



National Association of
Conservation Districts

URBAN AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated January 17, 2024

Since 2016, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have been proud partners in support of the Urban Agriculture Conservation (UAC) Grant Initiative.

Through these grants, conservation districts increased their capacity related to urban technical assistance and small-scale conservation while addressing community needs in both rural and urban contexts.

[See NACD's Urban and Community Conservation Website](#) for additional details. If you have questions after reviewing the FAQs below, please contact Rachel Theler, rachel-theler@nacdn.net

GRANT BACKGROUND

For the purposes of this grant, what is urban agriculture conservation?

The phrase covers a broad array of activities. USDA National Agriculture Library defines urban agriculture as “taking the form of backyard, roof-top and balcony gardening, community gardening in vacant lots and parks, roadside urban fringe agriculture and livestock grazing in open space.” See examples of past projects (2016-2020) in our [UAC Story Map](#), and reference NACD's archive of [urban and community webinars](#) for other examples of conservation district projects related to agricultural conservation in urban and community contexts.

Do the grants have to take place in heavily populated, urban areas?

No. Applicants should describe the area and population they plan to serve through the grant. Project areas may be of any size, for example, in neighborhoods, school gardens, community farms, etc., and should incorporate principles related to smaller-scale and “non-traditional” agriculture production. Applicants are encouraged to propose innovative projects, especially those that address unmet needs related to underrepresented clients, food security and sovereignty, and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). See the [NACD DEI Board Statement](#) for more information.

Is there an application form or required format?

Yes. All information regarding funding for a specific year is available on [NACD's Urban and Community Conservation Website](#).

Is a signature of approval from the conservation district board required for the proposal?

Proposals include a resolution adopted by the district board stating that the board has reviewed and approved the proposal and has addressed potential conflicts of interest. The written document may be submitted with the application in the online form or emailed to Rachel Theler (rachel-theler@nacdn.net) prior to the application deadline.

How will proposals be evaluated?

A separate review and selection team will use the criteria listed in the RFP.

Will federal grant regulations apply?

Yes. Regulations applying to federal grants must be followed as do any state regulations and requirements (e.g. conflict of interest policies, accounting practices, etc).

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

What are examples of underrepresented areas and populations?

While not required, additional consideration may be given to proposals that address underrepresented clients, especially in food deserts (see [this USDA-ERS interactive map](#)).

Underrepresented populations may be any clients who have not traditionally received services from conservation districts and their partners. Examples include but are not limited to low-income residents of urban areas, underrepresented minority urban agricultural producers, migrant and/or non-English-speaking populations seeking a foothold in rural or urban settings, and urban dwellers who find support in community gardening projects.

What is Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)?

Conservation technical assistance (CTA) is the help provided to individuals, communities, organizations, and agencies to address opportunities, concerns, and problems related to the use of natural resources. Through advice, design specifications, recommendations on practices and their implementation, etc., CTA can support sound management decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands. Learn more through [NRCS' Conservation Technical Assistance Program](#).

What are examples of eligible CTA activities?

- Providing conservation technical consultation to urban agriculturalists for both existing or planned operations, e.g., in the use of practices to avoid soil erosion or to implement cover cropping on a small scale.
- Hosting conservation workshops and/or practice implementation demonstrations (e.g., nutrient management, water management, soil health, high tunnels, invasive plants, pest management, pollinator habitat, conservation systems, etc.). *Grant funds can be used to reimburse costs associated with speakers, venue, and materials directly associated with the conservation practice presentation.*
- Encouraging land managers to work with NRCS and Districts to develop conservation plans.
- Upon request, developing conservation plans that address the natural resource concerns of the decision maker.
- Promoting the [NRCS conservation planning process](#)—technical assistance, financial assistance, and easement programs—to groups engaged in urban agriculture.
- Coordinating training sessions for groups and individuals who wish to learn more about the technical tools that have been developed by USDA and could aid in sustainable urban agricultural production (Web Soil survey, FOTG, Conservation Client Gateway, Plants Database, Know Your Farmer Know Your Food, National Agricultural Library, etc.).

- Meeting with groups and land managers, including representatives of other units of government, to educate them on the NRCS conservation planning process.
- Developing and disseminating conservation-related materials (fact sheets, articles, signs, posters, NRCS contact information, etc.) targeted to urban agricultural producers.

Would developing an urban ag education program to be presented in schools qualify as technical assistance?

Yes, as it could fall under the ‘coordinating training sessions’, though it will compete with other proposals that may result in more proactive urban agriculture conservation support for communities.

Can the proposed project be part of an existing initiative?

The grant objective is to increase conservation technical assistance. If the funds will be used to enhance the existing initiative and not to replace current resources, then it would be eligible, though it will have to compete with proposals for new initiatives.

What are examples of project promotion?

Some examples within NACD include presentations at regional and national meetings, presenting on an Urban and Community Conservation webinar, posting on the NACD Urban and Community Conservation Network on Facebook, and posting on the NACD Blog. Applicants should also consider promoting their project through other regional or national organizations and news outlets.

PARTNERSHIPS AND CONTRACTING

Who are potential partners?

Applicants are encouraged to creatively seek out new community partnerships, particularly those who can help sustain the project beyond the initial grant funding. Some examples include businesses, medical and rehabilitation communities, colleges, faith-based and youth organizations, and nonprofits. See examples of past projects in our [UAC Story Map](#), and reference NACD’s archive of [urban and community webinars](#) for other examples of conservation district projects related to agricultural conservation in urban and community contexts.

Can the district subcontract with another entity to complete the project?

Yes, some subcontracting is acceptable though not all funds. While partnering is encouraged to achieve project sustainability, one goal of this initiative is to enhance district capacity to provide conservation technical assistance in urban and community areas. Passing the project to another entity will not achieve this goal.

Can the funds be transferred to a lead partner of the project?

Districts must maintain control of the funds and thus are advised to reimburse partners on a regular schedule for approved tasks.

Can districts partner with their state association?

Yes, as long as a lead district submits the application and oversees the project.

ELIGIBILITY

Who is eligible to submit a proposal?

Only conservation districts as defined by the NACD Bylaws and tribal organizations are eligible to submit a proposal and oversee the project. Applicants are strongly encouraged to work with partner organizations, but only conservation districts and tribes may apply.

Our district has received a previous NACD Urban Agriculture Conservation grants. Are we eligible to apply for this one?

Yes, those who have received a previous UAC grant from NACD can apply within the following criteria:

- Previous recipients of **UAC Implementation Grants** are only eligible if they have received only one implementation grant in the last five years (between 2019-2023) and if all activities under the first grant are finalized and NACD staff have a record of a final report for the project on file.
- Previous recipients of the **UAC Planning Grants** are eligible to apply in the year immediately following their planning grant, provided they have shown adequate progress and outcomes toward their planning grant, and the implementation grant will support ongoing activities.
- The initial project must be completed and ongoing in some format to meet the original sustainability requirement.
- The new proposal must describe the first project's accomplishments, including metrics. It must also explain how the new activity/service will enhance the initial project and/or begin a separate project.

Our district applied for a previous Urban Agriculture Conservation grant but did not receive one. Would it be appropriate to resubmit the same project?

Yes, keep in mind that this is a competitive program. If you choose to apply for the same project again, [review previous grantees](#) to see what projects were successful the year you applied.

What if we can't get long-term funding committed before the proposal deadline? Can we still apply with tentative commitments?

It is not necessary to have long-term funding committed for the application. However, applicants will need to show community support and potential partners, as well as a plan for how they will achieve the long-term sustainability of their project.

TIMELINE

When are successful grantees announced?

We typically try to complete reviews with leadership by mid-May and will announce successful applicants once finalized and approved in the spring.

When will the funds be provided to the awardees...upfront or reimbursed?

An initial check will be provided to cover the first three months of expenses. Thereafter, a quarterly check will be sent for each of the subsequent three months.

How long do I have to complete my grant?

You will have one year from the date of the last signature on your MOA to complete all grant activities. In rare cases, we can offer an extension for a very short time frame. You are strongly advised to adhere to your initially proposed timeline.

What happens if we can't complete the grant work within the allotted time? Can the timeline be extended? Do we have to repay the money?

Applicants are strongly encouraged to complete the grant-funded portion of the project within the proposed timeline. Extensions will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

AGREEMENTS, RELEASE OF FUNDS AND REPORTING

What happens after successful applicants are announced?

We will contact successful applicants and provide information on next steps. Successful applicants must review and sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with NACD, committing to the completion of the work as proposed. As part of the MOA, grantees commit to submitting quarterly reports on time.

Should I invoice NACD when we spend grant funds?

If this is part of your audit and budget process, then yes, you may send us an invoice. However, these grants operate on an advance basis: an initial check will be provided to cover the first three months of expenses. Thereafter, a quarterly check will be **as funds are available pending release from our fiscal sponsor** and pending successful progress toward grant deliverables (as indicated in quarterly reports).

What happens if we need funds before the next advance?

You should plan for inconsistent timing between advances, as we cannot guarantee they will come on a specific timeline. Please ensure you have enough funds to cover activities in the event we are not able to issue advances.

How will I receive funds from NACD?

Depending on your internal processes, we can issue funds via paper check or direct deposit.

What is the quarterly reporting process like?

Applicants who agree to work with NACD via their MOA commit to submitting quarterly reports by a specific deadline (the 15th after the end of a quarter). Quarterly reports collect information on the number and types of clients reached, conservation outcomes, project activities, and funds spent. Release of additional funds to grantees is contingent on the successful completion of these reports (on time) and adequate progress toward grant deliverables.

Will I need to submit a final report?

Yes, it collects information like the quarterly report and lessons learned through the grant. Grantees must also submit a brief write-up for our weekly eResource newsletter highlighting project outcomes.

Am I required to continue reporting to NACD after my grant time frame ends?

No. However, we may occasionally check in regarding the ongoing success of your project, opportunities to network and connect with other grantees, presentation opportunities, etc. You are encouraged to participate in these activities as your time allows.

BUDGET

Are applicants required to apply for the full amount (\$60K) or (\$10K)?

No. Applicants may apply for however much they feel is needed to accomplish the project and to also allow it to continue after the initial grant with the support of the community and partners.

Is there a requirement to match the grant funds?

Yes. There is a 25% match of the total NACD funds required, which can be provided through cash and/or in-kind services. Examples of in-kind include donated materials, value of additional non-federal staff time, value of District board members' time at \$500 per day and other volunteers' time at \$25.43 per hour (from Independent Sector), free advertising, etc.

Is there a limit on the amount of grant used for salary?

No, but applicants applying for an implementation grant are strongly encouraged to have at least half of their proposed NACD budget cover salary of employees at the applying organization. The only budget limits apply to supplies (no more than 15%) and administrative (no more than 10%). Salary and benefits are up to the applicant. Note that a key evaluation criterion is how the service will be sustained after the initial grant funding.

Can we hire a part-time person?

Yes, as long as the focus is on conservation technical assistance.

If the grant funds are to be used to support staff, then does the sustainability expectation require maintaining that position?

The proposal must show how conservation technical assistance for urban agriculture will continue in future years, whether through staff, contractors, or other creative ideas.

Can funds be used to purchase land for urban agriculture/garden plots?

No. The funds are to be used for conservation technical assistance. Supplies and infrastructure are limited to 15% of the total budget.

Can the funds be used for tree planting in a city or village park?

As the funds are for conservation technical assistance for urban agriculture, they could be used to help identify appropriate sites and plants for a fruit or nut tree grove that will be open to public harvest and ensure appropriate planting. The 15% limit on supplies and equipment likely precludes the purchase of the actual grove trees.

What types of equipment or supplies can be purchased?

Up to 15% can be used for computers, office supplies, lab fees, soil testing, permits, planting and irrigation tools, signs, promotional materials, etc., and should be listed in the proposal. Additional funds for these should be sought elsewhere. These grant funds cannot be used for large equipment such as vehicles.

Can funds be used for cost-share to help cover the cost of on-the-ground practices?

Since the initiative focuses on providing technical assistance, grant funds cannot be used to cost-share conservation practices and projects.