

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)
September 10, 2026

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Q. Where can applicants find more information about the 2027 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP)?
A. The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)'s [SCBGP website](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/) has many resources for prospective applicants, including the [Request for Concept Proposals \(RFCP\)](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/2027_RFCP.pdf) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/2027_RFCP.pdf), supplemental documents designed to help with proposal development, and the schedule of upcoming office hours.
2. Q. Can multiple projects take place at the same location or on the same land?
A. There are no restrictions against multiple activities, including those funded by multiple funding sources, taking place at one location provided the proposal clarifies the mechanisms in place to ensure there is no duplication of costs.
3. Q. Can proposals that were not selected for funding in previous funding cycles be resubmitted for 2027?
A. There are no restrictions against submitting previously submitted proposals. However, please note that all proposals must meet the requirements for this funding cycle; character counts, questions, templates, allowability of costs, etc. may have changed since the proposal was originally submitted.
4. Q. How can an applicant demonstrate that their project benefits the California specialty crop industry, rather than the applicant organization or a single entity?
A. Applicants should clearly demonstrate that their project benefits the California specialty crop industry throughout the full scope of the proposal. All activities should directly support an industry-level need or objective, rather than enrich the applicant organization or a limited group. Project costs must be reasonable and limited to those necessary to execute project activities. Profit and overhead beyond the allowable indirect rate cannot be included in personnel costs, and participant support costs should align with the participants' actual level of involvement. Outcome measures should focus on benefits to the industry rather than improvements to the applicant's internal operations or circumstances. Outreach efforts should be designed to engage the broader industry and must not be restricted in ways that primarily benefit the applicant, its partners, or affiliated organizations.
5. Q. Why is the RFCP released ahead of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)?
A. USDA typically releases its NOFO in spring each funding year, with proposals due to USDA six to eight weeks later. Since CDFA's application process has two phases, each with administrative and technical review, CDFA releases the RFCP ahead of the USDA NOFO to allow time for the full solicitation process.
6. Q. What questions can CDFA staff answer regarding proposals to the conventional SCBGP program?
A. While CDFA staff cannot provide one-on-one support to applicants to the conventional SCBGP, nor advise on how to best answer questions in the proposal, CDFA can provide

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
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September 10, 2026

answers on general questions around allowability of costs and activities, eligibility requirements, program requirements, etc. through the Question-and-Answer (Q&A) process described in the RFCP.

7. Q. Where can applicants find the SCBGP Concept Proposal questions? Is the application available as a PDF or Word document?
- A. The SCBGP Concept Proposal questions, including character limits, are listed in the RFCP beginning on page 12. There is no alternative version of the application and all 2027 SCBGP Concept Proposals must be submitted using GOATS (<https://applications.cdfa.ca.gov/grants/s/>). Other submission methods will not be accepted and will result in disqualification of the proposal.
8. Q. Is it a requirement that the program director or project manager be an employee of the applicant organization, or can this role be held by a contractor?
- A. A contractor may be the program director or project manager of a proposal; it is not required that either role be held by an employee of the applicant organization. For all contractors, the applicant should ensure that the contractor is adequately qualified for the work and selected through a competitive process that follows a documented procurement policy which conforms to applicable federal law and reflects applicable state, local, and tribal laws and regulations. Reference 2 CFR 200.318 (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200#200.318>) for additional information on general procurement standards.

New Questions: September 10, 2026

9. Q. Can a project support both specialty crops and non-specialty crops?
- A. No, projects must benefit the California specialty crop industry and may not directly benefit non-specialty crops. If a project includes activities that benefit non-specialty crops, the costs associated with these activities must be covered through cost share.
10. Q. What is a block grant and how does SCBGP funding work?
- A. A block grant is a form of grant funding where a single entity awards funding to multiple other entities to support activities within a defined program purpose. Those entities then have a level of discretion to implement the program, again within the defined program purpose. Block grants are awarded by a formula meant to create a fair distribution of available funds amongst eligible participants. For SCBGP, USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), provides funding to state departments of agriculture and US territories, including California/CDFA, based on each state or territory's acreage and yield of specialty crops. Each state then manages its own solicitation process to distribute that funding to selected organizations through subawards.
11. Q. In the Concept Proposal phase, should project partners be listed if they have not yet confirmed their support?
- A. It is recommended that support be confirmed before listing a project partner in the Concept Proposal. All proposal questions should be answered as accurately as possible.

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)
September 10, 2026

12. Q. How can an applicant know if their project is appropriate for the SCBGP?
- A. Appendix A of the 2027 RFCP includes a list of acceptable and unacceptable project types. Appendix E of the RFCP has a list of costs and activities that are grounds for disqualification of SCBGP proposals. Please note that these lists are not intended to be all inclusive.
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ELIGIBILITY

1. Q. Are applicants required to be physically located in the state of California?
- A. There is no requirement that applicants be physically located in California, provided the proposal sufficiently demonstrates that the primary benefit of the project will be to California specialty crops.
2. Q. Is there a limit to the number of proposals that can be submitted by a single organization or Principal Investigator (PI)?
- A. There is no limit to the number of proposals that may be submitted by a single organization or PI, so long as each proposal submitted is for a unique project. Please ensure that the applicant organization and/or the PI has adequate capacity to effectively participate in multiple SCBGP grants. The combined time for the PI should not exceed 100 percent full time equivalent, should all projects be awarded funding, including projects funded by other sources.
3. Q. Can an organization serve as the lead on one project and as a contractor on another project?
- A. There are no restrictions against working on multiple projects, as long as each organization and individual has adequate capacity to effectively participate in the SCBGP grants.
4. Q. Are non-profit organizations required to have formalized their non-profit status to submit a Concept Proposal?
- A. No. However, all applicants must have their organization paperwork complete at the time of submitting a Grant Proposal, if invited to participate in Phase II. CDFA is unable to include proposals by organizations that are not recognized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in their submission to USDA. If an applicant is not able to complete their organization paperwork by Phase II, they may consider applying through a fiscal sponsor.

New Questions: September 10, 2026

5. Q. Is it possible to apply to the SCBGP without a Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) or Social Security Number (SSN)?
- A. It is possible to create an account in GOATS without either a FEIN or SSN; these fields are not mandatory. However, organizations without a FEIN or SSN at the time of Grant Agreement execution cannot be awarded funding as the State Controller's Office is unable to issue payments to recipients without either a FEIN or an SSN. For this reason, a FEIN will be required for applicants invited to submit a Grant Proposal in Phase II. Please note that individuals are not eligible to apply to the SCBGP.

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)
September 10, 2026

6. Q. Are for-profit organizations eligible to apply?
A. Yes, for-profit organizations are eligible to apply. Note that all proposals must demonstrate that the project will primarily benefit the California specialty crop industry, rather than the applicant organization.
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ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR LIMITED RESOURCE APPLICANTS (ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE) PROGRAM

1. Q. Can an organization that previously received an SCBGP grant through a fiscal sponsor apply to the Additional Assistance Program?
A. No. The use of a fiscal sponsor cannot be used to circumvent eligibility or previous recipient status to qualify for the Additional Assistance Program.

New Questions: September 10, 2026

2. Q. How can an applicant learn more about the Additional Assistance Program?
A. The 2027 Additional Assistance Program will open in November 2026. Interested applicants may review the [2026 Additional Assistance RFCP](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/2026_SCBGP_RequestForConceptProposals_AAP.pdf) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/2026_SCBGP_RequestForConceptProposals_AAP.pdf) to learn more about the program; note that the program may change somewhat year-to-year.
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GRANT OPPORTUNITY AND ADMINISTRATION TRACKING SYSTEM (GOATS)

1. Q. Have there been any updates to the GOATS application form?
A. The GOATS application form had an incorrect character limit in the Prior Year SCBGP Projects section. The prompt "Provide a summary of the outcomes of the previous efforts" was erroneously capped at 255 characters. CDFA has updated the form to allow 1,500 characters as described in the RFCP. All applicants who had created an application were notified via email on August 31, 2026; they may return to and edit this response if desired.

Update September 10, 2026: The GOATS system has been updated to allow a response between 1 and 80 for the California Assembly District. Applicants may return to and edit this section, if desired.

2. Q. Can multiple individuals work on the same proposal in GOATS?
A. GOATS does not currently support more than one person editing an application. While several accounts may view an application, only the account that created the application may make edits.
3. Q. Should grant writers or technical assistance providers create their own account in GOATS?
A. Grant writers, technical assistance providers, and similar should provide their own information when creating an account. They can then create individual applications for individual clients and provide their clients' information at that time.

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)
September 10, 2026

4. Q. Does the GOATS platform support saving a proposal prior to submission?
A. Yes. CDFA encourages applicants to save their progress regularly. To do so, navigate to the last page of any application section and select the "Save" button in the lower-right corner. The [GOATS User Guide](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/Salesforce_User_Guide.pdf) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/Salesforce_User_Guide.pdf) provides more detail.
5. Q. Should applicants upload attachments in GOATS?
A. No attachments should be uploaded in Phase I; any attachments uploaded will not be considered by the Technical Review Committee (TRC), will not improve the viability of the application, and may result in disqualification if it is determined that the uploaded documents serve to circumvent character limits.

New Questions: September 10, 2026

6. Q. Should members of large organizations, such as the University of California system, register as individuals or as the organization?
A. Members of large organizations should create their account in GOATS as an individual. Then, when applying for the 2027 SCBGP, applicants should list their organization, such as "The University of California, Davis," in the Organization Details section. Note that the status of the GOATS account used to create a proposal will not impact how an SCBGP proposal is reviewed or scored.
7. Q. There is a technical issue with the GOATS application. Who should be contacted to report this issue?
A. Technical issues and feedback regarding the GOATS application can be reported or provided by emailing grants@cdfa.ca.gov with a detailed description. If reporting a technical issue, screenshots are also helpful.

FUNDING AREA AND FUNDING CATEGORY

New Questions: September 10, 2026

1. Q. Is it possible to select more than one funding category for a proposal?
A. Concept Proposals may address elements from multiple funding areas and funding categories. However, applicants must select the **one** funding category that meets the primary focus of their Concept Proposal. It will not be possible to change that category once an application has been submitted.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

No questions at this time.

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)
September 10, 2026

PROJECT PURPOSE

No questions at this time.

PRIOR-YEAR SCBGP PROJECTS

1. Q. If an organization served as a contractor on a previous SCBGP project, are they required to respond to the Prior Year SCBGP Projects section?
A. Previous contractors may answer this question as "no." However, if the applicant previously served as a contractor but was the main responsible party for project activities, or if the applicant is building on a project where they previously served as a contractor, the response should be "yes," and appropriate responses should be provided.

Note that if a prior SCBGP project was awarded to the fiscal sponsor of a current applicant, with the current applicant as the responsible party for the project, then this response should be "yes," and appropriate responses should be provided.

2. Q. Can a proposal build upon a previous SCBGP project?
A. Yes. Applicants should detail how the proposed project builds upon, rather than duplicates, the previous SCBGP project.
 3. Q. Can an organization submit a proposal that builds upon a currently active SCBGP project?
A. Yes. Applicants should indicate the project is "active" in the GOATS system when completing the Prior Year SCBGP Projects section of the application and detail how the proposed project's goals and/or planned activities differ from those of the active project(s).
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PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

No questions at this time.

PROJECT BENEFICIARIES

No questions at this time.

OUTCOME MEASURES

New Questions: September 10, 2026

1. Q. Is a percentage change an acceptable measure to track progress against Outcome Measure 1, Indicator 1.5?
A. Yes. This indicator can be expressed in the following ways, 1) a dollar value, 2) a percent change, or 3) a combination of volume and average price. Projects should compare baseline sales to sales data following their marketing and promotion activities to determine the increase in sales. If a marketing and promotion project does not yet have one of these baselines established, one of the project objectives should include determining the

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)
September 10, 2026

baseline. Note that Indicator 1.5 is required for all marketing and promotional projects, regardless of the funding category selected.

2. Q. Is it allowable to include only a subset of project beneficiaries when tracking progress against selected indicators and/or subindicators?
- A. Yes. Depending on the project's goals and activities, it may be appropriate to track progress using a subset of project beneficiaries. For example, a project serving 4,000 students may choose to survey 400 students to measure changes in specialty crop consumption. However, results from the surveyed subset should not be extrapolated to the entire population served. For example, if 90 percent of the 400 students surveyed report an increase in specialty crop consumption, the project should report 360 students as demonstrating the increase, not extrapolate to 3,600 based on the total 4,000 students served.
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WORK PLAN AND OUTREACH

New Questions: September 10, 2026

1. Q. How detailed and finalized must the activities included in the Work Plan be? For example, should experimental design be fully realized?
- A. CDFA understands that a Concept Proposal is preliminary and may not include a fully developed Work Plan. If an applicant is invited to submit a full Grant Proposal in Phase II, CDFA cannot predict how the Technical Review Committee (TRC) will score a proposal that lacks detailed activities or plans at that stage. The TRC's evaluation will depend on the completeness and clarity of the information provided in the full proposal.
2. Q. Is there a preferred template to follow when completing the Work Plan and Objectives section in GOATS?
- A. For the Concept Proposal phase of the application, there is no preferred or required template for submitting the workplan and objectives section in GOATS. Please ensure all aspects of the workplan and objectives are clear; proposals should, 1) state all project objectives, 2) provide a brief description of the planned activities, 3) state who will perform each task (if known), and 4) provide approximate dates for when each activity will occur.
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BUDGET SECTION

1. Q. What is the difference between Project Partners and Contractors?
- A. Contractors will receive SCBGP funds and should be described in the Budget section. Note that if contributors will play a specialized role in the project and are included in the work plan but will not receive grant funds, this is an in-kind donation of services and must be included in the cost share summary in the Budget section.

Project partners will not receive SCBGP funds or provide an in-kind donation of goods or services. They will support or participate in the project in other ways and should be described in the Project Partners section.

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)
September 10, 2026

2. Q. Is there a maximum allowable percentage of total project costs that may be allocated to any one budget category?
A. No. All costs must be reasonable, allowable, and necessary for the successful completion of the project's goals.
3. Q. Are projects that include cost share scored higher or more likely to receive funding?
A. Cost share may be useful in demonstrating industry support for a proposal but is not a factor in scoring criteria. While cost share is presently not a requirement of the program, it may be necessary to cover costs that would otherwise be unallowable. If cost share is anticipated, it should be included in the concept proposal.
4. Q. Can some costs be covered by other sources of funding?
A. Yes, costs can be covered by cost share, including from other state or federal grants. If costs will be covered by other grants, this should be addressed in the Support from Other Federal or State Grant Programs section. Applicants must ensure that costs are not used to meet cost share requirements for more than one federal program and are not charged to multiple grants (i.e., no duplication of costs).
5. Q. How much detail is required for the budget?
A. The budget section should provide a reasonable estimate for all costs, then detail the costs requested and explain why they are necessary for the project goals in the text boxes provided.
6. Q. Is providing meals at a training allowable?
A. Providing meals at a training may be allowable if costs are reasonable (no higher than U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) locality maximums) and a justification is provided that such activity maintains the continuity of the meeting and to do otherwise will impose arduous conditions on the meeting participants.
7. Q. Are land rental costs allowable?
A. Land rental costs may be allowable, provided costs are reasonable and justification is provided that land rental is necessary for the successful completion of project goals and activities. Note that rent-to-own agreements are not allowable; the rental agreement or lease must terminate at the end of the grant cycle.
8. Q. Are costs associated with donations allowable?
A. No, costs associated with donations, including cash, property, and services, from the recipient to other entities are not allowable. Note that personnel, supply, indirect, or any other costs associated with carrying out donations are likewise unallowable.
9. Q. Is selling specialty crops below market value allowable?
A. No, this is considered a donation and is unallowable.

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)
September 10, 2026

10. Q. Are projects required to include costs in each budget category?
A. No. Proposals should include only those costs that are necessary to complete the project's goals and activities. Note that it is the applicant's responsibility to comply with their organization's policies around personnel, fringe benefit, travel, and indirect costs.

New Questions: September 10, 2026

11. Q. Are stipends allowable?
A. Stipends or subsistence allowances, including travel reimbursements, that offset the costs of participating in training or other program activities for participants may be allowable. Note that these costs should be reasonable and designed to offset costs incurred or services provided by trainees or participants, rather than to provide an additional benefit to these individuals. Stipends may be distributed as makes most sense for the applicant organization, such as through checks or gift cards.
12. Q. Can gift cards be distributed to consumers to promote purchasing specialty crops?
A. SCBGP projects cannot support donations, nor may they compete with an existing USDA, CDFA, or other government program. Providing gift cards to encourage purchasing of local produce is not allowable. Some uses of gift cards may be allowable; for example, providing stipends to participants via gift cards is allowable, as described above, provided that the cost is reasonable and necessary for the project's goals.
13. Q. Are translation services an allowable cost?
A. Translation services are allowable costs, if reasonable and necessary for the success of the project's goals. This could include in-person interpretation services, document translation, and/or providing captioning in different languages on recorded media. Translation-related costs are typically included in section G. Other of the budget.
14. Q. Will submitting a proposal without a 25 percent cost share impact the project's likelihood of receiving funding?
A. USDA has not yet provided CDFA, or any other state agency, with information regarding the proposed 25 percent cost share requirement for the 2027 SCBGP. Proposals will continue to be reviewed as submitted. If USDA makes this requirement official, all applicants will be notified and given an opportunity to revise their budget, including cost share, to reflect these new requirements.
15. Q. Is renting or contracting for the use of equipment allowable?
A. Renting or contracting for the use of equipment is allowable, provided costs are reasonable and necessary for the success of the project's goals. Please refer to the Equipment section of the [Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities Table](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/allowable_and_unallowable_cost_activities.pdf) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/allowable_and_unallowable_cost_activities.pdf) for more information, including restrictions on rent-to-own agreements and drone use.

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)
September 10, 2026

16. Q. How should collaborators from different branches of the same organization be differentiated in the Concept Proposal?
- A. For the purposes of the SCBGP, all individuals employed by the applicant organization and receiving grant funds should be listed in the budget under A. Personnel. Other individuals receiving grant funds, but not employed by the applicant organization, should be listed in F. Contractual.
17. Q. What is the cost threshold for an item to be considered equipment?
- A. Items costing \$10,000 or more per unit, net, are considered equipment. Items with a lower cost per unit, net, are considered supplies.
18. Q. Is it allowable to purchase supplies or other items to provide to local specialty crop businesses or organizations?
- A. This is unallowable. Providing supplies or other items to individual businesses or organizations would constitute an unallowable giveaway or donation to those businesses; this would offset the cost of doing business for those organizations and allow them an unfair competitive advantage against other organizations in their area.
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REVIEW PROCESS

1. Q. Are proposals reviewed by the same Technical Review Committee (TRC) members in Phase I and Phase II?
- A. Reviewer teams remain consistent within each funding category. While CDFA makes every effort to ensure that the same individuals review a project throughout both phases of the application process, projects may be reassigned to different reviewers to balance reviewer workloads.

New Questions: September 10, 2026

2. Q. Are some organization types favored over others in scoring?
- A. No organization type is favored over another in scoring. The organization type question is unscored during both the administrative and technical review of each proposal.
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GRANT MANAGEMENT

1. Q. Are projects subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)?
- A. All activities funded by SCBGP must comply with any applicable state, local, federal, or tribal laws for the location where the project will take place. Note that construction and other capital improvements are not allowable with SCBGP funds.

2027 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)
September 10, 2026

New Questions: September 10, 2026

2. Q. Are reporting, record keeping, and tracking requirements the same for all organization types?
- A. Reporting, record keeping, and tracking requirements are not dependent on organization type. Each project is required to submit invoices at least quarterly, but not more frequently than monthly, in arrears. Bi-annual reports will track spending across all budget items, including but not limited to, cost share, work plan achievements, and progress against the Outcome Measures. Please note that all SCBGP projects are subject to a minimum of one performance site visit, as well as a financial compliance audit, desk review, and/or Agreed Upon Procedure (AUP).
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