

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Additional Assistance for Limited Resource Applicants Program

Frequently Asked Questions

This is the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for the Additional Assistance for Limited Resources Applicants Program. The [general Specialty Crop Block Grant Program \(SCBGP\) FAQ](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/scbgp_frequently_asked_questions.pdf) can be found at https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/scbgp_frequently_asked_questions.pdf.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Q. What are specialty crops?

A. The Farm Bill defines specialty crops as "fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture)." Eligible plants must be cultivated or managed and used by people for food, medicinal purposes, and/or aesthetic gratification to be considered specialty crops. Visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [What is a Specialty Crop website](https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop) (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop>) for a comprehensive list of eligible and ineligible crops. Please note that cannabis is not currently considered a specialty crop.

2. Q. How does an applicant determine if a proposal is appropriate for the SCBGP?

A. All proposals must enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, meet one or more of the program priorities as described in the Additional Assistance for Limited Resource Applicants (Additional Assistance) Program Request for Concept Proposals (RFCP), and be able to achieve one or more outcome measures and indicators during the grant duration to be eligible for this program.

3. Q. Are first-time applicants required to apply to the Additional Assistance Program?

A. First-time applicants are not required to apply to the Additional Assistance Program. Please note that organizations that have successfully applied to the conventional 2026 SCBGP are not eligible to apply to the Additional Assistance Program. Applicants that were disqualified from the conventional 2026 SCBGP are eligible to apply through the Additional Assistance Program.

4. **Q. Will the presentations from the SCBGP webinars be available online?**
- A. A link to the presentations will be available on the [California Department of Food and Agriculture \(CDFA\) SCBGP website](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/) following the live presentation. PDFs of the PowerPoint slides will be available upon request by sending an email to grants@cdfa.ca.gov
5. **Q. Will CDFA provide answers to specific questions regarding the eligibility of Concept Proposals or assist applicants in selecting a funding category, program priority, and/or outcome measure(s) and indicator(s)?**
- A. CDFA can provide technical assistance to applicants submitting under the Additional Assistance Program. Please email grants@cdfa.ca.gov or complete the [inquiry form](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/66BX79X) (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/66BX79X>) prior to the application deadline to request technical assistance. Please note that CDFA will prioritize providing technical assistance to the first 20 applicants who request application assistance. CDFA recommends requesting technical assistance with ample time ahead of the application due date.
6. **Q. Where can applicants find information about projects awarded SCBGP funding in past years?**
- A. Applicants can find project abstracts for past grant awards on the [CDFA SCBGP Project Abstracts website](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/PastGrantAwards.html) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/PastGrantAwards.html). Note that program requirements change year to year, so past projects may not necessarily conform to current program requirements.
7. **Q. How does USDA define beginning and underserved farmers?**
- A. USDA defines beginning farmers as an individual or entity that has not operated a farm for more than 10 years and who substantially participates in the operation. An underserved farmer is a member of a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and, where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

8. **Q. Can proposals promote an organization's image, logo, or brand name?**
- A. SCBGP funds cannot be used to promote an organization's image, logo, or brand name. SCBGP funds must be used to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Projects should focus on promoting the specialty crops identified rather than promoting any organization's logo or brand.
9. **Q. What is a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and is it required to submit a Concept Proposal?**
- A. Entities doing business with the federal government must obtain a UEI through SAM.gov. Active registrants will have their UEI assigned and viewable within SAM.gov. A UEI is not required prior to submitting a Concept Proposal; however, if awarded SCBGP funds, recipients will need to obtain a UEI before a grant agreement can be executed. Please note that the Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) will no longer be accepted.
10. **Q. Are fiscal sponsorships allowable under the SCBGP?**
- A. Proposals that involve a fiscal sponsorship are subject to the following requirements, 1) the fiscal sponsorship arrangement and the identities of the involved parties must be clearly disclosed within the proposal; 2) if awarded funds, the fiscal sponsor, rather than the sponsored organization, is the grant recipient; is responsible for executing the grant agreement; and must ensure all project activities and costs, including activities of the sponsored organization, contractors, or consultants, comply with applicable federal regulations and requirements and grant terms and conditions; 3) changes to the recipient (such as a change from the non-profit fiscal sponsor to the sponsored organization) or key personnel require USDA and CDFA approval; and 4) fiscal sponsorship fees cannot be charged as a direct cost. Fiscal sponsorship fees may be allowable as an indirect cost, if charged consistent with the sponsored organization's established policies. Note that the use of a fiscal sponsor to circumvent program eligibility requirements and/or prior recipient status is not allowable.
11. **Q. What is program income?**
- A. Program income refers to any net income generated during the grant period by a supported project activity or earned as a direct result of the award. If a project will generate program income, applications must provide a description of how it will be generated and how it will be used to enhance specialty crops. Program income cannot be used as a net profit, should be expended before seeking reimbursement of grant funds, and must be spent before the end of the grant

period in accordance with restrictions on allowable and unallowable costs and activities.

12. Q. If selected for funding, are Additional Assistance Program recipients eligible to receive advances?

- A. While the SCBGP is federally funded and not subject to 2023 Assembly Bill 590, Recipients may be eligible to receive advance payments of up to 10 percent of the award amount to cover anticipated project expenditures. Multiple advances can be requested during the project duration; advances should be spent down within 90 days.

Advance payments are, however, not allowed under the following circumstances: an existing advance is not completely liquidated; the advance will reduce the project balance below 10 percent of the award amount; there is an invoice dispute; there is a pending resolution of an audit or desk review finding of overpayment, unallowable costs, inadequately supported costs, or unsupported costs; the project is not current in invoicing or reporting; the project is in the final three months of the project duration; and/or additional conditions imposed prohibit an advance payment.

ELIGIBILITY

1. Q. Who is eligible to apply for SCBGP Additional Assistance Program funding?

- A. Non-profit organizations, tribal governments (federally and non-federally recognized), and K-12 school districts that have not previously received SCBGP funding, do not have technical expertise with grant writing, and who work directly in either supporting small and/or beginning farmers or providing nutrition education and/or access to specialty crops in low resource communities are eligible to apply. Individuals; for-profit organizations; local, state, and federal government entities (excluding K-12 school districts and tribal governments); and public or private colleges and universities are not eligible to apply.

2. Q. How are project beneficiaries defined?

- A. Project beneficiaries are the specialty crop stakeholders that will directly benefit from a project, including individual growers, producers, groups, commodities, etc. Employees of the applicant, contractors, and/or individuals who may receive a direct monetary benefit from the project are typically not considered project beneficiaries. The number cited in the Project Beneficiaries response should be a reasonable estimate that can be documented and reported upon during the

duration of the grant, if selected for funding. For these reasons, stating that a project will benefit the entire specialty crop industry, or that of a particular crop, is not an appropriate response for this question.

3. Q. Are there any criteria for who can be named as Project Director(s), Project Manager(s), Principal Investigator(s), and/or collaborators who will directly manage activities funded through SCBGP?

A. CDFA does not have set requirements for these positions. It is up to the applicant to select the individual(s) best suited and appropriately qualified for the project. Applicants should provide a summary of qualifications for the individuals who will receive a portion of the project funds or who will directly manage activities funded through SCBGP. All personnel who will receive SCBGP grant funds must be listed in the Project Oversight section.

4. Q. Can SCBGP funds be used to offset business costs for specialty crop farmers or organizations (e.g., using funds to procure, store, and distribute specialty crops through a food hub)?

A. SCBGP funds cannot be used to offset business costs for specialty crop farmers or other organizations as this creates the potential for unfair competition and directly benefits the participants through what is effectively a donation of services.

5. Q. Can SCBGP funds be used to donate and/or distribute specialty crops (e.g., using funds to grow specialty crops for a community garden that delivers free meals)?

A. SCBGP funds cannot be used for donations or giveaways, including free meals and/or vouchers for free vegetables. Costs associated with crops grown with the end purpose of donation are also unallowable, including staff, supplies, and indirect costs associated with growing crops for donation.

5. Q. Are projects required to last the full two years?

A. Two (2) years and eight (8) months is the maximum project duration. As long as projects do not start before or end after the dates specified in the Additional Assistance Program RFCP, any duration is allowed. Please note that no-cost extension requests will not be facilitated beyond the maximum grant duration.

APPLICATION

1. **Q. Where can applicants to the 2026 SCBGP Additional Assistance Program obtain the Concept Proposal application?**
 - A. Applicants should email grants@cdfa.ca.gov or complete [the inquiry form](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/66BX79X) (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/66BX79X>) to request the Concept Proposal application.
2. **Q: How do applicants submit proposals to the 2026 SCBGP Additional Assistance Program?**
 - A. Applicants should submit both the Additional Assistance Application form and completed Budget Template to grants@cdfa.ca.gov by 5:00 p.m. PT on January 12, 2026. Note that incomplete and/or late submissions will not be accepted.
2. **Q. Is a federal tax ID required prior to submitting a Concept Proposal?**
 - A. Applicants (or their fiscal sponsor) must have a legal business name and a federal tax ID to submit a Concept Proposal.
3. **Q: Do Additional Assistance Program applicants participate in Phase II?**
 - A. Successful Additional Assistance applicants will be invited to submit a Scope of Work (i.e. a more detailed version of their proposal) with direct support from CDFA. Additional Assistance applicants will not participate in the conventional Phase II application, and timelines and requirements for the Scope of Work will differ.

OUTCOME MEASURES

1. **Q. Where can applicants find additional information about the outcome measures and indicators/sub-indicators?**
 - A. The outcome measures, indicators, and sub-indicators have been developed by USDA and the Office of Management and Budget for nationwide reporting purposes and cannot be altered, amended, or replaced in any way. Projects must accomplish all selected outcome measures and associated indicators and/or sub-indicators during the grant duration. Specific information on outcomes and indicators/sub-indicators can be found in the [Outcome Measures supplemental document](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/SCBGP_OutcomeMeasuresSupplement.pdf) (https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/docs/SCBGP_OutcomeMeasuresSupplement.pdf).

2. **Q. Do projects that address more than one outcome measure receive a higher priority for funding?**
- A. The number of outcome measures a project will address is not a factor in the scoring of proposals. Projects are not required to select more than one outcome measure and indicator. All selected outcome measures and associated indicators and/or sub-indicators must be trackable and achievable within the grant duration.

BUDGET SECTION

1. **Q. What are federal cost principles?**
- A. Federal cost principles are regulations, based on organization type, used to determine allowable costs and ensure consistent treatment of federal funds. Applicants are responsible for identifying the federal cost principles appropriate to their organization, applying cost principles to SCBGP grant funds consistently, and ensuring contractors and/or consultants comply with federal cost principle requirements.
2. **Q. What are indirect costs and is there a maximum rate?**
- A. Indirect costs (also known as “facilities and administrative costs”) are costs incurred for common or joint objectives that cannot be identified specifically with a particular project, program, or organizational activity. Typically, these involve costs to run an organization as a whole, including administrative staff salaries, information technology services, rent, utilities, internet and telephone service, general use office supplies, insurance, and maintenance. The maximum amount of indirect costs an organization is allowed is eight (8.00) percent of the total personnel costs (budget category A. Salary and Wages plus category B. Fringe Benefits).
3. **Q. Can applicants charge an indirect cost rate greater than the eight percent of total personnel costs?**
- A. The indirect cost rate for the SCBGP is established in federal statute. Please reference 2 CFR 200.414 (c)(1) (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?node=se2.1.200_1414&rgn=div8) as well as the Agricultural Act of 2014, Public Law 113-79 10010(4) (<https://www.congress.gov/113/plaws/publ79/PLAW-113publ79.pdf>). This statutory limitation covers both applicant indirect and CDFA’s costs to administer the program. For this reason, CDFA will not accept requests for indirect costs greater than eight (8.00) percent of total personnel costs. Applicants that might ordinarily be eligible to receive a higher indirect rate from other state or federal programs are responsible for ensuring that their organization/institution and any

contractors will allow an exception for this program before submitting an application.

4. Q. What are fringe benefits?

A. Fringe benefits are allowances and services provided by employers to their employees as compensation, in addition to regular salaries and wages. Fringe benefits should follow an organization's established policy and may include, but are not limited to, the costs of leave (vacation, family-related, sick, or military) employee insurance, pensions, and unemployment benefit plans. Please refer to 2 CFR 200.431 (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=35fcd29238edd42c8b1f8b1628e39d47&mc=true&node=pt2.1.200&rgn=div5#se2.1.200_1431) for more information.

5. Q. Does the SCBGP impose a maximum fringe benefit rate?

A. There is no maximum fringe benefit rate and applicants should follow their organization's established policies. However, fringe benefit rates greater than 50 percent may be questioned by USDA and additional information may be required.

6. Q. What is the General Schedule 15 (GS-15), Step 10?

A. The GS-15, Step 10 is the maximum pay allowed annually and hourly for contractors and consultants by the federal government. Applicants should use the GS-15, Step 10 rate for their area when developing contractual cost estimates to ensure rates are reasonable and consistent with fees in the marketplace for similar services. Contractor costs exceeding the GS-15, Step 10 rate must be paid from a source other than SCBGP funds unless a justification is provided and approved by CDFA and USDA. To access the GS-15 step 10 rate, reference the U.S. Office of Personnel Pay and Leave website (<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>) and click on "GS Pay Tables" under "General Schedule and Locality Pay Tables."

7. Q: Are stipends an allowable cost?

A: Stipends may be allowable; please ensure all costs are reasonable and necessary for the success of the proposed project and support the competitiveness of specialty crops. Stipends designed to provide a benefit to the individual receiving the stipend are not typically allowable; SCBGP funds cannot be used to provide an individual benefit.

COST SHARE

1. Q. Is cost share a requirement of the SCBGP?

A. Cost share is allowed but is not a requirement of the SCBGP and is discouraged by USDA. CDFA includes the ability to outline cost share in proposals so that unallowable costs and/or activities (such as projects that also benefit non-specialty crops) can demonstrate that SCBGP grant funds will not be used for these costs. Cost share is not required, and as an unscored question, does not impact whether projects will be awarded funding.

2. Q. What is the difference between matching funds and in-kind contributions?

A. Matching funds refers to a dollar amount committed to a project from a source other than the SCBGP. An in-kind contribution is the estimated dollar value of any time, property, or supplies donated to a project.

3. Q. Is there any restriction on the kind of funds or resources that can be used for cost sharing?

A. Funds from other state or federal grant programs are not considered matching funds. Applicants must disclose if they have applied for or are receiving state or federal funds for a project submitted to the SCBGP in the "Other Support from Federal or State Grant Programs" section if invited to the Scope of Work phase. Reference 2 CFR Part 200.306 (b)(5) (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=201623e52a9fd321ebc67f5d2bc9365f&mc=true&node=se2.1.200_1306&rgn=div8).

REVIEW PROCESS

1. Q. What is the Technical Review Committee (TRC) and how does the review process work?

A. The TRC is a group of volunteers with knowledge and expertise regarding the California specialty crop industry. This committee is broken up by funding category to review, evaluate, and make recommendations to CDFA on proposals submitted for funding to California's SCBGP. The reviewers evaluate and score proposals individually and then meet to have an open discussion. The committee's recommendations are then presented to CDFA.

2. Q. What is required to serve on the TRC? May TRC members submit Concept Proposals?

A. All individuals interested in serving on the TRC must submit an application form and a copy of their résumé/CV to grants@cdfa.ca.gov, which are reviewed for experience and expertise. TRC members must complete and sign a conflict of

interest disclosure and complete state mandated sexual harassment prevention, and ethics training. In addition, applications and résumé/CVs are reviewed to identify possible conflicts of interest. All TRC members are recused from reviewing/discussing any proposals where conflicts of interest are identified or would likely occur. TRC members and their organizations may submit Concept Proposals; however, said members are prohibited from reviewing/discussing them.

3. Q. How does the review process work between CDFA and USDA for projects that receive funding?

- A. CDFA's administrative and technical review process helps to ensure that the proposals recommended to USDA for funding are timely and important for California specialty crops and comply with all program rules and regulations. USDA has the final say regarding which proposals receive funding. USDA may approach CDFA with questions on specific proposals, in which case CDFA will work with the applicant to resolve any issues. In some cases, USDA may ultimately elect to decline a proposal.