

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative
Questions and Answers
Fiscal Year 2006**

Q. What is the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCCPI)?

A. The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCCPI) is a voluntary program established to foster conservation partnerships that focus technical and financial resources in watersheds (8-digit HUC) and airsheds of special significance. The CCPI 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 CCPI work?

A. The CCPI 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-plan that addresses conservation priorities through the establishment of locally led partnerships. CCPI 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. CCPI 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 CCPI rule been published?

A. No. Because CCPI 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 CCPI?

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 2006, up to \$4,000,000 is available for projects that focus technical and financial resources on watersheds (8-digit HUC) or airsheds of special significance. Funds will be awarded for watershed or airshed planning through a nationwide competition that consists of two components:

- *Conservation Priorities component*: Applicants must address at least one of the CCPI conservation priorities identified in the funding announcement. Up to \$2 million is available for this component.
- *Rapid Watershed Assessment (RWA) component*: Applicants must develop RWAs consistent with NRCS guidelines (these guidelines are available on the CCPI web page, www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ccpi). Up to \$2 million is available for this component.

Q. What is a Rapid Watershed Assessment (RWA)?

A. A rapid watershed assessment is a method for identifying the existing natural resource conditions in a watershed and the means by which natural resource challenges may be addressed. NRCS has issued guidance regarding RWA development. This guidance is posted on the CCPI web page: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ccpi. Applicants submitting proposals under the RWA component should review this document carefully. RWAs developed using CCPI funding must be consistent with this guidance.

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. CCPI 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 CCPI announcement for program funding (the announcement can be found on the CCPI web page at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ccpi>). The State Technical committee will make recommendations to the State Conservationist, who may forward up to two proposals (for each component) to the NRCS Chief. All proposals forwarded to the Chief will be scored and ranked by a CCPI Review Board against the evaluation criteria found in the RFP. The CCPI 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 CCPI 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 CCPI.

Q. Is CCPI a nationwide program?

A. Yes. Applications for CCPI 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 CCPI?

A. Following publication of the CCPI funding announcement, applicants have 60 days to submit their proposals to the appropriate NRCS State Office(s). Address information for each NRCS State Office is listed in the announcement. 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/ccpi>.

Q. Who provides the technical assistance on CCPI projects?

A. NRCS, the grantee, and other project partners may provide the technical assistance for CCPI projects.

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

A. Yes. For each component, NRCS intends to select as one of the CCPI awards a proposal that addresses RWAs or one or more of the CCPI conservation priorities as they 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 CCPI, 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@wdcusda.gov or consult the NRCS Web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ccpi> .