

Conservation Partnership Initiative Questions and Answers

Q. What is the Conservation Partnership Initiative (CPI)?

A. The Conservation Partnership Initiative (CPI) is a voluntary program established to foster conservation partnerships that focus technical and financial resources on conservation priorities in watersheds of special significance and other geographic areas of environmental sensitivity. The CPI is a component of the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program established under authorities provided by the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1935, 16 U.S.C. 590a et seq.

Q. How does CPI work?

A. The CPI operates through a two-phase process. The first phase allows eligible applicants to apply for project planning funds to assist in the development of a watershed- or regional-scale plan that addresses conservation priorities through the establishment of locally led partnerships. CPI funds will support this phase of the initiative. Following successful completion of the project planning phase, project implementation may be carried out using funding secured or provided by project partners. CPI projects are expected to secure implementation funds from a wide range of potential partners from local, State, and Federal governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Q. Has a CPI rule been published?

A. No. Because CPI is a component of the CTA program and will be implemented using existing authorities, publication of a rule is not necessary.

Q. Who is eligible for CPI?

A. Funds may be awarded to State and local governments and agencies; Indian Tribes; and non-governmental organizations that have a history of working with agricultural producers.

Q. How much money is available?

A. For fiscal year 2005, \$1 million is available for CPI.

Q. What will be the size of the planning grants?

A. Applicants may request between \$50,000 and \$200,000.

Q. How will grant applications be evaluated?

A. CPI applications will be evaluated through a two-step process. Applications first must be submitted to the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist. In each State, the State

Technical Committee (or subcommittee thereof) will evaluate the proposals against the criteria for proposal evaluation identified in the CPI request for proposals (RFP) (a copy of the RFP can be found on the NRCS website at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cpi>). The State Technical committee will make recommendations to the State Conservationist, who may forward up to two proposals to the NRCS Chief. A State Conservationist may be party to one in-State proposal and one multi-State proposal. All proposals forwarded to the Chief will be scored and ranked by a CPI Review Board against the evaluation criteria found in the RFP. The CPI Review Board will make award recommendations to the NRCS Chief, who will make the final award decisions.

Q. Are applicants required to provide matching funds?

A. Yes. Applicants must provide a 1:1 match using non-NRCS funding. Up to 100 percent of the match may come from in-kind contributions.

Q. What is the connection between CPI and Partnerships and Cooperation?

A. Section 1243(f) of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3843(f)), as added by section 2003 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-171) (2002 Farm Bill) authorized a feature called Partnerships and Cooperation. Through Partnerships and Cooperation, the Secretary of Agriculture may “enter into stewardship agreements with State and local agencies, Indian tribes, and non-governmental organizations and to designate special projects, as recommended by the State Conservationist, after consultation with the State technical committee, to enhance technical and financial assistance provided to owners, operators, and producers to address natural resource issues related to agricultural production.” NRCS believes it can fulfill the intent of the discretionary Partnerships and Cooperation feature of the 2002 Farm Bill, using its existing authorities, through the CPI.

Q. What kind of projects are eligible for CPI?

A. Applications must describe projects that address conservation priorities in watersheds of special significance or other geographic areas of environmental sensitivity. The four conservation priorities for 2004 are:

- Terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat
- Invasive species
- Agricultural air quality
- Livestock nutrient management
- Minor/specialty crop pest management

In addition, projects must adhere to the following four CPI objectives. CPI projects must encourage:

- producers to cooperate in project planning and the establishment of project goals, as well as the installation and maintenance of conservation practices that affect multiple agricultural operations;

- producers to share information and technical and financial resources;
- cumulative and demonstrable conservation benefits in geographic areas; and,
- the development and demonstration of innovative conservation methods.

Q. Is CPI a nationwide program?

A. Yes. Applications for CPI are accepted from the fifty States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands of the United States, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Q. How do entities apply for CPI?

A. Following publication of the CPI Request for Proposals (RFP), applicants have 60 days to submit their proposals to the appropriate NRCS State Office. Address information for each NRCS State Office is listed in the RFP, and on the website indicated below. Multi-State proposals must be submitted to all relevant NRCS State Offices. Following the close of the application period, State Conservationists have 30 days to convene a meeting of the State Technical Committee (or a subcommittee thereof) to evaluate the proposals. Application information and materials are available on the NRCS website at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cpi>.

Q. Who provides the technical assistance on CPI projects?

A. NRCS, the grantee, and other project partners may provide the technical assistance on CPI projects.

Q. Is special consideration provided for limited resource and beginning farmers and ranchers, and Tribes?

A. Yes. NRCS intends to select as one of the CPI awards a proposal that addresses one of the CPI conservation priorities as it impacts limited resource or beginning farmers and ranchers, or Tribes.

Q. Who are limited resource producers?

A. A limited resource producer/rancher is: (1) A person with direct or indirect gross farm sales of not more than \$100,000 in each of the previous two years (to be increased starting in fiscal year 2004 to adjust for inflation using the Prices Paid by Farmer Index as compiled by the National Agriculture Statistics Service; and (2) Has a total household income at or below the National poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years (to be determined annually using Commerce Department data). A limited resource producer/rancher self determination tool is available on the Web at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/tool_noname.asp

Q. Who are beginning farmers and ranchers?

A. The basic criterion for a beginning farmer or rancher is an individual or entity who has operated a farm or a ranch for not more than ten years. Contact your local USDA Service Center for additional information.

For More Information

If you need more information about CPI, please contact Kari Cohen, Financial Assistance Programs Division, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 14th and Independence Ave., SW., Room 5239-S, Washington, DC 20250. Phone: (202) 720-2335; Facsimile: (202) 720-4265; Email: kari.cohen@usda.gov Subject: Conservation Partnership Initiative RFP; or consult the NRCS Web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cpi> .