

Program Description

December 2010

Conservation Innovation Grant Program

Overview

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG), authorized under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), 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. Under CIG, EQIP funds are used to award competitive grants to non-Federal governmental or non-governmental organizations, federally-recognized Indian tribes, or individuals. CIG funding will be available for single- or multiyear projects.

Authority

Section 1240H of the Food Security Act of 1985 was amended by section 2301 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-171), and established CIG with funding from EQIP. Section 2509 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246) reauthorized CIG. The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for EQIP to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is a vice president of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).

Scope

CIG is available in the 50 States, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

How CIG Works

Funding for CIG is announced each year through a funding notice. Funds for single- or multi-year

projects, not to exceed three years, will be awarded through a nationwide competitive grants process. CIG competitions 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.

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 identified in the funding announcement, and may change annually.

Applications are evaluated by a technical peer review panel against criteria identified in the funding notice. Evaluated applications will be forwarded to an NRCS Grant Review Board. The Grant Review Board will make recommendations for project approval to the NRCS Chief. Final selections will be made by the Chief. Awards will be made through a grant agreement.

At least 50 percent of the total cost of the project must come from non-Federal matching funds (cash and in-kind contributions) provided by the grantee. The grantee also is responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully complete the project. NRCS will provide technical oversight for each project receiving an award.

In addition to the nationwide grants competition, the State component of CIG is available in select States each year. The State component emphasizes projects that have a goal of providing benefits within a limited geographic area. Projects may be farm-based, multi-county, small watershed, or Statewide in scope. Public



notices in each participating State will announce the availability of funds for the State CIG competitions.

Eligibility

Applicant: To be eligible, CIG applicants must be a federally-recognized Indian tribe, State or local unit of government, non-governmental organization, or individual.

Project: To be eligible, proposals must involve landowners who meet the eligibility requirements under EQIP.

Application Process

The CIG application process is outlined below:

1. When funds for CIG become available, a funding notice is published on the NRCS website www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html and on www.grants.gov, to solicit project proposals from federally-recognized Indian tribes, State and local governments, and non-governmental organizations and individuals.
2. Interested eligible entities and individuals will have an application period including a deadline to submit proposals to NRCS. Information will include in the funding notice.
3. Peer technical review panels evaluate proposals against the evaluation criteria described in the funding notice. Evaluated proposals are forwarded to a Grant Review Board.
4. An NRCS Grant Review Board certifies the recommendations from the technical peer review panels, and ensures that the proposal evaluations are consistent with program objectives. The Board then makes recommendations for awards to the NRCS Chief.
5. Final award selections are made by the Chief.
6. Selected applicants enter into grant agreements with NRCS. Following signature by NRCS and the grantee, grant funds are obligated.

Identifying Natural Resource Conservation Concerns

The CIG natural resource conservation concerns are identified through an information gathering process that included the NRCS State

Conservationists, other Federal agencies, and agricultural and environmental stakeholders. The natural resource concerns may be reviewed and updated each year to ensure that CIG continues to address critical resource conservation needs.

Grant Agreements

Once selected, grant recipients must work with the designated NRCS official to finalize and sign grant agreements, incorporating all necessary project requirements. A grant agreement is the legal instrument with which the Federal government establishes partnerships with State, Tribal, or local government entities or non-governmental organizations.

Documentation of Progress on Funded Projects

Grant recipients are required to submit progress reports to NRCS. These reports will describe the applicant's progress towards the purposes and goals of the project and document adherence to program guidelines. In addition, a final report must be submitted to NRCS upon completion of the project.

For More Information

If you need more information about CIG, please contact the National CIG Program Manager, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 6227-S, Washington, D.C., 20250, telephone: (202) 720-8071, fax: (202) 720-4839.

Additional information is available on the World Wide Web at:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html

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.