Assistance (TA)? How many NRCS and what is the expertise of the personnel needed?
 - Funding requested by the partner for partner activities
 - Are these activities that NRCS currently accomplishes or can accomplish?
 - Cost/benefit for federal dollars being spent outside the agency to accomplish agency goals.
 - Do these activities requested for funding meet the RCPP policies?

Additionally, as you respond to the Full Proposal Narrative questions remember that each question gives an opportunity to describe how partnership with NRCS will drive successful outcomes. Response lengths of the Full Proposal Narratives are limited to focus on the most essential information of the proposal. Successful RCPP proposals will specifically demonstrate how projects will lead to measurable outcomes such as changes in TMDL or delisting of a species.

Prior to addressing the narrative questions, please meet with your partnership team to fully develop your partnership responsibilities. Make sure you use the review criteria on pages 15-17 of the APF as discussion topics and challenge team members to identify opportunities and/or responsibilities to be addressed as questions are specifically answered. Proposals will be scored on their ability to identify, prioritize, and achieve outcomes, through the engagement of program participants.

The goal of RCPP is to strategically invest public resources to improve conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of our nation's natural resources. We can do more together.

RCPP Narrative Elements for Full Proposal (4000 character limit per item)

Project Name:

Funding Pool:

State:

1. Describe the lead partners and the partnership team. What makes this partnership adept at addressing the resource concern(s) and capable of accomplishing the proposed project? Describe past successes of the lead partner with respect to experience executing projects of similar size and duration. Characterize the expertise of individuals recruited to help solve the complex resource challenges. Are any of the project partners new to agricultural conservation activities? If so, describe the expertise these partners bring to the project.

2. Describe the natural resource challenge(s) that your project proposes to address. Provide information that validates the critical need for both federal and partner investment of resources. Your description should include relevant scientific data such as resource assessments, models, physical data, and/or historic trends, etc.

3. Characterize the geographic focus of the project. Provide sufficient background that explains why this area was selected. Consider how the project size will lead to successful, measurable outcomes in addressing the defined resource challenges. Discuss any prioritization or targeting that will achieve maximum success and whether it will be based on relevant scientific data.

4. Describe the proposed conservation systems selected to accelerate outcomes. This includes conservation practices, activities, enhancements, restoration work, easement acquisition, and other partner approaches.

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5. Describe any activities that have already taken place addressing the resource concerns in the geographical focal area. Describe any previous attempts to resolve or any barriers to project success. Consider geographic scope, participation rates, implementation and project goals/outcomes in your response.

6. Consider how your proposed activities relate to past and current NRCS accomplishments. Describe how a team approach will lead to more efficient and effective outcomes. Does your approach supplement or enhance an existing project, initiative, or local/regional plan? If so, please elaborate.

7. Describe the project approach and timeline. Conceptually consider how the partnership team (including NRCS) will work together on tasks. Describe roles, responsibilities and capabilities of each partner as they relate to project goals, solutions, and accomplishments.

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8. Describe any innovative or creative methods the project and partnership will utilize to provide solutions to the identified resource concerns. For example, will new or emerging markets be utilized, will practice standards or enhancements be expanded upon, or will new strategies be employed to overcome previous adoption limitations?

9. Clearly state intended uses of partner cash and in-kind resources. Describe partner commitments to perform specific activities, particularly ones that are not typically performed by NRCS. Letters of Financial Contribution are required in the Full-proposal submission package. Please upload them into the Data Tool, "Letters" tab.

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10. What is your plan for documenting project success? Is there a feedback mechanism or evaluation criteria that will determine whether the final product has accomplished the project goals? Describe how changes will be detected once implementation is complete?

11. How can the methodology and accomplishments of this project be transferred or expanded to other geographic focal areas with similar resource challenges?

12. Describe any available data that demonstrates demand for project solutions. This can include surveys, existing application demand, etc. Estimate how many eligible producers, in the geographic scope, are likely to participate, and how this was calculated. Describe the basis of your estimation. Does the project include comprehensive strategies for encouraging participation of **historically underserved producers** (see definition)?

13. Describe potential criteria to evaluate and rank RCPP applications. Ranking criteria should be transparent, fair, and allow for any size operation to participate. Was any resource data or research used to justify ranking criteria? Describe any local and/or partner input that was considered and the process utilized to gather input.

14. Describe the cost-effectiveness of the approach. Explain alternative approaches that were considered, including a no-action alternative. Consider these questions in your response: Are the project costs in line with current regional averages? Are there additional values that can be attributed to project success, such as local economic gains? Will this project address social issues, particularly with respect to environmental justice or persistent poverty that have long term economic consequences if not addressed?

Additional Questions

15. If applicable, indicate how the project will assist "producers in meeting or avoiding the need for natural resource regulatory requirements" Section 1271B (d)(4)(A) of the 1985 Act. Briefly describe the regulation or potential regulation; the impact or potential impact of the regulation on producers, including any economic impact or impact on production; what mechanism (e.g., State-level or "safe-harbor" agreement or Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances) will allow project activities to be considered under the regulation.

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16. Does the proposal include any activities that are not included in an NRCS conservation practice standard or enhancement? If so, briefly identify the beneficial and adverse effects of those activities on affected natural resources (soil, water, air, plants, and animals) and specifically statutorily protected resources (e.g., cultural and historic resources, wetlands, threatened and endangered species, etc.). This information will help NRCS determine the appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation needed. If project actions are covered by an existing NEPA document, provide the name of the document, a link, or indicate how a copy can be obtained.

17. If **Adjustment of Terms** are needed in order to achieve project objectives, please describe here. Partners are strongly encouraged to work with NRCS to fully understand NRCS program purpose and limitations. If any Adjustment of Terms are being requested, please refer to Appendix A in the APF for Definitions.

18. Does the project require **Alternative Funding Arrangements**? If the project requires Alternative Funding Arrangements, please describe how it will meet the goals and objectives of RCPP. Refer to Section III, Part C. for AFA eligibility and requirements and Appendix A in the APF for Definitions.

19. Please use this space to provide relevant information that was not included in the previous questions or in the Data Entry Tool.