TA2021 Technical Assistance Grants

Frequently Asked Questions

My Question is about:

Grant Application Process

Questions

Finding Help

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

North Central - Beth Mason	Beth-mason@nacdnet.org
Northeast - Eric Hansen	Eric-hansen@nacdnet.org
Northern Plains – Aubrey Evans	Aubrey-evans@nacdnet.org
Pacific - Ariel Rivers	Ariel-rivers@nacdnet.org
South Central - Keith Owen	Keith-owen@nacdnet.org
Southeast - Candice Abinanti	Candice-abinanti@nacd.net
Southwest - Rachel Theler	Rachel-theler@nacdnet.org

If you cannot reach your region representative, NACD Projects and Partnerships Coordinator Meg Leader (meg-leader@nacdnet.org) and NACD Director of Projects and Partnerships Rich Duesterhaus (rich-duesterhaus@nacdnet.org) are available to answer questions.

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 Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Councils are eligible. For tribal organizations without a dedicated conservation office, we can work with comparable options. NACD will also consider joint agreements such as between multiple districts or districts and an association or state agency.

Is a district that is already sharing resources, such as survey equipment, eligible?

Yes.

Is a district that already has an agreement with NRCS eligible?

Yes, these agreements would be supplementary to existing agreements and are not intended to replace them.

Are previous Technical Assistance grantees eligible to reapply?

Yes.

Are there any restrictions on which districts can receive these funds?

Any district can receive funds if recommended by their CPL. Tribal districts are also eligible for funding.

How do I apply for funding?

Each state and territory will have their own way to determine who may apply for funding. Tribal Conservation districts who are interested in applying should contact NACD Projects and Partnerships Coordinator Meg Leader directly, for information on what their process will be.

If you are interested in applying, start by contacting your State/Territory Conservation Partnership Leaders (CPL) to discuss your needs, learn more about state/territory priorities and seek CPL support to submit an application to NACD. If supported, you may submit an application using this online form

If an application is submitted that is not supported by the CPL it will not be evaluated for funding.

What is my state/territory conservation partnership?

The National Conservation Partnership (NCP) agreement provides the basis for this program. Your conservation partnership is made up of the state representatives of whichever NCP organizations are active within your state/territory. For most states/territories, partnerships include the 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.

What criteria will be used to evaluate the applications?

The grant evaluation criteria are described in the Eligibility Section of the RFP announcement. The primary criteria NACD will be working with is each CPL's priority ranking. Each CPL may have their own criteria they will be using within the guidelines of the RFP. It is your CPL's criteria that the application should be written to address.

What is the difference between a Priority Request (PR) and a Request for Proposals (RFP)?

Recognizing that recipients of current grants are probably the State/Territory Conservation Partner Leadership's (CPL) continuing top priorities when additional funding is available, prior to offering an RFP, NACD goes through a PR cycle to award continuing funding. All PR requests are reviewed by their CPL before funds are awarded. At the conclusion of the PR, an RFP may be held with the unallocated funds.

Will previous Technical Assistance grantees get priority from NACD?

Not from NACD. Priority is set by the state/territory CPL, 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 tribal application?

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. Support for your application needs to be secured from your state-level tribal association (if applicable, otherwise by a tribal representative) and an NRCS State Conservationist. Tribal applications also receive a separate set of rankings from other Conservation Districts, so please provide a separate list of priorities for any applicants.

Can multiyear proposals be submitted?

Refer to the RFP announcement for guidance on whether multi-year will be considered. The typical RFP will only ask for single year proposals. That said, on the application after you enter your request for a year's support, there is a place to indicate if you would be interested in multi-year funding. If you indicate that you are, we only ask for the total support you'd like for a second year. If multi-year funding is available, you will be contacted to discuss what funds are available and if that will work within your plans.

How should an applicant collect information from a local partner?

The TA Grant RFP 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.

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 other organizations do not need to be supplying match or other support of the MOA. The documents will be uploaded as part ofyour application, so you need to have them available when you submit your proposal.

What can I use as a Concurrence document?

We have a TA Grant 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 TA Grant RFP 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.

What happens after an application is submitted?

1. 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 application period is open.

2. The submitted Online Application is sent to the NACD region representative for review. The region representative will contact whoever is listed as the contact if they see anything that needs editing/revision. The region representative 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.
3. Once the region representative 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.
4. Refer to the TA Briefer for a general time line of when to expect new awards to be announced.

Grant Finances

Questions

How much funding is available for the RFP?

The funding available may be different each year and will be specified in the RFP announcement. The mix of available funding may include:

- Conservation Operations Technical Assistance (COTA) funds to increase capacity to provide technical assistance
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) funds to increase access and implementation assistance
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds for implementation assistance

What can the funding be used for?

The intention of this project funding is to increase district capacity by supporting additional staff time to focus on state/territory priorities and NRCS workload. The additional time can be achieved with either additional hours for existing staff or hiring/contracting of new staff.

To ensure that focus, eighty percent (80%) of the project funds must be used to pay salaries, contracted labor and fringe benefits.

The remaining funds may be used to support the staff. Typical examples include training, travel, supplies and equipment. Supplies and equipment may not be more that ten percent (10%) of the project funds.

Can we charge indirect costs to these grants?

These grants do not allow for indirect costs in most situations. You'll need to break out the actual expenditures and charge the expenses to either the grant or match funds. Only if you have a Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate can you charge indirect costs.

How long is this funding available?

Typically, we issue a 13-month MOA. If multi-year funding is available, the MOA length will be adjusted. The MOA begins when it is signed by the local organization. There could be a need for an extension in a few cases, and NACD will consider these requests as they arise.

Is there a recommended pay scale for the grant supported staff?

NACD understands that between geographical differences and the different types of staff that are supported with these funds it is impossible to make blanket guidance on how much they should be paid. We also respect that grant recipients will keep in mind the public nature of this funding and pay fair wages to attract qualified staff to do the work.

Is there a dollar limit that a proposal can request?

There are neither minimum nor maximum limits on how much you can ask for. Whatever the amount is of your 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 project budget. 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 project's total budget would then be $50,000.

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

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.

What is in-kind match?

In-kind match is an expense that must be paid whether the grant-supported employee is there or not, but since you have the grant the expense is supporting the employee. Refer to ******** for some examples.

> Caution: Applicants whose offices are housed in federally-owned or rented buildings cannot claim office space and any federally-purchased and operated equipment or supplies as a match. This grant funding is provided by NRCS and federal funding and resources cannot be used as a source of in-kind match for these grants.

What are the 'Unique Partners' the RFP mentions, can you give some examples?

In past years, 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.

How do I adjust my budget after the MOA is signed?

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 representative to discuss your options.

Is direct deposit of our grant advances an option?

Yes. Contact your NACD region representative and they can send you the ACH form to set up direct deposit. The completed form is submitted to finance@nacdnet.org.

Direct deposit is not required. We will happily send you a paper check if that will work better for you.

What are the CFDA numbers for this agreement?

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance numbers are:

- COTA – 10.902
- EQIP – 10.912
- CSP – 10.924

Grant Workload and Staffing

Questions

What NRCS programs will the technical assistance grant cover?

The funding available may be different each year and will be specified in the RFP announcement. The mix of funding may include Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) for assisting landowners implementing contracts, Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) for increased access and Conservation Operations Technical Assistance (COTA) for developing plans.

What is the process to identify needed technical assistance services?

Each state/territory conservation partnership leadership (CPL) 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 CPL.

What kinds of conservation planning are applicable for COTA planning funds?

Most of the planning needed will likely be assistance to individuals wanting to apply conservation systems and practices. The assistance can take the form of preliminary meetings to long-range written plans. 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 each state/territory/reservation. The required narrative statement is the place where an applicant can include the need or justification for the planning.

What EQIP activities are applicable under this grant?

Depending on the identified needs the grant is addressing, EQIP activities range from applying for an EQIP contract, assisting an existing grant to designing/certifying installed practices.

What CSP activities are applicable under this grant?

Each set CPL 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.

Can Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) work be addressed with these funds?

It is not the intention for the staff funded with these grants to be addressing CRP workloads. While we understand that they might be occasionally tasked with CRP related work in a busy office, it is not to be part of their regular tasks.

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 and part of the CPL's discussion may be focused on what they would like accomplished with the funding.

Must technical assistance services be provided by new hires 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. Redirecting existing staff that is fully funded from other non-federal sources may only be used for in-kind match.

What kinds of employees will be eligible?

The technical assistance funding is intended to add capacity in areas where the workload cannot be address with the current staffing. We leave it to the CPL and local organizations to determine what skills are needed to address the workload demands. Examples of typical positions include: Resource Technicians, Resource Conservationists/Planners, Program

Management Specialists and Technical Specialists. Technical Specialists might be Agronomists, Cultural Resource Specialists, Engineers, Conservation Outreach Specialist or Foresters.

Existing employees with the needed skills would be eligible to be redirected to the proposal's deliverables. When that isn't an option, new staff could be a new hire, 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.

Grant Performance

Questions

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, or near the end of a previous NACD technical assistance grant. The additional 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 must submit Quarterly Reports 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.

Reports are due from when you receive your first advance from NACD until a final report is submitted closing the grant.

How long will a district have to implement their signed agreement?

Typically, we issue a 13-month MOA. If multi-year funding is available, the MOA length will be adjusted. The MOA begins when it is fully executed by both the grantee and NACD. There could be a need for an extension in a few cases, and NACD will consider these requests as they arise.

If our proposed project has a seasonal aspect 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 grantee 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 employees doing this work?

NACD doesn't provide training. Costs connected to normal training for new hires and existing employees should be accounted for within your proposal and budget. What that training will entail will vary depending on the type of work undertaken.

How do I request an extension?

When you realize that your MOA will terminate before your funds are exhausted or the proposed accomplishments are achieved, reach out to your NACD Region Representative. They can issue extensions as long as you are in compliance with your MOA and we have the time within our master agreement.

Can the agreement be terminated early?

Yes. It is our desire to work with the grantee to find a solution that will see the proposed work accomplished but understand that may not be possible.

A grant recipient may terminate their MOA with a 60-day notice (email is acceptable) to their NACD Region Representative, submitting a final report through the TA Grant Portal and returning any unused funds.

NACD may terminate an MOA with 60-day email notice. MOA non-compliance is grounds for termination.

Grant Reporting and Closing

Questions

Where do I file my reports?

We use an electronic service to collect reports. All reports can be accessed through the [TA Grant Portal](). The Portal can be accessed from the list of Resources on the TA Grants webpages.

What reports do I need to submit?

NACD collects information on these grants across six reports.

Three reports, Contact and Listserv Info Update, Staffing Update Report and Map Data Collector, are completed at the beginning of a grant or when the information should change.

Two reports, Quarterly Financial Report and Quarterly Accomplishments Report are submitted each quarter starting when the first funds are advanced until the grant is closed.

The last report, Final Report, is submitted to close a grant.

When are the Quarterly Reports due?

The Quarterly Financial Report and Quarterly Accomplishments Report 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. If the 20th is a weekend or federal holiday, the due date is shifted to the next regular workday.

How do I fix or add something to a report I submitted?

Once submitted, reports are locked and can not be edited. If you need to change something you will need to submit an additional report. Both the Financial and the Accomplishments Report have a question that asks 'Is this your first report for this grant and this reporting period?'

- 'No, this replaces the previous' will delete the report with the error and replace it with the new report.
- 'No, this is in addition to the previous' will add the new information to the report with the error

If my Financial Report shows $0 expended, is an Accomplishment Report due?

No. If you didn't spend any grant or match funds during a quarter, we will waive the requirement of submitting an Accomplishments Report.

You may still submit an Accomplishments Report if there is some information you want to report, or if you have a narrative to share.

How do I get the information from our field staff for the Accomplishment Report?

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.

How do I collect financial information from another organization?

You are welcome to use your own system to collect financial expenditures from a partner for the Financial Report. NACD Projects and Partnerships Coordinator, Meg Leader developed a worksheet as well. Contact her for a copy.

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 specified time frame. When you realize that is a concern, contact your region representative 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 representative 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 representative 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 TA Grant Portal.

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. If you are returning any funds, she will send directions on how to return the funds.

Grant Process for State/Territory Leaders

Questions

What is the recommended process for each State/Territory Conservation Partnership (CPL)?

Here's how we envisioned the process would proceed. It is meant to be flexible and each set of CPL may add their own requirements.

1. All proposals need to start with the CPL. Their discussions will determine priorities and which projects should be applying. When their discussions are concluded, all members of the CPL sign the completed TA Grant Signature Sheet and emailed it to NACD Projects and Partnerships Coordinator Meg Leader and the NACD Region Representative.
   a. The Signature Sheet is a fillable PDF. While we prefer all signatures to appear on a single file, we accept that multiple printing/signing/scanning may be needed to collect all signatures.
   b. The Signature Sheet is meant to be completed once with all 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.
   c. All Signature Sheets should be submitted within five days of the RFP closing. Your NACD Region Representative will need it to complete the applications.
2. Once the CPL have determined which projects are submitting proposals, they can authorize who should be submitting each proposal using the Online Application.

Who will be submitting the proposals from each state/territory?

Once each state/territory CPL 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 RFP application link and invite them to apply. Alternatively, the state/territory leadership could designate someone to complete the online application.

What is the TA Grant Signature Sheet and who needs to submit it?

The TA Grant Signature Sheet is a form for the state/territory conservation partnership leaders (CPL) 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 within five days of the RFP closing.

This form indicates to NACD that the applicant(s) listed have the support of their CPL. The CPL 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 based on discussions between the CPL.