

# **Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **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 considered a specialty crop.

#### **2. 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/](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/)) following the final webinar. PDFs of the PowerPoint slides will be available upon request by sending an email to [grants@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:grants@cdfa.ca.gov).

#### **3. 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. With the exception of Additional Assistance proposals, CDFA is unable to advise and/or provide individuals with feedback on specific proposals during the solicitation process. CDFA cannot provide guidance on the most appropriate funding category, program priority, and/or outcome measure(s) and indicator(s) for a concept proposal.

#### **4. Q. Do certain organization types or commodities receive higher priority for funding than others?**

A. There is no consideration given to an organization or commodity type in the scoring of proposals. CDFA ensures the review process has no conflicts of interest and reviewers are instructed to review each project on its individual merits.

- 5. 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 at least one of the program priorities as described in the Request for Concept Proposals (RFCP), and be able to achieve at least one outcome measure and indicator during the grant duration to be eligible for this program.
- 6. Q. Is the SCBGP concept proposal application available as a Word document? Is there a page limit?**

A. The concept proposal application is not available as a Word document. All applicants must complete and submit the concept proposal application using the Financial Assistance Application Submittal Tool (FAAST) (<https://faast.waterboards.ca.gov>). As a result, there is no page limit. However, each question in FAAST is assigned a character limit.
- 7. Q. Where can applicants find the character limits for each question?**

A. The character limit for each question is provided in FAAST. This limit includes letters, numbers, punctuation, spaces, and special characters.
- 8. Q. Where can applicants find information about projects awarded SCBGP funding in past years?**

A. Applicants can find project abstracts and Final Performance Reports for past grant awards on the CDFA SCBGP website ([https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty\\_Crop\\_Competitiveness\\_Grants/](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/)). Note: Program requirements change year to year, so past projects may not necessarily conform to current program requirements.
- 9. Q. Are projects required to last the full two years?**

A. Two years and six months is the maximum project duration. As long as projects do not start before or end after the dates specified in the RFCP, any duration is allowed. For Additional Assistance proposals, two years is the maximum project duration.
- 10. Q. How does USDA define beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers?**

A. USDA defines beginning farmers as an individual or entity that has not operated a farm for more than 10 years and substantially participates in the operation. A socially disadvantaged farmer is a farmer who is a member of a Socially Disadvantaged Group. A Socially Disadvantaged Group is 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.

**11. Q. How can an applicant determine if a piece of equipment is considered scientific research equipment?**

- A. Scientific research equipment is defined as equipment which is used only for research, scientific, or other technical activities and has an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit. Applicants must be able to explain how the equipment qualifies as scientific research equipment and why it is required for the specific project or program proposed. Applicants should utilize the RFCP and the Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities Table ([https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty\\_Crop\\_Competitiveness\\_Grants/pdfs/Allowable-and-UnallowableCosts-and-Activities.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Specialty_Crop_Competitiveness_Grants/pdfs/Allowable-and-UnallowableCosts-and-Activities.pdf)) to determine whether equipment meets the definition of scientific research equipment.

**12. Q. Can proposals promote an organization's image, logo, or brand name allowable?**

- 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 submitted to the Grown in California funding category should focus on promoting the specialty crops identified rather than promoting the CA GROWN logo or brand.

**13. 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. This language supports that some projects may indirectly benefit non-specialty crops while primarily benefiting specialty crops. SCBGP funds still cannot be used to directly benefit an ineligible commodity or provide a benefit or profit to a single organization, institution, or individual.

**14. Q. Can cooperators or contractors outside the state of California or outside of the United States be involved in project activities?**

- A. There is no prohibition on cooperating or contracting with an organization outside of California or the United States, provided the country is not listed on the [Office of Foreign Assets Control Active Sanctions List](https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/office-of-foreign-assets-control-sanctions-programs-and-information) (<https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/office-of-foreign-assets-control-sanctions-programs-and-information>) and that the applicant sufficiently demonstrates that the primary benefit of the project will be to California specialty crops. In addition, in accordance with [California Assembly Bill 1887](https://oag.ca.gov/ab1887) (<https://oag.ca.gov/ab1887>), state funded and state sponsored travel to states with discriminatory laws is prohibited. SCBGP funds cannot be used to support costs for travel to or within states with active discriminatory laws.

**15. Q. What is a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number or a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and is it required to submit a concept proposal?**

- A. A DUNS number is a proprietary system developed and regulated by Dun & Bradstreet that assigns a unique numeric identifier to a single business entity. A DUNS number or UEI is not required prior to submitting a concept proposal; however, if awarded SCBGP funds, recipients will need to obtain a DUNS number or UEI before a grant agreement can be executed.

**16. Q. What is a UEI?**

- A. The federal government intends to stop using the DUNS number to uniquely identify entities resisted in the System of Award Management (SAM). Entities doing business with the federal government will instead use a UEI created in SAM.gov and will no longer have to go to a third-party website to obtain their identifier. Active registrants will have their UEI assigned and viewable within SAM.gov; there is no action for registered entities to take at this time. This transition is anticipated to occur by April of 2022.

**17. 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.

**18. Q. Do first-time applicants have to apply to the Additional Assistance program?**

- A. First-time applicant are not required to apply to the Additional Assistance program. However, organizations that do apply for this program are not permitted to apply to any other funding category.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

**1. Q. Who is eligible to apply for SCBGP funding?**

- A. Non-profit and for-profit organizations; local, state, and federal government entities, including tribal governments; and public or private colleges and universities are eligible to apply. Individuals are not eligible to apply. The Additional Assistance program has additional restrictions as outlined in the RFCP.

**2. Q. Are applicants allowed to submit the same proposal for funding to more than one grant program?**

- A. Applicants may submit the same proposal to multiple state or federal award programs; however, applicants are required to disclose the other grant programs if invited back to the grant proposal phase. If the proposal is selected for funding by another state or federal award program after the proposal is submitted to the SCBGP, the applicant must inform CDFA immediately. Applicants are allowed to receive SCBGP funds to support activities within a project funded through multiple grant sources. However, SCBGP funds may not be used to duplicate activities funded by another grant source.

**3. Q. Are past SCBGP recipients more or less likely to receive funding? Is there a waiting period required between receiving SCBGP funding?**

- A. Past recipients are not more or less likely to receive funding and all proposals are reviewed on their individual merit. However, failure to adequately explain how a proposal builds upon previously funded work may negatively impact scoring. Additionally, any significant issues with an organization's past performance may affect the probability of funding or necessitate additional requirements if funds are awarded. There is no waiting period required between receiving SCBGP

grants; an organization could apply for and receive funding for projects in any year.

**4. Q. Are sole proprietors eligible to apply?**

- A. Sole proprietors are eligible to apply. However, CDFA encourages sole proprietors to partner with another organization such as a local Farm Bureau or cooperative extension, a commodity board, or other growers. Although sole proprietors may apply for SCBGP funds, applicants must demonstrate that their proposal will benefit the specialty crop industry, rather than their organization.

**5. Q. How are project beneficiaries defined?**

- A. Project beneficiaries are the specialty crop stakeholders, including individual growers, producers, groups, commodities, etc. that will directly benefit from a project. Employees of the applicant, contractors and/or individuals who may receive a direct 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 is not an appropriate response for this question.

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

- A. It is up to the individual applicant to select the individual(s) best suited for their project when providing 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.

**7. Q. Can SCBGP funds be used to offset business costs for specialty crop farmers (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 as this creates the potential for unfair competition and directly benefits the participants through what is effectively a donation of services.

## **FAAST APPLICATION**

- 1. Q. Can changes be made to a concept proposal that has already been submitted in FAAST?**
  - A. Changes can be made to concept proposals that have already been submitted in FAAST. If such a change is necessary, applicants should contact the FAAST Help Desk at (866) 434-1083 or [FAAST\\_ADMIN@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:FAAST_ADMIN@waterboards.ca.gov) and reference the SCBGP year along with the PIN. All requests must be received within a reasonable amount of time before the submission deadline, no changes can be made after the submission deadline, and applicants are still required to resubmit their revised proposal before the submission deadline.
- 2. Q. Can applicants use their existing FAAST account to submit a concept proposal?**
  - A. Applicants that already have a FAAST account may use their existing account to access the SCBGP application and submit their proposal.
- 3. Q. Is a federal tax ID required prior to submitting a concept proposal?**
  - A. Applicants must have a legal business name and a federal tax ID in order to submit a concept proposal. Applicants may begin an application in FAAST prior to receiving a federal tax ID number, however, a federal tax ID number must be entered in FAAST prior to submitting a concept proposal.

## **FUNDING AREA AND CATEGORY**

- 1. Q. Can an organization submit two projects to the same funding category?**
  - A. An organization may submit more than one proposal to a single funding category as long as the proposals are for unique projects. However, applicants to the Additional Assistance program may only submit one proposal.
- 2. Q. Are examples available of projects that would be eligible under each funding category?**
  - A. There are examples of possible projects for each funding category provided in the RFCP. Please note that these examples are not intended to be all inclusive.

- 3. Q. Does CDFA allocate a set amount of funding or number of projects per funding category?**
  - A. CDFA does not allocate a set amount of funding or number of projects per funding category. Similarly, CDFA does not allocate a set amount of funding to address a particular issue, including COVID-19
  
- 4. Q. If an applicant selects the wrong funding category, will they be disqualified?**
  - A. Applicants will not be disqualified for selecting the wrong funding category. However, the Technical Review Committee is comprised of subject matter experts who may not be qualified to review proposals submitted to an inappropriate funding category. This may affect the probability of success for a given project. For this reason, applicants are strongly encouraged to carefully review the program priorities and select the funding category that most closely aligns with their project.

## 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. Projects must accomplish all selected outcome measures and associated indicators and, if applicable, sub-indicators during the grant duration. Refer to the Outcome Measures supplemental document for specific information on outcomes and indicators/sub-indicators.
  
- 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.
  
- 3. Q. If an applicant selects more than one outcome measure and/or indicator, do they all have to be achievable within the grant duration?**
  - A. All selected outcome measures and associated indicators and sub-indicators must be achievable within the grant duration.

- 4. Q. Are outcome measures related to increased access for specialty crop alcoholic beverages (e.g. winegrape or hops-based products) appropriate for SCBGP project?**
    - A. Generally, projects that promote specialty crops that are alcoholic beverages should focus on increased sales and not improving access. Access outcomes are traditionally related addressing food deserts and improving the availability of fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, etc.

## BUDGET TEMPLATE

- 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 costs. Applicants are responsible for identifying the federal cost principles appropriate to their organization, consistent application of cost principles to the SCBGP grant funds, and ensuring contractors or consultants comply with federal cost principle requirements.
- 2. 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) ([https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=35fcd29238edd42c8b1f8b1628e39d47&mc=true&node=pt2.1.200&rgn=div5#se2.1.200\\_1431](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.
- 3. 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.
- 4. 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 8 percent of the total personnel costs (budget category A. Salary and Wages plus category B. Fringe Benefits).

**5. 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) ([https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?node=se2.1.200\\_1414&rgn=div8](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) (<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 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 will allow an exception for this program before submitting an application.

**6. Q. What is program income?**

- A. Program income refers to 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 and it must be spent before the end of the grant period in accordance with restrictions on allowable and unallowable costs and activities.

**7. Q. What is the difference between “scientific research” and “general purpose” equipment? Is there a minimum or maximum cost limit for special purpose equipment?**

- A. Both “scientific research” and “general purpose” equipment refer to tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost that equals or exceeds \$5,000 per unit. “Scientific research” equipment used only for research, scientific, or other technical activities may be conditionally allowable. “General purpose” equipment is used for purposes other than research, scientific, or other technical activities and is not allowable. The amount that can be charged for scientific research equipment cannot exceed the maximum award amount.

**8. 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.

## COST SHARE

**1. 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.

**2. 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 will need to 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" if invited to the grant proposal 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](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 and how does the review process work?**

- A. The Technical Review Committee is a group of volunteers with knowledge and expertise regarding the California specialty crop industry. This committee is broken up by funding category and reviews, evaluates, and makes 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 Technical Review Committee? May Technical Review Committee members submit concept proposals?**
- A. All individuals interested in serving on the Technical Review Committee submit an application form and a copy of their resume to [grants@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:grants@cdfa.ca.gov), which are reviewed for experience and expertise. TRC members are asked to complete and sign conflict of interest disclosures and complete state mandated training. In addition, applications and resumes are reviewed to identify possible conflicts of interest. All Technical Review Committee members are recused from reviewing/discussing any proposals where conflicts of interest are identified or would likely occur. Technical Review Committee 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 proposal 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.