

**2025 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM**  
**PHASE II, GRANT PROPOSAL**  
**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)**  
**January 9, 2025**

**GENERAL QUESTIONS**

1. Q. Can the project duration differ from the Concept Proposal?  
A. Yes, the project start and end dates can be updated so long as they fall within the allowed grant duration (November 1, 2025, through June 30, 2028).
2. Q. Is the submitter required to obtain formal organizational approval prior to submitting a Grant Proposal?  
A. The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) does not require that applicants provide formal letters of approval from the applicant organization. However, applicants must follow their organization's internal procedures for submitting grant applications.
3. Q. Should applicants directly address the feedback received on the Concept Proposal?  
A. Applicant responses within the Financial Assistance Application Tool (FAAST) and content provided on the required templates may be responsive to feedback received. However, applicants should not provide a direct/formal response to feedback, nor attempt to respond point-by-point to reviewer feedback.
4. Q. Can figures, pictures, or tables be included in the Grant Proposal application?  
A. No, the FAAST system is not designed to facilitate figures, pictures, or tables. Additionally, projects selected for funding must conform with the application formatting requirements developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for this program so attachments should not be altered to include figures, pictures, and/or tables.
5. Q. Can references and/or citations be included in the Grant Proposal application? Where should the bibliography be located?  
A. References and/or citations may be provided so long as they are deemed necessary and responsive to the prompt and, if applicable, fit within the character limits provided in the FAAST system. Applicants should not upload supplemental documents, supersede template page limits, or take advantage of templates without character or page limits to provide references or a bibliography. This would be considered circumventing character and page limits which may result in disqualification of a proposal. Note, the Technical Review Committee (TRC) is not required to review references or citations provided.
6. Q. Can hyperlinks or website URLs be included in the Grant Proposal application?  
A. Applicants are discouraged from including hyperlinks or website URLs within the Grant Proposal application. While these are not strictly prohibited, TRC members are not required to read external content. Links provided in the FAAST system will appear as text. Additionally, use of hyperlinks that serve to circumvent the character limits set forth in the FAAST system may result in the disqualification of a proposal.

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7. Q. Where are the character limits for each Grant Proposal question listed?
- A. The character limit for each question is provided in the FFAST system. The character limits can also be found in the Grant Proposal Questions and Scoring section of the [Grant Proposal Instructions](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/2025_SCBGP_Grant_Proposal_Instructions.pdf) ([https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty\\_Crop\\_Competitiveness\\_Grants/docs/2025\\_SCBGP\\_Grant\\_Proposal\\_Instructions.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/2025_SCBGP_Grant_Proposal_Instructions.pdf)). Character limits includes letters, numbers, punctuation, spaces, and special characters.
8. Q. Can acronyms be used in the Grant Proposal?
- A. Yes, applicants should define the acronym the first time that it is introduced by writing it out and then incorporating the acronym in parenthesis. Please be sure to use the acronyms consistently throughout the application.
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## **ELIGIBILITY**

1. Q. Can proposals submitted to the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) promote specialty crops grown outside of California?
- A. Proposals must demonstrate a clear benefit to the California specialty crop industry. CDFA cannot anticipate how proposals that will directly benefit specialty crops grown outside of California will be viewed by the TRC.
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## **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE APPLICATION TOOL (FFAST)**

1. Q. Can the Grant Proposal application in the FFAST system be saved as a PDF?
- A. There is not a direct way to generate a PDF of the Grant Proposal application within the FFAST system. To save as a PDF, right click in the browser and select 'Print', select 'Save as PDF' from the drop down before clicking on 'Save'.
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## **PRIOR-YEAR SCBGP PROJECTS**

1. Q. How far back should applicants go when responding to the Prior SCBGP section?
- A. Applicants should include any prior year SCBGP project(s) that the current application will build upon, regardless of how many years ago it was.
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**PROJECT OVERSIGHT**

1. Q. Who should provide résumés or curriculum vitae (CV)?  
A. Résumés or CVs should be provided for the Project Director, Project Manager, Principal Investigator (PI), and any collaborator or contractor responsible for the development or execution of the project. Project support staff such as interns, student assistants, or part time staff are not required to submit a résumé/CV. If a résumé/CV is not available (i.e., position is not yet filled), applicants may provide the duty statement for the role that will be performing the work.
  2. Q. Is there a page limit for resumes or CVs?  
A. There is not page limit for resumes or CVs. Applicants should ensure that information provided is relevant and necessary and not used to circumvent character limits in the FFAST system.
  3. Q. Is there a required template or format for résumés/CVs?  
A. There is no required template or specific format required for résumés /CVs. It is up to the applicant to determine the most appropriate format to use for résumés and/or CVs submitted.
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**OTHER SUPPORT FROM FEDERAL OR STATE GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS**

1. Q. Should applicants include proposals that have been submitted for funding to other federal or state government programs but that have not yet been awarded?  
A. Yes, applicants should indicate projects that have or will be submitted to or funded by another federal or state grant program other than the SCBGP. If, at any time, an applicant is awarded funds from another federal or state grant program, it is the responsibility of the applicant to notify CDFA immediately.
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**FUNDING AREA AND FUNDING CATEGORY**

No questions at this time.

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**PROGRAM PRIORITIES**

No questions at this time.

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**PROJECT PURPOSE**

No questions at this time.

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**PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND WORK PLAN**

1. Q. Can project personnel change between the Concept Proposal application and the Grant Proposal application?  
A. Yes, personnel listed in the Grant Proposal can differ from those listed in the Concept Proposal application.
2. Q. Is there a limit to the number of individuals listed in the "performed by" column of the Work Plan?  
A. No, there is not a limit to the number of individuals that can be listed in the "performed by" column. Applicants may choose to abbreviate positions after the first time used.
3. Q. Can the time periods associated with each objective overlap with one another?  
A. Yes, objectives can occur concurrently. Please ensure the correct time periods are noted and the differences in the objectives activities are described in detail.
4. Q. Can the Project Manager/Director be listed in the Grant Proposal as the PI or Co-PI?  
A. Yes, it is up to the applicant to determine which titles to use for employees listed in the Project Objectives and Work Plan and Budget Narrative templates. Ensure that the title(s) used in the Budget Narrative template match those used for the same individual in the Work Plan.
5. Q. Can general information about the objective be included at the end of the objective?  
A. The project objectives should summarize the main goals that will be accomplished. The activities listed in the Work Plan table should summarize the activities necessary to accomplish the stated objective. Applicants are discouraged from providing extraneous information.

***New Questions: January 9, 2025***

6. Q. Can the project start and end dates change from the Concept Proposal to the Grant Proposal?  
A. Yes, applicants may adjust the project start and end dates so long as all of the project activities occur within the allowable grant duration (November 1, 2025 through June 30, 2028). However, the project duration response provided in the Concept Proposal application is locked for editing. Applicants should ensure that the project duration listed on the Project Objectives and Work Plan (Form 1.6.2.1.) template reflects the updated timeline.
  7. Q. Should outreach activities be presented as a separate objective or incorporated into existing objectives?  
A. It is up to the applicant to determine where to include the outreach activities. If appropriate, they can be listed as a single objective with associated activities or outreach related activities can be included with the appropriate project objective.
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**PROJECT BENEFICIARIES**

1. Q. How are project beneficiaries defined?  
A. Project beneficiaries are the specialty crop stakeholders that will directly benefit from project activities but will not receive grant funds. The estimated number of project beneficiaries should be reasonable, trackable, and reportable within the grant duration. Employees of the applicant organization, contractors, individuals receiving stipends, or anyone else directly receiving grant funds should not be included as project beneficiaries.
  2. Q. Can members of an organization that receives funding be listed as project beneficiaries?  
A. Yes, members of an organization (such as a commodity board or commission) that will receive a direct benefit from project activities can potentially be listed as project beneficiaries regardless of whether that organization will receive SCBGP funds. Individuals or organizations that are paid for directly with grant funds, including individuals receiving a stipend are not an appropriate measure of project beneficiaries.
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**SPECIALTY CROP ENHANCEMENT**

No questions at this time.

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**PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY**

1. Q. What is expected in the Project Sustainability section response?  
A. Applicants should describe how the efforts of the proposed project will continue after the grant duration has ended. This may include materials (such as educational or promotional) that will be generated through the course of the grant and maintained after the grant duration has ended. If applicable, describe the lasting impact that the project is anticipated to have on the specialty crop industry.
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**EXTERNAL PROJECT SUPPORT**

1. Q. Is there a required format or template for letters of support? To whom should they be addressed?  
A. There is no required template or specific format for letters of support. It is recommended that if letters of support are submitted, they be written on the stakeholders official letterhead and be addressed to CDFA's Office of Grants Administration and should explain why the stakeholder supports the project. Letters of support should not be submitted in lieu of providing a response to the External Support section, and are not a requirement of the SCBGP.

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2. Q. Whom should be included in the External Support response?  
A. Within the External Support response, identify at least one specialty crop stakeholder and explain why they believe the project is important and timely. Stakeholders can be individuals or organizations that are involved in the specialty crop industry (e.g., specific growers, companies, certified crop advisors, pest control advisors, commodity boards or commissions, trade associations, etc.). Applicants should not include members of the general public, legislators, or any organizations that are not affiliated with the specialty crop industry.
  3. Q. Can cooperating entities be included in External Support and can they provide Letters of Support?  
A. No, External Support should be from those who are not directly involved in the project. Cooperating entities and individuals being paid with grant funds or providing cost share should not be included in this section.
  4. Q. Do applicants need to obtain and provide official approval from entities listed in the External Support section?  
A. No, CDFA does not require applicants to provide official authorization or letters of support from entities listed in the External Support response. Applicants are encouraged to obtain approval from individuals and/or organizations listed in this section prior to submitting a Grant Proposal application.
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**OUTCOME MEASURES**

1. Q. What is the difference between knowledge gained and the number of stakeholders that have implemented a new practice?  
A. Knowledge gained is the number of individuals that have reported an increase in knowledge due to grant activities. The number of stakeholders that have implemented a new practice or tool are the total number of individuals that report having started using a new recommended practice or tool as a result of project activities. Both should reflect a direct measurement such as through surveys, quizzes, interviews, etc.
2. Q. How should applicants show the feasibility of achieving totals indicated in the Outcome Measures template (Form 1.6.1.1.).  
A. It is recommended that applicants elaborate on the data collection methods that will be carried out. If appropriate, applicants may summarize previous work conducted by the applicant that achieved similar results.
3. Q. How should knowledge gained be determined?  
A. Applicants should use the method most appropriate for their project and/or field. There are no restrictions on how knowledge gained should be measured. However, applicants must demonstrate that data collection methods are reasonable and show actual increase in knowledge. This can be accomplished through conducting surveys, quizzes, interviews, etc. Note that accessing materials, receiving information, or attendance does not sufficiently measure knowledge gained.

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4. Q. Are there page or character limits for the Outcome Measures template (Form 1.6.1.1.)?  
A. No, there are no page or character limits for the Outcome Measures template (Form 1.6.1.1.). Content provided must be relevant and should not include additional information in an attempt to circumvent character limits set forth in the FAAST system.
5. Q. How should baseline sales be determined?  
A. There are no specific requirements for measuring sales; it is up to the applicant to determine the most appropriate measure of baseline sales. Applicants must ensure that data collection methods measure actual sales numbers.

***New Questions: January 9, 2025***

6. Q. How should Indicator 1.5c be measured?  
A. Indicator 1.5c should measure the increase in the volume sold AND the average price. The numbers indicated should reflect the total numerical increase rather than a percentage. It is up to the applicant to determine how best to measure this.

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**BUDGET SECTION**

1. Q. Can the total funds requested change from the original Concept Proposal application?  
A. Yes, so long as the total funds requested fall between \$100,000 and \$500,000. CDFA cannot anticipate how significant changes to the budget (plus or minus 20 percent) will be viewed by the TRC.
2. Q. What types of costs should be categorized as G. Other?  
A. Budget category G. Other includes expenses that are not listed in any of the other budget categories. These types of costs include, but are not limited to, conference registration fees, rental expenses, printing or postage costs, and publication fees for professional journals.
3. Q. Can multiple trips be grouped together in C. Travel, or should each trip be listed individually?  
A. Multiple trips for the same purpose, location, personnel, and similar costs may be grouped together within the Budget Narrative (Form 1.6.2.2.) template. Applicants may use the "number claiming expense" column to reflect the number of people traveling and the number of trips. In the justification, applicants should specify what the number claiming each expense entails, e.g., in the justification it would be noted that two individuals will be taking four trips for a total of eight claiming the expense. The trips should be separated if the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) (<https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>) maximum per diem rates differ. Applicants may also group mileage that occurs for the same purpose, but to different locations within the same county, by listing the county as the destination.

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4. Q. Is there a limit to the total funds requested for each budget category?  
A. There is not a limit to the total funds requested per category so long as the funds requested are reasonable and total funds requested do not exceed \$500,000. Please note, H. Indirect Cost is limited to 8 percent of total personnel (A. Salary and Wages plus B. Fringe Benefits) requested.
5. Q. How should bridge toll fees be categorized within the Budget Narrative (Form 1.6.2.2.) template?  
A. Tolls should be listed in the C. Travel section of the Budget Narrative (Form 1.6.2.2.) template.
6. Q. Can individuals with similar titles be grouped together within A. Salary and Wages?  
A. CDFA recommends that all individuals listed in A. Salary and Wages be separated out into individual line items. Employees with the same title should be differentiated by the individuals name followed by their title, if the individual is not yet known, applicants may include a numeral after the title (ex: To Be Determined, Project Scientist 1).
7. Q. How are sub-contractors defined? Is a budget breakdown required for sub-contractors?  
A. A sub-contractor is any individual or organization that will be classified as a contractor by an organization listed under F. Contractual. Yes, applicants should provide a similar breakdown for sub-contractors as they would for entities listed under F. Contractual.
8. Q. How should applicants list contractors that have yet to be determined?  
A. Contractors that have not yet been identified can be listed as "To be determined" within the Budget Narrative (Form 1.6.2.2.) template.
9. Q. Are costs associated with contractors or consultants subject to the same requirements as the applicant organization?  
A. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that contractors/consultants and any subsequent subcontractors comply with applicable federal regulations and requirements.
10. Q. What is the maximum indirect cost rate that can be requested by a contractor?  
A. Contractors that will utilize a salary and wages fee structure may request indirect cost up to 8 percent of their total personnel costs (A. Salary and Wages plus B. Fringe Benefits). If applicable, indirect cost for contractual personnel should be included in F. Contractual, in the subsection H. Indirect Cost, for each separate contractor for whom this cost will be requested.
11. Q. Do the individual cost categories listed within F. Contractual need to be completed for contractors charging a flat rate?  
A. No, if a flat rate fee structure will be used, provide a summary of the services and/or activities that the contractor will carry out along with a justification for the use of a flat rate fee structure. The justification should demonstrate that the rate is reasonable and consistent with fees in the marketplace for similar services. No cost breakdown is required for categories A-H because all associated costs (e.g., supplies, travel, etc.) should be included in the flat rate.



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12. Q. Can applicants use their organizations established rates to estimate travel costs?  
A. When estimating travel, all applicants should use the lesser of the rates in effect, either their organizations established rates or those established by the [GSA](https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates) (<https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>).
13. Q. How should employee salary and/or fringe benefit increases be listed in the Budget Narrative (Form 1.6.2.2.) template?  
A. The total funds requested for each employee should reflect the total amount that the employee will be compensated for the entire project duration. Within the employee justification, applicants may note that the salary and/or fringe benefits per year will change and include the calculations of total costs based on the anticipated annual salary/fringe benefit rate.
14. Q. Are applicants required to list fringe benefit rates if they will not be requested?  
A. No, applicants should not include fringe benefit rates unless they will be covered by grant funds.
15. Q. What information is required if personnel costs (A. Salary and Wages and/or B. Fringe Benefits) will not be covered with grant funds?  
A. The Budget Narrative (Form 1.6.2.2.) template should only include costs that will be covered by SCBGP funds. No additional information is required if SCBGP will not be used, including costs associated with personnel.
16. Q. Are website hosting fees an allowable expense?  
A. Website hosting fees are potentially an allowable cost. Associated costs must be directly related to meeting the project goals and objectives. Costs cannot be used to promote a single organization, brand, or logo and cannot be used to cover costs associated with managing a sales portal.
17. Q. Are there page or character limits for the Budget Narrative template (Form 1.6.2.2.)?  
A. No, there are no page or character limits for the Budget Narrative template (Form 1.6.2.2.). Content provided must be relevant and should not include additional information in an attempt to circumvent character limits set forth in the FFAST system.
18. Q. Can SCBGP funds be used to cover costs associated with liability insurance?  
A. No, grant funds cannot be used to cover costs associated with liability insurance. Insurance and indemnification costs are considered indirect costs and are unallowable as direct cost.
19. Q. How should airfare and vehicle rental rates be determined?  
A. Applicants should provide estimates for airfare and vehicle rentals based on current information available. The most economical rate options available should be used for both airfare and vehicle rentals. If applicable, colleges and universities may use the vehicle rental rates established by their organization's fleet services.

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20. Q. Are long-term vehicle leases allowed and how should they be listed in Budget Narrative (Form 1.6.2.2.) template?
- A. If necessary and appropriate for the project, applicants may consider leasing a vehicle so long as the costs are reasonable. Costs should be listed in the Budget Narrative under category C. Travel as a monthly expenditure. Note, that insurance and maintenance costs necessary for a leased vehicle are considered indirect costs and cannot be charged as direct costs. Lease agreements must terminate prior to the close of the grant duration.
21. Q. Can pre-award or post-award grant management costs be included in the budget?
- A. All expenditures paid for with SCBGP funds must occur within the allowable grant duration (November 1, 2025 through June 30, 2028). Any post award related expenditures that occur prior to 06/30/2028 can be included in the budget.
22. Q. How should a flat rate contractor that is responsible for multiple roles be listed in the Budget Narrative (Form 1.6.2.2.) template?
- A. Describe the roles and provide a justification for all of the work that the contractor will be responsible for. If applicable, provide further breakdown of the flat rate fee such as by activity or deliverable.
23. Q. How should applicants identify contractors that have yet to be determined?
- A. All anticipated contractors should be included within F. Contractual category. If the specific contractor is unknown, indicate "to be determined".

***New Questions: January 9, 2025***

24. Q. How should applicants determine travel costs?
- A. Applicants should use the lowest reasonable commercial airfare available. Meals and lodging rates should not exceed those established by the GSA (<https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates> ). Applicants should use the lesser of the GSA rate or their established rate for travel.
25. Q. Can columns, rows, or tables be added or deleted in the Budget Narrative (Form 1.6.2.2.) template?
- A. Applicants may add rows to existing tables as needed. Unused rows and tables should be left blank or deleted. Columns may not be added to any tables. Font style and size should also not be altered.

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**PROCUREMENT OF GOODS AND SERVICES**

1. Q. Are applicants required to report procurement methods for selecting a contractor to CDFA?
- A. Applicants are not required to provide the procurement method that will be undergone within the Grant Proposal application. Successful applicants will be required to maintain procurement documentation through the competitive process and be able to provide documentation to CDFA upon request.
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**COST SHARE**

1. Q. Are cooperating entities or organizations contributing through cost share required to submit letters of commitment?  
A. Entities that will not receive SCBGP funds but will be contributing to the project are not required to submit letters of commitment. Applicants are strongly encouraged to obtain confirmation of participation from these entities prior to submitting the Grant Proposal.
  2. Q. Is cost share a requirement of the SCBGP?  
A. No, cost share is not a requirement of the SCBGP and is generally discouraged by USDA. CDFA includes the ability to outline cost share so that proposals that include unallowable costs and/or activities necessary for the completion of project goals and objectives to demonstrate that SCBGP funds will not be used for these costs. Cost share is not a requirement and as an unscored question, does not impact whether projects will be awarded funding.
  3. Q. Will a justification be required to request cost share in the Grant Proposal Phase if it was not previously requested?  
A. No, applicants choosing to report cost share should complete and upload the Cost Sharing template (Form 1.6.2.3.) to the application in the FFAST system.
  4. Q. Can cost share be contributed even if it is not included in the Grant Proposal application or Cost Sharing Template (Form 1.6.2.3.)?  
A. Yes, it is up to the applicant to determine whether to report on cost share. Cost share is not a requirement of the SCBGP. CDFA includes the ability to outline cost share so that proposals that include unallowable costs/activities necessary for the project goals and objectives to demonstrate that SCBGP funds will not be used for these costs.
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**REVIEW PROCESS**

1. Q. Are the TRC reviewers the same for Phase II as they were for Phase I?  
A. TRC members generally do not change from Phase I to Phase II.
  2. Q. Will TRC reviewers have access to the feedback provided during the Concept Proposal phase?  
A. Yes, TRC reviewers have access to comments provided during the Concept Proposal phase.
  3. Q. How does CDFA avoid conflict of interest with TRC reviewers?  
A. CDFA reviews TRC member applications and résumés/CVs to identify possible conflicts of interest. All TRC members are recused from reviewing and discussing any proposal where conflicts of interest are identified or would likely occur. TRC members are also required to notify CDFA of any potential conflict of interest.
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**GRANT MANAGEMENT**

1. Q. Are SCBGP recipients required to report on cost share?  
A. Yes, cost share is reported on invoices, progress reports, and final reports. Reporting on progress and final reports includes the type of cost share (i.e., matching funds or in-kind contributions) and the amount.
2. Q. How do recipients obtain prior approval for contractors?  
A. Contractors listed in the Scope of Work formally approved by USDA are considered to have obtained prior approval. Changes made to the listed contractors must be submitted to CDFA for approval prior to project related work being conducted by that individual or organization. Recipients must follow necessary procurement requirements for all contractors paid for with SCBGP funds.
3. Q. Where can applicants find information on the disposition requirements of special purpose equipment?  
A. Information on the disposition as well as the purchase, use, management, maintenance, and reporting of special purpose equipment purchased with or developed under a SCBGP Grant Agreement can be found in 2 CFR 200.310-200.316. (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-D/subject-group-ECFR8feb98c2e3e5ad2>). These requirements continue to remain in effect after the close of the Grant Agreement.