

# Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

## Frequently Asked Questions

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. **Q. When are the 2025 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) awards announced?**
  - A. The 2025 SCBGP awards will be announced by Fall 2025. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has final approval of all proposals awarded funding; therefore, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) cannot announce awards until final approval from USDA has been received.
2. **Q. Is a recording or PowerPoint of the 2025 SCBGP Grant Proposal webinar available?**
  - A. Links to a recording of the 2025 Grant Proposal webinar will be posted to the [CDFA SCBGP website](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/SCBGP/) ([https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty\\_Crop\\_Competitiveness\\_Grants/](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/)) by December 13, 2024. PDF copies of the PowerPoint presentations will be available for download during the webinar or upon request via email to [grants@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:grants@cdfa.ca.gov). In addition, answers to questions received during both webinars will be incorporated into the weekly Questions & Answers (Q&A) posted to CDFA's website.
3. **Q. Do any of the Grant Proposal attachments have a page limit?**
  - A. The only Grant Proposal attachment with a page limit is the Project Objectives and Work Plan, which cannot exceed five pages. The Budget Narrative, Outcome Measures, and Cost Sharing attachments do not have a maximum number of pages; however, content on these templates should be appropriate, necessary, and responsive to the intended purpose of the form. Providing additional content in an attachment to circumvent the character limitation for a question in FFAST may result in disqualification.
4. **Q. Can project activities occur before November 1, 2025, or after June 30, 2028? If so, can the costs of those activities be charged to the grant?**
  - A. Expenses for activities occurring before November 1, 2025, or after June 30, 2028, cannot be charged to the grant. Applicants may use cost sharing to fund activities prior to the start of the grant duration at the risk that grant funding is not

subsequently received. Please note, no-cost extensions beyond June 30, 2028, are not available.

**5. Q. Can substantial changes be made to the project described in the Concept Proposal?**

A. Applicants may revise and refine their project during the Grant Proposal phase. Some degree of change is anticipated in response to Grant Proposal requirements and feedback provided; however, substantial changes are discouraged. CDFA cannot anticipate how changes to the scope of a project will be viewed by the Technical Review Committee (TRC).

**6. Q. Can applicants be awarded funding for more than one SCBGP project?**

A. Applicants may be awarded funding for more than one SCBGP project; however, duplication of costs or activities is not permitted. In addition, applicants should ensure they have adequate capacity to effectively manage multiple SCBGP awards.

**7. Q. Are applicants required to register with the System for Award Management (SAM) and obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) prior to submitting a Grant Proposal?**

A. Registering with SAM is not required prior to submitting a Grant Proposal. However, successful applicants will be required to be registered with SAM before SCBGP funds are awarded. Applicants are highly encouraged to begin the registration process now as the process can be lengthy. Note that failure to register and maintain an active SAM account will prevent an organization from receiving federal funds. SAM accounts must be renewed annually.

**8. Q. Can applicants use a third party to manage their SAM registration?**

A. To ensure applicants are in control of who has permission to edit and maintain their information, individuals assigned a SAM.gov Entity Administrator role must hold a position within the organization (e.g., employees, officers, board members), and cannot be a third party acting on behalf of the organization. Applicants are strongly encouraged to have at least one backup Entity Administrator assigned in case of staff changes or absences. If applicants have chosen to use a third party to assist with managing their SAM.gov registration, they will still need to have at least one Entity Administrator who holds a position within their organization. An Entity Administrator within their organization can assign Data Entry roles to third parties through the role management tools in

SAM.gov. Note, applicants do not need to pay a fee to register their organization or to keep their entity registration active and SAM.gov does not endorse any third-party firm.

**9. Q. The Review Process section of the Grant Proposal Instructions states that there are other factors beyond the TRC scores and feedback that will determine which proposals will be submitted to USDA. Does this mean that a proposal that receives a lower score could be funded over a proposal with a higher score?**

A. While scoring by the TRC is the most substantial factor in selecting proposals, it is possible for a lower scoring proposal to receive funding over a proposal with a higher score.

**10. Q. The phrase “solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops” was removed from the SCBGP under the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (Farm Bill). How does this change the program and can funds now benefit non-specialty crops?**

A. The removal of this phrase does not substantially change the SCBGP, rather, this amendment and the additional Farm Bill language that replaced this phrase, clarifies methods through which specialty crop competitiveness may be enhanced. These methods were largely already present in CDFA program priorities. This language also supports that some projects may have an ancillary benefit to non-specialty crops while primarily benefiting specialty crops. SCBGP funds still cannot directly benefit an ineligible commodity or provide a benefit or profit to a single organization, institution, or individual.

## **FUNDING AREA AND FUNDING CATEGORY**

**1. Q. Can a Grant Proposal be submitted under a different funding category than the Concept Proposal?**

A. A Grant Proposals cannot be submitted under a different funding category than the Concept Proposal.

## **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE APPLICATION TOOL (FAAST)**

**1. Q. How can applicants access the Grant Proposal application in FAAST?**

A. To view the Grant Proposal application, log onto the [FAAST system](https://faast.waterboards.ca.gov) (<https://faast.waterboards.ca.gov>) with the username and password used to submit the Concept Proposal. Click on Active Applications, select the project's title and click on the Questionnaire tab.

2. **Q. Are there character limits for each section of the Grant Proposal application in FFAST?**
  - A. FFAST imposes text box character limits, clearly marked at the bottom of each text box. The character limits include letters, numbers, spaces, punctuation, and hidden formatting code. Figures, images, tables, and hyperlinks are not allowed. The character limits are listed 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)).
3. **Q. Can figures, pictures, or tables be included in the proposal?**
  - A. The FFAST system is text based and not designed to facilitate figures, pictures, or tables. Additionally, projects selected for funding must conform with the application formatting requirements developed by USDA for this program, so attachments should not be altered to include figures, pictures, or additional tables.

## OTHER SUPPORT FROM FEDERAL OR STATE GRANT PROGRAMS

1. **Q. Should an applicant inform CDFA if they applied to another agency to fund a project submitted to the 2025 SCBGP? What if both agencies agree to fund the project?**
  - A. An applicant must inform CDFA if they apply and/or receive funding for a project that has been submitted to the 2025 SCBGP. SCBGP funds cannot duplicate activities supported by other state or federal programs. If awarded funding from another source, applicants must either demonstrate that funds from each program will go towards different activities or decline funding from one program or the other.

## EXTERNAL PROJECT SUPPORT

1. **Q. Who should be listed in the External Project Support response?**
  - A. The External Project Support response should identify at least one specific specialty crop stakeholder and explain why they believe the project is important and timely for the specialty crop industry. Specialty crop stakeholders include individuals/organizations involved in the specialty crop industry such as growers, companies, certified crop advisors and pest control advisors, commodity boards or commissions, trade associations, etc. The External Project Support response should not reference the applicant and/or any contractors or cooperators directly involved in the project. In addition, members of the general public, legislators, or

any organizations that are not affiliated with the specialty crop industry should not be included in the External Project Support response.

**2. Q. Are letters of support required?**

A. Letters of support are not a requirement of the SCBGP but are strongly encouraged to demonstrate industry support for a project. Letters of support should not be provided in lieu of a narrative response to the External Project Support question.

**3. Q. Who should submit letters of support?**

A. Letters of support may come from specialty crop stakeholders, individuals, and organizations that are supportive of what the project will accomplish but who are not directly involved in project activities. Do not include letters of support from the applicant, contractors, or any other entity that will participate, receive project funding, or contribute cost share. Letters of support from project beneficiaries are appropriate, so long as the benefit received is not in the form of grant funding. For example, letters of support from specialty crop farmers who will receive training through the grant are appropriate; letters of support from the employees of the applicant or a contractor are not. In addition, do not include letters of support from members of the general public, legislators, elected officials, or any organizations that are not affiliated with the specialty crop industry.

**4. Q. How should letters of support be submitted?**

A. Letters of support should be written on the stakeholder's official letterhead, be addressed to CDFA Office of Grants Administration, and explain why the stakeholder supports the project. All letters of support must be attached to the Grant Proposal application in FFAST; letters sent directly to CDFA via mail or email will not be considered. Applicants should attach letters of support in PDF format using the following file naming convention: LOS1, LOS2, LOS3, etc.

## **OUTCOME MEASURES**

**1. Q. Can the Grant Proposal identify different outcome measures and indicators than those listed in the Concept Proposal?**

A. Applicants may select different outcome measures and indicators from the Concept Proposal to the Grant Proposal phase.

**2. Q. Do all Outcome Measures have to be achievable within the grant duration?**

- A. All outcome measures must be achievable within the grant duration. Applicants should not overstate outcomes or select outcomes and indicators that cannot reasonably be achieved within the grant duration in an effort to improve the likelihood of funding. The number of outcomes selected is not a factor in scoring criteria; however, failure to successfully achieve outcome measures may adversely affect an applicant's ability to receive funding in the future.
3. **Q. When does Indicator 1.5 have to be selected for Outcome Measure 1?**
- A. Outcome Measure 1.5 is required for all proposals submitted to the Grown in California funding category and all marketing and promotion projects. However, only one of the sub-indicators (a, b, or c) must be selected.

## BUDGET NARRATIVE

1. **Q. Can the amount of SCBGP funding requested change from the Concept Proposal phase to the Grant Proposal phase?**
- A. The amount of SCBGP funding requested in the Grant Proposal phase may increase or decrease from the Concept Proposal phase. Although there is no limit on the amount that the budget may change, CDFA cannot anticipate how changes will be viewed by the TRC and substantial changes (plus or minus 20 percent) may be questioned.
2. **Q. What is the limit for compensation for individual contractors/consultants?**
- A. Individual contractual fees should be reasonable and consistent with fees in the marketplace for similar services. Salary and wages or fees for professional services for contractors/consultants cannot exceed the GS-15 step 10 (<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>) for the applicant's locality/area without justification. A justification for an individual contractor/consultant may include but is not limited to: a cost/price analysis; an explanation of unique qualifications and/or special expertise due to the complexity of the project/task and/or limited pool of available or qualified contractors/consultants; or historical data supporting the rate charged by contractors/consultants. Reference the Procuring Goods and Services Using Federal Funds Supplement ([https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty\\_Crop\\_Competitiveness\\_Grants/pdfs/SCBGP\\_Procuring\\_Goods\\_and\\_Services.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/pdfs/SCBGP_Procuring_Goods_and_Services.pdf)) for additional guidance on contractual restrictions.

3. **Q. Can applicants request indirect costs greater than eight (8) percent of the total personnel costs?**
- A. The indirect cost rate for the SCBGP is established in federal statute. The statutory limitation of 8 percent of total costs is the maximum which state departments of agriculture may claim in their applications to USDA, including the state's administration and any indirect passed through to subrecipients. USDA gives state departments of agriculture broad discretion whether and how much, if any, indirect will pass through to subrecipients with many states not allowing applicants to collect any indirect. While it is CDFA's intent to allow applicants to receive the maximum amount of available funding, CDFA must retain a portion of the allowed indirect to carry out the activities needed to administer the program. Accordingly, CDFA will not accept requests for indirect costs greater than eight (8) percent of total personnel costs and excessive indirect costs may result in disqualification.
4. **Q. Can applicants use grant funds to give away specialty crop commodities?**
- A. The cost to purchase or grow specialty crop commodities and any other costs associated with facilitating a donation of those specialty crops are unallowable costs. Projects that focus primarily on donating or distributing donated food may want to consider the alternative funding opportunities described in the [Request for Concept Proposals](#) ([https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty\\_Crop\\_Competitiveness\\_Grants/pdfs/2025\\_SCBGP\\_RFCP.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/pdfs/2025_SCBGP_RFCP.pdf)) and on the [CDFA grants website](#) (<http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/grants/>), or consider securing cost share to cover unallowable costs and activities.
5. **Q. Is cost share a requirement of the SCBGP?**
- A. Cost share is not a requirement of the SCBGP, is generally discouraged by USDA, and is not a factor in scoring criteria in either phase of the application process. Additionally, cost sharing will create ongoing administrative obligations as applicants will be required to report on cost share throughout the duration of the project, if selected for funding.
6. **Q. What is the difference between matching funds and in-kind contributions?**
- A. Matching funds refers to real dollar contributions to a project from sources other than the SCBGP. In-kind contributions refer to the determined values of assets donated to the project (e.g., equipment, use of land, volunteered staff time, etc.). If matching funds and/or in-kind contributions have been secured for the project, applicants must complete and attach the Cost Sharing template.



7. **Q. Can other state or federal grants be treated as cost share? Can SCBGP funds be reported as cost share for another grant?**

- A. Generally, funds from one grant program cannot be treated as cost share for another grant program unless permitted in the terms and conditions of that grant program. The federal SCBGP terms and conditions do not have such a provision and SCBGP funds cannot be reported as cost share for another grant.

## PROJECT OVERSIGHT

1. **Q. Who should provide résumés or curriculum vitae (CV)s?**

- A. Résumés or CVs (whichever is most applicable) should be provided for the Project Director, Project Manager, Project Investigator, and/or collaborators who will receive a portion of the grant funds. The preferred format for résumés or CVs is PDF.

## GRANT MANAGEMENT

1. **Q. How will an applicant be reimbursed for allowable costs incurred throughout the grant?**

- A. Generally, recipients submit invoices to CDFA for reimbursement of actual expenses. Invoices must be submitted at least quarterly, but no more frequently than monthly. In some circumstances, recipients may also request advance payments. Reference the Invoicing section of the Grant Management Procedures Manual available on the [CDFA SCBGP Grant Recipient Resources website](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/RecipientResources.html) ([https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty\\_Crop\\_Competitiveness\\_Grants/RecipientResources.html](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/RecipientResources.html)) for more information regarding payment of grant awards.