TA2020 Technical Assistance RFP
Frequently Asked Questions

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General questions relating to the grant application process

Who can I contact if I have more questions?

NACD has seven regional representatives who would be happy to discuss your application with you. In addition, they will be reviewing your application for completeness when you submit it. If you aren’t sure of which region you are in, you can use the NACD Region Map.

- Ariel Rivers, Pacific – Ariel-rivers@nacdnet.org
- Beth Mason, North Central – Beth-mason@nacdnet.org
- Candice Abinanti, Southeast – Candice-abinanti@nacd.net
- Eric Hansen, Northeast – Eric-hansen@nacdnet.org
- Jeff Burwell, Southwest – Jeff-burwell@nacdnet.org
- Keith Owen, South Central – Keith-owen@nacdnet.org
- Sunni Heikes-Knapton, Northern Plains – Sunni-heikes-knapton@nacdnet.org

In addition, NACD Director of Projects and Partnerships Rich Duesterhaus and NACD Projects and Partnerships Coordinator Meg Leader welcome any questions.
What is the general application process states and territories should follow?

Here’s how we envisioned the process would proceed. It is meant to be flexible. Tribal Conservation districts who are interested in applying should contact NACD Projects and Partnerships Coordinator Meg Leader, for information on what their process will be.

1. All proposals need to start with the state/territory conservation leadership. We leave it to them to determine priorities and which projects should be applying. When their discussions are concluded, we would like the completed TA2020 Signature Sheet emailed to NACD Projects and Partnerships Coordinator Meg Leader and your NACD Region Rep. The Signature Sheet must be sent while the RFP is open.

   a. The Signature Sheet is a fillable PDF and in the current emergency may require multiple printing/signing/scanning to collect all of signatures.

   b. The Signature Sheet is meant to be completed once with all of your applicants and their priority ranking listed. There is room for nine applicants to be listed on one form. For additional applicants, you are welcome to submit additional Sheets. The additional Sheets can be submitted at the same time, or at a later date.

   c. All Signature Sheets have to be submitted while the RFP is open. Your NACD Region Rep will need it in order to complete the applications.

2. Once the state/territory leadership have determined which projects are submitting proposals, they can authorize who should be submitting each proposal using the Online Application. Here’s the two options we discussed:

   a. Option A – The lead applicant (the district/organization who will be our contact if the proposal is funded) submits the application. They will need to upload a completed TA Budget Worksheet as part of the process. If their project has the grant-supported staff working outside their district, then they will need to upload concurrence documents.
b. Option B – Staff at the state/territory level uses the TA Grant App Worksheet to complete the application. The completed TA Budget Worksheet will need to be uploaded as part of the process. If the project has the grant-supported staff working outside the district/organization listed as the lead applicant, then the concurrence documents will be needed to be uploaded.

3. The Online Application will require the person completing it to give us an electronic signature.

4. When the Online Application is submitted, the email entered in the contact info will receive a PDF of the information submitted. If funded, this document will serve as the Exhibit 1 of the MOA. This step must be completed while the RFP is open.

5. The submitted Online Application will then be sent to the NACD Region Rep for review. The Region Rep will contact whomever is listed as the contact if they see anything that needs editing/revision. The Region Rep can also be contacted during this time to make a change for the applicant. How long this window for making changes is open will depend on workload. Once the Region Rep is satisfied, they will add the priority ranking from the Signature Sheet and move the proposal forward to be considered during the RFP Evaluation Stage. Depending on workload, this may happen after the RFP closes.

What criteria will be used to evaluate the applications?
The grant evaluation criteria are described in the Eligibility Section of the RFP. You do not need to write your application against the criteria listed and the primary criteria NACD will be working with is each state/territory’s priority ranking.

Who is eligible to receive grant funds?
Conservation districts are intended to be the primary recipients of funds. In instances where conservation districts are unable to participate, state/territory associations of conservation districts, conservation agencies and/or RC&D
Councils are eligible. NACD will also consider joint agreements such as between multiple districts or districts and an association or state agency.

**Are there any restrictions on which districts can receive these funds?**
Any district can receive funds if recommended by their state/territory conservation partnership. Tribal districts are also eligible for funding.

**What is my state/territory conservation partnership?**
For most states/territories, partnerships will include representatives of a state/territory association of conservation districts, NRCS, state conservation agency, association of conservation district employees and the state’s resource conservation and development (RC&D) councils or associations where applicable.

**Can previous Technical Assistance grantees reapply?**
Yes.

**Will previous Technical Assistance grantees get priority from NACD?**
Not from NACD. Priority is set by the state/territory conservation partnership, and it will be up to them to decide if a previous TA grantee should receive funding now and then set their priority as compared to other proposals.

**What is the process for a tribe to request the funds?**
If a tribe is part of a tribal conservation association, they should start by discussing their interest with them; otherwise, or if they aren’t sure, they should contact NACD Projects and Partnerships Coordinator Meg Leader. The TA Signature Sheet needs to be signed off by the state-level tribal association (if applicable, otherwise by the tribe) and an NRCS State Conservationist. Tribal Conservation District (TCD) applications also receive a separate set of rankings from other Conservation Districts, so please provide a separate list of priorities for any TCDs.

**Can multiyear proposals be submitted?**
For the RFP this year, we are only asking for single year proposals. That said, on the application after you enter your request for a year’s support, we are asking if you would be interested in an additional year’s support. If you are interested in a second year, we only ask for the total support you’d like for that second
year. If we decide we can direct additional grant funds for that second year, you will be contacted to discuss what funds are available and what your proposed accomplishments would be.

Who will be submitting the proposals from each state/territory?
Once state/territory conservation partnership leaders identify the highest priorities for funding, it is recommended that they reach out to those high priority conservation districts or other applicants, provide them with the online TA2020 application link and invite them to apply. Alternatively, the state/territory leadership could designate someone to complete the online application.

If an applicant needs to get information from a local partner to include in the application is there an easy way to obtain the information?
The TA2020 Grant App Worksheet can be used to collect the information from a partner. It is a fillable form, so it can be saved and returned by email. It can also be completed, printed out, signed and photographed/scanned by the local partner to indicate concurrence.

Is it okay for a district that is already sharing resources such as survey equipment to receive one of these agreements?
Yes.

Some state/territories and districts already have agreements. Is this agreement intended to replace those?
No, these agreements would be supplementary to existing agreements.

What is the TA2020 Signature Sheet and who needs to submit it?
The TA2020 Signature Sheet is a form for the state/territory conservation partnership leaders to complete and sign. The form must be emailed to the NACD region representative and NACD Projects and Partnerships Coordinator Meg Leader. It needs to be received by NACD while the RFP is open.

This form indicates to NACD that the applicant(s) listed have the support of their State/Territory or Tribal Conservation Leadership and are located in a priority area. Representatives of the Conservation Partnership may complete this form once with all applicants listed, or multiple forms may be completed.
and submitted as additional applicants are given authorization to apply. For each applicant, the priority ranking that reflects the State/Territory/Tribal assessment (with 1 as the highest priority in the state) needs to be completed as indicated by your discussions at the state level.

**Where can I find the TA Budget Worksheet?**
The TA Budget Worksheet must be completed and uploaded as part of the application submission. We recommend that you complete the Worksheet prior to attempting to submit your proposal, then save it to your computer with a different name. When you get to that step of the application, you can simply upload the completed file.

**When do I need to get Concurrence documents?**
A concurrence document is needed any time the grant–supported staff is expected as part of your proposal to be working outside of the lead organization named in the MOA. The documents will be uploaded as part of your application, so you need to have them available when you submit your proposal.

**What can I use as a Concurrence document?**
We have a TA2020 Concurrence Form, but you are not required to use it. You are welcome to create your own if that is what works best for you. Here are some of our suggestions:

- A PDF of an email from the other district(s) indicating their agreement with your proposal. It must clearly indicate the author and who they represent.
- A scan of a completed TA2020 Grant App Worksheet that has been physically signed by a representative of the other district.
- If the grant proposal is coming from a state/territory organization that intends for the grant–supported staff’s services to be available to all their members, we will accept a PDF of an email that has been distributed to all members letting them know. You do not need to upload the individual responses from each local organization.
Finance questions relating to the grant application

How much funding is available?
$6.50 million
- 80% of funds, or $5,150,000, to increase capacity to provide conservation operations technical assistance (COTA) planning funds
- 20% of funds, or $1,350,000, to increase access to CSP

How long is this funding available?
Once the MOA is signed by both parties, you will have 13 months to spend the funds. There could be a need for an extension in a few cases, and NACD will plan to consider these requests as they arise.

Is there a dollar limit that a proposal can request?
There are neither minimum nor maximum limits on how much you can ask for. However much you request, you need to supply at least the minimum amount of match from cash and in-kind sources. No matter the size of your proposal, your state/territory conservation partnership leaders must agree that your proposal is a priority and your proposed accomplishments justify the request.

Would payroll costs be allowed as part of the agreement?
Yes, fringe benefits are the indirect compensation paid for the employee. For TA grant reporting, they can include: employers’ portion of Social Security and Medicare taxes, federal and state employment taxes, employers’ share of health insurance, holiday and vacation pay, retirement contributions. This list is only suggestive and not definitive. Speak to your local tax expert or state compliance officer for guidance.

What is the requirement for matching funds?
Districts are required to contribute 20 percent of the total proposal costs. For example, if you are requesting a grant of $40,000, then you need to be able to supply at least $10,000 in match. The proposal’s total costs would then be $50,000.

Overall, NACD’s agreement with NRCS requires a 25 percent match. However, for each NACD-district agreement, NACD is fulfilling the first 5 percent, leaving
the 20 percent requirement. For the example above, this means that your $10,000 is also matched by an additional $2,500 from NACD when we report to NRCS. The $2,500 isn’t included in your proposal anywhere, but we are supplying it and helping you make this opportunity successful.

The match should come from non-federal sources and should preferably be cash, but in-kind contributions or a combination of both will be considered.

**What is in-kind match?**

In-kind match is an expense that has to be paid with local funds, whether the grant-supported employee is there or not, but is still connected in some way to the employee. Refer to [Financial Reporting](#) for some examples.

**The RFP refers to ‘Unique Partners’ for match, can you give some examples?**

With the last two technical assistance grants, the grantees have found very diverse solutions to supplying the match required. When we refer to Unique Partners, we are acknowledging that diversity and creativity. Diverse partners are not a requirement to be a successful proposal, but they do add to the resulting accomplishments.

While not a definitive list and projects may have geographical limits, we are aware there may be opportunities with Field to Market, Ecosystem Services Market Consortium and the DOD (eligible even though it’s federal) that will supply match.

**Questions relating to Grant Supported Staff and Workload**

**What programs will the technical assistance grant cover?**

This year’s RFP is for increased access to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and to increase capacity to provide conservation operations technical assistance (COTA) planning.

**What is the process to identify needed technical assistance services?**

Each state/territory conservation partnership leadership will identify their highest priority locations and staffing needs.
Will urban or non-farm related projects be considered?
If the projects are considered a priority by your state/territory leadership then they can certainly be used for an application. One way we might see that happening might be a planning project at a landscape level where the landscape/watershed/region includes an urban area. Your proposed project should be discussed with your state/territory leadership.

What CSP activities are applicable under this grant?
Each state partnership leaders’ team will need to assess their respective CSP situation. Some states will need to do outreach to help the program get started; some states already have a robust response to the program and may need to do specific technical assistance tasks with the producers who want to use the program.

What kinds of conservation planning are applicable for Conservation Operations Technical Assistance (COTA) planning funds?
Most of the planning needed will likely be assistance to individuals wanting to plan and apply conservation systems and practices. There may be other planning needs of high priority to include landscape-scale planning, or longer-range planning for a district, including tribal conservation districts or for other longer-term resource concerns in a given state/territory/reservation. The narrative statement required for COTA fund requests is the place where a state partnership or a Tribal applicant can include the need or justification for the planning.

Where do we get the detailed information for the planned accomplishments part of the application?
In most cases, the local NRCS designated conservationist or district conservationist will be the best source of accomplishment information. State conservationists have been notified of this announcement. At your state partnership deliberations for assembling a request, please request that the state conservationist or representative communicate with the respective district conservationist in the locations the partnership selects for inclusion in their request.
Must technical assistance services be provided by new hires (increased capacity) or can existing district staff do the work?

The purpose of these funds to expand capacity and supply services to your customers. That capacity could be in the form of new hires, contractors, redirecting existing staff, or extending the hours of existing part-time staff.

What kinds of employees will be eligible?

The advertised funds are intended for technical assistance to develop and implement conservation plans. COTA funds are available for planning and implementation. CSP funds are available for assisting with CSP outreach, planning, and implementation of contracts. Examples of typical positions include: Resource Technicians, Resource Conservationists/Planners, Agronomists, Cultural Resource Specialists, Program Support Specialists, and Foresters.

Employees with the skill sets to assist in meeting the local district’s workload will be eligible. These could be new hires, redirected existing employees, part-time, former district, or other conservation employees. In some cases, the district may choose to use a contractor arrangement.

What is meant by Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)?

We use FTE to compile the full impact across the country of all the grant-supported staff. One FTE would be a single person working full time for a year. For a 40-hour work week, that would be equivalent to them working 2,080 hours. A part-time person working 20 hours per week would then be 0.5 FTE.

On the grant application, you will be asked for the FTE of all the employees the grant will be supporting. To calculate it, take the total number of hours you expect them to work based on your budget and divide by 2,080. For example, two grant supported staff putting in 30 hours a week for a year would be 0.75 FTE each, or 1.5 FTE total.

Questions relating to Grant Performance

When would a district receive their funds?

Technical Assistance grants generally are paid in quarterly installments as an advance. The first payment is released shortly after a signed MOA is returned.
to NACD, and the other payments will then come automatically every three months as long as regular reports are submitted. Payment schedules can be adjusted when the need is documented and NACD is given notice.

What reporting requirements will there be?
Each grantee is expected to submit a Quarterly Report updating NACD with their accomplishments, financial spending and a narrative. The reports are due before the 20th of the month following the end of the quarter. Late or missing reports may impact the release of your next advance or future Technical Assistance grant opportunities.

A grantee is expected to submit a Quarterly Report for each quarter, starting once they receive their first advance from NACD until they submit a final report closing the grant.

How long will a district have to implement their signed agreement?
Once the MOA is signed by both parties, you will have 13 months to spend the funds. There could be a need for an extension in a few cases, and NACD will plan to consider these requests as they arise.

If our proposed project has a seasonal aspect that would benefit being implemented over a different 13 months than those following the MOA being signed, can the MOA be adjusted?
Yes, within the limits of our agreement with NRCS. Please include information on when it should run in the narrative section of the application. Adjustments of less than 12 months shouldn’t be a problem, but we will need to consider each request individually.

Who will oversee the work prepared from a quality standpoint?
The practices/plans will need to meet NRCS specifications, so the party signing the agreement will need to ensure proper oversight of the work completed. The arrangement could also be different depending on who signs the agreement.
What training is provided for new district hires and for existing district employees doing this work?

Normal training for new hires would be a part of the agreement, as would normal training for existing employees. Again, it will vary depending on the type of work undertaken.

Questions relating to Grant Reporting

When do I need to start submitting reports on the grant?

Each grantee is expected to submit a Quarterly Report updating NACD with their accomplishments, financial spending and a narrative. The reports are due before the 20th of the month following the end of the quarter. Late or missing reports may impact the release of your next advance or future Technical Assistance grant opportunities.

A grantee is expected to submit a Quarterly Report for each quarter starting once they receive their first advance from NACD until they submit a final report closing the grant.

Where do I file my reports?

We use an electronic service to collect the Quarterly Reports. This is also where you will submit your final report. The link is here and also in the list of Resources on the TA Grants webpages.

I am the person submitting the report, but not the one doing the work. How do I get the information for the reports?

You are welcome to use your own system to have the field staff submit their information, but we have created a fillable PDF you can give them to submit to you. This form is not submitted to NACD.

Do you have any suggestions for handling the grant finances and reporting requirements?

We do not have any requirements on how you handle grant finances. Some grantees use Quickbooks, others use an Excel spreadsheet, and there are a few that use paper. As long as you have a system that works for you and is acceptable to your local auditors, we are fine. We do have a handout with
some guidance, and we have a couple of Excel templates that others have shared that we can send you.

What should I do if I don’t have all the information I need when a report is due?

We understand that this is a frustrating situation, but we need you to submit a report on time for our own reporting and so we are aware of your issue. When this happens, there are two general solutions. They both start by you turning in a partial report with the information that you have currently. Include in the narrative a description of what’s missing and why. Then:

• When you have the missing information, you can turn in a supplemental report
• Or on your next report include the missing information from the partial report.

How do I request an extension?

We understand that sometimes it is impossible to complete your proposed accomplishments within the 13-month time frame. When you realize that is a concern, contact your region rep to discuss your options.

If I think I’m going to have funds left when I reach the end date from the MOA, what do I need to do?

In most circumstances, we would rather see you continue to use the funds to continue completing more work than return the funds. If you expect to be in this situation, contact your region rep to discuss your options.

How do I adjust my budget?

We can consider moderate budget revisions, but be aware that shifting funds between different programs (EQIP, CSP or COTA) is not usually an option. Contact your region rep to discuss your options.

What do I do when I am finished with the grant?

Wonderful! All NACD needs you to do is submit a final report. We’d like it submitted within 30 days of when you are finished. Final reports are submitted at the same link where you submit Quarterly Reports, just choose ‘Final’ as the reporting period.
Once your final report is submitted, NACD Projects and Partnerships Coordinator Meg Leader will review everything you have submitted and will send a confirmation if she doesn’t see any reporting issues. That confirmation officially closes your grant.