

Key Points

January 2005

Conservation Innovation Grants

- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is a voluntary program intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production.
- The 2002 Farm Bill authorized CIG under EQIP. Funds made available for CIG come from EQIP. Proposed projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers.
- The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers CIG.
- The CIG final rule was published in the Federal Register on January 11, 2005.
- A Request for Proposals (RFP) announcing the availability of funds for fiscal year 2005 was published simultaneously on the NRCS website and on the Federal government's eGrant portal, www.grants.gov.
- CIG funds are awarded through a nationwide grants competition. CIG applications will be accepted from State or local units of government, Federally-recognized Indian Tribes, non-governmental organizations, and individuals.
- The National grants competition will emphasize projects that have a goal of providing benefits over a large geographic area. These projects may be watershed based, regional, multi-State, or nationwide in scope.
- The CIG final rule describes the potential for implementing a State component of CIG. The intent of the State component is to provide flexibility to NRCS State Conservationists to target CIG funds to individual producers, smaller organizations, and limited geographic areas.
- The State component of CIG will be piloted in a limited number of States in fiscal year 2005. Funding availability and application and submission information for State competitions will be announced through public notices (and on State NRCS websites) separately from this National notice. State Conservationists will determine the funding level for State competitions, with individual grants not to exceed \$75,000.
- Applications should describe the use of innovative technologies or approaches, or both, to address a natural resource conservation concern or concerns. The natural resource concerns eligible for funding through CIG will be announced in the RFP, and may change annually. The five natural resource concerns for fiscal year 2005 are:
 - Water resources
 - Soil resources
 - Atmospheric resources
 - Grazing land and forest health
 - Wildlife habitat

Selected applicants may receive grants of up to 50 percent of the total project cost. Applicants must provide non-Federal funding for at least 50 percent of the project cost, of which up to one-half (25 percent of the total project cost) may come from in-kind contributions.

- CIG provides for two programmatic exceptions for historically underserved groups.
 - Each year, up to 10 percent of CIG funds may be set aside for applicants who are beginning or limited resource farmers or ranchers, or Tribes, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities.
 - Matching funds for grants awarded to any of the groups mentioned above may consist of up to 75 percent in-kind contributions.
- All CIG applications must include a letter of review from the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist(s). State Conservationists will review proposed projects for potential duplication of effort, ethics concerns, and consistency with NRCS needs and overall EQIP objectives.
- Qualified applications will be scored by a peer review panel against the following criteria for proposal evaluation:
 - Purpose and goals
 - Soundness of approach or design
 - Project management
 - Transferability

- Scored applications will be forwarded to an NRCS Grant Review Board, consisting of the Deputy Chief for Programs, Deputy Chief for Science and Technology, Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment, one Regional Assistant Chief, and one State Conservationist. The Grant Review Board will certify the rankings from the peer review panels, and ensure that the proposal evaluations are consistent with program objectives.
- The Grant Review Board will make recommendations to the Chief for final selections.

For More Information

If you need more information about CIG, please contact Kari Cohen, 14th and Independence SW, Room 5239-S, Washington, D.C., 20250; phone: (202) 720-2335; fax: (202) 720-4265; e-mail: kari.cohen@usda.gov. Additional information, including *Federal Register* notices, is available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig>.



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<http://www.usda.gov/farmbill>

Note: This is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.